

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

Editor:

JOHN TALLACH,

Free Presbyterian Manse, Kinlochbervie, Lairg, Sutherland,
IV27 4RP.

Incorporating the Protestant Beacon and The British Protestant

"JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TODAY, AND FOR EVER."
"ENDEAVOURING TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND
OF PEACE."

"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD."

New Series
No. 1469

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1976

Old Series
No. 2469

Editorial

As Mr. Carson turns to attend to other work, I know that readers will wish to accord him their sincere thanks for his work as editor over the last twelve years. Also I am sure that they join with me in wishing him well. We pray that the Lord's blessing may rest on whatever he does in His service, as we believe His blessing has rested on his work in connection with the *Gospel Magazine*. Of course, I do not wish to give the impression that readers need bid the former editor a last good-bye. I hope that many articles from him may be published in these pages yet.

In situations like this we are reminded of our insignificance. Years are passing, our life is running through the hour-glass, and what is time itself in relation to eternity? 'We are of yesterday, and know nothing.'

What can we say? How can we describe our feelings at a time like this? We do not need to search for anything new. Our feelings were expressed by David long ago: '*I wait for God*' (Psalm 130 : 5). What can the creatures of time do but wait on Him who inhabits eternity? What can the weak do but wait on Him who is strong?

You may or may not have read a play by Samuel Becket: 'Waiting for Godot'. It seems to epitomise the confusion, the hopelessness and frustration in which this modern world lives out its life. Men have a sense that they lack something. They

grope for it, they hope for it: but like Godot in the play, it never turns up. They are like the priests of Baal on Carmel: 'O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered'.

But it is God we wait for: not Baal, not an indefinite, vague expression of the hope of modern man. And as we wait, we are encouraged by the word of God to hope:

'I wait for God, my soul doth wait,
My hope is in his word.
More than they that for morning watch,
My soul waits for the Lord;

'I say, more than they that do watch
The morning light to see.
Let Israel hope in the Lord,
For with him mercies be.'

Let readers join with me in praying that our waiting on Him in this venture will not be in vain: that we will be able yet to say: 'Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation'.

THE LAMB IS THE LIGHT THEREOF

(Revelation 21 : 23)

The sevenfold consummation of all the redemption plan is given in the twenty-second chapter of Revelation:

'And there shall be no more curse'—Perfect sinlessness.

'And the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it'—Perfect authority.

'And His servants shall serve Him'—Perfect obedience.

'And they shall see His face'—Perfect communion.

'And His Name shall be in their foreheads'—Perfect consecration.

'And there shall be no night there'—Perfect blessedness.

'And they shall reign for ever and ever'—Perfect glory.

What visions of such sevenfold perfection are found anywhere outside the oracles of God?—A. T. PIERSON.

Grace in the Wilderness

(This is the substance of a sermon preached in Scourie on Sabbath evening, the 4th of January, 1976. This was one of the quarterly Sabbaths set apart in the denomination concerned for praying for the revival of Christ's cause.)

'Thus saith the Lord, The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest.'—Jeremiah 31 : 2.

This is a text which might well be applied in a personal way, and those who have come to have a saving interest in the mercy of God in Christ could well see their experience in terms of this text. They see no reason in themselves why they were spared when the sword of divine justice sought vengeance on others. But in the wilderness, where they were brought to feel their own barrenness and lostness, it was mercy that they found instead of judgment. And it was God alone who did this for them; it was He alone who arose to cause them to rest. However, as this is one of the Sabbaths set apart by the Synod as one on which we are called upon to be especially concerned to pray for the advancement of the cause of Christ throughout the world, we apply the text to the church of Christ at large, rather than in an individual way.

Firstly, let us look at some principles seen in this verse and in this context, which operate in the Lord's conduct of His kingdom in the world. Secondly, let us see from the context why we may expect that these principles will always apply in the life of the church. Thirdly, let us look at the application of these principles to ourselves.

The first principle that we note as governing the life of the church is that God will not ignore sin. This arises from the reference in the text to the sword, and if we remember the background to the reference we will see how this principle is illustrated here. Most of Jeremiah's ministry passed before the fall of Jerusalem. He prophesied against the sin within the city, he wept over the backsliding of the people of God, but they paid little attention. It did not matter what he said about the danger of a merely external religion, the leaders of the church clung to their religious heritage as if that alone could save them. We see in chapter 7, for example, that whatever the prophet charged the people with, they refused to believe that God would judge them. They had the temple of God among them, and how could God turn from that? The same point is brought out when we remember the attitude of the

Israelites in Eli's day to the ark of the covenant. They had suffered defeat at their enemies' hands, but if they would only bring the external sign of God's presence into the camp, their victory over the uncircumcised would be guaranteed (I Samuel, chapter 4). Thus these Israelites had regard to the ark, and the people of Jeremiah's day clung to the temple as their hope. It seems that in a day of declension the externals of religion rise to prominence, the more spiritual aspects fall into neglect. For it is easy to make a fuss of externals, to think that having the external things in order will guarantee God's favour. But to live in constant contact with the spiritual side of things requires a daily dying to self and living to God.

But when the church of God falls into decay, He will reach for the sword to chastise it. In the background to this context we see that He used the Babylonians, and that through them the people of God were carried away into captivity. In this way their sin was punished, their heart rebellion and deceitfulness found out. And this is a lesson for us. It is a principle of God's government of His church that He will not ignore sin.

The other main point which strikes us in this passage is that God will never allow sin to destroy His church. He will not pass over sin without taking vengeance on it, but yet He will never suffer sin to obliterate his work. Whoever will fall by the sword, there will be those whom He will bring to repentance. In a time of upheaval and change, many who had a prominent place in the affairs of the Temple may be cut off. They may disappear, they may never be heard of again, and people may say, 'The whole church is finished'. But that can never be, for the very reason why God is in providence pulling apart the outward fabric of the church is that the inner church itself may be preserved. He will bring her to the wilderness, that she may there come face to face with her own barrenness. But what is the cry from the wilderness? It is a cry of repentance. 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me and I shall be turned: for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth' (verses 18-19).

When the church had prayer before, in comparative ease in Jerusalem, the heavens had been as brass; for when they stretched their hands to heaven their hands were stained with sin. But now she knows her barrenness, she has repented of her sin. And what is the answer from Heaven to her prayer?

'Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him saith the Lord' (verse 20). This is entirely according to what the Lord spoke by the prophet Hosea, 'I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her. And I will give her . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope' (Hosea 2 : 14, 15). The wilderness where Israel would be confronted with her barrenness would be the same as the valley of Achor (trouble) where she suffered for her sin (Joshua, chapter 7), and where Achan and his family were put away. But the Lord would speak to Israel in the wilderness, speak to her heart. There He would speak comfortably to her. And the Lord would come to His church when she was closed in in the valley of trouble, convicted of her sin. And He would open a door at the end of that valley, the door of His mercy.

What a miracle is grace in the wilderness! 'This is the doing of the Lord and wondrous in our eyes.' It is this grace that is set before us again in verse 9: 'They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.' There was a father once who confided to his friend some of the misdeeds of his wayward son. And when the father had finished telling about the waywardness of his son his friend said to him, 'I wouldn't have such a person living under by roof. If he chose to live like that, I would just put him out.' The father was silent for a moment at this; then he turned to his friend and said, 'Ah, but he's not your son.' When we review the fearful backsliding of which the people of God were guilty, we might say in the exercise of carnal wisdom, that God should have cast them off. He should have put them out from under His roof. But in this verse it is as if the Lord were saying to us, 'Ah, but he's not your son.' 'For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.' It is the same heart as we see laid bare in Hosea 11 : 8: 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? . . . mine heart is turned within me.' So we see that 'He is of one mind, and who can turn Him?' 'For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance'. He will not overlook sin. He will chastise his children for it, but He will not allow His glorious work to be lost because of sin. He will bring His church down, He will bring her to feel her barrenness. And then He will come to meet her with grace in the wilderness.

If these are two of the principles governing God's conduct of His church, what now is the basis for believing that these principles will be unfailingly applied? For answer, we do not need to waste our time looking any lower than God Himself. And when we look to God's will, revealed to us in this chapter, we see three reasons why His government of His church, as regards these principles, will never change.

First there is infinite love. 'Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name: If these ordinances depart from me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the Lord: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord' (verses 35-37). Why will He not cast off His people? The only explanation given here is infinite love. Why will He never cast them off? Because 'God is love'. Love that is changeless and unfathomable cannot bear to lose them.

And there is another reason in God why He will not allow sin to triumph. That is His mercy. ' . . . But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more' (verses 33-34). How is it that David will not be cut off after his grievous sin and shameful fall? Because, as Nathan said, 'The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die' (II Samuel 12 : 13). And why will the church in desolate days, in times of deadness and backsliding, not be struck out of the Lamb's book of life? Because 'I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more'. So divine mercy goes along with divine love, to seek the carrying out of love's purposes. What a mercy it is that the church should not be permitted to continue in sin! What a mercy it is that God will not abandon His gracious work in the church because of sin! It is a sight of that mercy that moved the repentant church to say, 'Come and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us. He hath smitten, and he will bind us up' (Hosea 6 : 1).

Then there is a third divine attribute made known in this passage which wraps up the ultimate salvation of the church in a perfect security. 'Two are better than one . . . and a three-fold cord is not easily broken' (Ecclesiastes 4 : 9, 12). The third basis in God for the continued application of these points to the church is God's infinite power. 'Hear the word of the Lord, all ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion . . .' (verses 10-12). What a wonderful 'therefore' that is!

'Surely,' we might say, 'the children of Israel are lost for ever, locked in the prison house in Babylon. Surely they have sunk into a pit from which they never shall arise.' And the children of Israel themselves did say, 'Our hope is lost: we are cut off' (Ezekiel 37 : 11). But whatever basis there was in their circumstances for concluding that their case was hopeless, there was a reason in God by which they were certain of deliverance. 'He that scattered Israel will gather them.' And this will be the church's song in the day of her deliverance,

Thou hast an arm that's full of power,
thy hand is great in might;
And thy right hand exceedingly
exalted is in height. (Psalm 89 : 13).

When we review the successive stages of God's purposes for the redemption of the church, what do we see, securing the fulfilment of these purposes, but His own infinite power? Look at Abraham. He has a promise, but he cannot obtain the fulfilment of it in his own strength. He is in the wilderness, faced with his own weakness and the deadness of Sarah's womb. Then what do we see next but that he found grace in the wilderness? For God 'went to cause him to rest'. The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken' (Genesis 21 : 1).

It is the same with the church in exile. They are surely in the wilderness and no where else. But against that background of the church's barrenness there comes to prominence the gracious power of God: 'I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel . . . The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them' (Micah 2 : 12-13).

It is the same with the early church. They have the most

great and precious promises in their hands, but how can these glorious promises find fulfilment? There is only one way for that: 'Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high' (Luke 24 : 49). And when the spirit came upon them, then 'with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all' (Acts 4 : 33). That was 'grace in the wilderness'.

Again it is the same at the time of the Reformation. The church is all but obscured beneath that mediaeval darkness that prevails. And when a lonely German starts to preach we cannot in the exercise of carnal wisdom expect a happy issue or an outgate. But oh can we not see Him here as well? The One who was with the three in the fiery furnace, the One who shepherded Ezra and the others along the road to Jerusalem, the same One is here with Luther and the same words of encouragement speak to him: 'Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness' (Isaiah 41 : 14, 13, 10).

This is the hope of the church in every age when she is made conscious of her weakness, and is yet lifted with a sense of the greatness of her calling in Christ Jesus. This 'therefore' of God's power is the only antidote to her many fears: 'Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion . . . and they shall not sorrow any more at all.'

We have seen God's redemptive purposes towards His church made known. They were, at least in part, made known to Jeremiah in his sleep and 'his sleep was sweet to him' (verse 26). Have we ourselves caught sight of these glorious purposes as here made known? If so, the sight will have been sweet to us as it was to the weeping prophet. And if we have looked around for those who will act as guarantors of the covenant, who will secure its administration, who will guarantee the continued application of these truths to the church to the end of time, we have not looked in vain. For in this passage itself we have found a holy trinity—the love of God, binding Him to His people: the mercy of God preparing 'grace in the wilderness': and the power of God ensuring that that grace is received.

When we come to apply to ourselves these principles, what is their significance for us as we set ourselves to pray for the revival of God's cause? The first point that occurs to us is that we are not to look in hope to any man. We do not look to any man of bygone days: we do not look to any mere man now. It is an extraordinary thing that in a day of small things men often rise to prominence. Then we see how little they are, and how small the day that produced them. But in a day of great things, when giants are going about the land, leading the armies of the Lord, it is not men who are thought of but the Lord who made them great. Nor do we look to men who may come in the future. For if a man were to arise with all the qualities combined of Whitefield, Spurgeon and Edwards, and we were to look to him to save us, we would only bring the blight of God upon his soul. Moses was useful as a leader through the wilderness, but if the people of God had looked to him to work salvation, where would they have been as they stood by Jordan's banks, and Moses lay low in the grave? Surely there was only One who was present at all the deliverances of the church in all her history. Surely there was one figure alone at every extremity of the church. It is to Him, whose glorious presence cast a shadow from heaven over every salvation scene in the church's history, to Him alone we must look. And if we look to Him we will have eyes for no mere man.

Another point which is very practical, and which we must accept as we apply the teaching of God's word here to our souls, is this. We must follow the author of the church's salvation, the guardian of her securities, wherever He will lead. He led the church in Jeremiah's day into exile, and led her back purified and purged. He led the New Testament Church in a total break from the rituals of the ceremonial law. He led Martin Luther and others until they were forced to quit the mediaeval church altogether. If we believe that Christ alone is the author and finisher of our faith, we must be prepared to follow Him as they did. It may be that He will require the destruction of the body to keep alive the soul. In the days of Jeremiah there was rooting out and pulling down to be done, before any building and planting. It may be that great changes are required. Some institutions and usages may have to go. But if some aspects of what has ministered life in the past will have to go, we know that it is only that the church herself will be kept alive in the years to come. We do not know where He will lead, but the all-important question is, Will we follow Him there? *(concluded on page 237)*

Mount Sinai and Mount Zion

(A Communion Table Address)

DR. JOHN DUNCAN

Jehovah he is the God. He is a wonderful God; He is a wonder-working God. God quickens the dead, God opens the blind eyes, and unstops the deaf ears; and the quickened soul has a voice wherewith to respond to the call—'Call unto Me and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not'; and the opened ear can hear the voice that says, 'Look'; and the opened eye can look.

I have been lately, and methinks I still am, at the foot of Mount *Sinai*; and I heard a *voice*, and this voice spake of wrath; the wrath of God, which is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. God thundereth with His voice—who thundereth with a voice like Him? I heard the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, concerning which the Scripture saith, 'so terrible was the sight that Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake".'

And the Lord showed me a *biography*: a biography written defectively in the memory, which at the best is ever treacherous, but written perfectly in the book of God's remembrance. And the voice said, 'Come, and read this biography'. I said, 'O Lord, how can I read it?' 'I have read it,' said God. 'And you must, you must.' And when I had looked, still the voice came, 'Turn thee yet again, and I will show thee greater abominations than these'.

And not a biography only—He showed me a *heart*. 'There are seven abominations in a man's heart'—seven being the Scripture number for completeness. And my eye was fixed on that with horror. I speak not now of godly sorrow and repentance, but of horror; and with something that is surely worse, with shame. For it was not simply my eye fixed on the heart but God showing me His own eye looking on it. 'See thy sin under My eye; see, My eye sees that.' God be merciful to me a sinner!

Now I heard a voice, at first distant and mysterious; but it came nearer, a *still small voice*, proclaiming salvation—a voice which came from Zion, the city of our solemnities, the city of our God—a voice publishing peace, proclaiming the salvation

which comes from Zion—a voice proclaiming, as salvation, so also a Saviour—‘Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, for unto you is born in the city of David, a Saviour’—and not merely a Saviour, and a Saviour on earth—Emmanuel, God with us, God among us, God for us—but a Saviour slain.

Methought then I stood on *Calvary* and heard these words, ‘It is finished’. God said, ‘Look into the heart of Christ and behold Him in His vicarious death. Behold Him, and know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes, He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.’ The greatest depth of this poverty being not in His incarnation—though that was a wondrous depth—look at it in His death.

Then methought also that God said, ‘Come by the blood to the Mercy-Seat’. And I heard a voice speak from the Mercy-Seat from between the Cherubims. And what voice was that? ‘This is My beloved Son (not merely with Whom, but) in Whom I am well pleased, hear Him,’ said He from the Mercy-seat, from between the Cherubims. ‘The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake,’ said He from the Mercy-Seat, from between the Cherubims. ‘I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins,’ said He from the Mercy-Seat, from between the Cherubims. Sweet invitation to me, a departer, ‘Return unto Me’, God assigning to the sinner the saving clause, ‘For I have redeemed thee’.

Then methought the Lord said, ‘I know heart secrets’. And I said, ‘Lord, show me a heart which thou knowest’. And methought the Lord showed me a heart. Whose it was He did not say, and I do not know; but a heart which God knows. He showed me something of it.

It was a heart into which He had put a *new song*. The soul was making melody, attempting to make melody to the Lord. Where it was I do not know; but I heard it singing about the middle of its song. It had been singing other songs before this. It had been singing, ‘What profit is there in my blood when I go down to pit?’ It had been singing the 51st Psalm: and Jehovah had put a new song into its mouth; He had done it, and it was trying to sing; and I heard it in the middle of its song. It had been reading Revelation 5, and trying to sing some of its numbers; and now it was at these words, ‘For Thou wast slain’. And oh, how it was sobbing and breaking, how it was melting and breaking with a joyous grief, and a grievous joy! It could not get its song sung, though it would have liked it. Oh how it faltered when it tried to sing, ‘And hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood’.

(concluded on page 237)

God's Blessedness and His Statutes

HUGH MARTIN

The author of the following discourse was born in 1821, and was brought to know the Lord in his early days. At twenty-three years of age he was ordained to the ministry, and for fourteen years he was pastor in a quiet Free Church charge in Forfar. In 1858 he accepted a call to the congregation of Greyfriars, Edinburgh. Here he served his Master until ill-health forced him to resign his charge. He died in 1885.

Hugh Martin showed a rare combination of intellectual brilliance, genuine humility and spiritual fervour. I think that most will recognise this as they read the following sermon. It is not the first sermon of Hugh Martin's to be published in the *Gospel Magazine*. There may have been others also, but a particularly memorable communion sermon, preached by the shores of Loch Migdale in 1877, was published in these pages in December 1908.

Hugh Martin's main published works are: *Christ's Presence in the Gospel History* (re-issued under the title, *The Abiding Presence*); *The Shadow of Calvary*; *The Prophet Jonah*; and *The Atonement*. The sermon which follows formed the Appendix to this last work.

'Blessed art thou, O Lord; teach me thy statutes.'—

Psalm 119 : 12.

The blessedness of God; subjection to His statutes; and the relation between these topics—such are the threefold materials of thought furnished by this verse. Depending on the blessed God Himself to teach us, we take the three topics in their order.

I

The Blessedness of God

The blessedness of God! It is a great deep, it is a dazzling bright abyss. We can look into it only as with shaded eyes; we can speak of it only as with lisping tongue, like children. Yet if with childlike spirit we look, and listen, and meditate, our exercise may neither be unacceptable to the 'blessed God' nor destitute of blessing to ourselves.

The blessedness of God! It is the result of His possession of all perfections, natural and moral. 'God is light'; 'God is

love.' Infinitely wise to devise the best conceptions, to entertain the infinitely true and good and grand ideals, and infinitely powerful to carry them out into accomplishment, His intelligent nature cannot but be characterised by that combination of inviolable repose and unhindered activity which constitutes a great element in our worthiest ideas of blessedness. His moral nature also in its glorious attributes severally, as also in the unison of their fulness and in the harmony alike of their indwelling in His being and of their outgoing into action, is at once suggestive of the highest conception we can form of blessedness. Speaking even negatively—which to our feeble intellects is often the best means of grasping truth and guiding our own intelligence—speaking even negatively of God's moral nature, it must be very apparent that He is 'the blessed God'. In Him is no darkness, no gloom, no shadow; no variableness, or shadow of turning. In Him is no malevolence; no pleasure even in the death of the vilest or most wicked of the wicked. In Him is no unrighteousness, no inequality. His nature and His ways are 'equal'. Beautiful is that word 'equal', as applied to God's nature and His ways; and blessed is that which it implies. There is nothing unequal in Him; there is no inequality; no excess; no defect; no incongruity, no conflicting element, no discord; no stain, no blemish, no shade, no spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing. In all the boundless fulness of His being He is right, and only right—right, righteous, upright; even as one of His adoring servants hath sung: 'To show that the Lord is upright: 'He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him' (Psalm 92 : 15). How then can we think of Him as other than the 'blessed God'?

But again: the blessedness of God is intimately connected not only with the absolute perfections of His being, but with His absolute natural supremacy and moral sovereignty. These may be distinguished. His natural supremacy is His necessary and absolute independence and superiority over all that exists; His moral sovereignty is His kingly rule over intelligent, responsible beings. And in each of these relations Scripture assigns to Him the attribution of 'blessedness'. For in one passage He is designated as 'God over all'—that is, the Supreme—'blessed for evermore' (Romans 9 : 5); and in another, 'The blessed and only Potentate' (1 Timothy 6 : 16)—the Sovereign; King of kings, and Lord of lords. As the Supreme He is blessed: 'God over all, blessed for evermore'. As the sovereign God He is blessed: 'the blessed and only Potentate'.

Nor is it difficult to see the grounds of these glorious asser-

tions. He is in the fullest, the deepest sense, 'God over all', and therefore blessed. He is independent—absolutely so. He has relations to that which is without His own being; but He is independent of all that is outside His own being. All except Godhead exists by His will and at His pleasure: 'Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things'. 'For His pleasure they are, and they were created.' His is the uncreated, self-existent, independent Being; infinite, eternal, unchangeable, inviolable. In virtue thereof, the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, and He dwelleth in light that is inaccessible. Language fails to tell, and thought fails to body forth unto itself, the secret dwelling-place of the Most High, where the omnipotent and self-sufficient Godhead sits enthroned above all being beside, in His supreme and absolute, yet not self-secluding independence; exalted above all circumstances, above all creatures, above all changes, above all influences; 'God over all', in blessedness which no contingencies can invade, affect, control; which no creature-will can cross, no alien influence overshadow or approach; which no voice of querulousness or questioning can even penetrate or ruffle, even though a million of apostate creations should unite to cry, 'What doest thou?'

For God is not only naturally, necessarily, and, so to speak, physically, the Supreme; He is morally and judicially the absolute Sovereign of the universe: and herein also He is blessed. 'Blessed art thou, O Lord.' Thou art the *Lord*; the Master; the Ruler. God is Judge, Lawgiver, King. The Church welcomes and glorifies Him very specially in this relation, with emphatic reiterated, rejoicing recognitions; and perilling and binding in her salvation with her recognition of it: 'The Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our Lawgiver; the Lord is our King: He will save us': as such—in this capacity in which we give Him threefold recognition; as Judge, Lawgiver, King—Sovereign Lord Most High—as such, 'He will save us'.

And in this moral sovereignty God is blessed. For it is the outcome of His moral nature which is blessed; and is therefore a high exercise, expression, enjoyment of conscious blessedness. For His kingly rule is at once the outgoing of His blessed nature and the fitting action of His blessed supremacy, when He deals with intelligent and moral beings: and if His nature and His supremacy are blessed, then blessed is He also in that sovereignty which is the adequate expression alike of His nature with its perfections, and of His supremacy with its rights and claims. And the more pure and simple we perceive this sovereignty to be—the more absolute, independent, un-

controlled; the more we see it to be the pure and simple expression of His sheer and absolute will; so much the more will we see that it is blessed, and be disposed to acquiesce and rejoice in it. For if His will cannot contradict His nature, which is light and love, beneficence and righteousness; and if it vindicate to moral beings His supremacy and independence; why should it not be sheer and absolute—the mere good pleasure of His will? Shall we plead for its being brought down beneath His natural supremacy, as He is God over all, blessed for ever? Shall we plead for its being taken outside the boundless glory of His blessed nature as light and love—the only wise, the only good; in whom is nothing tortuous, perplexed, unequal, unright, unrighteous? Would we not thereby impair His blessedness as our Sovereign? or rather would we not impair and destroy our own perceptions of His blessedness? And would we rather serve a sovereign whose blessedness we could not recognise, than one whom we cannot but perceive to be the blessed and the only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, absolute and uncontrolled? Nay; it concerns me much, if I am to be His subject and His servant, to see His sovereignty as ruled by nothing but His nature—His will controlled by nothing but His perfections—His reign worthy of His absolute supremacy, and unimpaired by influences that must be of infinite inferiority. Let Him do what seemeth good in His own sight alone. Let me rejoice that He taketh counsel with none—whose counsel would be infinitely beneath His own, incongruous with His own, degrading to His own. 'Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight.' Thy sovereign rule is blessed as Thy nature is blessed. Thou art the blessed and only Potentate. Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!

But further: the blessedness of God subsists in fellowship—fellowship worthy of His eternal being and Godhead; worthy of His glorious nature and its infinite perfections; worthy of His absolute supremacy and uncreated independence—fellowship in the everlasting relations of the ever-blessed Three in One.

As far as I can see, after much and frequent thought, the doctrine of the Trinity enters indispensably into the blessedness of God.

For it provides the element of fellowship—fellowship fully worthy of God's nature, and alone adequate to God's infinite capabilities of fellowship; and without fellowship, I confess, I cannot conceive of 'blessedness' either in the creature or the Creator. I cannot conceive of a Unitarian's God as a blessed

being. A uni-personal Deity inhabiting a past eternity, absolutely without all relations, without converse, without reciprocations, without all love or ought to love; in solitariness, solitude, silence—such a past eternity inhabited by absolutely one only unrelated Person, contemplating naught and in naught conversing, alike unloving and unloved, seems to me to add only the element of infinity to the idea of all that is blank, and cold, and terribly repulsive—to add the character of boundlessness—of illimitable magnitude—to that of the very grave itself—the most unchristian idea even of the grave, ‘the cold grave to which we haste, where everlasting silence reigns’.

—I cannot imagine a uni-personal Deity blessed in contemplating Himself—contemplating His own nature in His own only person, however replete with all possible perfections that nature might be. I doubt whether it is even possible to imagine Him as self-conscious at all, or capable of saying from eternity, ‘I am’; and I do not wonder at the particular Oriental heathen doctrine which represents a uni-personal deity, Brahm, as asleep from all eternity, until He wakens up in the act of creating. And, as far as I can see, the profoundest modern doctrine of what is called the absolute Being faints and fails because it proudly shuns to borrow light from revelation, and draw upon the glorious revealed truth that Godhead subsists as Three in One. I do not say that reason may discover that truth; but I do say that that truth being from any quarter suggested, reason cannot fail to justify it more fully than has, as far as I can see, been generally admitted. For how an absolutely unrelated unity—and God must assuredly be One—how an absolutely and eternally unrelated unity should ever begin to enter on relations, I utterly fail to understand; and, I think, as against such a notion of a personal God—a uni-personal Deity—Pantheism, which affirms that God is all and all things are God, is not without something reasonable to say on its own behalf. How such a God, subsisting in one eternal Person alone, ever should begin to create, I cannot possibly imagine; more especially how He ever could call persons—personal beings—intelligent, moral persons into being. A personal God, self-conscious, can utter from all eternity the great word, ‘I AM’. A dependent intelligent being created by Him, conscious of his own being, gives forth a created reflection of that utterance; and being in the image of God, self-conscious though dependent, expresses the essential dignity of highest created being by also saying, ‘I am’. It is a result of the uncreated ‘I AM’. That any creature in the universe can say, ‘I am’, demonstrates that there must be One who from all eter-

nity could say, 'I AM'—in His case, 'I AM THAT I AM', Jehovah. But then, besides the great word 'I am', there is another which seems to me as great—yea, it would appear, the necessary reciprocal and complement—'Thou art'. A created intelligence can say 'I am', but that is not the first time that great word has been uttered; Jehovah was from everlasting the eternal utterance of it—'I am'; 'I AM THAT I AM'. A created intelligence looking to his Creator can, in the instant following first consciousness, exclaim, 'THOU ART'; and his Creator, looking to His intelligent creature, can say, 'Thou art'. Is this the first time that this great word has been uttered or utterable? Is it right that the great word 'THOU ART', expressing relation, expressing recognition, expressing reciprocation, expressing fellowship, should begin to be uttered in time, and should have no place in eternity—should have no eternal root to grow upon, no eternal fountain to flow from, no eternal rock to lean and rest upon? I cannot think so. Is it right, is it fitting, is it conceivable, that God and His first intelligent creature should be on equal terms, in that each of them should, for the first time, begin reciprocally in recognising each other to say, each unto the other, 'Thou art'? They are not on equal terms in saying 'I am'. God has from everlasting been the 'I AM'; 'I AM THAT I AM'. There was no beginning of circumstances to enable Him to say, 'I AM'. Shall there be a beginning of circumstances to enable Him to say, 'Thou art'? Is it right and fitting that this self-existent God, who has no beginning of being, should have beginning of fellowship, the very crown jewel and diadem of being? that He should begin in time, and only on the poor frail platform of created things, to say, 'Thou art'? Nay. 'To which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art—thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee?' But to His eternal Son He has eternally—in the unbeginning, unending now—the day that knows no morning and no evening—been saying, 'THOU ART'. All along the eternal line of His having said, 'I AM', to His own Son He has been saying, 'THOU ART—thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee'. And not reflecting merely on self, the Father hath seen, and been the blessed God in seeing, the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person in His Son: and in Him hath He also seen, and hath admired—in no self-seclusion, self-hood, or exclusiveness, but in fellowship, He hath seen and hath admired—and been blessed in admiring, Godhead's sovereignty; and *unto the Son* He saith, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom'.

Yes; I cannot imagine a uni-personal God as a Creator at

all. I cannot imagine God beginning to say 'Thou art' to a creature, if He has not been eternally saying 'THOU ART' to one altogether worthy to say 'I AM'—to say 'I AM' in all the same exhaustless fulness of meaning in which Jehovah says, 'I AM THAT I AM'. Without an eternal 'THOU ART', we search in vain for a beginning of creation: we meet with nothing but an eternal gulf between a uni-personal Deity and contingent created being. Reason fails to find a possibility of a beginning till she hear it said of a second Person in the Godhead, that 'He is the beginning of the creation of God'; 'the eternal Son'; the indispensable divine Mediator of creation—afterwards the divinely congruous divine Mediator of redemption. I repeat, I cannot possibly imagine a uni-personal eternal God, having in His own being no relations, no fellowship, no 'THOU ART'; no one, therefore, to whom to say even, 'I AM'; and therefore no voice, no word—no word at all. I cannot imagine a beginning to creation from such a God. But there has been a 'beginning', for there has been a 'Word'—the eternal Word; and I adore the wisdom that links that Word and that beginning thus: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God'—there was fellowship: 'and the Word was God'—it was fellowship adequate for Godhead—fellowship of God with God: yea, fully adequate, for the 'same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In *Him* was life, and the life was the light of men'.

Tell me not of a dark, blank, cold, and cheerless past eternity, with one only, eternal, self-inclusive, self-contemplating Person dwelling in it, however you may accumulate into your description of His being all possible perfections. The more you tell me that He is self-subsisting, self-sufficient, self-complete, and absolutely independent, so much the more do you remove Him far away from every idea of blessedness that reason, as it seems to me, can frame or can accept. It is a dark abyss of solitude and silence, from which I shrink back in terror, and from which I cannot possibly believe that any bright and blessed creation could ever spring—any bright beginning, or blessed work, could ever emanate. I demand some inward, living, bright, and blessed relation in the eternal God Himself ere I can imagine Him beginning to give birth to blessed and bright created beings. And if the problem of an absolute *unity*, such as reason tells that Godhead must necessarily be, combined with *relation*, such as reason and heart alike demand, be a problem insoluble, in which I can but doubtfully and darkly grope my way, my reason is more than satisfied, and my heart

is more than joyful, when from what were otherwise the dark and blank abyss of uni-personal solitude and silence I hear an eternal Person—an eternal Word—saying: 'The Lord possessed *me* in the beginning of His way, *before* His work of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, ere ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. When He prepared the heavens, I was there; when He set a compass on the face of the depth, when He appointed the foundations of the earth, then I was with Him as one brought up with Him, I was daily His delight'—blessed art Thou herein, O God!—'I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him' (Proverbs 8 : 22-32).

O Thou everlasting Son of God!—Thou art the deepest depth of all philosophy truly so called; the solution of all profoundest problems; the satisfaction of our reason; the joy of our heart; the Saviour of Thy people. Thou art alike the light of men and the explanation of the Godhead's blessedness; Thou fillest with boundless uncreated bliss Thy Father's boundless bosom. Blessed art Thou, O Thou Father of an Infinite Majesty: and Thou, O Word of God, His true and honourable Son: also the Holy Ghost. For the communion of two Personalities is saved from being a mere mutual enjoyment of reflected self-hood, by being communion concerning a third Personality. The fellowship of two, each of whom can say 'I AM', and each of whom can say 'THOU ART', seems incomplete, and still only a kind of reciprocal and mutually reflected self-hood, till, going beyond themselves, they can add that other great word, 'HE IS'. But in Trinity there is provision for this also. And the Father and the Son having fellowship in the Spirit and concerning Him; the Father and the Spirit, concerning the Son; and the Son and the Spirit, concerning the Father: blessedness in Godhead is in all relations and every light complete; complete in every kind and in every degree—complete in every kind beyond degree. 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord.'

II

God's Law, Statute Law

I fasten on the leading thought, the thought suggested by the word *statutes*—'Thy statutes'. So that the law of God is statute law—statute and ordained. It is strictly moral law; it is commandment; it is judicial, authoritative, peremptory. It is statute and ordained: 'Thou shalt'. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God: thou shalt not covet.

Two modern errors contradictory of this simple truth present themselves.

1. There are those who hold that the moral law is of the same kind and nature as natural and physical laws: and they would explain the consequence of breach of it, not as punishment, penalty, retribution, wrath inflicted by a personal offended lawgiver; but as the reaction caused by striking against the law itself; as when one leaning incautiously over from the summit of a lofty tower, falls by the law of gravitation, and by the law of the impenetrability of matter is dashed to pieces, or taken up bruised and bleeding. So, they hold, does God rule intelligent men, much as He rules the planets—as when, 'from His rounded palm, He bowled them flaming on the plains of night', leaving them to circle round the sun in virtue of the laws of attraction and inertia; or, as when He gave properties to fire which substantially say to man, 'Thou shalt not touch me, for when thou touchest me thou shalt be burned'.

Now, I ask, Is this a fair account of moral law? Does God as little consult my will, does He lay as little responsibility upon me, as when He rolls the moons and planets in their orbits, or sends a comet forth into the distant realms of space? And does He, by moral law, address Himself to me no more directly or personally than when He leaves me to find that by violating the law of fire I am burned, or violating the law of inertia and of prudence alike I dash my foot against a stone? Away with the futile absurdity! It is most miserable science—still more wretched philosophy. It is the destruction of morals; it makes Christianity an impertinence, an impossibility. Nay, it overthrows all evidence of the personality of God, and refuses all recognition of the personality of man. For if God deals with me in such a fashion, I may recognise Him as a *Power*, but I am not shut up to see Him as a *Person*. And I do not see that He deals with me as with a *PERSON*; He seems to count me only a *THING*. I ask also, Is this the sort of law by which earthly monarchs rule, and earthly kingdoms are conducted and conserved? Are the laws—the statutes—the laws statute and ordained in this favoured land of ours, like physical and material laws that lay no responsibility upon us, and address themselves in no respect to our free-will and sense of obligation? Does our earthly monarch rule her subjects after such a fashion? When our gracious Queen desired to send a General to give deliverance to the captives and to quell the savage, did she bowl him into the distant land bound to a camel or a car, and leave him there to work as laws of gravita-

tion, of metals, of fire, of projectiles, might allow—observing these laws, but without any law or commandment authoritative from his sovereign? Nay. She called him to her counsels. Personally she gave commandment; she dealt with him as her responsible subject—a free-agent, able to accept or to refuse responsibility. And in mutual action of her sovereign free-will and his subject free-will, she laid responsibility upon him, and duty: Thy duty shall be to give deliverance to the captive and to quell the heathen's pride. And he accepted the responsibility; and under the weighty burden of it, his soldier-soul sprang up elastic in its chivalry; and he went, bound in duty, free in will; and in full free-will he did his duty, and he did it all; and he gave deliverance to the captive, and he quelled the savage, and he sheltered and comforted the heathen widow's death-bed, and he took her son to be the ward and pupil of a man of God and missionary of the Cross;* and he praised the Lord Most High for his success, and he praised his soldiers under Him; and he shall return to hear his monarch's 'Well done, good and faithful servant', and to hear his country's proud acclaim of gratitude and praise. Wot ye not how his monarch honoured him by saying to him, 'Thou shalt'?

It is even so that God puts honour—perilous, yet grandest honour—on intelligent responsible man; not dealing with him as with dead material substance, but consulting his free-will, calling it into play, laying it under obligation. He shows me that I am under law; I, personally under law to Him, a living Person, Sovereign, and giving me commandment. He shows me that I have broken that commandment, and He is justified in thence condemning me. He shows me also a glorious One to whom He gave commandment also—a very different commandment—a commandment to lay down His life for the sheep; and He accepted the commandment and the responsibility; and not at the loss of the sinner's life, but the surrender of His own, He brings deliverance to the captive, and quells the sinner's pride, and maketh him the ward and pupil, not of any man of God merely, but of the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. He shows me a warfare in which not a single life was lost, but one was freely given; and from the altar, where that life was given, He takes a live coal and lays it on my lips, and He says, 'Lo! this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged'. Then I hear Him saying, 'Who will go for us, and whom shall we send?' And He enables me in personal responsibility, and

* This discourse was written and preached at the close of the Abyssinian war.

personal free-will to say, 'Here am I, send me'. And He answers, 'Thou shalt go unto all to whom I send thee, and thou shalt preach the preaching that I bid thee—deliverance to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; and all that I shall say unto thee thou shalt speak'. He gives me peremptory authoritative commandment. I am under law to Him, He is always saying to me: 'Thou shalt'. He is my Lord, my Sovereign, my Lawgiver, my King; and when my commission is at last finished, if it has been at all faithfully fulfilled, He will say: 'Thou hast been faithful over a few things': 'Go thy way; thou shalt stand in thy lot in the end of days'.

And that, I submit, is more honourable to my nature and my person far, than if, making me swift as Mercury, and bright as Sirius, He moved me about upon the broad plains of His government as if I were susceptible of but planetary and stellar movements, rather than of free and willing obedience to His sovereign word and will. It concerns me greatly to prefer being under express, authoritative, statute law to the 'blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords'. Yes; 'blessed art Thou, O Lord', my Lawgiver and King; 'teach me Thy statutes'.

II. There is a second perversion of this truth. Some would have it that although the moral law is categorically imperative in itself, it is not so to the believer. Regenerated by the Spirit of God, the law is *in* his heart as the law *of* his heart; and now he needs no outward commandment to rule, and bind, and obligate him. Inward principle moves him spontaneously; and external imperative law is removed.

Is it so? Was it so with the first Adam? or with the second Adam? either of them?—and they are the two representative men of the race.

(1) How was it with our first parent? If ever outward law, categorical and imperative, might have been dispensed with, it might in his case. God's law was in his heart. In all the compass of his holy blessed nature, there was nothing adverse to the law of God. He was a law unto himself. He was the moral law unto himself; loving God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself, in all things content, in nothing coveting. Was imperative, authoritative, sovereign commandment therefore utterly unnecessary? Did God see it to be needless to say to him, Thou shalt, or Thou shalt not? It was the very thing that infinite wisdom saw he still needed; ere being proved thereby he might obtain the crown of life, otherwise incompetent to him and unattainable. And therefore did He give command-

ment, sheer and sovereign, commandment that was not written on his heart and could not be by nature, but must be enjoined upon him from without by sovereignty: 'Thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die'.

(2) How was it with the second Adam? All God's law was in His heart. Operating there, an inward principle of grace, acted in Him by the Spirit of holiness His immeasurably, He surely, if any, might have dispensed with strict, imperative, authoritative law and commandment. 'I delight to do Thy will, O God; Thy law also is within my heart.' Was no commandment, therefore, laid upon—no obedience statute and ordained unto Him? Or, did He complain if there was? Nay; I hear Him specially rejoicing in it. Every word He uttered, every work He did, was by commandment; and I hear Him rejoicing that it was so. 'My Father which sent Me, He gave Me commandment what I should say and what I should do; as He gave Me commandment therefore, so I speak.' And grand beyond compare as was His willing priestly act of laying down His life; and only second to it in grandeur as was His kingly act of taking it again; both these acts of Zion's royal High Priest were done in obedience to strict imperative commandment, statute and ordained. 'I lay down My life of Myself, and I take it again: this commandment received I of My Father.' Ay, and at this moment, while He pleads at the right hand of the throne, an Advocate for sinners, He is acting by commandment, by the imperative law and obligation of official duty; and the vilest sinner seeking His aid can appeal to Him by the obligation of His office and by the force of His Father's commandment, that 'him that cometh to Him He may in no wise cast out'. *He* at least counts it not dishonour to be under imperative commandment—to hear the Father saying to Him, 'Thou shalt'. And, oh, how blessed for me it is that it should be so! For I hear the Father's 'Thou shalt' unto the Son take gracious, glorious forms like these: 'The bruised reed Thou shalt not break, and the smoking flax Thou shalt not quench, till Thou bring forth judgment unto truth.'

(3) And shall His members, though the regenerating Spirit dwells in them, claim an exemption from what the Son was not exempt, from what the Son counts it honourable not to be exempt even in His heavenly glory? For even there He shall for ever be 'subject to the Father, that God may be all in all'. Shall believers, because the Spirit puts the law into their hearts, claim a right to act merely at the dictate of inward gracious principle, untrammelled, uncontrolled by outward peremptory statute? I appeal to Paul in the seventh chapter of the Romans, where he says, 'The law is holy', and adds, as if to show that

it was no inward actuating law of the heart, but God's outward commanding law to the will: 'The law is holy, and the *commandment* is holy, and just, and good'. And I appeal to the sweet singer of Israel, a man whose heart was after God's own heart, yet trusted not his obedience in the keeping of inward principle, but bowed to outward categorical commandment. For I find in this psalm, which is all throughout the breathing of a heart in which the law of God is written—I find him, over and above that, owning himself with joy as under peremptory external law: 'Thou hast *COMMANDED* us to keep Thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes. Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all Thy *commandments*'.

III

Relations between God's Blessedness and His Statutes

What are the relations, the practical relations, between these two topics? They are not expressly indicated in the text. The two topics are simply placed in juxtaposition, without any formal link of connection. The bond that binds them is like a deep-sea electric line; yet the soul that understandeth will read without difficulty the silent telegraphic message that hidden line conveys. It is a twofold message or lesson—its parts reciprocal and mutually supplementary—and may be stated thus: (1) If I would effectually learn His 'statutes', let me constantly contemplate His 'blessedness'; (2) If I would safely contemplate His 'blessedness', let me habitually cherish subjection to His 'statutes'.

I. If I would effectually and loyally learn His statutes, let me contemplate Him as the blessed God. If I would in good faith and love accept Him as my only King and Potentate, let me dwell much upon the thought He is the 'blessed' and only Potentate. For if I am to be His obedient servant hearkening to the voice of His commandment, under stringent, strict, imperative law to fulfil His will, it concerns me much to know what sort of God He is, and, in particular, whether He be 'blessed for evermore'. My perceptions of His blessedness will enter deeply into the style of spirit with which I set myself to learn his statutes.

Take the case as it appears in the infinitely lower sphere of relation to a human teacher or master. I am to be indentured to a master as his servant or his pupil. I ask not only, Is he just-minded? Is he kindly? But is he a happy-minded man? Is he equable in temperament and temper? Is he genial and joyful?—in a word, a blessed man? Or, righteous and good, it may be, in the main—is he dark, moody, gloomy, fitful? Is he

such that, like the schoolboys in the 'Deserted Village', I might 'learn to trace the day's disaster in the morning face'? That, certainly, would make my obedience to him greatly more difficult, my relation to him greatly more uncomfortable.

I have seen—thank God, oftener than once—I have seen a truly blessed man, a father, a brother in the ministry; his face gleaming with gladness and with love; and as he turned it upon me, I could have gladly served him to the uttermost that health of body and power of soul could have permitted me. And as the sweet memory has come across me of that shining countenance—ripe alike in the rich joy of pious silvered age, and in the golden youthfulness that 'shall be fat and full of sap, and aye be flourishing'—I have felt as if I could understand somewhat of the depth of that prayer: 'God be merciful unto us and bless us, and *cause Thy face to shine* upon us'. And if a brother's or a father's blessedness could make me serve him gladly, if God would but show me the blessedness of the blessed and only Potentate, I think I would cry out imperiously: 'O blessed God, I will not let Thee go until Thou bless me; till Thou bless me by teaching me Thy statutes. The commandments of a God so blessed cannot possibly be grievous. Thy statutes cannot but be blessed too'.

II. If I would safely contemplate His blessedness, let me cherish subjection to His statutes. I say 'safely'. For there is risk, there is danger—the danger of envy, dark, malignant envy—grudging God His blessedness.

Is this said to be a devilish and fanciful idea? Devilish? Yes. 'Tis precisely that which made angels devils. Fanciful? No. 'Tis too terribly real, as must be confessed by the children of two bright blessed beings who fell from their integrity by their desire to be 'as gods' themselves; and it is too truly but the veritable reading of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and is not subject to the statute-law of God, neither indeed can be. Rightly probed, and rightly interpreted, that carnal mind is envious of God, envious of His inviolable, independent blessedness, and would excuse its own unholiness, if it dare, by saying, It is very easy for such a God to be holy—blasphemously fretting and grudging that it is not independently blessed, too—or at least comfortable.

It is a most insidious form of our malignant unbelief and vanity—this envious desire to be ourselves independent. And both by law and by gospel, both by wrath and by grace, God will have it avenged or annihilated. The very reconciliation proclaimed in 'the gospel of the blessed God' is expressly framed and instinct all throughout with faculty and force for

overthrowing it. For that reconciliation takes place as a justification—legal, judicial, in terms of law—contemplating the saved sinner as a subject under strict, imperative, inviolable law—standing at his Sovereign's throne condemned and self-condemned. Never more is the soul of man made to feel subject to the law of God, than in being justified freely by His grace. The believer, in the very act of receiving forgiveness and acceptance in the Beloved, is presented to God, to himself, to all the universe, in the most express conceivable aspect and attitude of a subject of his Sovereign, under peremptory obligation to authority and law, even by his very faith 'submitting himself to the righteousness of God' (Romans 10 : 3). Never am I more profoundly in subjection than when tremblingly I take hold on that righteousness of Christ. Never do I more profoundly own the stringency and strict severity of law, than when I essay to make use of that death of Christ which in such severity and stringency the law demanded in the case of Him who took my place, and came to magnify the law and make it honourable. Most blessed is our reconciliation to God. It is a *real* reconciliation. It is the sweet composing of a quarrel the most painful. It is the sweet and happy restoration of friendship with the Most High. All elements of handsomeness, generousness, good taste, good feeling—of finest feeling and delight—are in it; and '*blessed* is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, whose sin is covered, to whom the Lord imputeth no iniquity'. Nevertheless, formally, and fundamentally, and primarily, it is a *justification*—a legal act, a sovereign deed; in terms of law, in court of law, where all is statute and ordained.

Is not that, indeed, its charm and its strength—its exhaustless charm, its strength eternal? And again, I say, it is good that it should be so, for this as for other reasons—good, I mean, that I should be made to feel under imperative commandment, under authoritative law to God—because, save for that conviction, I might come to envy Him His blessedness by very reason of its supreme and infinite independence; its high, supernal, inviolable repose; its absolute and indestructible equipoise; resting, as it does, on eternal, unchangeable perfection, and on sovereign supremacy above all creatures, all influences whatsoever; enshrined in fellowship of infinitely equal and adequate reciprocal delights unfathomable. What is my relief against the snare and risk of envying the blessedness of God? Is it, on the one hand, the conviction that He rules me only as He rules material substances, binding me like a planet or a satellite, as by hard and iron fate, to circle round His throne? That, certainly, will never teach me to rejoice in

contemplating His blessedness, as He is 'God over all, blessed for evermore'. Is it, on the other hand, an indolent resigning of myself up to some inward principle, be it even the grace of this blessed God Himself, within my heart? Nay; as little will that even qualify me to rejoice in the blessedness of 'the blessed and only Potentate'. What I need is a cordial recognition, a personal, practical acknowledgment of His supremacy, His absolute sovereignty—a personal, cordial recognition that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; that He reigneth over me; that I am under statute-law in His kingdom, 'hearkening', like the angels, 'to the voice of His commandment'. That, and that alone, will keep me safe, as I gaze into the bright and fathomless abyss of the blessedness of God. That, and that alone, shall be my own reflected blessedness; while beholding the blessedness of God, I am changed into the same image from glory to glory, from blessedness to blessedness, as by the Spirit of the Lord. I may be in some measure like unto God in righteousness, by cultivating similar righteousness; or like unto God in wisdom, by cultivating similar wisdom, in my measure, by the Spirit of wisdom. I may be like unto God in holiness by sharing His holiness, being made partaker of His holiness, 'partaker of a divine nature through His exceeding great and precious promises'. In all these I may be like unto God by cultivating similarity. But I can be like unto God, I can bear the image of God, in His sovereignty, as the blessed and only Potentate, only by cultivating dissimilarity. That is the paradox, and it has its real ground in reason. I sympathise with God in righteousness, in holiness, in wisdom, by sharing these attributes in their *direct* reflection. I sympathise with Him in His sovereignty only by a reverse reflection or obverse image here. I sympathise with His sovereignty only by being in subjection—subjection absolute, unconditional, unqualified, even as His sovereignty is absolute, unqualified, unconditional. By affecting to share with Him here, I would be repudiating His sovereignty, envying Him His independence, invading, if I could, the inviolable blessedness which is His as the only Potentate. I have no relief against this risk and snare but learning His statutes; and the more I learn, and the more I am subject, the more do I see, and the more deeply do I rejoice in seeing, that He is the blessed and the only Potentate. I can safely see His blessedness then. Blessed art Thou, O Lord; teach me Thy statutes.

I close with two brief appeals.

First; I appeal to you to cherish a deep sense of God's statutes as authoritative, imperative, of absolute and unchange-

able obligation. 'Thou hast *commanded* us to keep Thy precepts.' They are His 'commandments', for ever binding all men, regenerate and unregenerate alike; and they are enforced by authority most absolute, from which there is and can be no appeal. Unless we feel that we are in this sense under law to God, piety or spiritual life is utterly impossible to us. We are under an error not merely of great magnitude, but an error that is fundamental, all-pervasive, and fatal. Unless we realise God's law as continually and absolutely binding, we will be incapable of understanding what sin is, for sin is the transgression of the law; incapable of conviction of sin; incapable of self-condemnation; incapable of contrition, of repentance unto life; incapable of faith in Jesus Christ, who magnified the law; incapable of receiving the sprinkling of His blood, which is just God's infinitely wise device for placing a once dishonoured law again in perfect honour in the conscience, unto its perfect peace and salvation and adoring gratitude for ever. We will be incapable, therefore, of sanctification; for a man is sanctified in so far as, and no further than, he is obedient to the law of God. I know of no spirituality that is not unqualified, unconditional obedience to God's unconditional, sovereign authority. 'If any man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the *commandments* of God'.

Secondly; I appeal to you to ascribe blessedness to our God. My text is not a cold, didactic assertion of the proposition that God is a blessed Being. It is the warm, adoring, direct ascription of blessedness to Him by a soul in communion with Him, rejoicing in His blessedness: 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord'. Therefore, brethren, join with me in thus ascribing blessedness unto our God. Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord from the fountain of Israel. Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless His holy name. Yea, blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David. And blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. And blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who keepeth not His blessedness unto Himself, but hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. His name shall endure for ever; His name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in Him—all nations shall
(concluded on page 240)

THOUGHTS

H. P. WOTTON

We little realise the importance of thoughts, for countless numbers of these often uninvited guests are allowed to run through our minds, where they may leave a trail of havoc in the form of worry, anxiety, emotional upsets, imaginary fears, and so on. These things bring misery to many people; and, strangely enough, they are given the liberty not only to run through our minds, but sometimes we give them free lodging and converse with them, instead of showing them the door. How unwise we are to allow them to enter without enquiring from whence they came and what their business is.

Then there are the more pleasant thoughts that come arrayed, not in the garments of sadness, but in the robes of gladness. These may be more dangerous because they are more demanding. The anxious thoughts cause trouble in the city of Mansoul, but those of worldly pleasure are satisfied with nothing less than the heart, for these enticing thoughts tend to reach the seat of the affections, where they are able to control the whole man. They often have such an innocent appearance that we do not suspect them, and if any one is bold enough to point out where the danger lies, he is likely to meet with rebuke instead of thanks. For, after all, what is wrong with thoughts of pleasure, position, or ambition in the world—or in the church? Nothing, you may say. But we shall see.

A *motif* is defined as 'the predominant feature in a piece of music or any work of art'. It is that which gives character to the whole thing, for it governs and moderates every other artistic element that is allowed into the arrangement. A predominant thought does the same for us as a motif does for a work of art. It can so govern us that it becomes the chief feature running through the tapestry of our lives. How important our thought life is seen to be when we remember that our personality may be marred by inordinate desires to cut a figure in the world, or in the church. On the day of judgment we will not be judged so much by what we have done as by what we have thought, for our thoughts supply the motives that give character to our lives. As a man thinks so is he. A godly writer says, 'Men judge our inside by our outside; our heart by our work; but God judges our outside by our inside, our works by our heart'.

We are born with what the Bible calls the carnal mind; and 'the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be' (Roman 8 : 7). It is the mind that refuses to be governed by the word of God. It is essentially of this world, for the great end of its being is to find its satisfaction and rest here. Its thoughts terminate in the things of time, which, because of their carnal nature, subjugate everything—even prayers, hymns and sermons—to their own carnal purpose. Prayers, hymns and sermons may give a religious slant to the character of the religious unregenerate; but however cultured and refined by education and theological teaching the carnal mind may be, it must be what it always is—enmity against God and spiritual death.

The origin of the believer's new thought life

The origin of the believer's new thought life is in the fact that he is a new creature in Christ. 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new' (2 Corinthians 5 : 17). The carnal mind is now seen to be a shameful thing, and by the new creature it is considered to be redundant. Though the believer knows that it will continue to be a nuisance to him as long as he lives in the world, he takes comfort from the fact that he is 'born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of the Lord, which liveth and abideth forever (1 Peter 1 : 23). He is determined that the word of the Lord shall be the predominant feature in the pattern of his life, for he knows that if he is to live a Christian life in the New Testament sense of the term the word of the Lord must so enter into the moral and spiritual fibre of his being, that it shall become the meat and drink of his soul, 'for man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' (Matthew 4 : 4).

Consider the miry clay from whence the regenerate believer has been taken. In the sight of God his best thoughts were vain, foolish and sinful; and 'every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Genesis 6 : 5). He put light for darkness, and darkness for light; wisdom for foolishness, and foolishness for wisdom. But now he has access to the greatest thoughts, for he has the word of God, in which he has the mind of God, who has declared that 'as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah 55 : 9).

Thinking our way to glory

Thought is not only the life of the intellect; it is that of the soul also. Take away the power of thought and we cease to be what we now are, being left with less intelligence than animals. It is true to say that the Christian religion is necessarily in the thoughts of our hearts, for this phrase 'the thoughts of our hearts' indicates that the mind is the seat of the affections. It is here that we love or hate, rejoice or sorrow. Our faith ceases to be a merely intellectual exercise when it works by love, when the thoughts of our hearts go out in love to the Lord Jesus. We may look at the graces of the Spirit and see that each one is a gracious thought, for even when it becomes an act, the act ceases to be valid when the thought is not there.

We cannot love God when we have no thoughts of love towards Him; we cannot believe in the Lord Jesus and in His way of salvation unless we have an intelligent understanding as to who He is and what He has done for us. The same applies to the other graces of the Spirit, and so the apostle exhorts us to think on these things. 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things' (Philippians 4 : 8).

Genuine Christianity consists of spiritual-mindedness, and we cannot be spiritually minded unless our thought life is directed by the Spirit and the word of God. We need to be reminded that the spiritual mind is not intended for a favoured few only, who appear to be more spiritually minded than others. It is necessary to the very being of Christianity, and the dreadful alternative is nothing less than death, 'for to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace' (Romans 8 : 6).

If we are going to heaven we must think our way to glory. It is no more possible to be a Christian without a spiritual mind than it is to be a doctor without a doctor's mind, or a lawyer without a lawyer's mind.

Someone has said that if we are too heavenly minded we are of no earthly use. This remark may be clever but it is not true, for who have been of more use in the world than those who have walked consistently with their God? To think of one outstanding example. Who walked closer to God than George Muller of Bristol? By prayer and faith in God alone he was enabled to build seven orphan houses at Ashley Down, in which, from April, 1836, until May, 1898, he cared for

10,024 orphans; besides the Scriptural Knowledge Institution, by which he did much to spread the gospel in various parts of the world. But though the quip about being too heavenly minded is not true, the reverse is, for if we are too worldly minded we are no heavenly use.

We are exhorted by the apostle to set our affection on things above and not on things on the earth. It is recorded of Martin Luther that he said that he loved Bernard of Clairveaux more than all the other monks put together. This was no doubt because Luther saw that Bernard was such a heavenly man, and he loved him for it. Of Bernard of Clairveaux's hymn, 'Jesus, the very thought of Thee', David Livingstone said, 'The hymn of St. Bernard on the name of Christ pleases me so much that it rings in my ears as I wander the wide, wide wilderness'.

'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not' (Malachi 3 : 16 to 18).

I have had many things in my hand and I have lost them all; but whatever I have been able to place in God's hand, I still possess.—MARTIN LUTHER.

When you have got up to heaven and cast your eyes to view the golden city and the fair and never-withering tree of life, you will then say, 'Four and twenty hours' abode in that place is worth three score and ten years' sorrow upon earth'.—SAMUEL RUTHERFORD.

How great a ground of quietness it is that the whole disposal and management of all our affairs and concerns is in the hand of our own God and Father. . . . Neither men nor devils can do anything without God's leave, and be sure He will sign no order to your prejudice.—JOHN FLAVEL.

Though the world can smite us low and trouble us, it cannot extinguish the faithfulness of God nor annul His promises, nor cast a veil, not even the slightest cloud, over the love with which God has loved us in Jesus Christ.—ADOLPHE MONOD.

LOST HORIZONS

H. M. CARSON

*(This series of sermons was first published in
THE EVANGELICAL MAGAZINE)*

'Now there was in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed . . .' (Acts 13 :1-4).

I

In this and subsequent articles we shall consider the missionary responsibilities of the Church of Christ. The articles are abridged from a series of sermons, the first of which was not tape-recorded and is thus not available for printing. Briefly, it introduced our subject by setting the present missionary situation against the background of the command of Christ in Matthew 28 : 18-20. The abiding commission given by the Lord of the Church is to go to all the nations and to make disciples. But today we see opportunities overseas and doors still open for preaching the gospel, but sadly inadequate numbers of recruits, especially men, and insufficient funds.

These things reveal the spiritual weakness in the churches at home. But it is not enough merely to diagnose weakness and failure. We need also to seek the remedy for such a situation. It is all too easy when things are sadly weak to go in the wrong direction and to adopt some expedient which may indeed yield short-term results but in the long term leaves us just where we were before.

I do not believe that the real remedy is simply to intensify our missionary education, have more missionary conventions and more means of bringing home to God's people the needs of this and that land. Obviously education will play an important part, but the fact is we have never been so well provided for as far as missionary education is concerned. We have an abundance of first-class literature, both magazines and books, which put us in the picture as far as the situation overseas is concerned. We have film strips and slides and films telling us about the situation in this and that country and the news of the

church in this and that area. We even have tape recordings brought back so that we can have one of our own missionaries as it were in person speaking to us and we can have up-to-date information. There is a very real sense in which we have never in the churches at home had so much information and, in spite of all that, missionary interest is all too often at a very low ebb.

There are of course great exceptions, and many godly people spend much time in prayer and give sacrificially. But in general it is surely true to say that, in the evangelical churches, missionary interest is at a very low ebb indeed.

What then should we do to seek the remedy? Surely, what we always need to do when confronted with any problem is to go back to the Scripture. What we should be concerned to discover both for ourselves individually and for the life of our churches is what the Word of God says to us in this present situation. And this we shall try to do in these present articles.

II

Clearly the answer to our problem is to go back to the Acts of the Apostles and see the kind of church from which missionaries went. And what more appropriate church could we choose than the one which sent Paul and Barnabas? Missionaries down the centuries have looked back to the Apostle Paul as in many ways the great prototype missionary, the man whom God raised up and sent out to be the Apostle of the gentiles, the man who had to break through a wall of prejudice as far as his own Jewish people were concerned in order that he might reach the gentiles. Paul was a man in whose very bones the gospel burned and whose one concern was that the gospel might be declared to the ends of the earth, no matter what dangers or ignominies he had to suffer personally. So we ask, from what kind of church did this missionary come? What kind of situation produced this kind of outlook? I believe as we look at the church in Antioch we shall see some of the principles which need to be applied to our situation today.

Obviously, this was a church that was developing spiritually. It was a church that was indwelt and directed by the Holy Ghost, and in which there was preaching and instruction in sound doctrine. It had come into being in a time of persecution. After the martyrdom of Stephen in Jerusalem, persecution had led to the scattering of the disciples, who went everywhere preaching the gospel. They were not all called to public ministry, but wherever these people went they spoke to others of Christ. And in Antioch this resulted in many, including Greeks, being brought to the Lord. Conversion, however, was

only the beginning; something more was required. Thus Barnabas came down from Jerusalem and taught these young Christians. But there were too many converts for Barnabas to teach alone, so he went to Tarsus and found Paul, this man who not so long before had been a bitter opponent of the Christians, and brought him back to Antioch, where they both spent a year teaching the people.

There is a great principle for us here. There is no short cut to blessing in a church. A thorough foundation of true biblical doctrine must always be laid if solid long-term results are to be seen.

Another significant thing about the church at Antioch was the emergence of spiritual gifts. When we look at chapter 13, verse 1, we find that a whole group of prophets and teachers has emerged. Yet this was a very young church, which not so long before had had no leaders at all. But the Holy Spirit was active and besides Barnabas and Paul exercising their preaching ministry, God had been giving gifts to others, such as Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Philip, and already preaching and prophetic gifts are beginning to be seen. This makes it clear that opportunity must have been given to these men to exercise their preaching gifts within the fellowship. And this of course is the pattern of New Testament church life, for a preaching ministry always reproduces itself. In a sense Paul and Barnabas were preparing for their own departure from Antioch, because through their preaching other men were emerging to whom God was giving these gifts. Thus when Paul and Barnabas went the church would not suddenly be bereft of teachers, but others would be ready to continue to minister to the brethren.

Again, this was an outward-looking church. Very significantly it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christian'. Obviously the name Christian was first given as a nick-name. But outsiders only apply nick-names when they are conscious of the presence of a particular group in their midst. All too often today nick-names are not thrown out at the church because the outsider looks on it as completely irrelevant, and is hardly aware of it as a living, dynamic body. This was not the case in Antioch. There the Christians were clearly making an impact in this pagan town, with the result that the outsiders gave them the nick-name of 'Christian'. What was the impact they made? Well, they must have been speaking much about Christ. Christ must have been so much at the heart of their message and their witness that the outsider said, 'These people seem to be Christ-men, the only thing they talk about is Christ—we'll call them Christians'.

At the same time, this church was plainly concerned about the community. It was looking out at men and women who lived round about, and was speaking and preaching the gospel to them. Later there was going to be missionary outreach, when the church caught the vision of spreading the gospel right across the Roman Empire, but even now, in its early days, it was involved in evangelistic enterprise. And so it always is. Missionaries are not produced by taking an air or boat trip overseas. Missionaries are those who have already been committed at home to the task of reaching others with the gospel. A missionary-minded church is not activated because it has heard some stirring address from a missionary on furlough, rather it is a church which first of all is concerned with the community in which God has established it. It is an evangelistic church in its own home situation. If it is not that, it is very unlikely ever to become concerned with those further off. There may, of course, be an emotional concern: it is very easy to pray for those who are lost in distant lands simply because it does not involve us in very much, while at the same time ignoring some of those we meet day by day who are equally lost, equally without Christ. But this church at Antioch was evangelistic in its own local situation, having a sense of responsibility towards preaching to others, and it was to such a church that God gave this wider vision.

Not only was the church at Antioch concerned with gospel preaching, though that came first. We read in Acts 11 the account of the prophecy that was given about the great famine that gripped so much of the area, and of how believers at Antioch decided that they would send help to the needy Christians in Judea. This was quite spontaneous. There does not seem to have been any word in the prophecy that 'You are to do this'. Here was a church that was on the look-out for opportunities to fulfil God's law and to serve others. What is even more striking is that it was largely a gentile church, while in Jerusalem the believers were largely Jewish. Now the Christian cannot divorce himself from the situation in which he lives, and in the first century there was a bitter cleavage between Jew and Gentile. But Gentiles as they were, they sent help to these Jewish believers who were in need. In other words, here was a church which was not concerned simply with itself, and its own life, but which all the time was looking out, and it was to this church that God turned and it was from this church that God called these missionaries.

It was then a church that in a very real sense was God-centred. At the beginning of Acts 13 we find that Paul and Barnabas' missionary call came through the church and in the

ordinary course of church life. It was while the believers were ministering to the Lord and fasting and when they were engaged in the normal life of the church that God met with them and spoke to them. They were 'ministering to the Lord'. The word that is used here is one that was used by the Greek translators of the Old Testament to describe the ministry of the priests in the temple. It is a word that spoke of the realm of public worship, of the directing of the minds and hearts of the people towards God Himself. Here then was a church which was concerned with worship. The pursuit of God—this was the people's great concern. They were setting their minds upon Him, their hearts' desire was to know and to adore and to serve Him.

A missionary church begins as a God-centred church and continues as such. It is in so far as we get some glimpse of the glory of our God, in so far as we see our risen, living Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, and as we get some glimpse of the Lord of all the earth as a God Who desires that the gospel should be taken to all the nations, that we begin to understand in some measure the part that He has for us to play in the outworking of His great redeeming purposes. These people were taken up with God. The glory of God! This was their first concern! To worship, to adore, to serve Him, this was at the very heart of the life of their church. And it was in this situation that God spoke to them.

They ministered to the Lord, *and they were fasting*. This is something that sounds almost strange to us today. We have reacted so far from false views of fasting that we have tended to ignore what the New Testament has to say, and that the Lord Jesus Christ practised fasting and coupled this with prayer.

Fasting is obviously not to be thought of in terms of some meritorious act in order that we might gain further favours of God. The New Testament seems to view it more in terms of spiritual concentration. There are seasons in which we seek God and we desire God's blessing, and so we lay aside other things. In this case at Antioch fasting involved the laying aside of that which is perfectly normal and legitimate, daily food, in order that there might be a concentration upon prayer. Here was a church in dead earnest. These people were not trifling with holy things. They were concerned for the glory of God, with the outreach of the gospel and the blessing of the Church of Christ, and so they gave themselves to fasting. And to them, God came. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit spoke and said 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'.

Here then was also a listening church, a church that was submissive to the Spirit of God. The truth that emerges from this narrative is that the Holy Spirit is the Lord of the Church. We have one Lord of the Church, Christ, Who is present in and through His Spirit. And at Antioch the Holy Spirit manifested His Lordship over the church, and His Lordship over the men whom He called to this particular task. 'Separate to Me,' He says, 'Barnabas and Saul; they are Mine. I have opened their minds in the first place to see the gospel, I have convicted them of their sins, I have brought them to Christ, they are Mine, I want them.' The church at Antioch might well have said, 'We need them. These are gifted men, look at the ministry they are exercising here, look at the blessing they have been to us. How we rejoice in their teaching, why, their ministry has been the very life of the church'. But this church was not clinging to its most gifted men: it was too conscious of the needs of a world lost in the darkness of sin to be doing that. Its people were concerned rather to know the mind of the Spirit for the life of their church and for the life of these men who were being separated for the gospel.

This was not some work which was devised by the church, or some missionary scheme or plan devised by the believers at Antioch. This was very much a visitation from Heaven. The Spirit was saying, 'Here is the task for which I have designated these men, and to that task they must go', and as they went they were subject to the leading and direction of the Spirit. This is true missionary enterprise, when the Spirit of God is controlling and directing a church, directing its people so that they are looking out on a field which is the world. They see that field, not as a particular work which becomes theirs, but as a field where the Lord of the harvest works out His own great purposes and where those who work in the harvest are always ready, working under the direction of the Lord of the harvest.

III

So look again at this church at Antioch as it sends out its first missionaries, a church which had been taught in the Word, a church which was maturing, a church in which the Spirit was evidently present in power. Here they are, sending out these missionaries. It is interesting to notice for instance the interchange of use in verses 3 and 4 of this 'sending'. In verse 3 'when they had fasted and prayed, *they* sent them away', but in verse 4 it is the Holy Spirit Who sent them away. But of course this is no contradiction. Ultimately it was the Spirit, the sovereign Lord of the church, Who reached into

that fellowship and laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them out. But there was also a sending by the church. And there are always these two aspects. When a man is called to the ministry of the Lord he accepts the call because he believes he has been called and moved by the Holy Spirit of God, but obviously there must be the attestation of his call by the church. The church is, if you like, the agency through which the Spirit works, and it is most significant here that this missionary call came not just to the two men—it came to the fellowship, God spoke to the whole company.

It followed that this church should bear public witness to the fact that they believed God had called these two men, and so they stood with them as they left Antioch to go out with the gospel. That meant of course that the church not merely accepted the fact that these men had been called, but they accepted responsibility for their support. They were sending them out to a very difficult and possibly dangerous task. They were going out to a completely unknown situation, they did not even have a missionary tradition. There might well be suffering ahead. There might well be death. It was a solemn moment.

What a responsibility it is to send out a missionary! There was a note of earnestness, as they gave themselves to a time of prayer and thereby signified the solemnity of the occasion. But what of us? We join in valedictory meetings and we pray for God's blessing on those who leave us, but I fear we often do it in rather a lighthearted fashion, judging by the speed with which we forget their departure and turn to other things again. Yet it is a desperately solemn moment when a missionary is sent from a company of Christians. We are accepting responsibility for them.

At Antioch, as the believers sent these missionaries, they turned again to fasting and praying. When they had fasted and prayed they laid their hands on them and sent them away. Sometimes I think we are so afraid of abuse that we fail to see some of the precious things in the New Testament, and laying on of hands is certainly a very biblical practice. It goes right back into the Old Testament. In the Old Testament when hands were laid upon someone there was the picture and the symbolism of invoking the blessing of God upon the one upon whom the hands were laid. So the father might lay his hands upon the head of his son to invoke the blessing of God upon the lad. At Antioch two men were going out to danger and to uncertainty so far as the future was concerned. The church laid hands upon them, praying for the blessing of God and the power of the Spirit to sustain them as they went. There was

also another element in this laying on of hands. If you go back again to the Old Testament, when a man gave his sacrificial gift he laid his hands upon the gift, and by that symbolic laying on of hands he was identifying himself with the offering. So these men were also being offered to God, they were the offering of the church that the Spirit might take the offering and use it for the blessing of many. In laying hands upon them, they were identifying themselves with them. The church at Antioch had already had its eyes opened to the needs around and now they were getting a glimpse of a great wide world in need of Christ and in this glorious and solemn moment, as they laid their hands upon these men, the Spirit was moving through the church and men were going out with the everlasting gospel.

This is the essence of a missionary-minded church. It is the kind of church life that we want to see again among us, and for which we should be praying. There are many of us who may say 'I am not called to go overseas and this is all irrelevant to me'. There are many for whom family circumstances may make it impossible to go, someone who is responsible for an aged parent or an invalid or who has other ties. There are others who are at home because they have had a clear call from God to stay in some situation here. The majority of the church at Antioch obviously remained there and God continues this pattern. Those who go are those who have been specially called and specially chosen by the church, but this is where the disastrous hiatus comes. So often the Christians at home think that because they are not called, they do not have the same measure of responsibility as those who go. If a man is called to be a missionary we expect him to prepare himself, and to discipline his mind to study the Word in order that he might be fitted for the task, but all too often we imagine that those who stay at home in the ordinary life of the church and continue with their daily occupations are not called to that high standard. It is the old mediaeval idea of some being called to special degrees of sanctity, but it is quite foreign to biblical teaching.

If we grasp the doctrine of the Church and have some measure of understanding of what Paul is talking about when he speaks of the Church as being the Body of Christ, we shall see that we are all involved. If one member goes, the whole Body is involved. This is the argument of Paul when he deals with the Body. Whatever happens to one member, the whole Body is affected, so that when a missionary goes from us there is one member of the Body of Christ going to a task to which the Spirit has sent him, but the whole Body is involved. God forgive us that so often we are *not* involved! We may be

thrilled that someone has gone from us, but are we burdened with concern for them, do we fast and pray, do we stand right behind them, are we prepared to deny ourselves in order that we might pray and that we might give, or are we just playing at missionary interest in these days? Missionary speakers are often broken-hearted because they visit churches at home where they feel they are just interesting speakers, there for a meeting and it is all very enjoyable and then on they go. But—this is a solemn business. The souls of men and the whole matter of the honour of our God are involved in this. Woe unto me, says, Paul, if I preach not the gospel. This needs to be written right across the life of our churches today.

Where is our likeness to New Testament church life if we are not seeing a stream of young men and women going from us with the gospel, or if we let them go and fail to stand behind them? Here was a church under the control of the Spirit of God. And this indeed may be the heart and the crux of our missionary failure today, whether in sending men or in standing behind them. We know so little of the power of the Holy Ghost among us. We go back to the Acts of the Apostles, and see church life as God intended it to be. From these churches men went out who turned the world upside down. Then look at our country's religious assemblies today! We need to pray that God will move among us in mighty power, that we might have a visitation from the Spirit, not simply to enjoy some new experiences, but in order that, from revived and quickened churches, the gospel might go out to this city around us, to this land of ours, and further—to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Be assured that any revival in evangelism, missions or other manifestations of church life will be only superficial and transitory unless it is based on the strong rock foundation of Biblical truth.—J. G. VOS.

Preach a full-orbed, a complete gospel. The deposit (1 Timothy 6:20) is not yours to deal with as you will; it is another's entrusted to your care. You are but its witnesses. Bear your witness truly and bear it fully. Keep the deposit inviolate.—B. B. WARFIELD.

To be in Christ is the source of the Christian's life; to be like Christ is the sum of his excellence; to be with Christ is the fulness of his joy.—CHARLES HODGE.

For Younger Readers

Since this is the first issue of the magazine since I took over as editor, I do not have anything for you which was not published before. What you are going to read was written three years ago, though it may well be new to you. 1973 was the centenary of Livingstone's death; it was then that I wrote these articles for the *Young People's Magazine* of my Church.

You will notice, if you look elsewhere in this issue, that this is not the only place where you will read about David Livingstone. There is a reference to him at the end of Mr. Wotton's article on 'Thoughts'. Then, the sermon which Mr. Carson sent me deals with the subject of missionary work in a general way. The next two issues will, D.V., also contain sermons by Mr. Carson, continuing his study of the same theme. So you can read what he says about this work, and then turn to your own page and read about David Livingstone. From his life you will gather something of how difficult, how glorifying to God, the life of a missionary can be. Perhaps some day you may yourself be called to take up this wonderful work.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

David Livingstone was born in Blantyre, near Glasgow, just over a hundred and sixty years ago. He came to know the Lord Jesus as his Saviour when quite young, and afterwards determined to give his life to bringing the gospel to others who needed it like himself. To help him in his chosen work, he thought it a good idea first to become a doctor.

So he became a doctor, and he was made a minister too. At first he was not a very good preacher, and once he ran out of the pulpit after announcing his text. Still, he was accepted as a missionary by the London Missionary Society.

David was twenty-seven when he sailed from home as a missionary to Africa. Remember that Africa was not known then as it is now. In those days people thought that the centre of Africa was all made of sand. Of course, if this were true, it meant that there were no people living in the middle of Africa.

Livingstone arrived in Africa after a long sea voyage, and then made the slow journey by ox-cart seven hundred miles to the mission station at Kuruman. He did not stay long at Kuruman, but soon went off by himself among the African natives to learn how they spoke, and to watch how they lived.

One day he wanted to go on a journey, but the oxen were

sick: so he had to walk. Some Africans went with him on this trip, and they watched him closely, wondering how he would survive under the hot African sun. Some of them said among themselves: 'He is not strong: he is quite slim, and only appears stout because he puts himself into these bags: he will soon knock up.' Perhaps the natives had never seen trousers before, and they certainly did not then know that Livingstone had already learned some of their language. He thus understood what they said about him, and was not very pleased. He did not say anything, but for the next few days he walked on at a great speed until he heard the natives admitting that he was very good at walking after all.

A number of months after this, Livingstone settled in a beautiful valley called Mabotsa, and began a mission there. There was one difficulty about Mabotsa, however: there were too many lions there. Livingstone encouraged the Africans to kill one of the lions, knowing that if one were killed the rest of the troop would go away. But the Africans were afraid of the lions, and Livingstone came to help them with his gun. Seeing one lion on a rock behind a bush, he fired both barrels at it, but in a moment it had sprung on him and knocked him to the ground. Then it caught his shoulder and shook him until Livingstone felt like a mouse in the mouth of a cat. Then he put the missionary down and put one paw on his head. Livingstone wondered which part of him he would eat first, but just then the lion saw an African nearby, trying to shoot him. He bounded after this man and bit his thigh. At that another man tried to spear the lion, but instead it bit his shoulder. Then, suddenly, the lion dropped down and died. The Africans gathered round, amazed: it was the biggest lion they had ever seen. The bone in Livingstone's arm was shattered, and never did heal properly: to the end of his days it reminded him of his wonderful escape at Mabotsa.

At this time Livingstone was working among the Bakwain tribe. Their chief, Sechele, lived at Chonuane, and to this village the missionary moved in 1845, together with his wife, Mary Moffat, whom he had married the year before. Try to imagine what the village of Chonuane looked like. The African huts were arranged in circles. The least important people in the village lived in the huts on the outside circle. As Livingstone walked into the village the circles got smaller and he knew that he was passing the huts of the most important people. Then at the very centre of all the encircling huts was the chief's home, and the kotla. The kotla was a clear space in the centre of the village where a fire was lit, and where the

village people would gather to eat or to talk. No doubt it was here that Livingstone preached.

After the first service that Livingstone held at Chonuane, the chief remarked that his people were used to asking questions, when anyone brought before them something new. Livingstone must have wondered what was coming. Sechele then asked if Livingstone's forefathers had known of the future judgment to which he had just referred. Livingstone said that they had. 'You startle me,' replied Sechele, 'these words make all my bones to shake; I have no more strength in me. But my forefathers were living at the same time yours were, and how is it that they did not send them word about these terrible things sooner? They all passed away into darkness without knowing whither they were going.' How glad Livingstone must then have felt that he, at least, had given his life to bringing the gospel to these poor heathen people.

Sechele had been a very active man, keen on outdoor sport, but now he became fond of staying at home, listening to the teaching of Livingstone. On the very first day that the teacher arrived at Chonuane, the chief learned the alphabet, and soon he became a good reader of the Bible. Whenever Livingstone appeared in Chonuane, the chief made him listen as he read some chapters from the Bible. I do not know which book of the Bible is your favourite, but Sechele liked Isaiah best and used to say to Livingstone: 'He was a fine man, that Isaiah; he knew how to speak'.

Having come to believe the gospel, Sechele's great desire was that his people would receive it too. He therefore asked Livingstone to conduct family worship in his house, which he did. Soon the missionary was amazed at the chief's own prayers, simple and beautiful. However, regarding others in his tribe, Sechele had to complain: 'In former times when a chief was fond of hunting, all his people got dogs and became fond of hunting, too. If he was fond of dancing or music, all showed a liking to these amusements, too. If the chief loved beer, they all rejoiced in strong drink. But in this case it was different. I love the word of God and not one of my brethren will join me.'

In the years that followed Sechele became devoted to the man who had brought to him the good news of salvation through Christ. He helped his white friend all he could. He also himself spoke to his people about Christ, and tried to live before them as a Christian should.

In his preaching, Livingstone often used illustrations. One illustration he had was of a caterpillar called Nato which would hide itself in the earth, and then fly out as a butterfly

of gorgeous colours. This he used as an illustration of the change which believers would pass through at the resurrection. Whereas they had been buried in the earth at death, they would yet rise with glorious bodies to meet Christ in the air. Of many of his hearers Livingstone was afraid that they would not have this glorious resurrection, for they did not believe in Christ. But of Sechele he could hope, changing the words of Rutherford:

‘If one soul from Chonuane
Meet me at God’s right hand,
My heaven shall be two heavens
In Immanuel’s land.’

GRACE IN THE WILDERNESS (*contd. from page 201*)

We must follow Him, for any form apart from Him is dead; in His favour alone is life. It will be worth following Him. It is only those that follow who shall hear His voice. It is to those that fight near Him that He will whisper the words ‘Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee’ (verse 5). That encouragement will be personal. But we look as well for a broader blessing, a blessing of a public sort. ‘For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the Mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God’ (verse 6). What blessings are before the church there; blessings worth praying for.

MOUNT SINAI AND MOUNT ZION (*contd. from page 203*)

It was the song of a soul known to God; and many such there are. It was the song of one to whom much had been forgiven, and who therefore loved much; and many such there are. But it was the song of the chief of sinners; of the one to whom *most* had been forgiven, and who loved *most*.

Yet it *faltered* and made wrong music; it jarred, and there was discord; and it grated on its own ear; and pained it. And God was listening to it; the omniscient God, Who knows all things. But the song was presented through and by the Mediator of the New Covenant; and if there was discord, it was removed by grace in atoning blood, by the sweet accents of intercession; for it came up as music in Jehovah’s ear; melody to the Lord. It was not discord in heaven.

I would know, O God, what soul that is! O God, let that soul be *mine*! And tell me of it. Let it be mine! Put a new song into my mouth; teach me to sing it. Teach me to sing it on earth; and to sing it when earth shall be no more.

Book Reviews

THE WORKS OF ROBERT TRAILL. Banner of Truth Trust. Two volumes pp 594 and 520, £3.50 per volume.

Here is an example of Puritan preaching of a high order in which there is a searching exposition of the Scripture leading constantly to a practical application. The re-print covers four volumes but they appear in a two-volume format. There are thirteen sermons on Hebrews 4:16; sixteen on the Lord's Prayer—not on the prayer usually so designated but on John 17:24; eleven on I Peter 1:1-4 and six on Galatians 2:21.

He has a great deal to say on the issue of assurance which will be a blessing to those who are troubled by doubts and fears as to whether they are elect or not. 'There is,' he writes, 'an assurance of faith, that is a duty as well as a blessing, Hebrew 10:22. And were it more minded as a duty, it would be more often attained as a mercy. That assurance of faith I press you to have stands in firm and strong believing.' Elsewhere he writes in similar vein: 'Can you give yourselves to Jesus Christ to be saved by him? Then were you given to him, to be redeemed by him. Your faith on him, speaks your election in him. True faith is the faith of God's elect, Titus 1:1. Why so called, but because all, and only God's elect, get it, and have it; and because election may be known by it.'

On the experience of passing through a time of 'desertion' he writes well. 'Our Lord was deserted . . . yet he prayed, and in his agony prayed yet more fervently. Deserted believers, take comfort in a deserted Saviour. His desertion was penal, yours but medicinal. Though it be bitter physic, it is of the great Physician's prescription; and he can and will bless it, and make you bless him, both for the physic and the cure.'

Here are two telling quotations from his treatment of the death of Christ. 'This blood, as it is satisfying blood, so it is purchasing blood. It is both an atonement and satisfaction, and it is a price. It is redeeming blood for persons, and purchasing blood for blessings.' Then again: 'A true Christian is a poor starving sinner, digging in Christ's grave for eternal life. There it only is, and there he surely finds it.'

Perhaps one final quotation will indicate both the vivid and powerful nature of his preaching and also how it speaks to the heart. He addresses himself to those who pray for Christian friends who are sick as he expounds John 17:24. 'Learn to pray moderately for the lives of Christ's people. . . . Who

can tell, but Christ and we are praying counter to one another? He may be saying in heaven, 'Father, I will have "such a one to be with me where I am" '; and we saying on earth, "Lord we would have him to be with us where we are"; we are saying, "We cannot spare him as yet"; and Christ saying, "I will be no longer without him". It is the force of this prayer of Christ, "I will have them to be with me where 'I am', that is the cause of the death of the godly".'

I hope this extended selection of quotations will whet your appetite for more. The *Banner of Truth* has, as usual, ensured that the meal is not only attractively presented but moderately priced!

THE GOSPEL OF MARK. William Hendriksen. *Banner of Truth Trust*, pp 700. £4.00.

Dr. Hendriksen has long since captured a firm place in the appreciation of those who respond to clear exposition of the Word. You get the feel, in reading his commentaries, that here is a man of God who loves the Word and wants to share what the Spirit has shown him.

But his deceptively simple style of presentation should not blind us to the background of solid scholarly study. His comments emerge not only from his own careful study of the text but from a serious consideration of the views of others—including those from whom he dissents.

One question to pose about any commentator is—how does he deal with the difficult passages? There are some who expatiate at length on the obvious and pass over the problem passages. The answer to this question in the case of Hendriksen is that he faces the problems. Two notable ones in Mark's Gospel are the interpretation of the little apocalypse in Mark 13, and the authenticity of the last few verses in the *Textus Receptus* which lies behind the A.V.

What answers does he give to these two issues? By way of reply I would say that it would not do justice to him to give a simple answer—you must read his arguments for yourself, and also his critique of other views, and then decide whether or not you can follow him.

Many years ago I first 'met' Hendriksen in his commentary on the Book of Revelation. How grateful I am that his productive life has continued in such a fruitful fashion.

THE CHILD'S STORY BIBLE: NEW TESTAMENT.

Catherine Vos, *Banner of Truth Trust*, pp 215. £1.95.

Generations of children—not to mention parents—have

appreciated these lucidly presented Bible stories with their application to the children for whom she wrote. She was the wife of the great exegete Geerhardus Vos, whose 'Biblical Theology', reviewed some time ago, is an outstanding work. But this paperback re-print is a reminder that she is not just a shadow of her husband but a major contributor in her own right—and in her own field, that of instructing the young and enthusing them with a love for the Scriptures.

ALSO RECEIVED

THE GREAT AWAKENING. Joseph Tracy. Banner of Truth Trust, pp 433. £2.75 (for review later).

THE MOTHER'S CATECHISM. Free Presbyterian Publications, pp 32. 20p.

H. M. CARSON.

GOD'S BLESSEDNESS AND HIS STATUTES

(contd. from page 220)

call Him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things; and blessed be His glorious name for ever. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting, and let all the people say, Amen. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. From every voice upon the crowded battlements of Zion let the joyful shout ascend, and let it be echoed back from all that are around the throne. BLESS the Lord, ye His angels that excel in strength, and do His COMMANDMENTS, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His that do His pleasure. Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominions. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Amen and amen.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Readers will please note that subscriptions should be sent to the Business Manager at the address shown on the front of the magazine. They should **NOT** be sent to the editor.