

Volume 22—Studies in the Scriptures—January, 1943
NEW YEAR'S COMFORT.

As we launch out into another year there is little visible prospect of a smooth and pleasant voyage. To the natural eye the clouds are dark and fierce storms seem imminent. The very uncertainty of what the morrow may bring forth fills many with uneasiness and trepidation. But how different should be the state of God's children: an all-sufficient Object is presented to the eyes of their faith from which unbelief derives no comfort. If the poor worldling is concerned with *what* lies before him, it is the blessed privilege of the believer to be occupied with *Who* goes before him—the One who is his Captain, his Guide, his Forerunner. “The Lord! HE it is that doth go before thee” (Deut. 31:8). What a difference that makes! O that writer and reader may be enabled to lay hold of this grand Truth as we enter another period of time and keep it steadily in mind throughout the coming days!

1. The Lord has gone before you in the grand decree of His *predestination*. Last year was one of suspense and sorrow, of trial and trouble and perhaps you tremble at what this one has in store. Well, here is solid comfort. Your future has all been marked out for you. You shall not tread a step which is not mapped on the grand chart of God's foreordination. All your circumstances have been Divinely ordered for you. Ah, Christian reader, what an immense difference this makes that you are not a child of chance, that your lot is not decided by the caprice of fickle fortune. Infinite wisdom and infinite love have arranged everything. You will go nowhere during 1943 but where God has decreed, His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2), planning your path, your life. A predestinating God has appointed “the bounds of your habitation” (Acts 17:26). You may be thrust into the furnace of affliction, yet you will not be deserted. You may be brought low, yet it will be for your future blessing. You may be chastened, yet the rod is in the hand of your Father.

“Your times of trial and of grief,
 Your times of joy and sweet relief,
 All shall come and last and end
 As shall please your heavenly Friend.”

2. The Lord has gone before you in the preparations of His *Providence*. “My god shall supply all your need” (Phil. 4:19): full provision has *already* been made for it. Jehovah does not have to improvise. No unexpected emergency can overtake Him: “known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). Therefore is it written, “And it shall come to pass that before they call I will answer” (Isa. 65:24). Before we reach a place, God has provided for us wherever the road leads, all has been made ready. “Who went in the way *before you*, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in” (Deut. 1:33); and He will not do less for His people today. Canaan was fully prepared for Israel long before they arrived there: “when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which He sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which *thou buildest not*, and houses full of good things which thou filledst not, and wells digged which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees which thou plantedst not” (Deut. 6:10, 11). Here is comfort for the preacher too: “The LORD, *He* it is that doth go before thee,” to prepare hearts for the message, for the reception of the Truth.

3. The Lord has gone before you *in Person*. The path which He calls you to tread has first been traversed by Himself. None other than the Lord of Glory became incarnate, entered this world of ours and tabernacled here for thirty-three years in the flesh, that He might be the Captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10). "When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth *before* them" (John 10:4). Are they required to tread the way of obedience? Well, their Shepherd has Himself preceded them therein. Are they required to deny themselves and take up their cross? Well, He Himself did nothing less. Are they called upon to be buffeted, not for their faults but when they do well, to be persecuted for righteousness' sake? Well, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21). What comfort is there here: that the trials we endure for the Truth's sake, that the unkind treatment we meet with from professing brethren because we dare not compromise are an essential part of the process of our being conformed to the image of God's Son! Shall we be called upon to pass through the valley of the shadow of death? Well, the Christian has nothing to fear, for Christ has gone before Him and extracted the sting of death.

4. The Lord has gone before you in the directions of His *Precepts*. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105), revealing the way of peace and blessing through this dark world. Especially is that true of its preceptive portions, for they make known the paths of righteousness which we are to tread. Ignorance of God's will concerning the way we should go is inexcusable, for He has already clearly and definitely made known His will. The highway of holiness does not have to be made by us: it is there plainly enough before us in the Word and it is ours to walk in it. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory" (Psa. 73:24). A "guide" is one who goes before us, directing our course and the "counsel" of our Divine Guide is contained in His prohibitions and commandments and according as we heed them shall we escape the dangers around us and be kept in the narrow way which leadeth unto Life.

5. The Lord has gone before you in the provisions of His *promises*. What are the Divine promises but so many anticipations of our varied needs and guarantees that God stands pledged to supply them? They are so many proofs of His omniscience which foresaw what would meet our requirements. They are so many tokens of His lovingkindness to manifest His tender concerns for us long before we had any historical existence. They are so many evidences of His faithfulness that He will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly. Whatever tomorrow may hold, the Divine promises assure the Christian that the Lord has gone before and made every provision for him. No dire situation, no pressing emergency, no desperate peril can possibly arise but what there is one of the "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:4) exactly suited to our case. Their value lies in the fact that they are the word of His who cannot lie and "this God is our God forever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death" (Psa. 48:14).

6. The Lord has gone before you into *Paradise*. Did He not expressly announce ere He left this scene, "In My Father's House are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2)? Not for Himself but for His redeemed: nor would He entrust this task unto the angels. How it tells of the love of the Bridegroom for His Bride! Christ has entered Heaven on our behalf, taking possession thereof in our name: "whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" (Heb. 6:20). His entry ensures ours. "Father," He says, "I will that they also whom Thou hast given

Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me” (John 17:24).

“He and I in one bright glory
Endless bliss shall share:
Mine, to be forever with Him,
His, that I am there.”

Here, then, is real substantial comfort, and what shall be my response thereto? “The LORD, He it is that doth go before thee” (Deut. 31:8). Then, first, my eye should be constantly fixed upon Him: “*looking unto* Jesus” (Heb. 12:2)—looking away from all else, trusting none other. Second, then it is my business to follow Him—for what other purpose is a Guide?—“When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him” (John 10:4). And as they do, so they find that He makes them to lie down in green pastures, that He leads them beside the still waters. Ah, who would not follow such a Shepherd! O that the Lord may say of us as He did of Caleb, “he hath followed Me fully” (Num. 14:24).

Third, then *fear* should be entirely *banished* from my heart. And will it not be so if faith really lays hold of this: “The LORD, HE it is that doth go before thee, He will be with thee, He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed” (Deut. 31:8).

7. The Lord has gone before *the preacher*. This little message would hardly be complete if we failed to include a special word for the minister of the Gospel. Nor has God overlooked him at this very point. “Behold HE goeth before *you*” (Matt. 28:7), is addressed immediately unto the servants of Christ and it is for their faith to appropriate the same. According as they do so will their hearts and hands be strengthened. If you are really the servant of Christ, your Master has not called you to draw a bow at a venture but has appointed your specific place in His vineyard and has ordered everything in connection therewith. That does not mean all will be smooth sailing. It did not mean that for the Apostles, as the book of Acts shows. But it *did* mean that they were not left without a Pilot. HE not only went before them but gave assurance, “Lo, I am *with you*, always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20). That is the grand consolation of this writer. May it be yours, too.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

25. *False Prophets* Matthew 7:15.

Our last two articles of this series were devoted principally to showing the relation of good works unto final salvation, this being both pertinent and needful, forasmuch as many of the “false prophets” of our day expressly repudiate all that we therein insisted upon. They dogmatically affirm that “believing the Gospel is *all* that is needed to ensure Heaven for any sinner.” And is it not so? Certainly not. First, it requires to be pointed out that there is an *order* in presenting the Gospel and it is the business of those who preach to observe that order: unless they do so nothing but *disorder* will ensue and spurious converts will be the issue of their labours. If due attention is paid to the Word of God it will not be difficult to discover what that order is: the proclamation and enforcing of the Divine Law *precedes* the publication of the Divine Gospel. Broadly speaking the Old Testament is an exposition of the Law, while the New Testament sets forth the substance and benefits of the Gospel.

The Gospel is a message of “good news.” To whom? To sinners. But to what sort of sinners? To the giddy and unconcerned, to those who give no thought to the claims of God and where they shall spend eternity? Certainly not. The Gospel announces no good tidings to *them*: it has no music in it to *their* ears. They are quite deaf to its charms, for they have no sense of their need of the Saviour. Only those who have their eyes opened to see something of the ineffable holiness of God and their vileness in His sight—who have learned something of His righteous requirements and of their criminal neglect to meet those requirements—only those who are deeply convicted of their depravity, their moral inability to recover themselves, whose conscience is burdened with an intolerable load of guilt and who are terrified by their imminent danger of the wrath to come—only those who know that unless an all-mighty Redeemer saves them they are doomed—only those are qualified to appreciate and welcome the Gospel. “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”

Now the natural man has no realization of the desperate sickness of his soul. He is quite unconscious of what spiritual health consists of, namely, personal holiness. Never having sincerely measured himself by the Divine Standard, he knows not how far, far short he comes of it at every point. God has no real place in his thoughts and therefore he fails to comprehend how obnoxious he is in His sight. Instead of seeking to glorify the One who made and sustains him, he lives only to please himself. And what is the means for enlightening him? What is the sure “line and plummet” (Isa. 28:17) for exposing the crookedness of his character? The preaching of God’s *Law*, for that is the unchanging Rule of conduct and standard of righteousness. “By the Law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20)—its nature, as rebellion against God; its exceeding sinfulness as contrariety to Divine holiness; its infinite evil, as deserving of eternal punishment.

“I had not known sin, *but by the Law*” (Rom. 7:7) declares one who formerly had prided himself in his integrity and righteousness. God’s Law requires inward conformity as well as outward: it addresses itself to the motions of the heart as well as prescribes our actions. We are sinless or sinful just in proportion as we conform or fail to conform to the Law both internally and externally. Just so far as we have false ideas of God’s Law do we entertain false estimates of our character. Just so far as we fail to perceive that the Law demands perfect and perpetual obedience shall we be blind to the fearful extent of our disobedience. Just so far as we realize not the spirituality and strictness of the Law, that it

pronounces a lascivious *imagination* as adultery and causeless anger against a fellow-creature to be *murder*, shall we be unaware of our fearful criminality. Just so far as we hear nothing of the awful thunders of the Law's curse shall we be insensible to our frightful danger.

It has been rightly said that "The Gospel has such respect to the Law of God and the latter is so much the reason and ground of the former, so essential to the wisdom and glory of it, that it cannot be understood by him who is ignorant of the Law. Consequently, our idea and apprehension of the Gospel will be erroneous and wrong just so far as we have wrong notions of God's Law" (S. Hopkins). The excellence of the Mediator cannot be recognized until we see that the Law demands flawless and undeviating obedience on pain of eternal damnation and that such a demand is right and glorious. We must see that *sin* is infinitely criminal and heinous. The essential work of the Mediator was to honour and magnify that Law and make atonement for the wrongs done to it by His people. And they who repudiate this Law or who view it not in its true light, are and must be totally blind to the wisdom and glory of the Gospel. For while they never see sin in its real odiousness and true ill-desert they are incapable of realizing or perceiving their deep need of the Divine remedy.

That salvation which Christ came here to purchase for His people consists first in the gift of His Spirit to overcome their enmity against God's Law (Rom. 8:7) and produce in them a love for it (Rom. 7:22). It is by this we may discover whether or not we have been regenerated. Second, to bring them to a cordial consent to the Law, so that each genuine Christian can say, "So then with the mind I myself serve the Law of God" (Rom. 7:25). Third, to deliver them from the curse of the Law by dying for their sins of disobedience against it, Himself bearing its penalty in their stead (Gal. 3:13). Consequently, they who are experimentally ignorant of God's Law, who have never heartily assented to it as "holy, just and good," have never been sensible of sin in its true hideousness and demerits. They have never been subject to a supernatural work of grace within them—are yet in nature's darkness—strangers to Christ, still in their sins, having felt neither the strength of sin nor the power of the Gospel.

Again—the order which is to be observed in the presentation of the Gospel is exemplified in the appointment of *John the Baptist*. He was the forerunner of Christ, going before to "prepare His way" (Isa. 40:3). John came "in the way of righteousness" (Matt. 21:32), crying, "Repent ye" (Matt. 3:2). A saving faith in Christ must be preceded by and accompanied with a heart-felt sense of the true odiousness and ill-desert of sin. An impenitent heart is no more able to receive Christ than a shuttered window is capable of letting in the rays of the sun. None but the humbled, contrite, broken-hearted penitent is ever comforted by the Lord Jesus, as none but such will ever desire Him or seek after Him. This is the unchanging order laid down by Christ Himself: "repent and (then) believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15): ye "repented not afterward that ye might believe" (Matt. 21:32) was His solemn affirmation. First "repentance toward God and (then) faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21) was what the Apostle testified to Jews and Gentiles alike.

It has often been said that nothing more is required of the sinner than that he come to Christ as an empty-handed beggar and receive Him as an all-sufficient Saviour. But that assertion needs clarifying and amplifying at two points lest souls be fatally misled thereby. To come to Christ empty-handed signifies not only that I renounce any fancied

righteousness of mine but also that I relinquish my beloved idols. Just so long as the sinner holds fast to the world or clings to any fond sin, he cannot thrust forth an *empty* hand. The things which produce death must be dropped before he can “lay hold on eternal life.” Furthermore, Christ cannot be received in part but only in the entirety of His Person and office: He must be received as “Lord and Saviour” or He cannot be savingly received at all. There must be a submitting to His authority, a surrendering to His sceptre, a taking of His yoke upon us, as well as a trusting in His blood, or we shall never find “rest unto our souls.”

“But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12). This verse is often *quoted* by the self-appointed “evangelists” of our day but it is rarely *expounded*. Instead of throwing all the emphasis on “received,” attention rather needs to be directed unto “received *Him*.” It is not “received it”—a mental proposition or doctrine, nor even received “His”—some gift or benefit; but “Him,” in the entirety of His Person as clothed with His offices, as He is proposed in the Gospel. Such a “receiving” as is here spoken of implies an enlightened understanding, a convicted conscience, renewed affections—the exercise of love, an act of the will—choice of a new Master, the acceptance of His terms (Luke 14:26, 27, 33). It is at the last point that so many balk: “why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). And therefore is the inquirer bidden to “sit down first and count the cost” (Luke 14:28). The order is first the Person of Christ and then His gifts (Rom. 8:32): thus God bestows and thus we receive.

Those, then, who declare that a bare believing of the Gospel is all that is needed to ensure Heaven for any sinner are “false prophets,” liars and deceivers of souls. It also requires to be pointed out that saving faith is not an isolated act but a *continuous* thing. When the Apostle contrasted genuine saints with apostates, he described them as “them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:39). Note well the tense of the verb: not “them that believed” one day in the past but “them that believe” with a faith which is operative in the present. In this he was holding fast, “the form of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13) employed by his Master, for Christ, too, taught: “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever *believeth* in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:15, 18, 36; 5:24 etc). In like manner another Apostle says, “If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to whom (*not*, ye “came,” but) *coming*, as unto a living Stone” (1 Peter 2:4)—coming daily, as needy as ever.

Saving faith is not an isolated act which suffices for the remainder of a person’s life, rather is it a living principle which continues in activity, ever seeking the only Object which can satisfy it. Nor is it a thing apart, but a *productive principle* which issues in good works and spiritual fruits. “Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17). A faith which does not bring forth obedience to the Divine precepts is not the faith of God’s elect. Saving faith is something radically different from a mere mental assent to the Gospel, believing that God loves me and that Christ died for me. The demons assent to the whole compass of Divine revelation but what does it advantage them? Nor is the “faith” advocated by the false prophets of any more value or efficacy. Saving faith, my reader, is one which “purifieth the heart” (Act 15:9), which “worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), which “overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4). And such faith man can neither originate nor regulate. Has such a faith been Divinely communicated to *you*?

Now it is in their opposition to those aspects of the Truth we have been concerned with above, that the false prophets may be identified. Not that their preaching is all cast in the same mold: far from it. As the servants of God are variously gifted—one to evangelize, another to indoctrinate, another to exhort and admonish—so Satan accommodates his emissaries to the different types of people they meet with. On the one hand, Romanists and other legalists teach that salvation is by obedience to the Law, that repentance and good works are meritorious. On the other, Plymouth Brethren and other Antinomians insist that the Law is entirely Jewish, that the Gentiles were never under it and have nothing to do with it. But just as the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians differed widely the one from the other yet made common cause in antagonizing Christ, so the false prophets, though far from being uniform in their heterodoxy, nevertheless are one in opposing the Truth. Conversely whatever are their distinctive gifts and spheres of service, the true ministers of God are always identifiable by their fidelity to the Faith once for all delivered to the saints.

It is particularly the Antinomian kind of false prophets we are here seeking to expose and warn against. For the last two or three generations they have swarmed in Christendom, especially in the so-called “evangelical” and “orthodox” sections of it. Almost all the “evangelists,” “Bible teachers” and leaders among the “Fundamentalists” were and are “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” They have deceived multitudes by their very seeming soundness in the Faith. They have denounced “Higher Criticism” and Evolutionism, Christian Science and Russellism. They have affirmed the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures and have made much of the mercy of God and the atoning blood of Christ. But they have falsified God’s way of salvation. Christ bade His hearers “strive” (agonize) to enter in at the “strait gate” (Luke 13:24)—these men declare such striving to be altogether unnecessary. Christ affirmed, “except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” They say that sinners may be saved without repentance. Scripture asks, “If the righteous scarcely be saved, (with difficulty), where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:18): these men aver that salvation is easy for anyone. Scripture uniformly teaches that unless the believer perseveres in holiness he will lose Heaven: but these men insist he will merely forfeit some “millennial crown.”

As one of the Puritans quaintly, yet truly, expressed it, “The face of error is highly painted and powdered so as to render it attractive to the unwary.” The false prophets, whether of the Papist or the Protestant order, make a great show of devotion and piety on the one hand and of zeal and fervour on the other, as did the Pharisees of old with their fasting and praying and who “compassed sea and land to make one proselyte” (Matt. 23:15). They are diligent in seeking to discredit those truths they design to overthrow by branding them “legal doctrines” and denouncing as “Judaizers” those who are set for the defense of them. “With goods words and fair speeches they deceive the heart of the simple” (Rom. 16:18). They speak much about “grace,” yet it is not that *Divine* grace which “reigns through righteousness” (Rom. 5:21), nor does it effectually teach men to deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Titus 2:11, 12). With “cunning craftiness” they “lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14) souls who have never been established in the Truth and beguile with “enticing words” (Col. 2:4), making a great show of quoting Scripture and addressing their converts as “beloved brethren.”

Many of the false prophets of Protestantism have popularized themselves by granting their deluded followers the liberty of preaching. As any reader of ecclesiastical history

knows, it has been a favourite device of false prophets in all ages to spread their errors through the efforts of their converts, flattering their conceits by speaking of their “gifts” and “talents.” By multiplying lay preachers they draw after them a host of disciples. Such incompetent novices are themselves ignorant of the very essentials of the Truth, yet in their egotism and presumption deem themselves qualified to explain the deepest mysteries of the Faith. A great deal safer and more excusable would it be to put an illiterate rustic into a dispensary to compound medicines out of drugs and spirits he understands not and then administer the same unto his fellows, than for young upstarts with no better endowment than self-confidence to intrude themselves into the sacred office of the ministry—the one would poison men’s bodies—but the other their souls.

“But such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:13, 14). In all opposition to the Truth there is an agent at work which belongs to the office of the Spirit of Truth to discover and unmask. If “another Gospel” (Gal. 1:6) be preached rather than the Gospel of Christ it is the fruit of Satanic energy, the minds and wills of its promulgators being led captive by the devil. Satan is the arch-dissembler, being the prince of duplicity as well as of wickedness. When he had the awful effrontery to tempt the Lord Jesus he came with the Word of God on his lips saying, “It is written” (Matt. 4:6)! Though Satan’s kingdom be that of darkness, yet his craft is the mimicry of light and thus it is that his agents work by deception. They claim to be the “apostles (or “missionaries”) of Christ,” but they have received no call or commission from Him. Nor should we marvel at their pretence when we remember the hold which the father of lies has over men.

“Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:15). They are “deceitful workers” for they pose as champions of the Truth and as being actuated by a deep love for souls. As sin does not present itself to us *as sin* nor as paying death for its wages but rather as something pleasant and desirable, and as Satan never shows himself openly in his true colours, so his “ministers” put on the cloak of sanctity, pretending to be dead to the world and very self-sacrificing. They are crafty, specious, tricky, hypocritical. What urgent need, then, is there to be on our guard that we be not imposed upon by every mealy-mouthed and “gracious” impostor, who comes to us, Bible in hand. How we should heed that injunction, “Prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21). Certain it is, my reader, that any “preacher” who rejects God’s Law, who denies repentance to be a condition of salvation, who assures the giddy and godless that they are loved by God, who declares that saving faith is nothing more than an act of the will which every person has the power to perform, is a false prophet and should be shunned as a deadly plague.—A.W.P.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA.

1. *Introduction.*

That which occupies the central and dominant place in what the Spirit has been pleased to record of the life of Elisha are the *miracles* performed by and connected with him. Far more miracles were wrought by him or were granted in answer to his prayers than by any other of the Old Testament Prophets. In fact the narrative of his history consists of little else than a record of supernatural acts and events. Nor need this at all surprise us, though it is strange that so few seem to grasp the implication and signification of the same. The character of Elisha's mission and ministry was in thorough keeping with Israel's condition at that time. The very fact that these miracles were *needed* by them indicates the state into which they had fallen. Idolatry had held sway for so long that the true and living God was no longer known by the nation. Here and there were individuals who believed in and owned the Lord but the masses were worshippers of idols. Therefore by means of drastic interpositions, by awe-inspiring displays of His power, by supernatural manifestations of His justice and mercy alike, God forced even the skeptical to recognize His existence and subscribe to His supremacy.

In our introductory article on the life of *Elijah* we pointed out what is implied and denoted by the *prophetic* office and mission. We think now it is fitting that we should make a few remarks upon the reason for and meaning of *miracles*. The two partake of much the same nature, for prophecy is really an oral miracle, while miracles are virtually prophecies (forthtellings of God) in action. As God only sends forth one of His Prophets in a time of marked declension and departure of His people from Himself, so miracles were quite unnecessary while the sufficiency of His Word was practically recognized. The one as much as the other lies entirely outside the ordinary line or course of things, neither occurring during what we may term normal times. Which of the Patriarchs, the priests or the kings performed any miracles? How many were wrought during the lengthy reign of Saul, David or Solomon? Why, then, were so many wonders done during the ministry of Elijah and still more so during that of Elisha?

The mission and ministry of Elisha was the same in character as that which God did in Egypt by the hand of Moses. There Jehovah was unknown: entirely so by the Egyptians, largely so by the Israelites. The favoured descendants of Abraham had sunk as low as the heathen in whose midst they dwelt, and God by so many remarkable signs and unmistakable interventions brought them back to that knowledge of Himself which they had lost. Unless the Hebrews in Egypt had been thoroughly convinced by those displays of Divine power that Moses was a Prophet sent from God, they had never submitted to him as their leader—how reluctantly they owned his authority on various occasions! So also in the conquest of Canaan, God wrought four miracles in favour of His people: one in the *water* of Jordan; one in the *earth*, in throwing down the walls of Jericho; one in the *air*, in destroying their enemies by hail; and one in the *heavens*, by slowing the course of the sun and the moon. Thereby the nations of Canaan were furnished with clear proof of Jehovah's supremacy, that the God of Israel possessed universal dominion, that He was no local Deity but the Most High reigning over all nature.

But, it may be asked, how do the miracles wrought by Christ square with what has been said above? Surely they should present no difficulty. Pause and ask the question, *Why* did He work miracles? Did not His teaching make clearly evident His Divine mis-

sion—the very officers sent to arrest Him having to acknowledge, “Never man spake as this man”? Did not the spotless holiness of His life make manifest the heavenliness of His Person—even Pilate being forced to testify, “I find no fault in Him”? Did not His conduct on the Cross demonstrate that He was no impostor—the centurion and his fellows owning “truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:54)? Ah, but men must be left without the shadow of an excuse for their unbelief: the whole world shall have it unmistakably shown before their eyes that Jesus of Nazareth was none other than “God manifest in flesh.” The Gentiles were sunk in idolatry—Judaism was reduced to a lifeless formality and had made void the Word of God by their traditions and therefore did Christ reveal the wisdom and power of God as none other before or since by a series of miracles which warranted Him saying, “he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.”

Thus it will be seen that there is another characteristic which links closely together prophecy and miracles: the character of the times in which they occur supplying the key both to their implication and their signification. Both of them may be termed abnormalities, for neither of them are given in the ordinary course of events. While conditions are relatively decent God acts according to the ordinary working of the laws of creation and the operations of His Providence. But when the Enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a more apparent and noticeable standard against him, coming out as it were more into the open and obliging men to take cognizance of Him. But there is this difference: the one intimates there is a state of grievous departure from God on the part of His people—the other indicates that the knowledge of the true and living God has publicly disappeared—that He is no longer believed in by the masses. Drastic diseases call for drastic remedies.

The missions of Elijah and Elisha form two parts of one whole, the one supplementing the other, though there was a striking contrast between them. Therein we have an illustration of the spiritual signification of the number *two*. Whereas *one* denotes there is no other, *two* affirms there is another and therefore a *difference*. That difference may be for good or for evil and therefore this number bears a twofold meaning according to its associations. The second that comes in may be for opposition or for support. The two, though different in character, may be one in testimony and friendship. “The testimony of two men is true” (John 8:17 and cf. Num. 35:30). Thus two is also the number of *witness*, and the greater the contrast between the two witnesses the more valuable their testimony when they agree therein. Hence it is that all through the Scriptures we find two persons linked together—to present a contrast: as in such cases as Cain and Abel, Abraham and Lot, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau—or two bearing witness to the Truth—as Enoch and Noah, Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, Naomi and Ruth, Ezra and Nehemiah, the sending forth of the Apostles by twos (Mark 6:7 and cf. Rev. 11:3).

This linking together of two men in their testimony for God contains valuable instruction for us. It hints broadly at the *twofoldness* of Truth. There is perfect harmony and unity between the two great divisions of Holy Writ, yet the differences between the Old and New Testaments are apparent to every thoughtful reader of them. It warns against the danger of lopsidedness, intimating the importance of seeking to preserve the balance. The chief instruments employed by God in the great Reformation of the sixteenth century were Luther and Calvin. They took part in a common task and movement, yet how great was the difference between the two men and the respective parts they were called upon to play. Thus with Elijah and Elisha: there are manifest parallels between them, as in the

likeness of their names, yet there are marked contrasts both in their missions and their miracles. It is in the observing of their respective similarities and dissimilarities that we are enabled to ascertain the special teaching which they are designed to convey to us.

At first glance it may appear that there is a much closer resemblance than antithesis between the two men. Both of them were Prophets, both of them dwelt in Samaria, and they were confronted with much the same situation. The falling of Elijah's mantle upon Elisha seems to indicate that the latter was the successor of the former, called upon to continue his mission. The first miracle performed by Elisha was identical with the last one wrought by his master: the smiting of the waters of the Jordan with the mantle, so that they parted asunder for him (2 Kings 2:8, 14). At the beginning of his ministry Elijah had said unto Ahab king of Israel, "As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand" (1 Kings 17:1). And when Elisha came into the presence of Ahab's son he also declared, "As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand" (2 Kings 3:14). As Elijah was entertained by the widow of Zarephath and rewarded her by restoring her son to life (1 Kings 17:25), so Elisha was entertained by a woman at Shunem (2 Kings 4:8-10) and repaid her by restoring her son to life (4:35-37).

Striking as are the points of agreement between the two Prophets, yet the contrasts in their careers and works are just as vivid and certainly more numerous. The one appeared suddenly and dramatically upon the stage of public action without a word being told us of from whence he sprang or how had previously been engaged—but of the other the name of his father is recorded and an account of his occupation at the time he received his call into God's service. The first miracle of Elijah was that for the space of three and half years there should be neither dew nor rain according to his word, whereas the first public act of Elisha was to heal the springs of water (2 Kings 2:21, 22) and to produce an abundance of water (3:20). One of the most noticeable features of Elijah's life was his loneliness, dwelling apart from the apostate masses of the people; but Elisha seems to have spent most of his life in the company of the Prophets, presiding over their schools. The different manner in which their earthly careers terminated is even more marked: the one being taken to Heaven in a chariot of fire and the other falling sick in old age and dying a natural death.

The principal contrast between the two Prophets appears in the character of the miracles wrought by and connected with them. The majority of those performed by Elijah were associated with death and destruction, whereas by far the greater of those attributed to Elisha were works of healing and restoration. If the former was the Prophet of judgment, the latter was the Prophet of grace—if the course of one was fittingly closed by a "whirlwind" removing him from this scene, a peaceful dove would be the more appropriate emblem of the other. Elisha's ministry consisted largely of Divine interpositions in a way of mercy, interventions of sovereign goodness, rather than judicial dealings. He commenced his mission by a miracle of blessing, healing the death-dealing springs of water—what immediately followed was the establishing of his authority, the symbol of his extraordinary office. The work of Elijah was chiefly a protest against evil, while the work of Elisha was an almost continuous testimony to the readiness of God to relieve the distressed and respond to the call of need wherever that call came from a contrite and believing heart.

Unto many it may seem really astonishing that a ministry like that of Elisha should immediately follow after Elijah's, for in view of the desperate defiance he encountered

we would naturally suppose the *end* had been reached, that the patience of God was at last exhausted. But if we take into account what has been before us above on the signification of miracles, we shall be the less surprised. As we have pointed out, a state of general infidelity and idolatry forms their background and thus the reason for and purpose of them breaking through the darkness and making Himself manifest to His people who know Him not. Now since God is "light" (1 John 1:5), that is, the ineffably Holy One, it necessarily follows that when revealing Himself He will do so as the Hater and punisher of sin. But it is equally true that God is "love" (1 John 4:8), that is, the infinitely Benevolent One and consequently, when appearing more evidently before the eyes of His creatures it is in wondrous works of kindness and benignity. Thus we have the two sides of the Divine character revealed in the respective ministries of Elijah and Elisha: deeds of vengeance and deeds of mercy.

While their two missions may certainly be considered separately, yet Elisha's ministry should be regarded primarily as the complement of Elijah's. The two, though dissimilar, make one complete whole—and only subordinately a thing apart. On the one hand Elijah's mission was mainly of a public character; on the other Elisha's was more in private. The former had to do principally with the masses and those who had led them astray and therefore his miracles consisted chiefly of judgments, expressive of God's wrath upon idolatry. The latter was engaged mostly with the Lord's Prophets and people and consequently his acts were mainly those of blessing, manifestations of the Divine mercy. The comforting and assuring lesson in this for Christians today is that even in a season of apostasy and universal wickedness, when His rod is laid heavily upon the nations, the Lord will neither forget nor forsake His own but will appear unto them as "the God of all grace." Things may become yet worse than they now are: even so the Lord will prove Himself to be "a very present help" to His people.

Coming now to the subordinate viewpoint and considering Elisha's career as the sequel to Elijah's, may we not find in it a message of hope in this dark, dark hour? Those with any measure of spiritual discernment cannot fail to perceive the tragic resemblance there is between the time in which Elijah's lot was cast and our own sad day. The awful apostasy of Christendom, the appalling multiplication of false prophets, the various forms of idolatry now so prevalent in our midst and the solemn judgments from Heaven which have been and are being visited upon us and the blatant refusal of the multitudes to pay any heed to them by mending their ways all furnish an analogy which is too plain to be missed. There is therefore a real temptation to conclude that the end of all things is at hand—some say an end of the age, others the end of the world. Many thought the same when Napoleon was desolating Europe and again in 1914-18, but they were wrong and it is quite likely that they who think the same today will have their conclusions falsified. There is at least hope for us here: Elijah was followed by Elisha! Who can tell what mercy God may yet show to the world?

We must be on our guard against missing the consolation which this portion of Scripture may contain for us. The darkest night is followed by the morning's light. Even though the present order of "civilization" is doomed to destruction, we know not what favours from God await this earth in generations to come. Of necessity there will be a time when this world and all its works will be burned up and that event may be very near. On the other hand that event may be thousands of years away and if such is the case then black as is the present outlook and blacker as it may become, yet the clouds of Divine

judgment will again disperse and the Sun of Righteousness arise once more with healing in His wings. More than once have the times of Elijah been substantially duplicated even during this Christian era, yet each time they were followed by an Elisha of mercy. Thus it may be again, yea, will be, unless God is now on the point of ringing down the curtain upon human history.

Very little, indeed, seems to have been written upon the life of Elisha, yet this is not difficult to account for. Though there is almost twice as much recorded about him than his predecessor, his history is not given in one connected piece or consecutive narrative, but rather is disjointed, the current of his life being crossed again and again by references to others. The scattered allusions to the Prophet's career do not lend themselves so readily to biographical treatment as do the lives of Abraham, Jacob or David. Why is this? for there is nothing meaningless in Scripture, perfect wisdom directing the Holy Spirit in every detail. May it not be that we have a hint here of the method which will be followed by the Lord in that era which will possibly succeed the period of Christendom's history foreshadowed by Elijah's life? May not the broken and disconnected account of Elisha's deeds presage the form God's dealings will take in a future generation: that instead of being a regular stream they will be occasional showers of blessing at intervals?—A.W.P.

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

6. *Its Blessedness.*

In an earlier article we dwelt upon the deep importance of this doctrine. Here we wish to show something of its great preciousness. Let us begin by pointing out the opposite. Suppose that the Gospel proclaimed only a forgiveness of all sins up to the moment of conversion and announced that believers must henceforth keep themselves from everything unworthy of this signal mercy. What if it declared that means are provided, motives supplied, and warnings given of the fatal consequences which would surely befall those who failed to make a good use of those means and diligently respond to those motives. And that whether or not he should ultimately reach Heaven is thus left entirely in the believer's own hands. Then what? We may well ask what would be the consequences of such a dismal outlook: what would be the thoughts begotten and the spirit engendered by such a Gospel? what effect would it produce upon those who really believe it? Answers to these questions should prepare us to more deeply appreciate the converse.

It hardly requires a profound theologian to reply to the above queries. They have only to be carefully pondered and the simplest Christian should be able to perceive for himself what would be the inevitable result. If the Christian's entrance into Heaven turns entirely upon his own fidelity and his treading the path of righteousness unto the end of his course, then he is far worse off than was Adam in Eden, for when God placed him under the Covenant of Works he was not heavily handicapped from the beginning by indwelling sin. But each of his fallen descendants is born into this world with a carnal nature which remains unchanged up to the moment of death. Thus the believer would enter into the fight not only without any assurance of victory but face almost certain defeat. If such a Gospel were true then those who really believed it would be total strangers to peace and joy, for they must inevitably spend their days in a perpetual dread of Hell. Or the first time they were overcome by temptation and worsted by the Enemy, they would at once abandon the fight and give way to hopeless despair.

"I will not turn away from them, to do them good" (Jer. 32:40). "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). "Nothing whatever can or shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39). "He will keep the feet of His saints" (1 Sam. 2:9). How immeasurable the difference between the vain imaginations of men and the sure declarations of God! It is the contrast of the darkness of a moonless and starless midnight from the radiance of the midday sun. "Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none" (John 18:9) affirmed the Redeemer. Is not that inexpressibly blessed! Everyone of the redeemed shall be brought safely to Heaven. The final apostasy of a believer is an utter impossibility, not in the nature of things but by the Divine constitution. No one who has once been received into the Divine favour can ever be cast out thereof. God has bestowed on each of His children a life that cannot die, He has brought him into a relationship which nothing can change or effect, He has wrought a work in him which lasts "forever" (Eccl. 3:14).

It is sadly true that multitudes of empty professors have "wrested" this truth to their destruction, just as many of our fellows have put to an ill use some of the most valuable of God's temporal gifts. But because foolish gluttons destroy their health through intemperance is no reason why sane people should refuse to be nourished by wholesome food; and because the carnal pervert the doctrine of Divine Preservation is no valid argument for Christians being afraid to draw comfort from the same. Most certainly it is the design

of God that His people should be strengthened and established by this grand article of the faith. Note how in John 17 Christ mentions again and again the words “keep” and “kept” (vv. 6, 11, 12, 15). And His reason for so doing is clearly stated: “these things I speak in the world that they may have My joy fulfilled in them” (v. 13). He would not have them spend their days in the wretchedness of doubts about their ultimate bliss, uncertain as to the issue of their fight. It is His revealed will that they should go forward with a song in their hearts, praising Him for the certainty of ultimate victory.

But the joy which issues from a knowledge of our security is not obtained by a casual acquaintance with this Truth. Christ’s very repetition, “I kept them . . . those that Thou gavest Me I have kept” (John 17:12) intimates to us that we must meditate frequently upon this Divine preservation unto eternal life. It is to be laid hold of in no transient manner but should daily engage the Christian’s heart till he is warmed and influenced by it. A few sprinklings of water do not go to the roots of a tree but frequent and plentiful showers are needed. So it is not an occasional thought about Christ’s power to keep His people safe for Heaven which will deeply affect them but only a constant spiritual and believing pondering thereon. As Jacob said to the Angel, “I will not let thee go except thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26), so the believer should say to this truth, I will not turn from it until it has blessed me.

When our great High Priest prayed, “Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me” (John 17:11) it was not (as the Arminians say) that He asked merely that they might be provided with adequate means by the use of which they must preserve themselves. No, my reader, it was for something more valuable and essential. The Saviour made request that faith should be continually wrought in them by the exceeding greatness of God’s power (Eph. 1:19) and where that is, there will be works of sincere (though imperfect) obedience and it will operate by responding to the holiness of the Law so that sins are mortified. The Father answers that prayer of the Redeemer’s by working in the redeemed “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13), fulfilling in them “all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power” (2 Thess. 1:11) preserving them “through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:5). He leaves them not to their feeble and fickle wills but renews them in the inner man “day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16).

That Christ would have His redeemed draw comfort from their security is clear again from His words, “Rejoice because your names are written in Heaven” (Luke 10:20). To what purpose did the Lord Jesus thus address His disciples but to denote that infallible certainty of their final salvation by a contrast from those who perish: that is, whose names were written only “in the earth” (Jer. 17:13) or on the sands which may be defaced. Surely He had never spoken thus if there were the slightest possibility of their names being blotted out. “Rejoice because your names are written in Heaven”—is not the implication both necessary and clear as a sunbeam?—such rejoicing would be premature if there were any likelihood of final apostasy. This call to rejoice is not given at the moment of the believer’s death as he sees the angels about to convoy him to the realm of ineffable bliss but while he is still here on the battlefield. Those name are written by none other than the finger of God, indelibly inscribed in the Book of Life, and not one of them will ever be erased.

Take again His words in the parable of the lost sheep: "I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:7). "Such exalted hosannas would not resound on these occasions among the inhabitants of the skies if the doctrine of final perseverance was untrue. Tell me, ye seraphs of light; tell me, ye spirits of elect men made perfect in glory why this exuberance of holy rapture on the real recovery of a sinner to God? Because ye know assuredly that every true conversion is (1) a certain proof that the person converted is one of the elect number and (2) that he shall be infallibly preserved and brought to that very region of blessedness into which ye yourselves are come. The contrary belief would silence your harps and chill your praises. If it be uncertain whether the person who is regenerated today may ultimately reign with you in Heaven or take up his eternal abode among apostate spirits in Hell, your rejoicings are too sanguine and your praises too presumptuous. You should suspend your songs until he actually arrives among you and not give thanks for his conversion until he has persevered unto glorification" (A. Toplady).

1. What encouragement is there here for *the babe in Christ!* Conscious of his weakness he is fearful that the flesh and the world and the Devil may prove too powerful for him. Aware of his ignorance, bewildered by the confusion of tongues in the religious realm, he dreads lest he be led astray by false prophets. Beholding many of his companions who made a similar profession of faith so quickly losing their fervour and going back again into the world, he trembles lest he make shipwreck of the faith. Stumbled by the inconsistencies of those called "the pillars of the church," chilled by older Christians who tell him he must not be too extreme, he is alarmed and wonders how it can be expected that he shall hold on his way almost alone. But if these fears empty him of self-confidence and make him cling closer to Christ, they are blessings in disguise for he will then prove for himself that "underneath are the everlasting arms," and those arms are all-mighty and all-sufficient.

The babe in Christ is as much a member of God's family as is the mature "father" (1 John 2:13) and the former is as truly the object of Divine love and faithfulness as is the latter. Yea, the younger ones in His flock are more the subjects of the Shepherd's care than are the full-grown sheep: "He shall gather *the lambs* with His arm and carry them in His bosom" (Isa. 40:11). The Lord does not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax (Matt. 12:20). He gave proof of this in the days of His flesh. He found some "smoking flax" in the nobleman who came to Him on behalf of his sick son: his faith was so weak that he supposed the Saviour must come down to his house and heal him ere he died—as though the Lord Jesus could not recover him while at a distance or after he had expired (John 4:49): nevertheless He cured him. So, too, after His ascension He took note of a "little strength" (Rev. 3:8) and opened a door which none can shut. The highest oak was once an acorn and God was the maintainer of its life.

When we affirm the final perseverance of every born-again soul we do not mean that saints are not *in themselves* prone to fall away, nor that at regeneration such a work is wrought in them once and for all that they now have sufficient strength of their own to overcome sin and Satan. Nor do we declare there is no likelihood of their spiritual life decaying. So far from it, we hesitate not to declare that the very principle of grace (or "new nature") in the believer considered abstractedly in itself—apart from the renewing and sustaining power of God—would assuredly perish under the corruptions of the flesh and the assaults of the Devil. No, the preservation of the Christian's faith and his con-

tinuance in the paths of obedience lies in something entirely *external to himself* or his state. Wherein lay the impossibility of any bone of Christ being broken? Not because they were in themselves incapable of being broken, for they were as liable to be broken as His flesh to be pierced but solely because of the *unbreakable decree of God*. So it is with the mystical Body of Christ: no member of His can perish because of the purpose, power and promise of God Himself.

How important it is, then, that the babe in Christ should be instructed in *the foundation of Christian perseverance*, that the ground on which his eternal security rests is nothing whatever in himself but wholly outside. The preservation of the believer depends not upon his continuing to love God, believe in Christ, tread the highway of holiness, or make diligent use of the means of grace, but on the Covenant-engagements entered into between the Father and the Son. That is the basic and grand Cause which produces as a necessary and infallible effect our continuing to love God, believe in Christ and perform sincere obedience. O what a sure foundation is that! What firm ground for the soul to rest upon! What unspeakable peace and joy issues from faith's apprehension of the same! Though fickle in ourselves, the Covenant is immutable. Though weak and unstable as water we are, yet *that is* "ordered in all things and sure." Though full of sin and unworthiness, yet the sacrifice of Christ is of infinite merit. Though often the spirit of prayer is quenched in us, yet our great High Priest ever lives to make intercession for us. Here, then, is the "anchor of the soul" and it is "both sure and steadfast" (Heb. 6:19).

Ere concluding this subdivision it is necessary to point out in such days as these that it must not be inferred from the above that because the grace, the power and the faithfulness of God insures the preservation of the feeblest babe in Christ that henceforth he is relieved of all responsibility in the matter. Not so—such a blessed truth has not been revealed for the purpose of encouraging slothfulness but rather to provide an impetus to use the means of preservation which God has appointed. Though we must not anticipate too much what we purpose to bring before the reader under a later division of our subject when (D.V.) we shall consider at more length the safeguards which Divine wisdom has placed around this truth, yet a few words of warning, or rather explanation, should be given here to prevent a wrong conclusion being drawn from the preceding paragraphs.

The babe in Christ is weak in himself, he is left in a hostile world, he is confronted with powerful temptations both from within and from without to apostatize. But strength is available unto faith, armour is provided against all enemies, deliverance from temptations is given in answer to prevailing prayer. But he must *seek* that strength, *put* on that armour, and *resist* those temptations. He must fight for his very life, and refuse to acknowledge defeat. Nor shall he fight in vain, for Another shall gird his arm and enable him to overcome. The blessedness of this doctrine is that he shall not be left to himself nor suffered to perish. The Holy Spirit shall renew him day by day, quicken his graces, move him to perseverance and make him "more than conqueror through Him that loved him."—A.W.P.

THE UNKNOWN WAYS OF LOVE

C.H. Spurgeon—1876

“Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shall know hereafter” (John 13:7).

These words of our Lord were spoken in answer to Peter’s exclamation of surprise, “Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?” It was a very natural expression of astonishment and one which deserved no censure. But at the same time it was not a very wise remark, for, albeit that it was a marvelously condescending action for the Lord Jesus to wash His disciples’ feet, He had already performed a greater condescension by coming upon the earth at all in the form of a man. For the Son of the Highest to dwell among mortals in a human body, capable of being girt about with a napkin and able to take a basin and pour water into it, is a far greater marvel than that He should, being a man, leave the supper table and act as a menial servant by washing His disciples’ feet. Had Peter understood also what his Master had prophesied and explained to him, namely, His approaching sufferings and death, he would have seen that for his Master to take a towel and basin was little compared with His having our iniquities laid upon Himself and being a sacrifice for *sin*.

If it surprises you to see the Lord of Glory wear a towel, does it not amaze you still more to see Him clad in the purple robe of mockery? Are you not still more astonished to see His vesture stripped from Him and to hear Him cry upon the Cross, “I may tell all My bones: they look and stare upon Me” (Psa. 22:17)? It is wonderful that He should take the basin in the upper room but surely it was more extraordinary that He should take the cup in the garden and drink in its full bitterness till He sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. To wash the disciples’ feet with water was certainly a surprising action but to pour out His heart’s blood to wash *us* was far greater—for this involved His death, His making His grave with the wicked and His being numbered with the transgressors.

The expression of Peter is thus seen to be very natural but not very profound. Dear Brethren, do you not think it very likely that our pretty pious speeches which strike us as very proper and seem to our friends to be very commendable, will one of these days appear to be mere baby prattling and do even now appear so to the Lord Jesus? Those choice sayings and holy sentences which we have read with admiration and greatly valued—even those are not like the words of Jesus for solid intrinsic weight and worth—but may in other lights appear far less beautiful than they now do. I have myself proved in different humours and frames of mind that the very things which struck me being so very deep and gracious have at other times appeared to be one-sided, shallow, or questionable. We know in part and prophesy in part: our highest attainments here are those of little children and even for the close student, the deeply experienced Christian, the venerable man of years and the graciously anointed instructor of the churches, there is no room for boasting.

Note next that our Saviour answered Peter’s speech in the words of the text, which are as admirable for their tone as for their matter: which should we admire most in this reply, its meekness or its majesty? To Peter’s ignorant simplicity how gentle He is! “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.” And yet how royally He confronts Peter’s forward objection and how distinctly His majestic personality puts down the too conspicuous individuality of Peter! “What I do thou knowest not now.” How perfect the blending of the majesty and the meekness. Who shall tell which of the

colours is best laid on? This is ever the way of our Lord Jesus. You shall find through life, beloved, that whenever Jesus Christ comes to rebuke you, He will do so powerfully but gently; He will speak as a friend, and as a king; you will feel both His love and His authority and own the power both of His goodness and His greatness. His smile shall not make you presume, nor shall His royal glance cause you to tremble. You will find His left hand supporting you while in His right you see His imperial sceptre. Blessed Saviour, are You more meek or more majestic? We cannot tell, but certainly to our hearts You are both kind and kingly, sweet and sovereign, gracious and glorious.

Let us now come to the words themselves. We have looked at the occasion of them and at the manner of them and we will now weigh their matter. The words have suggested to me many thoughts: first, in *our Lord's doings* that there is much which we cannot understand. Our text is not merely true about the washing of the feet but also all that our Lord does: "What I do thou knowest not now." We may know the external part of what He does, or think we do, but there is more in His actions than any of us can conceive. The external is not all—there are wrapped up within the mercies which we perceive other and yet greater mercies as yet unknown to us. You traverse the soil of Canaan and you drink of its rivers and are refreshed by its corn and wind but the goodly land has hidden riches. Its stones are iron and out of its hills you may dig brass. The brooks of which you drink derive their cool waters from springs which have tapped "the deep which lieth under." If you know in some measure what Jesus does, yet the mystery is not altogether laid bare to your eye; there are folds of His manifold grace which are as yet unopened. The work of Jesus is beyond you: it is lower than your fall, higher than your desire; it surpasses you, and is altogether too high for you. Who can, by searching, find it out unto perfection?

Our want of knowledge of the Divine doings is a wide subject, and I shall not attempt to explore its hithermost boundaries but shall restrain myself to the text. Brethren, there are many things that God does which we cannot understand now and probably never shall. For instance, why *He permitted evil* at first and tolerates it still. To this inquiry the Divine answer would be, "What I do thou knowest not." Leave that alone. It is our highest wisdom to be ignorant where God has not enlightened us. It is great folly to pretend to know when we do not—and there lives not a man, nor ever will live a man who has even an approximation to an understanding of the dread mystery—the existence of moral evil. The bottom of this abyss no mind can reach and he is foolhardy who ventures on the plunge. Let this dread secret alone! You cannot endure the white heat which burns around it. Many a man has lost the eyes of his reason while trying to peer into this fiery furnace. What have you to do with that which God conceals from you? It is God's business not yours. The thing was done ere you were born and He who permitted it can answer to Himself if He cares so to do.

So also with regard to *predestination*. That God ordains all things and had before His eye the chart of everything that has been, is, or shall be, is most true. But who knows the depths of foreknowledge and destiny? To sit down and pluck the eternal purposes to pieces, to question their justice and impugn their wisdom is both folly and audacity. Here the darkness thickens and out of it comes forth the oracle, "What I do thou knowest not." The things which are revealed belong to us and to our children; and as to the unrevealed, if it is to the glory of God to conceal a thing, let it be concealed. Christ has rent the veil of the holy place and into the secret of Divine love you may now freely enter. But other

veils which He rends not you may not touch. Some truths are closed up from our understanding, even as the ark of the covenant was shut against prying eyes: let us not violate their sanctity lest we meet the doom of the men of Bethshemesh. Rather let us zealously guard them as priceless treasure that we may obtain the blessing which rested upon the house of Obededom. The same remark applies to the great designs of God in *Providence*. He is pleased in prophecy often to tell us what He has meant by His Providence, and perhaps it will be one of the enjoyments of the future state to see the hand of God in the whole current of history—but while incidents are occurring we must not expect to understand their drift and bearing. The wonderful tapestry of human history, all woven in the loom of God's infinite wisdom, will astonish both men and angels when it is complete. But while it is yet unfinished it will not be possible for us to imagine the completed pattern. From between those wheels of Providence, which are full of eyes, I hear a voice which says, "What I do thou knowest not now."

But we will confine ourselves to the loving acts of the Lord Jesus Christ, since what the Lord was doing with Peter was not very mysterious, nor a deed of transcendent power, nor of stern justice. He was humbly girding Himself with a towel and pouring water into a basin to wash His followers' feet. It was a very simple matter and evidently a very gracious, kind, and condescending act; but yet, even concerning *that* Jesus said, "What I do thou knowest not now."

My Brethren, even the acts of our Lord Jesus Christ in His loving condescension we do not fully understand. Ah, think a minute: how can we? Does not our Lord's love always surpass our knowledge, since He Himself is the greatest of all mysteries? Let me read these words to you: "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel and girded Himself" (John 13:3, 4). Do you understand the higher and the lower points of this transaction? You must comprehend them both before you can see what He has done. "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands." Can you see the glory of this? Jesus our Lord was conscious that His Father had made Him Head over all things to His church. That He had laid the government upon His shoulder and given Him the key that He might open and no man shut and shut and no man open. He knew assuredly that at His girdle swung the keys of Heaven and death and Hell and that having fulfilled the commission of the eternal God He was about to return to His throne. Have you grasped the idea? Do you perceive the glory of which Jesus was conscious? If you have done so, then descend by one long sweep—He, this Lord of All, having all things in His hand, takes off His garments, foregoes the common dress of an ordinary man and places Himself in the undress of a servant—and wears a towel that He may do service to His own disciples. Can you follow Him from such a height to such a depth!

A superior in the East never washes an inferior's feet: Christ acts as if He were inferior to His friends, inferior to those poor fishermen, inferior to those foolish scholars who learn so slowly, with whom He had been so long a time and yet they did not know Him and who soon forgot what they knew and needed line upon line and precept upon precept. Having loved them to the end, He stoops to the extreme of stooping and bows at their feet to cleanse their defilements. Who, I say, can compute the depth of this descent? You cannot know what Christ has done for you, because you cannot conceive how high He is by nature. Neither can you guess how low He stoops in His humiliation and death. With an

eagle's wing you could not soar so high as to behold Him as God over all blessed forever, sitting at the right hand of the Father, the adored of cherubim and seraphim: nor could you dive, even if you dared to take a plunge into the abyss, until you reached the depth of "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me." And yet you must somehow know the interval. I was about to say the infinity, between these two points of height and depth before you could know what Jesus has done for you.

Moreover, think awhile. Was anything that Jesus did understood *while He was doing it*? He is born a babe in Bethlehem but who knew what He did in the manger? A few shepherds and sages and two or three favoured saints discerned the Saviour in the Babe. But to the mass of mankind He was unknown God came on earth and angels sung His advent, but O earth, your Lord might have said to you, "What I do thou knowest not now." He lived here the life of a mechanic's son: that life was the most august event in all human history, but men knew not what it was or what it meant. "The world knew Him not." He came forward to preach the Gospel: did they know who it was that spake as never man spake? Did they comprehend what He spake? Ah, no. He was hid from their eyes. At last He laid aside the life He had so strangely taken—who knew the reason of His death upon the Cross? Did even His disciples know though He had told them? When earth shook and graves were opened by His last cry, did even His own followers understand what a sacrifice had been offered? No, until the Spirit was poured upon them from on high they did not comprehend that "It behooved Christ to suffer." He could say to each of His own disciples, of all that He had done, "What I do thou knowest not now."

This is true, too, of every separate gift which our Lord's love has given to His people. You have been justified in Jesus Christ, but do you fully know the wondrous righteousness with which justification by faith has endowed you? You are accepted in the Beloved, but do any of you realize what it is to have full acceptance with the Father? I know you have realized the fact and rejoiced in it, but have you known, ay, *can* you know the full sweetness of its meaning? You are one with Christ and members of His body: comprehend you that? You are the joint-heirs with Christ: know you the full significance of that? He is betrothed unto you in an everlasting marriage: know you what that means? Ah, no. These wonders of His love, we hear of them, and we believe them, but "What I do" saith He, "thou knowest not now."

Our Lord is doing great things by way of preparing us for a higher state of existence. We shall soon be rid of this vile body, and released from this narrow world. We are going to a sphere more suited for our Heaven-born life, where we shall be the comrades of angels and commune with the spirits of the just made perfect! We shall serve the Lord day and night in His temple but what the glory shall be we do not know—for the ear has not heard it, nor the eye beheld it, nor the heart conceived it. As for the preparations which are going on within us to make us ready for this sublime condition, we know that they are being carried on but we cannot as yet see their course, their separate tendencies, and their ultimate issues. The instrument does not comprehend the tuner: the tuner fetches harsh sounds from their disordered strings but all those jarring notes are necessary to the harmonious condition which he is aiming to produce. If the discords were not discovered now, the music of the future would be marred. My Brethren, concerning all that Christ has done it is true, "What I do thou knowest not now." Oh, if His worth were little we could measure it, if His love were scanty we could know it, if His wisdom were finite we could judge it—but where everything is past finding out, who can pretend to know? Re-

member that in our salvation Christ Himself is the sum and substance, in it every attribute of His deity is brought into exercise to the full. He makes it His glory counting our salvation to be His coronet and crown jewels; and therefore it is not at all marvellous that we not know what He does.

Our want of understanding does not prevent the efficacy of our Lord's work. Peter does not know what Christ is doing when He washes his feet but the Master washes them just as clean whether Peter understands it or not. Jesus did not say, "There, Peter, you do not understand what I am doing by washing your feet. So I shall not wash them until you do." No—He moves on with the basin and towel and washes them clean, though Peter does not know why. Is not this a great mercy, Brethren, that the blessings which Christ bestow upon us are not dependent for their efficacy upon our capacity to understand them? Just look out in the world and see how true this is. A mother has her little child on her lap and she is washing its face. The child does not like the water and it cries. Ah, babe, if you could understand it you would smile. The child cries and struggles in the mother's arms but it is washed all the same. The mother waits not for the child to know what she is doing but completes her work of love. So is the Lord often exercising Divine acts upon us and we do not appreciate them, nor are we pleased. Perhaps we even strive against His work of love—but for all that He perseveres and turns not away His hand because of our crying.

Does the tree understand pruning, the land comprehend plowing? yet pruning and plowing produce their good results. The physician stands at the bedside of the patient and gives him medicine, medicine which is unpalatable and which in its operation causes the patient to feel worse than he was before. This the sufferer cannot understand and therefore he draws unhappy conclusions—but the power of the medicine does not depend upon the patient's understanding its qualities—and therefore it will do him good, though it puzzles him by its strange manner of working.

If a fool eats his dinner, it will satisfy his hunger as much as if he were a philosopher and understood the processes of digestion. This is a great mercy, for the most of men can never become philosophers. It is not necessary for the man to be learned in the nature of caloric in order to be warmed by the fire or comforted by a greatcoat. A man may be ignorant of the laws of light and yet be able to see; he may know nothing of acoustics and yet be quick of hearing. A passenger who does not know a valve from a wheel enters a carriage at the station and he will be drawn to his journey's end by the engine as well as if he

were learned in mechanics. It is the same in the spiritual as in the natural world. The efficacy of spiritual forces does not depend upon our capacity to understand them.

I have mentioned this very simple fact because it really is necessary for us to remember it. We are so knowing, or think we are—we think it so essential that we should form a judgment of what the Lord is doing. Ah, dear Brethren, there are more essential things than this. It is better to trust, to submit, to obey, to love, than to know. Let the Lord alone. He is doing rightly enough, be sure of that. Is He to be questioned and cross-examined by us? Are we to judge His judgments? Dare we demand answers to our impertinent enquiries and say, Why this, why that, and why the other? Were He a God if He would submit to such examination? If we call ourselves His disciples, how can we justify a spirit which would arraign our Lord? Be still and know that He is God. What more would you know?

Remember that the things which you understand are for your good, but they can only bring you a small amount of benefit because they must be in themselves small, or you would not be able to measure them. When a great, deep good is coming to you, you will not be able to comprehend it, for your comprehension is narrow: yet it will be none the less but all the more a blessing because you know it not. Joseph is gone, and here is his bloody coat! “Without doubt he is torn in pieces! All these things are against me. O how my heart is broken with the loss of my darling child, I cannot understand it; it cannot be right” (Gen. 42:36). So talks poor Jacob, but it was right, all the same for that. Joseph was on the sure road to Pharaoh’s throne and to providing for his brethren in the land of Egypt. So it is with you, my Brethren, under your present trial and affliction. You cannot understand it now but that does not make a penny worth of difference—it is working out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Be content to let faith rule and knowledge wait and what you know not now you shall know hereafter.

Completed in the February issue.

DIVINE HEALING.

A number of friends who appreciated our recent articles on this subject have written to us expressing the desire for a few words on James 5:14-16. We respond to their wish with a certain amount of diffidence, for we are not sure in our own mind either as to its interpretation or application. This is a passage which has long been an occasion of controversy and debate and those who took part therein found—as is often the case—that it was easier to refute the argument of their opponents than to establish their own position. When we are uncertain about the meaning of Scripture we usually remain silent thereon but in this instance we will give the leading views which have been expressed and state how we feel toward them.

First, Romanists insist that this “anointing with oil” is a standing ordinance in the church and James 5:14, 15 is the principal passage appealed to by them in support of their dogma and practice of “extreme unction.” But here, as everywhere, the papists go contrary to the Scriptures, for instead of anointing the sick as a healing ordinance, they only administer it to those at the point of death. We have no hesitation in denouncing their *perversion* as a mere hypocritical pageantry. The “unction” they use must be oil—olive mixed with balsam—consecrated by a bishop, who must nine times bow the knee, saying thrice “Ave sanctum oleum” (Hail, holy oil), and thrice, “Ave sanctum chrisma” (Hail holy chrisma) and thrice more, “Ave, sanctum balsamum” (Hail, holy balsam). The members anointed are the eyes, ears, nose, mouth and for the extremities the reins and feet: in women, the navel. The design thereof is the expulsion of the relics of sin and to equip the soul for its conflicts with the powers of evil in the moment of death. One has but to mention these things to reveal the absurdity!

Second, the position generally taken by the Reformers and Puritans, was that this anointing the sick with oil was not designed as a sacrament, there being but two in number: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. They pointed out that so far from this being a standing rite, the Apostles themselves seldom used oil in the healing of the sick: they wrought cures by a touch (Acts 3:7), by the shadow (Acts 5:15), by handkerchiefs (Acts 19:12), by laying on of hands (Acts 28:8), by speaking (Acts 9:34). Nor does it appear that they were permitted to employ this gift indiscriminately—no, not even among Brethren in Christ dear to them, or why should Paul leave Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20)? or sorrow so much over the illness of Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:27)? In this, too, God exercised His sovereignty. But what is more to the point, this supernatural endowment was only of brief duration: “But that grace of healing has disappeared, like all the other miraculous powers, which the Lord was pleased to exhibit for a time, that He might render the power of the Gospel which was then new, the object of admiration forever” (Calvin).

A list of the “charismata” or supernatural gifts which obtained during the apostolic period is found in 1 Corinthians 12: “to another faith, by the same Spirit; to another the gift of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues” (vv. 9, 10). They were designed chiefly for the authenticating of Christianity and to confirm it in heathen countries. Their purpose, then, was only a *temporary* one, and as soon as the Canon of Scripture was closed they were withdrawn. As 1 Corinthians 13 plainly intimates, “whether there be prophecies (inspired messages from God) they shall cease (to be given any more); whether there be tongues, they shall cease, whether there be (supernatural) knowledge, it shall vanish away” (v. 8). It was the

view of Matthew Henry, Thomas Manton, John Owen and in fact nearly all of the Puritan divines, that James 5:14, 15 refers to the exercise of one of those supernatural gifts which the church enjoyed only in the first century.

Among the leading arguments advanced in support of this contention are the following. First, the "anointing with oil" clearly appears to look back to Mark 6:13 where we are told of the twelve, they "anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." Second, the positive promises of healing, verse 15, seems to be an unconditional and general one, as though no exceptions, no cases of failure, were to be looked for. Third, "healing" was certainly one of the miraculous gifts specified in 1 Corinthians 12. Moreover, it hardly seems likely that the "faith" here mentioned is an ordinary one: though whether it differed in kind or only in degree is not easy to determine. There was the "faith of miracles" either to work them or the expectation of them on the part of those who were the beneficiaries, as is clear from Matthew 21:21, Mark 11:24, 1 Corinthians 13:2. The "anointing with oil" after the praying over the sick is regarded as a seal or pledge of the certainty of healing or recovery.

On the other side, we find such a deeply-taught man and so able an expositor as Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680,) insisting for the contrary. He pointed out, first, that James 5:14 is quite different from Mark 6:13, for here the anointing with oil is joined with prayer, whereas prayer is not mentioned there—but only the miraculous gift. Second, the ones to be sent for were not specified as men endowed with the gift of healing, but the "elders," and there is nothing to show that all of them possessed that *gift*. The "elders" were standing *officers* who were to *continue*. Third, the ones to be healed are the "sick" or infirm but extraordinary healing would have extended further—to the blind, the deaf and dumb and would have reached to unbelievers instead of being restricted to church members: cf. 1 Corinthians 14:22. Fourth, the means commanded: oil and prayer on all such occasions, whereas the extraordinary gift of healing was not so confined, but was frequently effected without any means at all, by mere word of mouth.

Third, rather more than a century ago, a certain Edwin Irving, founder of the "Catholic Apostolic church," propounded the theory that the supernatural gifts which existed in the early Church had been lost through the unbelief and carnality of its members and that if there were a return to primitive order and purity, they would again be available. Accordingly he appointed "apostles" and "prophets" and "evangelists." They claimed to speak in tongues, prophesy, interpret and work miracles. There is little doubt in our mind that this movement was inspired by Satan and probably a certain amount of abnormal phenomena attended it, though much of it was explainable as issuing from a state of high nervous tension and hysteria. Irving's theory, with some modifications and some additions, has been popularized and promulgated by the more recent so-called "Pentecostal movement," where a species of unintelligible jabbering and auto-suggestion cum mesmerism is styled "speaking in tongues," and "faith healing." Many of their devotees and dupes attempt to carry out James 5:14, 15, but with very meager and unsatisfactory results.

Concluded in the February issue.