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MINISTERIAL THIEVES.

We have often thought it might be interesting and instructive if we were to devote a short series of articles to some of the misunderstood and misinterpreted texts of the Bible. They are not few in number, nor are the mistakes made in their interpretation trivial in importance: there is nothing trivial in the Holy Scriptures, and it is always to our personal loss when we misapply them. Among those verses whose real meaning is often misunderstood is, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber” (John 10:1). Those words have been strangely wrested both by pulpit and pew, and there seems a real need to prayerfully ascertain their significance, for they contain a warning which is a very timely one for these days.

The reference in John 10:1 *is not* to unregenerate souls creeping into the Church of God, still less to their obtaining an entrance to Heaven. It is well-nigh unthinkable that any commentator should take such a view, for “thieves and robbers” never invade the celestial Paradise (Matt. 6:20), nor does Christ lead His sheep out of the Church, as He does from this “fold” (John 10:3). It is not fictitious sheep but *false shepherds* our Lord is here depicting. It is not unregenerate souls attempting to steal salvation, but unregenerate preachers seeking to fleece the flock of Christ who are represented by these “thieves and robbers.” Sheep are quite incapable of “climbing up” high fences, but men who would prey upon them will stop at nothing in their determination to fatten at the expense of their victims.

Here, as everywhere, careful attention must be paid to the setting of our verse. John 10:1 forms part of a “parable” (v. 6) or proverb. It is manifestly a continuation of the previous chapter, and therefore the false teachers among the Jews (those who had cast out of the Temple the one whose sight Christ had restored—9:35) were primarily intended by the “thieves and robbers.” The priests and scribes demanded of Christ by what authority He acted, seeing that He had received no commission from *them*. Here He turns the tables upon them and insists that *they* had no Divine authority to officiate as the pastors of God’s people. In its wider application, the appellation, “thieves and robbers,” refers to all those who invade the pastoral office that are neither called nor equipped by God.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you.” The “you,” then, are the Pharisees of 9:40. “He that entereth not in by the door into the sheepfold”—this “door” must not be confused with that of verse 9: here it is the door into the “sheepfold,” there it is the door of salvation. The “sheepfold” was Judaism, then degenerate; today it is Christendom, now apostate. The “door,” into it denoted the *lawful* means of entrance—a Divine call: being in contrast from “some other way” by which the thieves and robbers gained access. In styling the Pharisees “thieves and robbers,” Christ denounced them as false shepherds with no Divine commission, in sharp antithesis from Himself, who had (by His credentials) evidenced Himself to be the lawful and good Shepherd (John 10:2).

How diligently should they scrutinize their motives who think of entering the ministry, for thousands have abused this Divine institution through love of ease, desire for authority and reputation, or love of money, and brought upon themselves “greater damnation” (James 3:1). Thousands have invaded the pastoral office in an unauthorized manner, to fleece sheep rather than feed them, robbing Christ of His honour and starving His peo-

ple. Solemn beyond words is it to observe how sternly our Lord denounced these false shepherds of His day. As Bishop J.C. Ryle rightly said, “Nothing seemed so offensive to Christ as a false teacher of religion, a false prophet, or a false shepherd. Nothing ought to be so much feared by the Church, be so plainly rebuked, opposed and exposed”—compare Matthew 23:27, 28, 33.

In conclusion it is pertinent to ask, what are the marks of a true shepherd, how are God’s people to *identify* those called and qualified by Him to minister unto His people? We answer, first, the genuine pastor has *the doctrine of Christ on his lips*. The ministers of the new covenant are described as those who had “renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness.” Christendom today is infested with men who are full of guile and hypocrisy, trimming their sails according to whatever direction the breeze of public opinion is blowing. “Nor handling the Word of God deceitfully” (2 Cor. 4:2). The true servant of Christ holds back nothing that is profitable, no matter how unpalatable it may be unto his hearers. He is one who magnifies not himself, nor his denomination, but *Christ*—His wondrous Person, His atoning blood, His exacting claims.

Second, the genuine pastor has *the Spirit of Christ in his heart*. It is the Spirit who opens to him the mysteries of the Gospel, so that he is a “wise servant” (Matt. 24:45). It is the Spirit of Christ who gives him a love for His sheep, so that it is his greatest delight to lead them into the green pastures of His Word. It is the Spirit of Christ who enables him to use “great plainness (margin “boldness”) of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12), so that he shuns not to declare all the counsel of God. It is the Spirit of Christ who makes him “instant in season, out of season . . . exhorting with all longsuffering” (2 Tim. 4:2). It is the Spirit of Christ who gives efficacy to his ministry, making it fruitful according to the sovereign pleasure of God.

Third, the genuine pastor has *the example of Christ in his life*, which is a conforming of him to the image of his Master. It is true, sadly true, that there is not one of them who does not fall far short both of the inward and outward image of Christ. Yet there *are* some faint tracings of His image visible in all His true servants, or why do God’s people love them, respect them, hear them? What other claims have they upon their attention? The image of Christ is seen in their words, spirit, actions—it may be broken, like the image of the sun in ruffled water; but it is *there*, otherwise we have no warrant to receive them as God’s servants. Find a man (no easy task today!) who has the doctrine of Christ on his lips, the Spirit of Christ in his heart, and the example of Christ in his life, and you find one of His genuine ministers—all destitute thereof are but “thieves and robbers.”—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

10. *The Law and Murder*: Matthew 5:21-27.

“The discourse which our Lord delivered on this occasion entirely corresponds with the new era which it marked in the history of God’s dispensations. The revelation from Sinai, though grafted on a Covenant of Grace (i.e., the Abrahamic: Gal. 3:19—“added”), and uttered by God as the Redeemer of Israel, was emphatically a promulgation of law. Its direct and formal object was to raise aloft the claims of the Divine righteousness, and meet with repressive and determined energy, the corrupt tendencies of human nature. The Sermon on the Mount, on the other hand, begins with blessing. It opens with a whole series of beatitudes, blessing after blessing pouring itself forth as from a full spring of beneficence, and seeking, with its varied and copious manifestations of goodness, to leave nothing unprovided for in the deep wants and longing desires of men. Yet, here, also, as in other things, the difference between the New and the Old is relative only, not absolute. There are the same fundamental elements in both, but these differently adjusted, so as fitly to adapt them to the ends they had to serve, and the times to which they respectively belonged.

“In the revelation of law there was a *substratum* of grace, recognized in the words which prefaced the Ten Commandments, and *promises* of grace and blessing intermingling with the stern prohibitions and injunctions of which they consist. And so, inversely, in the Sermon on the Mount, while it gives grace priority and prominence, is far from excluding the severer aspect of God’s character and government. No sooner, indeed, had grace poured itself forth in a succession of beatitudes, than there appear the stern demands of righteousness and law—the very same Law proclaimed from Sinai—and that Law so explained and enforced as to bring fully under its sway the intents of the heart, as well as the actions of the life, and by men’s relation to it determining their place and destinies in the Messiah’s kingdom” (P. Fairbairn).

It is with these “stern demands of righteousness” we are now to be engaged. The transition point is found in Matthew 5:17, though in the verses preceding, our Lord had intimated the trend of what was to follow, by likening the ministry of His servants to the nature and action of “salt.” Verses 17-20 contain the preface of all that follows to the end of chapter five. In affirming that He had come to “fulfil” the Law, Christ signified, first, that it was His mission as the faithful witness of God and the Teacher of His Church to expound the Law in its purity and spirituality—and to rescue it from the corruptions of the false teachers of that day. Second, to exemplify its righteousness in His own conduct, by rendering to it a personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, in thought and word and deed. Third, to endure its curse in His people’s stead.

To understand a discourse, nothing is of greater importance than a clear grasp of its object and design. If this be not definitely understood, then the plainest statements may appear obscure, the most conclusive arguments unsatisfactory, and the most pertinent illustrations irrelevant. A great deal of the obscurity which, in most men’s minds, rest on many passages of the Scriptures, is to be accounted for on this principle. They do not distinctly perceive, or they altogether misapprehend the *purpose* of the inspired writer, consequently they fail to understand his arguments and true meaning. Considerable misapprehension has obtained in reference to those sections of our Lord’s Sermon which we are about to consider, in consequence of mistakes as to their *object* or design. Yet there is

no excuse for this: by carefully weighing verses 17-20 the scope of what follows is obvious.

The words of Christ in verse 17 make it plain that He had not come here to antagonize or annul the Law of God, as they equally exclude the idea that it was His design to replace it with a new law. Is it not strange, then, to find Mr. Darby (in his "Synopsis"), after giving an outline of the contents of the Sermon, subjoining a footnote to verses 17-48 in which he says, "In these the exegencies of the law and what Christ required are *contrasted*," which would be to pit the Son against the Father! In verse 20 the Lord Jesus enunciated a general principle, and from verse 21 onwards He was engaged in illustrating, by varied examples, how and wherein the righteousness of those whom He would own as subjects of His kingdom exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

It should be self-evident that the distinctions which Christ proceeded to draw between what had been said by the ancients on certain points of moral and religious duty, and that which He Himself solemnly affirmed, must have respect not to the *real* and actual teaching of the Law and the Prophets, but rather to the erroneous conclusions which had been drawn therefrom, and of the false notions founded thereon, which were currently entertained at His advent. It were blasphemy to imagine that Christ was so inconsistent as to contradict Himself on this occasion. After so definitely asserting His entire accord with the Law and the Prophets and His own dependence upon them, we cannot believe for a moment that He would immediately afterwards set Himself in opposition to them. This must be settled at the outset if we are to have hearts prepared to weigh what follows.

"The Scribes and Pharisees of that age had completely inverted the order of things. Their carnality and self-righteousness had led them to exalt the precepts respecting ceremonial observances to the highest place, and to throw the duties inculcated in the Ten Commandments comparatively into the background—thus treating the mere appendages of the Covenant as of more account than its very ground and basis" (P. Fairbairn). Therefore it was that when He proceeded to expose the inadequacy and hollowness of "the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees," our Lord made His appeal to the testimony engraved on the two tables, and most commonly, though not exclusively, to the precepts of the second table, because He had to do more especially with hypocrites, whose defects might most readily be revealed by a reference to the duties of the *second* table—compare Matthew 19:16; Luke 10:25 and 18:18.

The first commandment brought forward by Christ on this occasion was the sixth of the Decalogue: "Thou shalt not kill." All that the Pharisees understood by this was a prohibition of the act of murder; but our Lord insisted that the commandment in its true import prohibited not only the overt act but every evil working of the heart and mind which led to it—such as unjust anger, with contempt and provoking language. Such an interpretation should not stand in need of any argument. The spiritual mind would rightly reason from such a law: if He who desireth truth in the inward parts (Psa. 51) condemns murder, then it is evident we must abstain from all that might lead to that culmination of wickedness; and so it would be discovered that "thou shalt not kill" really signifies "Thou shalt not hate."

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matt. 5:21). To what, or rather to whom, did our Lord *not* refer to in His, "them of old time?" Certainly not Moses, nor to

His Father, as the plural “them” unequivocally shows. Then to whom? In answering this question, let us also show wherein lay the special need for Christ to here expound and enforce the Law. Unfortunately for the Nation, there was ample opportunity for the Scribes and Pharisees to corrupt God’s Law, for the rank and file of the people were unable to read the Scriptures in their original tongue. When the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity, they had largely forgotten their own language, and therefore could not read the Hebrew text.

Obviously, it was the duty of the learned to supply the people with a plain and simple translation of God’s Word into the Chaldee or Aramaic. But the proud and selfish Rabbis were concerned not with the glory of God and the good of the people, but with the exaltation of their own order. Therefore, instead of preparing a translation which could be read by the masses at large, they were accustomed, in the synagogues, to read off a loose rendering of the sacred text (alleged to be simpler than the original), intermingled with their own explanatory remarks. It was this ancient paraphrase of the Law, with the comments of the Rabbis, that the Scribes and Pharisees reiterated, and to which our Lord alluded when He here mentioned “them of old time.”

God’s commandment, “thou shalt not kill,” was capable of expansion into the widest spiritual meaning, prohibiting all hatred against our fellows. But the Scribes and Pharisees restricted it to the bare act of murder as an external crime—as is quite clear from the next verse, where it is referred to as a crime for the consideration of the judicial courts of earth. Thus they were guilty of restricting the scope of God’s command, and by connecting it with earthly courts, both suggested to their hearers that only external deeds are sinful, and also removed the very wholesome fear of the Judgment to come, when God shall lay bare not only the actual deeds of men, but even their innermost thoughts, and accuse the murderer in *desire* and intention equally guilty with the actual slayer of his fellow.

Ere passing on, let us make three remarks. First, how strangely has history repeated itself! The religious leaders of Israel refused to make a plain translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the speech used by the people upon their exodus from the Babylonian captivity, keeping them in ignorance of the pure Word of God, determining to retain matters in their own hands and exalting their own order. So the Papacy (after the desolating persecution of the early Church by the Roman emperors) refused to make an accurate translation of the Scriptures! They clung, instead, to the corrupt rendition of the Vulgate version, corrupting her dupes by the additions, restrictions, and alterations she made to Divine revelation—her present-day prelates and priests reiterating what was said by their predecessors “in old time”!

Second, how worthless is antiquity as such! As there is a class of people who make a fetish of what is modern and despise anything of the past, so there is a certain type of mind which is strongly attracted by the antique and which venerates traditions. But antiquity is no infallible mark of true doctrine, for this exposition of the Sixth Commandment had obtained among the Jews for centuries past, yet Christ, the great Doctor of the Church, rejected it as *false*, and therefore the argument which the Papists use for the establishing of some of their dogmas and practices drawn from antiquity, is of no effect. Equally worthless are the appeals of Protestants to the Reformers and the Puritans unless they can show that their teachings rested upon a clear, “Thus saith the Lord.”

Third, how thankful we should be that we have the pure Word of God reliably translated into our mother tongue! To the multitudes of His day Christ said, “Ye have *heard*

that it was said by *them* of old time”—but to *us* He can exclaim, “Ye may *read* what *God* has said.” This is a wondrous and inestimable privilege—purchased by the blood shedding of many of our forefathers—that the Holy Scriptures are no longer confined to the learned and the abbot of the monastery. They are accessible to the unlearned and the poor, everywhere, in simple English. But such a privilege carries with it, my reader, a solemn responsibility. What use are we making of this precious treasure? Do we search it daily, as did the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11)? Are we nourishing our souls thereby? Is our conduct governed by its teaching? If not, double guilt lies at our door.

“But I say unto you, That whosoever that is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (v. 22). This is far from being the easiest verse of Matthew 5 to interpret, and the commentators vary in their explanations of its details; yet its general meaning is plain enough. With His royally authoritative, “I say unto you,” the Lord Jesus at once swept aside the rubbish of the rabbis and placed the Law of God before His hearers in all its majesty and holiness, propounding the true interpretation of the Sixth Commandment. No matter what you may have heard the Scribes and Pharisees teach—whether from themselves or from the ancients—it was but the dulling of the sharp edge of God’s precept. I, the incarnate Son of God, who seeks only the glory of the Father and the good of souls, declare unto you that there are three degrees of hatred, falling short of the actual deed of murder, which expose a man to the judgment of God as a violator of the Sixth Commandment.

First, “Whosoever is angry against his brother without a cause”: “brother” would be one Jew against another—for us, against a fellow-Christian—but in its widest scope, against a fellow-man, for by creation all are brethren. It is not anger simply which Christ here reprehends, but unwarrantable and immoderate anger. There is a holy anger as appears from the example of Christ (Mark 3:5) and the apostolic precept, “Be ye angry and sin not” (Eph. 4:26). Should it be asked, How are we to distinguish godly anger from that which is unlawful? The former proceeds from love of righteousness, has in view the *good* of him against whom it is exercised, and looks to the glory of God. Unholy anger issues from pride and desires the *injury* of the one against whom it is directed. Anger is lawful only when it burns against *sin*, and this is equivalent to zeal for the Divine honour.

In His first singling out of unjust anger when expounding the Sixth Commandment, Christ did hereby teach us in *general* that whenever God forbids one sin, He at the same time forbids all sins of the same kind, with all the causes thereof. But He taught in *particular* that specific passion from which most murders proceed. Since, then, unjustified and immoderate anger is a breach of the Decalogue deserving of Divine punishment, how diligently and constantly we should be on our guard, lest this headstrong affection break forth. We must seek grace to restrain and nip it in the bud. Now in order that we may subdue this lust that it prevail not, lay to heart this commandment which forbids rash anger, and frequently call to mind how patiently and mercifully God deals with us every day, and therefore we ought to be like-minded toward our brethren (Eph. 4:31, 32).

The second branch of the sin here condemned is, “whosoever shall say to his brother Raca,” or as the margin renders it, “vain fellow.” What is here prohibited is that scorn, arising from uncontrolled temper, which leads to speaking contemptuously. All abusive language is forbidden by the Sixth Commandment, all expressions of malignity issuing

from a bitter heart, for as Matthew Henry rightly pointed out, “all malicious slanders and censures are adders’ poison under their lips” (Psa. 140:3), and kills secretly and slowly. The Spirit of God refers to Ishmael’s jeering at Isaac as “persecution” (Gal. 4:29), and the same may be said of all bitter speaking. Yea, the prohibition here extends to the gestures of our body—a sneer, the wagging of our head (Matt. 27:29). Therefore are we required to make conscience of every gesture, every casting of the eye (Gen. 4:6), as well as every passionate word.

The third degree of murder mentioned by Christ is censorious reviling, or calling our brother a “Fool.” It is not the simple use of this English word which renders us guilty of this crime as is clear from Luke 24:25; 1 Corinthians 15:36. A benevolent desire to make men sensible of their folly is a good work, but the reviling of them from ungovernable rage is wickedness. With the Jews “fool” (“moren”) signified a rebel against God, an apostate, so that the one using this term arrogated to himself the passing of judicial sentence, consigning his fellow to Hell. This was the very word Moses used (in the plural form) in Numbers 20:10, and for which sin he was excluded from Canaan. It is to be observed that never once does the Lord designate His people “rebels,” though on several occasions He charges them with being rebellious.

One other thing remains to be mentioned. In the different degrees of penalty mentioned by Christ, He alluded unto the various courts of judgment in vogue among the Jews for punishment—which He applied to the Divine judgment which should fall upon those guilty of the sins He here condemned. And let us say in conclusion, there is no way of escaping the Divine curse upon these sins except by humbling ourselves before God, penitently confessing the murderous passions of our hearts and the manifestation of the same in gesture and speech—begging for His pardon through the atoning blood of Christ.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF DAVID

89. *His Final Folly.*

The Word of God supplies us with two separate accounts of David's sin in numbering the people: one in 2 Samuel 24 and the other in 1 Chronicles 21, and both of them need to be carefully pondered by us if we are to have the advantage of all the light the Lord has vouchsafed us on this mysterious incident. Infidels have appealed to these two chapters in an endeavour to show that the Scriptures are unreliable, but their efforts to do so are utterly vain. What they, in their blindness, suppose to be discrepancies are in reality supplementary details, which enable us to obtain a more comprehensive view of the various factors entering into this incident. Thus, once more, God takes the wise in their own craftiness and makes the wrath of man to praise Him, for the attempt of His enemies to pit 1 Chronicles 21 against 2 Samuel 24 has served to call the attention of many of His people to a companion passage which otherwise they had probably overlooked.

The first help which 1 Chronicles 21 affords us is to indicate the moral connection between David's folly and that which *preceded* it. 1 Chronicles 21 opens with the word "And," which bids us look at the immediate context—one which is quite different from that of 2 Samuel 24. 1 Chronicles 20 closes with, "These were born unto the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants" (v. 8). That closes a record of notable exploits and victories which David and his mighty men had obtained over their foes. And then we read, "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel" (1 Chron. 21:1). Is not the connection obvious? Flushed with his successes, the heart of David was lifted up, and thus the door was opened for Satan to successfully tempt him. Let us seek to constantly bear in mind that the only place where we are safe from a fall is to lie in the dust before God.

Some have wondered wherein lay David's sin in taking this military census. But is it not plain that, as king over all Israel and victorious over all his enemies, he wished to know the full numerical strength of the Nation—losing sight of the fact that his strength lay wholly in that One who had multiplied his power and *given* him such success? Would it not also serve to strike terror into the hearts of the surrounding nations for there to be publicly proclaimed the vast number of men capable of taking up arms that David had under him? But if this were one of the motives which actuated the king, it was equally unnecessary and unworthy of him, for God is well able to cause His fear to fall upon those who oppose us without any fleshly efforts of ours to that end—efforts which would deprive *Him* of the glory were He to grant them success. What honour does *the Lord* get as the Protector of any nation while they boast of and rely on the vastness of their armaments?

But David was far from being alone in this folly, for as 2 Samuel 24:1 tells us, "And again the anger of the LORD was kindled *against Israel*, and He moved David against them." The Lord had a controversy with the Nation. He had dealt governmentally with David and his house (chapters 12-21), as He had likewise with Saul and his house (21), and now His grievance is more immediately with Israel, whom He chastised through the act of their king—the "again" looks back to 21:1. No one particular sin of Israel's is mentioned, but from David's Psalms we have little difficulty in ascertaining the general state of his subjects. Ever prone to remove their eyes from Jehovah, there is little room for doubt that the temporal successes which God had granted them became an occasion to

them of self-congratulation, and like the children of this world, in the unbelief of self-confidence, they were occupied with their own resources.

The second help which 1 Chronicles 21 affords us is the information which it supplies that *Satan* was instrumental in moving David to commit this great folly. Not that this in any way excused David or modified his guilt, but because it casts light on the governmental ways of God. "In the righteous government of God, rulers and their subjects have a reciprocal influence on one another. Like the members in the human body, they are interested in each other's conduct and welfare and cannot sin or suffer without mutually affecting each other. When the wickedness of nations provokes God, He leaves princes to adopt pernicious measures, or to commit atrocious crimes, which bring calamities on the people: and when the ruler commits iniquity, he is punished by the diminution of his power, and by witnessing the distresses of his subjects. Instead, therefore, of mutual recriminations under public calamities, however occasioned, *all* parties should be reminded to repent of their own sins, and to practice their own duties. Princes should hence be instructed, even for their own sakes, to repress wickedness and to promote righteousness in their dominions, as well as to set a good example: and the people, for the public benefit, should concur in salutary measures, and pray continually for their rulers" (Thomas Scott).

The solemn principles which are illustrated in the above quotation are of wide ramification and go far to explain many a painful incident which often sorely puzzles the righteous. For example, only the Day to come will reveal how many ministers were permitted by God to fall into public disgrace because He had a controversy with *the churches* over which they were set as pastors. God left David to himself to be tempted by Satan because He was displeased with his subjects and determined to chastise them. In like manner, He has left more than one minister of the Gospel to himself, to be tried and tripped up by the Devil, because He had a grievance against the people he served, so that in the fall of their leader the pride of the people was humiliated. Yet, be it said emphatically, this is in nowise a case of making the *innocent* suffer because of the guilty: the pride of David's own heart left him an easy prey to the Enemy.

"For the king said to Joab the captain of the host which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people. And Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?" (2 Sam. 24:2, 3). From the human side of things, it seems strange that Joab should have been the one to demur against David's act of vain glory. As we have seen in earlier chapters, Joab was a man of blood and eminently one of the children of this world, as the whole of his career makes plain; yet was he quick to see, on this occasion, that the step David proposed to take was one fraught with grave danger, and, therefore did he earnestly remonstrate with the king.

It is indeed striking to find that this infatuation of David's was met by an objection from the commander of his army. Not that it was the ungodliness of David's project which filled Joab with horror: rather that he realized the danger of it. As we pointed out in last month's article, after Israel entered into Canaan God never gave a command for the numbering of His people, and there was no occasion now for a military census to be taken. Joab was conscious of that and expostulated with his master. This serves to illus-

trate a solemn principle: many a man of the world exercises more common sense than does a saint who is out of communion with God and under the power of Satan. This fact is written large across the pages of Holy Writ and a number of examples will no doubt come to mind if the reader meditates thereon.

The force of Joab's objection to David's plan was, Why take delight in such a thing as ascertaining the precise numerical strength of your army, and thereby run the danger of bringing down Divine judgment upon us? Thus this child of the world perceived what David did not. Most solemn is the lesson which is here pointed for the Christian. It is in *God's light* that we "see light" (Psa. 36:9), and when we turn away from Him we are left in spiritual darkness. And as the Lord Jesus exclaimed, "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:23). A believer who is out of fellowship with the Lord will make the most stupid blunders and engage in crass folly such as a shrewd unbeliever would disdain. This is part of the price which he has to pay for wandering from the narrow path.

But we must now look at Joab's opposition of David's plan from the *Divine* side. Had David been walking with holy watchfulness before the Lord he would not have yielded so readily to Satan's temptation, still less had he been prepared to act contrary to the express requirements of Exodus 30:12-16. Nevertheless, God did not now utterly forsake David and give him up fully to his heart's lusts. Instead, He placed an obstacle in his path, in the form of Joab's (probably most unexpected) opposition, which rebuked his folly, and rendered his sin still more excuseless. Behold here, then, the wondrous mingling of the workings of Divine sovereignty and the enforcing of human responsibility. God decreed that Pilate should pass the death-sentence upon Christ, yet He gave him a most emphatic deterrent through his wife (Matt. 27:19). In like manner, it was God's purpose to chastise Israel through the folly of their king, yet so far from approving of David's act He rebuked him through Joab.

Yes, remarkable indeed are the varied factors entering into this equation, the different actors in this strange drama. If on the one hand the Lord suffered Satan to tempt His servant, on the other hand He caused Joab to deter him. It was David's refusal to listen to Joab—backed up by his officers (2 Sam. 24:4)—which rendered his sin the greater. And is not the practical lesson plain for us?! When we are meditating folly and a man of the world counsels us against it, it is high time for us to "consider our ways." When the merciful providence of God places a hindrance in our path, even though it be in the form of a rebuke from an unbeliever, we should pause in our madness, for we are in imminent danger to ourselves and probably to others as well.

"Notwithstanding, the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host" (v. 4). Joab perceived that David's purpose sprang from carnal ambition and that it was against the public interest, and accordingly he remonstrated with him. When that failed he summoned the additional pleas of the captains of the army. But all in vain. David's mind was fully made up, and in self-will he committed this grievous sin. "When the mind, instead of taking a comprehensive view of all the circumstances before it, persists in viewing them partially in some favourite aspect, it is astonishing how blind it may become to things obvious as the day to everyone who has no such bias to warp his judgment. David's soul, whilst absorbed in contemplating the might and triumphs of Israel, had no desire to consider other circumstances, the consideration of which would leave on the heart a sense of weakness—not of strength" (B. W. Newton).

How merciful is God to raise up those who oppose us when we anticipate doing that which is displeasing to Him! Yet how often, in the pride of our hearts and the stubbornness of our wills do we resent such opposition. Everything that enters our lives contains a message from God if only we will pause and listen to it. Many a thorny path should we have escaped if only we had heeded that hedge which Divine providence placed in our way. That hedge may take the form of a friendly word of advice from those around us, and though we are far from suggesting that we should always follow out the same, yet it is for our good that we prayerfully weigh it before God. If we do not, and in our self-will force our way through that hedge, then we must not be surprised if we get badly torn in the process. How much better had it been both for David and his subjects to have responded to the counsel of Joab and his officers.

“And Joab and the captain of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel” (2 Sam. 24:4). On other occasions Joab had lent himself readily to the furthering of the king’s evil designs (11:16; 14:1, 2), but this time he carried out his orders with great reluctance. How strongly he was opposed to David’s policy appears from “the king’s word was abominable to Joab” (1 Chron. 21:6). The service on which Joab now embarked was most distasteful to him, nevertheless he carried it out, for it was “of the Lord” (as 2 Sam. 24:1 shows) that he should do so. Yet that did not excuse him; the less so when he clearly perceived the wrongfulness of it. What God has decreed must come to pass, nevertheless the entire guilt of every wicked deed rests upon him who performs it. It is never right to do wrong, and Joab certainly ought to have declined having any part in such an evil course.

Joab commenced his distasteful task in the remotest sections of Palestine, and took his time about it, perhaps hoping that long ere it was completed the king would repent of his folly. The compilers of the census first numbered the inhabitants of the country to the east of the Jordan, from thence proceeding to the northern part of Canaan, and finishing up in the region to the west of the Jordan (vv. 5-7). They compiled a complete register of all the men capable of taking up arms, excepting only the Levites and the Benjamites: the former because their sacred vocation exempted them from military service—the latter, probably because they could not yet be relied upon to render whole-hearted devotion to David (compare 2:25; 3:1, etc). Nearly 10 months were spent on this task: how patient the Lord is and how great His mercy in giving us “space for repentance”—alas, how great is our madness and sin in refusing to repent.

“So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men” (2 Sam. 24:8, 9). The careful student will note that the figures given here are different from those found in 1 Chronicles 21:5—a variation which skeptics are quick to seize upon as one of the “errors the Bible is full of.” And most deplorable is it to find that some of the orthodox commentators solve “the difficulty” by suggesting that the records were “inaccurate.” The fact is that the two classifications are quite different, the one supplementing the other. It is to be carefully observed that 2 Samuel 24:9 qualifies the first total by, “there were in Israel eight hundred thousand *valiant men*,” whereas 1 Chronicles 21:5 only says 1,100,000 “men that drew the sword” in Israel, so that an additional number to the “valiant men” was there included! Again—in Chronicles the men of Judah “was four hundred three-

score and ten thousand men that drew sword,” whereas in 2 Samuel 24 the “men of Judah” were 500,000—evidently 30,000 drew *not* the sword.

It is striking to note that the Hebrews had not multiplied nearly so much during their 500 years’ residence in Canaan as they did in their briefer sojourn in Egypt; nevertheless, that such a vast multitude were sustained in such a narrow territory is greater evidence of the remarkable fertility of the Country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Whether the total figures which Joab presented to his royal master reached his expectations, or whether they mortified his pride, we are not told; but probably his subjects were not so numerous as he had expected. It usually follows that when we set our hearts upon the attaining of some earthly object, the actual realization of our quest proves to be but a chimaera. But such disappointments ought only to serve in weaning our affections from things below, to fix them on things above which alone can satisfy the soul. Alas, how slow we are to learn the lesson.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

9. *Its Perception.*

Thus far we have dwelt mainly upon the *doctrinal* side of election—now we turn more directly to its experimental and practical aspect. The entire doctrine of Scripture is a perfect and harmonious unit, yet for our clearer apprehension thereof it may be considered distinctively in its component parts. Strictly speaking, it is inadmissible to talk of “the doctrines of grace,” for there is but one grand and Divine doctrine of grace, though that precious diamond has many facets in it. We are not warranted by the language of Holy Writ to employ the expression the “doctrines” of election, regeneration, justification and sanctification, for in reality they are but parts of one doctrine; yet it is not easy to find an alternative term. When the plural “doctrines” is used in the Word of God, it alludes to what is false and erroneous: “doctrines of men” (Col. 2:22), “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1), “divers and strange doctrines” (Heb. 13:9)—“divers” because there is not agreement among them.

In contrast from the false and conflicting doctrines of men, the Truth of God is one grand and consistent whole, and it is uniformly spoken of as “the doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:16), “sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Its distinctive mark is described as “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3—the doctrine which produces and promotes godliness.) Every part of that doctrine is intensely practical and experimental in all its bearings. It is no mere abstraction addressed to the intellect, but, when duly apprehended, exerts a spiritual influence upon the heart and life. Thus it is with that particular phase of God’s doctrine which is now before us. The blessed truth of election is revealed not for carnal speculation and controversy, but to yield the lovely fruits of holiness. The choice is God’s, but the salutary effects are in us. True, that doctrine must be applied by the power of the Holy Spirit to the soul before those effects are produced—for here, as everywhere, we are entirely dependent upon His gracious operations.

The first effect produced in the soul by the Spirit’s application of the truth of Divine election is the promotion of true *humility*. Pride and presumption now receive their death wound: self-complacency is shattered, and the subject of this experience is shaken to his very foundations. He may for years past have made a Christian profession, and entertained no serious doubts of the sincerity and genuineness thereof. He may have had a strong and unshaken assurance that he was journeying to Heaven; and during that time he was utterly ignorant of the truth of election. But what a change has come over him! Now that he learns God has made an eternal choice from among the children of men, he is deeply concerned to ascertain whether or not *he* is one of Heaven’s favourites. Realizing something of the tremendous issues involved, and painfully conscious of his own utter depravity, he is filled with fear and trembling. This is most painful and unsettling, for as yet he knows not that such exercises of soul are a healthy sign.

It is just because the preaching of election, when accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit (and what preaching is more calculated to *have* His blessing than that which most magnifies God and abases man!) produces such an harrowing of heart, that it is so distasteful to those who wish to be “at ease in Zion.” Nothing is more calculated to expose an empty profession, to arouse the slumbering victims of Satan. But alas, those who have nothing better than a fleshly assurance do not wish to have their false peace disturbed, and consequently *they* are the very ones who are the loudest in their outcries against the proclamation of discriminating grace. But the howling and snapping of dogs

is no reason why the children of God should be deprived of their necessary bread. And no matter how unpleasant be the first effects produced in him by the heart's reception of this truth, it will not be long before the humbled one will be truly thankful for that which causes him to dig more deeply and make sure that his hope is founded on the Rock of Ages.

Divine chastisement is a painful thing, nevertheless, to them that are exercised thereby, it afterwards yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). So it is a grievous thing for our complacency to be rudely shattered, but if the sequel be that we exchange a false confidence for a Scripturally-grounded assurance, we have indeed cause for fervent praise. To discover that God's purpose of grace is restricted to an elect people is alarming to one who has imagined that He loves all mankind alike. To be made to seriously wonder if I am one of those whom God chose in Christ before the foundation of the world raises a question which is not easy to answer satisfactorily; and to be made to diligently inquire into my actual state, to solemnly examine myself before God, is a task which no hypocrite will prosecute. Yet is it one which the regenerate will not shrink from, but on the contrary will pursue it with earnest zeal and fervent prayers to God for help therein.

It is not (as some foolishly suppose) that the one who is now so seriously concerned about his spiritual condition and eternal destiny is in such alarm because he doubts God's Word. Far from it: it is because he believes God's Word that he *doubts himself*, doubts the validity of his Christian profession. It is because he believes the Scriptures when they declare the Lord's flock is a "very little one" (Greek, Luke 12:32), he is fearful that he belongs not to it. It is because he *believes* God when He says, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12), and finding so much filth in his own soul, he trembles lest that be true of him. It is because he believes God when He says, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9), that he is deeply exercised lest *he* be fatally deluded. Ah, my reader, the more firmly we believe God's Word, the more cause have we to doubt ourselves.

To obtain assurance that they have received a supernatural call from God, which has brought them from death unto life, is a matter of paramount concern to those who really value their souls. Those to whom God has imparted an honest heart abhor hypocrisy, refuse to take anything for granted, and greatly fear lest they impose upon themselves by passing a more favourable verdict than is warranted. Others may laugh at their concern and mock their fears, but this moves them not. Too much is at stake for such a matter to be lightly and hurriedly dismissed. They know full well that it is one which must be settled in the presence of *God*, and if they are deceived, they beg Him to make them aware of it. It is God who has wounded them, and He alone can heal; it is God who has disturbed their carnal complacency, and none but He can bestow real spiritual rest.

Is it possible for a person, in this life, to really ascertain his eternal election of God? Papists reply dogmatically that no man can know his own election unless he is certified thereof by some special, immediate, and personal revelation from God. But this is manifestly false and erroneous. When the disciples of Christ returned from their preaching tour and reported to Him the wonders they had wrought and being elated that even the demons were subject to them, He bade them, "notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names *are written in Heaven*" (Luke 10:20). Is it not perfectly plain in these words of our Saviour that men

may attain unto a sure knowledge of their eternal election? Surely we cannot, nor do we, rejoice in things which are unknown or even in things uncertain.

Did not Paul bid the Corinthians, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5). Here it is certainly taken for granted that he who has faith may know that he has it, and therefore may also know his election, for saving faith is an infallible mark of election: "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). Would that more ministers took a page out of the Apostle's book and urged their hearers to real self-examination—true, it would not increase their present popularity, but it would probably result in thanksgiving from some of their hearers in a future day. Did not another of the Apostles exhort his readers, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10)? But what force would such an injunction possess if assurance be unattainable in this life? It would be utterly vain to use diligence if knowledge of our election is impossible without an extraordinary revelation from God!

But how may a man come to know his election? Certainly it is not by ascending up as it were into Heaven, there to search into the counsels of God, and afterwards come down to himself. None of us can obtain access to the Lamb's Book of Life: God's decrees are a secret. Nevertheless, it is possible for the saints to know they are among that company whom God has predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. But *how*? Not by some extraordinary revelation from God, for Scripture nowhere promises any such thing to exercised souls. Spurgeon put it bluntly when he said, "We know of some who imagine themselves to be elect because of the visions they have seen when they were asleep, or when they were awake—for men have waking dreams—but these are as much value as cobwebs would be for a garment, they will be of as much service to them at the Day of Judgment as a thief's convictions would be to him if he were in need of a character to commend him to mercy" (From Sermon on 1 Thessalonians 1:4 -6).

In order to ascertain our election we have to descend into our own hearts, and then go up from ourselves as it were by Jacob's ladder to God's eternal purpose. It is by the signs and testimonies described in the Scriptures, which we are to search for within ourselves, and from them discover the counsel of God concerning our salvation. In making this assertion we are not unmindful of the satirical comment which it is likely to meet with in certain quarters. There is a class of professing Christians who entertain no doubts whatever about their salvation, who are fond of saying, as well look to an iceberg for heat or into a grave to find the tokens of life, as search within ourselves for proofs of the new birth. But is it not akin to blasphemy to suggest that God the Spirit can take up His residence in a person and yet for there to be no definite evidences of His presence?

There are two testifiers to the believer from which he may assuredly learn the eternal counsels of God respecting his salvation: the witness of God's Spirit and the witness of his own spirit (Rom. 8:16). By what means does God's Spirit furnish testimony to a Christian's conscience of his Divine sonship? Not by any extraordinary revelation separate from the Word, but rather by His application of the promises of the Gospel in the form of a syllogism: whosoever believes in Christ is chosen to everlasting life. That proposition is clearly set forth in God's Word, and is expressly propounded by His ministers of the Gospel. The Spirit of God accompanies their preaching with effectual power, so that the hearts of God's elect are opened to receive the Truth, their eyes enlightened to perceive its blessedness, and their wills moved to renounce all other dependencies and give up themselves to the mercy of God in Christ.

But the question arises, How may I distinguish between the witness of the Spirit and Satan's delusive imitations? for as there is a sure persuasion of God's favour from His Spirit, so there are frauds of the Devil whereby he flatters and soothes men in their sins. Moreover, there is in all men natural presumption which is often mistaken for faith—in fact there is far more of this mock-faith in the world than there is of true faith. It is really tragic to find what multitudes there are in the religious world today who are carried away by the "strange fire" of wild enthusiasm, supposing that the exciting of their animal spirits and emotions is sure proof that they have received the Spirit's "baptism" and thus are certain of Heaven. At the other extreme is a large company who disdain and discredit all religious feelings and pin their faith to an, "I am resting on John 5:24," and boast that they have not had a doubt of their salvation for many years past.

Now the true witness of the Spirit may be discerned from natural presumption and Satanic deception *by its effects and fruits*. First, the Spirit bestows upon God's elect *praying hearts*. "Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?" (Luke 18:7). Notice how right after making that statement the Lord Jesus went on to give an illustration of the *nature* of their praying. It is true that formalists and hypocrites pray, but vastly different is that from the crying of the sin-conscious, guilt-burdened, distressed people of God, as appears from the vivid contrast between the Pharisee and the publican. Ah, it is not until we are brought to feel our utter unworthiness and Hell-deservingness, our ruin and wretchedness, our abject poverty and absolute dependency on God's sovereign bounty, that we begin to "cry" unto Him, and that, "day and night"—to pray experimentally, to pray perseveringly, to pray with "groanings which cannot be uttered," and thus, to pray effectually.

Let us look for a moment at a prayer of one of God's people, "Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation" (Psa. 106:4). Now my reader, you are either earnestly seeking that favour by which the Lord remembers His people, or you are not. It is only when we are brought to the place where we are pressed down with a sense of our sinfulness and vileness that we can say in our souls before God, "O visit me with Thy salvation." But the Psalmist did not stop there, nor must we: he went on to say, "That I may see the good of *Thy chosen*, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance" (v. 5). God's elect pray for and seek after that which no other men pray for and seek after: they long to *see* the good of God's chosen, they seek to be saved with His salvation, and to dwell in the order of His Everlasting Covenant and eternal establishment.

A second effect of the Spirit's witness is in bringing of us *to submit to God's sovereignty*. Not only do God's elect pray for something which no other men pray for, but they do so in a different manner from all others. They approach the Almighty not as equals, but as beggars; they make "requests" of Him, and not demands; and they present their requests in strict subservience to His own imperial will. How utterly different are their humble petitions from the arrogance and dictatorialness of empty professors. They know they have no claims upon the Lord, that they deserve no mercy at His hands, and therefore they raise no outcry against His express assertion, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15). That person whose heart is indwelt by the Spirit of God takes his place in the dust, and says with pious Eli, "It is the LORD: let Him do what seemeth Him good" (1 Sam. 3:18).

We read in Matthew 20:3 of a number of men “standing idle in the marketplace,” which we understand to signify that they were not actively engaged in Satan’s service, but that they had not yet entered God’s service. Their attitude was indicative of a desire to be religious. Very well, said the Lord, go and work in My vineyard. But a little later the Lord of the vineyard displayed His *sovereignty*, and they were highly displeased. The Lord gave unto the last even as unto the first, and they murmured. The Lord answered, “I do thee no wrong Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own?” (v. 15). That was what offended them—they would not submit to His sovereignty, yet He exercised it notwithstanding. “Is thine eye evil, because I am good?”—He asked and still asks to everyone who in the pride and unbelief of his heart rises up against God’s discriminating grace. But not so with God’s elect: they bow before His throne and leave themselves entirely in His hands.

Third, God’s elect have imparted to them *a filial spirit*, so that they have the affections of dutiful children to their heavenly Father. It inspires them with an awe of His majesty, so that they make conscience of every evil way. It draws out their hearts in love to God, so that they crave for the conscious enjoyment of His smiling countenance, esteeming fellowship with Him high above all other privileges. That filial spirit produces confidence toward God so that they plead His promises, count on His mercy, and rely on His goodness. His high authority is respected and they tremble at His Word. That filial spirit produces subjection to Him, so that they desire to obey Him in all things, and sincerely endeavour to walk according to His commandments and precepts. True, they are yet very far from being what they *should* be, and what they *would* be could their earnest longings be realized; nevertheless, it is their fervent desire to please Him in all their ways.—
A.W.P.

“THE MOTHER OF JESUS.”

The touching incident of our Lord on the Cross, commending His Mother to the care of John, has often been the subject of comment, and always with the object of pointing out His tender filial care for her, and His wish that she should not be left desolate. Doubtless such was His purpose; but was it all, or nearly all? Had this been all, would He be likely to have chosen almost His last moment, and the most public occasion possible, for the fulfillment of a private family duty, besides using a most strange and peculiar form of expression? Surely not. There seems to be a far deeper purpose, which may appear if we trace the Lord's treatment of His earthly parent from the beginning. The first recorded words uttered by the Lord to His mother were a gentle remonstrance: “How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about *My Father's* business?” “*Thy father* and I,” had said Mary. She seemed to have been leaving the Heavenly Father for a moment out of sight, and a reminder was necessary. Though the Child Jesus returned and was “subject unto them,” and 18 quiet years of loving intercourse followed—the first strand of the tie which had united Mother and Son had been parted, and their relation to one another can never have been quite the same as before.

The next recorded conversation was at the marriage at Cana: “Woman, *what have I to do with thee?*” The words sound strangely stern; doubtless they were softened by the tenderest tone and manner, but they were, for all that, a sharp reminder that Mary's maternal authority was now at an end. Another strand was parted, this one at the opening of His public ministry, as the first one was at the opening of His life or Manhood. A little later on His mother and His brethren stood without desiring to speak with Him, seeking to lay hands on Him, for they said, “He is beside Himself” (Mark 3:21, 31). The Lord's reply was startling, for it placed His mother on an absolute level with the humblest believers, “Who is My mother and who are My brethren?” “Whosoever shall do the will of My *Father* which is in Heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother” (Matt. 12:48-53)! Another strand was gone! The last mention of Mary in the Gospels is the one with which we started, and which is now seen in a stronger light.

One by one we have seen the ties which bound together Divine Son and human mother severed by His own hand, now the last is touched, and she is His no longer. “Woman, behold thy *son*,” said the dying Saviour. “Then said He unto the disciple, Behold thy *mother*” (John 19:26-27). A remarkable form of expression it seems. *We* should have expected Him to say, “I commend unto thee My mother”; but never once is it recorded that the Lord either addressed Mary or spoke of her as *My mother*, and now as He is about to lay down His earthly life and afterwards assume His resurrection glory, He sets the human relationship aside forever. And Mary, who was wont to ponder things in her heart, seems to have meekly acquiesced, though doubtless this was one of the sharpest thrusts of the sword which pierced through her soul. “From that hour,” apparently an early hour, “that disciple took her unto his own home.” Perhaps she did not see Him die. Certainly her name is not among those present at the empty grave; indeed it is not *recorded* that she ever saw Him in his resurrection body.

Once more does Mary appear in Holy Writ: Acts 1:14, where, she is seen among the little company of humble believers who continued in prayer and supplication, waiting for the promise of the Father; and then we altogether lose sight of her. Each of the occasions on which our Lord repudiated Mary's interference was a *public* one, as if to emphasize and provide ample testimony to His action, and the last was the most public of all, when

He finally *relinquished* the filial relationship and transferred it to another man. Preachers have taken much pains to minimize and explain away the apparent distance of our Lord towards Mary—but that it existed there can be no manner of doubt, and we can see the “needs be” of it. The time was coming when the poor humble human instrument of His incarnation would be styled “the Mother of God” and the “Queen of Heaven” and would be accorded idolatrous reverence, and the Lord foreseeing it took strong measures to discountenance such misplaced devotion; and hard as it may have seemed to Mary at the time, she will understand it all, and “magnify the Lord” for it in that day when she shall “awake” with His “likeness” and be “satisfied.”—(A.M. 1902).

THE HOLY SABBATH.

5. *Its Pollution.*

The importance and value of the Sabbath is evidenced by the many, varied, and precious objects which, from the dawn of its institution, it was designed to accomplish. Under the Patriarchal dispensation it was a real and powerful witness for the existence of God, His creative power, His sovereignty over His creatures, and their responsibility to Him—truths which lie at the very foundation of all true religion. Under the Mosaic economy the Sabbath not only bore continued testimony to those truths, but also to the providential and moral government of God in the preservation and renewal of the Holy Day and His indisputable title to the worship of His people. It bore testimony to His gracious concern for their temporal and spiritual welfare—it taught them to look, through its hallowed use, for blessings on themselves and their nation—it pointed to a future period of richer blessing and purer worship. Under the Christian era, while all these fundamental truths are still inculcated by the Sabbath, it has become also a memorial of redeeming love, a witness for the establishment of the better covenant, a remembrance of Him who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.

It has often been pointed out that the Sabbath is not secured from man's pollution by any natural fences. The winter prevents much labour; obliging employers in many cases to reduce the tasks of their employees. Night is still more obstructive of toil, and consequently, still more conducive to needful repose. In the absence of light, the fields cannot be plowed, the crops harvested, nor homes built; and thus darkness serves to protect the couch of the heavy laden. But the Sabbath has no such bulwarks. It comes without any cosmic herald of its advent, and all nature fulfils its functions on that day as on any other day. The weather may be so inclement as to present no temptation to engage in outdoor sports; on the other hand, the day may be one of cloudless sunshine, alluring into the wide open spaces. Thus the Sabbath is like a vine when bereft of its hedges, which any boar out of the wood may waste, and any beast of the field devour.

While the institution of the Sabbath is itself a fence to the general interests of religion and a Divine bulwark thrown up to repress the floods of ungodliness, yet the Sacred Day is not secured from profanation by any defenses furnished by the natural world. Thus we may perceive how admirably the Fourth Commandment serves *as a trial* of the attitude of the creature toward his Creator. There are few, if any, of the Divine ordinances that more definitely operate as a moral and religious test of the children of men than the one we are here considering. The conduct of men with reference to the Lord's Day most clearly discovers either their love or their hatred, their loyalty or their rooted enmity to Jehovah, their sovereign Lord. In proportion as nations, churches, or individuals increase in spirituality and morality, they venerate and improve this holy day; and to the degree in which they decline from the love of God and belief of His Truth, they despise and pollute it. The whole of human history forcibly illustrates that fact.

Allusion has been made by us to the natural obstacles which the seasons present to labour, and the protection they are designed to afford the labourer, yet these have been forced to yield to the pressure of greed and the merciless grind of commerce. During winter, at any rate in "civilized" (?) countries like our own, labour is never given a prolonged holiday, but instead its tasks are *varied*. And now the night (still more indispensable to our feeble frames) is disturbed and abridged, till it inadequately suffices for its gracious purpose. As the day comes to a close, artificial light is requisitioned, and in numberless

instances the artisan is compelled to work “overtime”—and what compensation for the undermining of his health, and what is far worse, the degrading of his soul, is the extra wages he draws? How far the transportation of the workers and the noise of the “night shifts” interfere with the slumbers of other toilers, it is impossible to estimate—no wonder that institutions for nervous wrecks and mental cases are multiplying.

If, then, the protected seasons of nature have been ruthlessly invaded and trampled upon by graspers after gold, then much more is the unprotected Sabbath exposed to very special and imminent jeopardy. But the very fact that it is so exposed only serves to make more real the *test* it furnishes for the state of our hearts. Private gardens are railed off, and thus are secured from the carelessness and vandalism of the rank and file of the people; but those parks and downs which are open to the general public, furnish a criterion to the manners and conscientiousness of those who use them, or abuse them—as the litter they leave behind bears witness. Thus it is with the Holy Sabbath. The righteous call it “a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable,” and they honour Him by not “doing their own ways, nor finding their own pleasure, nor speaking their own words” (Isa. 58:13). But the ungodly say, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?” (Amos 8:5).

At no one point has the depravity of fallen men been more conspicuously, more blatantly, and more constantly displayed, than by their profanation of the Sabbath. From earliest times they have discovered their awful rebellion against their Creator and Governor by trampling upon His holy institution. As we have pointed out earlier, there is good reason to believe that one of the principal grievances which the Lord had against the antediluvians was their disregard for and desecration of this primitive ordinance. So, too, with the descendants of Jacob after they settled in Egypt—as the language used by Jehovah in Exodus 16:28 so plainly implies. For centuries past the Hebrews had despised His Law and dishonoured His Sabbaths; and for that very reason His anger waxed hot against them and they were made to suffer His sore judgments (Ezek. 20:8, etc.) And as we shall now see, there was little or no improvement in the later conduct of the Nation as a whole.

After the Lord had acted with such wondrous grace toward His refractory people, and by His mighty power delivered them from the house of bondage, one would have thought their hearts would have been so affected that their subsequent ways were amended. Moreover, the awe-inspiring display which Jehovah gave of His majesty on Sinai and the covenant which He there entered into with the Nation, ought surely to have resulted in a radical change of their behaviour. But alas, neither the goodness nor the severity of God makes any real and lasting impression upon men until they are born again. No matter what mercies they may be the recipients of, no matter how wondrously God deals in providence with them, and no matter how solemnly He makes known to them His sovereignty and holiness, they continue unchanged, unmoved, till they be renewed in their *souls*. Clear and awful proof of this was furnished by them in the Wilderness.

In order to obtain a complete picture of Israel’s conduct in the Wilderness, not only must we attend diligently to the historical accounts furnished by the Pentateuch, but we must also search for the additional information supplied by the Prophets, for in many instances their retrospective statements supplement the former. Here, as everywhere, Scripture must be compared with Scripture. It is to Ezekiel that we are again indebted for fuller light on the point now before us. Reviewing the past, the Lord said through him, “I wrought for My name’s sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among

whom they were, in whose sight I made Myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt. Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes, and showed them My judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover, also *I gave them my Sabbaths*, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them” (20:9-12). And what was their response to such grace on His part?

Here is the sad answer to our question, “But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness: they walked not in My statutes, and they despised My judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and *My Sabbaths they greatly polluted*: then I said, I would pour out My fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I wrought for My name’s sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out. Yet also I lifted up My hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands. Because they despised My judgments, and walked not in My statutes, but *polluted My Sabbaths*” (Ezek. 20:13-16). What a tragic picture does that present to us of the generation of Israel which came out of Egypt! How it discovers to us the inveterate wickedness of the human heart. Unaffected by the Divine goodness, they now despised God’s statutes and polluted His Sabbaths. And how heavily punished were they for their disobedience? They were excluded from the land of promise and condemned to die in the wilderness. Ah, my reader, God is not to be mocked with impunity; and remember, this Divine judgment of Israel is recorded as a warning for us today.

And what effect did that fearful deprivation have upon their children? Did *they* profit from the warning? Did they turn from the evil ways of their fathers, which had so sorely displeased Jehovah? Surely, surely, with such a solemn judgment before their eyes, they would turn it to good account. Every opportunity to do so was then given to them: “Nevertheless Mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness. But I said unto their children, in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols: I am the LORD your God: walk in My statutes, and keep My judgments, and do them; and *hallow My Sabbaths*; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that ye may know that I am the LORD your God” (Ezek. 20:17-20).

Alas, the younger generation were no better than the old: no more amenable to Jehovah’s exhortations, no more restrained by fear of His judgments. “Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me: they walked not in My statutes, neither kept My judgments, to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; *they polluted My Sabbaths*: then I said, I would pour out My fury upon them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness. Nevertheless, I withdrew Mine hand, and wrought for My name’s sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth. I lifted up Mine hand unto them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries; because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, and had *polluted My Sabbaths*, and their eyes were after their fathers’ idols” (vv. 21-24). It is to be duly noted that in each of these passages the Lord, while making the general complaint that Israel rebelled and walked not in His statutes, specifically singles out for mention the heinous crime that they had “polluted His Sabbath,” for *that* is something which He will by no means toler-

ate, and fearful indeed are His judgments upon those who are guilty of such it high offense.

Nor was there any improvement after Israel entered and was established in Canaan. To the people of Ezekiel's own day, the Lord complained, "Thou hast despised Mine holy things and, hast *profaned My Sabbaths*" (22:8). The order of those two things is solemn: it is because we despise the things of God that we pollute them. But still worse is what we read of in verse 26 of this chapter: "Her *priests* have violated My Law, and have profaned Mine holy things . . . And have hid their eyes from My Sabbaths." Not only was the general public guilty of this sin, but the ministers of God were offenders too. They turned a blind eye to the requirements of the Sacred Day, conniving at the joining in of its profanation. Those religious leaders esteemed not those who kept the Sabbath, and winked at those who did servile work therein.

So, too, we find the Lord saying through Jeremiah, "Hear ye the word of the LORD, ye kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates: thus saith the LORD; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath Day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath Day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the Sabbath Day, as I commanded your fathers" (17:20-22). Note this message was addressed first to the "king's of Judah," the heads of the Nation, for the heaviest weight of responsibility ever rests on those in the chief places of governmental power; and second, to the people at large. And what was Israel's response to this Divine call? This: "But *they obeyed not*, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction" (v. 23). Alas, what is man? The same in every age, under all circumstances: self-willed, defiant, refusing to be in subjection to his Maker; blind to his own interests, forsaking his own mercies, deaf to all reproof and admonition.

Patiently and faithfully did the Lord expostulate with His wayward people, setting before them the certain alternatives of their conduct: "And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto Me saith the LORD, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath Day, but hallow the Sabbath Day, to do no work therein; then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain forever. And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, and meat offerings and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise unto the house of the LORD" (vv. 24-26). What inducements were these to render loyal and loving allegiance to their King! The Lord is no Egyptian taskmaster. Not only is His yoke easy and His burden light, but He gives most liberal wages to those who serve Him. True is this for individuals and communities alike. Here is another Scripture which makes it abundantly clear that the chief thing on which *national prosperity turns* is its careful observance of the Sabbath.

If on the one hand Israel would not be moved to obedience by promises of rich reward, perhaps they might be deterred from disobedience by threats of terrible judgment. Accordingly, Jehovah concluded by saying, "But if ye will not hearken unto Me to hallow the Sabbath Day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath Day; then will I kindle *a fire* in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the

palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched” (v. 27). Alas, Israel was as indifferent to the latter as they had been to the former. How strictly God made good His threat appears from, “came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: and he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king’s house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man’s house burnt he *with fire*” (2 Kings 25:8, 9). This was a national calamity in consequence of national pollution of the Sabbath. Following upon the destruction of the Temple and the raising of Jerusalem, the people were carried into Babylon.

Seventy years later, God, in His mercy, opened a way of escape for the people from their captivity, and thousands of their descendants returned to Jerusalem. Had they *at last* learned their lesson? Did they now hearken to the voice of God’s rod and mend their ways? No, they were incorrigible. Hardly had they arrived back in the holy land than Nehemiah had to complain, “In those days saw I in Judah some treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and laden asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath Day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals” (13:15). And then he added, “Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring *more wrath* upon Israel *by profaning the Sabbath*” (v. 18).

Thus it was all through the long centuries of Israel’s history. Nor has the conduct and career of Christendom been any better. While today it is far worse than for generations past. Here, in Great Britain, Sabbath desecration is now almost as rife as it is on the Continent, and only here and there is a feeble voice raised in protest. Sad to say *the heads* of the Nation often set a bad example by travelling on the Sabbath Day. The flood of Sunday newspapers which deluges the land, the irreligious rubbish which is being broadcast over the air, the increasing number of public places open for sport and entertainment, and the millions of people who turn the Holy Day into one of pleasure and “joyriding” is surely heaping up for us wrath against the Day of wrath unless we, as a people repent and reform.—A.W.P.

THE TWO NATURES.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6); “The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other” (Gal. 5:17). These and similar passages clearly connote that there are two distinct and diverse springs of action in the Christian, from which proceed evil and good works. The older expositors were accustomed to speak of these springs of action as “principles”—the principles of evil and holiness. Modern writers more frequently refer to them as “the two natures in the believer.” We have no objection against this form of expression, provided it be used to represent Scriptural realities and not human fancies. But it appears to us that there are not a few today who speak of the “two natures” and yet have no clear conception of what the term signifies, often conveying a faulty idea to the minds of their hearers.

In ordinary parlance “nature” expresses, first, the result of what we have by our origin: and second, the qualities that are developed in us by growth. Thus, we talk of anything bestial or devilish as being contrary to human nature—alas that the beasts so often put us to shame. More distinctly, we speak of a lion’s nature (ferocity), a vulture’s nature (feeding on carrion), a lamb’s nature (gentleness). A “nature,” then, describes what a creature is by birth and disposition. Now the Christian has experienced two births, and is subject to two growths. Two sets of moral qualities belong to him: the one as born of Adam, the other as born of God. But much caution needs to be exercised at this point, lest on the one hand we carnalize our conception of the new birth, or, on the other hand, dwell so much on the two natures that we lose sight of the *person* who possesses them, and thus practically deny his responsibility.

In the interests of clarity we must contemplate these two natures separately, considering first what we are as children of men, and then what we are as children of God. In contemplating what we are as men, we must distinguish sharply between what we are by God’s creation, and what we became by our fall from that uprightness in which we were originally made, for fallen human nature is radically different from our primitive condition. But here, too, great care must be taken in defining that difference. Man *did not lose* any component part of his being by the Fall: he still consists of “spirit and soul and body.” No essential element of his constitution was forfeited, none of his faculties were destroyed. Rather was his entire being vitiated and corrupted, stricken with a loathsome disease. A potato is still a potato when frozen; an apple remains an apple when decayed within, though no longer edible. By the Fall man relinquished his honour and glory, lost his holiness, and forfeited the favour of God; but he still retained his *human nature*.

It cannot be insisted upon too strongly that no essential part of man’s complex make-up, no faculty of his being, was destroyed at the Fall, for multitudes are seeking to shelter behind a misconception at this very point. They suppose that man lost some vital part of his nature when Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, and that it is *this* loss which accounts for all his failures. Man imagines he is far more to be pitied than blamed. The blame, he supposes, belongs to his first parent, and he is to be pitied because deprived of his capability of working righteousness. It is in such a manner that Satan succeeds in deceiving many of his victims, and it is the bounden duty of the Christian minister to expose such a sophistry and drive the ungodly out of their refuge of lies. The truth is that man today possesses identically the same faculties as those with which Adam was origi-

nally created, and his accountability lies in the *use* he makes of those faculties, and his criminality consists in his abuse of the same.

On the other hand, there are not a few who believe that at the Fall man *received a nature* which he did not possess before, and in his efforts to evade his responsibility he throws all the blame of his lawless actions on that evil nature. Equally erroneous and equally vain is such a subterfuge. No material addition was made to man's being at the Fall, any more than that some part was taken from it. That which entered man's being at the Fall was *sin*, and sin has defiled every part of his person—but for *that* we are to be blamed and not pitied. Nor has fallen man become so helplessly the victim of sin that his accountability is cancelled: rather does God hold him responsible to resist and reject every inclination unto evil, and will justly punish him because he fails to do so. Every attempt to negate human responsibility must be steadfastly resisted by us.

The youth differs much from the infant, and the man from the immature youth; nevertheless it is *the same* individual, the same human person, who passes through these stages. Men we are, and shall ever remain: whatever internal change we may be subject to at regeneration, and whatever change awaits the body at resurrection, we shall never lose our essential identity as God created us at the first. Let this be clearly understood and firmly grasped. (To be completed, D.V., in the June issue).—A.W.P.