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DIVINE HEALING.

Every once in a while we receive an inquiry or a request for help on this subject, usually from one who has come into contact with some belonging to a cult which gives prominence to “Divine healing,” the removal of physical ills without the aid of doctors and medicine in response to faith and prayer. Such inquiring friends are generally more or less perplexed. They have heard nothing on the subject in their own churches and feel they are more or less in the dark on the matter. Those who press this “Divine healing” teaching upon them appear to be ill-balanced people and not at all orthodox in doctrine. If they are induced to attend their meetings they are not favourably impressed and sense that something is wrong. The absence of reverence, the allowing of women to take part in the services before a mixed congregation, the prominence of the spectacular element and the general spirit of excitement which prevails makes the normal child of God feel quite out of place in such a gathering. The zeal displayed does not appear to be according to knowledge and the fervid emotionalism strikes him as being “strange fire” (Lev. 10:1)—not kindled at the Divine altar.

But what of their teaching on “Divine healing”? Is it Scriptural or unscriptural? This is a question which is not easy to answer in a single sentence. Many passages on healing may be cited from God’s Word but that raises the question of their *interpretation*—in accord with the context and also in harmony with the general Analogy of Faith. And it also calls for a careful examination of all inferences drawn from and conclusions based upon those passages. Moreover these modern cults who stress “Divine healing” are by no means uniform in their teaching thereon, some being more radical and extreme than others so that the refutation of one erroneous presentation of this subject would not hold good of a similar error in an entirely different dress. Though familiar with all the principal varieties of them—during our lengthy sojourn in the U.S.A. (where nearly all these cults originated) we came into more or less close contact with them—we do not propose to waste the reader’s time by taking them up seriatim but rather deal with broad principles which apply to them all.

First it must be said that much of the teaching which has been given out on this subject it decidedly *unscriptural*. For example, the majority of those who emphasize “Divine healing” insist that “it was in the Atonement”—that on the Cross—Christ was as truly our sickness-bearer as our sin-bearer. It was *there*, they teach, that He purchased healing for the body as well as salvation for the soul and therefore every Christian has the same right to appropriate by faith the cure of bodily disorders as he has forgiveness for his transgressions. In support of this contention appeal is made to Christ “healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the Prophet: “Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses” (Matt. 8:16, 17). Here is where the expositor is needed if the unlettered and unstable are to be preserved from jumping to an erroneous conclusion, where the mere sound of the words is likely to convey a wrong impression unless their sense be carefully ascertained—just as “the dead know not anything” (Eccl. 9:5) is not to be understood absolutely, as though they who have departed this life are in a state of utter unconsciousness.

Had those words, Christ “bare our sicknesses” occurred in some passage in the Acts or Epistles where one of the Apostles was explaining the purpose and character of Christ’s death, then we should have been obliged to regard them as meaning that the Lord

Jesus vicariously endured the sicknesses of His people while on the Cross, though this would present a very great difficulty, for there is no hint anywhere in the Word that the Redeemer experienced any illness at that time. But instead, Matthew 8:16, 17 has reference to what transpired during the days of His public ministry, the meaning of which we take to mean Christ employed not the virtue that was in Him to cure infirmity and sickness as a matter of mere power but in deep pity and tenderness He entered into the condition of the sufferer. The Great Physician was no unfeeling stoic but took upon His own spirit the sorrows and pains of those to whom He ministered. His miracles of healing cost Him much in the way of sympathy and endurance. Thus He “sighed” (Mark 7:34) when He loosed the tongue of the dumb, “wept” by the grave of Lazarus, and was conscious of virtue going out of Him (Mark 5:30) as He cured another. By a compassion, such as we are strangers to, He was afflicted by their afflictions.

That the interpretation we have given above (briefly suggested by the Puritan Thomas Goodwin) is the correct meaning of “Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses” appears from several considerations. If those words signified what the “Divine healing” cults say they do, then they mean that in His act of healing the sick Christ was then making atonement, which is absurd on the face of it. Again—if the healing of the body were a redemptive right which faith may humbly but boldly claim, then it necessarily follows that the believer *should never die*, for every time he fell ill he could plead before God the sacrifice of His Son and claim healing. In such a case, why did not Paul exhort Timothy to exercise faith in the Atonement rather than bid him “use a little wine for his stomach’s sake” (1 Tim. 5:23), and why did he leave Trophimus at “Miletum sick” (2 Tim. 4:20)? A glorified body, as well as soul, is the fruit of Christ’s atonement, but for that the believer has to wait God’s appointed time.

One error leads to another: most of those who teach that Divine healing is in the Atonement argue that therefore it must constitute an essential element in and part of the Gospel and thus their favourite slogan is: “Christ our Saviour, Christ our Sanctifier, Christ our Healer, Christ our coming King,” and hence “the Fourfold Gospel” is the leading caption of most of them. But such a contention will not bear the light of Holy Writ. In the book of Acts we find the Apostles preaching the Gospel of God both to Jews and Gentiles and although in the course of their ministry miracles of healing were performed by them (to authenticate their mission, for none of the New Testament had then been written), nowhere did the removal of physical maladies form part of their *message*. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 a brief summary of the Gospel is given, namely, that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day”—mark the omission of His dying for our sicknesses! In Romans we are furnished with systematic and full unfolding of “the Gospel of God” (see 1:1), “healing” of bodily ills is *never* referred to.

If it were true that Christ made atonement for our sicknesses as well as our sins, then it would follow that all bodily disorders are the immediate consequence of some iniquity. We say “the immediate consequence,” for, of course, it is readily granted that all the ills which man is heir to are so many effects and results of the great transgression of our first parents. It is only reasonable to conclude that had sin never entered this world suffering in any form had been unknown here, for we know that in Heaven the absence of the former ensures the absence of the latter. Thus there is a vital difference between saying that a physical disorder which occasions great discomfort and pain finds its remote cause in

the tragedy of Eden and affirming that it is the direct result of the person's own wrongdoing, as most of the "Divine healing" cults insist. Our Lord's reply to His disciples in John 9:2, 3 expressly forbids any such sweeping conclusion. There is much suffering, especially among children, which is due to ignorant and innocent breaking of natural laws rather than to violation of the Moral Law. Moreover, if the contention of "Divine healing" were valid, we should be obliged to conclude that every sickness severed the soul from communion with God, which is falsified by the experience of many of the saintliest persons who ever trod this earth.

Those who hold that Christ made atonement for our sicknesses as well for our sins are quite consistent in maintaining that deliverance from the former must be obtained in precisely the same way as salvation from the latter: that the sole means must be the exercise of *faith*, without the introduction or addition of any works or doings of our own. Thus the "Divine healing" cults teach that the service of a physician or the aid of drugs is as much a setting aside of the finished work of Christ as reliance upon baptism or deeds of charity for the securing of pardon would be. The fallacy of this logical inference reveals the unsoundness of the promise. A reference to the Scriptures will at once show that while in some cases God was pleased to cure the sick without means, yet in other instances He both appointed and blessed the use of means. For the healing of the bitter waters of Marah, Moses was instructed to cast into them a tree which "The Lord showed him" (Exo. 15:25). When God promised to heal Hezekiah who was sick unto death, Isaiah bade the king "take a lump of figs" and we are told "they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered" (2 Kings 20:7). So with Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:23.

We are certainly not prepared to hold any brief in defense of the present-day medical fraternity as a whole. The greed for gold, the love of novelty (experimentation), the deterioration of moral character in all walks of life fails to inspire confidence in any class or clique and the writer for one would prefer to suffer pain than place himself at the mercy of the average surgeon. Yet this does not mean that we regard all medical practitioners as either charlatans or knaves, still less do we believe with "Faith-healing" fanatics that medical doctors are the special emissaries of Satan. The Holy Spirit would never have termed Luke "the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14) had he been employed in the service of the Devil.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

23. *The Golden Rule: Matthew 7:12.*

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets.” This single verse forms a distinct section, the ninth in this discourse of our Lord’s. Its theme is that of equity and justice, which must regulate us in our dealings with one another. Its very brevity evidences the Divine wisdom of Him who spake as never man spake, for who else would have condensed so much into such few words? The manner in which this rule is enforced manifests the fundamental unity of the two economies: so far from the Gospel setting aside the requirements of the Law it establishes the same (Rom. 3:31). Analyzing our present verse we find it contains three things. First, a Conclusion drawn from the context: “therefore.” Second, a Commandment which presents to us a standard of complete unselfishness: “whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” Third, a Commendation of that standard: “for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

The opening “Therefore” looks back to what Christ had said in the previous section (Matt. 7:7-11). In it we behold the Divine Teacher making a practical application of what He had just said upon prayer, intimating that privilege and duty are never to be divorced, that blessings from God are to enable us the better to discharge our responsibilities unto men. “Fittingly is the law of justice subjoined to the law of prayer, for unless we be honest in our conversation, God will not hear our prayers: Isaiah 1:15, 17; 58:6, 9; Zechariah 7:9, 13. We cannot expect to receive good things from God if we do not practice fair things and that which is lovely and of good report among men. We must not only be devout, but honest, else our devotion is but hypocrisy” (Matthew Henry). Alas that this is so little insisted upon by the pulpit today; alas that the impression is generally created that we may expect an answer to our petitions regardless of how we treat our fellows. God requires a conscientious performance of all the duties of civil righteousness as well as that we be earnest in acts of piety.

“How much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him. *Therefore* all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” The connection between these two things then shows that in the practice of this golden rule Christians are to consider not only how they would be dealt with by men, but by God Himself, thereby elevating the precept high above the ethics of the heathen. Whatever usage we expect to meet with at the hands of God, the same in our measure, must we dispense to others. How can we expect God to be merciful to us if we are merciless unto our neighbour? How can we expect Him to deal liberally with us if we are eaten up with selfishness? Let us not forget that whatever need others have of us, the same need have we of God. According as we sow sparingly or bountifully, so will our reaping be (2 Cor. 9:6). I am therefore to consider how God will deal with me if I am rigid, severe, and demand the uttermost farthing from those in my power.

It is also to be observed that a due regulation of our prayer life is indispensable if we are to be fitted for dealing properly with our fellows. All inordinate affection toward the world, which is the impulse that moves men to over-reaching practices, has its root in a distrust of God. “Were we daily to ask for all we want of Him, seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and relying upon His promise to add other things as He sees them to be best for us, we should have no inclination to covetousness or injustice. But if instead of depending like sheep on the care of their shepherd we set off like beasts

of prey to forage the world for ourselves, we shall often judge it to be wise and necessary to seize on that which equity forbids" (Andrew Fuller). It is only by dwelling in (not paying an occasional visit to) the secret place of the Most High that my heart will be prepared to act becomingly toward my neighbour. It is only by constant communion with Him who is both light and love that a spirit of righteousness and grace will actuate me in my relations with other men.

"How much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Consider the connection also in this manner: since your Father in Heaven gives good things to you when you ask Him, make it your care to do good unto all who come within the sphere of your influence. "Be ye therefore followers (imitators) of God, as dear children" (Eph. 5:1). Since God has dealt bountifully with you, practice generosity and liberality unto men. Let not your conduct be determined by how your fellows treat you, but rather by how God treats you. How immeasurably does this holy and gracious standard from Christ exceed "the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matt. 5:20)! How far had they departed from the Law and the Prophets! Nor need we fear that the unregenerate will take such an unfair advantage of our magnanimity that we shall be the losers thereby: "Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord" (Eph. 6:8).

But how am I to determine what will be for the good of my neighbours? Thus: "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." This commandment consists of two parts: that which is *to be ordered*, namely, our actions unto other men, and the rule which is *to regulate this*: namely, the law of justice and equity which is in every man by nature. Whatever you would desire and deem best for yourself were you in *their* place, that is what you must do unto others. Nothing less than such a standard of unselfishness is our rule of righteousness. "Christ came to teach us not only what we are to know and to believe, but what we are to do: what we are to do, not only toward God, but toward men; not only toward our fellow disciples, those of our own party and persuasion, but toward men in general, all with whom we have to do" (Matthew Henry). It is utterly vain to speak like angels when on our knees before God if we act like devils in our transactions with men.

"The meaning of this rule lies in these three things. (1). We must do that to our neighbour which we ourselves acknowledge to be fit and reasonable. The appeal being made to our own judgment and the discovery of our judgment is referred to that which is our own will and expectation when it is our own case. (2). We must put other people upon the level with ourselves, and reckon we are as much obliged to them as they to us. We are as much bound to the duty of justice as they are and they are as much entitled to the benefit as we. (3). We must in our dealing with men suppose ourselves in the same particular case and circumstances with those we have to do with, and deal accordingly. If I were making such a one's bargain, labouring under such a one's infirmities and afflictions, how would I desire and expect to be treated? And this is a just supposition, for we know not how soon their case may really be ours; indeed we may fear, lest God by His judgments should do to us as we have done to others, if we have not done as we would be done by" (Matt. Henry).

This golden rule is God's witness in every human heart. Each one has so much regard for himself as to quickly feel when he is wronged and to pass censure on the one injuring

him. He has only, then, to apply this principle to his conduct unto others and the right or wrong of his actions must instantly appear. Hereby we are taught to abstain from everything which would injure our neighbour, either in his body, estate or good name—such as lying, slandering, dishonesty, oppression. Nature itself teaches men this, for would they have men defame, rob or oppress *them*? Then let them avoid such reprehensible practices toward *others*. For the rule is not to treat men according as they deal with you, but act toward them as you would desire them to act toward you. It is the corruption of nature, the yielding to sinful inclinations which moves men to seek their own temporal advantage and advancement by the loss and debasing of others. Alas, how far, far away is the world from God and His righteousness.

How this precept cuts at the very root of all the pretensions and sophistries used by men in their endeavours to justify crooked ways and practices! How often they plead, “We must live,” though they like not to think that in a very short time they must also die—“and after death, the judgment”! Here these selfish creatures are reminded that their fellows also must live, and have rights equal to their own. However the unscrupulous may seek to excuse their dishonest tricks of the trade, unmerciful employers grinding the faces of their employees, harsh tyrants demanding their full pound of flesh from widows and orphans under the plea of “business is business,” let them come nearer home and inquire whether they would like to be dealt with thus were the positions reversed. “The money-lender may pretend he pleases the poor, but his help is no better than he that gives a draught of cold water to one that is in a burning fever, which seems pleasant at the first but after increases his sufferings” (W. Perkins). Were this rule heeded, the light weight, short change, and adulterated commodities would be unknown.

This rule applies not only to giving but *forgiving*, for as long as we are in this world there will be infirmities and offenses and thus the mutual need of forgiving and receiving forgiveness. “Forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a complaint against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Col. 3:13). If we resent the idea that others should require flawless perfection from us, then we must not demand the same from them. If we desire that our fellows view our unwitting failures with the eyes of charity then we must cultivate the same attitude. If we refuse to forgive those who trespass against us, God will not forgive us our trespasses” (Matt. 6:15). “Take no heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee; for oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others” (Eccl. 7:21, 22). The meaning is be not over affected when others speak evil of you, for you know that you are not guiltless of that very thing; therefore, meekly forbear. The realization that the flesh is still in us and the knowledge that we are compassed about with infirmities should make us pardon those who wrong us.

Let us mention another direction in which this precept needs to be applied: where there are difference of religious opinion. Had this principle been acted upon then persecution in all its manifold and cruel forms would have been unknown. Where is the man who would acknowledge it to be right and proper to persecute him for his conscientious convictions or for that conduct which is the necessary result of them? Then if he deems such punishment to be unmerited and unjust in his own case, by what principle can he regard such punishment as being deserved by his fellows? Religious controversies will obtain while ever men differ in their views and regard the Truth as valuable, but they would be conducted very differently from what they are if those who engaged in them acted ac-

ording to this golden rule. Imputation of unworthy motives, scurrilous language, personal abuse, malignant insinuations and all the unworthy resorts by which polemical discussions are so generally marred would be thrown to the winds and clear statement and fair argument take their place if we all lived by this golden rule.

By this precept we are taught the secret of how to preserve a good conscience in all our dealings with men in the world. If we are regulated by this rule in our actings with others, our hearts will condemn us not. For many particulars absolute precepts are given in the Scriptures telling us what to do and what not to do and they are strictly to be observed by us. But where we lack any specific command from God, then we are to fall back upon this general rule and search our conscience as to how we would have men deal with us in a similar case or circumstance, and act accordingly with them. This will make us jealous of the reputation of our neighbour, will prevent us making false and injurious statements and cause us to be cautious of heeding and circulating any evil reports. We should then treat others with the same courtesy and kindness as we would wish to be treated by them. We should refrain from subjecting them to those slights and neglects which, were we in their place and they in ours, we should feel unpleasant and undeserved.

“It is a peculiar excellence of this rule of our Lord, that it not only show us our duty, but its obvious tendency is to *persuade* us to perform it. It brings duty before the mind in a peculiarly inviting form. It not only enlightens the mind, but inclines the heart. Self-love is the great obstacle in the way of doing our duty to our neighbour. Our Lord makes even self-love become, as it were, the hand-maid of justice and charity. Having led us to change places with our neighbour to feel what are our rights, and how unreasonable it would be to withhold them, He then says, These are *his* rights, and you will be the unreasonable person to deprive him of them. We are made, as it were, to declare what is our neighbour’s due when we suppose we are only considering what was our own; and we cannot, without the shame of conscious inconsistency, refuse to him what we clearly see, were we in his place, we should account it unreasonable and unjust to be deprived of” (John Brown).

From all that has been pointed out it follows that the breach of this rule is more evil in the case of one who has tasted personally the bitterness of injustice at the hands of others than those who have not done so, because experience gives a truer and closer knowledge of things than a bare concept of them imparts. He who knows things by mere contemplation knows them but at a distance—but he who knows them by actual experience knows them at hand and feels the smart of them. Therefore conscience should work more in them by way of restraint because they know what it is to be oppressed or disgraced and remember how grievous it was when they lay under a wrong. “Thou shalt neither vex a stranger nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exo. 22:21): the Hebrews knew from painful experience what it was to be friendless under a heavy yoke and cruelly afflicted and therefore should be the last people to oppress any strangers who came into their lands. Servants who have groaned under heavy tasks ought to make the kindest and most considerate masters and mistresses if Providence raises their station in the world.

It should also be pointed out that this rule like all the Divine precepts is spiritual and concerns the inward man as well as the outward: bearing upon our thoughts as well as our words and actions. The whole Law of God is spiritual (Rom. 7:14). “The Law of the

LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (Psa. 19:7): it is a guide not only for the motions of the body, but also for the intents and workings of the heart. As is the first table, so is the second: “the second is like unto it” (Matt. 22:39). How so? It is as spiritual as the first, and therefore not only what I “do” but also what I think and purpose to do unto others is comprehended in it. As we saw in Matthew 5, Christ speaks of murder and adultery committed in the heart by spiteful anger and revengeful thoughts—by wanton desires and impure imaginations. Thus secret grudgings in our hearts against others is forbidden, so that our affections be not alienated from them. Our neighbour is to be loved as ourself and therefore the justice and equity required by this rule is a righteousness which proceeds from a principle of love.

It will thus be seen that this golden rule is not only a guide to conduct but a *revealer of sin* to the saints, for who that knows his own heart will say that he measures up to it. “Let all who habitually neglect or violate this law recollect that whatever be their profession, they are not Christians. Even now Christ is saying to them ‘Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say’ ” (John Brown). How few real Christians there are, then, in the world. How many are most resolute in standing up for their own rights, yet have no regard for the rights of others; who are very strict in demanding prompt payment from their debtors, yet are exceedingly slack in meeting the dues of their creditors; who hotly resent being slandered, yet care nothing of other men’s names; who are very hurt when friends fail to sympathize with them in their troubles, yet are callously indifferent to the sorrows of their neighbours. It is vain to parade our orthodoxy in doctrine and prate about the communion we enjoy with Christ, while we pay little or no attention to this important precept. God will not accept our worship if our conduct unto our fellows contradicts our Christian profession.

“*For this is the Law and the Prophets.*” This clause contains a commendation of the preceding commandment. It is no strange and harsh task which I am setting before you, says Christ, but one which God has required from His people since the beginning. That golden rule is in fact a remarkable epitome of the second table of the Moral Law, an abridgement of the duties there demanded by it. “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” is a gathering up into one compendious maxim of all that the Old Testament teaches concerning our converse and commerce with men. That golden rule is the sum of what the Law and the Prophets taught about the law of equity and justice between man and man. In this declaration, “*For this is the Law and the Prophets*” Christ placed His imprimatur upon the authenticity and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, for our Lord had never backed up His own teaching with anything less than an appeal unto that which was and is the very Word of God. The doctrine of Moses and the Prophets is of equal weight and worth as the doctrine of Christ.

Perhaps a brief amplification is called for by the last sentence above. If we compare Christ and Moses and the Prophets, we must distinguish between their doctrine and their persons. The doctrine of Moses and the Prophets is equal to the doctrine of Christ in two ways: first, in certainty of Truth, for they speak nothing other than the very Word of God, and Christ did no more. Second, in efficacy and authority for the binding of conscience, theirs being thus equal with His. Yet the Person of Christ is infinitely above the persons of Moses and the Prophets, for He is God incarnate, whereas they were but holy men. He is the Author and Fountainhead of Truth, whereas they were only the amanuenses and channels thereof. Therefore Christ’s doctrine more binds us to obedience than the doc-

trine of the Old Testament because the Person delivering it is of more excellence: this is forcibly argued in Hebrews 1:1, 2; 2:1 “we ought to give the more earnest heed,” and 12:25 “much more.”

The Old Testament taught the imperative duty of seeking the good of our neighbour as emphatically and clearly as does the New. It plainly and repeatedly forbade the doing of anything which would in anywise injure him. “Thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:18). “If thou meet thy neighbour’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again” (Exo. 23:4): clearly that was enunciating the principle, Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you. “Thou shalt not harden thy heart nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, and that which he wanteth” (Deut. 15:7, 8). “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth” (Prov. 24:17). “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink” (Prov. 25:21). Thus we may perceive the error and senselessness of those who claim that the New Testament contains a higher morality and spirituality than the Old.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

31. *His Ordeal.*

“And it came to pass when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it” (1 Kings 21:16). The coveted object (see v. 2) should now be seized. Its lawful owner was dead, brutally murdered by Ahab’s acquiescence, and being king who was there to hinder him enjoying his ill-gotten gain? Picture him delighting himself in his new acquisition, planning how to use it to his best advantage, promising himself much pleasure in this extension of the palace grounds. To such lengths are men allowed to go in their wickedness that at times on-lookers are made to wonder if there is such a thing as Justice, if after all might is not right. Surely if there were a God who loved righteousness and possessed the power to prevent flagrant unrighteousness we should not witness such grievous wrongs inflicted upon the innocent and such triumphing of the wicked. Ah, that is no new problem, my reader, but one which has recurred again and again in the history of this world, a world which lies in the Wicked One. It is one of the mystery elements arising out of the conflict between good and evil. It supplies one of the severest tests of our faith in God and His government of this earth.

Ahab’s entering into possession of Naboth’s vineyard reminds us of a scene described in Daniel 5. There we behold another king, Belshazzar, surrounded by the nobility of his kingdom, engaged in a great feast. He gives orders that the golden and silver vessels which his father had taken out of the temple of Jerusalem should be brought to him. His command was obeyed and the vessels were filled with wine, his wives and concubines drinking from them. Think of it: the sacred utensils of Jehovah’s house being put to such a use! How passing strange that a worm of the dust should be suffered to go to such fearful lengths of presumption and impiety. But the Most High was neither ignorant of nor indifferent unto such conduct. Nor can a man’s rank exempt from or provide any protection against the Divine wrath when God is ready to exercise it. There was none in Samaria who could prevent Ahab’s taking possession of Naboth’s vineyard, and there was none in Babylon who would hinder Belshazzar desecrating the sacred vessels of Israel’s temple, but there was One above who could and did bring each of them to judgment.

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl. 8:11). Since retribution does not promptly overtake evil-doers they harden their hearts still further, becoming increasingly reckless, supposing that judgment will never fall upon them. Therein they err, for they are but treasuring up unto themselves “wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5). Note well that word “revelation.” The “righteous judgment of God” is now more or less in abeyance but there is a set time, an appointed “Day,” when it shall be made fully manifest. The Divine vengeance comes slowly yet it comes none the less surely. Nor has God left Himself without plain witness of this. Throughout the course of this world’s history He has, every now and then, given a clear and public proof of His “righteous judgment,” by making an example of some notorious rebel and evidencing His abhorrence of him in the sight of men. He did so with Ahab, with Belshazzar, and with others since then and though in the great majority of instances the heavens may be silent and apparently impervious, yet those exceptions are

sufficient to show “the heavens do rule,” and should enable the wronged to possess their souls in patience.

“And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it” (1 Kings 21:17, 18). A living, righteous, and sin-hating God had observed the wickedness of which Ahab had been a willing party and determined to pass sentence upon him, employing none other than the stern Tishbite as His mouthpiece. In connection with matters of less moment junior Prophets had been sent to the king a short time before (20:13, 22, 28), but on this occasion none less than the father of the Prophets was deemed a suitable agent. It called for a man of great courage and undaunted spirit to confront the king, charging him with his horrid crime and denouncing sentence of death upon him in God’s name. Who so well qualified as Elijah for this formidable and perilous undertaking? Herein we may perceive how the Lord reserves the most difficult tasks for the most experienced and mature of His servants. Peculiar qualifications are required for special and important missions, and for the development of those qualifications a rigid apprenticeship has to be gone through. Alas that these principles are so little recognized by the churches today.

But let us not be misunderstood at this point. It is not of natural endowments, intellectual powers and educational polish we have reference to. It was vain for David to go forth against the Philistine giant clad in Saul’s armour: he knew that, and so discarded it. No, it is *spiritual* graces and ministerial gifts of which we speak. It was strong faith and the boldness it imparts which this severe ordeal called for: faith not in himself but in his Master. Strong faith, for no ordinary had sufficed. And that faith had been tried and disciplined, strengthened and increased in the school of prayer and on the battle-field of experience. In the wilds of Gilead, in the loneliness of Cherith, in the exigencies of Zarephath the Prophet had dwelt much in the secret place of the Most High, had learned to know God experimentally, had proved His sufficiency. It was no untried novice that Jehovah called upon to act as His ambassador on this solemn occasion, but one who was “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”

On the other hand we must be careful to place the crown where it properly belongs and ascribe unto God the honour of furnishing and sustaining His servants. We have nothing but what we have received (1 Cor. 5:7) and the strongest are as weak as water when He withdraws His hand from them. He who calls us must also equip—and extraordinary commissions require extraordinary endowments—which the Lord alone can impart. Tarry ye in Jerusalem, said Christ to the Apostles, “until ye be endued with power from on High” (Luke 24:49). Bold sinners need to be boldly reprov’d, but such firmness and courage must be sought from God. Said He to another of His Prophets, “All the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks” (Ezek. 3:7-9). Thus, if we behold Elijah complying promptly with this call it was because he could say, “But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD and of judgment and of might to declare unto Jacob (Ahab) his transgression” (Micah 3:8).

“Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it” (1 Kings 21:18). Ahab was not in his palace, but God knew where he had gone and the business with which he would

be engaged. "The eyes of the LORD are in *every* place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3): nothing can be concealed from Him. Ahab might pride himself that none should ever reprove him for his diabolical conduct and that now he could enjoy his spoils without hindrance. But sinners, whether of the lowest or the highest rank, are never secure. Their wickedness ascends before God, and He often sends after them when they least expect it. Let none flatter themselves with impunity because they have succeeded in their iniquitous schemes. The day of reckoning is not far distant even though it should not overtake them in this life. If these lines should be read by one who is far from home, no longer under the eye of loved ones, let him know that he is still under the observation of the Most High. Let that consideration deter him from sinning against Him and against his neighbour. Stand in awe of God's presence lest some fearful sentence from Him be pronounced upon you, and be brought home to your conscience with such power that you will be a terror to yourself and to all around you.

"And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? and thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (1 Kings 21:19). With no smooth and soothing message was the Prophet now sent forth. It was enough to terrify himself: what then must it have meant to the guilty Ahab! It proceeded from Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords—the supreme and righteous Governor of the universe—whose omniscient eye is witness to all events and whose omnipotent arm shall arrest and punish all evil-doers. It was the word of Him who declares, "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill Heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23:24). For "His eyes are upon the ways of man and He seeth all his goings. There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves" (Job 34:21, 22). It was a word of denunciation bringing to light the hidden things of darkness. It was a word of accusation, boldly charging Ahab with his crimes. It was a word of condemnation, making known the awful doom which should surely overtake the one who had blatantly trampled upon the Divine Law.

It is just such a message which our degenerate age calls for. It is the *lack of them* which has brought about the terrible condition which the world is now in. Mealy-mouthed preachers deceived the fathers, and now their children have turned their backs on the churches; and it requires no prophetic foresight to discern that unless the rot be stopped at once, in a very few years at most the last of the churches will have to close their doors. "Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked" (Jer. 23:19). The figure is a very awful one: a whirlwind uproots trees, sweeps away houses, and leaves death and desolation in its wake. Who among God's people can doubt that such a whirlwind is now going forth? "The anger of the LORD shall not return until He have executed, and till He have performed the thoughts of His heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly" (v. 20). And why? what is the root cause thereof? This: "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (v. 21): false prophets, preachers never called of God, who uttered "lies" in His name (v. 25). Men who rejected the Divine Law, ignored the Divine holiness, remained silent about Divine wrath. Men who filled the churches with unregenerate members and then amused them with speculations upon prophecy.

It was false prophets who wrought such havoc in Israel, who had corrupted the throne and called down upon the land the sore judgment of God. And the past century the false prophets have corrupted Christendom. As far back as fifty years ago Spurgeon lifted up his voice and used his pen in denouncing the "Downgrade movement" of the churches and withdrew his tabernacle from the "Baptist Union." After his death things went rapidly from bad to worse and now "a-whirlwind of the Lord" is sweeping away the flimsy structures the religious world erected. Everything is now in the melting pot and only the genuine gold will survive the fiery trial. And what can the true servants of God do? Lift up their voices, "Cry aloud and spare not" (Isa. 58:1). Do as Elijah did: fearlessly denounce sin in high places. Charge the government with its violation of the Sabbath statute. Arraign the B.B.C. for the filth and blasphemy they are polluting the air with. Chide the magistrates of the land for their laxity in enforcing the penalties of the law. Condemn the greed of the working men who are blackmailing the public in their ceaseless demands for higher wages.

A message pleasant to deliver? No. A message likely to be popular with the hearers? No, the very reverse. But a message sorely needed and criminally neglected. Did the Lord Jesus preach a sermon in the temple on the love of God while its sacred precincts were being made a den of thieves? Yet this is what thousands of those who posed as His servants have been doing for the last two or three generations. With flaming eye and scourge in hand the Redeemer drove out from His Father's House the traffickers who defiled it. And those who were His true servants denounced the "entertainments," "socials," and other worldly devices employed by the churches to "hold the young people." Those who were the true servants of Christ refused to use carnal methods for adding numbers of nominal professors to their membership. Those who were the true servants of Christ proclaimed the unchanging demands of a holy God, insisted on the enforcing of a Scriptural discipline, and resigned their pastorates when their flocks rebelled. And the religious powers-that-be were glad to see the back of them, and their ministerial brethren so far from seeking to strengthen their hands did all they could to injure them and cared not if they starved to death.

But those servants of Christ were few in number, a negligible minority. The great bulk of the "pastors" were hirelings, timeservers, holders of an easy and lucrative job at any price. They carefully trimmed their sails and deliberately omitted from their preaching anything which would be distasteful unto their ungodly hearers. Anything which savoured of "Calvinism" was rigidly eschewed, eternal punishment was not mentioned, the word "repentance" was never heard, the crying sins of the day were never denounced. The people of God in their congregations were famished, though few of them dared to take their pastors to task, following the line of least resistance. And the very passage from which we have quoted above declares, "But *if they had* stood in My counsel and had caused My people to hear My word, then they should have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings" (Jer. 23:22). But they did not, and therefore "a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind." Can we wonder at it? God will not be mocked. The churches are responsible for it, and there is no denomination, no party, no "circle of fellowship" who can plead innocence.

"And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (1 Kings 21:20). With what consternation must the king have beheld him! The Prophet would be the last man he wished or expected to see, believing that Jezebel's threat had frightened him

away so that he would be troubled by him no more. Perhaps Ahab thought that he had fled to some distant country or was in his grave by this time: but here he stood before him. The king was evidently startled and dismayed by the sight of Elijah. His conscience would smite him for his base wickedness and the very place of their present meeting would add to his discomfort. He therefore could not look on the Tishbite without terror and fearful foreboding that some dire threat of vengeance was at hand from Jehovah. In his fright and annoyance he cried, "hast thou found me?" Am I now tracked down? A guilty heart can never be at peace. Were he not conscious of how ill he deserved at the hands of God, he would not have greeted His servant as, "O mine enemy." It was because his heart condemned him as an enemy of God that he was so disconcerted at being confronted by His ambassador.

"And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Such a reception is all that the faithful servant of God must expect at the hands of the wicked, especially from unregenerate religious professors. They will regard him a disturber of the peace, a troubler of those who wish to be comfortable in their sins. They who are engaged in evil doing are annoyed at him who detects them, whether he be a minister of Christ or a policeman. The Scriptures are detested because they denounce sin in every form. Rome hates the Bible because it exposes her hypocrisies. The impenitent look upon those as *their friends* who speak smooth things to them and help them to deceive themselves. "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly" (Amos 5:10). Hence it was that the Apostle declared, "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10)—how few servants of Christ are left! The minister's duty is to be faithful to his Master, and if he pleases *Him* what does it matter if he is despised and detested by the whole religious world? Blessed are they whom men shall revile.

At this point we would say to any young man who is seriously contemplating entering the ministry, Abandon such a prospect at once if you are not prepared to be treated with contempt and made "as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things" (1 Cor. 4:13). The public service of Christ is the last place for those who wish to be popular with their fellows. A young minister once complained to an older one, "my church is making a regular doormat of me," to which he received the reply, "If the Son of God condescended to become the Door surely it is not beneath you to be made a doormat." If you are not prepared for elders and deacons to wipe their feet on you, shun the ministry. And to those already in it we would say, Unless your preaching stirs up strife and brings down persecution and contumacy upon you, there is something seriously lacking in it. If your preaching is the enemy of hypocrisy, of carnality, of worldliness, of empty profession, of all that is contrary to vital godliness, then you must be regarded as the enemy of those you oppose.

"And he answered, I have found thee" (1 Kings 21:20). Elijah was not a man who wore his heart on his sleeve. It took a good deal more than a frown to deter or an angry word to peeve him. So far from being "hurt" and turning away to sulk, he replied like a man. He took up Ahab on his own terms and said, "Yea, I have found thee." I have found thee as a thief and murderer in another's vineyard. It is a good sign when the self-convicted one denounces God's servant as his "enemy," for it shows the preacher has hit the mark, his message has gone home to the conscience, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23), says God, and so Adam, Cain, Achan, Ahab, Gehazi, Ananias

proved. Let none think they shall escape Divine retribution: if punishment is not inflicted in this life it most certainly will in the next unless we cease fighting against God and flee to Christ for refuge. “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jude 14, 15).—A.W.P.

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

4. *Its Marvel.*

This is an aspect of our subject which has received far too little attention from those who have written and preached thereon. Amid all the dust which controversy has raised up, only too often one of the grandest wonders of Divine grace has been hidden from the sight of the theological contestants: alas, how frequently is this the case, that being so occupied with the shell we reach not the kernel. Even those who have sought to defend this truth against the assault of Popish and Arminian antagonists did not sufficiently hold up to view the glorious *miracle* which it embodies. The security of the saint concerns not only the Divine veracity and faithfulness but it also exemplifies the workings of Divine power. The believer's cleaving unto the Lord, despite all hindrances and temptations to the contrary, not only manifests the efficacy of God's so-great salvation but displays the marvels of His workmanship therein. That the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church of Christ, that Satan is unable to destroy a single member of it, that the weakest shall be more than conqueror through Him that loved them should fill us with admiration and adoration!

All the blessings of the Christian's life may be summed up in two eminent ones, for they include all the others of which he is the recipient from the moment of the new birth to his arrival in Heaven, namely, regeneration or instating him into life and the preservation of that life through all the difficulties and dangers of his pilgrimage to safe passage unto Glory. Hence it is we so often find them linked together in Scripture. Just as the work of creation at the first and then the upholding of all things by Divine power and Providence are yoked together as works of like wonder (Heb. 1:2, 3), so we find regeneration and preservation joined together as the sum of the operations of grace. "Hath He not made thee *and* established thee?" (Deut. 32:6). "I have made, and will bear; even I will carry, and deliver you" (Isa. 46:4). In Psalm 66:9 both are comprehended in one word—"who *putteth* (margin) thy soul in life," and "who *holdeth* thy soul in life," first imparting life and then sustaining it. So also in the New Testament: "I give unto them eternal life *and* they shall never perish" (John 10:28); "begotten us again unto a lively hope . . . kept by the power of God through faith" (1 Peter 1:3, 5); "sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ" (Jude 1).

This great marvel of Divine preservation is enlarged upon and celebrated in Psalm 66. After saying, "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice His praise to be heard: which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved" (vv. 8, 9) the Psalmist pointed out first that they had been proved and tried "as silver is tried" (v. 10), which denotes the sorest of trials (Ezek. 22:22). Second, God had brought them "into the net" and had "lain affliction upon their loins" (Psa. 66:11): that is, He had so encompassed them round about with afflictions that there was no way of escaping out of them (cf. Isa. 51:20). Third, God had caused men to "ride over their heads" (Psa. 66:12): that is, they were delivered to the will of cruel enemies, who treated them as slaves. Fourth, they had gone "through fire and water" (v. 12), which denotes the extremity of evils. Nor were these various dangers perils to their outward man only, but tryings and testings of their faith, as "Thou, O God, hast proved us" (v. 10) intimates. Yet through all of them they had been sustained and preserved. God had supported their faith and upheld them under His sorest chastenings.

Having blessed God on behalf of other saints and invited his readers to do the same, the Psalmist added a personal testimony, recounting the Lord's goodness unto himself. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul" (v. 16), which confession continues to the end of the Psalm. That testimony is not to be divorced from its context but regarded as the continuation of what he had affirmed in the preceding verses. It was as though he said, What I ask you to praise the Lord for is not something with which I have had no firsthand acquaintance but rather of that I have experienced in my own checkered history. The Lord put and held *my* soul in life during the many buffetings I have passed through. He did not suffer the waters to completely submerge me but kept my head above them. Give me an audience, fellow pilgrims, while I recount to you the wonderful workings of the God of all grace with me. Let me review the whole of my wilderness journey and tell of God's failing not to show Himself strong on my behalf: I cried unto Him, "Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me" (v. 20).

Ah, could not each child of God emulate the Psalmist in that? We are greatly interested and delighted when we read or hear of how different ones were brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light. We marvel at and admire the variety of the means and methods employed by Him in convicting of sin and discovering Christ to different ones. We are awed and rejoice when we learn of how some notorious rebel was brought to the foot of the Cross. But equally interesting, equally wonderful, equally blessed is the story of each Christian's life *after* conversion. If the mature believer looks back at the whole of his journey and reviews all God's gracious dealings with him, what a tale he could unfold! Let him describe the strange twists and windings of his path, all ordered by infinite Wisdom, as he now perceives. Let him tell of the tempests and tossing through which his frail craft has come and how often the Lord said to the winds and waves, "be still." Let him narrate the providential help which came when he was in sore straits, the deliverances from temptation when he was almost overcome, the recoveries from backslidings, the revivings after deadness of heart, the comforting in sorrow, the uplifting when borne down by difficulties and discouragements, the answers to prayer when things appeared hopeless, the patience which has borne with dullness, the grace with unbelief, the joy of communion with the Lord when cut off from public means of grace. What a series of miracles the Christian has experienced!

The saint is indeed a marvel of marvels: without strength yet continuing to plod along his uphill course. Think of a tree flourishing in the midst of a sandy desert, where there is neither soil nor water. Imagine a house suspended in mid-air with no visible means of support above or below. Conceive of a man living week after week and year after year in a morgue, yet maintaining his vigour. Suppose a lone lamb secure in the midst of hungry wolves, or a maid keeping her garments white as she plows her way through deep mud and mire—and in such figures you have an image of the Christian life. The new nature is kept alive between the very jaws of death! Health of soul is preserved while breathing a fetid atmosphere and surrounded by those with the most contagious and fatal diseases. It is like a defenseless dove successfully eluding droves of hawks bent on her destruction. It is like a man subsisting, on a barren wilderness where there is neither food nor drink. It is like a traveler on some icy summit with unfathomable precipices on either side—where a false step means certain destruction. O the wonder of Christian perseverance in the face of such handicaps and obstacles!

1. The marvel, then, of the saints' perseverance is seen in the character of those who are chosen by God. We would naturally conclude that if He determined to have a people in this world through whom He would show forth His praises, He would select the most promising and excellent: those of strong intellectual power, those of noble birth, those of sweet disposition, those of outstanding moral character. But His ways are different from ours. He singles out the most unlikely and unworthy ones to be the vessels of mercy. Thus it was in the Old Testament era. Why were the Hebrews taken to be the most favoured of all nations? Had they a stronger natural claim than others? Assuredly not. The Egyptians were a more intelligent race, as the monuments of their industry attest to this day. The Chaldeans were more ancient, more numerous, more civilized and albeit exerted a much greater influence on the rest of the world. Was it, because the Israelites were more *spiritual*, more likely to prove amenable to the Divine government? No, for ere they set foot upon Canaan it was expressly declared unto them, "Understand therefore that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness, for thou art a stiffnecked people" (Deut. 9:6).

It is the same thing in the New Testament dispensation. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Cor. 1:26-28). How remarkable is this: the ones chosen to successfully resist Satan, overcome the world, persevere in the difficult path of faith and obedience and finally win Heaven are the feeble, the weak, the base, the despised, and the mere nobodies! This has ever presented a stumblingblock to the proud Pharisee: "have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" (John 7:48). That the priests and scribes be passed by and publicans and harlots called to feast with Christ—that heavenly things should be hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes—evokes the sneer from the learned, "Christianity is only suited to old women and children." And why is this God's way? "That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:29). That the crown of honour should be placed on the head of Him who alone is entitled to wear it, that we may learn this is the result of sovereign and miraculous *grace*.

2. It is seen in the fewness of them. There is but "a *remnant* according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5) even among those who bear the name of the Lord, and in comparison with the hundreds of millions in heathendom who worship false gods and the vast multitudes in Christendom who make no profession at all, the real people of God constitute such an insignificant handful as to be almost lost to view. One had naturally thought that if the Lord purposed to have a people on earth who should glorify His name that they would be conspicuous in size, commanding attention and respect. Is it not a maxim of worldly wisdom that "there is strength in numbers" and did not Napoleon give expression thereto in his satirical dictum, "God is always on the side of the biggest battalions"? Ah, but here, too, God's thoughts and ways are the very opposite of the world's, for His strength is "made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9.) and the things which are highly esteemed among men are an "abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). Turn, my reader, to Judges 7:2 and ponder anew the lesson Jehovah taught Gideon when He said,

“The people that are with thee are *too many* for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves”!

Not only have the Lord's people always been in the minority but they have never included more than a fractional percentage of earth's population. Only eight were delivered from the Flood. From the days of Noah unto Moses—a period of roughly eight and a half centuries—we may count upon our fingers those recorded in Holy Writ who gave evidence of spiritual life. It requires no courage or resolution to follow the tide of popular opinion for one is likely to encounter less opposition when he is on the side of the majority. What a miracle that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob preserved their piety in Canaan when surrounded by the heathen! The principle which we are now engaged in illustrating was emphasized by Moses when he said unto Israel, “The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were *the fewest* of all people” (Deut 7:7). It is the same in this New Testament dispensation. Near the close of Paul's life Christians were referred to as a sect “every where spoken against” (Act 28:22). The Lord Jesus declared that His flock was a “little” one (Luke 12:32), which increases the wonder of its survival, and though in recent years the membership of the “churches” has swelled to huge proportions, it is now becoming more and more apparent that with rare exceptions they are but nominal professors and that only a “few” tread that Way which leadeth unto Life (Matt. 7:14).

3. It is seen in God's leaving them in this world. We might well suppose that since the Father has set His heart upon them He would take them Home as soon as they are brought from death unto life. Instead they are left down here, most of them for many years, in a hostile country, in the Enemy's territory, for “the whole world lieth in the Wicked one” (1 John 5:19). And why? that they may have opportunity to manifest their love for Him, that despite ceaseless opposition and innumerable temptations to cast off their allegiance, they will, by His grace, remain faithful unto death. We marvel that Noah was preserved in the ark when the devastating flood without swept away the entire human race from the earth and when he was surrounded by all manner of wild beasts within. Why was he not torn to pieces by the lions and tigers? or poisoned by the stench from the dung of all the animals? Though he remained there no less than a year, at the end thereof he and all his household stepped forth alive and well. Not less wonderful is the survival of the Christian in a world where there is nothing to help spiritually but everything to the contrary.

The believer may be compared to an individual who has thrown off allegiance to his king, has disowned his country, and refuses obedience to its laws yet continues to dwell in the land he has renounced and hard by the sovereign he has forsworn. The grace of God has called us out of the world, but the Providence of God has sent us into the world. We may therefore expect nothing but hatred and hostility from it. The world will never forgive the act by which we broke from its thralldom, renounced its sway, relinquished its pleasures and resigned its friendship. Nor can it look with complacency upon the godly, self-denying and unworldly life of the Christian, which is a constant rebuke of its own carnality and folly. First it will veil its opposition and conceal its malignity beneath smiles and flattery, seeking to win back the one it has lost. But when that effort proves unavailing it changes its course and with venomous tongue, tireless zeal and devilish tactics seeks by detraction and falsehood to wound and injure the people of God. We marvel at the three Hebrews not being destroyed in Babylon's fiery furnace, but it is not less a

miracle for a believer to persevere in the path of holiness amid the contagious sinfulness, seductive allurements and relentless persecutions of an evil world.

4. It is seen in the old nature being left in the saint. Since God is pleased to leave His people in this howling wilderness for a season, where everything seems to be dead against them, surely He will rid them of that which is most of all calculated to lead to their fatal undoing. If He requires them to be "holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Peter 1:15), will He not purge them of all inward corruptions? If the sons of God are to be "without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation," among whom they are to "shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15), will He not remove all darkness from their understanding? And again we are made to realize how worthless is all human reasoning upon spiritual matters. Indwelling sin remains in the believer: the flesh is neither eradicated nor transformed. But how can we expect those with a sink of iniquity still within them to maintain a godly walk? Ah, therein we are brought to see again the *marvel* of the saint's perseverance. If a lorry has to pass down a street where the buildings on either side are burning fiercely, would it not greatly augment the wonder of its journeying through successfully when we learned that the lorry was laden with barrels of gunpowder and dynamite?

This is precisely the case of the believer: there is that in him which is responsive to the evil without him. The world and his heart are in a confederacy against the good of his soul, so that he can neither eat nor drink, work nor sleep in safety because of enemies without and treacherous lusts within. For a holy angel to dwell here would involve him in no danger, for in freedom from all inward corruptions there would be nothing in him to which the allurements of the world could appeal. But the Christian has a stack of dry tinder ready to ignite as soon as the sparks of temptation alight thereon. O the policy and power, the strength and prevalence, the nearness and treachery of indwelling sin! It is something which cleaves to all the faculties: not only *in* us but part and parcel *of* us. It dwells there (Rom. 7:17) ever seeking our overthrow. Such is our native depravity that it is capable of transmuting blessings into curses, making things lawful into snares and entangling us with everything we meet with. Ah, my reader, if it were a miracle when Elisha caused iron to swim (2 Kings 2), not less so is it when our affections are set upon things above and our minds stayed on Jehovah.—A.W.P.

PASTORAL DIRECTIONS.

To my dearly beloved friends, that small company to whom by the Providence of God, I have for some years past preached the everlasting Gospel. Grace, mercy, and peace unto you, from God our Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by the eternal Spirit—

It is now many years since we have been called to worship God's great and reverend name together: during which time He hath been exceeding good to us, manifesting His power in our weakness, and His love in our unworthiness. He hath declared His name to be recorded amongst us by His coming to us and blessing of us. Some of you have been convinced, some converted, some edified, and all (I hope) quickened and encouraged heavenwards. And not only yourselves, but through the grace of God many others have been born to Christ amongst us and more built up in the holy faith. O the many warm, sweet, and refreshing Sabbaths we have enjoyed together! And what shall we say to these things? or what shall we do? O let us bow down at the foot of God, and adore His infinitely, infinitely, infinitely free, rich, and powerful grace, ascribing all the glory to that alone, to which (I am sure) all is due!

God hath now called me aside from you, and not only from you, but He seems to be calling me out of His vineyard, yea, out of this world. I have long had a weak and infirm body and now God, in His wise and holy Providence, hath seen good to reduce me to a far lower and weaker state of body, my health being now utterly broken. Yet I must say God is exceeding good to me and deals in Fatherly tenderness with me. I have neither much sickness nor much pain; only my disease, according to its name, gradually consumes me. Nor am I without some lucid intervals: God both lifts me up and casts me down, as He dealt with the Church of old.

Sometimes I am under some revivings which seems to give hopes of a return from the grave, others nothing but death seems to be in view. And in this dubious state I am waiting upon the will of God, which (I am sure) is holy, wise, and good, and which (I hope) shall be welcome to me, whether it be for life or death. Hitherto, through grace, death hath not been terrible to me; what it may be in its nearest approaches, I cannot tell; but I look to and rest upon Him who hath destroyed both death, and him that had the power of death.

And now only two things I beg of you: one is that you will give me room in your prayers while I am in the land of the living: and I desire you would beg of God these things for me. First, that all sin and guilt cleaving to me may be fully expiated and discharged through the blood of Christ. O beg both forgiveness and repentance for me, which (God knows) I greatly need! Second, that my will may be thoroughly resigned up unto the will of God, either for life or death. Third, that I may have much of God's presence with me and may always have good thoughts of Him and His dispensations towards me in all He doth or shall lay upon me.

Fourth, that if God should please to restore me, I may come out of this furnace purified and refined, as gold that is tried seven times and more fitted for my Master's service. Or if His pleasure is (which seems at present most probable) to put a period to my mortal life, that His love and the light of His countenance may shine upon me to sweeten the bitter pains of death to me; we cannot live comfortably without His love, much less can we die comfortably without it. That is my first request.

The other is that you will accept and embrace some plain but weighty counsels. God is my record that my heart's desire and prayer for you is, and has been, that you may be

saved and in love to your salvation I leave these directions with you. 1. Above all things look well to and labour to make sure of an union with Christ, knowing assuredly that without union with Him all your religion is vain and ineffectual. 2. Take heed of too much addictedness to this world, as remembering, that if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; and that the friendship of this world is enmity to God. 3. Dwell much within and be much conversant in heart-work, in studying the heart, searching the heart, cleansing the heart, keeping the heart, looking always upon it as the biggest cheat and impostor in the world, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

4. Take heed of splitting upon that fatal rock of self-deceit of which you have sometimes heard and upon which the greatest part of professors split and perish forever. 5. Set up and keep up the worship of God both in your families and closets. For the Lord's sake, let none of yours be prayerless families. 6. Always maintain a great honour and reverence for all God's ordinances and in an especial manner honour and sanctify His Sabbath. The Sabbath-day is your soul's market-day. O lose not your market! 7. Be universally honest and upright in your callings and your dealings in them. The fraudulent dealings of professors do much reproach to the Gospel.

8. Covet to seat yourselves under a sound, clear, searching, Gospel ministry, and keep mainly to the same ministry; and the Lord guide you therein. 9. Labour that your profiting under the ministry may appear unto all men. It will be a dreadful thing to enjoy rich means and bring no fruit to perfection. O sirs! be fruitful Christians! 10. Expect farther trials and sufferings, and prepare for them. There is a dark and gloomy day coming, wherein (possibly) you will think it best with them that God shall have hid in the grave beforehand; but be not troubled, it will be short, and a glorious day will follow, a day wherein the church of God shall sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, a day wherein our dear Lord and Head shall reign gloriously.

11. Pray and long, long and pray, much and earnestly, for the coming of the day of God, for the coming of Christ's kingdom. *Thy kingdom come* is a petition which should be much upon our hearts. O do not rest in low things as to Divine appearances and manifestations both in the world and in your own souls! These counsels I leave with you out of that affection I bear to your salvation and our Lord's honour, as concerned in you. I will conclude all with that solemn and cordial profession to you, which Augustine often made to those to whom he was wont to preach, namely:

"It is the desire of my soul, that as we have been often crowded together to worship God in one earthly house, so we may all worship Him together forever in the heavenly house: and if we must never pray and preach, hear and mourn, together more on earth, yet we may love and sing, praise and admire together forever in Heaven; which that we may do, the God of peace (who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the Everlasting Covenant), make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you and me that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen and Amen."—Last letter of E. Pearse to his flock.

N.B. Though the above was written nearly two centuries ago, it contains counsels for the Lord's people which are thoroughly pertinent to our own days. Many of the scattered flock are no longer in church fellowship with other saints and therefore there is the more reason why they need to attend with diligence unto the garden of their own souls. Re-read the closing paragraph and translate it into prayer and action.—A.W.P.

WELCOME TIDINGS.

“Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4). The Christian has daily cause to grieve over much that he finds in himself; often there is that in his circumstances which is unpleasant and painful and his lot is now cast in evil days when the world is in such a state that everything seems to make for depression and despondence. Even so, the Lord still lives, still reigns, still remains the all-sufficient Portion of His people and it is our privilege, our duty, our wisdom to rejoice in Him. “Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous, for praise is comely for the upright” (Psa. 33:1). Rejoice in His immutability: that amid all the vicissitudes of history He remains unchanged. Rejoice in His faithfulness: that in contrast from your instability and the fickleness of all human creatures, He can be relied upon to make good His promises. Rejoice in His power: that no matter what straits you may be in, how desperate your situation, nothing is too hard for Him. Rejoice in His love: suffer not the mystery of His providences nor even the severity of His chastisements to cause you to doubt it. Rejoice in His mercy: however deplorable your relapses, however far you have wandered from Him, “His mercy endureth forever.”

“Rejoice in the Lord *always*.” The writer for one is deeply thankful for that word. Without it we might conclude there are seasons when it would be wrong to rejoice. We are apt to suppose that rejoicing is a spiritual luxury, suited only to festive occasions and certainly many now think that with the world torn asunder by war and myriads of our fellow-creatures plunged into misery rejoicing is unseemly. But there is never a time when it is incongruous for the believer to rejoice in the Lord. Yea, it is when the streams of carnal satisfaction are dried up, when the creature in which we delighted is taken from us, when the world gives itself up to melancholy—that the realities of godliness and the supernatural character of Christianity has its best opportunity to prove itself. “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, Yet will I rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17, 18).

We are to “rejoice in the Lord” not only because of what He is in Himself and because of our relation to Him, but to “declare His *works* with rejoicing” (Psa. 107:22). All that He does should delight our hearts, for all His acts are perfect. His works in creation, in Providence and in grace will stimulate praise as we take pleasure therein. His works of mercy and His works of judgment alike call for adoration. The tasks appointed His servants are many and varied. “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people” (Isa. 40:1) is an essential part of their commission. “These things write we unto you that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:4) said one of His Apostles. And now the time has again come round for us to make our little annual contribution to this end—to record briefly something of the Lord’s workings through these pages during another year—to make mention of His goodness that readers may have additional reason to “rejoice in the Lord.” Before quoting a few of the testimonies to hand, we would mention the recent receipt of a letter from a British General, to whom we sent a sample copy of the “Studies,” asking that the magazine be sent to him personally and also to a number of chaplains in the forces he commands. Surely that is cause for rejoicing in the Lord!

“Several years ago I ran across some of your writings and have found them very helpful in opening up the Scriptures. I have always liked your emphasis on the total depravity of man and the absolute sovereignty of God, as this is the centre of my teaching. I possess two volumes of

your 'Studies' and am very eager to get a complete set" (Bible Conference Speaker). "We are receiving real blessing from the Studies and pray that the Lord will long spare you to minister to the Household of Faith" (Canadian preacher). "Every copy has arrived thus far, which is a remarkable thing in view of all that is being sunk monthly in the Atlantic. Once again I can say that much benefit has been derived from the reading of the articles in your magazine" (Missionary, San Salvador).

"We still get the Studies and cannot be sufficiently thankful for all they mean to us. We are indeed favoured in having so God-honouring a ministry and such able and clear exposition of the Word at our disposal" (Australia). Just a note to express our thanks to you for sending us the Studies through another year. We are indeed grateful to our God for enabling you to carry on this precious ministry, and we look to Him for your continuance in this blessed work, D.V." (Australia). "I wish to again thank you for the blessing through His grace that you have given me in the Studies. Each article is rich with food and all have brought joy to my soul as they exalt my God, give Him the glory, and me the blessing" (Australia). "I am at the present employed in the Bush, away from everyone, and your magazine is very helpful, especially the Life of Elijah and Man's Impotency: such articles as these are very much needed today, and meditation is profitable" (Australia).

"I am truly grateful for your continued ministry in the exposition of the Scriptures, and pass on the extra copies for others to read. I find them most edifying and trust you may be long spared for this good work" (New Zealand). "I am very pleased to be able to report that I received all your magazines last year. I do hope you will continue to send them to me . . . I have no doubt that these Studies will be helpful to people in many lands long after you have gone to your rest, though valued in these days by comparatively few" (New Zealand). [Amen!] "Among the many good things I have been profited by your setting forth of the Ten Commandments, the Life of Elijah, and in a great measure by the thoughts of George Lawson on the Divine Agency in War" (Canada). "It is such a comfort and joy that the Studies continue to arrive safely" (Canada).

"How many, many times have we had cause to praise Him during this past year, not only for ourselves but for others, because of the way in which you have been able to break the Bread of Life to us. While we thank you, we praise Him who alone is the interpreter of His Word. The articles on the Sermon on the Mount have exposed much of my righteousness as unrighteousness" (Pennsylvania). "I have received every copy of the Studies thus far for which I thank our omnipotent God. The reading of them has been a blessing to my heart and soul" (Iowa). "Thank you so much for the continued publication of the Studies . . . and I find no such deep teaching outside the Bible in any paper" (California). "I am still enjoying your Studies and do not know how I would get along without them. I am sorry you are so far away as I crave companionship in the Lord and there are so few places you can go to hear any of the Word" (New Jersey).

"Thank you for the final copies of another year's issue of the Studies. I was interested once again to read your Annual Letter. How glad I am to know of your continued welfare and of your dear wife and trust you may be permitted to pursue your most valuable and helpful ministry for a long time to come under the good hand of our God. I do so much value your writings and my little collection of the bound volumes are one of my most esteemed treasures. To me they are irreplaceable" (Bath). "It is always a joy to me to receive the Studies and I find them just as fresh, helpful and suitable as ever. While I thank God for this truly spiritual food I must also

thank you for the prayer and labour you have put into your articles. This is the only magazine, if it may be called such, that I really get any help from" (Swindon). "Enclosed is . . . towards the printing of Studies, with a prayer that God will be pleased to enable you to continue it for many years to come. The reading of them is soul-refreshing and inspiring, especially in these days when we get such poor preaching" (Herts.).

"Looking back on the past year's Studies I can truly say they have been very helpful: on every page there has been food for the soul. Sometimes this has been a word of correction, advice, exhortation, encouragement, all of which we need. As the days grow darker, this work is a light shining in a dark place, for it ever puts our Lord in His rightful place and man in his" (Lancs.). "Greetings in the Saviour's name which is above every name, and by His grace it has become precious indeed to us. I would very much like to have your monthly magazine as I receive great blessing and enlightenment from it. I have borrowed one occasionally and found much help" (English Soldier).

"The messages have been most instructive and heart-searching, and I trust under the hand of the Lord will continue to be a blessing and bear much fruit. So glad to hear that in the will of God the Studies will be continued in the coming year. Am praying that you may be guided to give messages that may be meat in due season for the people of God" (Wales). "Thank you for another year's Studies: needless to say how thankful I am to get such wholesome instruction from the Holy Scriptures. I am sorry to hear that your mailing list is decreasing, yet one can understand it when we see those who once stood well carried away with this, that, and the other—arm in arm with the world" (Wales). "Please do not stop sending the monthlies as I look forward to them. If only I had words to tell you the blessing they have been to me. I am sure not a day passes but I read some part of your ministry" (Scotland). "I am thankful to read so much sound doctrine in these dark days when there is so much form of godliness but denying its power" (Scotland). "Rejoice in the Lord *always*"! With Christian greetings and best wishes, Yours by Divine mercy, A. W. and V. E. Pink.

