

## Deuteronomy 8 - 13, Section 4 of 6.

C. H. Mackintosh.

### Deuteronomy 8

"All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord aware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no." (Vers. 1, 2.)

It is, at once, refreshing, edifying and encouraging to look back over the whole course along which the faithful hand of our God has conducted us; to trace His wise and gracious dealings with us; to call to mind His many marvellous interpositions on our behalf, how He delivered us out of this strait and that difficulty; how, oft-times, when we were at our wits' end, He appeared for our help, and opened the way before us, rebuking our fears and filling our hearts with songs of praise and thanksgiving.

We must not, by any means, confound this delightful exercise with the miserable habit of looking back at our ways, Our attainments, our progress, our service, what we have been able to do, even though we are ready to admit, in a general way, that it was only by the grace of God that we were enabled to do any little work for Him. All this only ministers to self complacency, which is destructive of all true spirituality of mind. Self-retrospection, if we may be allowed to use such a term, is quite as injurious in its moral effect as self-introspection. In short self occupation, in any of its multiplied phases, is most pernicious; it is, in so far as it is allowed to operate, the death-blow to fellowship. Anything that tends to bring self before the mind must be judged and refused, with stern decision; it brings in barrenness, darkness and feebleness. For a person to sit down to look back at his attainments or his doings, is about as wretched an occupation as any one could engage in. We may be sure it was not to any such thing as this that Moses exhorted the people when he charged them to "Remember all the way by which the Lord their God had led them"

We may here recur, for a moment, to the memorable words of the apostle in Philippians 3. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, *forgetting those things which are behind*, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Now, the question is, what were the "things" of which the blessed apostle speaks? Did he forget the precious dealings of God with his soul, throughout the whole of his wilderness journey? Impossible; indeed we have the very fullest and clearest evidence to the contrary. Hear his touching words before Agrippa: "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great." So also, in writing to his beloved son and fellow-labourer, Timothy, he reviews the past, and speaks of the persecutions and afflictions which he had endured: "But," he adds, "Out of them all the Lord delivered me." And again, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all forsook me; I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

To what then does the apostle refer when he speaks of "forgetting the things which are behind"?

We believe he refers to all those things which had no connection with Christ things in which the heart might rest, and nature might glory — things which might act as weights and hindrances; all these were to be forgotten in the ardent pursuit of those grand and glorious realities which lay before him. We do not believe that Paul, or any other child of God or servant of Christ, could ever desire to forget a single scene or circumstance, in his whole earthly career, in any way illustrative of the goodness, the loving kindness, the tender mercy, the faithfulness of God. On the contrary, we believe it will ever be one of our very sweetest exercises to dwell upon the blessed memory of all our Father's ways with us while passing across the desert, home to our everlasting rest. " There with what joy reviewing

Past conflicts, dangers, fears,  
Thy hand our foes subduing,  
And drying all our tears;  
Our hearts with rapture burning,  
The path we shall retrace.  
Where now our souls are learning  
The riches of thy grace."

But let us not be misunderstood. We do not, by any means, wish to give countenance to the habit of dwelling merely upon our own experience. This is often very poor work, and resolves itself into self occupation. We have to guard against this as one of the many things which tend to lower our spiritual tone and draw our hearts away from Christ. But we need never be afraid of the result of dwelling upon the record of the Lord's dealings and ways with us. This is a blessed habit, tending ever to lift us out of ourselves, and fill us with praise and thanksgiving.

Why, we may ask, were Israel charged to "remember all the way" by which the Lord their God had led them? Assuredly, to draw out their hearts in praise for the past, and to strengthen their confidence in God for the future. Thus it must ever be. "We'll praise Kim for all that is past, and trust Him for all that's to come." May we do so more and more! May we just move on, day by day, praising and trusting, trusting and praising. These are the two things which redound to the glory of God, and to our peace and joy in Him. When the eye rests on the "Eben-ezers" which lie all along the way, the heart must give forth its sweet "Hallelujahs" to Him who has helped us hitherto, and will help us right on to the end. He *hath* delivered, and He *doth*, deliver, and He *will* deliver. Blessed chain! Its every link is divine deliverance.

Nor is it merely upon the signal mercies and gracious deliverances of our Father's hand that we are to dwell, with devout thankfulness, but also upon the "humblings" and the "provings" of His wise, faithful and holy love. All these things are full of richest blessing to our souls. They are not, as people sometimes call them, "mercies in disguise," but plain, palpable, unmistakable mercies for which we shall have to praise our God throughout the golden ages of that bright eternity which lies before us.

"Thou shalt remember *all* the way" — every stage of the journey, every scene of wilderness life, all the dealings of God, from first to last, with the special object thereof, "to humble thee, and to prove thee, *to know what was in thine heart.*"

How wonderful to think of God's patient grace and painstaking love with His people in the wilderness! What precious instruction for us! With what intense interest and spiritual delight we can hang over the record of the divine dealings with Israel in all their desert wanderings! How much we can

learn from the marvellous history! We, too, have to be humbled and proved, and made to know what is in our hearts. It is very profitable and morally wholesome. On our first setting out to follow the Lord, we know but little of the depths of evil and folly in our hearts. Indeed, we are superficial in everything. It is as we get on in our practical career that we begin to prove the reality of things; we find out the depths of evil in ourselves, the utter hollowness and worthlessness of all that is in the world, and the urgent need of the most complete dependence upon the grace of God, every moment. All this is very good; it makes us humble and self-distrusting; it delivers us from pride and self-sufficiency, and leads us to cling, in child-like simplicity, to the One who alone is able to keep us from falling. Thus as we grow in self-knowledge we get a deeper sense of grace, a more profound acquaintance with the wondrous love of the heart of God, His tenderness toward us, His marvellous patience in bearing with all our infirmities and failings, His rich mercy in having taken us up at all, His loving ministry to all our varied need, His numberless interpositions on our behalf, the exercises through which He has seen fit to lead us for our souls' deep and permanent profit.

The practical effect of all this is invaluable; it imparts depth, solidity and mellowness to the character; it cures us of all our crude notions, and vain theories; it delivers us from one-sidedness and wild extremes; it makes us tender, thoughtful, patient and considerate toward others; it corrects our harsh judgements and gives a gracious desire to put the best possible construction upon the actions of others, and a readiness to attribute the best motives in cases which may seem to us equivocal. These are precious fruits of wilderness experience which we may all earnestly covet.

"And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." (Ver. 3.)

This passage derives special interest and importance from the fact that it is the first of our Lord's quotations from the book of Deuteronomy, in His conflict with the adversary in the wilderness. Let us ponder this deeply. It demands our earnest attention. Why did our Lord quote from Deuteronomy? Because that was the book which, above all others, specially applied to the condition of Israel, at the moment. Israel had utterly failed, and this weighty fact is assumed in the book of Deuteronomy, from beginning to end. But notwithstanding the failure of the nation, the path of obedience lay open to every faithful Israelite. It was the privilege and duty of every one who loved God, to abide by His word, under all circumstances; and in all places.

Now, our blessed Lord was divinely true to the position of the Israel of God; Israel after the flesh had failed and forfeited everything; He was there, in the wilderness, as the true Israel of God, to meet the enemy by the simple authority of the word of God. "And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing; and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." (Luke 4.)

Here then is something for us to ponder. The perfect Man, the true Israel, in the wilderness, surrounded by the wild beasts, fasting for forty days, in the presence of the great adversary of God, of man, of Israel. There was not a single feature in the scene to speak for God. It was not with the second Adam as it was with the first; He was not surrounded with all the delights of Eden, but with all the dreariness and desolation of a desert, there in loneliness and hunger — but there for God!

Yes; blessed be His Name, and there for man; there to show man how to meet the enemy in all his

varied temptations; there to show man how to live. We must not suppose, for a moment, that our adorable Lord met the adversary as God over all; true, He was God, but if it were only as such that He stood in the conflict, it could not afford any example for us. Besides, it would be needless to tell us that God was able to vanquish and put to flight a creature which His own hand had formed. But to see One who was, in every respect, a man, and in all the circumstances of humanity, sin excepted; to see Him there in weakness, in hunger, standing amid the consequences of man's fall, and to find Him triumphing completely over the terrible foe; it is this which is so full of comfort, consolation, strength and encouragement for us.

And how did He triumph? This is the grand and all-important question for us, a question demanding the most profound attention of every member of the church of God, a question the magnitude and importance of which it would be utterly impossible to overstate. How then did the Man Christ Jesus vanquish Satan in the wilderness? Simply by the word of God. He overcame not as the Almighty God, but as the humble, dependent, self-emptied, and obedient Man. We have before us the magnificent spectacle of a man, standing in the presence of the devil, and utterly confounding him with no other weapon whatsoever save the word of God. It was not by the display of divine power, for that could be no model for us; it was simply with the word of God in His heart and in His mouth, that the second Man confounded the terrible enemy of God and man.

And let us carefully note that our blessed Lord does not reason with Satan He does not appeal to any facts connected with Himself — facts with which the enemy was well acquainted. He does not say, "I know I am the Son of God; the opened heavens, the descending Spirit, the Father's voice have all borne witness to the fact of my being the Son of God." No; this would not do; it would not and could not be an example for us. *The one special point for us to seize and learn from is that our Great Exemplar, when meeting all the temptations of the enemy, used only the weapon which we have in our possession, namely, the simple, precious, written, word of God.*

We say, "all the temptations," because in all the three instances our Lord's unvarying reply is, "*It is written.*" He does not say, "I know" — "I think" — "I feel" — "I believe" this, that or the other; He simply appeals to the written word of God — the book of Deuteronomy in particular, that very book which infidels have dared to insult, but which is pre-eminently the book for every obedient man, in the face of total, universal, hopeless wreck and ruin.

This is of unspeakable moment for us, beloved reader. It is as though our Lord Christ had said to the adversary, "Whether I am the Son of God or not, is not now the question, but how man is to live, and the answer to this question is only to be found in holy scripture; and it is to be found there as clear as a sunbeam, quite irrespective of all questions respecting me. Whoever I am, the scripture is the same, "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord."

Here we have the only true, the only safe, the only happy attitude for man, namely, hanging in earnest dependence upon "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord." Blessed attitude! we may well say; there is nothing like it in all this world. It brings the soul into direct, living, personal contact with the Lord Himself, by means of His word. It makes the word so absolutely essential to us, in everything; we cannot do without it. As the natural life is sustained by bread, so the spiritual life is sustained by the word of God. It is not merely going to the Bible to find doctrines there, or to have our opinions or views confirmed; it is very much more than this; it is going to the Bible for the staple commodity of life — the life of the new man; it is going there for food, for light, for guidance, for comfort, for authority, for strength, for all, in short, that the soul can possibly need, from first to last.

And let us specially note the force and value of the expression, *every word.*" How fully it shows

that we cannot afford to dispense with a single word that has proceeded out of the mouth of the Lord. We want it all. We cannot tell the moment in which some exigency may present itself for which scripture has already provided. We may not; perhaps, have specially noticed the scripture before, but when the difficulty arises, if we are in a right condition of soul, the true posture of heart, the Spirit of God will furnish us with the needed scripture; and we shall see a force, beauty, depth and moral adaptation in the passage which we had never seen before. Scripture is a divine, and therefore exhaustless treasury in which God has made ample provision for all the need of His people, and for each believer in particular, right on to the end. Hence we should study it all, ponder it, dig deeply into it, and have it treasured up in our hearts, ready for use when the demand arises.

There is not a single crisis occurring in the entire history of the church of God, not a single difficulty in the entire path of any individual believer, from beginning to end, which has not been perfectly provided for in the Bible. We have all we want in that blessed volume; and hence we should be ever seeking to make ourselves more and more acquainted with what that volume contains so as to be "thoroughly furnished" for whatever may arise, whether it be a temptation of the devil, an allurement of the world, or a lust of the flesh; or, on the other hand, for equipment for that path of good works which God has afore prepared that we should walk in it.

And we should further give special attention to the expression, "*Out of the mouth of the Lord.*" This is unspeakably precious. It brings the Lord so very near to us, and gives us such a sense of the reality of feeding upon His every word, yea, of hanging upon it as something absolutely essential and indispensable. It sets forth the blessed fact that our souls can no more exist without the word than our bodies could without food. In a word, we are taught by this passage that man's true position, his proper attitude, his only place of strength, safety, rest and blessing is to be found in habitual dependence upon the word of God.

This is the life of faith which we are called to live, life of dependence — the life of obedience — the life that Jesus lived perfectly. That blessed One would not move a step, utter a word, or do a single thing save by the authority of the word of God. No doubt He could have turned the stone into bread, but He had no command from God to do that; and inasmuch as He had no command, He had no motive for action. Hence Satan's temptations were perfectly Powerless. He could do nothing with a Man who would only act on the authority of the word of God.

And we may also note, with very much interest and profit, that our blessed Lord does not quote scripture for the purpose of silencing the adversary; but simply as authority for His position and conduct. Here is where we are so apt to fail; we do not sufficiently use the precious word of God in this way; we quote it, at times, more for victory over the enemy than for power and authority for our own souls. Thus it loses its power in our hearts. We want to use the word as a hungry man uses bread, or as a mariner uses his chart and his compass; it is that on which we live and by which we move and act, and think and speak. Such it really is, and the more fully we prove it to be all this to us, the more we shall know of its infinite preciousness. Who is it that knows most of the real value of bread? Is it a chemist? No; but a hungry man. A chemist may analyse it and discuss its component parts, but a hungry man proves its worth. Who knows most of the real value of a chart; is it the teacher of navigation? No; but the mariner as he sails along an unknown and dangerous coast.

These are but feeble figures to illustrate what the word of God is to the true Christian. He cannot do without it. It is absolutely indispensable, in every relationship of life, and in every sphere of action. His hidden life is fed and sustained by it; his practical life is guided by it; in all the scenes and circumstances of his personal and domestic history, in the privacy of his closet, in the bosom of his

family, in the management of his affairs, he is cast upon the word of God for guidance and counsel.

And it never fails those who simply cleave to it, and confide in it. We may trust scripture without a single shade of misgiving. Go to it when we will, we shall always find what we want. Are we in sorrow? Is the poor heart bereaved, crushed and desolate? What can soothe and comfort us like the balmy words which the Holy Spirit has penned for us? One sentence of holy scripture can do more, in the way of comfort and consolation, than all the letters of condolence that ever were penned by human hand. Are we discouraged, faint-hearted and cast down? The word of God meets us with its bright and soul-stirring assurances. Are we pressed by pinching poverty? The Holy Ghost brings home to our hearts some golden promise from the page of inspiration, recalling us to Him who is "The Possessor of heaven and earth," and who, in His infinite grace, has pledged Himself to "supply all our need according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus." Are we perplexed and harassed by the conflicting opinions of men, by the dogmas of conflicting schools of divinity, by religious and theological difficulties? A few sentences of holy scripture will pour in a flood of divine light upon the heart and conscience, and set us at perfect rest, answering every question, solving every difficulty, removing every doubt, chasing away every cloud, giving us to know the mind of God, putting an end to conflicting opinions by the one divinely competent authority.

What a boon, therefore, is holy scripture! What a precious treasure we possess in the word of God! How we should bless His holy Name for having given it to us! Yes; and bless Him, too, for everything that tends to make us more fully acquainted with the depth, fullness and power of those words of our chapter, "Man shall not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

Truly precious are these words to the heart of the believer! And hardly less so are those that follow, in which the beloved and revered lawgiver refers with touching sweetness to Jehovah's tender care throughout the whole of Israel's desert wanderings. "Thy raiment," he says, "waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years."

What marvellous grace shines out in these words! Only think, reader, of Jehovah looking after His people, in such a manner, to see that their garments should not wax old or their foot swell! He not only fed them, but clothed them and cared for them in every way. He even stooped to look after their feet, that the sand of the desert might not injure them! Thus, for forty years, did He watch over them, with all the exquisite tenderness of a father's heart. What will not love undertake to do for its object? Jehovah had set His love upon His people, and this one blessed fact secured everything for them, had they only understood it. There was not a single thing within the range of Israel's necessities, from Egypt to Canaan, which was not secured to them and included in the fact that Jehovah had undertaken to do for them. With infinite love and almighty power on their side, what could be lacking?

But then, as we know, love clothes itself in various forms. It has something more to do than to provide food and raiment for its objects. It has not only to take account of their physical but also of their moral and spiritual wants. Of this the lawgiver does not fail to remind the people. "Thou shalt also consider," he says, "*in thine heart*" — the only true and effective way to consider — "that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee."

Now, we do not like chastening; it is not joyous, but grievous. It is all very well for a son to receive food and raiment from a father's hand, and to have all his comforts provided by a father's thoughtful love; but he does not like to see him taking down the rod. And yet that dreaded rod may be the very best thing for the son; it may do for him what no material benefits or earthly blessings could effect; it may correct some bad habit, or deliver him from some wrong tendency, or save him from

some evil influence, and thus prove a great moral and spiritual blessing for which he shall have to be for ever thankful. The grand point for the son is to see a father's love and care in the discipline and chastening, just as distinctly as in the various material benefits which strew his path from day to day.

Here is precisely where we so signally fail, in reference to the disciplinary dealings of our Father. We rejoice in His benefits and blessings; we are filled with praise and thankfulness as we receive, day by day, from His liberal hand, the rich supply of all our need; we delight to dwell upon His marvellous interposition on our behalf, in times of pressure and difficulty; it is a most precious exercise to look back over the path by which His good hand has led us, and mark those "Eben-ezers" which tell of gracious help supplied all along the road.

All this is very good, and very right, and very precious; but then there is great danger of our resting in the mercies, the blessings and the benefits which flow, in such rich profusion, from our Father's loving heart and liberal hand. We are apt to rest in these things, and say with the psalmist, "*In my prosperity* I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong." True it is, "by thy favour," but yet we are prone to be occupied with our mountain, and *our* prosperity; we allow these things to come in between our hearts and the Lord, and thus they become a snare to us. Hence the need of chastening Our Father, in His faithful love and care is watching over us; He sees the danger and He sends trial, in one shape or another. Perhaps a telegram comes announcing the death of a beloved child, or the crash of a bank involving the loss of our earthly all. Or, it may be, we are laid on a bed of pain and sickness, or called to watch by the sick bed of a beloved relative.

In a word, we are called to wade through deep waters which- seem to our poor feeble coward hearts absolutely overwhelming. The enemy suggests the question, "Is this love?" Faith replies, without hesitation and without reserve, "Yes!" it is all love, perfect love; the death of the child, the loss of the property, the long, heavy, painful illness, all the sorrow, all the pressure, all the exercise, the deep waters and dark shadows — all, all is love — perfect love and unerring wisdom. I feel assured of it, even now; I do not wait to know it by-and-by, when I shall look back on the path from amid the full light of the glory; I know it now, and delight to own it to the praise of the infinite grace which has taken me up from the depth of my ruin, and charged itself with all that concerns me, and which deigns to occupy itself with my very failures, follies and sins, in order to deliver me from them, to make me a partaker of divine holiness, and conform me to the image of that blessed One who "loved me and gave himself for me."

Christian reader, this is the way to answer Satan, and to hush the dark reasonings which may spring up in our hearts. We must always justify God. We must look at all His disciplinary dealings in the light of His love. "Thou, shalt also consider in thine heart, that, *as a man chasteneth his son*, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." Most surely we should not like to be without the blessed pledge and proof of sonship. "*My son*, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth*, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be Partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." Heb. 12: 5-13.

It is, at once, interesting and profitable to mark the way in which Moses presses upon the congregation the varied motives of obedience arising from the past, the present and the future. Everything is brought to bear upon them to quicken and deepen their sense of Jehovah's claims upon them. They were to "remember" the past; they were to "consider" the present; and they were to anticipate the future; and all this was to act on their hearts, and lead them forth in holy obedience to that blessed and gracious One who had done, who was doing, and who would do such great things for them.

The thoughtful reader can hardly fail to observe in this constant presentation of moral motives a marked feature of this lovely book of Deuteronomy, and a striking proof that it is no mere attempt at a repetition of what we have in Exodus; but, on the contrary, that our book has a province, a range, a scope and design entirely its own. To speak of mere repetition is absurd; to speak of contradiction is impious.

"Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him." The word "therefore" had a retrospective and prospective force. It was designed to lead the heart back over the past dealings of Jehovah, and forward into the future. They were to think of the marvellous history of those forty years in the desert, the teaching, the humbling, the proving, the watchful care, the gracious ministry, the full supply of all their need, the manna from heaven, the stream from the smitten rock, the care of their garments and of their very feet, the wholesome discipline for their moral good. What powerful moral motives were here for Israel's obedience!

But this was not all, they were to look forward into the future; they were to anticipate the bright prospect which lay before them; they were to find in the future, as well as in the past and the present, the solid basis of Jehovah's claims upon their reverent and whole-hearted obedience.

"For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates, a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass."

How fair was the prospect! How bright the vision! How marked the contrast to the Egypt behind them and the wilderness through which they had passed! The Lord's land lay before them in all its beauty and verdure, its vine-clad hills and honeyed plains, its gushing fountains and flowing streams. How refreshing the thought of the vine, the fig-tree, the pomegranate and the olive! How different from the leeks, onions and garlic of Egypt! Yes, all so different. It was the Lord's own land: this was enough. It produced and contained all they could possibly want. Above its surface, rich profusion; below, untold wealth, exhaustless treasure.

What a prospect! How the faithful Israelite would long to enter upon it! — long to exchange the sand of the desert for that bright inheritance! True, the desert had its deep and blessed experiences, its holy lessons, its precious memories. There they had known Jehovah in a way they could not know Him even in Canaan; all this was quite true, and we can fully understand it; but still the wilderness was not Canaan, and every true Israelite would long to set his foot on the land of promise, and truly we may say that Moses presents the land, in the passage just quoted, in a way eminently calculated to attract the heart. "A land," he says, "wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, *thou shalt not lack anything in it.*" What more could be said? Here was the grand fact, in reference to that good land into which the hand of covenant love was about to introduce them. All their wants would be divinely met. Hunger and thirst should never be known there. Health and plenty, joy and gladness, peace and blessing were to be

the assured portion of the Israel of God, in that fair inheritance upon which they were about to enter. Every enemy was to be subdued; every obstacle swept away; "the pleasant land," was to pour forth its treasures for their use; watered continually by heaven's rain, and warmed by its sunlight, it was to bring forth, in rich abundance, all that the heart could desire.

What a land! what an inheritance! What a home! Of course, we are looking at it now from a divine standpoint; looking at it according to what it was in the mind of God, and what it shall, most assuredly, be to Israel, during that bright millennial age which lies before them. We should have but a very poor idea indeed of the Lord's land, were we to think of it merely as possessed by Israel in the past, even in the very brightest days of its history, as it appeared amid the splendours of Solomon's reign. We must look onward to "the times of the restitution of all things," in order to have anything like a true idea of what the land of Canaan will yet be to the Israel of God.

Now Moses speaks of the land according to the divine idea of it. He presents it as given by God, and not as possessed by Israel. This makes all the difference. According to his charming description, there was neither enemy nor evil occurrent: nothing but fruitfulness and blessing from end to end. That is what it would have been, that is what it should have been, and that is what it shall be, by-and-by, to the seed of Abraham, in pursuance of the covenant made with their fathers — the new, the everlasting covenant, founded on the sovereign grace of God, and ratified by the blood of the cross. No power of earth or hell can hinder the purpose or the promise of God. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it?" God will make good to the letter every word, spite of all the enemy's opposition, and the lamentable failure of His people. Though Abraham's seed have utterly failed under law and under government, yet Abraham's God will give grace and glory, for His gifts and calling are without repentance.

Moses fully understood all this. He knew how it would turn out with those who stood before him, and with their children after them, for many generations; and he looked forward into that bright future in which a covenant God would display, in the view of all created intelligences, the triumphs of His grace in His dealings with the seed of Abraham His friend.

Meanwhile, however, the faithful servant of Jehovah, true to the object before his mind, in all those marvellous discourses in the opening of our book, proceeds to unfold to the congregation the truth as to their mode of acting in the good land on which they were about to plant their foot. As he had spoken of the past and of the present, so would he make use of the future; he would turn all to account in his holy effort to urge upon the people their obvious, bounden duty to that blessed One who had so graciously and tenderly cared for them all their journey through, and who was about to bring them in and plant them in the mountain of His inheritance. Let us hearken to His touching and powerful exhortations.

"When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he has given thee." How simple! How lovely! How morally suitable! Filled with the fruit of Jehovah's goodness, they were to bless and praise His holy Name. He delights to surround Himself with hearts filled to overflowing with the sweet sense of His goodness, and pouring forth songs of praise and thanksgiving. He inhabits the praises of His people. He says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." The feeblest note of praise from a grateful heart ascends as fragrant incense to the throne and to the heart of God.

Let us remember this, beloved reader. It is as true for us, most surely, as it was for Israel, that praise is comely. Our grand primary business is to praise the Lord. Our every breath should be a hallelujah. It is to this blessed and most sacred exercise the Holy Ghost exhorts us, in manifold places. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips,

giving thanks to his name." We should ever remember that nothing so gratifies the heart and glorifies the Name of our God as a thankful worshipping spirit on the part of His people. It is well to do good and communicate. God is well pleased with such sacrifices. It is our high privilege, while we have opportunity, to do good unto all men, and especially unto them who are of the household of faith. We are called to be channels of blessing between the loving heart of our Father and every form of human need that comes before us in our daily path. All this is most blessedly true; but we must never forget that the very highest place is assigned to praise. It is this which shall employ our ransomed powers, throughout the golden ages of eternity, when the sacrifices of active benevolence shall no longer be needed.

But the faithful lawgiver knew but too well the sad proneness of the human heart to forget all this, to lose sight of the gracious Giver, and rest in His gifts. Hence he addresses the following admonitory words to the congregation-wholesome words, truly, for them and for us. May we bend our ears and our hearts to them, in holy reverence and teachableness of spirit!

"Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgements, and his statutes, which I command thee this day. Lest *when thou hast eaten and art full*, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought; where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint, who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to *do thee good at thy latter end*: and thou say in thine heart, My power, and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant, which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day, that ye shall utterly perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish, *because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God.*" (Vers. 11-20.)

Here is something for us to ponder deeply. It has, most assuredly, a voice for us, as it had for Israel. We may perhaps feel disposed to marvel at the frequent reiteration of the note of warning and admonition, the constant appeals to the heart and conscience of the people as to their bounden duty to obey, in all things, the word of God; the recurrence again and again to those grand soul-stirring facts connected with their deliverance out of Egypt, and their journey through the wilderness.

But wherefore should we marvel? In the first place, do we not deeply feel and fully admit our own urgent need of warning, admonition and exhortation? Do we not need line upon line, precept upon precept, and that continually? Are we not prone to forget the Lord our God, to rest in His gifts instead of Himself? Alas! alas! we cannot deny it. We rest in the stream, instead of getting up to the Fountain. We turn the very mercies, blessings and benefits which strew our path, in rich profusion, into an occasion of self-complacency and gratulation, instead of finding in them the blessed ground of continual praise and thanksgiving.

And then, as to those great facts of which Moses so continually reminds the people, could they ever lose their moral weight, power or preciousness? Surely not. Israel might forget and fail to appreciate those facts, but the facts remained the same. The terrible plagues of Egypt, the night of the passover, their deliverance from the land of darkness, bondage and degradation, their marvellous

passage through the Red Sea, the descent of that mysterious food from heaven, morning by morning, the refreshing stream gushing forth from the flinty rock: how could such facts as these ever lose their power over a heart possessing a spark of genuine love to God? And why should we wonder to find Moses, again and again, appealing to them and using them as a most powerful lever wherewith to move the hearts of the people? Moses felt the mighty moral influence of these things himself, and he would fain lead others to feel it also. To him they were precious beyond expression, and he longed to make his brethren feel their preciousness as well as himself. It was his one object to set before them, in every possible way the powerful claims of Jehovah upon their hearty and unreserved obedience.

This, reader, will account for what might, to an unspiritual, unintelligent, cursory reader, seem the too frequent recurrence to the scenes of the past, in those wonderful discourses of Moses. We are reminded, as we read them, of the lovely words of Peter, in his second epistle: "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you *always in remembrance of these things*, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, *to stir you up by putting you in remembrance*; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have *these things always in remembrance*." (2 Peter 1: 12-15.)

How striking the unity of spirit and purpose in these two beloved and venerable servants of God! Both the one and the other felt the tendency of the poor human heart to forget the things of God, of heaven and of eternity; and they felt the supreme importance and infinite value of the things of which they spoke. Hence their earnest desire to keep them continually before the hearts and abidingly in the remembrance of the Lord's beloved people. Unbelieving, restless nature might say to Moses or to Peter, "Have you nothing new to tell us? Why are you perpetually dwelling on the same old themes? We know all you have got to say; we have heard it again and again. 'Why not strike out into some new field of thought? Would it not be well to try and keep abreast of the science of the day? If we keep perpetually moping over those antiquated themes, we shall be left stranded on the bank while the stream of civilization rushes on. Pray give us something new."

Thus might the poor unbelieving mind, the worldly heart reason; but faith knows the answer to all such miserable suggestions. We can well believe that both Moses and Peter would have made short work with all such reasonings. And so should we. We know whence they emanate, whither they tend, and what they are worth; and we should have, if not on our lips, at least deep down in our hearts a ready answer — an answer perfectly satisfactory to us, however contemptible it may seem to the men of this world. Could a true Israelite ever tire of hearing of what the Lord had done for him, in Egypt, in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness? Never! Such themes would be ever fresh, ever welcome to his heart. And just so with the Christian; can he ever tire of the cross and all the grand and glorious realities that cluster round it? Can he ever tire of Christ, His peerless glories and unsearchable riches — His Person, His work, His offices? Never! No, never, throughout the bright ages of eternity. Does he crave anything new? Can science improve upon Christ? Can human learning add ought to the great mystery of godliness which has for its foundation God manifest in the flesh, and for its topstone a Man glorified in heaven? Can we ever get beyond this? No, reader, we could not if we would, and we would not if we could.

And even were we, for a moment, to take a lower range, and look at the works of God in creation; do we ever tire of the sun? He is not new; he has been pouring his beams upon this world for well-nigh six thousand years, and yet those beams are as fresh and as welcome today as they were when first created. Do we ever tire of the sea? It is not new; its tide has been ebbing and flowing for nearly six thousand years, but its waves are as fresh and as welcome on our shores as ever. True, the sun is often

too dazzling to man's feeble vision, and the sea often swallows up, in a moment, man's boasted works; but yet the sun and the sea never lose their power, their freshness, their charm. Do we ever tire of the dew-drops that fall in refreshing virtue upon our gardens and fields? Do we ever tire of the perfume that emanates from our hedgerows? Do we ever tire of the notes of the nightingale and the thrush?

And what are all these when compared with the glories which cluster round the Person and the cross of Christ? What are they when put in contrast with the grand realities of that eternity which is before us?

Reader, let us beware how we listen to such suggestions, whether they come from without or spring from the depths of our own evil hearts, lest we be found, like Israel after the flesh, loathing the heavenly manna and despising the pleasant land; or like Demas who forsook the blessed apostle, having loved this present age; or like those of whom we read in the sixth of John, who, offended by our Lord's close and pointed teaching, "went back, and walked no more with him." May the Lord keep our hearts true to Himself, and fresh and fervent in His blessed cause, till He come!

#### Deuteronomy 9.

"Hear, O Israel; thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven; a people great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak!" (Vers. 1, 2.)

This chapter opens with the same grand Deuteronomic sentence, "*Hear, O Israel.*" This, we may say, is the key note of this most blessed book, and especially of those opening discourses which have been engaging our attention. But the chapter which now lies open before us presents subjects of immense weight and importance. In the first place, the lawgiver sets before the congregation, in terms of deep solemnity, that which lay before them, in their entrance upon the land. He does not hide from them the fact that there were serious difficulties and formidable enemies to be encountered. This he does, we need hardly say, not to discourage their hearts, but that they might be forewarned, forearmed, and prepared. What that preparation was we shall see presently; but the faithful servant of God felt the rightness, yea, the urgent need of putting the true state of the case before his brethren.

There are two ways of looking at difficulties; we may look at them from a human stand-point, or from a divine one; we may look at them in a spirit of unbelief, or we may look at them in the calmness and quietness of confidence in the living God. We have an instance of the former, in the report of the unbelieving spies, in Numbers 13; We have an instance of the latter, in the opening of our present chapter.

It is not the province nor the path of faith to deny that there are difficulties to be encountered by the people of God; it would be the height of folly to do so, inasmuch as there are difficulties, and it would be but fool-hardiness, fanaticism, or fleshly enthusiasm to deny it. It is always well for people to know what they are about, and not to rush blindly into a path for which they are not prepared. An unbelieving sluggard may say, "There is a lion in the way;" a blind enthusiast may say, "There is no such thing;" the true man of faith will say, "Though there were a thousand lions in the way, God can soon dispose of them".

But, as a great practical principle of general application, it is very important for all the Lord's people to consider deeply and calmly what they are about, ere they enter upon any particular path of service or line of action. If this were more attended to, we should not witness so many moral and spiritual wrecks around us. What mean those most solemn, searching and testing words addressed by

our blessed Lord to the multitudes that thronged around Him, in Luke 14? "He turned and said to them, If any man *come to me*, and hate not his father, and mother his wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish" (Vers. 26-30.)

These are solemn and seasonable words for the heart. How many unfinished buildings meet our view, as we look forth over the wide field of Christian profession, giving sad occasion to the beholders for mockery! How many set out upon a path of discipleship, under some sudden impulse, or under the pressure of mere human influence, without a proper understanding or a due consideration of all that is involved; and then when difficulties arise, when trials come, when the path is found to be narrow, rough, lonely, unpopular, they give it up, thus proving that they had never really counted the cost, never taken the path in communion with God, never understood what they were doing.

Now, such cases are very sorrowful; they bring great reproach on the cause of Christ, give occasion to the adversary to blaspheme, and greatly dishearten those who care for the glory of God and the good of souls. Better far not to take the ground at all than, having taken it, to abandon it in dark unbelief and worldly-mindedness.

Hence, therefore, we can perceive the wisdom and faithfulness of the opening words of our chapter. Moses tells the people plainly what was before them; not, surely, to discourage them, but to preserve them from self-confidence which is sure to give way in the moment of trial; and to cast them upon the living God who never fails a trusting heart.

"Understand therefore this day, that the Lord thy God is he which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the Lord hath said unto thee."

Here, then, is the divine answer to all difficulties, be they ever so formidable. What were mighty nations, great cities, fenced walls, in the presence of Jehovah? Simply as chaff before the whirlwind. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" The very things which scare and stumble the coward heart afford an occasion for the display of God's power, and the magnificent triumphs of faith. Faith says, "Grant me but this, that God is before me and with me, and I can go anywhere." Thus the only thing in all this world that really glorifies God is the faith that can trust Him and use Him and praise Him; and inasmuch as faith is the only thing that glorifies God, so is it the only thing that gives man his proper place, even the place of complete dependence upon God, and this ensures victory and inspires praise-unceasing praise.

But we must never forget that there is moral danger in the very moment of victory — danger arising out of what we are in ourselves. There is the danger of self-gratulation — a terrible snare to us poor mortals. In the hour of conflict, we feel our weakness, our nothingness, our need. This is good and morally safe. It is well to be brought down to the very bottom of self and all that pertains to it, for there we find God, in all the fullness and blessedness of what He is, and this is sure and certain victory and consequent praise.

But our treacherous and deceitful hearts are prone to forget whence the strength and victory come. Hence the moral force, value and seasonableness of the following admonitory words addressed by the faithful minister of God to the hearts and consciences of his brethren, "Speak not thou in *thine* heart — here is where the mischief always begins — "after that the Lord hath cast them out from

before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land; but for the wickedness of those nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee."

Alas! what materials there are in us! What ignorance of our own hearts! What a shallow sense of the real character of our ways! How terrible to think that we are capable of saying in our hearts such words as, "For my righteousness!" Yes, reader we are verily capable of such egregious folly; for as Israel was capable of it so are we, inasmuch as we are made of the very same material; and that they were capable of it is evident from the fact of their being warned against it; for, most assuredly, the Spirit of God does not warn against phantom dangers or imaginary temptations. We are verily capable of turning the actings of God on our behalf into an occasion of self-complacency; instead of seeing in those gracious actings a ground for heartfelt praise to God, we use them as a ground for self exaltation.

Hence, therefore, we would do well to ponder the words of faithful admonition addressed by Moses to the hearts and consciences of the people; they furnish a very wholesome antidote for the self-righteousness so natural to us as well as to Israel. " Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land; but for the wickedness of those nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the Lord giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people. Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the Lord." (Vers. 5-7.)

This paragraph sets forth two great principles which, if fully laid hold of, must put the heart into a right moral attitude. In the first place, the people were reminded that their possession of the land of Canaan was simply in pursuance of God's promise to their fathers. This was placing the matter on the most solid basis — a basis which nothing could ever disturb.

As to the seven nations who were to be dispossessed, it was on the ground of their wickedness that God, in the exercise of His righteous government, was about to drive them out. Every landlord has a perfect right to eject bad tenants; and the nations of Canaan had not only failed to pay their rent, as we say, but they had injured and defiled the property to such an extent that God could no longer endure them; and therefore He was going to drive them out, irrespective altogether of the incoming tenants. Whoever was going to get possession of the property, these dreadful tenants must be evicted. The iniquity of the Amorites had reached its highest point, and nothing remained but that judgement should take its course. Men might argue and reason as to the moral fitness and consistency of a benevolent Being unroofing the houses of thousands of families and putting the occupants to the sword; but we may depend upon it the government of God will make very short work with all such arguments. God, blessed for ever be His holy Name, knows how to manage His own affairs, and that too without asking man's opinion. He had borne with the wickedness of the seven nations to such a degree that it had become absolutely insufferable; the very land itself could not bear it. Any further exercise of forbearance would have been a sanction of the most terrible abominations; and this of course was a moral impossibility. The glory of God absolutely demanded the expulsion of the Canaanites.

Yes; and we may add, the glory of God demanded the introduction of the seed of Abraham into possession of the property to hold, as tenants for ever under the Lord God Almighty, the most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth. Thus the matter stood for Israel, had they but seen it. Their possession of the land of promise and the maintenance of the divine glory were so bound up together that one could not be touched without touching the other. God had promised to give the land of Canaan to the seed of Abraham, as an everlasting possession. Had He not a right to do so? Will infidels

question God's right to do as He will with His own? Will they refuse to the Creator and Governor of the universe a right which they claim for themselves? The land was Jehovah's, and He gave it to Abraham His friend for ever; and although this was true, yet were not the Canaanites disturbed in their tenure of the property until their wickedness had become positively unbearable.

Thus we see that in the matter both of the outgoing and incoming tenants, the glory of God was involved. That glory demanded that the Canaanites should be expelled because of their ways; and that glory demanded that Israel should be put in possession because of the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

But, in the second place, Israel had no ground for self-complacency, as Moses most plainly and faithfully instructs them. He rehearses in their ears, in the most touching and impressive manner, all the leading scenes of their history from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea; he refers to the golden calf, to the broken tables of the covenant, to Taberah and Massah, and Kibroth-hattaavah; and sums all up, at verse 24, with these pungent humbling words, "Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you."

This was plain dealing with heart and conscience. The solemn review of their whole career was eminently calculated to correct all false notions about themselves; every scene and circumstance in their entire history, if viewed from a proper standpoint, only brought to light the humbling fact of what they were, and how near they had been, again and again, to utter destruction. With what stunning force must the following words have fallen upon their ears! "And the Lord said unto me, Arise, get thee down quickly from hence, for thy people which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt have corrupted themselves; they are quickly turned aside out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten image. Furthermore, the Lord spake unto me, saying, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; *let me alone, that I may destroy them*, and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they." (Vers. 12-14.)

How withering was all this to their natural vanity, pride and self-righteousness! How should their hearts have been moved to their very deepest depths by those tremendous words, "Let me alone, that I may destroy them!" How solemn to reflect upon the fact which these words revealed — their appalling nearness to national ruin and destruction! How ignorant they had been of all that passed between Jehovah and Moses, on the top of mount Horeb! They had been on the very brink of an awful precipice. Another moment might have dashed them over. The intercession of Moses had saved them, the very man whom they had accused of taking too much upon him. Alas! how they had mistaken and misjudged him! How utterly astray they had been in all their thoughts! Why the very man whom they had accused of self-seeking and desiring to make himself altogether a prince over them, had actually refused a divinely given opportunity of becoming the head of a greater and mightier nation than they! Yes, and this same man had earnestly requested that if they were not to be forgiven and brought into the land, his name might be blotted out of the book.

How wonderful was all this! What a turning of the tables upon them! How exceedingly small they must have felt, in view of all these wonderful facts! Surely as they reviewed all these things, they might well see the utter folly of the words, "For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land." How could the makers of a molten image use such language! Ought they not rather to see and feel and own themselves to be no better than the nations that were about to be driven out from before them? For what had made them to differ? The sovereign mercy and electing love of their covenant God. And to what did they owe their deliverance out of Egypt, their sustenance in the wilderness, and their entrance into the land? Simply to the eternal stability of the covenant made with

their fathers, "a covenant ordered in all things and sure," a covenant ratified and established by the blood of the Lamb, in virtue of which all Israel shall yet be saved and blessed in their own land.

But we must now quote for the reader the splendid paragraph with which our chapter closes — a paragraph eminently fitted to open Israel's eyes to the utter folly of all their thoughts respecting Moses, their thoughts respecting themselves, and their thoughts respecting that blessed One who had so marvellously borne with all their dark unbelief and daring rebellion.

"Thus I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights, as I fell down at the first; because the Lord had said he would destroy you. I prayed therefore unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, destroy not *thy people* and *thine inheritance* which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; *look; not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their uncleanness, nor to their sin* : lest the land whence thou broughtest us out say, Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness. *Yet they are Thy people, and thine inheritance*, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power, and by thy stretched out arm."

What marvellous words are these to be addressed by a human being to the living God! What powerful pleadings for Israel! What self-renunciation! Moses refuses the offered dignity of being the founder of a greater and mightier nation than Israel. He only desires that Jehovah should be glorified, and Israel pardoned, blessed and brought into the promised land. He could not endure the thought of any reproach being brought upon that glorious Name so dear to his heart; neither could he bear to witness Israel's destruction. These were the two things he dreaded; and as to his own exaltation, it was just the thing about which he cared nothing at all. This beloved and honoured servant cared only for the glory of God and the salvation of His people; and as to himself, his hopes, his interests, his all, he could rest, with perfect composure, in the assurance that his individual blessing and the divine glory were bound together by a link which could never be snapped.

And oh! how grateful must all this have been to the heart of God! How refreshing to His spirit were those earnest, loving pleadings of His servant! How much more in harmony with His mind than the intercession of Elias against Israel, hundreds of years afterwards! How they remind us of the blessed ministry of our Great High Priest who ever liveth to make intercession for His people, and whose active intervention on our behalf never ceases for a single moment!

And then how very touching and beautiful to mark the way in which Moses insists upon the fact that the people were Jehovah's inheritance, and that He had brought them up out of Egypt. The Lord had said, "*Thy people which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt.*" But Moses says, "*They are Thy people, and thine inheritance, which Thou broughtest out.*" This is perfectly exquisite. Indeed this whole scene is full of profound interest.

#### Deuteronomy 10

"At that time the Lord said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood: and I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brokest, and thou shalt put them in the ark. And I made an ark of shittim wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in mine hand. And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the Lord spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire, in the day of the assembly: and the Lord gave them unto me. And I turned myself and came down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made? and there they be, as the Lord commanded me." (Vers.

1-5.)

The beloved and revered servant of God seemed never to weary of rehearsing in the ears of the people, the interesting, momentous and significant sentences of the past. To him they were ever fresh, ever precious. His heart delighted in them. They could never lose their charm in his eyes; he found in them an exhaustless treasury for his own heart, and a mighty moral lever wherewith to move the heart of Israel.

We are constantly reminded, in these powerful and deeply affecting addresses, of the inspired apostle's words to his beloved Philippians, "To write the same things to you, to me is not grievous, but for you it is safe. "The poor restless, fickle, vagrant heart might long for some new theme; but the faithful apostle found his deep and unfailing delight in unfolding and dwelling upon those precious subjects which clustered, in rich luxuriance, around the Person and the cross of his adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He had found in Christ all he needed, for time and eternity. The glory of His Person had completely eclipsed all the glories of earth and of nature. He could say, "What things were *gain to me*, those I counted *loss for Christ*. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." (Phil. 3: 7, 8.)

This is the language of a true Christian, of one who had found a perfectly absorbing and commanding object in Christ. What could the world offer to such an one? What could it do for him? Did he want its riches, its honours, its distinctions, its pleasures? He counted them all as dung. How was this? Because he had found Christ. He had seen an object in Him which so riveted his heart that to win Him, and know more of Him, and be found in Him was the one ruling desire of his soul. If any one had talked to Paul about something new, what would have been his answer? If any one had suggested to him the thought of getting on in the world or of seeking to make money, what would have been his reply? simply this, "I have found my ALL in Christ; I want no more. I have found in Him '*unsearchable riches*' — '*durable* riches and righteousness.' In Him are hid *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. What do I want of this world's riches, its wisdom or its learning? These things all pass away like the vapours of the morning; and even while they last, are wholly inadequate to satisfy the desires and aspirations of an immortal spirit. Christ is an eternal object, heaven's centre, the delight of the heart of God; He shall satisfy me throughout the countless ages of that bright eternity which is before me; and surely if He can satisfy me for ever, He can satisfy me now. Shall I turn to the wretched rubbish of this world, its pursuits, its pleasures, its amusements, its theatres, its concerts, its riches or its honours to supplement my portion in Christ? God forbid! All such things would be simply an intolerable nuisance to me. Christ is my all, and in all, now and for ever!"

Such, we may well believe, would have been the distinctly pronounced reply of the blessed apostle; such was the distinct reply of his whole life; and such, beloved Christian reader, should be ours also. How truly deplorable, how deeply humbling to find a Christian turning to the world for enjoyment, recreation or pastime! It simply proves that he has not found a satisfying portion in Christ. We may set it down as a fixed principle that the heart which is filled with Christ has no room for ought beside. It is not a question of the right or the wrong of things; the heart does not want them, would not have them; it has found its present and everlasting portion and rest in that blessed One that fills the heart of God, and will fill the vast universe with the beams of His glory, throughout the everlasting ages.

We have been led into the foregoing line of thought in connection with the interesting fact of Moses' unwearied rehearsal of all the grand events in Israel's marvellous history from Egypt to the

borders of the promised land. To him they furnished a perpetual feast; and he not only found his own deep personal delight in dwelling upon them, but he also felt the immense importance of unfolding them before the whole congregation. To him, most surely, it was not grievous, but for them it was safe. How delightful for him, and how good and needful for them, to dwell upon the facts connected with the two sets of tables — the first set smashed to atoms, at the foot of the mountain and the second set enclosed in the ark.

What human language could possibly unfold the deep significance and moral weight of such facts as these? Those broken tables! How impressive! How pregnant with wholesome instruction for the people. How powerfully suggestive! Will any one presume to say that we have here a mere barren repetition of the facts recorded in Exodus? Certainly no one who reverently believes in the divine inspiration of the Pentateuch.

No, reader, the tenth of Deuteronomy fills a niche and does a work entirely its own. In it the lawgiver holds up to the hearts of the people past scenes and circumstances in such a way as to rivet them upon the very tablets of the soul. He allows them to hear the conversation between Jehovah and himself; he tells them what took place during those mysterious forty days upon that cloud-capped mountain. He lets them hear Jehovah's reference to the broken tables — the apt and forcible expression of the utter worthlessness of man's covenant. For why were those tables broken? Because they had shamefully failed. Those shattered fragments told the humiliating tale of their hopeless ruin on the ground of the law. All was gone. Such was the obvious meaning of the fact. It was striking, impressive, unmistakable. Like a broken pillar over a grave which tells, at a glance, that the prop and stay of the family lies mouldering beneath. There is no need of any inscription, for no human language could speak with such eloquence to the heart as that most expressive emblem. So the broken tables were calculated to convey to the heart of Israel the tremendous fact that, so far as their covenant was concerned, they were utterly ruined, hopelessly undone; they were complete bankrupts on the score of righteousness.

But then, that second set of tables, what of them? Thank God, they told a different tale altogether. They were not broken. God took care of them. "I turned myself and came down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and *there they be*, as the Lord commanded me."

Blessed fact! "There they be." Yes, covered up in that ark which spoke of Christ, that blessed One who magnified the law and made it honourable, who established every jot and tittle of it, to the glory of God and the everlasting blessing of His people. Thus, while the broken fragments of the first tables told the sad and humbling tale of Israel's utter failure and ruin, the second tables, shut up intact in the ark set forth the glorious truth that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.

We do not, of course, mean to say that Israel understood the deep meaning and far-reaching application of those wonderful facts which Moses rehearsed in their ears. As a nation, they certainly did not then, though, through the sovereign mercy of God, they will, by-and-by. Individuals may, and doubtless did enter into somewhat of their significance. This is not now the question. It is for us to see and make our own of the precious truth set forth in those two sets of tables, namely, the failure of everything in the hands of man, and the eternal stability of God's covenant of grace, ratified by the blood of Christ, and to be displayed in all its glorious results, in the kingdom, by-and-by, when the Son of David shall reign from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth; when the seed of Abraham shall possess, according to the divine gift, the land of promise; and when all the nations of the earth shall rejoice under the beneficent reign of the Prince of peace.

Bright and glorious prospect for the now desolate land of Israel, and this groaning earth of ours! The King of righteousness and peace will then have it all His own way. All evil will be put down with a powerful hand. There will be no weakness in that government. No rebel tongue will be permitted to prate, in accents of insolent sedition, against the decrees and enactments thereof. No rude and senseless demagogue will be allowed to disturb the peace of the people, or to insult the majesty of the throne. Every abuse will be put down, every disturbing element will be neutralised, every stumbling-block will be removed, and every root of bitterness eradicated. The poor and the needy shall be well looked after; yea, all shall be divinely attended to; toil, sorrow, poverty and desolation shall be unknown; the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. "Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgement. And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

Reader, what glorious scenes are yet to be enacted in this poor sin-stricken, Satan-enslaved, sorrowful world of ours! How refreshing to think of them! What a relief to the heart amid all the mental misery, the moral degradation, and physical wretchedness exhibited around us, on every side! Thank God, the day is rapidly approaching when the prince of this world shall be hurled from his throne and consigned to the bottomless pit, and the Prince of heaven, the glorious Emmanuel shall stretch forth His blessed sceptre over the wide universe of God, and heaven and earth shall bask in the sunlight of His royal countenance. Well may we cry out, O Lord, hasten the time!

"And the children of Israel took their journey from Beeroth of the children of Jaakan to Mosera; there Aaron died, and there he was buried; and Eleazar his son ministered in the priest's office in his stead. From thence they journeyed unto Gudgodah; and from Gudgodah to Jotbath, a land of rivers of waters. At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant, to stand before the Lord to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day. Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the Lord is his inheritance, according as the Lord thy God promised him."

The reader must not allow his mind to be disturbed by any question of historical sequence in the foregoing passage. It is simply a parenthesis in which the lawgiver groups together, in a very striking and forcible manner, circumstances culled, with holy skill, from the history of the people, illustrative, at once, of the government and grace of God. The death of Aaron exhibits the former; the election and elevation of Levi, presents the latter. Both are placed together not with a view to chronology, but for the grand moral end which was ever present to the mind of the lawgiver — an end which lies far away beyond the range of infidel reason, but which commends itself to the heart and understanding of the devout student of scripture.

How utterly contemptible are the quibbles of the infidel when looked at in the brilliant light of divine inspiration! How miserable the condition of a mind which can occupy itself with chronological hair splittings in order, if possible, to find a flaw in the divine Volume, instead of grasping the real aim and object of the inspired

writer!

But why does Moses bring in, in this parenthetical and apparently abrupt manner, those two special events in Israel's history? Simply to move the heart of the people toward the one grand point of obedience. To this end he culls and groups according to the wisdom given unto him. Do we expect to find in this divinely taught servant of God the petty precision of a mere copyist? Infidels may affect to do so; but true Christians know better. A mere scribe could copy events in their chronological order;

a true prophet will bring those events to bear, in a moral way, upon the heart and conscience. Thus, while the poor deluded infidel is groping amid the shadows of his own creation, the pious student delights himself in the moral glories of that peerless Volume which stands like a rock, against which the waves of infidel thought dash themselves with contemptible impotency.

We do not attempt to dwell upon the circumstances referred to in the above parenthesis; they have been gone into elsewhere, and therefore we only feel it needful, in this place, to point out to the reader what we may venture to call the Deuteronomic bearing of the facts — the use which the lawgiver makes of them to strengthen the foundation of his final appeal to the heart and conscience of the people, to give pungency and power to his exhortation, as he urged upon them the absolute necessity of unqualified obedience to the statutes and judgements of their covenant God. Such was his reason for referring to the solemn fact of the death of Aaron. They were to remember that, notwithstanding Aaron's high position as the high priest of Israel, yet he was stripped of his robes and deprived of his life for disobedience to the word of Jehovah. How important, then, that they should take heed to themselves! The government of God was not to be trifled with, and the very fact of Aaron's elevation only rendered it all the more needful that his sin should be dealt with, in order that others might fear.

And then they were to remember the Lord's dealings with Levi in which grace shines with such marvellous lustre. The fierce, cruel, self-willed Levi was taken up from the depths of his moral ruin and brought nigh to God, "to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name.

But why should this account of Levi be coupled with the death of Aaron? Simply to set forth the blessed consequences of obedience. If the death of Aaron displayed the awful result of disobedience, the elevation of Levi illustrates the precious fruit of obedience. Hear what the prophet Malachi says on this point. "And ye shall know that I have sent this *commandment* unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts. My covenant was with him of life and peace; and *I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name*. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity." Mal. 2: 4-6.

This is a very remarkable passage, and throws much light upon the subject now before us. It tells us distinctly that Jehovah gave His covenant of life and peace to Levi "for the fear wherewith he feared" Him on the terrible occasion of the golden calf which Aaron (himself a Levite of the very highest order) made. Why was Aaron judged? Because of his rebellion at the waters of Meribah. (Num. 20: 24.) Why was Levi blessed? Because of his reverent obedience at the foot of mount Horeb. (Ex. 32.) Why are both grouped together in Deuteronomy 10? In order to impress upon the heart and conscience of the congregation the urgent necessity of implicit obedience to the commandments of their covenant God. How perfect is scripture in all its parts! How beautifully it hangs together! And how plain it is to the devout reader that the lovely book of Deuteronomy has its own divine niche to fill, its own distinctive work to do, its own appointed sphere, scope and object! How manifest it is that the fifth division of the Pentateuch is neither a contradiction nor a repetition, but a divine application of its divinely inspired predecessors! And, finally, we cannot help adding — how convincing the evidence that infidel writers know neither what they say nor whereof they affirm, when they dare to insult the Oracles of God — yea, that they greatly err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God!\* At verse 10 of our chapter, Moses returns to the subject of his discourse. "And I stayed in the mount, according to the first time, forty days and forty nights; and the Lord hearkened unto me at that time also, and the Lord would not destroy thee. And the Lord said unto me, Arise, take thy journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land which I sware unto their fathers to give unto

them."

{\*We have, in human writings, numerous examples of the same thing that infidels object to in Deuteronomy 10: 6-9. Suppose a man is anxious to call the attention of the English nation to some great principle of political economy, or some matter of national importance; he does not hesitate to select facts however widely separated on the page of history, and group them together in order to illustrate his subject. Do infidels object to this? No; not when found in the writings of men. It is only when it occurs in scripture, because they hate the word of God, and cannot bear the idea that He should give to His creatures a book-revelation of His mind. Blessed be His Name, He has given it notwithstanding, and we have it in all its infinite preciousness, and divine authority, for the comfort of our hearts, and the guidance of our path, amid all the darkness and confusion of this scene through which we are passing home to glory.}

Jehovah would accomplish His promise to the fathers, spite of every hindrance. He would put Israel in full possession of the land concerning which He had sworn to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give it to their seed for an everlasting inheritance.

"And now, Israel, what doth the Lord *thy* God require of thee, but to fear the Lord *thy* God, to walk *in all His ways*, and to love him, and to serve the Lord *thy* God with all thy heart and with all thy soul. To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day, *for thy good.*" It was all for their real good, their deep, full blessing to walk in the way of the divine commandments. The path of whole-hearted obedience is the only path of true happiness; and blessed be God, this path can always be trodden by those who love the Lord.

This is an unspeakable comfort, at all times. God has given us His precious word, the perfect revelation of His mind; and He has given as what Israel had not, even His Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts whereby we can understand and appreciate His word. Hence our obligations are vastly higher than were Israel's. We are bound to a life of obedience by every argument that could be brought to bear on the heart and understanding.

And surely it is for our good to be obedient. There is indeed "great reward" in keeping the commandments of our loving Father. Every thought of Him and of His gracious ways, every reference to His marvellous dealings with us — His loving ministry, His tender care, His thoughtful love — all should bind our hearts in affectionate devotion to Him, and quicken our steps in treading the path of loving obedience to Him. Wherever we turn our eyes we are met by the most powerful evidences of His claim upon our heart's affections and upon all the energies of our ransomed being. And, blessed be His Name, the more fully we are enabled by His grace to respond to His most precious claims, the brighter and happier our path must be. There is nothing in all this world more deeply blessed than the path and portion of an obedient soul. "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." The lowly disciple, who finds his meat and his drink in doing the will of his beloved Lord and Master, possesses a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. True, he may be misunderstood and misinterpreted; he may be dubbed narrow and bigoted, and such-like; but none-of these things move him. One approving smile from his Lord is more than ample recompense for all the reproach that men can heap upon him. He knows how to estimate at their proper worth the thoughts of men; they are to him as the chaff which the wind driveth away. The deep utterance of his heart, as he moves steadily along the sacred path of obedience, is

"Let me my feebleness recline

On that eternal love of Thine,

And human thoughts forget;  
Child-like attend what Thou wilt say  
Go forth and serve Thee while 'tis day,  
Nor leave Thy sweet retreat."

In the closing verses, of our chapter, the lawgiver seems to rise higher and higher in his presentation of moral motives for obedience, and to come closer and closer to the hearts of the people. "Behold," he says, "the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day." What a marvellous privilege to be chosen and loved by the Possessor of heaven and earth! What an honour to be called to serve and obey Him! Surely nothing in all this world could be higher or better. To be identified and associated with the Most High God, to have His Name called upon them, to be His peculiar people, His special possession, the people of His choice, to be set apart from all the nations of the earth to be the servants of Jehovah and His witnesses. What, we may ask, could exceed this, except it be that to which the church of God, and the individual believer are called?

Assuredly, our privileges are higher, inasmuch as we know God in a higher, deeper, nearer, more intimate manner than the nation of Israel ever did. We know Him as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as our God and Father. We have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, shedding abroad the love of God in our hearts, and leading us to cry, Abba, Father. All this is far beyond anything that God's earthly people ever knew or could know; and, inasmuch as our privileges are higher, His claims upon our hearty and unreserved obedience are also higher. Every appeal to the heart of Israel should come home, with augmented force to our hearts, beloved Christian reader; every exhortation addressed to them should speak, far more powerfully to us. We occupy the very highest ground on which any creature could stand. Neither the seed of Abraham on earth, nor the angels of God in heaven could say what we can say, or know what we know. We are linked and eternally associated with the risen and glorified Son of God. We can adopt as our own the wondrous language of? John 4.17, and say, "As he is so are we in this world." What can exceed this, as to privilege and dignity? Surely nothing save to be, in body, soul and spirit, conformed to His adorable image, as we shall be, ere long, through the abounding grace of God.

Well then let us ever bear in mind — yea, let us have it deep, deep, down in our hearts, that according to our privileges are our obligations. Let us not refuse the wholesome word " obligation" as though it had a legal ring about it. Far from it; it would be utterly impossible to conceive anything further removed from all thought of legality than the obligations which flow out of the Christian's position. It is a very serious mistake to be continually raising the cry of "Legal! Legal!" whenever the holy responsibilities of our position are pressed upon us. We believe that every truly pious Christian will delight in all the appeals and exhortations which the Holy Ghost addresses to us as to our obligations, seeing they are all grounded upon privileges conferred upon us by the sovereign grace of God, through the precious blood of Christ, and made good to us by the mighty ministry of the Holy Ghost.

But let us hearken still further to the stirring appeals of Moses. They are truly profitable for us, with all our higher light, knowledge and privilege.

"Circumcise therefore *the foreskin of your heart* and be no more stiff-necked. For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not

persons, nor taketh reward. He doth execute the judgement of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment."

Here Moses speaks not merely of God's doings and dealings and ways, but of Himself, of what He is. He is high over all, the great, the mighty and the terrible. But He has a heart for the widow and the fatherless — those helpless objects deprived of all earthly and natural props, the poor bereaved and broken-hearted widow, and the desolate orphan. God thinks of, and cares for such, in a very special way; they have a claim upon His loving heart and mighty hand. "A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widow is God in his holy habitation." "She that is a widow indeed and desolate trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day." "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me."

What a rich provision is here for widows and orphans! How wondrous God's care of such! How many widows are much better off than when they had their husbands! How many orphans are better cared and provided for than when they had their parents! God looks after them! This is enough. Thousands of husbands and thousands of parents are worse by far than none; but God never fails those who are cast upon Him. He is ever true to His own Name, whatever relationship He takes. Let all widows and orphans remember this for their comfort and encouragement.

And then the poor stranger! He is not forgotten. "He loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment." How precious is this! Our God cares for all those who are bereft of earthly props, human hopes, and creature confidences. All such have a special claim upon Him to which He will, most surely, respond according to all the love of His heart. The widow, the fatherless and the stranger are the special objects of His tender care, and as such have but to look to Him, and draw upon His exhaustless resources in all their varied need.

But then He must be known in order to be trusted. "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." Those who do not know God would vastly prefer an insurance policy or a government annuity to His promise. But the true believer finds in that promise the unfailing stay of his heart, because he knows, and trusts, and loves the Promiser. He delights in the thought of being absolutely shut up to God, wholly dependent upon Him. He would not, for worlds, be in any other position. The very thing which would almost drive an unbeliever out of his senses is to the Christian — the man of faith, the very deepest joy of his heart. The language of such an one will ever be, "My soul, wait thou *only* upon God; for my expectation is from him. He *only* is my rock." Blessed position! Precious portion! May the reader know it as a divine reality, a living power, in his heart, by the mighty ministry of the Holy Ghost! Then will he be able to sit loose to earthly things. He will be able to tell the world that he is independent of it, having found all he wants, for time and eternity, in the living God and His Christ.

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want;

More than all in Thee I find."

But let us specially note the provision which God makes for the stranger. It is very simple — "food and raiment." This is enough for a true stranger, as the blessed apostle says to his son Timothy, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."

Christian reader, let us ponder this. What a cure for restless ambition is here! What an antidote against covetousness! What a blessed deliverance from the feverish excitement of commercial life, the grasping spirit of the age in which our lot is cast! If we were only content with the divinely appointed

provision for the stranger, what a different tale we should have to tell! How calm and even would be the current of our daily life! How simple our habits and tastes! How unworldly our spirit and style! What moral elevation above the self-indulgence and luxury so prevalent amongst professing Christians! We should simply eat and drink to the glory of God, and to keep the body in proper working order. To go beyond this, either in eating or drinking, is to indulge in "fleshly lusts which war against the soul."

Alas! alas! how much of this there is, specially in reference to drink! It is perfectly appalling to think of the consumption of intoxicating drink amongst professing Christians. It is our thorough conviction that the devil has succeeded in ruining the testimony of hundreds, and in causing them to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, by the use of stimulants. Thousands ruin their fortunes, ruin their families, ruin their health, ruin their souls through the senseless, vile and cursed desire for stimulants.

We are not going to preach a crusade against stimulants or narcotics. The wrong is not in the things themselves but in our inordinate and sinful use of them. It not infrequently happens that persons who fall under the horrible dominion of drink seek to lay the blame on their medical adviser; but surely no proper medical man would ever advise his patient to *indulge* in the use of stimulants. He may prescribe the use of "a *little* wine, for the stomach's sake and frequent infirmities," and he has the very highest authority for so doing; but why should this lead any one to become a drunkard? Each one is responsible to walk in the fear of God in reference to both eating and drinking. If a doctor prescribes a little nourishing food for his patient, is he to be blamed if that patient becomes a glutton? Surely not; the evil is not in the doctor's prescription, or in the stimulant, or in the nourishment, but in the wretched lust of the heart.

Here, we are persuaded, lies the root of the evil; and the remedy is found in that precious grace of God which while it bringeth salvation unto all men, teacheth those who are saved "to live *soberly*, righteously and godly in this present world." And be it remembered that "to live soberly" means a great deal more than temperance in eating and drinking; it means this most surely, but it takes in also the whole range of inward self-government — the government of the thoughts, the government of the temper, the government of the tongue. The grace that saves us not only *tells* us how to live, but *teaches* how to do it, and if we follow its teachings we shall be well content with God's provision for the stranger.

It is, at once, interesting and edifying to notice the way in which Moses sets the divine example before the people as their model. Jehovah "loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." This is very touching. They were not only to keep before their eyes the divine model, but also to remember their own past history and experience, in order that their hearts might be drawn out in sympathy and compassion toward the poor homeless stranger. It was the bounden duty and high privilege of the Israel of God to place themselves in the circumstances and enter into the feelings of others. They were to be the moral representatives of that blessed One whose people they were, and whose Name was called upon them. They were to imitate Him in meeting the wants and gladdening the hearts of the fatherless, the widow, and the stranger. And if God's earthly people were called to this lovely course of action, how much more are we who are "blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." May we abide more in His presence, and drink more into His Spirit, that so we may more faithfully reflect His moral glories upon all with whom we come in contact!

The closing lines of our chapter give us a very fine summing up of the practical teaching which has been engaging our attention. "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him

shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen. Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the Lord hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude." Vers. 20-22.

How thoroughly bracing is all this to the moral being! This binding of the heart to the Lord Himself by means of all that He is and all His wondrous actings and gracious ways, is unspeakably precious. It is, we may truly say, the secret spring of all true devotedness. God grant that the writer and the reader may abidingly realise its motive power!

### Deuteronomy 11

"Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgements, and his commandments, alway. And know ye this day; for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisements of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm, and his miracles and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land; and what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red Sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the Lord hath destroyed them unto this day; and what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came unto this place; and what he did unto Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben; how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel; but your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which he did."

Moses felt it to be of the very highest importance that all the mighty acts of Jehovah should be kept prominently before the hearts of the people, and deeply engraved on the tablets of their memory. The poor human mind is vagrant, and the heart volatile; and, notwithstanding all that Israel had seen of the solemn judgements of God upon Egypt and upon Pharaoh, they were in danger of forgetting them, and losing the impression which they were designed and eminently fitted to make upon them.

It may be we feel disposed to wonder how Israel could ever forget the impressive scenes of their history in Egypt from first to last — the descent of their fathers thither as a mere handful, their steady growth and progress, as a people, spite of formidable difficulties and hindrances, so that from the insignificant few they had become, by the good hand of their God upon them, as the stars of heaven for multitude.

And then those ten plagues upon the land of Egypt! How full of awful solemnity! How pre-eminently calculated to impress the heart with a sense of the mighty power of God, the utter impotency and insignificance of man, in all his boasted wisdom, strength and glory, and the egregious folly of his attempting to set himself up against the Almighty God! What was all the power of Pharaoh and of Egypt in the presence of the Lord God of Israel! In one hour all was plunged into hopeless ruin and destruction. All the chariots of Egypt, all the pomp and glory, the valour and might of that ancient and far-famed nation — all was overwhelmed in the depths of the sea.

And why? Because they had presumed to meddle with the Israel of God; they had dared to set themselves in opposition to the eternal purpose and counsel of the Most High. They sought to crush those on whom He had set His love. He had sworn to bless the seed of Abraham, and no power of earth or hell could possibly annul His oath. Pharaoh, in his pride and hardness of heart, attempted to countervail the divine actings, but he only meddled to his own destruction. His land was shaken to its very centre, and himself and his mighty army overthrown in the Red Sea, a solemn example to all who should ever attempt to stand in the way of Jehovah's purpose to bless the seed of Abraham His friend.

Nor was it merely what Jehovah had done to Egypt and to Pharaoh that the people were called to remember, but also what He had done amongst themselves. How soul-subduing the judgement upon Dathan and Abiram and their households! How awful the thought of the earth opening her mouth and swallowing them up! And for what? For their rebellion against the divine appointment. In the history given in Numbers, Korah, the Levite, is the prominent character; but here he is omitted, and the two Reubenites are named — two members of the congregation, because Moses is seeking to act on the whole body of the people by setting before them the terrible consequence of self-will in two of their number — two ordinary members, as we should say, and not merely a privileged Levite.

In a word, then, whether the attention was called to the divine actings without or within, abroad or at home, it was all for the purpose of impressing their hearts and minds with a deep sense of the moral importance of obedience. This was the one grand aim of all the rehearsals, all the comment, all the exhortations of the faithful servant of God who was so soon to be removed from their midst. For this he ranges over their history for centuries, culling, grouping, commenting, taking up this fact and omitting that, as guided by the Spirit of God. The journey down to Egypt, the sojourn there, the heavy judgements upon the self-willed Pharaoh, the exodus, the passage through the sea, the scenes in the wilderness, and specially, the awful fate of the two rebellious Reubenites — all is brought to bear, with marvellous force and clearness, upon the conscience of the people, in order to strengthen the basis of Jehovah's claim upon their unqualified obedience to His holy commandments.

"Therefore shall ye *keep all the commandments* which I command you this day, *that ye may be strong*, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it; and that ye may prolong your days in the land, which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land that floweth with milk and honey."

Let the reader note the beautiful moral link between those two clauses, "Keep *all* the commandments" — "That ye may be strong." There is great strength gained by unreserved obedience to the word of God. It will not do to pick and choose. We are prone to this, prone to take up certain commandments and precepts which suit ourselves; but this is really self-will. What right have we to select such and such precepts from the word, and neglect others! None whatever. To do so is, in principle, simply self-will and rebellion. What business has a servant to decide as to which of his master's commands he will obey? Surely none whatever; each commandment stands clothed with the master's authority, and therefore claims the servant's attention; and, we may add, the more implicitly the servant obeys, the more he bends his respectful attention to every one of his master's commands, be it ever so trivial, the more does he strengthen himself in his position and grow in his master's confidence and esteem. Every master loves and values an obedient, faithful, devoted servant. We all know what a comfort it is to have a servant whom we can trust, one who finds his delight in carrying out our every wish, and who does not require perpetual looking after, but knows his duty and attends to it.

Now, ought we not to seek to refresh the heart of our blessed Master, by a loving obedience to all His commandments? Only think, reader, what a privilege it is to be allowed to give joy to the heart of that blessed One who loved us and gave Himself for us. It is something wonderful that poor creatures such as we can in any way refresh the heart of Jesus; yet so it is, blessed be His Name! He delights in our keeping His commandments; and assuredly the thought of this should stir our whole moral being, and lead us to study His word, in order to find out, more and more, what His commandments are — so that we may do them.

We are forcibly reminded, by those words of Moses which we have just quoted, of the apostle's prayer for "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse." "For this cause we also, since the day

we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord *unto all pleasing*, being fruitful in every good work, and *increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might*, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Col. 1: 9-14.)

Making allowance for the difference between the earthly and the heavenly — between Israel and the church, there is a striking similarity between the words of the law-giver and the words of the apostle. Both together are eminently fitted to set forth the beauty and preciousness of a willing-hearted loving obedience. It is precious to the Father, precious to Christ, precious to the Holy Ghost; and this surely ought to be enough to create and strengthen in our hearts the desire to be filled with the knowledge of His will, that so we might walk worthy of Him to all pleasing, being fruitful *in every good work*, and increasing in the knowledge of God. It should lead us to a more diligent study of the word of God, so that we might be ever finding out more and more of our Lord's mind and will, learning what is well-pleasing to Him, and looking to Him for grace to do it. Thus should our hearts be kept near to Him, and we should find an ever-deepening interest in searching the scriptures not merely to grow in the knowledge of truth, but in the knowledge of God, the knowledge of Christ — the deep, personal, experimental knowledge of all that it treasured up in that blessed One who is the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Oh! may the Spirit Of God, by His most precious and powerful ministry, awaken in us a more intense desire to know and to do the will of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that thus we may refresh His loving heart and be well-pleasing to Him in all things!

We must now turn, for a moment, to the lovely picture of the promised land which Moses holds up before the eyes of the people. "For the land whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: but the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven; a land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." (Vers. 10-12.)

What a vivid contrast between Egypt and Canaan! Egypt had no rain from heaven. It was all human effort there. Not so in the Lord's land; the human foot could do nothing there, nor was there any need, for the blessed rain from heaven dropped upon it; Jehovah Himself cared for it and watered it with the early and latter rain. The land of Egypt was dependent upon its own resources; the land of Canaan was wholly dependent upon God — upon what came down from heaven "My river is mine own," was the language of Egypt. "The river of God" was the hope of Canaan. The habit in Egypt was to water with the foot; the habit in Canaan was to look up to heaven.

We have in the sixty-fifth Psalm a lovely statement of the condition of things in the Lord's land, as viewed by the eye of faith "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God which is full of water; thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness; and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." (Vers. 9-13.)

How perfectly beautiful! Only think of God watering the ridges, and settling the furrows! Think

of His stooping down to do the work of a husbandman for His people! Yes, and delighting to do it! It was the joy of His heart to pour His sunbeams and His refreshing showers upon the "hills and valleys" of His beloved people. It was refreshing to His spirit, as it was to the praise of His Name to see the vine, the fig-tree and the olive flourishing, the valleys covered with the golden grain, and the rich pastures covered with flocks of sheep.

Thus it should ever have been, and thus it would have been, had Israel only walked in simple obedience to the holy law of God. "It shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, *to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart, and with all your soul*, that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full." (Vers. 13-15)

Thus the matter stood between the God of Israel, and the Israel of God. Nothing could be simpler, nothing more blessed. It was Israel's high and holy privilege to love and serve Jehovah; it was Jehovah's prerogative to bless and prosper Israel. Happiness and fruitfulness were to be the sure accompaniments of obedience. The people and their land were wholly dependent upon God; all their supplies were to come down from heaven, and hence so long as they walked in loving obedience the copious showers dropped upon their fields and vineyards; the heavens dropped down the dew, and the earth responded in fruitfulness and blessing.

But, on the other hand, when Israel forgot the Lord, and forsook His precious commandments, the heaven became brass and the earth iron; barrenness, desolation, famine and misery were the melancholy accompaniments of disobedience. How could it be otherwise? "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth Of the Lord bath spoken it."

Now, in all this there is deep practical instruction for the church of God. Although we are not under law, we are called to obedience, and as we are enabled through grace to yield a loving hearty obedience, we are blessed in our own spiritual state, our souls are watered, refreshed and strengthened, and we bring forth the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

The reader may refer with much profit, in connection with this great practical subject, to the opening of John 15 — a most precious scripture, and one demanding the earnest attention of every true-hearted child of God. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, *that it may bring forth more fruit*. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without [or apart from] me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love*, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." (Vers. 1-10.)

This weighty passage of scripture has suffered: immensely through theological controversy and religious strife. It is as plain as it is practical, and only needs to be taken as it stands, in its own divine simplicity. If we seek to import into it what does not belong to it, we mar its integrity and miss its true

application. In it we have Christ, the true vine, taking the place of Israel who had become to Jehovah the degenerate plant of a strange vine. The scene of the parable is obviously earth and not heaven; we do not think of a vine and a husbandman (*georgos*) in heaven. Besides, our Lord says, "I am the true vine." The figure is very distinct. It is not the Head and the members, but a tree and its branches. Moreover, the subject of the parable is as distinct as the parable itself; it is not eternal life, but fruit-bearing. If this were borne in mind, it would greatly help to an understanding of this much misunderstood passage of scripture.

In a word then, we learn from the figure of the vine and its branches that the true secret of fruit-bearing is to abide in Christ, and the way to abide in Christ is to keep His precious commandments. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." This makes it all so simple. The way to bear fruit in season is to abide in the love of Christ, and this abiding is proved by our treasuring up His commandments in our hearts and a loving obedience to every one of them. It is not running hither and thither in the mere energy of nature; it is not the excitement of mere fleshly zeal displaying itself in spasmodic efforts after devotedness. No; it is something quite different from all this; it is the calm and holy obedience of the heart — a loving obedience to our own beloved Lord which refreshes His heart and glorifies His Name.

"How blest are they who still abide  
Close sheltered by Thy watchful side;  
Who life and strength from Thee receive  
And with Thee move and in Thee live."

Reader, may we apply our hearts diligently to this great subject of fruit-bearing. May we better understand what it is. We are apt to make great mistakes about it. It is to be feared that much — very much of what passes for fruit would not be accredited in the divine presence. God cannot own anything as fruit which is not the direct result of abiding in Christ. We may earn a great name among our fellows for zeal, energy and devotedness; we may be abundant in labours, in every department of the work; we may acquit ourselves as great travellers, great preachers, earnest workers in the vineyard, great philanthropists and moral reformers; we may spend a princely fortune in promoting all the great objects of Christian benevolence, and all the while not produce a single cluster of fruit acceptable to the Father's heart.

And, on the other hand, it may be our lot to pass the time of our sojourn here in obscurity and retirement from human gaze; we may be little accounted of by the world and the professing church; we may seem to leave but little mark on the sands of time; but if only we abide in Christ, abide in His love, treasure up His precious words in our hearts, and yield ourselves up to a holy and loving obedience to His commandments, then shall our fruit be in season, and our Father will be glorified, and we shall grow in the experimental knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We shall now look for a moment at the remainder of our chapter in which Moses, in words of intense earnestness, presses upon the congregation the urgent need of watchfulness and diligence in reference to all the statutes and judgments of the Lord their God. The beloved and faithful servant of God, and true lover of the people was unwearied in his efforts to brace them up to that whole-hearted obedience which he knew to be, at once, the spring of their happiness and their fruitfulness; and just as our blessed Lord warns His disciples by setting before them the solemn judgement of the unfruitful branch, so does Moses warn the people as to the sure and terrible consequences of disobedience.

"Take heed to yourselves, that *your heart be not deceived*, and ye turn aside, and serve other

gods, and worship them." Sad progress downward! The heart deceived. This is the beginning of all declension. "And ye turn aside." The feet are sure to follow the heart. Hence the deep need of keeping the heart with all diligence; it is the citadel of the whole moral being, and so long as it is kept for the Lord, the enemy can gain no advantage; but when once it is surrendered, all is really gone; there is the turning aside; the secret departure of the heart is proved by the practical ways; "other gods" are served and worshipped. The descent down along the inclined plane is terribly rapid.

"And then" — mark the sure and solemn consequences — "the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he *shut up the heaven*, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you" What barrenness and desolation there must be when heaven is shut up! No refreshing showers coming down, no dewdrops falling, no communication between the heaven and the earth. Alas! how often had Israel tasted the awful reality of this! "He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the water-springs into dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein."

And may we not see in the barren land and the desolate wilderness an apt and striking illustration of a soul out of communion through disobedience to the precious commandments of Christ? Such an one has no refreshing communications with heaven — no showers coming down — no unfoldings of the preciousness of Christ to the heart no sweet ministrations of an ungrieved Spirit to the soul; the Bible seems a sealed book; all is dark, dreary and desolate. Oh! there cannot be anything more miserable in all this world than a soul in this condition. May the writer and the reader never experience it! May we bend our ears to the fervent exhortations addressed by Moses to the congregation of Israel! They are most seasonable, most healthful, most needful in this day of cold indifferentism and positive wilfulness. They set before us the divine antidote against the special evils to which the church of God is exposed at this very hour — an hour critical and solemn beyond all human conception.

"Therefore shall ye lay up these *my words in your heart* and in *your soul*, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up; and thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thine house, and upon thy gates, that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth."

Blessed days! And oh! how ardently the large, loving heart of Moses longed that the people might enjoy many such days! And how simple the condition! Truly nothing could be simpler, nothing more precious. It was not a heavy yoke laid upon them, but the sweet privilege of treasuring up the precious commandments of the Lord their God, in their hearts, and breathing the very atmosphere of His holy word. All was to hinge upon this. All the blessings of the land of Canaan — that goodly, highly favoured land, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land on which Jehovah's eyes ever rested in loving interest and tender care — all its precious fruits, all its rare privileges were to be theirs in perpetuity, on the one simple condition of loving obedience to the word of their covenant God.

"For if ye shall *diligently keep all* these commandments which I command you, to do them, *to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways*, and to *cleave unto him*; then will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves." In a word, sure and certain victory was before them, a most complete overthrow of all enemies and obstacles, a triumphal march into the promised inheritance — all secured to them on the blessed ground of affectionate and reverential obedience to the most precious statutes and judgments that had ever been addressed to the human heart — statutes and judgements every one of which was but the very voice of

their most gracious Deliverer.

"Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours; from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea, shall your coast be. There shall no man be able to stand before you; for the Lord your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you."

Here was the divine side of the question. The whole land, in its length, breadth and fulness, lay before them; they had but to take possession of it, as the free gift of God; it was for them simply to plant the foot, in artless appropriating faith, upon that fair inheritance which sovereign grace had bestowed upon them. All this we see made good in the Book of Joshua, as we read in Joshua 11. "So Joshua took *the whole land*, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel, according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war." (Ver. 23.)\*

{\*No doubt it was in faith that Joshua took — and could take nothing less than — the whole land. But as to actual possession, Joshua 13: 1 shows there was "yet much land to be possessed."}

But alas! there was the human side of the question as well as the divine. Canaan as promised by Jehovah and made good by the faith of Joshua, was one thing; and Canaan as possessed by Israel, was quite another. Hence the vast difference between Joshua and Judges. In Joshua we see the infallible faithfulness of God to His promise; in Judges, we see Israel's miserable failure from the very outset. God pledged His immutable word that not a man should be able to stand before them; and the sword of Joshua — type of the great Captain of our salvation — made good this pledge in its every jot and tittle. But the Book of Judges records the melancholy fact that Israel failed to drive out the enemy — failed to take possession of the divine grant in all its royal magnificence.

What then? Is the promise of God made of none effect? Nay, verily, but the utter failure of man is made apparent. At "Gilgal" the banner of victory floated over the twelve tribes, with their invincible captain at their head. At "Bochim" the weepers had to mourn over Israel's lamentable defeat.

Have we any difficulty in understanding the difference? None whatever; we see the two things running all through the divine Volume. Man fails to rise to the height of the divine revelation — fails to take possession of what grace bestows. This is as true in the history of the church as it was in the history of Israel. In the New Testament, as well as in the Old, we have Judges as well as Joshua.

Yes, reader, and in the history of each individual member of the church we see the same thing. Where is the Christian, beneath the canopy of heaven, that lives up to the height of his spiritual privileges? Where is the child of God who has not to mourn over his humiliating failure in grasping and making good practically the high and holy privileges of his calling of God? But does this make the truth of God of none effect? No; blessed for ever be His Holy Name! His word holds good in all its divine integrity and eternal stability. Just as in Israel's case, the land of promise lay before them in all its fair proportions and divinely given attractions; and not only so, but they could count on the faithfulness and almighty power of God to bring them in and put them in full possession; so with us, we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ; there is absolutely no limit to the privileges connected with our standing, and as to our actual enjoyment it is only a question of faith taking possession of all that God's sovereign grace has made ours in Christ.

We must never forget that it is the privilege of the Christian to live at the very height of the divine revelation. There is no excuse for a shallow experience or a low walk. We have no right whatever to say that we cannot realise the fulness of our portion in Christ, that the standard is too high, the

privileges are too vast, that we cannot expect to enjoy such marvellous blessings and dignities in our present imperfect state.

All this is downright unbelief, and should be so treated by every true Christian. The question is, Has the grace of God bestowed the privileges upon us? Has the death of Christ made Good our title to them? And has the Holy Ghost declared them to be the proper portion of the very feeblest member of the body of Christ? If so — and scripture declares it is so — why should we not enjoy them? There is no hindrance on the divine side. It is the desire of the heart of God that we should enter into the fulness of our portion in Christ. Hear the earnest breathing of the inspired apostle, on behalf of the saints at Ephesus, and of all saints. "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenlies, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1: 15-23.)

From this marvellous prayer we may learn how earnestly the Spirit of God desires that we should apprehend and enjoy the glorious privileges of the true Christian position. He would ever, by His precious and powerful ministry, keep our hearts up to the mark; but alas! like Israel, we grieve Him by our sinful unbelief, and rob our own souls of incalculable blessing.

But, all praise to the God of all grace, the Father of glory, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He will yet make good every jot and tittle of His most precious truth, both as to His earthly and heavenly people. Israel shall yet enjoy to the full all the blessings secured to them by the everlasting covenant; and the church shall yet enter upon the perfect fruition of all that which eternal love and divine counsels have laid up for her in Christ; and not only so, but the blessed Comforter is able and willing to lead the individual believer into the present enjoyment of the hope of God's glorious calling, and the practical power of that hope, in detaching the heart from present things and separating it to God in true holiness and living devotedness.

May our hearts, beloved Christian reader, long more ardently after the full realisation of all this, that thus we may live more as those who are finding their portion and their rest in a risen and glorified Christ! God, in His infinite goodness, grant it, for Jesus Christ's Name and glory's sake!

The remaining verses of our chapter close the first division of the Book of Deuteronomy which, as the reader will notice, consists of a series of discourses addressed by Moses to the congregation of Israel — memorable discourses, most surely, in whatever way we view them. The closing sentences are, we need hardly say, in perfect keeping with the whole, and breathe the same deep-toned earnestness in reference to the subject of obedience — a subject which, as we have seen, formed the special burden on the heart of the beloved speaker in his affecting farewell addresses to the people.

"Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse" — How pointed and solemn is this! — "A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day; and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. And it shall come to pass,

when the Lord thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerazim, and the curse upon mount Ebal. Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh? For ye shall pass over Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God giveth you, and ye shall possess it, and dwell therein. AND YE SHALL OBSERVE TO DO ALL THE STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS WHICH I SET BEFORE YOU THIS DAY." (Vers. 26-32.)

Here we have the summing up of the whole matter. The blessing is linked on to obedience; the curse, to disobedience. Mount Gerazim stands over against mount Ebal — fruitfulness and barrenness. We shall see, when we come to Deuteronomy 27, that mount Gerazim and its blessings are entirely passed over. The curses of mount Ebal fall, with awful distinctness, on Israel's ear, while terrible silence reigns on mount Gerazim. "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." The blessing of Abraham can only come on those who are on the ground of faith. But more of this, by-and-by.

#### Deuteronomy 12.

We now enter upon a new section of our marvellous book. The discourses contained in the first eleven chapters having established the all-important principle of obedience, we now come to the practical application of the principle to the habits and ways of the people when settled in possession of the land "These are the statutes and judgements which ye shall observe to do in the land which the Lord God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth"

It is of the utmost moral importance that the heart and conscience should be brought into their true attitude in reference to divine authority, irrespective altogether of any question as to details. These will find their due place when once the heart is taught to bow down, in complete and absolute submission, to the supreme authority of the word of God.

Now, as we have seen in our studies on the first eleven chapters, the law-giver labours, most earnestly and faithfully, to lead the heart of Israel into this all-essential condition. He felt, to speak after the manner of men, it was of no use entering upon practical details until the grand foundation principle of all morality was fully established in the very deepest depths of the soul. The principle is this — let us Christians apply our hearts to it — It is man's bounden duty to bow implicitly to the authority of the word of God. It matters not, in the smallest degree, what that word may enjoin, or whether we can see the reason of this, that or the other institution. The one grand, all-important and conclusive point is this, Has God spoken? If He has, that is quite enough. There is no room, no need for any further question.

Until this point is fully established, or rather until the heart is brought directly under its full moral force, we are not in a condition to enter upon details. If self-will be allowed to operate, if blind reason be permitted to speak, the heart will send up its endless questionings; as each divine institution is laid before us, some fresh difficulty will present itself as a stumbling-block in the path of simple obedience.

"What!" it may be said, "Are we not to use our reason? If not, to what end was it given?" To this we have a twofold reply. In the first place, our reason is not as it was when God gave it. We have to remember that sin has come in; man is a fallen creature, his reason, his judgement, his understanding, his whole moral being is a complete wreck; and moreover, it was the neglect of the word of God that caused all this wreck and ruin.

And, then, in the second place, we must bear in mind that if reason were in a sound condition, it would prove its soundness by bowing to the word of God. But it is not sound; it is blind and utterly

perverted; it is not to be trusted for a moment, in things spiritual, divine or heavenly.

If this simple fact were thoroughly understood, it would settle a thousand questions and remove a thousand difficulties. It is reason that makes all the infidels. The devil whispers into man's ear, "You are endowed with reason; why not use it? It was given to be used, used in everything; you ought not to give your assent to anything which your reason cannot grasp. It is your chartered right, as a man, to submit everything to the test of your reason; it is only for a fool or an idiot to receive, in blind credulity, all that is set before him."

What is our answer to such wily and dangerous suggestions? A very simple and conclusive one, namely this. The word of God is above and beyond reason altogether; it is as far above reason as God is above the creature, or heaven above earth. Hence, when God speaks, all reasonings must be cast down. If it be merely man's word, man's opinion, man's judgement, then verily reason may exert its powers; or rather, to speak more correctly, we must judge what is said by the only perfect standard, the word of God. But if reason be set to work on the word of God, the soul must inevitably be plunged in the thick darkness of infidelity from which the descent to the awful blackness of atheism is but too easy.

In a word, then, we have to remember, yea, to cherish in the very deepest depths of our moral being, that the only safe ground for the soul is divinely wrought faith in the paramount authority, divine majesty, and all-sufficiency of the word of God. This was the ground which Moses occupied in dealing with the heart and conscience of Israel. His one grand object was to lead the people into the attitude of profound, unqualified subjection to divine authority. Without this all was useless. If every statute, every judgement, every precept, every institution were to be submitted to the action of human reason, then farewell to divine authority, farewell to scripture, farewell to certainty, farewell to peace. But, on the other hand, when the soul is led by God's Spirit into the delightful attitude of absolute and unquestioning submission to the authority of God's word, then every one of His judgements, every one of His commandments, every sentence of His blessed Book is received as coming direct from Himself; and the most simple ordinance or institution, stands invested with all the importance which His authority is fitted to impart. We may not be able to understand the full meaning or exact bearing of each statute and -judgement; that is not the question; it is sufficient for us to know that it comes from God; He has spoken; this is conclusive. Till this great principle is grasped, or rather till it takes full possession of the soul, nothing is done; but when it is fully understood and submitted to, the solid foundation is laid of all true morality.

The foregoing line of thought will enable the reader to seize the connection between the chapter which now lies open before us, and the preceding section of this book; and not only will it do this, but we trust it will also help him to understand the special place and bearing of the opening verses of chapter 12.

"Ye shall utterly destroy all the places wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree. And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place." (Vers. 2, 3)

The land was Jehovah's; they were to hold as tenants under Him, and therefore their very first duty on entering upon possession, was to demolish every trace of the old idolatry. This was absolutely indispensable. It might, according to human reason, seem to be very intolerant to act in this way towards other people's religion. We reply, without any hesitation, Yes, it was intolerant, for how could the one only true and living God be otherwise than intolerant of all false gods and false worships. To suppose, for moment, that He could permit the worship of idols in His land, would be to suppose that

He could deny Himself, which were simply blasphemy.

Let us not be misunderstood It is not that God does not bear with the world, in His long-suffering mercy. It seems hardly needful to state this, with the history of well-nigh six thousand years of divine forbearance before our eyes. Blessed for ever be His holy Name, He has borne with the world most marvellously, from the days of Noah, and He still bears with it, though stained with the guilt of crucifying His beloved Son.

All this is vain, but it leaves wholly untouched the great principle laid down in our chapter. Israel had to learn that they were about to take possession of the Lord's land, and that, as His tenants, their first and indispensable duty was to obliterate every trace of idolatry. To them there was to be but "the one God." His Name was called upon them. They were His people, and He could not permit them to have fellowship with demons. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God; and him *only* shalt thou serve."

This might, in the judgement of the uncircumcised nations around, seem very intolerant, very narrow, very bigoted. They indeed might boast of their freedom, and glory in the broad platform. of their worship which admitted "gods many and lords many." It might, according to their thinking, argue greater breadth of mind to let every one think for himself in matters of religion, and choose his own object of worship, and his own mode of worshipping also. Or, still further, it might give evidence of a more advanced condition of civilisation, greater polish and refinement to erect, as in Rome, a pantheon in which all the gods of Heathendom might find a place. "What did it matter about the form of a man's religion, or the object of his worship, provided he himself were sincere? All would be sure to come right in the end; the great point for all was to attend to material progress, to help on national prosperity as the surest means of securing individual interests. Of course, it is all right for every man to have some religion, but as to the form of that religion it is immaterial. The great question is what you are yourself, not what your religion is."

All this, we can well conceive, would admirably suit the carnal mind, and be very popular amongst the uncircumcised nations. But as for Israel, they had to remember that one commanding sentence, "The Lord thy God is one God." And again, "Thou shalt have none other gods before me;" This was to be their religion; the platform of their worship was to be as wide and as narrow as the one true and living God, their Creator and Redeemer. That, assuredly, was broad enough for every true worshipper, every member of the circumcised assembly, all whose high and holy privilege it was to belong to the Israel of God. They were not to concern themselves with the opinions or observations of the uncircumcised nations around. What were they worth? Not the weight of a feather. What could they know about the claims of the God of Israel upon His circumcised people? Just nothing. Were they competent to decide as to the proper breadth of Israel's platform? Clearly not; they were wholly ignorant of the subject. Hence their thoughts, reasonings, arguments and objections were perfectly worthless, not to be listened to for a moment. It was Israel's one simple, bounden duty to bow down to the supreme and absolute authority of the word of God; and that word insisted upon the complete abolition of every trace of idolatry from that goodly land which they were privileged to hold as tenants under Him.

But not only was it incumbent upon Israel to abolish all the places in which the heathen had worshipped their gods; this they were solemnly bound to do, most surely; but there was more than this. The heart might readily conceive the thought of doing away with idolatry, in the various places, and setting up the altar of the true God instead. This might seem to be the right course to adopt. But God thought differently. "Ye shall not do so unto the Lord your God. But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes, to put his name there, *even unto his habitation* shall ye seek,

and thither thou shalt come; and thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks; and *there ye shall eat before the Lord your God*; and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the Lord thy God hath blessed thee."

Here a great cardinal truth is unfolded to the congregation of Israel. They were to have one place of worship — a place chosen of God and not of man. His habitation — the place of His presence was to be Israel's grand centre; thither they were to come with their sacrifices and their offerings, and there they were to offer their worship, and find their common joy.

Does this seem exclusive? Of course it was exclusive; how else could it be? If God was pleased to select a spot in which He would take up His abode in the midst of His redeemed people, surely they were, of necessity, shut up to that spot as their place of worship. This was divine exclusiveness, and every pious soul would delight in it. Every true lover of Jehovah would say, with all his heart, "*Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house*, and the place where thine honour dwelleth." And, again, "*How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth; yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.... Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee.... A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*" (Psalms 26: 84.)

Here was *the* one grand and all-important point. It was the dwelling-place of Jehovah which was dear to the heart of every true Israelite. Restless self-will might desire to run hither and thither; the poor vagrant heart might long for some change; but, for the heart that loved God, any change from the place of His presence, the place where He had recorded His blessed Name, could only be a change for the worse. The truly devout worshipper could find satisfaction and delight, blessing and rest only in the place of the divine presence; and this, on the double ground, the authority of His precious word, and the powerful attractions of His presence. Such an one could never think of going anywhere else. Whither could he go? There was but one altar, one habitation, one God, that was the place for every right-minded, every true-hearted Israelite. To think of any other place of worship would, in his judgement, be not only a departure from the word of Jehovah, but from His holy habitation.

This great principle is largely insisted upon throughout the whole of our chapter. Moses reminds the people that from the moment they entered Jehovah's land, there was to be an end to all the irregularity and self-will that had characterised them in the plains of Moab or in the wilderness. "*Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. For ye are not as yet come to the rest, and to the inheritance, which the Lord your God giveth you. But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the Lord your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose, to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you.... Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt-offerings in every place that thou seest; but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee.*" (Vers. 4-14.) Thus, not only in the object, but also in the place and mode of Israel's worship, they were absolutely shut up! to the commandment of Jehovah. Self pleasing, self-choosing, self-will was to have an end, in reference to the worship of God, the moment they crossed the river of death, and, as a redeemed people planted their foot on their divinely given inheritance. Once there, in the enjoyment of Jehovah's land, and the rest which the land afforded, obedience to His word was to be their reasonable, their intelligent service. Things might be allowed to pass in the wilderness which could not be tolerated in Canaan. The higher

the range of privilege, the higher the responsibility and the standard of action.

Now, it may be that our broad thinkers, and those who contend for freedom of will and freedom of action, for the right of private judgement in matters of religion, for liberality of mind and catholicity of spirit, will be ready to pronounce all this, which has been engaging our attention, extremely narrow, and wholly unsuited to our enlightened age, and to men of intelligence and education.

What is our answer to all who adopt this form of speech? A very simple and conclusive one; it is this, Has not God a right to prescribe the mode in which His people should worship Him? Had He not a perfect right to fix the place where He would meet His people Israel? Surely we must either deny His existence, or admit His absolute and unquestionable right to set forth His will as to how, when and where His people should approach Him. Will any one, however educated and enlightened, deny this? Is it a proof of high culture, refinement, breadth of mind or catholicity of spirit, to deny God His rights.

If then God has a right to command, is it narrowness or bigotry for His people to obey? This is just the point. It is, in our judgement, as simple as anything can be. We are thoroughly convinced that the only true breadth of mind, largeness of heart and catholicity of spirit, is to obey the commandments of God. Hence, when Israel were commanded to go to one place and there offer their sacrifices, it most assuredly was neither bigotry nor narrowness on their part to go thither, and to refuse, with holy decision, to go anywhere else. Uncircumcised Gentiles might go where they pleased; the Israel of God were to go *only* to the place of His appointment.

And oh! what an unspeakable privilege for all who loved God and loved one another to assemble themselves at the place where He recorded His Name! And what touching grace shines in the fact of His desiring to gather His people round Himself, from time to time! Did that fact infringe their personal rights and domestic privileges? Nay, it enhanced them immensely. God, in His infinite goodness, took care of this. It was His delight to minister to the joy and blessing of His people, privately, socially and publicly. Hence we read, "When the Lord thy God shall enlarge thy border, as he hath promised thee, and thou shalt say, I will eat flesh, because thy soul longeth to eat flesh, thou mayest eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after. If the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to put his name there be too far from thee, then thou shalt kill of thy herd and of thy flock, *which the Lord hath given thee*, as I have commanded thee, and thou shalt eat in thy gates whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, even as the roebuck and the hart is eaten, so thou shalt eat them; the unclean and the clean shall eat of them alike."

Here we have, most surely, a broad margin afforded by the goodness and tender mercy of God, for the fullest range of personal and family enjoyment. The only restriction was in reference to the blood. "Only be sure that thou eat not the blood; *for The blood is the life*; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh, Thou shalt not eat it; thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water. Thou shalt not eat it; that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the Lord."

This was a great cardinal principle under the law, to which reference has been made in our "Notes on Leviticus." How far Israel understood it is not the question; they were to obey that it might go well with them, and with their children after them. They were to own, in this matter, the sovereign rights of God.

Having made this exception, in reference to personal and family habits, the law-giver returns to the all-important subject of their public worship. "Only thy holy things which thou hast, and thy vows, thou shalt take, *and go unto the place which the Lord shall choose*; and thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, *the flesh and the blood*, upon the altar of the Lord thy God; and the blood of thy sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of the Lord thy God, and thou shalt eat the flesh." (Vers. 26, 27.) If

reason, or self-will were permitted to speak, it might say, "Why must we all go to this one place? Can we not have an altar at home? Or, at least, an altar in each principal town, or in the centre of each tribe?" The conclusive answer is, "God has commanded otherwise; this is enough for every true Israelite. Even though we may not be able, by reason of our ignorance, to see the why or the wherefore, simple obedience is our obvious and bounden duty. It may be, moreover, that, as we cheerfully tread the path of obedience, light will break in upon our souls as to the reason, and we shall find abundant blessing in doing that which is well-pleasing to the Lord our God."

Yes; reader, this is the proper method of answering all the reasonings and questionings of the carnal mind which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Light is sure to break in upon our souls, as we tread, with a lowly mind, the sacred path of obedience; and, not only so, but untold blessing will flow into the heart in that conscious nearness to God which is only known to those who lovingly keep His most precious commandments. Are we called upon to explain to carnal objectors and infidels our reasons for doing this or that? Most certainly not; that is no part of our business; it would be time and labour lost, inasmuch as objectors and reasoners are wholly incapable of understanding or appreciating our reasons.

For example, in the matter now under our consideration, could a carnal mind, an unbeliever, a mere child of nature, understand why Israel's twelve tribes were commanded to worship at one altar — to gather in one place — to cluster round one centre? Not in the smallest degree. The grand moral reason of such a lovely institution lies far away beyond his ken.

But to the spiritual mind all is as plain as it is beautiful. Jehovah would gather His beloved people around Himself, from time to time, that they might rejoice together before Him and that He might have His own peculiar joy in them.

Was not this something most precious? Assuredly it was to all who really loved the Lord.

No doubt, if the heart were cold and careless toward God, it would matter little about the place of worship; all places would be alike. But we may set it down as a fixed principle that every loyal loving heart from Dan to Beersheba would rejoice to flock to the place where Jehovah had recorded His Name, and where He had appointed to meet His people. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem [God's centre for Israel]. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is *compact together*; whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, *unto the testimony of Israel*, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. For *there* — and nowhere else — "are set thrones of judgement, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. *For my brethren and companions' sakes*, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good." (Ps. 102.)

Here we have the lovely breathings of a heart that loved the habitation of the God of Israel — His blessed centre — the gathering-place of Israel's twelve tribes — that hallowed spot which was associated in the mind of every true Israelite with all that was bright and joyous in connection with the worship of Jehovah and the communion of His people.

We shall have occasion to refer to this most delightful theme again, when we come to study Deuteronomy 16, and shall draw this section to a close by quoting for the reader the last paragraph of the chapter before us.

"When the Lord thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; take heed to thyself, that thou be not snared

by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God; for every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. *What thing soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.*" (Vers. 29-32.)

The precious word of God was to form a sacred enclosure round about His people, within which they might enjoy His presence, and delight themselves in the abundance of His mercy and loving-kindness; and wherein, they were to be entirely apart from all that was offensive to Him whose presence was to be, at once, their glory, their joy and their grand moral safeguard from every snare and every abomination.

Alas! alas! they did not abide within that enclosure; they speedily broke down the walls thereof, and wandered away from the holy commandment of God. They did the very things they were told not to do, and they have had to reap the terrible consequences. But more of this and of their future by-and-by.

### Deuteronomy 13.

This chapter abounds in most weighty principles. It consists of three distinct sections, each one of which claims our deep attention. We must not attempt to weaken the admonitory force of such a scripture, or turn aside its keen edge, by saying that it does not apply to Christians; that it is wholly Jewish in its scope and application. No doubt, primarily, it was addressed to Israel; this is so obvious as not to admit of a question. But let us not forget that it was "written for our learning;" and not only so, but the more closely we study it, the more we shall see that its teaching is of universal importance.

"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them: thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God prooveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the Lord thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee." (Vv. 1-5)

Here we have divine provision made for all cases of false teaching, and false religious influence. We all know how easily the poor human heart is led astray by anything in the shape of a sign or a wonder, and especially when such things stand connected with religion. This is not confined to the nation of Israel; we see it everywhere and at all times. Anything supernatural, anything involving an infringement of what are called the ordinary laws of nature is almost sure to act powerfully on the human mind. A prophet rising up, in the midst of the people, and confirming his teaching by miracles, signs and wonders, would be almost sure to get a hearing, and obtain an influence.

In this way, Satan has worked in all ages, and he will work yet more powerfully, at the end of this present age, in order to deceive and lead to their everlasting destruction those who will not hearken to the precious truth of the gospel. "The mystery of iniquity," which has been working in the professing church for eighteen centuries, will be headed up, in the person of "*that Wicked* whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming; even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all

deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not *the love of the truth*, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned *who believed not the truth*, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thess. 2: 8-12.)

So also, in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, our Lord warns His disciples against the same kind of influence. "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and *shall show great signs and wonders*; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, *I have told you before.*" (Vers. 23-25.)

Again, in Revelation 13, we read of the second beast, coming up out of the earth, the great false prophet, the antichrist, doing great wonders, "so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live." (Vers. 13, 14.)

Now, each of the above three passages of holy scripture refers to scenes which shall be enacted after the church has been taken away out of this world; but on this we do not dwell, inasmuch as our object in quoting them for the reader is to let him see how far the devil can go in the way of signs and wonders, to lead people away from the truth; and also to set before him the one divine and therefore perfect safeguard against all the delusive power of the enemy.

The human heart has no ability whatever to resist the influence of "great signs and wonders" put forth in favour of the most deadly error. There is but the one thing which can fortify the soul, and enable it to resist the devil and all his deadly delusions, and that is the word of God. To have the precious truth of God treasured up in the heart is the divine secret of preservation from all error, even though backed up by the most astounding miracles.

Hence, in the first of the above quotations we see that the reason why people will be deceived by the signs and lying wonders of "that wicked" one is "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." It is the love of the truth that preserves from error, be it ever so persuasive, ever so fascinating, ever so strongly supported by the powerful evidence of "great signs and wonders." It is not cleverness, intellectual power, mental grasp, extensive learning; all these things are perfectly powerless in the presence of Satan's wiles and machinations. The most gigantic human intellect must fall an easy prey to the wiles of the serpent.

But, blessed be God, the craft, the subtlety, the signs and lying wonders, all the resources of Satan, all the machinery of hell are perfectly powerless with a heart that is governed by the love of the truth. A little child who knows and believes and loves the truth is blessedly shielded, sheltered and divinely preserved from the blinding and deceiving power of the wicked one. If ten thousand false prophets were to arise and perform the most extraordinary miracles that were ever presented to the human gaze, in order to prove that the Bible is not the inspired word of God, or that our Lord Jesus Christ is not God over all blessed for ever, or in order to set aside the glorious truth that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin, or any other precious truth revealed in holy scripture, it could have no effect whatever on the very simplest babe in Christ whose heart is governed by the word of God. Yea, if an angel from heaven were to come down and preach anything contrary to what we are taught in the word of God, we have a divine warrant to pronounce him anathema, without any discussion or argument whatever.

This is an unspeakable mercy. It puts the simple hearted, unlettered child of God into the most blessed position — a position, not only of moral security, but of sweetest repose. We are not called

upon to analyse the false doctrine, or to weigh the evidence advanced in favour of it; we reject, with stern decision, both the one and the other, simply because we have the certainty of the truth and the love of it in our hearts. "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams;" — although the sign or the wonder had come to pass — "for the Lord your God proveth you to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

Here, beloved reader, was the all-important point for Israel; and it is the same for us. Then, now, and always, the true moral security is in having the heart fortified with the love of the truth, which is only another way of expressing the love of God. The faithful Israelite who loved Jehovah, with all his heart and with all his soul, would have a ready and conclusive answer for all the false prophets and dreamers who might arise — a thoroughly effectual method of dealing with them. "*Thou shalt not hearken.*" If the enemy does not get the ear, he is not likely to reach the heart. The sheep follow the Shepherd; "for they know his voice. And a stranger" — even though showing signs and wonders — "*will they not follow, but will flee from him.*" Why? Is it because they are able to discuss and argue and analyse? No, thanks and praise to God! but because "*they know not the voice of strangers.*" The simple fact of not knowing the voice is a sufficient reason for not following the speaker.

All this is full of comfort and consolation for the beloved lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ. They can hear the voice of their loving, faithful shepherd; they can gather round Him, and find in His presence true Test and perfect safely. He makes them to lie down in green pastures, and leads them by the still waters of His love. This is enough. They may be very weak, yea, perfect weakness in themselves; but this is no hindrance to their rest and blessing; quite the contrary, it only casts them more upon His almighty power. We need never be afraid of weakness, it is fancied strength we have to dread, vain confidence in our own wisdom, our own intelligence, our scriptural knowledge, our spiritual attainments; these are the things we have to fear; but as for our weakness, the more deeply we feel it the better, for our Shepherd's strength is made perfect in weakness, and His precious grace is amply sufficient for all the need of His beloved and blood bought flock as a whole, and for each member, in particular. Only let us keep near to Him in the abiding sense of our own perfect helplessness and nothingness; let us treasure up His precious word in our hearts, let us feed upon it, as the very sustenance of our souls, day by day, the staple article of our lives, the living bread for the strengthening of the inward man. Thus shall we be safe from every strange voice, every false prophet, every snare of the devil, every influence which might tend to draw us away from the path of obedience, and the practical confession of the Name of Christ.

We must now quote for the reader the second paragraph of our chapter, in which the Lord's people are warned against another snare of the devil. Oh! how many and varied are his snares and wiles! How manifold are the dangers of the people of God! But, blessed be His holy Name, there is full provision in His word for all.

"If thy brother, *the son of thy mother*, nearer, dearer and more tender than the son of the father — or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, *which thou hast not known*, thou, nor thy fathers, namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him; but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this

is among you" (Vv. 6-11.)

Here, then, we have something quite different from the false prophet or the dreamer of dreams. Thousands might be proof against the influence of these, and yet fall before the ensnaring and seductive power of natural affection. It is very hard to resist the action of this latter. It demands deep-toned devotedness, great singleness of eye, firm purpose of heart, to deal faithfully with those who live deep down in our hearts' tender affections. The trial to some of withstanding and rejecting a prophet or a dreamer with whom there was no personal relationship, no tender link of fond affection, would be as nothing compared with having to treat with stern and severe decision the wife of the bosom, the beloved brother or sister, the devoted and tenderly loved friend.

But where the claims of God, of Christ, of truth are at stake, there must be no hesitation. If any should seek to make use of the ties of affection in order to draw us aside from our allegiance to Christ, we must resist them, with unqualified decision. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 10: 26)

Let us see that we thoroughly understand this aspect of the truth, and also that we give it its proper place. If poor blind reason be listened to, it will be sure to present to the mind the most hideous perversion of this great practical subject. Reason, whenever it attempts to exercise its powers in the things of God, is sure to prove itself the active and efficient agent of the devil in opposition to the truth. In things human and earthly, reason may go for what it is worth; but in things divine and heavenly, it is not only worthless, but positively mischievous.

What then, we may ask, is the true moral force of Luke 14: 28, and Deuteronomy 13: 8-10? Most assuredly, they do not mean that we are to be "without natural affection," which is one of the special marks of the apostasy of the last days. This is perfectly clear. God Himself has established our natural relationships, and each of these relationships has its characteristic affections the exercise and display of which are in lovely harmony with the mind of God. Christianity does not interfere with our relationships in nature, but it introduces a power whereby the responsibilities which attach to those relationships can be duly fulfilled to the glory of God. And not only so, but in the various epistles, the Holy Ghost has given the most ample instructions to husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, thus proving, in the very fullest and most blessed manner, the divine sanction of those relationships and the affections which belong to them.

All this is perfectly plain; but still we have to inquire how it fits in with Luke 14 and Deuteronomy 13? The answer is simply this. The harmony is divinely perfect. Those scriptures apply only to cases in which our natural relationships and affections interfere with the claims of God and of Christ. When they operate in this way, they must be denied and mortified. If they dare to intrude upon a domain which is wholly divine, the sentence of death must be written upon them.

In contemplating the life of the only perfect man that ever trod this earth of ours, we can see how beautifully He adjusted the various claims which as a man and a servant, He had to meet. He could say to His mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" And, yet, at the fitting moment, He could, with exquisite tenderness, commend that mother to the care of the disciple whom He loved. He could say to His parents, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" and, at the same time, go home with them and be sweetly subject to parental authority. Thus the written teachings of holy scripture, and the perfect ways of the living Christ do both combine to teach us how to discharge aright the claims of nature and the claims of God.

But it may be that the reader feels considerable difficulty in reference to the line of action

enjoined in Deuteronomy 13: 9, 10. He may find it hard to reconcile it with a God of love, and with the grace, gentleness and tenderness inculcated in the New Testament scriptures. Here again we must keep a vigilant eye upon reason. It always affects to find ample scope for its powers in the stern enactments of the divine government; but, in reality, it only displays its blindness and folly. Still, though we would make very short work with infidel reason, we earnestly desire to help any honest soul who may not be able to see his way through this question.

We have had occasion, in our studies on the earlier chapters of this book, to refer to the very weighty subject of God's governmental dealings, both with Israel and the nations; but, in addition to what has already come under our notice, we have to bear in mind the very important difference between the two economies of law and grace. If this be not clearly apprehended, we shall find very considerable difficulty in such passages as Deuteronomy 13: 9, 10. The great characteristic principle of the Jewish economy was *righteousness*; the characteristic principle of Christianity is *grace* — pure, unqualified grace.

If this fact be fully grasped, all difficulty vanishes. It was perfectly right, perfectly consistent, and in perfect harmony with the mind of God for Israel to slay their enemies. God commanded them to do so. And, in like manner, it was right and consistent for them to execute righteous judgement, even unto death, upon any member of the congregation who should seek to draw them aside after false gods, as in the passage before us. To do so was in full moral harmony with the grand ruling principles of government and law, under which they were placed, in accordance with the dispensational wisdom of God.

All this is perfectly plain. It runs through the entire canon of Old Testament scripture. God's government in Israel, and His government of the world, in connection with Israel was on the strict principle of righteousness. And as it was in the past, so it shall be in the future. "A king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgement."

But, in Christianity, we see something quite different. The moment we open the pages of the New Testament, and hearken to the teachings, and mark the actings of the Son of God, we find ourselves on entirely new ground, and in a new atmosphere. In a word, we are in the atmosphere and on the ground of pure, unqualified grace.

Thus, as a sample of the teaching, take a passage or two from what is called the Sermon on the Mount — that marvellous and precious compendium of the principles of the kingdom of heaven. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; *but I say unto you*, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." Again, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy; *but I say unto you*, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the *sons [huioin]* of your Father which is in heaven; *for* he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust..... Be ye therefore perfect [*teleioi*] even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5: 38-48)

We cannot now dwell upon those blessed sentences; we merely quote them for the reader in order to let him see the immense difference between the Jewish and Christian economy. What was perfectly right and consistent for a Jew, might be quite wrong and inconsistent for a Christian.

This is so plain that a child may see it; and yet, strange to say, many of the Lord's beloved people seem to be clouded on the subject. They judge it to be perfectly right for Christians to deal in

righteousness, and go to war, and to exercise worldly power. Well, then, if it be right for Christians to act thus, we would simply ask, Where is it taught in the New Testament? Where have we a single sentence from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ, or from the pen of the Holy Ghost to warrant or sanction such a thing? As we have said, in reference to other questions that have come before us in our studies on this book, it is of no possible use for us to say, "We think so and so." Our thoughts are simply worth nothing. The one grand question, in all matters of Christian faith and morals is, "What saith the New Testament?" What did our Lord and Master teach, and what did He do? He taught that His people now are not to act as His people of old acted. Righteousness was the Principle of the old economy; grace is the principle of the new.

This was what Christ taught, as may be seen in numberless passages of scripture. And how did He act? Did He deal in righteousness with people? Did He assert His rights? Did He exercise worldly power? Did He go to law? Did He vindicate Himself, or retaliate? When His poor disciples, in utter ignorance of the heavenly principles which He taught, and in total forgetfulness of His whole course of action, said to Him, on one occasion in the which a certain village of the Samaritans refused to receive Him, "Lord, wilt thou that me command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" What was His answer? "He turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save. And they went to another village." It was perfectly consistent with the spirit, principle and genius of the dispensation of which Elias was the exponent and representative, to call down fire from heaven to consume the men sent by a godless king to arrest him. But the blessed Lord was the perfect Exponent and divine Representative of another dispensation altogether His was a life of perfect self-surrender, from first to last. He never asserted His rights. He came to serve and to give. He came to represent God, to be the perfect expression of the Father in every way. The Father's character shone out in His every look, His every word, His every act, His every movement.

Such was the Lord Christ when He was down here among men; and such was His teaching. He did what He taught, and He taught what He did. His words expressed what He was, and His ways illustrated His words. He came to serve and to give; and His whole life was marked by those two things, from the manger to the cross. We may truly say, time would fail us to quote the passages in proof and illustration of this, nor is there any need, inasmuch as the truth of it will hardly be called in question.

Well, then, is not He our great Exemplar in all things? Is it not by His teaching and ways that our course and character as Christians are to be formed? How are we to know how we ought to walk save by hearkening to His blessed words and gazing on His perfect ways? If we as Christians are to be guided and governed by the principles and precepts of the Mosaic economy, then, assuredly, it would be right for us to go to law, to contend for our rights, to engage in war, to destroy our enemies. But then what becomes of the teaching and example of our adorable Lord and Saviour? What of the teachings of the Holy Ghost. What of the New Testament? Is it not as plain as a sunbeam to the reader that for a Christian to do these things is to act in flagrant opposition to the teaching and example of his Lord?

Here, however, we may be met by the old and oft-repeated inquiry, "What would become of the world, what would become of its institutions, what would become of society, if such principles were to be universally dominant?" The infidel historian, in speaking of the early Christians, and their refusal to join the Roman army, sneeringly inquires, "What would have become of the empire, surrounded as it was on all sides, by barbarians, if every one had indulged in such pusillanimous ideas as these?"

We reply at once, If those spiritual and heavenly principles were universally dominant, there

would be no wars, no fighting, and hence, there would be no need of soldiers, no need of standing armies or navies, no need of constabulary or police; there would be no wrong doings, no strife about property, and hence no need of courts of law, judges or magistrates; in short, the world, as it now is, would have an end; the kingdoms of this world would have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

But the plain fact is, those heavenly principles of which we speak, are not intended for the world at all, inasmuch as the world could not adopt them, or act upon them for a single hour; to do so would involve the immediate and complete break up of the present system of things, the dissolution of the entire framework of society as at present constituted.

Hence, the objection of the infidel crumbles into dust beneath our feet, like all other infidel objections, and the questions and the difficulties which are based upon them. They are deprived of every atom of moral force. Heavenly principles are not designed for "this present evil world," at all; they are designed for the church which is not of the world, even as Jesus is not of the world. "If," said our Lord to Pilate, "my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence."

Mark the word "now." By-and-by, the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord; but now He is rejected, and all who belong to Him — His church — His people are called to share His rejection, to follow Him into the outside place, and walk as pilgrims and strangers here below, waiting for the moment when He shall come to receive them to Himself, that where He is, there they may be also.

Now, it is the attempt to mix the world and the church together that produces such terrible confusion. It is one of Satan's special wiles; and it has done more to mar the testimony of the church of God, and hinder its progress than most of us are aware. It involves a complete turning of things upside down, a confounding of things that differ essentially, an utter denial of the church's true character, her position, her walk and her hope. We sometimes hear the expression, "Christian world." What does it mean? It is simply an attempt to combine two things which in their source, nature and character, are as diverse as light and darkness. It is an effort to tack a new piece upon an old garment which, as our Lord tells us, only makes the rent worse.

It is not God's object to Christianise the world, but to call His people out of the world to be a heavenly people, governed by heavenly principles, formed by a heavenly object, and cheered by a heavenly hope. If this be not clearly seen, if the truth as to the church's true calling and course be not realised as a living power in the soul, we shall be sure to make the most grievous mistakes in our work, walk and service. We shall make an entirely wrong use of the Old Testament scriptures, not only on prophetic subjects, but in reference to the whole range of practical life; indeed, it would be utterly impossible to calculate the loss which must result from not seeing the distinctive calling, position and hope of the church of God, her association and identification — her living union with a rejected, risen and glorified Christ.

We cannot attempt to enlarge upon this most precious and interesting theme; but we should just like to point out to the reader an instance or two illustrative of the Spirit's method of quoting and applying Old Testament scripture. Take, for example, the following passage from that lovely thirty-fourth Psalm: "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." Now, mark the way in which the Holy Spirit quotes this passage in the first epistle of Peter. "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil." (1 Peter 3: 12.) Not a word about cutting off. Why is this? Because the Lord is not now acting upon the principle of cutting off. He acted upon it

under the law; and He will act upon it, in the kingdom, by-and-by. But, just now, He is acting in grace, and long-suffering mercy. His face is quite as much and quite as decidedly against all evil-doers as ever it was, or ever it will be, but not now to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The most striking illustration of this marvellous grace and forbearance, and of the difference between the two principles on which we have been dwelling is seen in the fact that the very men who, with wicked hands, crucified His only-begotten and well-beloved Son — evil-doers, surely, of the most pronounced type—instead of being cut off from the earth, were the very first to hear the message of full and free pardon through the blood of the cross.

Now, it may appear to some that we are making too much of the mere omission of a single clause of Old Testament scripture. Let not the reader think so. Even had we but this one instance, it would be a serious mistake to treat it with anything like indifference. But the fact is there are scores of passages of the same character as the one just quoted, all illustrative of the contrast between the Jewish and Christian economies, and also between Christianity and the coming kingdom.

God is now dealing in grace with the world, and so should His people, if they want to be like Him, and such they are called to be. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" and again, "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. (Eph. 5: 1)

This is our model. We are called to copy our Father's example, to imitate Him. He is not going to law with the world; He is not enforcing His rights with the strong hand of power. By-and-by, He will; but just now, in this day of grace, He showers His blessings and benefits, in rich profusion, upon those whose whole life is one of enmity and rebellion against Him.

All this is perfectly marvellous; but thus it is, and we, as Christians, are called to act on this morally glorious principle. It may be said, by some, "How could we ever get on in the world, how could we conduct our business, on such a principle as this? We should be robbed and ruined; designing people would take advantage of us, if they knew that we would not go to law with them; they would take our goods, or borrow our money, or occupy our houses, and refuse to pay us. In short, we could never get on in a world like this, if we did not assert our rights and establish our claims by the strong hand of power. What is the law for but to make people behave themselves? Are not the powers that be ordained of God for the very purpose of maintaining peace and good order in our midst? what would become of society, if we had not soldiers, policemen, magistrates and judges? And if God has ordained that such things should be, why should not His people avail themselves of them? And not only so, but who so fit to occupy places of authority and power, or to wield the sword of justice as the people of God?

There is, no doubt, very great apparent force in all this line of argument. The powers that be are ordained of God. The king, the governor, the judge, the magistrate are, each in his place, the expression of the power of God. It is God who invests each with the power which he wields; it is He who has put the sword into his hand, for the punishment of evil-doers, and the praise of them that do well. We bless God with all our hearts for the constituted authorities of the country. Day and night, in private and in public, we pray for them. It is our bounden duty to obey and submit ourselves to them, in all things, provided always that they do not call upon us to disobey God, or do violence to conscience. If they do this, we must — what? Resist? Nay, but suffer.

All this is perfectly plain. The world, as it now is, could not go on for a single day, if men were not kept in order by the strong hand of power. We could not live, or at least life would be perfectly

intolerable, were it not that evil-doers are kept in terror of the glittering sword of justice. Even as it is, through lack of moral power on the part of those who bear the sword, lawless demagogues are allowed to stir up the evil passions of men to resist the law of the land, and disturb the peace, and threaten the lives and property of well-disposed and harmless subjects of the government.

But, admitting all this, in the fullest possible manner, as every intelligent Christian, every one taught by scripture, most assuredly will, it leaves wholly untouched the question of the Christian's path in this world. Christianity fully recognises all the governmental institutions of the country. It forms no part of the Christian's business to interfere, in any one way, with such institutions. Wherever he is, whatever be the principle or character of the government of the country in which his lot is cast, it is his duty to recognise its municipal and political arrangements, to pay taxes, pray for the government, honour governors in their official capacity, wish well to the legislature and the executive, pray for the peace of the country, live in peace with all, so far as in him lies.

We see all this in the blessed Master Himself, in perfection, blessed be His holy Name for evermore! In His memorable reply to the crafty Herodians, He recognises the principle of subjection to the powers that be: "Render to Caesar the things that be Caesar's; and to God the things that be God's." And not only so, but we find Him also paying tribute, although personally free. They had no right to demand it of Him, as He plainly shows to Peter; and it might be said, "Why did He not appeal?" Appeal! Nay; He shows us something quite different. Hear His exquisite reply to His mistaken apostle, "Notwithstanding, *lest we should offend them*, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take and give unto them *for me and thee*.\* (Matt. 17.)

{\*The fact that the tribute money may have been for the temple does not touch the principle set forth in the text}

And here we get back, with increased moral force, to our thesis, namely, the Christian's path in this world. What is it? He is to follow his Master — to imitate Him in all things. Did He assert His rights? Did He go to law? Did He try to regulate the world? Did He meddle with municipal or political matters? Was He a politician? Did He wield the sword? Did He consent to be a judge or a divider, even when appealed to, as we say, to arbitrate about property? Was not His whole life one of complete self-surrender, from first to last? Was He not continually giving up until, at the cross, He gave up His precious life as a ransom for many?

We shall leave these questions to find their answer deep down in the heart of the Christian reader, and to produce their practical effect in his life. We trust that the foregoing line of truth will enable him to interpret aright such passages as Deuteronomy 13: 9, 10. Our opposition to idolatry, and our separation from evil, in every shape and form, while not less intense and decided, most surely, than that of Israel of old, is not to be displayed in the same way. The church is imperatively called upon to put away evil, and evil-doers, but not after the same fashion as Israel. It is no part of her duty to stone idolaters and blasphemers, or burn witches. The church of Rome has acted upon this principle; and even Protestants — to the shame of Protestantism — have followed her example.\* The church is not called — nay, she is positively and peremptorily forbidden to use the temporal sword. It is a flat denial of her calling, character and mission to do so. When Peter, in ignorant zeal and carnal haste, drew the sword in defence of his blessed Master, he was at once corrected by his Master's faithful word, and instructed by his Master's gracious act: "Put up thy sword into the sheath; for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword." And having thus reproved the act of His mistaken though well-meaning servant, He undid the mischief by His gracious touch. "The weapons of our warfare," says the

inspired apostle, "are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10: 4, 5.)

{\*The burning of Servetus, in 1553, for his theological opinions, is a frightful blot upon the Reformation, and upon the man who sanctioned such an unchristian proceeding. True, the opinions of Servetus were fatally and fundamentally false. He held the Arian heresy, which is simply blasphemy against the Son of God. But to burn him, or any one else for false doctrine was a flagrant sin against the spirit, genius and principle of the gospel, the deplorable fruit of ignorance as to the essential difference between Judaism and Christianity.}

The professing church has gone all astray as to this great and most important question. She has joined herself with the world, and sought to further the cause of Christ by carnal and worldly agency. She has ignorantly attempted to maintain the Christian faith by the most shameful denial of Christian practice. The burning of heretics stands as a most fearful moral blot upon the page of the church's history. We can form no adequate idea of the terrible consequences resulting from the notion that the church was called to take Israel's place and act on Israel's principles.\* It completely falsified her testimony, robbed her of her entirely spiritual and heavenly character, and led her upon a path which ends in Revelation 17 and 18. Let him that readeth understand.

{\*It is one thing for the church to learn from the history of Israel, and another thing altogether to take Israel's place, act on Israel's principles, and appropriate Israel's promises. The former is the church's duty and privilege; the latter has been the church's fatal mistake.}

But we must not pursue this line of things further here. We trust that what has passed before us will lead all whom it may concern to consider the whole subject in the light of the New Testament, and thus be the means, through the infinite goodness of God, of leading them to see the path of entire separation which we as Christians are called to tread; *in the world but not of it*, even as our Lord Christ is not of it. This will solve a thousand difficulties, and furnish a grand general principle which can be practically applied to a thousand details.

We shall now conclude our study of Deuteronomy 13 by a glance at its closing paragraph.

"If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known. *Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently;* and, behold, *if it be truth, and the thing certain,* that such abomination is *wrought among you;* thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword. And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, *for the Lord thy God;* and it shall be an heap for ever; it shall not be built again. And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand; that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and show thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers; when thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God." (Vers. 12-18.)

Here we have instruction of the most solemn and weighty character. But the reader must bear in mind that, solemn and weighty as it most surely is, It is based upon a truth of unspeakable value, and that is Israel's national unity. If we do not see this, we shall miss the real force and meaning of the foregoing quotation. A case is supposed of grave error in some one of the cities of Israel; and the

question might naturally arise, "Are all the cities involved in the evil of one?"\*

{\*It is, of course, needful to bear in mind that the evil referred to in the text was of the very gravest character. It was an attempt to draw the people away from the one living and true God. It touched the very foundation of Israel's national existence. It was not merely a local or municipal question, but a national one.}

Assuredly, inasmuch as the nation was one. The cities and tribes were not independent, they were bound up together by a sacred bond of national unity — a unity which had its centre in the place of the divine presence. Israel's twelve tribes were indissolubly bound together. The twelve loaves on the golden table in the sanctuary formed the beauteous type of this unity, and every true Israelite owned and rejoiced in this unity. The twelve stones in Jordan's bed; the twelve stones on Jordan's bank; Elijah's twelve stones on mount Carmel, all set forth the same grand truth — the indissoluble unity of Israel's twelve tribes. The good king Hezekiah recognised this truth, when he commanded that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for *all Israel*. (2 Chr. 29: 24.) The faithful Josiah owned it and acted upon it, when he carried his reformatory operations into all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel. (2 Chr. 34: 33.) Paul, in his magnificent address before king Agrippa, bears witness to the same truth, when he says, "Unto which promise *our twelve tribes*, instantly serving God, night and day, hope to come."\* (Acts 26: 7.) And when we look forward into the bright future, the same glorious truth shines, with heavenly lustre, in the seventh chapter of Revelation, where we see the twelve tribes sealed and secured for blessing, rest and glory, in connection with a countless multitude of the Gentiles. And, finally, in Revelation 21 we see the names of the twelve tribes engraved on the gates of the holy Jerusalem, the seat and centre of the glory of God and the Lamb.

{\*It may interest the reader to know that the word rendered, in the above passage, "twelve tribes," is singular, to; *dodekaphulon*. It certainly gives very full and vivid expression to the grand idea of indissoluble unity which is so precious to God, and therefore so precious to faith.}

Thus, from the golden table in the sanctuary, to the golden city descending out of heaven from God, we have a marvellous chain of evidence in proof of the grand truth of the indissoluble unity of Israel's twelve tribes.

And, then, if the question be asked, where is this unity to be seen? or how did Elijah, or Hezekiah, or Josiah, or Paul see it? The answer is a very simple one, They saw it by faith; they looked within the sanctuary of God, and there on the golden table, they beheld the twelve loaves setting forth the perfect distinctness and yet the perfect oneness of the twelve tribes. Nothing can be more beautiful. The truth of God must stand for ever. Israel's unity was seen in the past, and it will be seen in the future; and though, like the higher unity of the church, it is unseen in the present, faith believes it all the same, holds it and confesses it in the face of ten thousand hostile influences.

And, now, let us look, for a moment, at the practical application of this most glorious truth, as presented in the closing paragraph of Deuteronomy 13. A report reaches a city in the far north of the land of Israel of serious error taught in a certain city in the extreme south — deadly error, tending to draw the inhabitants away from the true God.

What is to be done? The law is as plain as possible; the path of duty is laid down with such distinctness, that it only needs a single eye to see it, and a devoted heart to tread it. "Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently." This surely is simple enough.

But some of the citizens might say, "What have we in the north to do with error taught in the south? Thank God, there is no error taught amongst us; it is entirely a local question; each city is

responsible for the maintenance of the truth within its own walls. How could we be expected to examine into every case of error which may spring up here and there all over the land; our whole time would be taken up, so that we could not attend to our fields, our vineyards, our oliveyards, our flocks and our herds. It is quite as much as we can do to keep our own borders all right. We certainly condemn the error, and if any one holding or teaching it were to come here, and that we knew of it, we should most decidedly shut our gates against him. Beyond this, we do not feel ourselves responsible to go."

Now what, we may ask, would be the reply of the faithful Israelite to all this line of argument which, in the judgement of mere nature, seems so exceedingly plausible? A very simple and very conclusive one, we may be sure. He would say it was simply a denial of Israel's unity. If every city and every tribe were to take independent ground, then verily the high priest might take the twelve loaves off the golden table before the Lord and scatter them here and there and everywhere; our unity is gone; we are all broken up into independent atoms having no national ground of action.

Besides, the commandment is most distinct and explicit, "Thou shalt inquire, and make search, and ask diligently." We are bound therefore, on the double ground of the nation's unity and the plain command of our covenant God. It is of no possible use to say there is no error taught amongst us, unless we want to separate ourselves from the nation; if we belong to Israel, then verily the error is taught amongst us, as the word says — "Such abomination is wrought *among you*." How far does the "you" extend? As far as the national boundaries. Error taught at Dan affects those dwelling at Beersheba. How is this? Because Israel is one.

And then the word is so plain, so distinct, so emphatic. We are bound to search into it. We cannot fold our arms and sit down in cold indifference and culpable neutrality, else we shall be involved in the awful consequences of this evil; yea, we are involved until we clear ourselves of it by judging it, with unflinching decision, and unsparing severity.

Such, beloved reader, would be the language of every loyal Israelite, and such his mode of acting in reference to error and evil wherever found. To speak or act otherwise, would simply be indifference as to the truth and glory of God, and independency as regards Israel. For any to say that they were not responsible to act according to the instructions given in Deuteronomy 13: 12-18, would be a complete surrender of the truth of God, and of Israel's unity. All were bound to act or else be involved in the judgement of the guilty city.

And surely if all this was true in Israel of old, it is not less true in the church of God now. We may rest assured that anything like indifference, where Christ is concerned, is most hateful to God. It is the eternal purpose and counsel of God to glorify His Son; that every knee should bow to Him, and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father. "That all should honour the Son even as they honour the Father."

Hence, if Christ be dishonoured, if doctrines be taught derogatory to the glory of His Person, the efficacy of His work, or the virtue of His offices, we are bound by every motive which could possibly act on our hearts to reject, with stern decision, such doctrines. Indifference or neutrality, where the Son of God is concerned, is high treason in the judgement of the high court of Heaven. We would not be indifferent if it were a question of our own reputation, our personal character, or our personal or family property; we should be thoroughly alive to anything affecting ourselves or those dear to us. How much more deeply ought we to feel in reference to what concerns the glory and honour, the Name and cause of the One to whom we owe our present and everlasting all — -the One who laid aside His glory, came down into this wretched world, and died a shameful death upon the cross in order to save us from the everlasting flames of hell! Could we be indifferent to Him? Neutral where He is concerned? God, in

His great mercy forbid!

No; reader, it must not be. The honour and glory of Christ must be more to us than all beside — reputation, property, family, friends, all must stand aside if the claims of Christ are involved. Does not the Christian reader own this, with all the energy of his ransomed soul? We feel persuaded he does even now; and oh! how shall we feel when we see Him face to face, and stand in the full light of His moral glory? With what feelings shall we then contemplate the idea of indifference or neutrality with respect to Him?

And are we not justified in declaring that next to the glory of the Head stands the great truth of the unity of His body, the church? Unquestionably. If the nation of Israel was one, how much more is the body of Christ one! And if independency was wrong in Israel, how much more wrong in the church of God! The plain fact is this, the idea of independency cannot be maintained for a moment, in the light of the New Testament. As well might we say that the hand is independent of the foot, or the eye of the ear, as assert that the members of the body of Christ are independent one of another. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; *so also is Christ*" — a very remarkable statement, setting forth the intimate union of Christ and the church — "*For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body*, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more, those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary; and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need; but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked. *That there should be no schism in the body*; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. NOW YE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, AND MEMBERS IN PARTICULAR." (1 Cor. 12: 12-27.)

We do not attempt to dwell upon this truly marvellous scripture; but we earnestly desire to call the attention of the Christian reader to the special truth which it so forcibly sets before us — a truth which intimately concerns every true believer on the face of the earth, namely, *that he is a member of the body of Christ*. This is a great practical truth, involving, at once, the very highest privileges, and the very weightiest responsibilities. It is not merely a true doctrine, a sound principle, or an orthodox opinion; it is a living fact, designed to be a divine power in the soul. The Christian can no longer view himself as an independent person, having no association, no vital link with others. He is livingly bound up with all the children of God, all true believers, all the members of Christ's body upon the face of the earth.

"By one Spirit are we all baptised into one body." The church of God is not a mere club, or a society, an association, or a brotherhood; it is a body united by the Holy Ghost to the Head, in heaven; and all its members on earth are indissolubly bound together. This being so, it follows of necessity, that all the members of the body are affected by the state and walk of each. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." That is, all the members of the body. If there is anything wrong with the foot,

the hand feels it. How? Through the head. So in the church of God, if anything goes wrong with an individual member, all feel it through the Head with whom all are livingly connected by the Holy Ghost.

Some find it very hard to grasp this great truth. But there it stands plainly revealed on the inspired page, not to be reasoned about, or submitted, in any way, to the human judgement, but simply to be believed. It is a divine revelation. No human mind could ever have conceived such a thought; but God reveals it, faith believes it, and walks in the blessed power of it.

It may be the reader feels disposed to ask, "How is it possible for the state of one believer to affect those who know nothing about it?" The answer is, "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." All the members of what? Is it of any mere local assembly or company who may happen to know or be locally connected with the person concerned Nay, but the members of the body wherever they are. Even in the case of Israel, where it was only a national unity, we have seen that if there was evil in any one of their cities, all were concerned, all involved, all affected. Hence, when Achan sinned, although there were myriads of people totally ignorant of the fact, the Lord said, "*Israel* hath sinned," and the whole assembly suffered a humiliating defeat.

Can reason grasp this weighty truth? No; but faith can. If we listen to reason we shall believe nothing; but, by the grace of God, we shall not listen to reason, but believe what God says because He says it.

And oh! beloved Christian reader, what an immense truth is this unity of the body! What practical consequences flow out of it! How eminently calculated it is to minister to holiness of walk and life! How watchful it would make us over ourselves, our habits, our ways, our whole moral condition! How careful it would make us not to dishonour the Head to whom we are united, or grieve the Spirit by whom we are united, or injure the members with whom we are united!

But we must close this chapter, much as we should like to linger over one of the very grandest, most profound, and most powerfully formative truths that can possibly engage our attention. May the Spirit of God make it a living power in the soul of every true believer on the face of the earth!