

The Life and Times of Elijah.

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Introduction

The exercise of prophetic ministry in Israel, of old, was always a proof of the nation's decline. So long as the great national institutions were maintained in their vigour, and the machinery of the Mosaic economy carried out according to its original design, there was no need of anything extraneous, and therefore the voice of a prophet was not heard; but when failure had set in — when those laws and institutions which had been enacted, and set on foot by God Himself, ceased to be carried out in their pristine spirit and power, then there was a demand for something additional, and that something was supplied by the energy of the Spirit in the prophets.

There were no materials in the whole range of Levitical rites and ceremonies for the formation or maintenance of such a ministry as that of Elijah the Tishbite; there was too much of the carnal element in them for that. The message of a prophet could only be delivered in the power of the Holy Ghost, and therefore, so long as the Levitical institutions fulfilled their end, the Spirit had no need to put forth any fresh energy.

There was no need of such a minister as Elijah in the days of Solomon's glory and greatness; all was in order then — the whole machinery was in a sound condition — every wheel and every screw worked effectually in its own place — the king on the throne wielded the sceptre for the maintenance of Israel's civil interest — the priest in the temple discharged in due order his religious functions — the Levites and the singers were all at their respective posts: in a word, all moved on in such a measure of order as to render the voice of a prophet unnecessary.

However, the scene soon changed; the mighty tide of evil soon set in, and swept away the very foundations of Israel's civil and religious system: ungodly men, in process of time, ascended the throne of David, and sacrificed the interests of the people of God at the shrine of their own vile lusts; and to such a height did wickedness rise, that at last the wicked Ahab, with his consort Jezebel, occupied that throne from which Solomon had administered the judgement of God.

Jehovah could no longer forbear; He could not allow the tide of evil to rise any higher, and He therefore sent forth from His quiver a polished shaft to pierce the conscience of Israel, if haply He might bring them back to their place of happy allegiance to Himself. This shaft was none other than Elijah the Tishbite — the bold and uncompromising witness for God who stood in the breach at a moment when every one seemed to have fled from the field of conflict, unable to stem the overwhelming torrent.

But, before we proceed to the consideration of the life and ministry of this remarkable man, it may be well just to make one observation upon the two-fold character of prophetic ministry. We shall find, in considering the ministry of the prophets, that, not only had each prophet a distinct ministry committed to him, but that, also, in one and the same prophet, there was a double purpose carried out: the Lord dealt with the conscience about present evil, while He pointed the eye of the faithful one to the future glory. The prophet, by the Holy Ghost, brought the light and truth of God to bear upon the heart and conscience — he laid open fully and faithfully the hidden chambers of evil within — he spoke plainly of the people's sad declension and departure from God, and removed the foundations of that false religious system which they were erecting around them.

But the prophet did not stop here; it would have been sad indeed had he been confined to the humiliating story of Israel's failure, and the departure of their ancient glory; he was able, through grace, to add to the solemn announcement, "O Israel, *thou* hast destroyed thyself," the consolatory assurance, "but *in Me is thy help*"; and herein we have developed to us the two elements which composed the ministry of the prophets, namely, Israel's total failure, and God's triumphant grace — the departure of the glory as connected with, and based upon, the obedience of Israel, and its final return and establishment as connected with, and based upon, the obedience and death of the Son of God.

Truly, we may say, this was ministry of a very elevated and holy character; it was a glorious commission to be told to stand amid the fragments of a crushed and ruined system, and there to point to the time — the happy time — when God would display Himself in the immortal results of His own redeeming grace, to the joy of His ransomed ones in Heaven and on earth.

Part 1

THE PROPHET'S FIRST MESSAGE

The reign of Ahab, the son of Omri, was a dark and dreary time for the house of Israel; iniquity had risen to a fearful height; the sins of Jeroboam were little when compared with the black catalogue of Ahab's transgressions; the wicked Jezebel, the daughter of the uncircumcised king of the Zidonians, was chosen to be the partner of his heart and his throne, and this circumstance alone was enough to secure the oppression of Israel, and the entire subversion of their ancient worship. In a word, the Spirit sums up the whole matter with these words, "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (1 Kings 16: 33). This was saying enough for him. The whole line of kings from Jeroboam down, had done evil in the sight of the Lord; but to do more than all of them, marked a character of no ordinary degree of guilt. Yet such was Ahab — such was the man that occupied the throne of God's ancient people, when Elijah the Tishbite entered upon his course of prophetic testimony.

There is something particularly sorrowful to the spirit in contemplating a scene like that which the reign of Ahab presents. Every light had been extinguished, every voice of testimony hushed; the firmament in which many a brilliant luminary had shone from time to time, had become overcast with dark clouds; death seemed to spread itself over the whole scene, and the devil to carry every thing with a high hand, when, at length, God in His mercy to His poor oppressed and misguided people, raised up a bright and powerful witness for Himself in the person of our prophet. But then it is just at such a time that a real witness for God is likely to produce the most powerful effect, and exert the most extensive influence. It is after a long drought that a shower is likely to be felt in all its refreshing virtue. The state of things at this time in Israel called for some mighty man of valour to come forth and act in divine energy against the tide of evil.

However, it is instructive to observe that Elijah is presented to us, in common with all his fellow-servants, in circumstances of secret training and exercise ere he appears in public. This is a feature in the history of all the servants of God, not excepting Him who was emphatically *the Servant*; all have been trained in secret with God previous to their acting in public with man; and, moreover, those who have entered most deeply into the meaning and value of the secret training will be found the most effective and permanent in their public service and testimony. That man has much cause to tremble for his destiny who has arrived at a position in public which exceeds the measure of his secret exercise of soul before God; he will assuredly come short.

If the superstructure exceed the measure of the foundation below, the building will totter or fall. If a tree shoot forth its branches into the air to a degree exceeding the depth of its roots, it will be

unequal to the violence of the storm, and will come to the ground: so is it with the man who enters a place of public service; he must be *alone with God*; his spirit must be exercised in private; he must pass through the deep waters in his own experience, otherwise he will be but a theorist, and not a witness; his ear must be opened to hear, ere his tongue can be fitted to speak as the learned.

What has become of all those apparently brilliant lights which have suddenly flashed across the path of the Church of God from time to time, and as suddenly disappeared behind the cloud? Whence came they, and whither have they gone, and why have they been so evanescent? They were but sparks of human kindling; there was no depth, no power of endurance, no reality in them; hence they shone for a time, and speedily vanished away, producing no result save to increase the darkness around, or at least the sad consciousness thereof.

Every true minister of God should be able, in measure, to say with the apostle, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1: 3-4).

1 Kings 17, gives us Elijah's first appearance in public; but the Spirit, in James, has graciously furnished us with the account of a yet earlier stage in his history, and one full of instruction to us, be our sphere of service what it may. The sacred historian introduces our prophet in a way which might seem abrupt. He presents him to us as at once boldly entering upon his sphere of labour, with this grand and solemn announcement, "Thus saith the Lord."

But he does not tell us, in this place, anything of the prophet's previous exercise; he speaks not of how it was he came to learn how the Lord would have him to speak: of all this, though most important for us to know, the Spirit in the historian says nothing; He simply introduces him to our notice in the holy exercise of a power which he had obtained in secret with God: He shows us Elijah acting in public, and nothing more. But the apostle lets us into the secret of Elijah's prayer to *God*, before ever he came out in active service before *man*. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (James 5: 17).

Now, if the Holy Ghost had not informed us about this important fact, by the pen of James, we should have lacked a very powerful incentive to prayer; but Scripture is perfect — divinely perfect, lacking nothing that it ought to have, and having nothing that it ought to lack; hence it is that James tells us of Elijah's secret moments of prayer and wrestling, and shows him to us in the retirement of the mountains of Gilead, where he had, no doubt, mourned over the lamentable state of things in Israel, and also fortified his spirit for the part he was about to act.

This circumstance in the life of our prophet teaches us a truly profitable lesson. We live in a time of more than usual barrenness and spiritual dearth. The state of the Church may well remind us of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. We have not merely to cope with evils which have characterised by-gone ages, but also with the matured corruption of a time wherein the varied evils of the Gentile world have become connected with, and covered by, the cloak of the Christian profession.

And when we turn to the state of those whose knowledge of truth and high profession might naturally encourage the expectation of more healthy and vigorous Christian action, we find alas! in many that the knowledge is but cold and uninfluential theory, and the profession but superficial, having no power over the feelings and affections of the inward man. Amongst persons of this class it will also be found that the truth of God possesses little or no interest, or attractive power; they know so much in the intellect that nothing can be presented to them with which they are not already acquainted: hence

the lifelessness with which they harken to every statement of truth.

In such a condition of things, what is the resource of the faithful one? To what should he betake himself? Prayer; patient, persevering prayer; secret communion with God; deep and real exercise of soul in His presence, where alone we can arrive at a true estimate of ourselves, and things around us: and not only so, but also obtain spiritual power to act for God amongst our brethren, or toward the world without.

“Elias was a man of like passions with us;” and he found himself in the midst of dark apostasy, and wide-spread alienation of heart from God. He beheld the faithful failing from amongst the children of men; he saw the tide of evil rising around him, and the light of truth fast fading away: the altar of Baal had displaced the altar of Jehovah, and the cries of the priests of Baal had drowned the sacred songs of the Levites; in a word, the whole thing was one vast mass of ruin before his view. He felt it; he wept over it; he did more — “he *prayed earnestly*.”

Here was the resource — the sure unfailing resource of the grieved prophet; he retreated into the presence of God; he poured out his spirit there, and wept over the ruin and sorrow of his beloved people; he was really engaged about the sad condition of things around him, and therefore prayed about it — prayed as he ought, not coldly, formally, or occasionally, but “earnestly,” and perseveringly.

This is a blessed example for us. Never was there a time when fervent prayer was so much needed in the Church of God as at this moment. The devil seems to be exerting all his malignant power to crush the spirits and hinder the activities of the people of God; with some, he makes use of their public engagements; with others, their domestic trials; and with others, personal sorrow and conflict; in a word, “There are many adversaries,” and nothing but the mighty power of God can enable us to cope with them and come off victorious.

But Elijah was not merely called to pass unscathed, as an individual, through the evil; he was called to exert an influence upon others: he was called to act for God in a degenerate age; he had to make an effort to bring his nation back to the God of their fathers; how much more, therefore, did he need to seek the Lord in private; to gather up spiritual strength in the presence of God, whereby alone he could not only escape himself, but be made an instrument of blessing to others also. Elijah felt all this, and therefore “he prayed earnestly that it might not rain.”

Thus it was he brought God into the scene, nor did he fail of his object. “It rained not.” God will never refuse to act when faith addresses Him on the ground of His own glory, and we know it was simply upon this ground that the prophet addressed Him. It could afford him no pleasure to see the land turned into a parched and sterile wilderness, or his brethren wasted by famine and all its attendant horrors. No; it was simply to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers — to bring the nation back to its early faith — to eradicate those principles of error which had taken fast hold of the minds of the people: for such ends as these did our prophet pray earnestly that it might not rain, and God darkened and heard, because the prayer was the offspring of His Spirit in the soul of His dear servant.

Truly we may say, *it is good to wait upon God*: it not only leads to happy results as seen in God's answer to it, but there is also much sweetness and comfort in the exercise itself. How truly happy it is for the tried and tempted believer to find himself along with God! how blessed to allow his spirit to flow out, and his affections to ascend to Him who alone is able to lift him above the depressing power of present things into the calmness and light of His own most blessed presence! May we all be found, then, waiting more upon God — making the very difficulties of our day an occasion for drawing near to the mercy-seat, and then we shall not only exert a salutary influence in our respective spheres, but our own heart will be comforted and encouraged by private waiting upon our Father, for the promise

has never yet failed, "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength!" Precious promise! May we make full proof of it!

Thus, Elijah the Tishbite entered upon his path of service; he came forth armed from the sanctuary of God with divine power to deal with, and act upon, his fellow-men. There is much power in the words, "as the Lord God of Israel liveth *before whom I stand*"; they bring before us in a very special way the basis on which the soul of this eminent servant of God was resting, as also the principle which sustained him in his course of service. He stood before "*the Lord God of Israel,*" and so standing, he could speak with a measure of power and authority.

But how very little did Ahab know of the secret exercises of Elijah's soul, ere he had thus come forth to speak to his conscience! He knew not that Elijah had been on his knees in secret before he presented himself in public. He knew nothing of all this, but Elijah did, and hence he could boldly confront the very head of the evil; he could speak to king Ahab himself, and announce to him the judgements of an offended God. In this, our prophet may be viewed as a fine model for all who are called upon to speak in the name of the Lord.

All who are so called should feel themselves, in virtue of their divine commission, entirely lifted above the influence of human opinion. How often does it happen that men who can speak with a measure of power and liberty in the presence of some, are before others cramped, and, it may be, altogether hindered! This we know would not be the case did they but realize with distinctness, not only that they had received their commission from on high, but also that they executed it in the presence of *the living God*. The messenger of the Lord should never be affected by those to whom he delivers his message; he should be above them, while at the same time he takes the humble place of a servant. His language should be, "But with me it is a very small matter that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgement" (*anthropines hemeras*).

This was pre-eminently the case with our blessed Master. How little was He affected by the thoughts or judgements of those to whom He spoke! They might thwart, oppose, and reject, but that never led Him for a moment to lose sight of the fact that He was sent of God. He carried with Him, throughout His entire course, the holy, soul-sustaining assurance expressed in the synagogue of Nazareth, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor," etc. (Luke 4: 18). Here was the basis of His ministry as Son of man. It was "in the power of the Spirit," and hence He ever felt Himself to be the minister of God, and as such raised quite above the influence of those with whom He had to do. "My doctrine is not Mine," said He, "but His that sent Me." He could truly say, "The Lord God of Israel, *before whom I stand:*" He was ever "the Lord's messenger," speaking "in the Lord's message unto the people" (Hag. 1: 13).

And should not all who fill the place of servants or messengers of the Lord, seek to know more of this holy elevation of mind above men and circumstances? Should they not aim at being less under the power of human thoughts and feelings? What have we to do with the thoughts of men about us? Nothing. Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; whether they will accept, or whether they will reject; whether we shall be highly esteemed for our work's sake, or made of no reputation — still let it be our aim, our constant aim, to "approve ourselves as the ministers of God."

But observe further, the power and authority with which our prophet speaks, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word." He felt such perfect assurance in the fact that he was standing in the Lord's presence, and speaking the Lord's words, yea, that he was thoroughly identified with Him, that he could say, "according to my word."

Such was the privilege of the Lord's messenger, when delivering the Lord's message. Such are the

wondrous results of secret prayer. “Elias was a man of like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” May it prove a powerful incentive to all those who desire to act for God in this day of weakness! We want to be more in the presence of God, in the real sense of our need; if we felt our need more, we should have more of *the spirit of prayer*. And it is the spirit of prayer we want — that spirit which puts God in His own proper place of *giver*; and us into our proper place of *receivers*.

But how often are we deceived by the mere form of prayer — with the formal utterance of words which have no reality in them! There are many who make a kind of god of prayer — many who let their very prayers get between their souls and the God of prayer. This is a great snare. We should always take care that our prayers are the natural outflow of the Spirit within us, and not of the mere superstitious performance of what we think ought to be done.

[I would offer a few words here on the subject of united prayer among Christians, an exercise which seems so sadly neglected by us at a time when it is so specially needed. It will be generally found that collective life and energy. service and testimony, will be in proportion to the measure of collective waiting upon God. Where there are not public prayer-meetings. there is sure to be a lack of service and testimony; the interests of the Church of God are not realized, and, as a consequence. the things of earth occupy a place of undue prominence in the minds of Christians. If *we felt* our collective weakness, there would be a collective utterance of that weakness, and, moreover, a renewal of our collective strength. Now I think it will be found that all important movements among the people of God have been the result of united heartfelt prayer. And surely we may say it is natural that it should be so. We are not to expect that God will pour forth His reviving grace on those who rest satisfied with their deadness and coldness. The word is, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” If we will not open our mouths, how can they be filled? If we are satisfied with what we have, how can we expect to get more? Let it be, therefore, the aim of the Christian reader to stir up his fellow-Christians around him to seek the Lord in united prayer, and, he may be assured of it, the happy results evils speedily be seen.]

Part 2

THE PROPHET IN RETIREMENT

Hardly had our prophet delivered his testimony when he was again called away from public observation into retirement and solitude. “And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and *hide thyself* by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.”

These words are full of deep instruction. Elijah had taken a very prominent place in the presence of Israel, and though his having done so was the result of previous retirement and exercise of soul in the presence of God, yet did the faithful One for whom he was acting see it needful to have him away again into privacy, that so he might not only occupy a high place in the presence of his brethren, but also a low place in the presence of God. All this is full of teaching for us. We must be kept low. Flesh must be crushed. Our time of *training in secret*, must far exceed our time of *acting in public*. Elijah stood, as it were, for a brief moment, in public testimony, and that too, after having been alone with God, and he must at once be led away into seclusion for three years and a half.

Oh! how little can man be trusted — how badly can we bear to be set in a place of honour! How soon we forget ourselves and God! We shall see presently, how much our honoured prophet needed to be thus kept in retirement. The Lord knew his temperament and tendencies, and dealt with him accordingly. It is truly humiliating to think how little we can be trusted in the way of public testimony for Christ; we are so full of self; we vainly imagine that *we* are something, and that God will do much by us hence it is that we need, like our prophet, to be told to “hide ourselves,” to get away from public

view, that we may learn, in the holy calmness of our Father's presence, our own proper nothingness.

And the spiritual mind can at once see the importance of all this. It would never do to be always before the eye of man; no creature could stand it: the Son of God Himself constantly sought the solitary place, apart from the din and bustle of the city, where He might enjoy a quiet retreat for prayer, and of secret communion with God. "Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives." "Rising up a great while before day, He departed into a solitary place and there prayed."

But it was not because He needed to hide Himself, for His entire path on earth was, blessed be His name, a hiding of self. The spirit of His ministry is brought out in these words, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me." Would that all the Lord's servants knew more of this! We all want to hide self more — much more than we do.

The devil acts so on our poor silly hearts; our thoughts so revolve round ourselves; yea, we so often make our very service, and the truth of God, a pedestal on which to show forth our own glory. No marvel, therefore, that we are not much used: how could the Lord make use of agents who will not give Him the glory? How can the Lord use Israel, when Israel is ever prone to vaunt himself? Let us then pray to be made more truly humble, more self-abased, more willing to be looked upon as "a dead dog, or a flea," or "the off-scouring of all things," or nothing at all, for the name of our gracious Master.

In His lonely retreat by the brook Cherith, Elijah was called to sojourn many days; not, however, without a precious promise from the Lord God of Israel in reference to his needed provision, for he went accompanied by the gracious assurance, "I *have commanded* the ravens to feed thee there." The Lord would take care of His dear servant while hidden from public view, and minister to his necessities, even though it should be by the instrumentality of ravens. What a strange provision! What a continual exercise of faith was there involved in being called to look out for the daily visits of birds that would naturally desire to devour the prophet's meal! But was it upon the ravens that Elijah lived? Surely not. His soul reposed in the precious words, "I *have commanded*." It was God, and not the ravens, for him. He had the God of Israel with him in his hiding place — he lived by faith. And how truly blessed for the spirit thus to cling, in unaffected simplicity, to the promise of God!

How happy to be lifted above the power of circumstances, in the apprehension of God's presence and care! Elijah was hiding himself from man, while God was showing Himself to Elijah. This will ever be so. Let us only set self aside, and we may be assured that God will reveal Himself in power to our souls. If Elijah had persisted in occupying a prominent and a public place, he would have been left unprovided for. *He must be hidden*, for the streams of divine provision and refreshment only flowed for him in the place of retirement and self-abasement. "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee *there*." If the prophet were anywhere else but "*there*" he would have gotten nothing at all from God.

What teaching for us in all this! Why are our souls so lean and barren? Why do we so little drink of the streams of divinely provided refreshment? Because we are not hiding self sufficiently. We cannot expect that God will strengthen and refresh us for the purpose of earthly display. He will strengthen us for Himself. If we could but realize more that we are "not our own," we should enjoy more spiritual power.

But there is also much meaning in the little word "*there*." Elijah should be "*there*" and nowhere else, in order to enjoy God's supplies; and just so is it with the believer now; he must know where God would have him to be, and there abide. We have no right to choose our place, for the Lord "orders the bounds of our habitation," and happy for us is it to know this, and submit to His wise and gracious ordering. It was at the brook Cherith, and there alone, that the ravens were commanded to convey bread and flesh to the prophet; he might wish to sojourn elsewhere, but, if he had done so he should have

provided for himself: how much happier to allow God to provide for him! So Elijah felt, and therefore he went to Cherith, for the Lord had “commanded the ravens to feed him *there*.” The divinely appointed provision is alone to be had in the divinely appointed place.

Thus was Elijah conveyed from solitude to solitude. He had come from the mountains of Gilead, with a message from the Lord God of Israel to Israel's king, and having delivered that message, he was again conducted, by the hand of God, into unbroken solitude, there to have his spirit exercised, and his strength renewed in the presence of God.

And who would be without those sweet and holy lessons learnt in secret? Who would lack the training of a Father's hand? Who would not long to be led away from beneath the eye of man, and above the influence of things earthly and natural, into the pure light of the Divine Presence, where self and all around are viewed and estimated according to the judgement of the sanctuary? In a word, who would not desire to be alone with God? — alone, not as a merely sentimental expression, but really, practically, and experimentally alone; alone like Moses at the mount of God; alone, like Aaron in the holiest of all; alone, like our prophet at the brook Cherith; alone, like John in the island of Patmos; and above all, alone, like Jesus on the mount.

And here, let us inquire what it is to be alone with God. It is to have self and the world set aside; to have the spirit impressed with thoughts of God and His perfections and excellencies; to allow all His goodness to pass before us; to see Him as the great Actor *for* us, and *in us*; to get above flesh and its reasonings, earth and its ways, Satan and his accusations; and, above all, to feel that we have been introduced into this holy solitude, simply and exclusively through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These are some of the results of our being alone with God. But, in truth, it is a term which one can hardly explain to another, for each spiritually-minded saint will have his own feelings on the subject, and will best understand what it means in his own case. This, at least, we may well crave, to be truly found in the secret of our Father's presence; to be done with the weariness and wretchedness of endeavouring to maintain *our character*; and to know the joy, the liberty, the peace, and unaffected simplicity of the sanctuary, where God in all His varied attributes and perfections rises before our souls and fills us with bliss ineffable.

To find my place within the veil,
To know that God is mine
Are springs of joy that will not fail,
Unspeakable, divine.

But, though Elijah was thus happily alone by the brook Cherith, he was not exempt from the deep exercise of soul consequent upon a life of faith. The ravens, it is true, in obedience to the divine command, paid him their daily visits, and Cherith flowed on in its tranquil and uninterrupted course, so that the prophet's bread was given him, and his water was sure, and thus, as far as he was personally concerned, he might forget that the rod of judgement was stretched out over the land.

But faith must be put to the test. The man of faith cannot be allowed to settle on his lees; he must be emptied from vessel to vessel; the child of God must pass from form to form in the school of Christ, and having mastered, through grace, the difficulties of one, he must be called to grapple with those of another. It was, therefore, needful that the soul of the prophet should be tried in order that it might be seen whether he was depending upon Cherith, or upon the Lord God of Israel; hence, “it came to pass,

after awhile, that *the brook dried up.*”

We are ever in danger, through the infirmity of our flesh, of having our faith propped up by circumstances, and when these are favourable, we think our faith is strong, and *vice versa*. But faith never looks at circumstances; it looks straight to God — it has to do exclusively with Him and His promises. Thus it was with Elijah; it mattered little to him whether Cherith continued to flow or not; he could say:

In vain the creature streams are dry,
I have a fountain still.

God was his fountain, his unfailing exhaustless fountain. The brook might yield to the influence of the prevailing drought, but no drought could affect God, and the prophet knew this; he knew that the Word of the Lord was as certain a portion, and as sure a basis in the drying up of Cherith, as it had been during the time of his sojourn upon its banks; and so it was, for “the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there; behold I *have commanded* a widow woman there to sustain thee.”

Elijah's faith must still rest upon the same immutable basis. “I have commanded.” How truly blessed is this! Circumstances change; human things fail; creature streams are dried up, but God and His Word are the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Nor does the prophet seem to have been the least disturbed by this fresh order from on high. No; for, like Israel of old, he had learned to pitch and strike his tent according to the movement of Jehovah's cloud. The camp, of old, was called to watch attentively the wheels of that heavenly chariot which rolled onward toward the land of rest, and here and there halted in the wilderness to find them out a resting-place; and just so was it with Elijah; he would take up his solitary post by the banks of Cherith, or tread his weary way to Zarephath of Zidon in undeviating obedience to “the word of the Lord.”

Israel of old were not allowed to have any plans of their own; Jehovah planned and arranged everything for them. He told them when and where they were to move and halt; at various intervals He signified His sovereign pleasure to them by the movement of the cloud above their heads. “Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed” (Num. 9: 22-23).

Such was the happy condition of the Lord's redeemed, while passing from Egypt to Canaan. They never could have *their own way*, as regards their movements. If an Israelite had refused to move when the cloud moved, or to halt when it halted, *he would* have been left to starve in the wilderness. The rock and the manna followed them while they followed Jehovah; in other words, food and refreshment were alone to be found in the path of simple obedience. Just so was it with Elijah; he was not permitted to have a will of his own; he could not fix the time of his sojourn at Cherith, nor the time for his removal to Zarephath; “the word of the Lord” settled all for him, and when he obeyed it he found sustenance.

What a lesson for the Christian in all this! The path of obedience is alone the path of happiness. If we were more successful in doing violence to self, our spiritual condition would be far more vigorous and healthy than it is. Nothing so ministers to health and vigour of soul as undeviating obedience; there is strength gained by the very effort to obey. This is true in the case of all, but specially so as regards those who stand in the capacity of ministers of the Lord. Such must walk in obedience if they would be used in ministry.

How could Elijah have said, as he afterwards did, upon mount Carmel, “If the Lord be God, *follow Him*, “ if his own private path had exhibited a wilful and rebellious spirit? Impossible. The path of a servant must be the path of obedience, otherwise he ceases to be a servant. The word *servant* is as inseparably linked with *obedience*, as is *work* with *workman*. “A servant,” as another has observed, “must move when the bell rings.”

Would that we were all more alive to the sound of our Master's bell, and more ready to run in the direction in which it summons us. “*Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.*” Here is our proper language. Whether the Word of the Lord summons us from our retirement into the midst of our brethren, or from thence into retirement again, may our language ever be, “Speak, Lord for Thy servant heareth.” The Word of the Lord, and the attentive ear of a servant, are all we need to carry us safely and happily onward.

Now, this path of obedience is by no means an easy one; it involves the constant abandonment of self, and can only be pursued as the eye is steadily kept on God, and the conscience kept under the action of His truth. True, there is a rich reward in every act of obedience, yet flesh and blood must be set aside, and this is no easy work. Witness the path of our prophet. He was first called to take his place by the brook Cherith, to be fed by ravens! How could flesh and blood understand this?

Then again, when the brook failed, he is called away to a distant city of Zidon, there to be nourished by a destitute widow who seemed to be at the very point of dying of starvation! Here was the command: “Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.”

And what confirmation did Elijah derive from appearances, upon his arrival at this place? None whatever; but everything to fill him with doubts and fears had he been looking at circumstances in the matter. “So he arose, and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks; and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”

This was the scene that presented itself to the eye of the prophet when he had arrived at his divinely appointed destination. Truly a gloomy and depressing one to flesh and blood. But Elijah conferred not with flesh and blood; his spirit was sustained by the immutable Word of Jehovah; his confidence was based upon the faithfulness of God, and he needed no aid from things around him. The horizon might look dark and heavy to mortal vision, but the eye of faith could pierce the clouds, and see beyond them all “the firm foundation which is laid for faith in Jehovah's excellent word.”

How precious, then, is the Word of God! Well might the psalmist say, “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever.” Precious heritage! Pure, incorruptible, immortal truth! How should we bless our God for having made it our inalienable portion — a portion which, when all sublunary things shall have vanished from view, when the world shall have passed away and the lust thereof, when all flesh shall have been consumed as withered grass, shall prove to the faithful a real, an eternal, an enduring substance. “Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.”

But what were the circumstances which met the prophet's eye upon his approach to Zarephath? A widow and her son starving, two sticks, and a handful of meal! And yet the word was, “I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.” How trying, how deeply mysterious, was all this!

Elijah, however, staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. He knew that it was the Most High and Almighty God, the possessor of Heaven and earth, that was to meet his necessities; hence, though there had been neither oil nor meal, it would have made no matter to him, for he looked beyond circumstances to the God of circumstances. He saw not the widow, but God. He looked not at the handful of meal, but at the divine command; therefore his spirit was perfectly calm and unruffled in the midst of circumstances which would have crushed the spirit of one walking by sight, and he was able, without a shadow of doubt, to say "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Here we have the reply of faith to the language of unbelief. "Thus saith the Lord" settles everything. The moment the spirit apprehends God's promise, there is an end to the reasonings of unbelief. Unbelief puts circumstances between the soul and God; faith puts God between the soul and circumstances. This is a very important difference. May we walk in the power and energy of faith, to the praise of Him whom faith ever honours!

But there is another point in this lovely scene to be particularly noticed: it is the way in which death ever hovers around the spirit of one not walking by faith. "That we may eat it and die" is the language of the widow. Death and unbelief are inseparably linked together. The spirit can only be conducted along the path of life by the energy of faith: hence if faith be not in energy, there is no life, no power, no elevation.

Thus was it with this poor widow: her hope of life was based upon the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil: beyond these she saw no springs of life, no hope of continuance. Her soul knew not as yet the real blessedness of communion with the living God to whom alone belong the issues from death. She was not yet able against hope to believe in hope. Alas, what a poor, frail, tottering thing is that hope which rests only on a cruse of oil and a barrel of meal! How scanty must be those expectations which only rest on the creature!

And are we not all but too prone to lean upon something quite as mean and paltry in God's view as a handful of meal? Truly we are; and it must be so where God is not apprehended by the soul. To faith it is either God or nothing. A handful of meal will afford, in the hand of God and to the view of faith, as efficient materials as the cattle upon a thousand hills. "We have here but five loaves and two small fishes; but *what are these amongst so many?*" This is the language of the human heart; but faith never says what are *these* amongst so many? but what is *God* among so many? Unbelief says *we* are not able; faith says, but *God is* well able.

And would it not be well, ere we turn from this interesting point in our subject, to apply these principles to the poor, conscience-smitten sinner? How often is such an one found clinging to some vain resource for the pardon of his sins, rather than to the accomplished work of Christ upon the cross, which has forever satisfied the claims of divine justice, and ought therefore, surely, to satisfy the cravings of his guilty conscience.

"I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." Such is the language of one who had not as yet learned to look beyond all human aid, straight to Jesus. "*I have no man,*" says the poor, guilty, unbelieving sinner: but I have *Jesus*, says the believer; and he may add, Thus saith the Lord, The cleansing efficacy of the blood shall not fail, nor its preciousness diminish, until the time that the Lord shall have safely housed His ransomed forever in His own heavenly mansions.

Hence, if these pages should meet the eye of any poor, halting, trembling, fearful sinner, I would

invite him to take comfort from the precious truth that God has, in His infinite grace, set the cross of Jesus between him and his sins, if only he will believe the divine testimony. The great difference between a believer and an unbeliever is this: the former has Christ between him and his sins; the latter has his sins between him and Christ.

Now, with the former, Christ is the all-engrossing object: he looks not at the enormity of his sin, but at the value of the blood and the preciousness of the person of Christ: he knows that God is not now on the judgement-seat, but on the mercy-seat: if He were on the former, His thoughts would be simply occupied about the question of sin, but being on the latter, His thoughts are, blessed be His name, as purely occupied about the blood. Oh for more simple and abiding communion with the mind of Heaven, and more complete abstraction from the things and thoughts of earth! The Lord grant more of both to all His saints!

It has been already observed that the man of faith must be emptied from vessel to vessel; each successive scene and stage of the believer's life is but his entrance upon a new form in the school of Christ, where he has to learn some fresh and, of course, more difficult lesson.

But, it may be asked, what more trying circumstances had Elijah to grapple with at Zarephath than at Cherith? Was it not better to be cast upon human sympathies than to have ravens as his channel of supply? And further, was it not more pleasing to the spirit to be domesticated with human beings than to dwell in the loneliness and solitude of the brook Cherith? All this might have been so, no doubt; yet solitude has its sweets, and association its trials. There are selfish interests which work amongst men, and hinder that refined and exquisite enjoyment which human society ought to yield, and which it will yield, when humanity stands forth in its divinely-imparted perfections.

Our prophet heard no such words as "*me and my son*" when he took up his abode by the brook. There was there no selfish interest acting as a barrier to his sustenance and enjoyment. No, but the moment he passed from his retirement into human society, then he was called to feel that the human heart does not like to have its own objects in the least interfered with; he was called to enter into the deep meaning of the words "*me and my son,*" which unfold the hidden springs of selfishness, which actuate humanity in its fallen condition.

But it will doubtless be observed that it was natural for the widow's heart to entertain thoughts of herself and her son in preference to any one else, and surely it was natural; it is what nature ever does. Harken to the following words of a genuine child of nature: "Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" (1 Sam. 25: 11)

Nature will ever seek its own first; nor does it come within the compass of this perishing world so to fill the human soul as to make it overflow for the benefit of others. It is the province of God alone to do this. It is utterly in vain to try to expand the heart of man by any instrumentality save the abundant grace of God. This it is which will cause him to open wide the door of his affections to every needy applicant. Human benevolence may do much where abundant resources prevent the possibility of personal privation, but grace alone will enable a man to trample personal interests under foot to meet the claims of another. "Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." This is the world's principle, and nothing can make us unlearn it but the knowledge of the fact that God has done well for us, and, moreover, that it is our best interest to let Him continue to do so unto the end.

Now it was the knowledge of this *divine* principle that enabled our prophet to say, "Make me thereof a little cake *first* and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son." Elijah was, in his address, simply putting in the divine claim upon the widow's resources; and, as we know, the result of a

true and ready response to that claim will be a rich harvest of blessing to the soul. There was, however, a demand upon the widow's faith in all this. she was called to act a trying and difficult part, in the energy of faith in a divine promise, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

And is it not thus with every believer? Undoubtedly it is; we must act in faith. The promise of God must ever constitute the great moving principle in the soul of the Christian. There would have been no room for the exercise of faith on the part of the widow had the barrel been full; but when it was exhausted, when she was reduced to her last handful, to be told to give of that handful to a stranger first, was surely a large demand, to which nothing but faith could have enabled her to respond.

But the Lord often deals with His people as He dealt with His disciples in the matter of feeding the multitude. "This He said to prove them, for He Himself knew what He would do." He frequently tells us to take a step involving considerable trial, and in the very act of taking it we not only see the reason of it, but also get strength to proceed. In fact, all the divine claims upon us for action are based upon the principle involved in the command to the children of Israel of old, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

Whither were they to go? Through the sea. Strange path! Yet behind this trying command we see grace providing the ability to execute it in the word to Moses, "But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea, and divide it; and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14: 16). Faith enables a man, being called, to go out not knowing whither he goes.

But there is more than the mere principle of obedience to be learned from this truly interesting scene between Elijah and the widow of Zarephath: we learn, also, that nothing but the superior power of divine grace can lift the human mind above the freezing atmosphere of selfishness in which fallen man lives, and moves, and has his being. The effulgence of God's benevolence shining in upon the soul disperses those mists in which the world is enveloped, and enables a man to think and act upon higher and nobler principles than those which actuate the moving mass around him. This poor widow had left her house influenced by no higher motive than self-interest and self-preservation, and having no more brilliant object before her mind than death.

And is it in any wise different with multitudes around us? Yea, is it a whit better in the case of any unregenerate man on earth? Not a whit. The most illustrious, the most intellectual, the most learned — in a word, every man upon whose spirit the light of divine grace has never shone, will be found, in God's estimation, like this poor widow, influenced by motives of self-interest and self-preservation, and having no brighter prospect before him than death.

The truth of God, however, speedily alters the aspect of things. In the case of the widow it acted most powerfully: it sent her back to her house occupied about and interested for another, and with her soul filled with cheering thoughts of life. And so will it ever be. Let but the soul get into communion with the truth and grace of God, and it is at once delivered from this present evil world, it is turned aside out of the current which is rapidly hurrying millions away upon its surface. It becomes actuated by heavenly motives, and animated by heavenly objects.

Grace teaches a man to live and act for others. The more our souls taste the sweetness of redeeming love, the more earnest will be our desire to serve others. Oh that we all felt more deeply and abidingly the constraining power of the love of Christ, in this day of lamentable coldness and indifference! Would to God we could all live and act in the remembrance that we are not our own, but bought with a price!

The widow of Zarephath was taught this truth. The Lord not only put His claim to the handful of meal and the cruse of oil, but also laid His hand upon her son — the cherished object of her affections. Death visits the house in which the Lord's prophet, in company with the widow and her son, were feeding together on the precious fruits of divine benevolence. "It came to pass, after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him."

Now this son, as we know, had, in common with herself, stood in her way in the matter of her ready response to the divine claim as put forward by Elijah; hence there is solemn instruction for the saint in the death of this child. So surely as we allow *any object*, whether it be parent or child, husband or wife, brother or sister, to obstruct us in our path of simple obedience and devotedness to Christ, we may rest assured that object will be removed. This widow had given her son a higher place in her thoughts than the Lord's prophet, and the son was taken from her that she might learn that it was not merely, "the handful of meal" that should be held in subjection to the Lord and in readiness for Him, but also her dearest earthly object.

It needs no small measure of the spirit of Christ to hold everything in mere stewardship for God. We are so prone to look upon things as ours, instead of remembering that all we have, and all we are, belongs to the Lord, and should ever be given up at His call. Nor is this a mere matter of rightful obedience; it is for our lasting benefit and happiness.

The widow responded to God's claim on her handful of meal; and what follows? She and her house are sustained for years! Again the Lord lays His hand upon her son; and what follows? Her son is raised from the dead by the mighty power of God, thus teaching her that the Lord could not only sustain life, but impart it. Resurrection-power is brought to bear upon her circumstances, and she receives her son now, as she had received her supplies before, directly from the hand of the Lord God of Israel.

How happy to be a dependent upon such bounty! How happy to go to our barrel of meal, or our cruse of oil, and find it daily replenished by our Father's generous hand! How happy to hold the dearest object of our affections in the power of resurrection ties! Such are the privileges of the weakest believer in Jesus.

Before, however, I turn from this branch of our subject, I would observe that the effect which the divine visitation produced upon this widow was to awaken a solemn inquiry in her conscience as to her sin. "Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance?" When the Lord comes near to us, there will always be observed a divine quickness and sensitiveness of conscience which are most earnestly to be sought after.

One may often pass on from day to day in the ordinary routine of life, in the enjoyment, too, of a replenished barrel and cruse, without much deep exercise of conscience before God. The latter will only be found where there is really close walking with God, or some special visitation of His hand. Had the Lord merely met the poor widow's need from day to day, there might never have been a question of "sin" raised in her mind; but when death entered, conscience began to work, for death is the wages of sin.

There is a twofold action in all the divine dealings with us, namely, an action of *truth*, and an action of *grace*. The former discovers the evil, the latter puts it away; that unfolds what man is, this what God is; that brings out into the light the hidden workings of evil in the heart of man, this brings out, in contrast, the rich and exhaustless springs of grace in the heart of God. Now, both are needful: *truth*, for the maintenance of God's glory; *grace*, for the establishment of our blessing; that, for the

vindication of the divine character and attributes, this for the perfect repose of the sinner's heart and conscience.

How blessed to know that both “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” The divine dealings with the widow of Zarephath would not have been complete had they not elicited from her the confession contained in the last verse of our chapter, “By *this* I know thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is *truth*.” She had learnt *grace* in the marvellous supply of her need; she learnt *truth* in the death of her son.

And if we were only more spiritually sensitive and quick-sighted, we should at all times perceive these two features in our Father's mode of dealing with us. We are the constant recipients of His grace, and again and again we get examples of His truth in the dealings of His hand which are more particularly designed to bring out the evil from the hidden chambers of the heart, in order that we may judge and put it away. While we see our barrel and cruse replenished, conscience is apt to slumber, but when Jehovah knocks at the door of our hearts by some chastening dispensation, forthwith it wakes up and enters with vigour upon the seasonable work of self-judgement.

Now, while we cannot too strongly deprecate that form of self-examination which frequently genders doubt as to the fact of the soul's acceptance, yet we must remember that *self must be judged* or we shall break down altogether. The believer is not told to examine himself with any such idea as that the examination may issue in the discovery that he is not in the faith. This idea is often based upon an unsound interpretation of 2 Cor. 13: 5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith,” etc.

Now, the idea in the mind of the apostle was the very reverse of what is sought to be deduced from his words, as may at once be seen by a little attention to the context. It would seem that the assembly at Corinth had given a place amongst them to certain false apostles who presumed to call in question the ministry of the Apostle Paul, thus rendering it necessary for the latter to enter upon a defence of his apostleship, which he does, first, by a reference to his general course of service and testimony; and secondly, by a touching appeal to the Corinthian saints. “Since,” says he, “ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me . . . examine yourselves.”

The most powerful and, to them at least affecting proof of the divine authority of his ; apostleship was to be deduced from the fact that they were in the faith. It cannot therefore for a moment be supposed that he would have told them to examine themselves in order to prove his heavenly mission if that examination were to issue in the discovery, that they were not in the faith at all: on the contrary, it was because he had a well-grounded assurance that they were “sanctified in Christ Jesus,” that he could confidently appeal to them as an evidence that his mission was from above.

There is, however, considerable difference between what is called “self-examination” and self-judgement; not so much in the abstract things themselves as in the ideas which we attach to them. It is a most blessed exercise to judge nature — honestly, solemnly and rigidly to judge that evil nature which we carry about with us, and which ever clogs and hinders us in running the race set before us. The Lord grant us all more spiritual power to exercise this judgement continually. But then we must take great care that our examination of self does not savour of mistrusting God. It is upon the ground of God's grace and faithfulness that I judge myself if *God be not God, there is an end of everything*.

But there was also a voice in this visitation for Elijah. He had presented himself to the widow in the character of a man of God, and he therefore needed to establish his claims to that character. This Jehovah graciously did for him by the resurrection of the child. “By *this* I know,” said she, “that thou art a man of God.” It was resurrection that vindicated his claim upon her confidence.

There must be the exhibition of a measure of resurrection power in the life of the man of God ere his claim to that character can be fully established. This power will show itself in the form of victory over self in all its odious workings. The believer is risen with Christ — he is made a partaker of the divine nature, but he is still in the world, and bears about with him a body of humiliation; and if he does not deny himself, he will soon find his character as a man of God called in question.

It would, however, be but a miserable object merely to seek *self-vindication*. The prophet had a higher and nobler aim, namely, to establish the truth of the Word of the Lord in his mouth. This is the proper object of the man of God. His own character and reputation should be matters of small moment with him, save as they stand connected with the Word of the Lord in his mouth. It was simply for the purpose of maintaining the divine origin of the gospel which he preached that the Apostle Paul entered upon the defence of his apostleship in his Epistles to the Galatians and Corinthians. It mattered little to him what they thought of Paul, but it mattered much what they thought of Paul's gospel. Hence, for their sakes, he was anxious to prove that the Word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.

How important, then, was it for the prophet to have such a testimony to the divine origin of his ministry before entering upon the scenes in which he is seen moving in 1 Kings 18! He gained thus much at least by his retirement at Zarephath; and surely it was not a little. His spirit was blessedly confirmed; he received a divine seal to his ministry; he approved himself to the conscience of one with whom he had sojourned for a long period, and was enabled to start afresh upon his public career with the happy assurance that he was a man of God, and that the Word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.

[I may just add a word here on the subject of self-vindication. It is truly sorrowful when the servant of God is obliged to vindicate himself; it shows there must be something wrong either in himself or in those who have rendered it needful for him thus to act. When, however, such a course becomes necessary, there is one grand object to be kept clearly before the mind, namely, the glory of Christ, and the purity of the truth committed to his trust. It too frequently happens that when any charge is brought either against our ministry or our personal character, the pride of our hearts is drawn out, and we are quick to stand up in self-defence. Now, we should remember that, apart from our connection with Christ and His saints, we are but vile atoms of the dust, utterly unworthy of a thought or word; it should therefore be far from our thoughts to seek the establishment of our own reputation. We have been constituted the depositaries, to a certain extent, of the reputation of Christ; and provided we preserve that unsullied, we need not be careful about self. The Lord grant us all grace to walk in the abiding consciousness of our high dignities and holy responsibilities as the “epistle of Christ, known and read of all men”!]

We have now arrived at the close of a very important stage of Elijah's history, embracing a period of three years and a half, during which he was hidden from the view of Israel. We have been occupied simply with the consideration of those principles of truth which lie on the surface of Elijah's personal history. But may we not draw instruction from his course viewed in a mystic sense? I believe we may. The reference of Christ Himself to the prophet's mission to the Gentile widow may justly lead us to see therein the blessed foreshadowing of the gathering of the Gentiles into the Church of God.

“But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow” (Luke 4:25-6). The Lord Jesus had presented Himself to Israel as the prophet of God, but found no response; the daughter of Zion refused to hear the voice of her Lord. “The gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” were answered by the carnal inquiry, “Is not this Joseph's son?” He therefore finds relief

for His spirit, in the view of Israel's scorn and rejection, in the happy reflection that there were objects beyond Jewish bounds to whom the divine grace of which He was the channel could flow out in all its richness and purity.

The grace of God is such that if it be stopped by the pride, unbelief, or hardness of heart of some, it will only flow more copiously to others, and so, "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength. And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldst be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for *a light to the Gentiles*, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49: 5-6).

The precious truth of the call of the Gentiles is largely taught in Scripture, both by type and precept, and it might be serviceable at another time to enter fully upon the consideration of it in its various ramifications; but my object, in this paper, is rather to consider the life and ministry of our prophet in a simple and practical way, with the hope that the Lord would be graciously pleased to acknowledge such simple reflections for the comfort and edification of His people of every name and denomination.

Part 3

THE HOUSE OF AHAB

We must now leave our prophet, for a season, and turn our attention to the sad condition of things in Israel during the time that he was hidden with God. Terrible indeed must be the condition of things on earth when "the heaven is shut up." Sterile and dreary must be the aspect of this lower world when Heaven withholds its refreshing showers, and specially of that land which was to "drink water of the rain of heaven." Egypt might not have regarded much the shutting up of Heaven, seeing she had never been wont to look thither for her supplies. She had her resources in herself. "My river is mine own," was her independent language.

But such was not the case with the Lord's land — "the land of hills and valleys." If Heaven yielded not its supplies, all was parched and sterile. Israel could not say, "My river is mine own." No; they were ever taught to look up; their eyes were always to be upon the Lord, as the Lord's eyes were ever upon them. Hence, when anything arose to hinder the intercourse between Heaven and earth, the land of Canaan was made to feel it with painful intensity.

Thus it was "in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land." Israel was made to feel the dreadful consequences of departure from their only source of real blessing. "There was sore famine in Samaria, and Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks; peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them, to pass throughout it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself."

Israel had sinned, and Israel must feel the rod of Jehovah's righteous anger. What a humbling picture of God's ancient people, to see their king going forth to look for grass! What a contrast between all this and the rich abundance and glory of Solomon's day! But God had been grossly dishonoured, and His truth rejected. Jezebel had sent forth the pestilential influence of her principles by the instrumentality of her wicked prophets — Baal's altar had superseded the altar of God; hence the Heaven above was iron, and the earth beneath brass; the physical aspect of things was but the expression of Israel's hardness of heart and low moral condition.

Now there is not so much as a word about God in Ahab's directions to his servants — not a syllable about the sin that had called down the heavy displeasure and judgement of God upon the land. No; the word is, “Go unto all fountains and brooks.” Such was Ahab's thought, his poor grovelling thought; his heart turned not, in true humility, to Jehovah; he cried not to Him in the hour of his need; hence his word is, “peradventure we may find grass. “ God is shut out, and self is the all-engrossing object. Provided he could find *grass*, he cared not about finding *God*

He could have enjoyed himself in the midst of Jezebel's idolatrous prophets, had not the horrors of famine driven him forth: and then, instead of searching out the cause of the famine, in true self-judgement and humility, and seeking for pardon and restoration at the hand of God, he goes forth, in impenitent selfishness, to look for grass. Alas! he had sold himself to work wickedness; he had become the slave of Jezebel; his palace had become a cage of every unclean bird; Baal's prophets, like so many vultures, hovered around his throne, and from thence spread the leaven of idolatry over the whole land.

Oh, it is a truly awful thing to allow the heart to depart from the Lord. One cannot tell where it may end. Ahab was an Israelite, but he had allowed himself to be ensnared by a false religious system, at the head of which was Jezebel his wife; he had made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and was driven headlong into the most abandoned wickedness. There is no one so bad as the man who turns aside from the ways of God. Such an one is sure to plunge into more profound depths of wickedness than even the ordinary victims of sin and Satan. The devil seems to take special delight in making such an one an instrument in carrying out his malignant designs against the truth of God.

If you have ever been taught to value the ways of truth and holiness, if you have ever taken delight in God and His ways, be watchful; “keep thy heart with all diligence;” beware of false religious influence; you are moving through a scene in which the very atmosphere you breathe is noxious, and destructive of spiritual life. The enemy has with hellish sagacity — a sagacity sharpened by well-nigh six thousand years' acquaintance with the constitution of the human mind — laid his snares on all sides of you, and nothing but permanent communion with your heavenly Father will avail to preserve your soul. Remember Ahab, and pray continually to be kept from temptation.

The following passage of Scripture may well be used, in connection with Ahab, as a solemn and seasonable warning: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited” (Jer. 17: 5-6).

Such was the wretched Ahab — wretched though favoured with a diadem and a sceptre. He cared neither for God nor his people. In his sayings and doings, on the melancholy occasion to which we are referring, we find as little about Israel as about God. There is not one word about the people that had been committed to his care, and who ought, after God, to have been his great object. His earthly mind seems to have been unable to reach beyond “the horses and mules.” Such were the objects of Ahab's anxious solicitude in the day of Israel's direful calamity.

Alas, what a contrast between all this low and grovelling selfishness and the noble spirit of the man after God's own heart, who, when the land was trembling beneath the heavy stroke of Jehovah's chastening rod, could say, “Is it not I that have commanded the people to be numbered: *even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed*; but as for *these sheep*, what have they done? let Thy hand, I pray Thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued” (1 Chr. 21: 17).

Here was the true spirit of a king. David, in the spirit of his blessed Master, would expose his

own bosom to the stroke, in order that the sheep might escape; he would “stand between them and the foe”; he would turn the sceptre into a shepherd's crook; he thought not of his “horses and mules”; yea, he thought not of himself or his father's house, but of the people of God's pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Happy, ineffably happy, will it be for Israel's scattered tribes to find themselves again under the tender care of the true David.

It might be profitable to follow out a little more fully the history of Ahab; to dwell upon his unprincipled treatment of the righteous Naboth; of the alluring influence exerted by him over the mind of the good king Jehoshaphat, and of many other circumstances in his unhappy reign; but all this would lead us too far from our subject. We shall therefore advert for a few moments to the character of an important member of Ahab's household, and then return to Elijah.

Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house, was one who, in the secret of his own spirit, feared the Lord, but who was planted in a most unhallowed atmosphere. The house of the wicked Ahab, and his still more wicked consort, must have been a painful school for the righteous soul of Obadiah; and so he found it. He was hindered in service and testimony. What he did for the Lord was done by stealth. He was afraid to act openly and decidedly; yet he did quite enough to show what he would have done had he been planted in a more congenial soil, and cherished by a more healthful atmosphere. “He took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.” This was a most precious token of devotedness of heart to the Lord — a blessed triumph of divine principle over the most untoward circumstances.

Thus it was with Jonathan in the house of Saul. He, too, was sadly hindered in his service to God and to Israel. He should have stood forth in more entire separation from the evil in which his father lived, and moved; his place at Saul's table should have been vacant as well as David's: the cave of Adullam would have been his proper place, where, in holy companionship with the rejected David and his despised band of followers, he might have found a wider and more suited range in which to manifest his affectionate devotedness to God and His anointed.

Human expediency, however, might, and doubtless would, have recommended Jonathan to remain in Saul's house, and Obadiah to remain in Ahab's house, as being “the sphere in which Providence had placed them”; but expediency is not faith, nor will it aid a man in his path of service, whatever it may be. Faith will ever lead a man to break through the freezing rules of human expediency, in order that it may express itself in a way not to be mistaken.

Jonathan felt constrained at times to leave the table of Saul in order that he might embrace David: but he should have abandoned it altogether; he should have cast in his lot entirely with David; he ought not to have rested satisfied with speaking *for* his brother, he should have identified himself with him. But he did not do so, and therefore he fell on Mount Gilboa, by the hand of the uncircumcised. Thus, in his life he was harassed and hindered by the unrighteous principle of rule which Saul had set up to entangle and bind the consciences of the faithful, and in his death he was ingloriously mingled with the uncircumcised.

Just so it was with Obadiah. It was his lot to stand in connection with the man who occupied the lowest step of that ladder of apostasy whereby the kings of Israel had descended from original principles. Hence he was obliged to act stealthily for God and His servants; he was afraid of Ahab and Jezebel; he lacked boldness and energy to stand out in decided testimony against all abominations; he had no room for the development of his renewed energies or affections; his soul was withered by the noxious vapours around him, and he could therefore exert but little influence on his day and generation.

Hence, while Elijah was boldly confronting Ahab, and openly serving the Lord, Obadiah was

openly serving Ahab, and stealthily serving the Lord. While Elijah was breathing the holy atmosphere of Jehovah's presence, Obadiah was breathing the polluted atmosphere of Ahab's wicked court. While Elijah was receiving his daily supplies from the hand of the God of Israel, Obadiah was ranging the country in search of grass for Ahab's horses.

Truly a most striking contrast! And is there not at this moment many an Obadiah similarly occupied? Is there not many a God-fearing man sharing, in common with the children of this world, its death and misery, and labouring in co-operation with them to avert its impending ruin? Doubtless there is. And is this fit work for such? Should “the mules and horses of an ungodly world engross the thoughts and energies of the Christian instead of the interests of the Church of God? Ah no! it should not be so. The Christian should have a nobler end in view — a higher and more heavenly sphere in which to use his energies. God, and not Ahab, demands and deserves our devotion.

This is a very wide question, and there are few amongst us that may not learn a lesson from it. Let us ask ourselves honestly, as before the Searcher of hearts, what are we doing? What object are we carrying out? What end have we in view? Are we sowing to the flesh? Are we working for merely earthly objects? Have we no higher end in view than self or this present world?

Oh these are searching questions, when rightly put! The tendency of the human heart and affections is ever downward — ever toward earth and the things of earth. The palace of Ahab holds out far more powerful attractions to our fallen nature than the lonely banks of Cherith or the house of the starving widow of Zarephath. But ah, *let us think of the end!* The end alone is the true criterion by which to judge in such matters. “Until I went into *the sanctuary of God*; then understood I *their end* “ (Ps. 73: 17).

Elijah knew, by being in the sanctuary, that Ahab stood in a slippery place; that his house would speedily crumble in the dust; that all his pomp and glory was about to end in the lonely tomb, and his immortal spirit to be summoned to render its final account. These things the holy man of God thoroughly understood, and he was therefore well content to stand apart from it all. His leathern girdle, his homely fare, his lonely path, were far better, he felt, than all the pleasures of Ahab's court. Such was his judgement, and we shall see, ere we close this paper, that his judgement was sound.

“The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” Would that all who love the name of Jesus were more uncompromising and energetic in their testimony for Him! The time is rapidly approaching when we would give worlds that we had been more *true and real* in our ways here below. We are too lukewarm, too much inclined to make terms with the world and the flesh, too ready to exchange the leathern girdle for the robe in which Ahab and Jezebel are most willing to array us.

May the Lord give all His people grace to testify against this world that the deeds thereof are evil, and to stand apart from its ways, its maxims and principles; in a word, from everything which properly belongs to it. “The night is far spent, and the day is at hand.” Let us then cast off the works of darkness and stand clothed in the armour of light; let us, as those that are risen with Christ, set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth; having “our citizenship in heaven,” let us, with unceasing eagerness, “look for the Saviour from thence, who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Part 4

THE PROPHET ON MOUNT CARMEL

In the opening verse of 1 Kings 18 a new order is issued to our prophet. “And it came to pass, after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.”

Here Elijah is summoned away from his retirement at Zarephath, to make his appearance in public and stand again before king Ahab. To one occupying the position, and exhibiting the spirit, of a true servant, it matters not what summons he receives. Whether it be “Go *hide* thyself,” or “Go *show* thyself,” he is ready, through grace, to obey. The Lord had been training His servant for three years and a half in secret. At Cherith and Zarephath He had taught him many important lessons; and when the time was come for his showing unto Israel, he was called to leave the desert and appear again as the public witness of Jehovah.

Nor did he hesitate. No, not for a moment, however much he might have preferred retirement to the stormy scenes and harassing vicissitudes of public life. Elijah was *a servant*, and that was enough. He was as ready to confront the angry Ahab, and all the prophets of Baal, as he had been to seclude himself for three years and a half. Truly we may well covet the spirit of a servant — a humble, obedient servant. Such a spirit will carry us through many difficulties; will save us from much contention; will send us along the path of service while others are disputing about it. If only we be willing to obey, and to serve, we shall never lack opportunity, nor be at a loss as to the path we should pursue.

[In every age the servant character is marked by the Holy Ghost as one of special value. It is, in fact, the only thing that will stand in times of general declension. Of this we have numerous examples in Scripture. When the house of Eli was about to fall before the divine judgement, Samuel occupied the position of a servant whose ear was opened to hear. His word was, “Speak, Lord, for Thy *servant* heareth.” When all Israel had fled from the face of the Philistine champion, the servant character again stood prominently forth. “Thy *servant* will go and fight,” etc. The Lord Jesus Himself had the title of Servant applied to Him by Jehovah, in the words of the prophet, “Behold My *Servant*,” etc. Furthermore, when the Church had failed, and had become “the great house,” “the *servant* of the Lord” was told how he ought to carry himself. And lastly, it is mentioned as one of the special features of the heavenly Jerusalem, that “His *servants* shall *serve* Him.” The Lord grant us more of this spirit!.]

We have already had occasion to notice the prophet's unhesitating obedience to the Word of the Lord. Such obedience will ever involve the abandonment of self. To be told, for example, to leave one's sweet retreat in order to appear before an angry tyrant who, with his wicked queen, led on to the contest a host of idolatrous prophets, called for no small measure of self-renunciation. But Elijah, through grace, was ready. He felt he was not his own. *He was a servant*, and as such ever stood with girded loins and open ears to attend his Master's summons, whatever it might be. Blessed attitude! May there be many found therein!

Elijah, therefore, goes to meet king Ahab, and we are called to follow him now into one of the most important scenes of his life.

Before, however, he comes in contact with Ahab, he crosses the path of Obadiah, and his meeting with him is perfectly characteristic. Obadiah certainly does not meet the prophet with that affectionate cordiality which ought to appear in the bearing of one brother towards another, but rather in the cold formality of one who had been moving much in the world's society. “Art thou that *my lord* Elijah?”

Now, though all this might have been occasioned by the overawing solemnity of Elijah's appearance and manner, still the thought forces itself upon one that there ought to have been more holy familiarity between two servants of the Lord. Elijah, too, seems to maintain this distance. “I am,” said he; “go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.” Elijah felt himself to be the depositary of the secret of the

Lord, of which secret his brother knew nothing.

And how could he? Ahab's house was not the place to obtain an entrance into the divine counsels. Obadiah was out on a mission perfectly in keeping with the place from whence he had come, and with the person who had sent him; and so was Elijah. The former had as his immediate object grass — if peradventure he might find it; and as his ultimate object, the preservation of Ahab's horses and mules; the latter had as his immediate object the announcement of Jehovah's indubitable purpose concerning rain; and as his ultimate object, the bringing back of the nation to its early faith and devotedness.

True they were both men of God; and, moreover, it may be said by some that Obadiah was as much in his place as Elijah, seeing he was serving his master. No doubt he was serving his master; but should Ahab have been his master? I believe not. I believe his service to Ahab was not the result of communion with God. True it did not rob him of his name and character as one that feared the Lord greatly, for the Holy Ghost has graciously recorded this concerning him; but truly it was a miserable thing for one that feared the Lord greatly to own as his master the worst of Israel's apostate kings. Elijah would not have done so. We cannot think of him as going forth on such a mission as that which was commanding the energies of his more worldly brother. Elijah would not own Ahab as his *master*, though he was bound to own him as his *King*.

There is a great difference between being a *subject* and one in a position under a monarch. People argue thus: "The powers that be are ordained of God," therefore it is right to hold office under them. But those who argue thus seem to lose sight of the manifest distinction between *subject to* and *co-operating with* the powers that be: the former is a sound and scriptural service — an act of positive obedience to God; the latter is an unsound and unscriptural assumption of worldly authority, for the wielding of which we have no direction, and which, moreover, will be found a sad obstruction in the path of the servant of God

We would not enter into judgement upon those who feel they can enlist their energies in the government of this world; but this much we would say — they will find themselves in an extremely awkward position in reference to the service of their heavenly Master. The principles of this world are diametrically opposed to those of God, and it is therefore hard to conceive how a man can be carrying out both at the same time.

Obadiah is a remarkable example of this. Had he been more openly on the Lord's side, he would have had no need to say, "Was it not told my lord what I did?" His hiding the prophets seems, in his estimation, to have been such a remarkable thing that he wondered if all had not heard it. Elijah had no need to ask such a question; it was well known "what he did." His acts of service to God were no phenomena in his history. And why? Because he was not trammelled by the arrangements of Ahab's house. *He was free*, and could therefore act for God without reference to the thoughts of Ahab or Jezebel.

In acting thus, however, he had to lie under the charge of troubling Israel. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" The more faithful one is to God and His truth, the more exposed he is to this charge. If all be allowed to sleep "in dead supineness," the god of this world will be well pleased, and his domain untroubled; but only let some faithful one make his appearance, and he is sure to be regarded as a troubler, and an intruder upon peace and good order.

But it is well to have that peace and order broken up which stand connected with the open denial of the Lord's truth and name. The hearts of the earthly-minded may only be occupied with the question, "Is it peace?" utterly regardless as to whether that peace is procured at the expense of truth and holiness. Nature loves ease, and may often be found, even amongst Christians, pleading for peace and

quietness, where faithfulness to Christ and His principles would call for plain dealing with unsound doctrine or evil practice.

The tendency of the age is to hold all religious questions in abeyance. The things pertaining to the world and the flesh are of far too much importance, in the estimate of this generation, to have them interfered with for a moment by questions of eternal importance. Elijah, however, thought not so. He seems to have felt that the peaceful slumber of sin must be interrupted at all cost. He beheld the nation wrapped in the deep sleep of idolatry, and he thought it well to be the instrument of raising a storm around them.

So it was, and so it is. The storm of controversy is always preferable to the calm of sin and worldliness. Truly happy is it when there is no need of raising such a storm; but when it is needed — when the enemy would stretch forth over the people of God “the leaden sceptre” of unholy repose — it is a matter of thankfulness to find that there is life enough even to break in upon such repose. Had there been no Elijah in Israel in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, had all been like Obadiah or the seven thousand, Baal and his prophets might have held undisputed sway over the minds of the people.

But God raised up a man who cared not about his own ease; no, nor about the nation's ease, if that ease were to be purchased at the expense of God's honour and Israel's early principles. He feared not, in the strength of the Lord, to face a terrific array of eight hundred and fifty prophets, whose living depended upon the nation's delusion, headed, as they were, by a furious woman who could turn her weak-minded lord whithersoever she would.

All this, surely, called for no small amount of spiritual vigour and energy. It needed deep and powerful convictions of the reality *of* divine truth, and a very clear insight into Israel's low and degraded condition, to enable a man to leave his quiet retreat at Zarephath and burst into the midst of Baal's votaries, thus to bring upon himself a fierce storm of opposition from every quarter. Elijah might, to speak after the manner of men, have remained in quiet retirement, in undisturbed repose, had he been satisfied to let Baal alone, and to allow the strongholds of idolatry to remain untouched. But this he could not do, and therefore he comes forth and meets the angry Ahab with these solemn and heart-searching words, “I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast served Baalim.”

This was tracing the evil up to its right source. It was departure from God and His holy commandments that had brought all this trouble upon them. Men are ever prone to forget the sin that has occasioned trouble, and think only of the trouble; but true wisdom will ever lead us to look from the trouble to the procuring cause.

Thus, too, when unsound doctrine has insidiously crept in, and gained power over many minds — if some faithful one should feel called to make a firm and decided stand against it, he must count upon being regarded as a troubler, and as being the cause of all the commotion consequent upon such acting; whereas the intelligent and reflecting mind will at once trace the matter, not to the faithful one who has made a stand for truth against error, but to him who may have introduced the error, and to those who have received and entertained it.

True, the defender of truth will need to watch his spirit and temper, lest, while he attacks error in doctrine, he fall into evil in practice. Many who have set out in real sincerity of heart to vindicate some neglected or disputed truth have failed in this particular, and have thus, in a great degree, nullified their valuable testimony; for their sagacious enemy is always ready to act upon the narrow-mindedness and unreasonableness of men by leading them to fasten upon the petty infirmities of temper, and lose sight of the important principle advocated.

But our prophet entered the arena well equipped; he had come from “the secret place of the Most High”; he had been learning, in solitude, those lessons of self-judgement and self-subjugation which could alone qualify him for the momentous scenes on which he was about to enter. Elijah was no angry or stormy controversialist; he had been too much in the secret of the divine presence for that; he had been blessedly solemnized in his spirit ere he was called to confront Baal's host of prophets. Hence he stands before them in all the calm elevation and holy dignity which ever marked his bearing. We see no haste about him, no perturbation, no hesitancy. He was before God, and therefore he was self-possessed and tranquil.

Now it is in such circumstances that a man's spirit is really tested. Nothing but the mighty power of God could have maintained Elijah in his extraordinary position on mount Carmel. “He was a man of like passions with us;” and being the only one of his day who possessed sufficient moral courage and spiritual power to make a public stand for God against the power of idolatry, the enemy might readily suggest to his poor heart, “What a great man you are to stand forth thus as the solitary champion of Israel's ancient faith!” But God held up His dear servant so far. He carried him through this very trying scene, because he was His witness, and His servant.

And so it will ever be. The Lord will ever stand by those that stand by Him. Had Obadiah only made a stand against Ahab and Jezebel, the Lord would have owned him and carried him through, so that instead of being the servant of Ahab, he might have been the yokefellow of Elijah in his great reformation. But this was not the case, and therefore, like Lot of old, “his righteous soul was vexed” by the errors and evils of an idolatrous house.

O dear Christian reader, let us aim at something beyond this! Let us not be chained down to earth by deliberate connection with this world's systems or plans. Heaven is our home; there, too, our hope is; we are not of the world; Jesus has purchased us, and delivered us from it, in order that we might shine as lights and walk as heavenly men while passing onward to our heavenly rest.

However, it was not merely in his deportment and manner that Elijah acquitted himself as a servant of God; he also showed himself to be one taught of God in reference to those principles on which the needed reformation should be based. Personal deportment and manner would avail but little if soundness in the faith were lacking. It would be an easy thing to put on a leathern girdle, and assume a solemn and dignified manner; but nothing save a spiritual apprehension of divine principles will enable any one to exert a reforming influence on the men of his age.

But Elijah possessed all those needed qualifications. Both his appearance and his faith were such as, in an eminent degree, suited a thorough reformer. Conscious, therefore, that he was in possession of a secret which would deliver the spirits of his brethren from the unhallowed thralldom of Baal, he says to Ahab, “Now, therefore, send and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.”

He is determined to bring Baal and the God of Israel face to face, in the view of the nation. He felt that matters should be brought to a test. His brethren must no longer be left to “halt between two opinions.” What strength there is in the prophet's words as he stands before the assembled thousands of Israel! “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.”

This was very simple. The prophets of Baal could not gainsay nor resist it. The prophet only asked for decision of character. There could be nothing gained on either side by vacillating ways. “I would ye were either cold or hot.” We know from the Lord's own words to Elijah, in the next chapter, that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and who, we may

suppose, were only waiting for some vigorous hand to plant the standard of truth in order that they might rally round it. No one amongst them would seem to have had power for such a bold step, but they would no doubt rejoice in Elijah's boldness and ability to do so.

This has often been the case in the history of the people of God. In times of greatest darkness there have always been those whose spirits mourned in secret over the widespread evil and apostasy, who longed for the bursting in of spiritual light, and were ready with joy to welcome its earliest beams. God has never left Himself without a witness; and although it is only here and there we can perceive a star of sufficient magnitude and brilliancy to pierce through the clouds of night and enlighten the benighted Church in the wilderness, yet we know, blessed be God, that let the clouds be ever so dark and gloomy, the stars have been there in every age, though their twinkling has been but little seen.

Thus it was in the days of Elias; there were seven thousand such stars whose light was obscured by the thick clouds of idolatry — who would not yield to the darkness themselves, though they lacked power to enlighten others; yet was there but one star of sufficient power and brightness to dispel the mists and create a sphere in which others might shine. This was Elijah the Tishbite, whom we now behold, in heavenly power and light, breaking into the very stronghold of Baal, upsetting Jezebel's table, [False religion has always sought the sunshine of this world's favour, whereas true religion has always been more pure and genuine when the world has frowned upon it. “*The prophets of the groves eat at Jezebel's table.*” If Jezebel had had no table, she would have had no prophets either; it was *her table*, and not *her souls*, they sought.] writing folly upon the whole system of Baal's worship, and in fact, by God's grace, effecting a mighty moral change in the nation — bringing the many thousands of Israel down into the dust in real self-abasement, and mingling the blood of Baal's prophets with the waters of Kishon.

How gracious of the Lord to raise up such a deliverer for His deluded people! And what a death-blow to the prophets of Baal! We may safely assert they never offered a more unwilling sacrifice to their idol than that which our prophet suggested. It was the sure precursor of his downfall, and of theirs also. What a sad aspect they present, “crying and cutting themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out,” and crying out, with unavailing earnestness, “O Baal, hear us!” Alas, Baal could not hear nor answer them!

The true prophet, conscious in his inmost soul of the sinful folly of the whole scene, mocks them: they cry more earnestly, and leap with frantic zeal upon the altar; but all in vain. They were now to be unmasked in the view of the nation. Their craft was in imminent danger. Those hands which, through their influence, had so often been lifted up in the diabolical worship of a sinful absurdity, were speedily about to seize them and drag them to their merited fate. Well, therefore, might they cry, “O Baal, hear us!”

How solemn, how immutably true, are those words of Jeremiah, “Cursed is the man whose heart departeth from the Lord!” It matters not on whom, or on what, we place our confidence: whether it be a religious system or a religious ordinance, or anything else, it is a departure of the heart from God — a curse follows it, and when the final struggle comes the Baal will be invoked in vain; “there will be neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard.”

How awful is the thought of departure from the living God! How dreadful to find, at the end of our history, that we have been leaning upon a broken reed! O, if you have not found solid and abiding peace for your guilty conscience in the atoning blood of Jesus, if you have a single emotion of fear in your heart at the thought of meeting God, let me put the prophet's question to you, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” Why do you stand aloof when Jesus calls you to come unto Him and take His

yoke upon you? Believe me, the hour is coming when, if you have not fled for refuge to Jesus, a greater than Elijah will mock at your calamity.

Harken to these solemn words: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all My counsel, and would none of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you” (Prov. 1: 24-27).

Awful words! inconceivably awful! How much more awful the reality! Flee to Jesus. Betake yourself to the open fountain, and there find peace and refuge ere the storm of divine wrath and judgement bursts upon your head. “When once the master of the house has risen up and shut to the door,” you are lost, and lost forever. Oh think of this, I implore of you, and let not Satan drag your precious soul into everlasting perdition!

We now turn to another side of the picture. The prophets of Baal were signally defeated. They had leaped, cut themselves, and cried to no purpose. Their whole system had been proved a gross fallacy; the superstructure of error had been trampled to the ground, and it only now remained to rear the magnificent superstructure of truth in the view of those who had been so long enslaved by vanity and lies. “And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. *And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.* And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord.”

It is always well to wait patiently, and allow evil and error to find their own level. Time will surely bring the truth to light; and let error array itself ever so carefully in the venerable robes of antiquity, yet will time strip it of these robes, and display it in all its naked deformity. Elijah felt this, and therefore he could stand quietly by and allow all the sands of Baal's glass to run out ere he began to exhibit the pattern of a more excellent way. Now it needs a very real apprehension of divine principles to enable one to adopt this patient course. Had our prophet been shallow-minded, or badly taught, he would have been in much greater haste to display his system and raise a storm of opposition against his antagonists.

But a spirit gifted with true elevation is never in haste, never perturbed; he has found a centre round which to move, and in revolving round that he finds himself carried out of the region of every other influence. Such an one was Elijah, a really elevated, independent, holy man — one who in every scene of his extraordinary career maintained a heavenly dignity which is earnestly to be sought after by all the Lord's servants. When he stood on mount Carmel, beholding the fruitless bodily exercise of Baal's prophets, he presented the appearance of one who was fully conscious of his heavenly mission; and not only in his manner, but also in his principles of acting, he acquitted himself as a prophet of the Lord.

What, then, were those principles on which Elijah acted? They were, in a word, those on which the unity of the nation was based. The first thing he does is to “repair the altar of the Lord that was broken down.” This was Israel's centre, and to this every true reformer directed his attention. Those who seek to carry out a one-sided reformation may rest satisfied with merely throwing down that which is false, without proceeding further to establish a sound basis on which to erect a new superstructure: but such reformation will never stand; it will carry with it too much of the old leaven to admit of its being a testimony. The altar of Baal must not only be thrown down, but the altar of the Lord must be set up.

Some there are who would sacrifice to the Lord on the altar of Baal; in other words, they would retain an evil system, and rest satisfied with giving it a right name. But no; the only centre of unity which God can recognize is the name of Jesus — simply and exclusively that. The people of God must not be looked at as members of a system, but as members of Christ. God sees them as such, and it should be their business to reckon themselves to be what God tells them they are, and manifestly to take that blessed place.

And we may further remark that Elijah in his actings on mount Carmel does not stop short of the recognition of Israel's unbroken unity. He takes *twelve stones*, according to the number of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the Word of the Lord came, saying "*Israel shall be thy name.*" This was taking high ground — yea, the very highest. Solomon could have taken no higher. To recognize the twelve tribes of Israel at a time when they were divided, and weakened, and degraded, evidenced true communion with the mind of God in reference to His people.

Yet this is what the Spirit will ever suggest. "Our twelve tribes" must never be given up. True they may, through their own weakness and folly, become scattered and divided; yet the God of Israel can only think of them in that unbroken unity which they once exhibited, and which, moreover, they will exhibit again when, having been united by the true David, they shall in holy fellowship tread the courts of the Lord forever.

Now the Prophet Elijah, through the Spirit, saw all this. With the eye of faith, he penetrated the long, dreary time of Israel's humiliating bondage, and beheld them in their visible unity, no longer Judah and Israel, but *Israel*, for the word is, "*Israel shall be thy name.*" His mind was occupied, not with what Israel was, but with what God had said. This was faith. Unbelief might say, "You are taking too high a stand; it is presumption to talk about twelve tribes when there are but ten; it is folly to speak of unbroken unity when there is nothing but division." Such will ever be the language of unbelief, which can never grasp the thoughts of God, nor see things as He sees them.

But it is the happy privilege of the man of faith to rest his spirit on the immutable testimony of God, which is not to be nullified by man's sinful folly. "*Israel shall be thy name.*" Precious promise! Most precious! Most permanent! Nothing could for a moment interfere with it — neither Rehoboam's childishness nor Jeroboam's cunning policy; no, nor yet Ahab's vileness could hinder Elijah from taking the loftiest position that an Israelite could take, even the position of a worshiper at an altar built of twelve stones, according to the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now in Elijah the Tishbite we have an example of the power of faith in the promise of God at a time when everything around him seemed to stand opposed. It enabled him to rise above all the evil and sorrow around him, and to build an altar of twelve stones with as much holy confidence and unclouded assurance as did Joshua when, amid the triumphant hosts of Israel, he erected his trophy on the banks of Jordan.

But I must bring this section to a close, having already extended it further than I had intended. We have seen the principle upon which our prophet desired to carry out the reformation. It was a sound one, and God honoured it. The fire from Heaven at once confounded the prophets of Baal, confirmed the prophet's faith, and delivered the people from their sad condition of halting between two opinions. Elijah's faith had given God room to act; he had made a trench and filled it with water; in other words, he had made the difficulty as great as possible in order that the divine triumph might be complete: and truly it was so.

God will always respond to the appeal of simple faith. "Hear me," said the prophet, "O Lord, hear me; that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart

back again.”

This is intelligent prayer. The prophet is engaged solely about God and His people. He does not say, “Hear me, that this people may know that I am a true prophet.” No; his only object was to bring the people back to the God of their fathers, and to have the claims of God established in their consciences, in opposition to the claims of Baal. And God darkened and heard; for no sooner had he concluded his prayer than “the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God.”

Truth triumphs! The prophets are confounded! The prophet, in holy indignation, mingles their blood with the waters of the Kishon, and thus, evil being judged, there remains no further hindrance to the communication of the divine blessing, which Elijah announces to Ahab in these words, “Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain.” How do these words convey to us Ahab's true character! “*Eat and drink.*” This was all he knew, or cared to know. He had come forth to look for grass, and nothing more; and the prophet conveyed to him that intelligence which he knew he desired. He could not ask him to come and join him in thanksgiving to God for this glorious triumph over evil, for he knew well he would meet with no response.

And yet they were both Israelites: but one was in communion with God, and the other was the slave of sin; hence, while Ahab found his enjoyment in getting up to “eat and drink,” Elijah sought his in retirement with God. Blessed, holy, heavenly enjoyment!

But mark the difference between Elijah's bearing in the presence of man and in the presence of God. He had met Obadiah, a saint in wrong circumstances, with an air of dignity and elevation; he had met Ahab in righteous sternness; he had stood amid the thousands of his deluded and erring brethren with the firmness and grace of a true reformer; and lastly, he had met the wicked prophets of Baal with mocking, and then with the sword of vengeance. Thus had he carried himself in the presence of man.

But how did he meet God? “He cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees.” Thus he carried himself before God. All this is lovely. Our prophet knew his place both before God and man. In the presence of man he acted in the wisdom of the Spirit, as the case demanded; in the presence of God he prostrated himself in unfeigned and reverent humility. Thus may all the Lord's servants know how to walk in all their complicated relations here below.

We must now accompany our prophet to widely different scenes.

Part 5

THE PROPHET ON MOUNT HOREB

There are few who have taken a prominent place in the history of the Church of God whose course has not been marked, in a special manner, by vicissitude: of such, as of “those that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters,” it may be said, “They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble.” They are sometimes seen on the mount, sometimes in the valley; at one time basking in the sunshine, at another beaten by the storm.

Nor is this the case merely with prominent characters; almost every Christian, be his path ever so retired and noiseless, knows something of this vicissitude. Indeed, it would seem as if no one could run the race which is marked out for the man of faith without finding inequalities in his way. The path through the desert must be rough, and it is well that is so; for there is no right-minded person who would not rather be set in a rough than in a “slippery” way. The Lord sees our need of being exercised

by roughness and hardness, not only that we may find the rest at the end sweeter, but also that we may be the more effectually trained and fitted for the place we are yet to occupy.

True we shall have no need for trials in the kingdom, but we shall have need of those graces and habits of soul which were formed amid the trials and sorrows of the wilderness. We shall yet be constrained to acknowledge that our path here below was not a whit too rough, but that on the contrary we could not have done without a single exercise of all those that had fallen to our lot. We now see things indistinctly, and are often unable to see the needs-be for many of our trials and sorrows: moreover our impatient nature may often feel disposed to murmur and rebel; but only let us be patient and we shall be able without hesitation, and with the full assent of every thought and feeling, to say, “He led us forth by *a right way*, that He might bring us to a city of habitation. “

The above train of thought is suggested by the circumstances of our prophet in 1 Kings 19. He seems to have had little anticipation of the terrific storm which was about to burst upon him: he had come from the top of mount Carmel, and in the energy of the Spirit outstripped Ahab in his chariot to the entrance of Jezreel; but there he was destined to receive a check, and that, too, from one who had hitherto kept herself in the background. This was the wicked Jezebel. I say, she had kept herself in the background; but she had not been idle there. She had no doubt influenced her weak-minded lord, and used his power for her wicked ends. She had opened her house and spread a table for the prophets of Baal. These things she had done in furtherance of her master's interests.

Jezebel is not to be looked at merely as an individual: she stands before the spiritual mind as the representative of a class — yea, more, as the impersonation of a principle which has from age to age been working in hostility to the truth of God, and which appears in its full maturity in the person of the great whore spoken of in the Apocalypse. The spirit of Jezebel is a persecuting spirit — a spirit that will carry its own point in opposition to everything — an active, energetic, persevering spirit, in which satanic vigour appears very manifestly.

Very different is the Ahab spirit. In Ahab we see one who, provided he could attain the gratification of his carnal and worldly desires, cared but little about religion. He troubled himself but little to decide between the claims of Jehovah and those of Baal. To him they were all alike. Now it was such an one that Jezebel could wield according to her mind. She took care to have his desires gratified while she actively and sagaciously used his power in opposition to the truth of God. The Ahabs are always found to be fit instruments for the Jezebels; hence, in the Apocalypse, where all those principles which have been, are now, or are yet to be, at work, are seen in their full maturity, we find the woman riding the beast: that is, corrupt religion wielding the secular power, or the full-grown Jezebel-spirit making use of the full-grown Ahab-spirit.

All this has a solemn voice for the present generation; and those that have ears to hear, let them hear. Men are becoming increasingly heedless as to the interests and destinies of the truth of God in the earth. Christ and Belial are all alike, provided the wheels of the vast machine of utilitarianism be not clogged in their movement. You may hold what principles you please provided you hold them in the background; and thus men of the most conflicting principles can unite and hold those principles in abeyance while with ardour and energy they pursue the phantom of worldliness.

Such is the spirit and tendency of the age, and all that is needed is that a Jezebel-spirit should arise and lead men on along the path upon which they have manifestly entered — a path which will most assuredly end in the blackness of darkness forever. Solemn, most solemn thought! Again I say, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

But we have said it was from Jezebel that the prophet Elijah received the check which seems so

to have overwhelmed his spirit. "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword." Observe, "Ahab told Jezebel"; he had neither sufficient interest in the matter to lead him to take an active part himself, nor, even if he had the interest, did he possess sufficient energy. To him, perhaps, the abundance of rain seemed to stand connected with the death of the prophets, and therefore he could quietly stand by and see them put to death.

What was Baal to him, or Jehovah either? Nothing. Let Ahab and all of that school get enough to "eat and drink," and all questions of truth and religion will be but lightly regarded. Gross and unmeaning abomination! Miserable, infatuated sensualism! Ye children of this world, whose sentiments are expressed in the words "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," think of Ahab; remember his terrible end — the end of his eating and drinking. What was it? "The dogs licked his blood." And as to his soul — ah, eternity will unfold its destinies!

But in Jezebel we see one who lacked neither interest nor energy. To her the controversy was one of the deepest moment, and she was determined to act with decision. "Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time."

Here then the prophet was called to endure the storm of persecution. He had been on mount Carmel, where he had stood against all the prophets of Baal; his course had hitherto been a triumphant one, the result of communion with God; but now his sun seemed, in his view, to be about to go down, and his horizon to become dark and gloomy.

"And when he saw that, he arose and *went for his life*, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

Elijah's spirit sinks altogether; he looks at everything through the dark cloud in which he was enveloped; all his labour seems, in his view, to have been for nought and in vain, and he has only to lie down and die. His spirit, harassed by what he deemed fruitless efforts to bring the nation back to its faith, longed to enter into rest.

Now, in all this we perceive the workings of impatience and unbelief. Elijah said nothing about longing to depart when he stood on mount Carmel. No; there all was triumph; there he seemed to be achieving something — he seemed to be of some use, and therefore he thought not of his departure. But the Lord would show His servant not only what he "must do," but also what he "must suffer." The former we like well enough, the latter we are not so well prepared for. And yet the Lord is as much glorified in a patient sufferer as in an active servant. The graces that are developed by one who is enabled to endure protracted suffering are as fragrant in their perfume as all the fruits of active service. This our prophet should have borne in mind. But ah, the heart can well understand and sympathise with him in his gloom and despondency.

There are few of the Lord's servants who have not, at some time or other, eagerly desired to put off their harness and cease from the toils of conflict, particularly at times when all their labour and testimony would seem to be in vain, and when they are disposed to look upon themselves as mere cumberers of the ground. Yet we must wait God's time, and until then seek to pursue our way in patient, uncomplaining service. There is a vast difference between longing to get away from trial and sorrow, and longing to be at home in our Father's house.

No doubt the thought of rest is sweet, ineffably sweet, to the labouring man. It is sweet to think of

the time when our own gracious God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, sweet to think of those green pastures and living fountains to which the Lamb will lead His flock throughout the coming ages of glory. In a word, the whole prospect presented to the view of faith is sweet and cheering; yet we have no right to say, "O Lord, take away my life." Nothing but an impatient spirit could ever dictate such language.

How different is the spirit breathed in the following words of the apostle Paul! "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is *far better*. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is *more needful for you*. And having this confidence, I know that I *shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith*" (Phil. 1: 23-25).

These words exhibit a truly Christian spirit. The servant of the Church should seek the Church's good, and not his own advantage. If Paul had considered himself, he would not have tarried a moment on earth; but when he considered the Church, he desired to abide and continue for the purpose of furthering its joy and faith. This should have been Elijah's desire too: he should have desired to remain for the benefit of the nation. But here he failed. He had fled into the wilderness under the influence of unbelief, and for the purpose of saving his life, and then desired that his life might be taken away simply to escape from the trials which his position involved.

In all this we may learn a most profitable lesson. Unbelief is sure to drive us from the place of testimony and service. So long as Elijah walked by faith, so long he occupied the place of a servant and a witness; but the moment his faith gave way, he abandoned both and fled into the wilderness. Unbelief ever unfits us for the place of service, and renders us useless. We never can act for God save in the energy of faith. We should remember this at a time like the present, when so many are giving up and turning aside. I suppose we may lay it down as a fixed principle of truth, that whenever a man abandons any distinctive position of testimony, it is from positive unbelief in the truth which led him into it.

Thus, for example, at the present day we see many who at one time took up a very distinct and prominent position from having learnt (as they stated) that great truth, the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church. Now, when this truth is really learnt, and held in power, it delivers from man's authority in matters of faith, and leads Christians out of those systems where such authority is acknowledged and defended.

If the Holy Ghost rules in the Church, then man has no right to interfere, no right to decree and institute ceremonies; for in doing so he is most presumptuously interfering with the divine prerogative. If therefore a man sincerely believe this important truth, his belief will certainly influence his conduct so far that he will feel himself called upon to bear testimony against every system in which this truth is practically denied; by separating from it.

It is not a question of what or whom he will attach himself to. No; this is another, and an after, consideration. A man's first business is to "cease to do evil," and after that to "learn to do well."

However, many who once professed to see this truth, and to act upon it, have since lost confidence in it, and as a consequence have retired from their distinct position, and gone back to those systems from which they had emerged. Like Elijah, they have not realized all their expectations; the results which they looked for have not appeared, therefore they have fled from the scene, and doubtless many have felt disposed to say, "*It is enough.*"

Yes, many a heart which once cherished high and fond expectations respecting the Church is now bowed down with sorrow and disappointment. Those who professed to see and act upon the truth of the

presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, and other collateral truths, have, to say the least, failed to carry them into practice, and not only failed, but in many instances have made a most humiliating exhibition of themselves; and the enemy has not been backward in making his own use of all this. He has used it especially to discourage the hearts of those who, no doubt, desired to stand in testimony for Christ, but who, seeing the failure of everything like corporate testimony on the earth, have given up in despair.

However, let Christians observe this: it was unbelief that made Elijah fly into the wilderness, and it is unbelief which causes any one to give up that position of testimony into which the truth of the Holy Ghost's presence in the Church would necessarily lead him.

Those who thus retreat prove that it was not with God and His eternal truth, but with man and his circumstances, that they had to do. If God's truth be the basis of our acting, we shall not be affected by man's mutability and failure. Man may, and assuredly will, fail in his very best and purest efforts to carry out the truth of God; but shall man's failure make the truth of God of none effect? "God forbid; yea, let God be true and every man a liar."

If those who profess to hold the blessed doctrine of the unity of the Church should split into parties; if those who hold the doctrine of the Spirit's presence in the Church for the purpose of rule and ministry should nevertheless practically lean upon man's authority; if those who profess to be looking for the personal appearance and reign of the Son of man should be found grasping with eagerness after the things of this present world, shall these things nullify those heavenly principles? Certainly not. Thank God, truth will be truth to the end. God will be God, though man should prove himself a thousandfold more imperfect than he is. Wherefore, instead of giving up in despair because men have failed to make a right use of God's truth, we should rather hold fast that truth as the only stay of our souls amid universal ruin and shipwreck.

Had Elijah held fast the truth which filled his soul when he stood on mount Carmel, he would never have been found beneath the juniper tree, nor would he have given utterance to such words as "Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

Yet the Lord can graciously meet his poor servant even asleep under a juniper tree. "He knoweth our frame, He remembers that we are dust," and therefore, instead of granting the petulant request of His harassed and disappointed servant, He rather seeks to feed and strengthen him for further exertion. This is not "the manner of man," but it is, blessed forever be His name, the manner of God, whose ways and thoughts are not as ours. Man would often deal roughly and harshly with his fellow, making no allowance for him, but acting towards him in haste and severity. Not so God. He ever deals in the deepest pity and tenderness. He understood Elijah, and He remembered the stand he had recently made for His name and truth, and therefore He would minister to him in the season of his depression.

"And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God" (1 Kings 19: 5, 8).

The Lord knows better than we do the demands that may be made on us, and He graciously strengthens us according to His estimate of those demands. The prophet wished to sleep for sorrow, but the Lord wished to strengthen and nerve him for future service. Like the disciples in the garden, who, overwhelmed with deep sorrow at the apparent failure of all their fondly cherished hopes, allowed

themselves to sink into profound slumber while their blessed Master would have had them girding up their loins and nerving their arms for the trying scenes on which they were about to enter.

But Elijah did eat and drink; and being thus strengthened, he proceeded to mount Horeb. Here again we have to trace the sorrowful actings of an impatient spirit. Elijah seems determined to retire from his place of service and testimony altogether. If he cannot sleep under the juniper tree, he will hide himself in a cave. "He came thither unto a cave, and lodged there."

When once a man allows himself to slip aside from the position in which faith would keep him, there is no accounting for the extremes into which he may run. Nothing but abiding faith in the Word of God can maintain any one in the path of service, because *faith makes a man satisfied to wait for the end*, whereas unbelief, looking only at surrounding circumstances, sinks into complete despondency.

The Christian must make up his mind to meet with nothing but trial and disappointment here. We may often dream of rest and satisfaction in some condition or other here; but it is only a dream. Elijah had no doubt hoped to see a mighty moral change brought about by his instrumentality; and instead of that, his life was threatened. But he ought to have been prepared for this.

The man who had fearlessly faced Ahab and all the prophets of Baal ought surely to have been able to bear a message from a woman. Yet no; his faith had given way. When a man's faith gives way, his own shadow will deter him. In contemplating the prophet's position on mount Horeb, one is disposed to ask, Can it be the same man whom we saw so recently standing on mount Carmel, at an altar of twelve stones, and there so blessedly vindicating the God of Israel in the presence of his brethren?

Alas! what a powerless creature man is when not sustained by simple faith in the testimony of God! David could, at one time, meet Goliath in the power of faith, and afterwards say, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Faith gets above circumstances and looks at God; unbelief loses sight of God, and looks only at circumstances. Unbelief says, "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight;" faith says, "We are well able to overcome them."

However, the Lord does not leave His servant in the cave; He still follows him, and seeks to bring him again and again back to that post which he had abandoned in his impatience and unbelief. "And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?" What a reproof! Why did Elijah thus bury himself in a cave? Why had he retreated from the honourable post of testimony? Because of Jezebel's message, and because his ministry had not been as fully owned as he expected. He thought to have reaped a more cheering harvest from all his labour than a threatening message and apparent desertion, and therefore he had sought the retirement of a mountain cave, as a place suited to indulge his feelings.

Now, it must be admitted that there was much — very much to wound the prophet's spirit; he had come from his quiet retreat at Zarephath to face the whole nation, headed by Jezebel and a host of wicked priests and prophets. He had confounded the latter, through God's grace; God had sent down fire from Heaven in answer to his prayer; all Israel had seemed to acknowledge the truth as proclaimed by him. All these things must have raised his expectations to no ordinary height; yet, after all, his life is threatened, he sees no one to stand by him, he is enveloped in a thick cloud, he abandons the field of conflict, and hides himself in a cave.

It is much easier to censure another than to act aright, and we must be exceedingly slow in pronouncing judgement upon the actions of so honoured a servant as Elijah the Tishbite. But though we should not deal much in censure, we may, at least, draw instruction and warning from this section of

our prophet's history. We may learn a lesson of which we stand very much in need. "What doest thou here?" is a question which might justly be put to many of us from time to time, when, in impatience or unbelief, we leave our proper place of service amongst our brethren, to sleep under a juniper tree, or hide ourselves in a cave.

Are there not many at this moment who, aforesaid, were powerful advocates of the principles connected with the unity and worship of the people of God, to be found either asleep or hidden in caves? that is, they are doing nothing for the furtherance of those truths which they once advocated. This is a truly sorrowful reflection. To such the question, "What doest thou here?" should come with special force. Yes, what are such doing? or rather, what are they not doing in the way of positive mischief to the sheep of Christ? A man who thus retires is not merely harmless, he is noxious; he is really injuring his brethren.

It would be far better never to have appeared as the advocates of important truth, than having done so to retire; to call special attention to some leading principles of divine truth, and then to abandon them, is most culpable. "If many man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." We can pity ignorance, or endeavour to instruct it; but the man, who, having professed to see truth, afterwards abandons it, can neither be looked upon as an object of pity, nor a subject for instruction.

But it is not merely unbelief and disappointment in reference to certain truths that drive men into unhappy isolation; apparent failure in ministry has the same effect. The latter was, perhaps, what more especially affected Elijah. The triumph on mount Carmel had, doubtless, led to much elation of spirit in reference to the results of his ministry, and he was not prepared for the sad reverse.

Now, the sovereign remedy for both these maladies, that is, for unbelief in important truth and disappointment as regards our ministry, is to keep the eye simply and steadily fixed on Jesus.

If, for example, we see men professing those two grand and all-important truths — the unity of the Church, and the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church — professing, I say, to see these things, and yet failing most sadly in carrying them out, shall we turn aside, and say there is no unity, and no abiding presence of the Holy Ghost? God forbid. This would be to make God's truth dependent upon man's faithfulness, which cannot be endured for a moment by the spiritual mind. No, let us rather look into the precious Word of God, and see the Church as the body of Christ, each member thereof written in God's book from everlasting to everlasting.

And, in like manner when we see Jesus at God's right hand in the Heavens, we see the unfailing ground of the Spirit's presence in the Church. Thank God for the blessed stability of all this. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

Finally, if any be tried in the matter of their ministry, if the enemy would endeavour to make them give up in chagrin or disappointment, let them try to keep their eyes more simply on Jesus, remembering that, however depressing the aspect of things here may be, the time is speedily approaching when all who have served the Lord simply, from love to Him, shall reap a full reward. We must take care, however, that we allow not our ministry, or the fruits thereof, to get between our souls and Christ. There is great danger of this. A man may set out in unaffected devotedness to his Master, and yet, through the craft of the enemy, and the weakness of his own heart, he may, ere long, give his work a more prominent place in his thoughts than Christ Himself. Had Elijah kept the God of Israel more before him, he would not have given up in despair.

But we learn the real state of the prophet's soul from his reply to the divine challenge: "I have been very jealous," said he, "for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy

covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away.” How different is this language from that which dropped from his lips on mount Carmel! There he vindicated God, — here he vindicates himself; there he endeavoured to convert his brethren by presenting before them the truth of God, — here he accuses his brethren, and recounts their sins before God.

[It is instructive to observe the order in which Elijah recounts the sins of Israel: 1 — “they have forsaken Thy covenant;” 2 — “they have thrown down Thine altars;” 3 — “they have slain Thy prophets with the sword.” The ground of all this evil was their having forsaken the covenant of God, the natural consequence of which was the throwing down of God’s altars, and the abandonment of His worship, which latter was followed out by killing the prophets. We can understand this order.]

“I have been very jealous;” but “they have forsaken,” etc. This was the strain in which the disappointed prophet spoke from his cave on mount Horeb. He seems to have looked upon himself as the only one that had done, or was doing, anything for God. “I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away.” Now all this was the natural consequence of his position.

The moment a man retires from his place of testimony and service among his brethren, he must begin to extol himself, and accuse them; yea, his very act expresses at once the assumption of his faithfulness, and their failure. But to all who thus separate from, and accuse their brethren, the searching question is, “What doest thou here?” “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Our prophet, however, is called forth from his isolated place. “Go forth,” said Jehovah, “and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a *still small voice*.”

The Lord, by these solemn and varied exhibitions of Himself and His wondrous actings, would teach His servant most impressively that He was not to be confined to one agent in carrying out His designs. The wind was an agent, and a powerful one, yet it did not accomplish the end; and the same might be said of the earthquake and the fire. They, by their very terribleness, served but to pave the way for the last, and apparently the weakest agent, namely, the still small voice.

Thus the prophet was taught that he must be satisfied to be an agent, and one of many. He might have thought that all the work was to have been done by him. Coming, as he did, with all the terrible vehemence of the mighty wind, he supposed he should have carried off every obstacle, and brought the nation back to its place of happy allegiance to God. But ah! how little does even the most elevated instrument apprehend his own insignificance! The most devoted, the most gifted and the most elevated are but stones in the superstructure, screws in the vast machine; and whoever supposes he is *the* instrument, will find himself much mistaken.

“Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase.” And so Elijah had to learn that the Lord was not confined to him. He had other shafts in His quiver, which He would discharge in due time. The wind, the earthquake, and the fire must all do their work, and then the still small voice could be heard distinctly and effectually. It is the sole province of God to make Himself heard, even though He speak in “a still small voice.” Elijah remained in the cave until this voice reached his ear, and then “he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave.”

It is only “before the Lord” that we get into our right position. We may conceive high thoughts of ourselves and our ministry, until we are brought into the divine presence, and then we learn to wrap our

face in a mantle; in other words, we learn, in reality, to hide ourselves. When Moses found himself in the divine presence “he trembled, and durst not behold.” When Job found himself there, “he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes”; and so has it been with every one who has ever gotten a view of himself in the light of God's presence; he has learned his own thorough nothingness, he has been led to see that God could do without him.

The Lord is ever ready to acknowledge the smallest act of service done to Him, but the moment a man makes a centre of his service, the Lord will teach him that He wants him no longer. Thus it was with Elijah. He had retired from the field of labour and conflict, and earnestly desired to be gone: he thought himself a solitary witness, a forsaken and disappointed servant, and Jehovah makes him stand forth before Him, and there, as it were, give up his commission, and hear the names of his successors in the field of labour.

“The Lord said unto him, Go, return, on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”

This statement must have thrown much light on the prophet's mind. Seven thousand! although he had thought himself left alone. Jehovah will never be at a loss for instruments. If the wind will not do, He has the earthquake; and if the earthquake will not do, He has the fire; and last of all, He has “the still small voice.”

And so Elijah was taught that Israel had to be acted upon by other ministry besides his: Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha had yet to appear on the scene, and as the still small voice had proved effectual in drawing him forth from his mountain cave, so would the gracious ministry of Elisha prove effectual in drawing forth from their lurking-places the thousands of faithful ones whom he had altogether overlooked. Elijah was not to do all. He was but one agent. “The eye cannot say to the hand I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”

Such, I believe, was the important lesson taught to our prophet by the impressive scenes on mount Horeb. He had gone up thither full of thoughts of himself alone; he stood there filled with the idea that he was *the* witness, the *only* witness; he went down from thence with the humbling yet wholesome consciousness that *he was but one of seven thousand*. A very different view of the case indeed. None can teach like God. When He desires to teach a lesson He can teach it effectually, blessed be His name. He had so taught Elijah his own insignificance that he was satisfied to retrace his steps, to come forth from his cave and down from the mount, to lay aside all his complaints and accusations, and humbly, silently, obediently, and willingly cast his prophetic mantle over the shoulders of another.

All this is most instructive. The silence of Elijah, after he hears of the seven thousand is most remarkable. He had learnt a lesson which mount Carmel could not teach him — a lesson which neither Zarephath nor Cherith had taught him. In these places he had learnt much about God and His truth, but on Horeb he had learnt his own littleness, and as the result of that learning he comes down from the mount and gives up his office to another; and not merely this, but in so doing he says “What have I done?”

In a word, we see in this dear servant the most complete renunciation of self from the moment he learnt that he was but one of many. He delivers a message to Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth; a message to Ahaziah in his sick chamber; then he takes his departure from earth, leaving the work which

he had begun to be finished by other hands. Like John the Baptist, who, as we know, came in the spirit and power of Elias, he was satisfied to usher in another and then retire.

Oh that we all knew more of this humble self-renouncing spirit — the spirit which leads a man to do the work and think nothing of it; or if it should be so, to see the work done by others and rejoice therein. The Baptist had to learn this as well as the Tishbite; he had to learn to be content to end his brilliant career in the gloom of a prison while another was doing the work. John too thought it strange that it should be thus with him, and sent a message to Christ to inquire, “Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?” As if he had said, Can it be possible that He to whom I have borne witness is indeed the Christ and yet I am left to perish, neglected, in Herod's dungeon?

Thus it was, and John had to learn to be content. He had said at the commencement of his ministerial course, “He must increase, but I must decrease”; but it may be he had not just counted upon such a mode of decreasing: yet such was the divine counsel concerning this honoured servant. How different are God's thoughts from those of man! John, after having fulfilled a most important mission, even the mission of ushering in the Son of God, was destined to have his head cut off at the will of a wicked woman, and lest an ungodly tyrant should break his oath.

Just so was it with Elijah the Tishbite. His course, no doubt, had been a most brilliant one; he had passed before the eyes of Israel in all the dignity and majesty of a heavenly man — a heavenly messenger. Divine truth had fallen from his lips, and God had abundantly honoured him in his work; yet the moment he began to think of himself as anything; the moment he began to say, “I have been very jealous, and I only am left.” the Lord taught him his mistake, and told him to appoint his successor.

May we learn from all this to be very humble and self-renouncing in our service, whatever it be. Let us not presume to survey ourselves as if we were anything, or our service as if we had achieved some great thing. And even though our ministry should be unproductive, and we ourselves despised and rejected, may we be able *to look forward to the end*, when everything shall be made manifest. This was what our blessed Master did. He kept His eye fixed on “the joy that was set before Him,” and regarded not the thoughts of men as He passed along. Nor did He complain of or accuse those who rejected, despised, and crucified Him. No; His dying words were, “Father, forgive them.” Blessed Master, impart unto us more of Thy meek, loving, gracious and forgiving spirit! May we be like Thee, and tread in Thy steps across this dreary world!

Part 6

THE PROPHET'S RAPTURE

From the moment that Elijah had cast his mantle upon the shoulders of Elisha we may consider his prophetic career as almost ended. He delivered a message or two, as has already been noticed; but as regards his ministerial connection with Israel, it may be looked upon as closed from the moment that Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, was anointed to be prophet in his room. Indeed, he abandoned the work himself. “He arose, and fled for his life;” so that it was, to speak after the manner of men, high time to think of appointing a successor.

But we must not confine our thoughts to Elijah's ministerial character when reflecting upon his life and times. We must not only look at him as a *prophet*, but also as a *man*; not only as a *servant*, but also a *child*; not only *officially*, but also *personally*. As a prophet, the steady continuance and successful termination of his course would depend, in a great measure, on his own faithfulness. Hence, when he allowed himself to be carried away by a spirit inconsistent with the character of a genuine servant, he

had to resign his office into the hands of another.

[It may be needful just to notice an objection which may be made to the view I have taken of the prophet's actings. It may be said that he was raised up at a special era of Israel's history, and for a special purpose, and that when that purpose had been effected another kind of instrument was needed. All this is most true. Yet we can have no difficulty in perceiving the haste and impatience of Elijah in desiring to resign his post because things had not turned out as he had expected. God's counsels and man's acting are very distinct. The ministry of Elijah had filled its proper place in the nation's history, no doubt; and moreover, another kind of instrument might be needed; yet this leaves quite untouched the question of his spirit and actings in the matter. Joshua might be needed to succeed Moses; and yet it was for hastiness of spirit that Moses was refused permission to go over Jordan.]

There were, however, better things in store for Elijah. He might be hasty; he might hide himself in a cave, and from thence make intercession against Israel; he might impatiently long to depart from the trying scene in which he had been called to move; he might do all this, and in consequence thereof be called to resign his place: still the blessed God had thoughts of grace about him which never could have entered into his heart.

How truly blessed to allow God to adopt His own manner in dealing with us! We are sure to sustain loss when we interfere with the divine method of proceeding; and yet it has ever been man's tendency thus to interfere. Man will not allow God to adopt His own method of justifying him, but will ever be intruding into the wondrous plan of redemption: and even when he has submitted himself, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, to God's righteousness, he will again and again, notwithstanding repeated experience of God's superior wisdom, seek to interfere with the divine method of training and leading him; as if he could make better arrangements for himself than God! Presumptuous folly! — the fruits of which, to some, will be eternal perdition; to others, present forfeiture of blessing in the way of enlarged knowledge and experience of God's character and ways.

Had Elijah received his request, how much he would have lost! How much better to be carried up to Heaven in a chariot of fire, than to be taken away in a fit of impatience! Elijah asked for the latter, but God gave him the former. “And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal” (2 Kings 2: 1).

It would be foreign to my present design to dwell upon the circumstances of Elisha's introduction into the prophetic office, his slowness at first in accompanying Elijah, and his unwillingness afterward to leave him. We find him in this chapter accompanying Elijah from Gilgal to Bethel, and from Bethel to Jericho, and from Jericho to Jordan. All these places were famous in Israel's history. Bethel, or the house of God, was the spot where Jacob of old had seen the mystic ladder stretching from earth to Heaven, the apt expression of God's future purposes concerning the heavenly and earthly families. To this same place did Jacob return, by the express command of God, after he had cleansed himself from the defilement of Shechem (Gen. 35: 1).

Bethel, therefore, was a spot of deep interest to the heart of an Israelite. But alas, it had become polluted! Jeroboam's calf had effectually obliterated the sacred principles of truth taught by Jacob's ladder. The latter conducted the spirit from earth to Heaven — it led upward and onward; upward to God's eternal purpose of *grace*; onward to the display of that purpose in *glory*. The former, on the contrary, bound the heart down to a degrading system of political religion — a system in which the *names* of things heavenly were used to secure for self the things earthly.

Jeroboam made use of *the house of God* to secure for himself *the kingdom of Israel*. He was well content to remain at the bottom of the ladder, and cared not to look upward. His earthly heart desired

not to scale those sublime heights to which Jacob's ladder led — earth and its glory were all he wanted; and provided he obtained these, he cared not whether he worshipped before Baal's calf at Bethel, or Jehovah's altar at Jerusalem. What was it to him? Jerusalem, Bethel, or Dan, was but a name in the estimate of this politico-religious man — yea, and in the estimate of every other such man.

Religion is but an instrument in the hands of the children of this world — an instrument by which they dig into the bowels of the earth; not a ladder by which they mount from earth to Heaven. Man pollutes everything sacred. Place in his hands the purest, the most heavenly truth, and ere long he will defile it: commit to his guardianship the most precious, the most impressive ordinance, and he will ere long convert it into a lifeless form, and lose therein the principles sought to be conveyed. So was it with Bethel. So was it with everything sacred that man had anything to do with.

Then as to Gilgal, the place from whence the two prophets started: it too was a place of interest. It was there the Lord rolled away the reproach of Egypt from His people; there Israel kept their first Passover in the land of Canaan, and were refreshed by the old corn of the land. Gilgal was the rallying point for Joshua and his men of war; from thence they went forth in the strength of the Lord to obtain glorious triumphs over the uncircumcised, and thither they returned to enjoy the spoils.

Thus was Gilgal a place round which the affections of a Jew might well entwine themselves — a place of many hallowed recollections. Yet it too had lost all its reality. The reproach of Egypt had rolled back upon Israel. The principles which once stood connected with Gilgal had lost their sway over the hearts of God's professing people. Bochim (the place of weepers) had long since taken the place of Gilgal in reference to Israel, and Gilgal had become an empty form — ancient, no doubt, but powerless, for Israel had ceased to walk in the power of the truth taught at Gilgal.

Again, as to Jericho, There it was that the hosts of the Lord, under their mighty Captain, gained their first victory in the land of promise, and exhibited the power of faith.

And lastly, at Jordan it was that Israel had had such an impressive manifestation of Jehovah's power in connection with the ark of His presence. Jordan was the place where death had been, in type, overcome by the power of life; and in its midst, and on its banks, it presented the trophies of victory over the foe.

Thus were these varied places — namely, Bethel, Gilgal, Jericho, and Jordan — deeply interesting to the heart of a true child of Abraham; but their power and meaning were lost: Bethel had ceased to be the house of God save in name; Gilgal was no longer valued as the place where the reproach of Egypt had been rolled away. The walls of Jericho which had been destroyed by faith were built again. Jordan was no longer viewed as the scene of Jehovah's power.

In a word, all these things had become mere form without power, and the Lord might, even in Elijah's time, have to speak to the house of Israel concerning them in the following impressive words: “Thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, *Seek ye Me*, and ye shall live: but seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to naught. Seek the Lord, and ye shall live” (Amos 5: 4-6). Here is an important truth for all those whose hearts are prone to cling to ancient forms.

We are taught by this striking passage, that nothing but the divine reality of personal communion with God will stand. Men may plead, in defence of forms, their great antiquity, but where can we find greater antiquity than that which Bethel and Gilgal could boast? Yet they failed and came to naught, and the faithful were admonished to abandon them all and look up in simple faith to the living God.

Through all the above places, then, our prophet passed in the energy and elevation of a heavenly

man. His destination lay beyond and above them all. He would seek to leave Elisha behind him while he pressed onward along his heavenward path; but the latter clings to him, and accompanies him as it were to the very portals of Heaven, and checks the busy intrusion of his less intelligent brethren by the words, "Hold ye your peace."

But Elijah moves on in the power of his heavenly mission. "The Lord hath sent me," says he; and in obedience to the divine command he passes through Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, and on to Jordan; leaving far behind him all those ancient forms and sacred localities which might engage the affections of any who were not, like Elijah the Tishbite, carried forward by a heavenly hope.

The sons of the prophets might tarry amid those things, and perhaps, too, have many a hallowed recollection awakened by them; but to one whose spirit was filled with the thought of his rapture to Heaven, things of earth be they ever so sacred, ever so venerable, could present no attraction. Heaven was his object, not Bethel or Gilgal. He was about to take his departure from earth and all its harassing scenes; he was about to leave Ahab and Jezebel behind to meet their terrible doom; to pass beyond the region of broken covenants, ruined altars, and slain prophets — in a word, to pass beyond the gloom and sorrow, trial and disappointment of this stormy world; and that not by the agency of death, but by a heavenly chariot.

Death was to possess no power against this heavenly man. No doubt his body was changed in the twinkling of an eye, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption"; but death can have no power over him; he rather stepped like a conqueror into his triumphal chariot, and thus passed away into his rest.

Happy man! his conflict was over, his race run, his victory secure. He had been a stranger here — unlike the men of this world; yea, unlike many of the children of the kingdom. He had come forth from the mountains of Gilead as the girded witness, and the stern intruder upon the course of a professing world. He had no home or resting-place here below, but as a stranger and pilgrim pressed onward toward his heavenly rest.

Elijah's path from first to last was a unique one. Like John the Baptist, he was a voice "crying in the wilderness," away from the haunts of men; and whenever he did make his appearance, he was like some heavenly meteor, the origin and destiny of which were alike beyond the reach of human conception. The man with the leathern girdle was only known as the witness against evil — the bearer of the truth of God. He had no fellowship with man as such, but in all his ways maintained an elevation which at once repulsed all intrusion and secured reverence and respect. There was so much of the sacred solemnity of the sanctuary about him that vanity or folly could not live in his presence. He was not, like his successor Elisha, a social man; his path was solitary.

"He came neither eating nor drinking." In a word, he was peculiar in everything; peculiar in his entrance upon his prophetic career, peculiar in his passage out of it. He was an exception, and a marked one. The very fact of his not being called to pass through the gates of the grave would be quite sufficient to draw special attention to him.

But let us observe the path pursued by our prophet as he journeyed toward the scene of his rapture. He retraced the path of the camp of old. Israel had journeyed from Jordan to Jericho, but Elijah journeyed from Jericho to Jordan. In other words, as Jordan was that which separated the wilderness from the land, the prophet crossed it, thus leaving Canaan behind him. His chariot met him, not *in the Land*, but *in the wilderness*. The land was polluted, and was speedily to be cleansed of those who had introduced the pollution the glory was soon to take its departure from even the most favoured spot. Ichabod might be written upon it all; wherefore the prophet leaves it and passes into the wilderness,

thus pointing out to the spiritual mind that nothing remained for heavenly men but the wilderness and the rest above.

Earth was no longer to be the resting-place, or portion, of the man of God it was polluted. The Jordan had been divided to allow Israel to pass from the wilderness to Canaan; it was now to be divided to allow a heavenly man to pass from Canaan to the wilderness where his chariot awaited him, ready to convey him from earth to Heaven.

Earthly things and earthly hopes had passed away from the mind of Elijah, he had learnt the thorough vanity of everything here below, and nothing now remained for him but to look beyond it all. He had toiled amid Israel's broken altars; he had laboured and testified for years among a disobedient and gainsaying people; he had longed to depart and be at rest; and now he was about to do so in a way worthy of God — Jehovah Himself was about to place His everlasting arms around and underneath His servant to shield him from the power of death. In his case death was to have no sting and the grave no victory.

Elijah was privileged, as he stood upon the sand of the wilderness, to look right upward and, unimpeded by the humiliating circumstances of sickness and death, see Heaven open to receive him. Not one of the circumstances of fallen humanity fell to the lot of our prophet in the matter of his exit from earth. He exchanged his prophet's mantle for a chariot of fire. He could cheerfully let his mantle drop to earth while he ascended to Heaven. To him earth was but a perishable and polluted speck in God's creation, and most happy was he to lay aside everything which marked his connection with it.

What a position! And yet it is only the position which every heavenly man should occupy. Nature and earth have no longer any claims on the man who believes in Jesus. The Cross has broken all the chains which once bound him to earth. As Jordan separated Elijah from Canaan, and brought him into the wilderness to meet Jehovah's chariot, so the Cross has introduced the believer into new ground; it has brought him into purely wilderness circumstances; it has placed him, too, at the other side of death, with no other object before him than his rapture to meet the Lord in the air.

Such is the real, unquestionable portion of every saint, be he ever so weak, ever so ignorant. The happy experience thereof is, of course, a very different thing. To attain to this we need to be much alone with God, and much in the exercise of a spirit of self-judgement. Flesh and blood can never be brought to understand the rapture of a heavenly man.

Indeed, we find that the sons of the prophets did not understand it either, for they say to Elisha, "Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men: let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master, lest, peradventure, the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley." Here was their highest thought about the prophet's rapture — "The Spirit of the Lord hath cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley." They could not conceive such a thing as his being carried up to Heaven in a chariot of fire.

[It has been observed by another that the little children who came out of Bethel, and said to Elisha, "Go up, thou bald head," were mocking the idea of rapture. If this be so, they afford a sample of the world in their thoughts about the rapture of the Church.]

They still tarried amid the things of earth, and had not their spiritual senses sufficiently exercised to perceive and appreciate a truth so glorious. Elisha yielded to their importunity, but they learnt the folly of their thoughts by the fruitless toil of their messengers. Fifty strong men could nowhere find the raptured prophet. He was gone; and it required other strength than that of nature to travel the same road. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because

they are spiritually discerned.” Those who walk in the Spirit will best understand the prophet's privilege in being delivered from the claims of mortality, and being introduced in a manner so glorious into his heavenly rest.

Such, then, was the end of our prophet's course. A glorious end! Who would not say, “Let my last end be like this”? Blessed be the love that so arranged it that a *man* should be thus honoured! Blessed be the grace that led the Son of God — the Prince of life — to stoop from His glory in the heavens and submit to a shameful death upon the cross, by virtue of which, even though yet only in prospect, the prophet Elijah was exempted from the penalty of sin, permitted to pass into the regions of light and immortality without the smell of death having passed upon him!

How we should adore this love, dear Christian reader! Yes; while we trace the footsteps of the remarkable man whose history we have been dwelling upon; while we follow him from Gilead to Cherith, from Cherith to Zarephath, from Zarephath to Carmel, from Carmel to Horeb, and from Horeb *to Heaven*, we must feel constrained to cry out, “Oh, the matchless love of God!” Who could conceive that mortal man could tread such a course? Who but God could bring about such things?

The path of Elijah the Tishbite magnifies exceedingly the grace of God, and confounds the wisdom of the enemy. The rapture of a saint to Heaven is one of the richest fruits and most magnificent results of redemption. To save a soul from hell is in itself a glorious achievement, a splendid triumph; to raise up the body of a sleeping saint is even a more marked display of divine grace and power; but to take a living man, in the freshness and energy of his natural existence, and carry him from earth to Heaven, is a finer display of the power of God and the value of redemption than anything we can conceive.

Thus it was with Elijah. It was not merely the salvation of his soul, nor the resurrection of his body; but it was the rapture of his person — “body, soul, and spirit.” He was taken away from the midst of all the turmoil and confusion around him. The tide of evil might yet have to flow onward; men and principles might continue to work and show themselves. The measure of Israel's iniquities might still have to be filled up and the proud Assyrian enter the scene as the rod of Jehovah's anger to chastise them; but what was all this to the raptured prophet? Nothing. Heaven had opened upon him as he stood a homeless wanderer in the wilderness. He was now to be done with the land of Canaan, with its defilement and degradation, and to take his place above, there to await those momentous scenes in which he was, and is yet, to take a part.

Having thus seen our prophet go into Heaven, our reflections on his life and times might naturally close. Yet there is one scene in particular in which he appears in the New Testament; and did we not dwell for a little upon it, our sketch of him would be incomplete. I allude to the mount of transfiguration, where Moses and Elias appeared in glory, and spoke with the Lord Jesus Christ of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.

The Lord Jesus had taken with Him Peter, James, and John, and brought them up into a high mountain, apart, in order to exhibit in their view a sample of His future glory, that thus their spirits might be fortified against the trying scenes through which both He and they had yet to pass.

What a company! The Son of God, in white and glistering raiment: Moses, type of those who sleep in Jesus; Elias, type of the raptured saints; and Peter, James, and John, who have been styled the pillars of the New Testament Church! Now it is evident that our Lord designed to prepare His apostles for the scene of His sufferings by showing them a specimen of the glory that should follow. He saw the cross, with all its accompanying horrors, in the distance before Him.

Shortly before His transfiguration He said to them, “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day”: but previous to His entering into all this, He would show them something of His glory. The cross is in reality the basis of everything. The future glory of Christ and His saints, the joy of restored Israel in the land of Canaan, and the deliverance of creation from the bondage of corruption, all hang upon the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. His sorrows and sufferings have secured the Church's glory, Israel's restoration, and the blessing of the whole creation.

No marvel, therefore, that the cross should form the subject of discourse between Christ and His glorious visitors. “They spoke of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” Everything hung upon this. The past, the present and the future all rested on the cross as upon an immortal basis. Moses could see and acknowledge in the cross that which superseded the law, with all its shadowy rites and ceremonies; Elijah could see and acknowledge in it that which could give efficacy to all prophetic testimony. The law and the prophets pointed to the cross as the foundation of the glory which lay beyond it.

How profoundly interesting, therefore was the subject of converse upon the mount of transfiguration, in the midst of the excellent glory! It was interesting to earth, interesting to Heaven, interesting to the wide creation of God. It forms the centre of all the divine purposes and counsels; it harmonises all the divine attributes; it secures upon immutable principles the glory of God and the sinner's peace; on it may be inscribed in indelible characters “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

No marvel, therefore, again I say, that Moses and Elias could appear in glory and talk of such a momentous subject. They were about to return to their rest, while their blessed Master had to descend again into the arena of conflict to meet the cross in all its tremendous reality; but they knew full well that He and they would yet meet in the midst of a glory which shall never be overshadowed by a cloud — a glory of which He, the Lamb, was to be the source and the centre forever — a glory which shall shine with everlasting brilliancy when all human and earthly glories shall be overcast by the shadows of an eternal night.

But what of the disciples during all this wondrous converse? How were they employed? They were asleep! Asleep while Moses and Elias conversed with the Son of God concerning His cross and passion! Marvellous insensibility! Nature can sleep in the very presence of the excellent glory.

[At is not a little remarkable that we find these same disciples asleep during the season of our Lord's agony in the garden. They slept In the view of the glory, and also in the view of the cross. Nature can as little enter into the one as the other. And yet the blessed Master does not rebuke them in either case, save to say to the most prominent and self-confident among them, “Couldst *thou* not watch with Me one hour?” He knew whom He had to do with: He knew that “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak “ Gracious Master, Thou wast ever ready to make allowance for Thy poor people, and didst say, “Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptation,” to those who had slept on the mount, slept in the garden, and who were about to deny and desert Thee In the hour of Thy deepest need!]

“And when they were awake they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him. And it came to pass, as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles — one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias — not knowing what he said.”

No doubt it was good to be there — far better than to go down from their elevation and glory to

meet all the contradiction and trying obloquy of man. When Peter saw the glory, and Moses and Elias, it instantly occurred to his Jewish mind that there was no hindrance to the celebration of the feast of tabernacles. He had been asleep while they spoke of “the decease”; he had been indulging nature whilst his Master's sufferings had formed the subject of discourse; and when he awoke, he would find his tent in the midst of that scene of peace and glory, beneath the open heavens. But ah, he knew not what he said. It was but a passing moment.

The heavenly strangers were soon to depart; the Lord Jesus was to be delivered into the hands of men. He was to pass from the mount of glory to the place of suffering; Peter himself, too, had yet to be sifted by Satan — to be deeply humbled and broken under a sense of his shameful fall — to be girded by another, and carried whither he would not; a long and a dreary season, a dark night of sorrow and tribulation, was in store for the Church; the armies of Rome were yet to trample the holy city in the dust, and lay waste her bulwarks; the thunders of war and political revolution were yet to roll, with terrible vehemence, over the whole civilised world; — all these things, and many more, were to come to pass, ere the fond thought of poor Peter's heart could be realized on earth. The prophet Elijah must visit the earth again “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal. 4: 5). “Elias must first come and restore all things.”

How long, O Lord? May this be the continual inquiry of our hearts as we pass along to that rest and glory which lie before us. “Time is short,” and eternity, with all its divine and glorious realities, is at hand. May we live in the light of it! May we ever be able, by the eye of faith, to see the bright beams of the millennial morning — the morning without clouds — irradiating the distance hills!

Everything points to this; every event that happens, every voice that reaches the ear, tells of the speedy approach of the kingdom: the sea and the waves may be heard roaring — nations are convulsed, thrones overturned; — all these things have a voice for the circumcised ear, and the voice is, “Look up!”

Those who have received the Holy Ghost have received the earnest of the future inheritance; and the earnest, as we know, is part of the thing to be received. They have been on the mount; and although the cloud may overshadow them too — although they too may have to come down from the mount to meet the trial and sorrow below — yet they have a foretaste of the joy and blessedness which shall be theirs forever; and they can unfeignedly thank God, as they journey on from day to day, that their hopes are not bounded by this world's gloomy horizon, but that they have a home beyond it all.

Oh wondrous grace, oh love divine,
To give us such a home!
Let us the present things resign,
And seek this rest to come.
And gazing on our Saviour's cross,
Esteem all else but dung and dross;
Press forward till the race be run,
Fight till the crown of life be won.

CONCLUSION

Although, in the character of his ministry, Elijah the Tishbite much resembled John the Baptist, as has been already observed, yet looking at him personally, and considering his unearthly and pilgrim

path, and specially his rapture to Heaven, he stands before us as a remarkable illustration of the Church, or heavenly family. Taking this view of him, I think a few observations on the important doctrine of the Church will not be considered out of place as a conclusion to the foregoing sketch of his life and times.

It is of the utmost importance that the Christian reader should understand the doctrine of the Church's heavenly character. It will be found to be the only preservative against the varied forms of evil and unsound doctrine which prevail around us. To be soundly instructed in the heavenly origin, heavenly position, and heavenly destiny of the Church, is the most effectual safeguard against worldliness in the Christian's present path, and also against false teaching in reference to his future hopes.

Every system of doctrine or discipline which would connect the Church with the world, either in her present condition or her future prospects, must be wrong, and must exert an unhallowed influence. The Church is not of the world. Her life, her position, her hopes, are all heavenly in the very highest sense of that word. The calling and existence of the Church are, humanly speaking, consequent upon the present rejection of Israel and the world.

The garden of Eden and the land of Canaan were successively the scenes of divine operation; but sin, as we have often heard marred them both, and now all who believe the gospel of the grace of God, preached to them in the name of a crucified, risen and ascended Saviour, are constituted living members of the body of Christ, and are called upon to abandon every earthly hope. Being quickened by the voice of Him who has passed into the heavens, and not only so, but being united to Him by the Holy Ghost, they are called to occupy the place of strangers and pilgrims on earth.

The position of Elijah the Tishbite as he stood on the wilderness side of Jordan waiting for his rapture to Heaven, aptly represents the condition of the Church collectively or the believer individually. [When I say the wilderness side of Jordan, I only speak of Jordan in reference to the prophet's path. If we look at it in reference to the path of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, we learn a different truth. The spiritual reader will understand both.] The Church, properly so called, finds (as another has said) "the termini of her existence to be the cross and the coming of the Lord"; and surely, we may say, earth has no place between these sacred bounds. To think of the Church as a worldly corporation, be it ever so sound and scriptural, is to sink far below the divine thought about it.

The doctrine of the Church's heavenly character was developed in all its power and beauty by the Holy Ghost in the apostle Paul. Up to his time, and even during the early stages of his ministry, the divine purpose was to deal with Israel. There had been all along a chain of witnesses, the object of whose mission was exclusively the house of Israel.

The prophets, as has been already observed in the opening of this paper, bore witness to Israel, not only concerning their complete failure, but also the future establishment of *the kingdom* agreeably to the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac Jacob, and David. They spoke not of the Church as the body of Christ. How could they, when the thing was a profound mystery, "not revealed to the sons of men"?

The thought of a Church composed of Jew and Gentile, "seated *together* in the heavenlies," lay far beyond the range of prophetic testimony. Isaiah, no doubt, speaks in very elevated strains of Jerusalem's glory in the latter day; he speaks of Gentiles coming to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising; but he never rises higher than the kingdom, and as a consequence never brings out anything beyond the covenant made with Abraham, which secures everlasting blessedness to his seed, and through them to the Gentiles. We may range through the inspired pages of the law and the prophets, from one end to the other, and find nothing concerning "*the great mystery*" of the Church.

Then, again, in the ministry of John the Baptist we observe the same thing. We have the sum and substance of his testimony in these words: “Repent, for *the kingdom is* at hand.” He came as the great precursor of the Messiah, and sought to produce moral order amongst all ranks. He told the people what they were to do in that transition state into which his ministry was designed to conduct them, and pointed to Him that was to come. Have we anything of the *Church* in all this? Not a syllable. The *kingdom is* still the very highest thought. John led his disciples to the waters of Jordan — the place of confession in view of the kingdom; but it was not yet that character of repentance produced in them who are made members of the body of Christ.

The Lord Jesus Himself then took up the chain of testimony. The prophets had been stoned; John had been beheaded; and now “the Faithful Witness” entered the scene, and not only declared that the kingdom was at hand, but presented Himself to the daughter of Zion as her King. He too was rejected, and, like every previous witness, sealed His testimony with His blood. Israel would not have God's King, and God would not give Israel the kingdom.

Next came the twelve apostles, and took up the chain of testimony. Immediately after the resurrection they inquired of the Lord, “Wilt Thou at this time restore again *the kingdom* to Israel?” Their minds were filled with the thought of the kingdom. “We trusted,” said the two disciples going to Emmaus, “that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.” And so it was. The question was, *when?* The Lord does not rebuke the disciples for entertaining the thought of the kingdom; He simply tells them, “It is not for you to know *the times or the seasons*, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be *witnesses* unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1: 7-8).

Agreeably to this, the Apostle Peter, in his address to Israel, offers them *the kingdom*. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and the times of refreshing shall come from the presence (*apo prosopon*) of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

Have we here the development of the Church? No. The time had not yet arrived for this. The revelation of the Church was yet to be, as it were, forced out as something quite extraordinary — something quite out of the regular course of things. The Church as seen in the opening of the Acts exhibits but a sample of lovely grace and order, exquisite indeed in its way, but not anything beyond what man could take cognisance of and value. In a word, it was still the kingdom, and not the great mystery of the Church. Those who think that the opening chapters of Acts present the Church in its essential aspect have by no means reached the divine thought on the subject.

Peter's vision in Acts 10 is decidedly a step in advance of his preaching in Acts 3. Still, however, the grand truth of the heavenly mystery was not yet unfolded. In the council held at Jerusalem for the purpose of considering the question that had arisen in reference to the Gentiles, we find the apostles all agreeing with James in the following conclusion: “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things” (Acts 15: 14-17) .

Here we are taught that the Gentiles, as such, are to have a place with the Jews in the kingdom.

But did the council at Jerusalem apprehend the truth of the Church, of Jews and Gentiles so truly formed in “one body” that they are no more Jew nor Gentile? I believe not. A few members might have heard it from Paul (see Gal. 2: 12), but as a whole they do not seem to have understood it as yet.

We infer, therefore, that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles by the mouth of Peter was not the development of *the great mystery* of the Church, but simply the opening of *the kingdom*, agreeable to the words of the prophets, and also to Peter's commission in Matt. 16: “And I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys *of the kingdom* of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind *on earth* shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose *on earth* shall be loosed in heaven.”

Mark, it is “the kingdom,” and not the Church. Peter received the keys of the kingdom, and he used those keys, first to open the kingdom to the Jew, and then to the Gentile. But Peter never received a commission to unfold the mystery of the Church. Even in his Epistles we find nothing of it. He views believers on earth; as strangers, no doubt, but yet on earth; having their hope in Heaven and being on their way thither, but never as the body of Christ seated there in Him.

It was reserved for the great apostle of the Gentiles to bring out, in the energy and power of the Holy Ghost, the mystery of which we speak. He was raised up, however, as he himself tells us, before the time. “Last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.” Things were not sufficiently matured for the development of the new revelation of which he was made the peculiar minister, and hence he styles himself one born *before* the time; for such is the real force of the original word. And how was he before the time? Because Israel had not as yet been finally set aside. The Lord was still lingering over His beloved city, unwilling to enter into judgement; for, as another has said, “Whenever the Lord leaves a place of mercy, or enters a place of judgement, He moves with a slow and measured pace.”

This is most true; and hence, although the apostle of the Gentiles had been raised up and constituted the depositary of a truth which was designed to carry all who should receive it far away beyond the bounds of Jewish things, yet did he make the house of Israel his primary object; and in so doing he worked in company with the twelve, although not a debtor to them in any one way. “It was necessary,” says he to the Jews, “that the word of God should *first* have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13: 46).

Why was it necessary? Because of God's long-suffering and grace. Paul was not only the depositary of the divine counsels, but also of divine affections. As the former, he should act upon his peculiar commission; as the latter, he would linger over “his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh”: as the former, he was called upon to lead the Church into the knowledge of “a mystery which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men”; as the latter, he would, like his Master, with “a slow and measured step,” turn his back upon the devoted city and the infatuated nation.

In a word, as the gospel with which he was entrusted could only be proclaimed upon the ground of the total abandonment of earth, the earthly city, and the earthly nation, and as Paul's heart yearned over that nation and city, therefore it was that he was so slow to make known publicly the gospel which he preached. He delayed for fourteen years, as he himself informs us. “Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain” (Gal. 2: 1-2).

This is a very important passage on the question now before us. Paul had been raised up quite out

of the regular course of things; his ministry was totally divested of the earthly, human and Jewish element; so much so indeed as to give rise to numerous questions as to its divine origin.

{There have not been wanting modern teachers who have laboured to deprive Paul's ministry of its peculiarly heavenly character by placing him among the regular college of apostles, whose aspect and bearing were manifestly Jewish. This they do by calling in question the election of Matthias. But to all those who need more than the exercise of spiritual judgement to guide them in this matter it may be sufficient to say that the Holy Ghost raised no question as to the validity of Matthias's election, for He fell upon him in common with his fellow-apostles. However, we can well understand why those who feel themselves called upon to uphold human systems should labour so diligently to reduce our apostle's ministry to a human, or earthly level.}

To him was committed what he emphatically styles *his* gospel. But, as has been remarked, it was a question whether things were ripe as regards the divine counsels respecting Israel, for the public development of this gospel. The apostle felt this to be a momentous question: hence his caution in communicating it *severally* to a few. He could not, even in the midst of the Church at Jerusalem, speak openly on this grand question, because he feared that the full time had not come, and that, should he develop it prematurely, few had sufficient spiritual intelligence or largeness of mind to understand or enter into it. His fears, as we know, were well grounded. There were few at Jerusalem who were at all prepared for Paul's gospel.

Even some years later we find James, who seems to have taken a very prominent place in the Church of Jerusalem, inducing Paul to purify himself and shave his head. And what was this for? Just to prevent a break-up of the earthly thing.

“Thou seest, brother,” said James, “how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law. And they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together; for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: we have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads; and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee are nothing, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law” (Acts 21: 20-24). Here, then, we have abundant proof of the fact that the great mystery was not understood and would not be received by the Church at Jerusalem.

[The circumstance to which allusion is made in the above quotation occurred some years later than the visit to which Paul refers in Gal. 2. The latter would seem to have been occasioned by the controversy respecting the Gentiles. This fact gives additional force to the expression “Severally to them which were of reputation.” Paul could not communicate his gospel to them en masse .]

Now, one can well understand how the spirit of James would have shrunk from the terrible break-up which must have resulted from the public declaration of Paul's gospel amongst those whose hearts still clung to the earthly thing. True, it was the privilege of believing Jews to breathe a purer atmosphere than that of an earthly sanctuary, yet they were not prepared for the strong meat of Paul's gospel, and moreover the heart would cling with peculiar fondness to the thought that Jerusalem was to be a great focus of Christian light and testimony from whence the rays of gospel truth should emanate to enlighten all around. But if the mystery which Paul had communicated to them privately were to be made known to the multitude, “the many thousands of Jews” would not receive it, and thus the great centre of light would have become the centre of division.

Moreover, the very same motive which had actuated Paul on the occasion of his former visit to Jerusalem, when he communicated his gospel only to a few, lest he should run in vain if things were not ripe for the revelation — the same motive, we say, might have led him at a later period to hold his gospel in abeyance, and accommodate himself to the thoughts and feelings of those who had not as yet got beyond the earthly order of things.

Every affection of Paul's heart as a man and a Jew would have led him to linger at Jerusalem, and also to hesitate in the development of a doctrine which would cast Jerusalem and all earthly things into the shade, and raise the thoughts and affections into a far higher and purer region than had yet been realized. Paul knew full well the vanity and emptiness of vows and purifications. He saw nothing in the temple and its splendid ceremonies save a vast system of shadows of which the substance was in Heaven.

Yet his affectionate heart yearned over his brethren who were still captivated by it all, and therefore he hesitated to let the full blaze of the light which had been communicated to him shine upon them, lest it should dazzle them, habituated as they were to the shadows of bygone days.

If this be a sound view of the conduct of our apostle in the matter of the vow, etc., it places him before us in a most truly interesting point of view, and also brings out very distinctly the two features of his character, namely, as the participator in the divine affections towards Israel, and also as the depositary of the divine counsels respecting the Church. Both these are lovely in their way. His fervent affection for Israel and his faithfulness to his own peculiar commission are both exquisite. Some may think he allowed the former to interfere at times with the latter, as in the matter of the vow; but it was an interference which we can well understand and account for.

His heart, however, led him to tarry in Jerusalem; yea, to tarry until the Lord had to compel him to leave it. His commission was to the Gentiles; and yet, again and again he betakes himself to Jerusalem, and in his unwillingness to depart from it reminds us of the “slow and measured steps” with which the glory as seen by Ezekiel had departed from the temple.

But the Lord would insist upon His servant's leaving Jerusalem. “*Make haste,*” said He, “and *get thee quickly* out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive *thy* testimony concerning Me.” Paul's Jewish heart still lingers. He replies, “They know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee; and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was also standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.”

What pleading is here! “Their unbelief is all my fault; my vileness acts as the great barrier to their reception of the testimony — only let me remain.” Impossible! “Depart: for I will send thee far *hence, to the Gentiles.*” Yes; the truth must be brought out; the divine counsels must be fulfilled; the time was come, and it was in vain for James to seek to stem the mighty current of events, or for Paul to linger or hesitate any longer: the crisis had arrived, and if Paul will after all this return to Jerusalem again, he must be carried away from it in bonds! He does return again.

The passage we have just quoted is Paul's own account of what the Lord had said to him on a former occasion, to which we have no allusion till now. Thus, although he had been expressly told to depart from Jerusalem because they would not receive his testimony, he goes thither again; and we know the result of this visit. It was his last.

The very thing that James dreaded and sought to avoid came upon them: an uproar was raised, and Paul was delivered over into the hands of the Gentiles. The Lord was determined to send him to the Gentiles. If he would not go as a free man, he must go as “an ambassador in bonds.” He could say,

however, that it was for “the hope of Israel that he was bound with this chain.” If his heart had not longed so after Israel, he might have escaped the bonds. He left Israel without excuse, but he himself became a prisoner and a martyr.

Thus then, at length, Paul took leave of Jerusalem. He had visited it again and again, and would have tarried there; but it was not his place. Jerusalem had been for ages the object of divine regard and the centre of divine operation, but it was speedily about to be trodden down of the Gentiles; its temple was about to be laid in ruins, and the flock of Christ that had been gathered there was about to be scattered abroad; a few short years, and that spot which had stood so long connected with all God's thoughts about earth would be laid low, even with the dust, beneath the rude foot of the Roman.

Now Paul's departure may be looked upon as the immediate precursor of all this. The peculiar truth of which he was the depositary could only be brought out in all its fullness and power in connection with the abandonment of earth as the *manifested* scene of divine operation. Hence Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome must be viewed with deepest interest by the intelligent and reflecting Christian.

[It is a thought full of interest, in connection with the subject before us, that Paul's voyage to Rome gives us the history of the Church as regards its earthly destinies. The vessel sets out in due order, as a compact and well regulated thing, framed to endure the violence of the stormy ocean over which it had to pass. After a time the apostle offers a certain suggestion, which, being rejected, the ship is dashed to pieces by the waves. There was, however, an important distinction between the vessel and the individuals on board: the former was lost, the latter were all saved. Let us *apply* all this to the history of the Church in its earthly path. The testimony, as we know, emanated from Jerusalem, whence Paul started on his way to Rome. Apostolic testimony was designed to guide the Church in its earthly course, and preserve it from shipwreck: but this being rejected, failure and ruin were the consequences. But, in the progress of the failure, we perceive the distinction between the preservation of the Church's corporate testimony and individual faithfulness and salvation. “He that hath ears to hear” will always find a word of instruction and guidance for him in times of thickest darkness. The waves may dash in pieces the corporate thing — everything connected with earth may vanish away, “but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” The above picture might be traced far more minutely by those who feel they have intelligence and warrant to do so.]

But we may ask, did our apostle, when he turned his back upon Jerusalem, take leave also of Israel? No; he did not yet despair. True they had not received his testimony at Jerusalem, but perhaps they might receive it at Rome: they had not given him a place in the East, perhaps they would in the West. At all events he would try. He would not abandon Israel, though Israel had rejected him.

Hence we read that “after three days [from the time of his arrival at Rome] Paul called *the chief of the Jews* together; and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.... For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.... And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28: 17, 20, 23).

Here, then, we have this blessed “ambassador in bonds” still seeking out “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and offering them, in the first place, “the salvation of God.” But “they agreed not among themselves,” and at last Paul is constrained to say, “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the

prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them. BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, AND THAT THEY WILL HEAR IT. “

There was now no more hope. Every effort that love could make had been made, but to no purpose; and our apostle, with a reluctant heart, shuts them up under the power of that judicial blindness which was the natural result of their rejection of the salvation of God. Thus every obstacle to the clear and full development of Paul's gospel was removed. He found himself in the midst of the wide Gentile world — a prisoner at Rome and rejected of Israel. He had done his utmost to tarry among them; his affectionate heart led him to delay as long as possible ere he would reiterate the prophet's verdict; but now all was over — every expectation was blasted — all human institutions and associations present to his view nothing but ruin and disappointment; he must therefore set himself to bring out that holy and heavenly mystery which had been hid in God from ages and generations — the mystery of the Church as the body of Christ united to its living Head by the Holy Ghost.

Thus closes the Acts of the Apostles, which, like the Gospels, is more or less connected with the testimony to Israel. So long as Israel could be regarded as the object of testimony, so long the testimony continued; but when they were shut up to judicial blindness, they ceased to come within the range of testimony, wherefore the testimony ceased.

And now let us see what this “mystery,” this “gospel,” this “salvation,” really was, and wherein its peculiarity consisted. To understand this is of the utmost importance. What, therefore, was Paul's gospel? Was it a different method of justifying a sinner from that preached by the other apostles? No; by no means. Paul preached both to the Jews and also to the Gentiles “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” This was the substance of his preaching.

The peculiarity of the gospel preached by Paul had not so much reference to God's way of dealing with *the sinner* as with *the saint*; it was not so much how God justified a sinner as what He did with him when justified. Yes — it was the place into which Paul's gospel conducted the *saint* that marked its peculiarity. As regards the justification of a sinner, there could be but one way, namely, through faith in the one offering of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there could be numerous degrees of elevation as regards the standing of the saint. For example, a saint in the opening of Acts had higher privileges than a saint under the law. Moses, the prophets, John, our Lord in His personal ministry, and the twelve, all brought out varied aspects of the believer's position before God. But Paul's gospel went far beyond them all. It was not the kingdom offered to Israel on the ground of repentance, as by John the Baptist and our Lord; nor was it the kingdom opened to Jew and Gentile by Peter in Acts 3 and Acts 10; but it was *the heavenly calling of the Church of God composed of Jew and Gentile, in one body, united to a glorified Christ by the presence of the Holy Ghost*.

The Epistle to the Ephesians fully develops the mystery of the will of God concerning this. There we find ample instruction as to our heavenly standing, heavenly hopes, and heavenly conflict. The apostle does not contemplate the Church as a pilgrim *on earth*, (which, we need not say, is most true,) but as sitting *in Heaven*: not as toiling *here*, but resting *there*. “He hath raised us up together, and made us *sit* together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” It is not that He *will* do this, but “He hath” done it. When Christ was raised from the dead, all the members of His body were raised also; when He

ascended into Heaven they ascended also; when He sat down, they sat down also; that is, in the counsel of God, and to be actualised in process of time by the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven.

Such was the thought and purpose of the divine mind concerning them. Believers did not know this at the first; it was not unfolded by the ministry of the twelve, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, because the testimony to Israel was still going on; and so long as earth was the manifested scene of divine operation, and so long as there was any ground of hope in connection with Israel, the heavenly mystery was held back; but when earth had been abandoned and Israel set aside, the apostle of the Gentiles, from his prison at Rome, writes to the Church, and opens out all the glorious privileges connected with its place in the Heavens with Christ. When Paul arrived at Rome as a prisoner he had, as it were, arrived at the end of all human things. He no longer thought of the Church as exhibiting anything like a perfect testimony on earth. He knew how things would turn out as regards the Church's earthly path; he knew that it would fare with it even as it had fared with the vessel in which he had sailed from Jerusalem to Rome; but his spirit was buoyed up by the happy assurance that nothing could touch the unity of the body of Christ, because it was a unity infallibly maintained by God Himself.

[I believe it is of the deepest moment that the believer should avoid all looseness of thought, or indifference, in reference to the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church and the unity of the body of Christ. The man who holds the former will assuredly seek the latter.]

This was the spring of Paul's joy as he lay a despised and neglected prisoner in the dungeon of Nero. He was not ashamed, for he knew that the Church, though broken in pieces here, was nevertheless held in the everlasting grasp of the Son of God, and that He was able to keep it until the happy moment of its rapture to meet Him in the air.

[A letter has been put into my hand. from a dear and valued servant of Christ. from which I extract the following statements which are well worthy of attention: "The Holy Ghost came down from heaven to form one body on the earth 'for by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body.' This is the unity we are responsible to maintain — the unity of the Spirit, the other, final one, God secures infallibly. If God set in the Church 'healings,' it certainly is not in heaven. One has only to read 1 Cor. 10 - 11 to learn that the unity of the Church on earth is a fundamental, essential, divine institution — the cardinal truth which will distinguish, I believe, those who have faith to walk devotedly in these last days, and without which the expectation of Christ will be only personal deliverance, and not 'The Spirit and the Bride say, Come.'"]

But it may be asked: How can believers be said to be seated in heavenly places when they are yet in the world, struggling with its difficulties, its sorrows and temptations? The same question may be asked in reference to the important doctrine of Rom. 6: How can believers be represented as dead to sin when they find sin working in them continually? The answer to both is one and the same.

God sees the believer as dead with Christ, and He also sees the Church as raised with and seated in Christ; but it is the province of faith to lead the soul into the reality of both. "Reckon yourselves to be" what God tells you you are. The believer's power to subdue indwelling corruption consists in his reckoning himself to be dead to it; and his power of separation from the world consists in his reckoning himself to be raised with Christ and seated in Him. The Church, according to God's estimation, has as little to do with sin and the world as Christ has; but God's thoughts and our apprehensions are very different things.

We must never forget that every tendency of the human mind not only falls short of but stands actually opposed to all this divine truth about the Church. We have seen how long it was ere man could take hold of it — how it was forced out, as it were, and pressed upon him; and we have only to glance

at the history of the Church for the last eighteen centuries to see how feebly it was held and how speedily it was let go. The heart naturally clings to earth, and the thought of an earthly corporation is attractive to it.

Hence we may expect that the truth of the Church's heavenly character will only be apprehended and carried out by a very small and feeble minority.

It is not to be supposed that the Protestant reformers exercised their thoughts on this momentous subject. They were made instrumental in bringing out the precious doctrine of justification by faith from amid the rubbish of Romish superstition, and also in letting in upon the human conscience the light of inspiration in opposition to the false and ensnaring dogmas of human tradition.

This was doing not a little: yet it must be admitted the position and hopes of the Church engaged not their attention. It would have been a bold step from the church of Rome to the Church of God; and yet it will be found in the end that there is not distinct neutral ground between the two; for every church, or, to speak more accurately, every religious corporation, reared up and carried on by the wisdom and resources of man, be its principle ever so pure and ever so hostile to Catholicism, will be found, when judged by the Spirit, and in the light of Heaven, to partake more or less of the element of the Romish system.

The heart clings to earth, and will with difficulty be led to believe that the only time wherein God ceases to be manifestly occupied about earth — that the only unnoticed interval in the history of time — is just the period wherein He, by the Holy Ghost, is gathering out the Church to form the body of Christ; and moreover, that when God was dealing publicly with earth, the Church, properly so called, was not contemplated; and that when He shall resume His public dealings with the earth and with Israel, the Church will be out of the scene.

To understand all this requires a larger measure of spirituality than is to be found with many Christians.* The question naturally arises in the mind of the inquirer after truth, “What is the most scriptural form of Church government?” To what body of Christians should I attach myself?” The answer to such questions is, “Attach yourself to those who are 'endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'”

{*The reader will, I trust, understand the distinction between God's *public* actings and His secret operations by His providence. The former ceased when Israel was set aside, and will be resumed when Israel comes again into notice; the latter are going on now. God controls the wheels of government and the counsels of kings to bring about His own great designs.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.}

Sects are not the Church, nor religious parties the body of Christ. Hence, to be attached to the sects is to find ourselves in some of those numerous tributary streams which are rapidly flowing onward into the terrible vortex of which we read in Rev. 17 and 18. Let us not be deceived — principles will work, and systems will find their proper level. Prejudice will operate, and hinder the carrying out of those heavenly principles of which we speak.

Those who will maintain Paul's gospel will find themselves, like him, deserted and despised amid

the splendid pomp and glitter of the world. The clashing of ecclesiastical systems, the jarring of sects, and the din of religious controversy, will surely drown the feeble voices of those who would speak of the heavenly calling and rapture of the Church.

But let the spiritual man who finds himself in the midst of all this sad and heart-sickening confusion remember the following simple principle: *Every system of ecclesiastical discipline, and every system of prophetic interpretation, which would connect the Church, in any one way, with the world, or things of the world, must be contrary to the spirit and principles of the great mystery developed by the Holy Ghost in the apostle of the Gentiles.*

The Church stands in no need of the world's aid in the matter of order or discipline. The Holy Ghost dwells in the Church, broken and scattered though it be, notwithstanding all man's unbelief about it; and if there be any introduction of the earthly or human element, it can only have the sad effect of grieving Him whose presence is the very light of believers and the spring and power of ministry and discipline.

And then, as to the Church's hope, "we look for the Saviour," and not for the accomplishment of any earthly event. Thank God, believers are not taught to wait for the revelation of Antichrist, but for the appearing of the blessed Son of God, who loved them and gave Himself for them. Christians should understand that they have nothing to look for save their rapture into the air to meet the Lord. The world may ridicule the idea, and false teachers may build up systems hostile to it, for the purpose of shaking the faith of the simple-minded; but through grace we will continue to "comfort one another" with the assurance that "the days are at hand, and the effect of every vision."

I must now close this paper. I am deeply conscious of how feebly and incoherently I have developed what I have in my mind concerning the doctrine of the Church; but I have no doubt of its real importance, and feel assured that as the time draws near much light will be communicated to believers about it. At present, it is to be feared, few really enter into it.

If it were understood, there would be far less effort to attain a name and a place on earth. Paul, the great witness of the Church's heavenly calling, must have exhibited a poor spectacle in the view of the children of this world, and so will all who maintain his principles and walk in his steps; but he comforted his spirit with the thought that "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His"; and he also knew that in the very darkest time there would be a few who would "call on the Lord out of a pure heart." May our lot be cast among such, in the midst of this sorrowful scene, until we shall see Jesus as He is, and be made like Him forever!