

[STEM Publishing: The writings of C. H. Mackintosh](#): Gideon and his companions.

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Judges 6-8.

C. H. Mackintosh.

PART 1.

In studying the history of the nation of Israel, we notice two distinct eras, namely, the era of *unity*, and the era of *individuality* — the period in the which the twelve tribes acted as one man, and the period in the which one man was called to act for the twelve tribes. We may take the Book of Joshua as illustrating the former; and the Book of Judges as a sample of the latter. The most cursory reader cannot fail to discern the difference between these two books. The one is characterised by external power and glory; the other by weakness and failure. Power is stamped on the former, ruin on the latter. In that, Jehovah gives the land to Israel; in this, Israel fails to take the land from Jehovah.

Now, all this is expressed in the two words which may be regarded as the motto of the two books, namely, "Gilgal" and "Bochim." In the Book of Joshua we find the congregation always starting from Gilgal to prosecute the war, and returning thither to celebrate their victory. Gilgal was their centre, because there they were circumcised; and there the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. See Joshua 5: 9, 10.

But no sooner have we opened the Book of Judges than the eye rests upon the sad record, "An angel of the Lord came up from *Gilgal to Bochim*, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars; but ye have not obeyed my voice; why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. And it came to pass, when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim, that is, weepers; and they sacrificed there unto the Lord." Judges 2: 1-5.

Here, then, we have, very remarkably, the contrast between the two books of Joshua and Judges — the book of unity and the book of individuality — the book of external power and glory, and the book of internal weakness, failure, and ruin. Alas! alas! the glory speedily departed. Israel's national greatness soon faded away. "The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old.... And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim.... And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed."

This, truly, is a gloomy and humiliating record. Joshua's sword was sheathed. Those palmy days in the which he had led Israel's compact host to splendid victories over the kings of Canaan, were passed and gone. The moral influence of Joshua and of the elders that survived him had passed away,

and the whole nation had rushed, with terrible avidity, into the gross moral evils and abominable idolatries of those nations whom they ought to have driven out from before them. In a word, the ruin was complete, so far as Israel was concerned. Like Adam, in the garden; and Noah, in the restored earth; so Israel, in the land of Canaan, utterly failed. Adam ate the forbidden fruit; Noah got drunk; and Israel bowed before the altars of Baal.

Thus much as to man. But, thank God, there is another side of the picture. There is what we may call a bright and beautiful "*Nevertheless*;" for God will be God, no matter what man may prove himself to be. This is an unspeakable relief and consolation to the heart. God abideth faithful. Here is faith's stronghold, come what may. God is always to be counted upon, spite of all man's failure and shortcoming. His goodness and faithfulness form the resource and the refuge of the soul amid the darkest scenes of human history.

This soul-sustaining truth shines out with remarkable lustre in the very passage from which we have just given such a depressing quotation. "Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them." But mark the following words, so illustrative of the individuality of the Book of Judges: "And when the Lord raised them up judges, then *the Lord was with the judge* and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies *all the days of the judge*: for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them." Judges 2: 16, 18.

In these last quoted words, we have the great root principle of the Book of Judges — the divine secret of the ministry of the Baraks, the Gideons, the Jephthas, and the Samsons, the record of whose ministry occupies so large a portion of this most interesting section of inspiration. Israel had failed — sadly, shamefully, inexcusably failed. They had forfeited all claims to the protection of Jehovah's shield. They were justly given over into the ruthless hands of the kings of Canaan. As to all this there could be no possible question. "Nevertheless" Jehovah's heart could feel for his poor, oppressed, and groaning Israel. True, they had proved themselves naughty and unworthy, yet His ear was ever ready to catch their very earliest groan; yea, we are even told, in Judges 10, that "his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel."

What touching words! What exquisite tenderness! What deep compassion! How such a statement lets us into the profound depths of the heart of God! The misery of His people moved the loving heart of Jehovah. The very faintest and earliest symptoms of brokenness and contrition, on the part of Israel, met with a ready and gracious response, on the part of Israel's God. It mattered not how far they had wandered, how deeply they had sunk, or how grievously they had sinned; God was ever ready to welcome the feeblest breathings of a broken heart. The springs of divine mercy and compassion are absolutely inexhaustible. The ocean of His love is boundless and unfathomable; and hence, the very moment His people take the place of confession, He enters the place of forgiveness. He delights to pardon, according to the largeness of His heart, and according to the glory of His own Name. He finds His peculiar joy in blotting out transgressions, in healing, restoring, and blessing, in a manner worthy of Himself. This glorious truth shines in the history of Israel; it shines in the history of the church; and it shines in the history of every individual believer.

But it is high time we should turn to our immediate subject, namely, "Gideon and his companions," as presented in that portion of the Book of Judges given at the head of this paper. May the eternal Spirit unfold and apply its precious contents to our souls!

Judges 6 opens with a very sad and depressing record — a record only too characteristic of Israel's entire history: "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord

delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel; and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds." What a humiliating picture! What a reverse for the Israel of God! What a contrast to the conquering host that had crossed the Jordan and walked across the ruins of Jericho! How sad, how humbling, to think of Israel crouching and hiding in the dens and caves of the mountains, through terror of the uncircumcised Midianites!

It is well for us to gaze upon this picture, and ponder its salutary lesson. Israel's power and glory consisted simply in having the presence of God with them. Without that, they were as water spilt upon the ground. They were as the autumn leaf before the blast. But the divine presence could not be enjoyed in connection with allowed evil; and therefore, when Israel forgot their Lord, and wandered away from Him into the forbidden paths of idolatry, He had to recall them to their senses by stretching out His governmental rod, and causing them to feel the crushing power of one or another of the nations around.

Now all this has a voice and a lesson for us. So long as God's people walk with Him in holy obedience, they have nothing to fear. They are perfectly safe from the snares and assaults of all their spiritual foes. Nought can, by any means, harm them while they abide in the shelter of God's own presence. But, clearly, that presence demands and secures holiness. Unjudged evil cannot dwell there. To live in sin and talk of security — to attempt to connect the presence of God with sanctioned evil — is wickedness of the very deepest dye. No, it must not be!" God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints; and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." "Thy testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, for ever." If God's people forget these wholesome truths, He knows how to recall them to their remembrance by the rod of discipline, and, blessed for ever be His name, He loves them too well to spare that rod, however reluctant He may be to use it. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. *Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.*" Hebrews 12: 6-12.

These are encouraging words for the people of God, at all times. The discipline may be — and no doubt is — painful; but when we know that a Father's hand is in it, and when we realise what His object is, we can pass through the trial with exercised hearts, and thus reap the peaceable fruits of righteousness. On the other hand, if we meet the discipline with an impatient spirit, a rebellious will, an unsubdued mind, we only render

it necessary for the pressure to be continued and augmented, for our loving Father will never let us alone. He will have us in holy subjection to Himself, cost what it may. He graciously takes our part against ourselves, subdues the proud risings of our will, and crushes all that in us which hinders our growth in holiness, grace, and divine knowledge.

Oh! what infinite grace shines in the fact that our God occupies Himself with our very failures and follies, our waywardness and wilfulness, our sins and shortcomings, in order to deliver us from them! He knows all about us. He understands and takes into account all our surroundings and all our inward tendencies, and He deals with us in infinite wisdom and perfect patience, keeping ever before

Him that one gracious object, to make us partakers of His holiness, and — wondrous thought — to bring out in us the expression of His own nature and character. Surely, then, in the presence of such abounding grace and mercy, we may well "lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees."

PART 2

There is one truth which shines out with uncommon lustre in the Book of Judges, and that is, that God is ever to be counted upon, even amid the darkest scenes of human history; and, moreover, faith can always count upon God; God never fails a trusting heart No, never. He never has failed, never will, never can fail the individual soul that confides in Him, that takes hold of His precious word, in the artless simplicity of a faith that trusts Him in the face of man's deepest and most humiliating failure and shortcoming.

This is most consolatory and encouraging, at all times, and under all circumstances. True it is — alas! how true! man fails in everything. Trace him where you will; mark him in whatever sphere of action or responsibility he occupies, and it is the same sad tale, over and over again, of unfaithfulness, failure, and ruin. Let man be set up in business, as often as he may, with the largest capital and the fairest prospects, and he is sure to become a bankrupt. It has ever been so, from the days of Eden down to the present moment. We may assert, without fear of contradiction, that there has not been one solitary exception to the dismal rule, in the history of Adam's fallen race. We must never forget this. True faith never forgets it, in its highest flights and brightest visions. It would be the blindest folly to attempt to ignore the fact that ruin is stamped, in characters deep and broad, upon the entire of man's story, from first to last.

But, in the face of all this, God abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself. Here is the resource and the resting-place of faith. It recognises and owns the ruin; but it counts on God. Faith is not blind to human failure; but it fixes its gaze on divine faithfulness. It confesses the ruin of man; but it counts on the resources of God.

Now, all this comes strikingly out in the interesting and instructive story of Gideon. He, truly, was made to realise, in his own person and experience, the fact of Israel's fallen condition. The contrast between Joshua and Gideon is as striking as anything can be, so far as regards the question of their condition and circumstances. Joshua could place his foot on the necks of the kings of Canaan. Gideon had to thrash his wheat in a corner to hide it from the Midianites. The day of Joshua was marked by splendid victories; the day of Gideon was a day of small things. But the day of small things for man is the day of great things for God. So Gideon found it. True, it was not permitted him to witness the sun and moon arrested in their course, or the cities of the uncircumcised levelled with the ground. His was a day of barley cakes and broken pitchers, not of astounding miracles and brilliant achievements. But God was with him; and this was enough. "There came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite; and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, *thou mighty man of valour.*" Judges 6: 11, 12.

What words were these to fall upon the ear of Gideon, cowering in the winepress, through fear of the enemy! They were words from heaven to lift his soul above the trials and sorrows, and humiliations of earth — words of divine power and virtue to infuse vigour into his depressed and sorrowing heart. "Thou mighty man of valour!" How hard was it for Gideon to take such wondrous accents in! How difficult to apply them to himself Where was the might or where was the valour? Most surely not in himself or in his surroundings. Where then? In the living God; precisely where Joshua found his might and his valour. Indeed there is a striking similarity in the terms in which both these eminent servants of

God were addressed. The similarity of the terms is quite as marked as is the contrast in their circumstances. Here are the terms to Joshua: "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage: be not thou afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." And what were the terms to Gideon? Even the very same — "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour."

Precious words! Soul-stirring, heart-strengthening accents! Words of light, life, and power! And yet Gideon was slow to make his own of them — slow to grasp them, in the lovely appropriating power of faith, which so delights the heart of God, and glorifies His name. How often is it thus with us! How constantly we fail to rise to the height of God's gracious thoughts and purposes towards us! We are prone to reason about ourselves and our surroundings, instead of believing God, and resting, in sweet tranquillity, in His perfect love and infallible faithfulness.

Thus it was with that dear man of God on whose history we are dwelling. The divine statement was clear, full, absolute, and unconditional: "The Lord is with thee." There was no ground, in these words, for any question, doubt, or difficulty whatsoever; and yet mark Gideon's reply: "And Gideon said unto him, O my Lord, *if* the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." Verse 18.

Here, as is evident, Gideon reasons from his surroundings. Hence the "*if*" — that little monosyllable of unbelief. It is a familiar remark amongst us, "If you want to be miserable, look within; if you want to be distracted, look around; if you want to be peaceful and happy, look up — 'look off unto Jesus.'" This is most true. So surely as we become occupied with self, or with men and things, the circumstances which surround us, we must be unhinged and unhappy. Our only strength, our only comfort, our only light, is to keep the eye of faith fixed on Jesus, and the heart firmly centred in Him. Most certainly Gideon's surroundings were of the gloomiest character. His "sensible horizon" was overhung with dark and heavy clouds. But there was one bright and blessed ray which shone in upon his depressed spirit — a ray emanating from the very heart of God, and conveyed in that one brief but comprehensive sentence, "The Lord is with thee." There was no "*if*" in this — no doubt, no difficulty, no reserve, no condition. It was distinct and unqualified, and needed only one thing to make it a spring of joy, strength, and victory in Gideon's soul, and that was to mix it with faith. But then "*if*" is not faith. True faith never answers God with ifs, for the simplest of all reasons, that it looks only at God, and there are no ifs with Him. Faith reasons from God downwards; not from man upwards. Faith has only one difficulty, and that difficulty is embodied in the question, "How shall he *not*?" It never says, "How shall he?" This is the language of sheer unbelief.

But, it may be asked by some, was there not some foundation for Gideon's "*if*" and "*why*?" Certainly not in God or in His word, whatever there had been in Israel and their actings. No doubt, if Gideon had only cast his eye back over the pages of his national history, he might have discovered ample reason for the sad and humiliating condition in which he found himself. Those blotted pages would have furnished an abundant answer to his question, "Why then is all this befallen us?" But had Israel's actings dimmed the lustre of Jehovah's mighty "miracles?" Not in the vision of faith, most surely. God had done great and glorious things for His people; and the record of those doings lay ever under the eye of faith, in all its soul-sustaining virtue. No doubt Israel had failed — shamefully failed; and the record of that failure lay also under the eye of faith, and furnished a solemn answer to Gideon's inquiry, "Why is all this befallen us?" Faith recognises God's government as well as His grace, and moreover it bows, in solemn awe, before each stroke of His governmental rod.

It is well to keep all this in mind. We are apt to forget it. God has, at times, to stretch forth his hand and lift the rod of authority. He cannot own what is contrary to His name and His nature. Now, Gideon needed to remember this. Israel had sinned, and this was the reason why they were under the rod, of which the power of the Midianites was the expression in Gideon's day.

Gideon, we repeat, was called to enter practically into the meaning of all this; and not only so, but to taste the reality of identification with his people in all their pressure and affliction. This latter, as we know, was the portion and experience of every true servant of God in Israel. All had to pass through those deep exercises of soul consequent upon their association with the people of God. It mattered not whether it were a judge, a prophet, a priest, or a king; all had to participate in the sorrows and trials of the nation of Israel; nor could any true heart — any genuine lover of God or His people — desire exemption from such deep and holy exercises. This was pre-eminently true of the only perfect Servant that ever stood upon this earth. He, though personally exempt from all the consequences of Israel's sin and failure — though pure and spotless, divinely holy in nature and in life — did nevertheless, in perfect grace, voluntarily identify Himself with the people in all their sorrow and humiliation. "In all their affliction he was afflicted." Thus it was with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ; and all who, in any degree, partook of His Spirit, had, according to their measure, to taste of the same cup, though none could ever come up to Him in this or in aught else.

But when we come to compare closely the angel's words to Gideon, with his reply, we notice a point of deep interest, and one which illustrates the individual character of the Book of Judges. The angel says, "The Lord is with *thee*." Gideon replies, "If the Lord be with *us*." This is very interesting and instructive; moreover it is in full keeping with a passage already referred to, in Judges 3: "And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord *was with the judge*" — it does not say, "with the people," but adds, with touching grace — "and *delivered them* out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them." Verse 18.

There is peculiar sweetness and beauty in this. If Jehovah had to hide His face from His people, and give them over, for the time, into the hand of the uncircumcised, yet His loving heart was ever turned towards them, and ever ready to mark and recognise the faintest traces of a repentant spirit. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old." Micah 7: 18-20.

PART 3.

Nothing can be more encouraging to the heart than the mode in which the Lord deals with the soul of Gideon — the way in which He prepares him for the course of action to which He was calling him. Gideon, like ourselves, was full of "ifs" and "whys," those little words so big with unbelief. The poor human heart is ever slow to take in the magnificence of divine grace; our feeble vision is dazzled by the brilliancy of divine revelation. It is only artless faith which can cause the soul to feel perfectly at home in the presence of the richest unfoldings of the goodness and loving-kindness of God. Faith never says "if" or "why?" It believes what God says, because He says it. It rests, in sweet tranquillity, upon every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord. Unbelief looks at circumstances, and reasons from them. Faith looks at God, and reasons from Him. Hence the vast difference in their conclusions. Gideon, judging from his surroundings, concluded that Jehovah had forsaken His people. A simple faith

would have led him to the very opposite conclusion; it would have enabled him to see and know and remember that Jehovah would ever be true to His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, however He might, in His governmental dealings, have to hide His face from their rebellious and sinful offspring. Faith always counts on God; and God, blessed be His name, ever honours faith. He first creates it, and then owns it.

But, not only does God graciously honour faith; He rebukes our fears. He rises above our unbelief, and hushes all our silly reasonings. Thus, in His dealings with His chosen servant Gideon, it would seem as though He heard not the "if" or the "why?" He goes on to unfold His own thoughts, to display His own resources, and to fill the soul of His servant with a confidence and a courage which were to lift him above all the depressing influences with which he was surrounded.

"And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel out of the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" Here we have the true secret of strength: "The Lord looked upon him." There was divine power in this look, if Gideon could only have taken it in. But alas! he was still full of questions. "And he said unto him, O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

Thus it is ever. Unbelief turns the eye in upon self, or out upon our surroundings. It leads us to compare our visible resources with the work to which God is calling us. Jehovah had said, "Go in this thy might." What was the "might?" In what did it consist? Was it great wealth, lofty position, or great physical power? Nothing of the kind. "Jehovah looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel." This was absolute and unqualified. It left no room for Gideon's "wherewith?" It made it very plain that the might with which he was to deliver Israel was not in himself or in his father's house, but in the God of Israel. It mattered little whether his family was rich or poor; whether he was little or great. It was God who was about to use him. What was wealth or greatness to Him? He could use a barley cake or a broken pitcher. Indeed we may observe this special feature in the varied instruments taken up in the Book of Judges, namely, that "no flesh shall glory in God's presence." How does human glory fade away before the humiliating fact that Israel's hosts were called forth to battle under the leadership of a woman! What a stain on human pride in the fact of deliverance coming through the agency of a "left-handed man!"

But, on the other hand, we find that, just in proportion as man's glory fades away, the divine glory shines out. The humbler the instrument, the more we see the power of God. What difference does it make to the Almighty God whether His instrument be left-handed or right-handed — a man or a woman — a dwarf or a giant? The instrument is nothing. God is all in all. True, He deigns to use instruments; but all the power is His, and His shall be the eternal and universal praise. Gideon had to learn this; and so had Moses; and so have we all. It is an invaluable lesson. We are all so prone to think of *our* competency for any work or service which may lie before us, when we ought to remember that the works that are done upon the earth, God is the doer of them. Our sufficiency is of Him. We can do nothing; and if we could do aught it would be badly done. The human finger can only leave a soil behind. The works of men perish like their thoughts. The work of God abideth for ever. Let us remember these things, that we may walk humbly and lean ever and only on the mighty arm of the living God. Thus the soul is kept in a well-balanced condition, free from self-confidence and fleshly excitement, on the one hand; and from gloom and depression, on the other. If we can do nothing, self-confidence is the height of presumption. If God can do everything, despondency is the height of folly.

But in the case of Gideon, as in that of all God's servants, we observe two things worthy of our deepest attention. In the first place, we have the divine commission, as embodied in those weighty

words, "*Have not I sent thee?*" And in the second place, we have the assurance of the divine presence, as set forth in these encouraging words, "*Surely I will be with thee.*"

These are the two grand points for all who will serve God in their day and generation. They must know that the path they tread has been marked out distinctly by the hand of God; and, furthermore, they must have the sense of His presence with them along the path. These things are absolutely essential. Without them we shall waver and vacillate. We shall be running from one line of work to another. We shall take up certain work, go on with it for a while, and then abandon it for something else. We shall work by fits and starts; our course will be faltering, our light flickering: "Unstable as water, we shall not excel." We shall never succeed at anything. There will be no certainty, no stability, no progress.

These are weighty matters for all of us. It is of immense importance for every servant of Christ, every child of God, to know that he is at his divinely appointed post, and at his divinely given work. This will give fixedness of purpose, moral elevation, and holy independence. It will preserve us from being tossed about by human thoughts and opinions — being influenced by the judgment of one or another. It is our happy privilege to be so sure that we are doing the very work which the Master has given us to do, that the thoughts of our fellows respecting us shall have no more weight with us than the pattering of rain on the window.

Not — be it carefully observed — that we should, for a moment, countenance, much less cultivate, a spirit of haughty independence. Far away be the thought! We, as Christians, can never, in one sense, be independent one of another, How can we, seeing we are members one of another? We are united to one another and to our risen Head in glory, by the one Spirit who is with us and in us. The most intense individuality — and our individuality should be as intense as our unity is indissoluble — can never touch the precious truth of the one body and one Spirit.

All this is divinely true, and most fully and thankfully owned. But, at the same time, we must insist upon the truth of our individuality, and of our personal responsibility. This must be maintained with all possible energy and decision. Each servant has to do with his Lord, in that particular sphere of work to which he has been called. And, moreover, each should know his work, and give himself to it diligently and constantly. He should possess the holy certainty and authority imparted to the soul by that divine and powerful sentence, "*Have not I sent thee?*"

It will, perhaps, be said, "We are not all Gideons or Joshuas. We are not all called to occupy such a prominent place or tread such a brilliant path as those illustrious servants." True; but we are called to serve; and it is essential to every servant to know his commission, to understand his work, and to be fully assured in his own soul that he is doing the very work which the Lord has given him to do, and treading the very path which the hand of God has marked out for him. If there be any uncertainty as to this, we do not see how there can be any progress.

But there is more than this. It is not enough to know that we are treading the divinely appointed path. We want to realise the divine presence. We want to have the precious words made good in our experience, "*Surely I will be with thee.*" This completes the servant's equipment. The divine commission and the divine presence are all we want; but we must have these in order to get on. With these priceless realities it matters not who we are, what we are, or where we are. The Lord can use a feeble woman, a left-handed man, a cake of barley meal, or a broken pitcher. The instrument is nothing. God is the workman. Unbelief may cry out, "O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold my family is *poor* in Manasseh, and I am the *least* in my father's house." Faith can cry out, in reply, "What of all this if God be for us? Does He want the rich or the noble? What are riches or greatness to Him? Nothing." "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty,

not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." 1 Corinthians 1: 26-29.

These are wholesome words for all of us. It is an unspeakable mercy for every dear servant of Christ to be kept in the abiding sense of his own utter nothingness — to be taught to realise, in some measure, the depth, fulness, and power of that one brief but most comprehensive statement, "Apart from me ye can do nothing." There is not a single branch in all the vine, however imposing or wide-spreading it may seem to be, which, if separated from the parent stem by the thickness of a gold leaf, can produce the very smallest atom of fruit. There must be the abiding realisation of our vital union with Christ the practical, living, abiding in Him, by faith, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, in order to bring forth any fruit that God can accept. It is as we abide in Christ that the living sap circulates freely through us, and gives forth the healthy bud, the green leaf, and the seasonable fruit.

Here lies the grand secret of power. It is abiding in the living vine. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is; for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river; and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Jeremiah 17: 7, 8.

All this is intensely personal. We must each, for himself and herself, cling, by faith, to Christ. It is of the very last possible importance for Christians to bear in mind that Christianity is a thoroughly individual thing. We are individual in our repentance, in our faith, in our salvation, in our communion, in our service, and in our reward. Look at the addresses to the seven churches in Revelation 2 & 3. Harken to those pointed words, "*He* that hath an ear" — "*To him* that overcometh." What do they mean? Do they not set forth, in the most distinct and forcible manner, that blessed individuality of which we speak? Unquestionably. But do they touch unity? Not in the smallest degree. They leave its sacred domain wholly untouched." There is one body and one Spirit." This must ever hold good, spite of all the ruin and failure of the professing church. Nevertheless, the writings of John are pre-eminently individual. From the opening lines of his Gospel to the closing sentence of his Apocalypse, we trace this feature. He shows us the Philips, the Simons, the Andrews, and the Nathanaels coming, in their individuality, to Jesus. He tells us of a Jewish ruler here, and a Samaritan sinner there, who were drawn by the Father to Jesus. He tells us of the good Shepherd who calleth His sheep by name he tells us of the branches clinging to the living vine. Thus it is in John's Gospel; and when we turn to his Epistles, we find the same principle running through them all. He writes to an elect lady, and to his beloved Gaius; and if he once speaks of "the church," it is but to weep over its departed glory, and to raise amid its ruins that warning note for individual ears, "*Look to yourselves.*" And as to the Revelation, it ends as it begins, with a solemn appeal "*to him that Heareth.*"

PART 4.

The more closely we study the narrative of the Lord's dealings with Gideon, the more we must be struck with the marvellous way in which He prepares him for his after course. Like all God's servants, in all ages, Gideon had to undergo a course of secret training and discipline, ere he was fit to appear in public. The space of time occupied in this training may vary, as may also the character of the discipline; but of this we may rest assured that all who will be used of God in public must be taught of God in private. It is a fatal mistake for any one to rush into prominence without proper equipment, and that equipment can only be attained in the secret of the divine presence. It is in profound and hallowed

retirement with God that vessels are filled and instruments fitted for His work.

Let us never forget this. Moses had to spend forty years at "the back side of the desert" ere he was fit to enter upon his public career. David had to feed his father's flock, ere he was called to rule the nation of Israel. He slew a lion and a bear in secret, ere he was called to slay Goliath in public. The great apostle of the Gentiles spent three years in Arabia, notwithstanding his very remarkable conversion and call. The apostles spent three years and a half in companionship with their Master, and then had to tarry until they were endued with power from on high. Thus it has been with all those who have ever been called to occupy a prominent place in the Lord's work; and even the blessed Master Himself — though surely needing no training or discipline, inasmuch as He was ever perfect — to set us an example, spent thirty years in retirement ere He came forth in public.

All this is full of most wholesome instruction for our souls. Let us seek to take it in and profit by it. No one can ever get on in public work without this private teaching in the school of Christ. It is this which gives depth, solidity, and mellowness to the character. It imparts a tone of reality and a fixedness of purpose most desirable in all who engage in any department of the Lord's work. It will invariably be found that where anyone goes to work without this divine preparation, there is shallowness and instability. There may perhaps, for a time, be more flash and show in those superficial characters than in those who have been educated in the school of Christ: but it never lasts. It may create a momentary sensation, but it soon passes away like the morning cloud or the early dew. Nothing will stand but that which is the direct result of private communion with God — secret training in His presence — the excellent discipline of the school of God.

Let us see how all this is exemplified in Gideon's case. It is very evident that this honoured servant was called to pass through deep exercises of soul before ever he took a single step in public action, yea before he ever unfurled the standard of testimony in his father's house. He had to begin with himself, with his own personal condition, with his own heart. Those who will be used for others must begin with themselves. So Gideon found it. Let us pursue his history.

"And the Lord said unto Gideon, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry till thou come again. And Gideon went in and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour; the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die." Judges 6: 16-23.

Here we reach a profoundly interesting stage of Gideon's preparatory course. He is called to enter practically and experimentally into the great and universal law for the servants of God, namely, "When I am weak, then I am strong." This is a most precious law, and one which forms an indispensable element in the education of all Christ's servants. Let no one imagine that he can ever be used in the Lord's work, or ever make progress in the divine life, without some measure of real entrance into this invaluable principle. We hold it to be absolutely essential in forming the character of the true servant of

Christ. Where it is not known, where it has not been felt, where it has not been, to some extent, realised, there is sure to be unsubduedness, unbrokenness, self-occupation, in some form or another. There will be more or less of self-confidence, and various points and angles turning up, here and there, and acting as a sad hindrance to all that is good, useful, and holy.

On the other hand, when one has learnt that great family motto quoted above — when one has learnt, in the divine presence to say, "When I am weak, then I am strong" — when nature has been weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, there you will always find a measure of brokenness, softness, and tenderness of spirit; and not only so, but also largeness of heart, and readiness for every good work, and that lovely elasticity of mind which enables one to rise above all those petty selfish considerations which so sadly hinder the work of God. In short, the heart must first be broken, then made whole; and, being made whole, be undividedly given to Christ and to His blessed service. It is impossible to run the eye along the brilliant array of Christ's workmen, and not see the truth of this. Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, in Old Testament times; and Peter, Paul, and John, in those of the New, all stand before us as vivid illustrations of the value of broken material. All those beloved and honoured servants had to be broken in order to be made whole — to be emptied in order to be filled — to learn that, of themselves, they could do nothing, in order to be ready, in Christ's strength, for anything and everything.

Such is the law of the household — the law of the vineyard — the law of the kingdom. So Gideon found it in his day. His "alas!" was followed by Jehovah's "Peace; fear not," and then he was ready to begin. He had been brought face to face with the angel of God, and there he learnt not only that his family was poor in Manasseh, and he the least in his father's house, but that in himself he was perfectly powerless, and that all his springs must be found in the living God. Priceless lesson this, for the son of Joash, and for us all! a lesson not to be learnt in the schools and colleges of this world, but only in the deep and holy retirement of the sanctuary of God.

And now let us see what was Gideon's first act after his fears were hushed, and his soul filled with divine peace. His very first act was to build an altar. "Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites." He takes the happy place of a worshipper, and his worship is characterised by the revelation of the divine character. He calls his altar by that precious title, "The Lord send peace." He had gone through many and deep exercises of soul-exercises which none can know save those who are called out into a prominent place amongst God's people. He felt the ruin and the weakness of all around him. He felt the fallen and humiliating condition of his beloved people. He felt his own littleness, yea his own emptiness and nothingness. How could he come forward? How could he smite the Midianites? How could he save Israel? Who was sufficient for these things? It is all very well for those persons who live an easy, irresponsible kind of life; who know not the toils, the cares, and anxieties connected with the public service of Christ and the testimony for His name in an evil day. These know nothing of Gideon's painful exercises of soul; nothing of the pressure upon his spirit as he looked forth from beneath the shade of his father's oak tree, and contemplated the dangers and responsibilities of the battle-field. They can enter but feebly into the meaning of those words of one high up in the school of Christ, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead."

These are weighty words for all Christ's servants; but we must be His servants in reality, in order to enter into their deep significance. If we are content to live a life of indolence and ease, a life of self-seeking and self-pleasing, it is impossible for us to understand such words, or indeed to enter into any of those intense exercises of soul through which Christ's true-hearted servants and faithful witnesses, in

all ages, have been called to pass. We invariably find that all those who have been most used of God in public have gone through deep waters in secret. It is as the sentence of death is written practically upon *self*, that the power of resurrection life in Christ shines out. Thus Paul could say to the Corinthians, "Death worketh in us; but life in you." Marvellous words! Words which let us into the profound depths of the apostle's ministry. What a ministry must that have been which was carried on upon such a principle as this! What power! what energy!

Death working in the poor earthen vessel, but streams of life, heavenly grace, and spiritual power flowing into those to whom he ministered.

This, reader, we may depend upon it, is the true secret of all effective ministry. It is an easy matter to talk about ministry; to set up to be ministers of Christ; but oh! how has the professing church departed from the divine reality of ministry! Alas! the heart sinks at the bare thought of it. Where are the Pauls, the Gideons, and the Joshuas? Where are the deep heart searchings and profound soul exercises which have characterised Christ's servants in other days? We are flippant and wordy, shallow and empty, self-sufficient and self-indulgent. Need we wonder at the small results? How can we expect to see life working in others when we know so little about death working in us?

May the eternal Spirit stir us all up, and work in us a more powerful sense of what it is to be the true-hearted, single-eyed, devoted servants of Jesus Christ!

PART 5.

We are now to contemplate Gideon called forth into action. He has received his commission from Jehovah. His questions have been answered, his fears hushed, his heart tranquillised, and he is enabled to build an altar. All this had reference to his own personal condition, to the state of his own soul, to the attitude of his own heart as in the sight of God.

Thus it must ever be. We must all begin in this way, if we are ever to be used of God to act on others. We must have to do with God in the secret of our own souls, else we shall prove to be but sorry workmen in the sequel. All who go forth in public work, without this secret training, are sure to prove flimsy and shallow. Self must be measured in the divine presence. We must learn that nature is of no account in the Lord's work. "Not by might, nor by power, but my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Zechariah 4: 6.

It was not until Gideon had gone through somewhat of this holy discipline in secret that he was led out into service. And let us carefully note where he had to commence. "It came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old" — for Jehovah knew how many bullocks Joash had, and the age of each — "and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it. And build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down."

Here we see that Gideon had to begin *at home*. He was called to unfurl the standard of testimony in the very bosom of his family — in the very centre of his father's house. This is intensely interesting, and deeply practical. It teaches a lesson to which we should all bend our ears and apply our hearts. Testimony must begin at home. It will never do to rush forth into public work while our private and domestic ways are anything but what they ought to be. It is useless to set about throwing down the altar of Baal in public, while the selfsame altar remains standing at home.

This is of the very last possible importance. We are all of us imperatively called upon to show piety at home. Nothing is more sorrowful than to meet with persons who, abroad amongst their fellow

men or their fellow Christians, are marked by a high tone of spirituality — a style of speaking which would lead one to suppose them far beyond the ordinary level of Christians, and yet when you come to close quarters with them — when you become acquainted with their private life and ways, their actual history from day to day, you find them very far indeed from bearing testimony for Christ to those with whom they come in contact. This is most deplorable. It dishonours the Lord Jesus, grieves the Spirit, stumbles and repulses young believers, gives occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully, and to our brethren to speak doubtfully, of us. Surely these things ought not to be. There ought to be a testimony yielded at home. Those who see most of us should see most of Christ in us. Those who know us best ought best to know that we are Christ's. But alas! how often is it otherwise! How often does it happen that the home circle is just the place where we least exhibit the lovely traits of Christian character! The wife or the husband, the parent or the child, the brother or the sister, the master or the servant, the fellow servant or some other companion in daily life, is just the one in whose sight we least display the beautiful fruits of divine life. It is in private life that all our weak points come out — our oddities and peculiarities, our silly tendencies and sinful tempers: instead of which it ought to be in that very sphere that the grace of Jesus is most faithfully manifested.

Christian reader, let us not turn away from the word of reproof, of admonition, or exhortation. It may not be pleasant; but, we may rest assured it is salutary. It may not be agreeable to the flesh; but it is wholesome to the soul. We are called, like Gideon, to begin at home, if we would prove helpful to our brethren, or act effectively against the common foe.

No doubt, there are difficulties involved in this home testimony. It is often very hard, for example, for a child to bear witness against the worldliness of a parent, or of the whole family; but where there is humility of mind and simple dependence upon God, He maintains and carries us through marvellously. One thing is certain, there is nothing like decision. "The first blow is half the battle," yea, the whole battle is often gained by a single blow, when that blow is dealt in full communion with the mind of Christ.

On the other hand, where there is weakness and vacillation — playing fast and loose with the truth of God, trifling with divine principles and one's own conscience, a looking at consequences and a weighing of probable results — there the enemy is sure to have the upper hand, and the testimony altogether fails. God acts with those who act for Him. This is the grand secret of their success; but where the eye is not single, there is no real progress, no divine result.

Here is where so many of us signally fail. We are not whole hearted, not decided, not thoroughly out — and out for Christ. Hence there is no result for God, no action on others. We have no idea of what may be accomplished by a single devoted heart, one earnest and energetic soul. Such an one may be used to raise up a standard round which thousands will flock who might never have had the courage or energy to unfurl the standard themselves.

Look at Gideon. See how he wrought for God, and how God wrought with him. "Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord had said unto him; and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night. And when the men of the city rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die; because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it."

This is what we may call striking at the very root of the matter. The worship of Baal is completely overturned. This was no trifle. We have little idea of what it cost the son of Joash to do this thing; but, by the grace of God, he did it. True it may have been with fear and trembling, still he did it. He dealt one vigorous blow at the entire system of Baal, and it crumbled into dust beneath his feet. No half measures would have availed. It would have been of no possible use to pick a stone, here and there, out of the idol's altar; the whole fabric had to be overturned from its very foundation, and the idol itself degraded in the very presence of its deluded worshippers. A bold decisive stroke was needed, and that stroke was given by the hand of Gideon the son of Joash, God's "mighty man of valour."

There is nothing, we repeat, like plain decision — bold, uncompromising faithfulness for Christ, cost what it may. Had Gideon been less decided, had his line of action been less thorough, his father Joash would not have been so perfectly won over. It needed just such a method of dealing with Baal to convince a rational person that the worship of such a god was a sham and a falsehood. "And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? *will ye save him?* he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar."

This was very simple reasoning, "If he be a god, let him plead for himself." Gideon's decided course had brought matters to a point. Baal was either a reality or a most complete delusion. If the former, let him plead for himself. If the latter, who would think of pleading for him? Nothing could be simpler. Gideon's action was a complete success. The worship of Baal was overturned; and the worship of Jehovah Elohim set up instead.

Thus we see that the divine work in the soul of Gideon is making very rapid but very real progress. He is conducted from strength to strength. How little idea had he, when first the divine voice fell on his ear, that, in so short a time, he would take so bold a step. If anyone had said to him, then, "In a few hours you will overturn the worship of Baal in the very midst of your father's house," he would not have believed it. But the Lord led him along, step by step, gently yet firmly; and as the heavenly light broke in upon his soul his confidence and courage grew.

Thus it is the Lord ever deals with His servants. He does not expect them to run before they have learnt to walk; but where the heart is true, and the purpose honest and firm, He graciously supplies the needed strength, moment by moment. He causes mountains of difficulty to remove, rolls away many a dark and heavy cloud, fortifies the heart, and girds up the loins of the mind, so that the very feeblest are armed with giant strength, and the coward heart filled with wonder, love, and praise at the triumph of divine grace.

All this is illustrated with great vividness in Gideon's interesting story. No sooner had he levelled Baal's altar, than he was called to encounter Midian's hosts. "Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, and Abi-ezer was gathered after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also was gathered after him; and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them."

In short there was a thorough awakening. The tide of spiritual energy rose majestically, and bore hundreds and thousands upon its bosom. The work which had begun in Gideon's heart was extending itself far and wide, throughout the length and breadth of the land. The Spirit of the Lord was displaying His mighty energy, and multitudes were stirred up to gather round the standard which the hand of faith

had unfurled.

But just at this point, it would seem that Gideon's faith needed fresh confirmation. It may be his spirit was overawed when he saw the mighty host of the uncircumcised mustering before him; and then, for a moment, his courage failed, and his heart craved a fresh sign from the Lord. "And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, *as thou hast said*" — alas! the poor heart can place its unbelieving "if" right in front of the word of God who cannot lie — "behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and if it be dry upon all the earth beside, *then shall I know* that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, *as thou hast said*."

How marvellous! And yet we need not marvel if we know aught of our own hearts. Anything for the poor human heart but the naked word of the living God. A sign, a token, something that the eye can see. The word of God is not enough for unbelieving nature.

But oh! the matchless grace of God! His unupbraiding love! His tender considerateness! He graciously meets the weakness of His poor servant, for "It was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, *a bowlfull of water*." What condescending grace! Instead of severely rebuking Gideon's unbelieving "if," He graciously confirms his wavering faith by superabounding evidence.

And yet all this sufficed not. Gideon seeks still further confirmation. "And he said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once. Let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew upon all the ground." Such is the abounding grace and exhaustless patience of the God with whom we have to do. For ever adored be His holy name! Who would not trust Him, and love Him, and serve Him?

PART 6.

We shall now ask the reader to open his Bible at Judges 7. Here Gideon's companions are brought before us; and their history, as well as that of their leader, is full of interest and profit for us. They had to be trained and tested as well as he. Let us ponder the narrative.

"Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh in the valley. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me."

The clear and soul-stirring blast of Gideon's trumpet had drawn around him a very large and imposing company; but this company had to be tested. It is one thing to be moved by the zeal and energy of some earnest servant of Christ, and it is quite another thing to possess those moral qualities which alone can fit a man to be an earnest servant himself. There is a vast difference between following in the wake of some devoted man of God, and walking with God ourselves — being propped up and led on by the faith and energy of another, and leaning upon God in the power of individual faith for ourselves.

This is a serious consideration for all of us. There is always great danger of our being mere imitators of other people's faith; of copying their example without their spiritual power; of adopting their peculiar line of things without their personal communion. All this must be carefully guarded against. We specially warn the young Christian reader against it. Let us be simple, and humble, and real. We may be very small, our sphere very narrow, our path very retired; but it does not matter in the

least, provided we are precisely what grace has made us, and occupying the sphere in which our blessed Master has set us, and treading the path which He has opened before us. It is by no means absolutely necessary that we should be great, or prominent, or showy, or noisy in the world; but it is absolutely necessary that we should be real and humble, obedient and dependent. Thus our God can use us, without fear of our vaunting ourselves; and then, too, we are safe, peaceful, and happy. There is nothing more delightful to the true Christian, the genuine servant of Christ, than to find himself in that quiet, humble, shady path where *self* is lost sight of, and the precious light of God's countenance enjoyed — where the thoughts of men are of small account, and the sweet approval of Christ is everything to the soul.

Flesh cannot be trusted. It will turn the very service of Christ into an occasion of self-exaltation. It will use the very name of him who made Himself nothing in order to make itself something. It will build up its own reputation by seeming to further the cause of Him who made Himself of none. Such is flesh! Such are we in ourselves! silly, self-exalting creatures, ever ready to vaunt ourselves, while professing to be nothing in ourselves, and to deserve nothing but the flames of an everlasting hell.

Need we marvel at the testing and proving of Gideon's companions? All must be tested and proved. The service of Christ is a very solemn and a very holy thing; and all who take part therein must be self ; judged, self-distrusting, and self-emptied; and not only so, but they must lean, with unshaken confidence, upon the living God, These are the grand qualities that go to make up the character of the true servant of Christ, and they are strikingly illustrated on the page of inspiration which now lies open before us.

Let us proceed with the narrative.

"The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands...Now, therefore, go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand."

Here the first grand test is applied to Gideon's host — a test designed to bring out the measure of the heart's simple confidence in Jehovah. A coward heart will not do for the day of battle; a doubting spirit will not stand in the conflict. The same principle is set forth in Deuteronomy 20: 8: "And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and faint-hearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart."

Faint heartedness is terribly contagious. It spreads rapidly. It withers the arm that should bear the shield, and paralyses the hand that should wield the sword. The only cure for this malady is simple confidence in God, a firm grasp of His faithfulness, a child-like trust in His word, true personal acquaintance with Himself. We must know God for ourselves, in such a way that His word is everything to us, and that we can walk alone with Him, and stand alone with Him in the darkest hour.

Reader, is it thus with thee? Hast thou this blessed confidence in God — this solid hold of His word? Hast thou, deep down in thy heart, such an experimental knowledge of God and His Christ as shall sustain thee even though thou hadst not the support or sympathy of another believer under the sun? Art thou prepared to walk alone in the world?

These are weighty questions, and we feel the need of pressing them upon the church of God at the present moment. There is a wide diffusion of the precious truth of God, and numbers are getting hold of it. Like the blast of Gideon's trumpet, so the clear testimony which has gone forth within the last few years has attracted many; and while we quite feel that there is real ground for thankfulness in this, we

also feel that there is ground for very serious reflection indeed. Truth is a most precious thing, if it be truthfully found: and truthfully held: but let us remember that in exact proportion to the preciousness of the truth of God is the moral danger of trafficking therein without a self judged heart and an exercised conscience. What we really need is faith — unfeigned, earnest, simple, faith, which connects the soul, in living power, with God, and enables us to overcome all the difficulties and discouragements of the way. Of this faith there can be no imitation. We must either possess it in reality or not at all. A sham faith will speedily come to the ground. The man who attempts to walk by faith, if he have it not must speedily totter and fall. We cannot face the hosts of Midian unless we have full confidence in the living God. "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return." Thus it must ever be. None can go to battle save those who are braced up by a faith that grasps the unseen realities of eternity, and endures as seeing Him who is invisible. May this faith be ours, in larger measure, beloved reader.

It is full of instruction for the heart to notice the effect of the first test upon the host of Gideon. It thinned his ranks amazingly. "There returned of the people twenty and two thousand, and there remained ten thousand." This was a serious reduction. But it is far better to have ten thousand that can trust God than ten thousand times ten thousand who cannot. What avails a vast mass of unbelieving flesh? Nothing. Of what use are numbers, if they be not energised by a living faith? None whatever. It is comparatively easy to flock around a standard raised by a vigorous hand; but it is a totally different thing to stand, in personal energy, in the actual battle. Nought but genuine faith can do this; and hence when the searching question is put "Who can trust God?" the showy ranks of profession are speedily thinned.

But there was yet another test for Gideon's companions. "And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog lapped, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place." Judges 7: 4-7.

Here then we have another great moral quality which must ever characterise those who will act for God and for His people, in an evil day. They must not only have confidence in God, but they must also be prepared to surrender self. This is a universal law in the service of Christ. If we want to swim in God's current, we must sink self; and we can only sink self in proportion as we trust Christ. Thus it stands ever. It is not, need we say, a question of salvation; it is a question of service. It is not a question of being a child of God, but of being a proper servant of Christ. The thirty-one thousand seven hundred that were dismissed from Gideon's army, were just as much Israelites as the three hundred that remained; but they were not fitted for the moment of conflict; they were not the right men for the crisis. And why? Was it that they were not circumcised? Nay. What then? They could not trust God and surrender self. They were full of fear when they ought to have been full of faith. They made refreshment their object instead of conflict.

Here, reader, lay the true and only secret of their moral unfitness. God cannot trust those who do not trust Him and sink self. This is pre-eminently solemn and practical. We live in a day of easy profession and self-indulgence. Knowledge can, now-a-days, be picked up at very small cost. Scraps of truth can be gathered, second hand, in all directions. Truth which cost some of God's dear servants

years of deep soul ploughing and heart-searching exercise, is now in free circulation and can be intellectually seized and flippantly professed, by many who know not what soul ploughing or heart-exercise means.

But let us never forget — yea, let us constantly remember — that the life of faith is a reality; service is a reality; testimony for Christ, a reality. And further let us bear in mind that if we want to stand for Christ in an evil day — if we would be men for the crisis, genuine servants, true witnesses — then verily we must learn the true meaning of those two qualities, namely, confidence in God, and self-surrender.

PART 7.

There is something peculiarly striking in the fact that out of the many thousands of Israel, in the days of Gideon, there were only three hundred men who were really fit for conflict with the Midianites; only this small band fit for the occasion. This truly is a suggestive and admonitory fact. There were hundreds of thousands of true Israelites — truly circumcised sons of Abraham — members of the congregation of the Lord, who were by no means up to the mark, when it was a question of war to the knife with Midian — a question of genuine confidence in God and self-surrender. We are safe in saying that the men who were morally fitted for the grand crisis in the day of battle were not one in a thousand. How solemn! Not one in a thousand who could trust God and deny self.

Christian reader, is not this something worthy of deep and serious thought? Does it not, very naturally, suggest the inquiry as to whether it is otherwise at this moment? Is it not painfully evident that we live in a day in the which little is known of the blessed secret of confidence in God, and still less of the exercise of self-surrender? In point of fact, these things can never be rightly separated. If we attempt to divorce self-surrender from confidence in God, it will land us in the deep and dark delusions of monasticism, asceticism, or ritualism. It will issue in nature trying to subdue nature. This, we need hardly say, is the direct opposite of Christianity. This latter starts with the glorious fact that the *old self* has been condemned and set aside by the cross of Christ, and therefore it can be practically surrendered, every day, by the power of the Holy Ghost. This is the meaning of those fine words in Colossians 3, "Ye *are* dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." He does not say, "Ye *ought to be* dead." No; but "ye *are* dead." What then? "Mortify your members which are on the earth." So also in the profound and precious teaching in Romans 6, "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death?" What then? "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here then lies the secret of all true surrender. If this be not understood and practically entered into, it will simply be *self* in one form trying to subdue *self* in another. This is a fatal delusion. It is a snare of the devil into which earnest souls are in imminent danger of falling, who sigh after holiness of life, but do not know the power of accomplished redemption, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost — are not built upon the solid foundation of Christianity.

We specially warn the reader against this deadly error. It distinctly savours of monasticism or asceticism. It clothes itself in the garb of pietism and sanctimoniousness, and is peculiarly attractive to a certain class of ardent spirits who long for victory over the lusts, passions, and tendencies of nature; but, not knowing how to attain it, are turning their back upon Christ and His cross, and betaking themselves to the resources of a spurious religion.

It is against this most mischievous and soul-destroying system that the apostle warns us, in such glowing words in Colossians 2. "Let no man," he says, "beguile you of your reward in a voluntary

humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances" — such as, "touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using — after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." Colossians 2: 18-23.

We deem it needful to say thus much lest any of our readers should at all mistake us on the subject of self-surrender. We desire it to be distinctly understood that the only possible ground of self-surrender is the knowledge of accomplished redemption, and our union with Christ through the power of the Holy Ghost. This is the essential basis of all Christian conduct. In short, a known salvation is the basis; the Holy Ghost indwelling, the power; and the word of God, the directory of all true self-surrender.

But what did Gideon and his companions know of these things? Nothing, as Christians now know them. But they had confidence in God, and further, they did not make their own refreshment their object, but simply took it up by the way as a means to an end. Herein they teach a fine lesson even to those whose privilege it is to walk in the full orb'd light of New Testament Christianity. If they, in the dim twilight in which they lived, could trust God, and surrender self for the moment, even in measure; then what shall we say for ourselves who, with all our light and privileges, are so ready to doubt God and seek our own things?

Is it not painfully evident that, in this our day of light and privilege, there is but little moral preparedness for the path of service and conflict which we are called to tread? Alas! alas! we cannot deny it. There is a deplorable lack of genuine trust in the living God, and of the true spirit of self-surrender. Here, we may rest assured, is the deep secret of the whole matter. God is not practically known and habitually trusted; self is exalted and indulged. Hence our unfitness for the warfare, our failure in the day of battle. It is one thing to be saved, and quite another thing to be a soldier. It is one thing to have our sins forgiven, and quite another to have our swords sharpened and our shields well up. There is a vast difference between talking about conflict and taking part therein; and we cannot shake off the painful conviction that, in this day of widely extended profession, the proportion of workmen and warriors would not be found a whit greater than it was in the days of Gideon and his companions. The fact is we want men of faith, and men of one idea, men whose hearts are fixed and their eyes single, men so absorbed with Christ and His cause that they have no time for aught beside. We greatly fear that, if the double test which was applied to Israel in the days of Gideon, were to be applied now to those who stand on the very highest platform of profession, the practical result would not differ very materially.

But we must draw this paper to a close, and shall therefore rapidly touch on two leading points, and then leave our readers to meditate closely upon the whole subject for themselves.

The close of Judges 7 shows us Gideon and his companions completely victorious. "The cake of barley bread," and "the broken pitchers," proved a match for all the power of the Midianites and the Amalekites, although the latter "lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude, and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude." God was with the cake of barley bread and the pitchers, as He will ever be with those who are prepared to take the low place; prepared to be nothing, but to make Him their all in all; prepared to trust Him and to sink self. This, let

it never be forgotten, is the great root principle in all service and in all conflict. Without it, we can never succeed; with it, we can never fail. It matters not what the difficulties, or what the numbers and power of our enemies, all must give way before the presence of the living God; and that presence will ever accompany those who trust Him and sink self.

Nor is this all. Not only is firm trust in God and self-surrender the secret of victory over external enemies; it is also the secret of overcoming, disarming, and melting down jealous and envious brethren, though these latter are often far more difficult to deal with than open enemies. Thus no sooner had Gideon reached the point of victory over the uncircumcised, than he was called to encounter the petty and contemptible jealousy of his brethren. "And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not when thou wentest to fight the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply." Judges 8: 1.

All this was most uncalled for and unworthy. Had they not heard the sound of the trumpet calling Israel to the battle field? Had they not heard that the standard was unfurled? Why had they not rushed to the battle at the first? It was an easy matter to come in at the close and reap the spoil, and then find fault with the one who had been God's real instrument on the occasion.

However, we shall not dwell upon the unlovely conduct of the men of Ephraim; but turn for a moment, to the exquisite way in which Gideon was enabled to meet them. "And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? . . . God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him when he had said that."

Here, Christian reader, is the true way to vanquish jealous and envious brethren. The cake of barley bread and the empty pitcher can vanquish jealous Ephraimites as well as hostile Midianites. A self-hiding spirit is the grand secret of victory over envy and jealousy, in all their odious forms. It is difficult, if not impossible, to quarrel with a man who is down in the dust, in true self-abasement. "What have I done now in comparison of you?" This is the language of one who had learnt something of the real meaning of self-surrender; and we may safely assert that such language must ever disarm the envy and jealousy of the self-occupied and self-sufficient. May we know more and more of the truth of this!

But we must now contemplate the closing scene of Gideon's remarkable history — a scene full of admonition for every servant of Christ. From it we learn that it is far easier to gain a victory than to make a good use of it; far easier to reach a position than to occupy it aright. We shall quote the passage. "Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you.

So far, this was very fine. It was in full keeping with the self-surrender of Gideon's previous course. Every true servant of Christ will ever seek to connect souls with his Master, and not with himself. Gideon would not, for worlds, displace Jehovah as the ruler of Israel. But alas! what he shrank from, in one form, he fell into, in another; and this too, simply because his self-surrender was not complete. There has been but One whose self-surrender was, and that One must, in all things, have the pre-eminence. "And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey.... And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his

house." Judges 8: 22-27.

Such is man, even the best of men, when left to himself. Here we see the very man who had led his brethren on to victory over Midian, now leading them into dark and abominable idolatry. The earrings of the Ishmaelites did what their swords could not do; and the love-tokens of the men of Israel proved far more dangerous than the sharp chidings of the men of Ephraim. The latter drew out a lovely spirit of self-emptiness: the former proved a snare to Gideon and to the whole house of Israel.

Reader, let us remember all this. If Gideon had refused the earrings as well as the throne, it would have been well for him and for his brethren; but the devil laid a snare for him into which he fell and carried all his brethren with him. May we all take warning from Gideon's fall, and draw encouragement from Gideon's victories. May we remember that it is one thing to gain a victory, and another to make good use of it; it is easier to reach a position than to occupy it aright. May God grant to the reader and writer of these lines, more simple confidence in Himself, and more of the true spirit of self-surrender. May such be the result of our meditations upon Gideon and his companions.

C. H. M.