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CHRISTIAN WITNESS:
CHIEFLY ON SUBJECTS
CONNECTED WITH
THE PRESENT STATE
OF THE
CHURCH.

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CONSISTENCY.

THE total corruption of man, although the very basis on which redemption rests, is much more generally received as a dogma, vague and indefinite in its kind, than acknowledged as an all-pervading truth. When there is failure in the recognition of this fundamental truth, the very principles of action necessarily become vitiated, and that which bears the name of consistency is, before God, the worst form of human evil. For what is consistency in the apprehension of men? It is man acting consistently with himself. Now if man was innocent, his consistency with himself would indeed be well-pleasing to God; but as fallen, it is only the showing out his entire inconsistency with God. He thinks it quite enough to act consistently with the character which he professedly assumes. Hence pride and self-regard become the centre around which he is constantly revolving; and while his object is to maintain a character before men, he remains in the deepest ignorance of himself. This condition of mind is one of the least favourable for the reception of truth.—“How can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” Many a man by the plea of consistency, lives in total disregard of God. He professes nothing, and therefore flatters himself that God can expect

nothing from him. He is consistent: and escapes the charge of hypocrisy by asserting practically that he is independant of God. "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful" (Psa. xxxvi. 1, 2).

The maintenance of consistency in the religion which man has corrupted, leads him on to the most unequivocal rejection of the authority of God. "Full well," says the blessed Lord, "ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." Had the authority of the word of God been admitted, it would have thrown them into inconsistency with the system which they had set up. Men are quick-sighted enough to perceive that the admission of a single truth often invalidates their favourite scheme, and therefore full well reject it. It is consistency with their principles which leads men to persecute those who differ from them. Hence wherever there is formally established order, or an association formally organized, the conscience becomes so habituated to surrender itself to the work of its own hands, that consistency requires they should act apart both from grace and righteousness for the maintenance of that which they seek to accredit. "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." It was consistent with his duty, to persecute the disciples of Christ. This is a very powerful principle; and if it be a false consistency, for there is only one which is true, we may expect to find a persecuting spirit even in sincere Christians themselves. The history of the Church furnishes many instances of godly men acting in direct opposition to the plainest precepts of Christ, because they must maintain their own consistency. Only admit the assumption that the Church of Rome is the Church of God, and she is fully justified in treating as heretics all who separate from her. Allow the same of the national establishment in this country, and the anathemas of her canons are wisely consistent with her assumption. Let only the assumption of the Oxford party become a little more general, an expectation by no means unwarranted, and we shall see the amiable and gentle spirits which have led on that movement, going, in deed, beyond what they have said in word, and thinking

they are doing God service. Of all the melancholy spectacles which meet our eye or try our hearts, nothing is so truly humbling as to see a saint forced, for very consistency sake, to act in a manner most abhorrent to the whole of the grace which his own soul knows and delights in in Christ Jesus.

Before we can properly touch the question of Christian consistency, it is needful to look to divine consistency. In the expression "the righteousness of God," used by the Apostle in the Epistle to the Romans, we have this, I apprehend, brought before us. God always acts consistently with himself. And much of the Apostle's statement in the first chapters of the Romans, is to prove God's consistency in dealing in grace with sinners. There is something which much more readily commends itself to us, as to its being consistent for God to require righteousness from man, as he did in giving the law, than in providing righteousness for man as he does in grace, but so in grace that it reigns through righteousness. It is thus that in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, God brings in the full display of himself—"the righteousness of God." Until this is seen, redemption is looked on merely as a remedy for man, instead of answering God's own end, the making known himself. It does not satisfy the awakened soul to find only a remedy provided. In the thought of many a soul, the remedy is at hand; but the gracious provider is unknown, and the soul is unsatisfied. Had Abraham to provide a lamb to offer up, instead of his son, he would not have known God as Jehovah-jireh. And so now it is the same, there is no settled peace or joy in the Holy Ghost, until it is known that salvation is of God. It is to see it all coming forth from him, and as it comes forth, unfolding his own character. It is to be placed as Moses was, in the cleft of the rock, and to have all the goodness of the Lord pass before us, and his name proclaimed to us. The Jesus whom we know is "the Christ of God." And the soul which knows him as such, finds God himself as its portion and exceeding great reward, as well as its shield. There is another expression of the Apostle in the same epistle,—"**The righteousness of God without law :**" this is indeed most blessed. It is perfectly consistent with God not to make any requirements from us. Yes, it is

quite as consistent through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus to do this, as it was righteous in him to make requirements from man when he gave the law. At Mount Sinai it was the righteousness of God in law, but now the righteousness of God without law. He is equally consistent in one way as the other, only the glory of the latter far surpasses that of the former. 2 Cor. iii. It is that "which remaineth:" God will never deal with man in blessing, save in the way of this ministry of life and righteousness, according to his own grace.

Now man's consistency must always be to act according to the standing which he has before God. In innocence man having been made in the image and likeness of God, had he maintained that standing he would have been consistent: then indeed as has been said in the beginning, man's acting in consistency with himself would have been proper consistency, or consistency with God.

So when God was manifesting his righteousness in law, consistency on the part of man would have been keeping the law. But man would not own himself to be inconsistent with God, and therefore frittered away the holy requirements of God's law to meet his own weakness, and eventually made the word of God of none effect through his own doctrines. God cannot deny himself,—with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,—and his primary claim on man is that he should own this. It is most fitting and consistent that man should allow himself to be in the wrong and God to be right. But he will not, he condemns God in order that he may be righteous; in other words, to maintain his own consistency. He is forced into this awful position; and the time is coming when God will vindicate his consistency, and manifest the perfectness of his own character, when redeemed saints shall say "True and righteous are his judgments." It was the Lord's own plea with the house of Israel by his prophets, "Are not my ways equal and your ways unequal?" and before his judgments are made manifest he is using the same plea with sinners now.

God is now before the period of manifested judgment, showing favour to the wicked. It is no longer a question of probation,—man has been tried in a variety of ways, and has ever proved himself quite inconsistent with God. But God is now showing himself

in grace to sinners ; and the very first step in order to a man's being right with God, is to take his proper place before God *as lost*. There can be no possible consistency till this be done. All attempts at self-improvement in order to come to God, set man in hopeless inconsistency with God. They are indeed but the indication of man's proud will, in refusing to acknowledge himself to be what God says he is—*lost*. Almost all that occupies man even in his highest thoughts and actings, are but busy self-importance to hide the fact of his being lost. Let but this be owned, and an entirely new scene presents itself:—Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. Redemption then is opened not as remedial of the original condition of man, but the introduction of a new condition altogether. It is on this previous point that man is so much at issue with God. Man will allow that he needs mercy, yea, that he needs sacrifice, but then it is invariably on the ground that he is a reclaimable being, one capable of being brought back to some standing in which he would be consistent with God. But no, the only consistent place which man can take before God, is that which Abraham took, as having nothing, and being able to do nothing, as in fact dead ; but then the one before whom he stood was the quickener of the dead. There was nothing then to hinder the fulness of blessing flowing out to Abraham—it is consistent with God to make alive the dead—he does it for his own glory. And so now, the moment one comes before God as a lost sinner, what hinders every blessing coming to him most freely from God ? It is righteous for God to bless such—he is acting in perfect consistency with his own character. The question is settled ; man says he is lost, and God says I can save such. If man preferred any claim to God's favour, he must show him that he has none ; but when he justifies God in taking his only suitable place as a lost sinner, then it is consistent with God, to justify him freely through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, to make him his own child and his own heir. Behold then a consistent man—one who takes his right place before God—a lost sinner freely saved by grace. Of such who have taken this place and known its blessedness it is said, “in whose spirit there is no guile.” There needs none ; they know the worst of themselves,

and they know that God too knows the worst of them, and therefore there is no need of guile, no pretension to be what they are not. "Blessed indeed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."

But we now come to another form of consistency, Christian consistency;—the lost sinner justified and redeemed, walking consistently before God, who has so graciously dealt with him. He has now a new standing, and a new nature; and before God he is expected to maintain that standing, and to exhibit that nature. He is inconsistent if he walks *as a man* (1 Cor. iii. 3), because he is a new man. This causes the difficulty of maintaining Christian consistency. Much which might be righteous and honourable to him as a man, would not accord with the standing of the saint before God. This was shown in principle, by our Lord, in answer to the Pharisees:—"Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees. And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then shall they fast in those days." Fasting was not consistent with there then standing. And he further instructs them by a parable:—"No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise then both the new maketh a rent; and *the piece which was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.*" The moment we come to new and old, there is room for the greatest inconsistencies.—There is no agreement between them. And hence it is that the actual christianity which is exhibited before men, so entirely fails of commending it to their consciences. Men do not know where the fault really lies. But while they themselves are proud of maintaining the standing they have assumed, their eyes discover in Christians, the unsightliness of the new attached to the old—a mass of inconsistencies, which leads them to say "the old is better."

The new standing in Christ before God which a believer has, and that not only representatively, but also in living union with Christ, is that which God always regards. "We are his workmanship"—

as such he looks on us. His dealing towards us is according to that which he has made us to be. He would have us to see and know ourselves, as he sees and knows us. There can be no possible consistency before this. The very thing we might have thought to be duty might prove an inconsistency. "We are not debtors to the flesh to live after the flesh." For duties in the thoughts of men, are frequently nothing more than being debtors to the flesh. A correct knowledge of the standing of a believer before God, is the first element of Christian consistency. Hence it is that we find apostolic teaching so dwelling on this point. A clear apprehension of justification is made by them the very basis of Christian conduct. A knowledge of the standing is presupposed before they can be called upon to walk worthily of it. This makes it to be of all importance as to the place which is given to justification; if it be in any wise made an object to be looked for (except indeed as in manifested glory), it is entirely put out of its place. If it be not assumed as a present standing given us of grace, an irreversible standing, there is no ground for Christian consistency, for that is that our conduct should be according to our standing. Hence we find that if justification be made the ultimatum of desire, or of attainment here, that either carelessness of walk or uncertainty of peace is the result. Now the standing which God has given to the believer, is to be as his own Son before him. Before God, he can never be more or less than this. It is on the ground of this standing that he comes under present discipline.—"What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" It is on this ground that he is exhorted, rebuked, and instructed.—"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." The exhortation speaketh unto you as unto sons.—"Do all things without murmurings &c. *that* ye may be sons of God." The standing is assumed as the very ground of conduct.

But whilst the believer's justification as standing before God perfect in Christ's perfectness, is assumed as the ground of his consistency, there is something beyond this, and that is "justification of life." (Rom. v.) It is not only judgment borne by Christ, and Christ made righteousness to the believer, but it is as a consequence, life in union with him who has borne the judgment and is the righ-

teousness. Hence we get another feature of Christian consistency, and that is accordance with the life thus received. Now this implies power. "The kingdom of God is not in word but in *power*." "God has given to us the spirit of love, and *power*, and of a sound mind." Now it is often found, even when there is the most zealous contention for justification alone through Christ, that present union with him in life is not maintained. Where such is the case, the experience of the evil of the flesh occupies the place which life in the Spirit ought to occupy. For in reality it is only judgment on the flesh which is seen. And as a necessary consequence, whilst the weakness and worthlessness of the flesh is most truthfully held, it is often used as an excuse for the flesh and for slothfulness. In truth justification of life, in consequence of judgment passed on Christ for the sins of his Church, and righteousness brought in as their title to stand before God, is but very little acknowledged. But the scripture statements connect these things together. Let us look at that blessed passage in Rom. viii. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit; for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Now this passage is not isolated, it is rather the summing up of the points previously discussed. And we are led to find (in result) that our justification is judgment on the flesh and life in the Spirit. All in us that is against God, has received its sentence in him whom God made to be sin for us. And we are *in* him. Hence I apprehend the close connection between the standing and the walk. They are surely separable, and the standing is quite independant of the walk, being invariably "in Him." But where justification is fully apprehended, the standing and the walk may be well enounced together. No condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk, &c. that being the characteristic of the justified as a class, just as "such as should be saved," expresses a class in Acts ii. 47.

If this be so, a main feature in Christian consistency is the denial of the flesh. It is that which God has judged for us, and therefore it is consistent for us to judge it in ourselves. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." It is only when our souls have entered into the real blessing of their standing in Christ, that they are at all able to give any force to the many expressions of our blessed Lord, implying that the course of his disciples must be contrary to that which is natural and pleasing to them. Then said Jesus unto *his disciples*, "if any man *will come after me*, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Jesus ever walked in consistency with God: if we would follow him in this, here is the way. It is not the flesh denying itself for the sake of pleasing itself, neither is it asceticism for the attainment of holiness; but it is the exercise of that power which the disciple has in virtue of union with Jesus against the flesh, against that which the disciple now knows God has judged and set aside entirely. The new life in close conjunction with the old, surrounded on all sides by adverse circumstances, has to maintain a constant struggle to maintain its ascendancy. So that to walk in the Spirit would lead us very intelligently to understand what it is "to lose and hate our lives in this world."

That consistency should be in the denial of the flesh, although constantly the subject of the Lord's teaching, was never practically understood until accomplished redemption in Jesus was known. Then the power according to which God worked in the Church, being according to that which had raised Christ from the dead, was manifested as acting against and overcoming the flesh. However Apostolic teaching might enter into minute practical details of conduct, it constantly recurred to this as the great principle (see 1 Pet. iii. 17, iv. 1—6). There is no disturbance to the happy repose of the soul of the believer in the blood of the cross, when urging him on to practical holiness. The soul is always kept in its rest,—Jesus and the resurrection being the ground of the rest and of the power.

To enter into detail to shew that the standing of the saint is assumed as the standard of consistency, would carry us too far. But there is one way in which the subject is presented to us of peculiar

interest. The various aspects of truth which are presented to us in the several epistles, are made the standard of the walk and conversation of the believer:—"that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

If we begin with the Epistle to the Romans, in which we have the dispensations of God towards man brought before us, we are led step by step till we see his complete failure as created, and then as taken up in redemption it is said, "ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." This is the standing, and this is the responsibility, "ye are in the Spirit." The turning aside from this, subjects to reproof or admonition. Surely this is as comforting as it is humbling. Man, as such, is no longer capable of rebuke or exhortation,—he stoppeth his ears against the voice of the charmer. But the saint is capable of this,—he "has ears to hear." The preceptive part of this epistle takes up the condition of the saint, while actually in the flesh and in the world. In that rest and glory which is before us, we shall know the full blessedness of not being in the flesh, but in the Spirit. Then not only shall the saints have a spiritual body, but the whole scene around them shall witness to the present power of God in blessing. Then indeed to be in the Spirit, will be to have the life flowing forth without any hindrance at all. This will indeed be to have a full cup; this will be to have the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore. But then the precepts addressed to the saint, as in the flesh and in the world (the only time he needs them), are intended to remove the hindrances to the flowing forth of this life now, and to lead to the enjoyment in which we have communion with God, which is real blessedness. This puts the preceptive parts of the epistles in a very peculiar light. They are seen as the jealous care of our heavenly Father for our real blessing. And would that we looked on them as such. And in the consciousness of redemption, and being in the Spirit, could experimentally say, "more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb: moreover by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward."

The preceptive part of the Epistle to the Romans, appears very

marked as meeting the condition of those who had been led to know themselves in the Spirit, and yet to be in the midst of circumstances most adverse to such a condition. The 13th chapter, inculcating obedience to the powers that be, appears to anticipate the difficulty that would arise in the mind of one taught that he, as in the Spirit, was to be subject to any delegated power in the flesh. But it is of the Spirit in every thing, to prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God ; to own God wherever he has shewn himself ; to own him as the only Potentate, whether in government, in the world, or in his Spirit in the Church.

In the Epistles to the Corinthians, being corrective of practical abuses, and replies to many questions, we do not find the preceptive part in the same manner as in the other epistles. But in the Galatians, corrective of erroneous doctrine, we do find in a very remarkable manner, the connection between sound doctrine and practical holiness.—“The truth is according to godliness.” Now in a recurrence to the law, as auxiliary to Christ in the question of justification, the Spirit, in the Apostle, immediately detected a return to the flesh and to the world. And this is always the case under whatever modification it may be presented, when redemption is not acknowledged as complete in Christ. The work of Christ was deliverance for them, “from this present evil world” (chap. i. 5). Jesus Christ had been evidently set forth before their eyes *crucified* among them. The cross was the starting point with them, there they had seen the end of the flesh ; and then the question comes in, “are ye so foolish ? *having begun* in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh ?” The law could only apply to the flesh : to have gone back to it would have been to have attempted to have got good from that which the cross declared to be in principle set aside. If righteousness came by law, the flesh could profit,—it was not ruined—it was not corrupt. And then worship must necessarily be after the order of the flesh,—in bondage, not in liberty. We have in the Protestant Churches, the evidence before us of what departure from complete justification in Christ has led to, even the denial of the total failure of the flesh often in doctrine, and the setting up again of a worldly sanctuary in worship, and the taking the standard of conventional righteousness in

practice. Hence, after viewing the question in all its bearings, when the Apostle comes to application, it is “walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.—If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” Our justification introduces us into the new creation, and this becomes the rule of our walk. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature; and as many as walk according to *this rule* (the rule of the new creation), peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” The Lord lead our souls to know the inseparable connection between liberty and holiness, for herein is Christian consistency,—death to the flesh—life in the Spirit.

The Epistle to the Ephesians sets before us the wonderful calling of the Church, even that calling into which God has called it. And then consistency with such a calling is practically urged upon us. “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk *worthy* of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” This supposes intelligence of the calling; and there is a power in that intelligence far beyond any thing that could be produced by mere literal enactment. Those so addressed, are at once thrown on their standing as in union with Christ, and are called on to use that power which is now working in the Church, even according to that which raised Christ from the dead. This principle runs through the latter chapters. They must be consistent with the doctrines they had been taught.—“But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be ye have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye have put off the old man; have been renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye have put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” “*Wherefore* putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour.” But it is “after God;” and therefore be kind, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. “Be ye therefore imitators of God as dear children.”

And this order is continued:—“let it not once be named among you *as becometh saints*.” “Foolish talking and jesting *are not convenient*,”—not at all in harmony with the truth they had been taught. So again, “Ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord; walk as children of light.” They were in the capacity, through the

knowledge of the truth which they had been taught, to understand what the will of the Lord was,—they could prove it. It is indeed most blessed thus to connect together the standing and walk of the believer: the intelligent apprehension of the former being the only ground of a consistent walk. It is thus that in the teaching of the blessed Spirit, the pressing of the closest walk with God will always lead to real soul establishment.

As we have seen in that portion of the word which declares to us the largest revelation of God's mind, as to the Church, that the truth taught forms the basis of consistency in the disciple of Christ; let us remark, in other instances, that the special truth taught is to be the mould to form and fashion the lives of those so instructed. The Epistle to the Philippians has much more of a personal character in it than that to the Ephesians. It is not the Apostle authoritatively communicating some new revelation of the mind of the Lord, but the servant leading on the souls of the saints into the use and maintenance of that blessed truth in which they had fellowship together. He thanks God, upon every remembrance of them, for their *fellowship in the gospel*, from the first day until then. He was suffering for it, and they also (chap. i. 29, 30). Now the consistency urged on them is according to that in which they had fellowship,—“Only let your conversation be as it *becometh the gospel of Christ* ;” and this runs through the epistle. “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample, for our conversation is in heaven.”

In the Epistle to the Colossians the great subject matter of revelation are the dignities and headships of the Lord himself, even of him with whom the Church is livingly united. What then is consistency in this aspect? “that ye might *walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing*, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Rudiments of the world, whether in Jewish ordinances or Gentile philosophy, would be alike inconsistent. It is therefore, “as ye have therefore received *Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him*.”

The great point which the Apostle brings before the Thessalonians was that which he had taught them, when he was with them, con-

cerning the glory and kingdom. And this is the basis of his exhortation:—"As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would *walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.*" This would be their consistency.

If we looked to the blessed instruction in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find most beautiful harmony in the practical instruction. They who had such boldness of access into the holiest of all through the blood of Jesus, and because they had a High Priest over the house of God, were to draw near as priests themselves with suitable sacrifices. "*By him* therefore let us offer *the sacrifice of praise to God* continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such *sacrifices* God is well pleased."

In the Epistle of James, where there is so much detail of practical righteousness, we can hardly expect to see the principle so much exemplified. Yet even there, I think, it will be found. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." Here is the standing and character of believers,—begotten of God and made a kind of sample of that creation, the new creation, in which he would rest. The instrument of their blessedness had been the word of truth. What then would be consistent? It is added, "*wherefore*, my beloved brethren, let every man *be swift to hear*, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." This would be suitable for those who had been begotten by the word of truth; and this train is pursued in the following verses. Only in this epistle we find much detail, and therefore we shall find consistency urged in correspondence with those details.—"My brethren, these things *ought not* to be so." It is not suitable, or convenient, or consistent.

In the 1st Epistle of Peter we find a very strong passage to the point. It begins at the 17th verse of the 3rd chapter, and runs into the next. "Forasmuch as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should

live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." Here judgment on the flesh as already having passed on the believer in Christ being assumed, consistency requires that we should not live to the lusts of men. Blessed doctrine indeed; but quite a paradox to those who know not the quickening power of the Spirit. What power is there in the word—"Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." I would only add that in the second epistle we have the same mode of instruction presented in another way.—"But he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and *hath forgotten* that he was purged from his old sins." He is acting quite inconsistently with his standing.

I would only add one little notice from the Epistle of John. The subject of that epistle is the spring of all the blessedness of the Church from God himself as love,—that love manifested in the gift of Jesus as the propitiation for our sins, and in Jesus laying down his life for us. What in the saint would correspond to such love? It is a high consistency indeed. "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and *we ought* (this would only be consistent) to lay down our lives for the brethren." And then, as if to guard us against glaring inconsistency with our most blessed standing in perfect love, he adds, "But whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him." If for a moment we turn from the instruction given in the epistles to that given by our Lord himself in the gospels, we find the same connection.—"Ought not Christ to suffer and to enter into glory." It was when he first opened to them his own sufferings and humiliation, which seemed so strange to Peter, that he taught Peter that he must go the same path to glory (Matt. xvi. 21—28). He has gone the way, and he is the way for us to follow. And so in service, the Lord and Master had bound himself to perpetual service, even to the present service of washing the feet of his disciples.—"Ye call me Lord and Master, and ye say well for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye OUGHT to wash one another's feet. If ye know these things, *happy* are ye if ye do them." It is not ye must wash one another's feet: if it came in

that form, all the grace of the Master and present service of the Master would be forgotten; but *ye ought*,—it would only be consistent. And then again it is not ye shall be saved or rewarded if ye do these things, but “if ye know these things, happy are ye:” he was happy in his service, and he would have us share in his own happiness.

In Jesus we see one indeed consistent with God in all his ways. But this very thing often led him to act inconsistently with human thoughts and the world’s order. That he often invaded. “A certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him; and he went in and sat down to meat; and when the Pharisee saw it he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.” It was quite consistent with their order to keep the outside clean. But here was one intrinsically holy, setting up a new order, consistency with which required inward cleansing. Hence it will often happen that the world will be unable to judge Christian consistency. “He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” There is life in the believer,—a power of discernment of the mind of God, and that in the midst of circumstances. And there is the Spirit in the Church to guide into all truth. So that Christian consistency would never be uniformity, and never could be produced by imitation or by literal enactment. St. Paul circumcised Timothy, and he did not circumcise Titus. It was the wisdom of the same Spirit which guided him in both cases. Hence the setting up any standard short of God himself, as revealed in his Son, and as known to the quickened soul, would lead us into inconsistency. “We have the mind of Christ.” But then it is the mind of Christ as ascertained and applied to actual circumstances by the Spirit. Surely we may say, “if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

THE WAYS AND RANGE OF THE ENEMY.

THERE are a few remarks I would gladly make concerning the Enemy; not as feeling at all able to present any thing like even a full outline of his ways, but as noticing what may have struck my own mind as *leading thoughts* in connexion with his ways. I do this in the belief that these things have too much escaped the minds of the saints, and that it is desirable to bring their thoughts, through grace, to bear upon the subject as one of great practical moment; and I trust that the grace of God may both guide me in writing, and others in reading, as well as overrule the effects of the study of this subject.

I.—The first thing I notice is, that the Enemy has various names or titles, each, as we shall see, connected with a different character of working; and the peculiarities of the operations proper to each, peculiarly distinctive to that to which it belongs, and from which it flows as distinguished from others. His names or titles, as gathered together in Rev. xii. 9, are the Great Dragon, that Old Serpent, called the Devil (or Accuser), and Satan (or the Adversary), which deceiveth the whole world. As to the distinctiveness of these names it is evident, to take two of them (that of the Accuser and the Adversary), that they may be separable, for any one may be an adversary without being an accuser; or again, one may be an accuser without being an adversary. To look at this more in detail, his name of the Great Dragon is only fully brought out in the scene presented to us in this 12th of Revelation, although his workings under this title and itself, may have been referred to in some of the Old Testament prophecies. It presents his aspect I conceive, when in living energy he is trying to thwart the accomplishment of God's grace toward the house of Israel. Directly the Lord's heavenly calling is succeeded by his standing up for the nation Israel, the Enemy begins to oppose it (4); being cast down out of heaven he persecutes the woman (13), stirs up the

nations against her, casting out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood (15); and being very wroth with the woman, he goes to make war with the remnant of her seed (17), and gives the beast his power and authority (chap. xiii. 2), in which beast all his power is afterward concentrated against Israel.

His name of the Old Serpent was developed in Eden, where we read (chap. iii.) "Now* the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman" &c.; "and (verse 4), the serpent said" &c.; and this is referred to by St. Paul (2 Cor. xi. 3):—"I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

No one can, I think, read the former quotations from Revelation, and these, and not see, at once, the difference in the characteristics of the two titles, and the operations connected with them,—power, and that manifested in open patronage, to some, and fierce persecution to others, are the traits of the DRAGON; subtilty and insidiousness and artful guile, with no display of power openly, are the traits of the SERPENT. Displays of THE ACCUSER we have in Job (chap. i.) &c., but the fullest of all is that in Rev. xii. 10.—"And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for THE ACCUSER of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.† The title of the ADVERSARY, though in itself less distinctive and more comprehensive, will yet *in the scripture use of it* (and that is to be the guide to us for our meaning of it), be found to have a distinctive use: our Lord in his temptation only calls him SATAN *once* (Matt. iv. 10, Luke iv. 8), and that only

* Horsley has justly remarked that in this passage and that in Isaiah (predictive of a virgin conceiving a child), the force of the article prefixed is "*a certain serpent*," "*a certain virgin*."

† This accusation evidently from the context does not mean conscience, as some strangely think; troublesome as the Enemy may be in conscience, when it is weak through bad teaching, or practice inconsistent with the faith, something much more tremendous is here referred to: for in this context he is *cast down* from the heavenlies, where day and night (which is not true in any man's conscience) he is accusing the brethren (not in themselves but) before our God.

when he has taken a position of open hostility to God. Two of the temptations had the aspect of being merely against himself, the other openly presented hostility to God:—"all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." "Then (the Enemy having thus taken the place of being God's adversary) saith Jesus unto him, get thee hence *Satan*." So in Zech. iii., God having set his hand to deliver the remnant, it was manifest opposition to God for the Enemy to stand to resist.—"And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and SATAN standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, the Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments." Again, in Mark, where the temptation is looked at as a whole, the Enemy is spoken of as Satan, i.e. as manifestly God's adversary, and as clearly are God's servants, the angels, shown to be present (chap. i. 13).—"And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; . . . and the angels ministered unto him." And lastly his character of deceiver of the whole world, while true in principle, all along from the beginning, has a scene in which it will be peculiarly exhibited (Rev. xx. ver. 2): he is cast bound into the pit. . . . that he should deceive the nations no more; and (ver. 8), when loosed, he shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, . . . the number of whom is as the sand of the sea; . . . "and (10) the Devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire." I notice this as the full development of his deceiving power, though from being at a time when God's glory is manifested, it falls under his satanic character, as adversary of God,—as it is said (verse 7), Satan shall be loosed. I add, that as god of the world, he has deceived the world all along; and the nations will be deceived in connection with the

day of Antichrist on the prophetic earth (see chap. xvii.): yet both these are narrower than that here presented to us in connection with the four quarters of the earth. These few remarks may suffice to present to those who have not considered the matter, the fact that there is a variety in the titles and characters of the Enemy, and distinctiveness in the operations proper and peculiar to each.

I only add that I believe this to be a most important topic; for if I have to contend with an enemy, and suppose that he only has one form and appearance in which to present himself, and only one set of operations, while in fact his forms and operations are many and various, it is quite clear I cannot be prepared to cope with him, but must constantly overlook his presence, and not see his working, because they are not at that time in the form and character in which alone I know him.

2.—Can there or can there not be traced any leading thought in connection with his movements? I think there can; and, strange as it may seem, that the peculiarities of the work of God at any given epoch in the course of time, will be found to be the clue to the peculiar sphere of the Enemy's movements. Many are apt to think that the Enemy has only one scene of conflict, and that he carries on only a defensive war, holding territory of his own and never troubling himself to assail any, nor even to be met in conflict, save by assailants, and then only upon his own fixed ground; but the simple facts are, that his warfare is much more offensive than defensive,—defensive indeed hardly at all; and that of all the many great conflicts in which he has formed a part, no two of them have been upon the same arena: the not observing this, comes from man supposing *himself*, and each man often his own individual self, to be the centre and end of the operations of the Enemy, instead of God and his Christ. If we take the word and trace this a little, the matter will be plain. Wherever God has acted, it has been by the Son through the Spirit; and in order to see the sphere at any given time in the history of the Bible of the Enemy's doings, we have only to see where at that time the work of God is. Let us look at Eden: there God had been displaying his own eternal power and Godhead, and had placed man, his vice-regent, in the wonders and beauties of crea-

tion ; and here first we have the first recorded effort of the Enemy's against God's glory, as in the hand of man. Can this goodness of God—can this blessed type of the Second Adam—can this most lovely work of the Holy Spirit, who broods upon the face of the waters, and brought forth the complement of all that was very good,—can the works in which all three of these Persons of the Godhead had been interested for man be marred ? The Enemy will try : he does try, and in man's hand mars them all ; and creation and its order of use and regulation cease to be faithful witnesses and expressions of the goodness and power of God, in his relationship with man. The battle is fought, the fight won, the trophy of triumph raised over man by the Enemy : neither is that field any longer used by God for the same display of himself, nor is it the place where the next trial will be made. True, not one of all the wreck of creation's lovely stores,—a wreck produced by man's folly, and the Enemy's artifice,—can entirely lose the impress of masterly skill and wisdom and goodness, which every work of God's hand bears ; but the whole is a wreck, and the whole creation groans and travails in pain together **until** now ; and this not only from the tyrannical usurpations of the Enemy, but also by reason of him who subjected the same to hope ; and pangs, throws, and subjection ; toil, labour, and sweat ; briars, thorns, and unfruitfulness ; are of God's appointment. True also God has neither resigned his claim or right to these things, nor admitted the usurper's claim. Most true also that the Enemy will use the power he has thus gained through man, while allowed to retain his hold of them ; and will go to the utmost limit the Overruler of all things permits him. But man is banished from Eden, and no longer stands over CREATION'S stores and revenues as lord therein. Where next shall we find the Enemy ? There surely where next God is seen acting with man ; and that is in the kingdom of PROVIDENCE, as dealing with the patriarchs. I do not mean to say that the long dark course of man's passions and wickedness, from the murder of Abel, through the deluge until the patriarchs, does not present much of his handiwork, as well as of the ripened fruit of this seed sown in Eden, in the natural effects of the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life ; surely

it does. But having observed that at certain distinct epochs in the history, the Enemy is *mentioned* and brought out to light; I would trace them, as believing them to be purposely given us by God for our guidance. Man having refused to hold CREATION under and for God, the next thing we have is God trying whether he will, even in a fallen world, recognize him as the God of PROVIDENCE. Displays of this we see in the driving out of Cain from his presence; in the establishment of Seth's family; in the deluge and salvation in it of Noah; in the division of the nations in chap. x.; the overthrow of the tower of Babel, &c. But the most perfect display of all seems to have been in the patriarchs, when the world having sunk into idolatry, we find God taking them up as witnesses for himself. Among these, and certainly among those to whom most especially the God of providence was most displayed, we find Job. And here also the adversary is at work—trying so to come in between the God of providence, and the creature of providence, as to break up the whole power of the testimony, as a perfect testimony for God in man. And by the instrumentality of the Enemy, it was seen that man could not hold his place under the God of providence; and another trophy was raised here by the Enemy against man. Blessed that we know that all was according to the permission of God; and that while man failed, as connected both with creation and providence, God neither failed nor let slip his power in either, or his willingness to use both for man, so far as his great purpose of restoring both to man in the second Adam might require. I would press the study of the 1st chapter of Job, in the view here presented, as the opening of man's failure, as connected with providence.

The next movement on the part of God is, in type and shadow, using man and his things as outlines of the glory of his Son. And here next we find the failure of man, as in the golden calf; Dathan and Abiram &c.; and toward the close of the epoch in the recorded manifestation of the Enemy. David was a type of the person and glory of the Lord as king, and we read that Satan moved him to number the people; moved him to act, that is, against and independent of the order of blessing God had laid down for the kingdom of

his Son in type ; and man's unfitness to have or to hold any thing in himself again is proved, and the Enemy triumphs.

See again the same thing when the grace of God is stirring up the heart of Daniel, to seek to understand about the promised mercy to Israel. God's heart no longer lingers on Eden,—no longer hangs on providence,—no longer rests in types marred by man ; but he will yet refresh himself a little by mercy toward the house of Israel in captivity. And where is the Enemy now ? walking in Eden, going to and fro on the earth, or in the place where David sinned ? No, he is here where God's fresh energy of mercy is ; and when the broken-hearted servant has bowed himself three whole weeks before his God, he finds that (chap. x. 12) "*from the first day* that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words,"—and the delay accounted for by satanic agency. "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days ; but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me ; and I remained there with the kings of Persia."

AGAIN, the revelation of mercy secured to the faithful, the Enemy is wise enough to see, that he can glean no more standing between Daniel and his God ; and,—marvellous as it then was, though unable to stay Daniel's prayer one day (see ver. 12), yet able to stay God's returning messenger twenty one days (ver. 13),—he leaves this to meet the energy of God where it is next shown in man. And a little onward we have the feeble remnant returning. Surely here the Enemy may still thwart God's work in man's hand. And so when (Zech. iii.) "he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, . . . Satan was standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, the Lord rebuke thee, O Satan ; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee : is not this a brand plucked out of the fire ?" The failure of man here also may be seen by a comparison of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai, grace still holding fast its divine purpose, for present and for future blessing.

When the Lord came into the world, none of these past scenes could afford any prospect of spoil to the Enemy, but the whole energy of his power is brought against the Son,—and in every varied way,—

by the lust of the flesh ; by the lust of the eye ; by the pride of life ; in the desert ; by the subjects of the kingdom being filled with devils ; by moving the lips of Peter till he was rebuked as satan ; by filling the heart of Judas ; by all such things does he try again his power ; but now he has to deal with the Son of man, and let him heat the furnace seven times hotter than is wont, not one ripple of dross can he throw out from this fine gold,—let him try all his sophistry, not one taint can he inject. He triumphs it is true for a little time, and bruises the heel, that it in crushing his head, might crush it without crushing man with it—so many as believed in him.

But Jesus is risen ! Jerusalem no longer contains him,—he is ascended up on high, leading captivity captive ;—he sits at the Father's right hand, and there in the glory, appears in supplication for the Church. The fore front of the battle is turned,—Judea no longer beholds the heat of the conflict. Whence and where the energy of God for man is, thither must we look now if we would see the trial of the war. Now therefore (Eph. vi. 12), “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.” The accuser of the brethren, is not yet cast down out of heaven, till then both he and his angels have entrance to the heavenlies, and till then (Rev. xii. 10), “he accuseth them before our God day and night.”

I do not, as I have said, mean that the Enemy merely works in the fore front of the battle, or forgets and lets go territory of past conflict, surely he does not ; but as surely if we would be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must know where the fore front of the battle is, and what *the* point is of present trial and pressure.

I am not sure I have picked up all the links of the chain of evidence deducible from scripture as to the action of the Enemy, though I believe I have. At all events sufficient has been shown to suggest the course of thought to the minds of others.

THE HARMONY AND DIVERSITY OF THE FOUR GOSPELS.

CAREFUL attention to the respective characters and to the common revelation of the four Gospels, would be richly rewarded by the much clearer perception of the Person of the Lord Jesus, which would necessarily result therefrom. For ignorance of His Person, is the remarkable and lamentable feature of the Church's present ignorance.

All saints know and avow in general terms, that the Lord Jesus is truly God and perfectly man. They know that these two natures exist in that one Person. But very few saints have, it appears, much reflected on this; and consequently they are ignorant of most important truths which necessarily spring from it.

The Lord Jesus Christ has certain relations, offices, dominions, &c., which belong to Him *as man*, which he had not, nor could have, were he God only. Though, remember, His humanity and divinity being indissolubly united in one Person, He can never hold or exercise any of these (His properly human relations, dominions, offices, &c.), but in divine power and in title of His eternal Sonship.

So again—as to His divinity. Though thus man, and therefore related to man and to the earth, He has absolute, essential, divine being and power. “The Word was God”—“He quickeneth whom He will”—for example. And however the Church may be one with Him as one Christ, still he has that, as very God, of which the saints are not fellow-partakers,—even that which is, by necessity of its own quality, independantly divine.

Yet it is true that the Church derives its existence from Him whose existence is divine; and that the Church is, through His death and resurrection, associated with Him in a position of blessedness, and a character and fulness of blessing, according to His as the Son of the Father.

Now as to the Gospels on this: in connection both with the Lord and the Church.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke, specially present to us the Lord Jesus as man. The Son of man, Son of Abraham, Son of David, and Servant of God. All is subjected or human: in whatever essential power of vitality by Him held and sustained, still all is human—delegated—subordinate.

But in John it is otherwise. Here He is at once presented in His essential fulness: He is God and the Creator; and here His terrestrial sojourn and human relations and offices, form the subordinate matter of revelation. In the former three, His essential nature and life are rather necessitated by His human perfectness and singularity; but in John, His human and subordinated excellencies are directly shown to be manifestations, outflowings, of His divine life and holiness. He is here indeed the *obedient* one; but here His very obedience to the Father is seen to be the outflowing of His own perfect mind. His Father's commandments heard, known, done: and yet in all he was divine. His mind was his Father's mind—His Father's mind was His—and yet He *kept* "*His Father's commandments, and abode in His love.*"

This is very marvellous. Thus to see divine life flowing out in subordinated love. And only in John are we able to trace this from its spring to its display as true of the most blessed Jesus. In Him was LIFE, and the LIFE was the LIGHT of men. This is the characteristic of John.

Here we have then the spring and the power of all the other presentations of the Lord Jesus. We have outer coverings displayed to us in Matthew Mark and Luke; we have the gold and the blue which give essential power and heavenly beauty to all disclosed to us in John.

Now it is of deep importance truly, that the saints should study in St. John, the marvellous height of glory and power of life into which they are brought by union, and hope of association, with Him who was from the beginning:—the Son of the Father who abideth in His bosom. But it is also of deep importance that they should learn Jesus as seen in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For there He is displayed as one who (though so exalted in essential and relative

blessing) came under all the responsibilities of man, general or special; and who, amidst all circumstances, natural or induced, served God in the earth.

Hence practical display of God, in humanity and in human circumstances and relations, we must learn in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Though the spring of the power for such display will be found in John, yet these three Gospels guide us to the developed forms and workings thereof. This I do judge to be most important truth now. Lest, having learnt the diversity in the four Gospels, we should forget their essential unity in their display of the Lord Jesus. They must be regarded as one entire, though variously presented, whole. Essentially they are this, whatever their characteristic variations may be. And if this is lost or forgotten, then their presentation of Jesus is lost or unknown. If the Gospels are absolutely divided, or spoken of as essentially contrasted, then is the Person of the Lord Jesus offended against, and His varied glories must be set in opposition to each other.

With respect to the Person of the Lord Jesus, the Gospels have therefore these two common objects.

1st.—They reveal the essential fulness of the manifested Son of God.

2nd.—They reveal His actual display of that fulness.

Their unity in these two points, binds them indissolubly together as one most wondrous whole.

And I here then repeat that (while this is so) the practical display of God, in humanity and in human circumstances and relations, we must peculiarly learn in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For therein we specially see the Lord Jesus thus revealed and acting.

And now I would add, that thus learning *Him* in these three Gospels, we also find *our own example therein also*. For we are men (Luke)—servants of God (Mark)—and members of an ostensible body owning God in the earth (Matthew); and it is in these positions and relations, that we are called on to display that divine life which we have in and from Christ Jesus. And which life the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ Jesus) is given us to energize and direct.

I would still further explain myself by one reference.

In John xiv. xv. xvi. xvii.—we have revealed to us our essential life and blessing and glory as children of God. The springs of all our blessing are here, and the power and order of all our joy and service. And well may we love to dwell on this portion of the word. We are amidst our treasures—our divine and heavenly and imperishable treasures. But now as to the detailed *display* of this *life* in our present standing amidst evil; where must we turn for instruction as to this? Where must we learn how the heavenly is to be manifested in grace amidst and towards the earthly and evil? I reply, in Matthew v. vi. vii. most especially; and I might add Matt. xviii. also, as another example. For the former chapters contain our directory for the *universal* practice of the divine life amidst evil, while the latter chapter specially refers to such display of that life *in the Church*. Matthew v. vi. vii. xviii. &c. &c., are thus our practical guide for the display of that which is shown to be really ours in John xiv. &c. In the sermon on the mount, we have the heavenly life and calling revealed in the *conduct* that becomes it. Conduct lovely in the sight of heaven, though poor and despised in the eyes of men.

How does this bind John and Matthew together. And how are they thus unitedly precious to the saints, as now so immediately of practical application and value unto them. If we rejoice in the treasures revealed as ours in John, let us put on the garment wrought out for us in Matthew.

And it is most important to remember that such is the connection between these Gospels, that none but those who have *communion* with that which is revealed *in John*, can possibly *walk* according to the path marked out *in Matthew*. The latter is as strictly and really belonging to the heavenly family as the former. And we should as carefully watch against anything which would take the *consciences* of the saints from under the obligations in Matthew, as against anything which would take their *hearts* away from the fulness of living power and consolation in John.

The four Gospels have thus not only two common objects in relation to the Person of Jesus, but they have also two common objects in relation to the Church.

1st.—They reveal the essential blessing of all who, by faith, through grace, receive the Son of God.

2nd.—They reveal the consequent obligations of such, and furnish them with principles and precepts for practical conduct.

Then they reveal the Lord Jesus *essentially* and *practically*, and thus they apply to the saints *essentially* and *practically*.

It is most instructive to study the Gospels with this two-fold end. First—to learn Jesus in them: secondly—to find our own blessing and directory therein also.

I do not purpose to follow this now; I leave it for individual meditation. Desiring to direct attention thus to the Gospels *as a whole*, and to define their *common and united objects*, in order to guard our minds against overlooking this, while studying their respective differences. Better never learn the peculiar character of each Gospel, though so blessed a study, than thereby forget the real unity of subject and purpose, which makes them one comprehensive reservoir of all blessing. For they contain the great body of those waters of life which flow throughout the word. Every stream of blessing found in the Old Testament may be traced until it empties its treasures into the Gospels: and every river of blessing flowing out in the New Testament owns the Gospels as its source. For in them He is revealed “in *whom dwelleth the fulness*.” And—Oh wondrous grace—“*of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace*.”

A LETTER ON THE DISPENSATIONAL STUDY OF SCRIPTURE.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

Your enquiries concerning the dispensational study of scripture are confessedly important; and peculiarly so when so many saints are thus reading the word, and when the practical results of this are so palpable. I by no means pretend fully to answer your enquiries;

I may however be able to suggest some leading points which may aid you therein.

Your first question is—"What is meant by the dispensational study of the word of God?"

In order to reply the more clearly to this, I must ask your attention to a brief preliminary statement.

The Bible reveals three grand spheres of divine action in direct connection with man. 1st.—That of Eden: wherein God acted towards man as an unfallen creature. 2nd.—This earth from the fall of man to the close of its existence: in which God acts towards man as a fallen creature. 3rd.—The new creation: in which God will act towards man as a perfect creature in union with Himself.

These are distinct (though not un-united) spheres of divine action; differing essentially from each other. For man, the subject of God's dealings, is essentially different in all. First, the innocent creature; secondly, the fallen creature; thirdly, a new creature having divine life. It is most obvious that God could act towards unfallen man, as He could not act towards fallen man; and again, that towards perfect man in union with Himself, God can act as He could not act in either of the preceding cases.

These are then the three successive spheres in which God's action on and in man is revealed.

But while all these are revealed to us in the word, it must be remarked, that a very small portion of scripture is directly occupied by the first and third of these; while, on the other hand, the second is the direct subject of almost the whole word. For the great subject-matter of scripture is—the revelation of God's ground of action and God's modes of action towards man as a ruined creature.

It is on this sphere of divine action that our attention must now rest. I have thus carefully defined it in order that I may surely fix your thought upon it. I repeat then, that *its limits* are from the fall to the end of this creation; and that *its character* is the display of the one basis, and the various modes of divine action towards sinful man.

On this sphere our attention must rest, because this is the great theatre of dispensations. Dispensations or economies being ordered

and varied divisions thereof. I would just say here, that this sphere is not absolutely unconnected with the original and the ultimate spheres; though it is nevertheless, a theatre of divine operation, essentially distinct from them.

We must now dwell a little on *the character* of this vast period as already defined. I have mentioned *one basis*, but *many modes* of divine action therein. This uniform basis gives essential unity to the whole period; while the succession of varied forms of action marks out its dispensational divisions. This essential unity, and this successive variety, as distinctly characteristic of this whole period, must be more closely considered.

1st.—As to the unity. The one common ground of divine action in this sphere is REDEMPTION. For redemption is God's only ground of action towards sinful man. In redemption is found that wondrous combination of divine power, wisdom, and love, which enables the holy God to act in long-suffering patience towards, or in effectual grace for, ruined and rebellious man. For neither forbearing nor effectual grace flow out on any other ground. God has long borne, and is yet bearing, with the evil of man: God effectually quickens and blesses some among men; and it is in redemption that God has provided both for thus saving some, and for thus forbearing with the mass. And thus we read—"the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Tim. iv. 10). Thus redemption enables us to understand how God can holily bear with evil, even doing good the while unto the unthankful and the unholy; as well as how He can effectually save whom He will.

This gives a solemn interest indeed to this whole period. This brings the heart and the conscience into exercise, when we are, as sinners redeemed by grace, studying it. For grace is flowing out towards sinners through it all, on the one ground of redemption. Grace, I say, whether as patient towards all, or as saving unto some.*

Thus then we have marked not only the *limits* of the sphere on

* Observe, I do not say that redemption was the *source* or *cause*, but the divinely prescribed *basis* of all such grace. Divine love is the *spring* of all, being the cause of redemption itself.—"God so loved the world that he gave," &c. (John iii. 16.)

which our attention is resting, but we have also clearly defined its generic and universal character.

But, 2ndly, as to the varied divisions of this period. God has been pleased to act in various ways towards man on the one ground of redemption. That is, redemption being the basis on which alone God bears with or blesses fallen man, God has at different times placed man in different relations unto Himself. Grace, whether effectual or forbearing, has flowed out, sometimes in one economy, sometimes in another. Many have been the forms in which "the light has shined in the darkness;" and many the positions and relations in which the darkness has been placed, in order for the light to shine upon it. These various modes of divine action towards sinful man ("the darkness"), are dispensations or economies. And these are our immediate subject.

God acted in one way towards His corrupted creature from Adam to Noah. In another from Noah to Abraham. In another from Abraham to Christ. Each of these times and ways, thus becomes a dispensation. During each of these times (or "ages"), God acted in a different way towards man, though in all of them on the basis of redemption. And so again we have from the incarnation to the end of the world, yet further dispensational order and distinctness revealed. For the past, the present, and the future, are alike divided and alike revealed to us by our God. The second advent of the Lord Jesus, for example, will close the present, and introduce the Millennial age. A point in dispensational study of paramount interest and importance to us. I do not enumerate these as all the dispensational divisions of our vast period, I mention them merely by way of illustration.

Thus, I hope, we have found a plain answer to our first question. For the dispensational study of scripture is just the study of these successive modes and defined periods of divine action. Each filling up its appointed place in the great moral display: each successively unfolding with increasing clearness the character of God and the real condition of man. Each, therefore, opening and applying in divine order, His fulness in whom all the fulness is pleased to dwell.

Those therefore engaged in this study, have specially before them

one distinct and expansive period. I say, specially before them; but *not exclusively* so, because they learn the sad occasion of all in the original sphere, Eden; and they learn the glorious results of all in the ultimate sphere, the new creation. They thus first discern the real connection between all revelation, and then they have one vast period as their peculiar study.

But further, they have this their sphere of present study divided for them, by infinite wisdom itself, into varied and characteristic stages. They enter on no confused or entangled, but on a divinely arranged subject. And they can in all of these divisions detect one grand purpose as the uniform ground of action, while in each they discern the varied operation of His wisdom and knowledge, who alike purposeth and worketh all. Throughout their study such are ready to exclaim, "of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things."

Thus they have an unbroken chain of varied operation laid out before them; and they are seeking to increase in divine knowledge, by an ordered acquaintance with the ordered ways in which divine love and wisdom have wrought.

Such is the nature of the dispensational study of scripture.

But it is possible that our second question, "What is our authority for thus reading and applying the word?" may yet be put. I will therefore refer briefly to this point also.

If, however, what has been already said be true, much cannot be needed here. For it must follow, that our authority for *thus* reading the word, is identical with our authority for reading it *at all*. We have, in fact, no authority to read it otherwise. For as He who in counsel of love and grace planned redemption, has in his own order dispensed it; so also in revealing redemption, has he in His own order revealed it. His "wisdom and prudence" are seen alike in His ordered ways, and in His ordered word. This word is the precious portion of His redeemed children. Before such, as "being rooted and grounded in love," He thus Himself traces out the manifold and patient wisdom of His ways; having herein (as every where) His own fixed and harmonious order. Having thus been pleased to prescribe to Himself, an arranged and connected order of operation,

and having also been pleased to reveal this for our knowledge of Himself, God is as surely God, and therefore as Sovereign, in this order of revelation whether in word or act, as He is in the way of redemption itself. But this order is directly rejected by those who refuse, or disregarded by those who neglect, to read and apply His word according to God's own dispensational divisions thereof. How can such *rightly* divide the word!

This question concerning the authority for this study, becomes thus a most important one: for it has to do immediately with subjection to God. And with subjection of that kind, even *subjection of mind*, which is *most* needful though *most* difficult. The presumptuous pride of human will may be displayed here as well as in any matter concerning vital truth. Merely natural man boldly exercises that will upon such vital truth; proudly rejecting what he cannot comprehend or harmonize. From this fatal enmity against God, God's own almighty and gracious power delivers His saints. Being born of God they have a renewed mind, which can receive and is subject to His truth. Of such it is said, "being renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Eph. iv. 23). But, though thus, by this gift of grace, enabled to understand and to be subject to the truth of God, we have also our old and wilful hearts as yet remaining: and we have special reason therefore, as saints, to watch against the specious admission of our own wills in any of those points which may not be vital; and thus against our continued practical implication in "the *great transgression*" (Psalm xix. 13),—in the common rebellion of human against divine will.

A wide field of (so called) non-essentials seems to have been reserved in the Church, as by common consent, for the exercise of self-will! There may be revealed things indeed non-essential to personal salvation, if this is all we heed. But we must remember, that if this is our end as to ourselves, it is not God's end concerning us. Our salvation is the pure, unaided, work of grace, in order to an end. And that end is our subordination in love to God in all things. And such thorough subordination to the mind of God in all things is essential to wise or acceptable service. And may we very carefully, distinguish between the noisy energy of the will of the flesh, which

always finds an answer from the flesh, and the holy quiet of acceptable, because obedient, service of God, which will always be of no esteem in the eyes of men.

Love and subordination are the two grand characteristics of the new creature. They constituted the developed perfectness of the beloved Son. He could say—"that the world may know that *I love the Father*, and as the Father *gave me commandment, even so I do.*" This was all that the "prince of this world, the spirit that now worketh in the children *of disobedience*," found in or drew from Jesus, the blessed the obedient one (John xiv. 30, 31).

Not only therefore have we good authority for this study of the word, but we have in it a test and a means of subjection to our God and Father. A test and a means of present practical subjection in thought and act unto Him, subjection to whom in love was the "meat" of the blessed Son of God (John iv. 34). But we need such a test and such a means as He did not. His obedience was the outflowing of His own, and only, perfect mind. He had no will to mortify—for He was without sin. Our obedience on the contrary, though flowing from the life of Christ and the Spirit of Christ within, is feeble, interrupted, and stained, through our evil flesh. And hence it is that the ordered word is to us so invaluable a means, as well as so sure a test, of real obedience. For we have in the revealed word of God an instrument provided, by which we can check and mortify the wilful energy of our "natural minds;" even while (yea, because) we are thereby, under God, training our "spiritual mind" into happy and intelligent subjection to the truth.

In a word then in reply to our second question—our authority for the dispensational study of scripture is simply and purely divine. Its wilful rejection thus becoming, in this, the rejection of God; its careless neglect making an open door for manifold wilfulness. Hence we are as bound to recognize God's dispensational order, as we are to believe His doctrinal truths, or to obey His practical precepts. "The fruit of the Spirit" being found alike in rejoicing subjection unto all.

Here our third question properly arises, though already in some measure replied to; What is the practical value of this study to the saints?

This question might be summarily answered by asking—what is the practical value of a right understanding and a right use of the word of God? For the same precisely is the value of the dispensational knowledge of the word; which is, in fact, a right understanding in order to a right use of that word.

But as this is the *great*, because the *immediately practical* question, I will not so summarily dismiss it.

I have already spoken of the saint as one who has a renewed mind, the mind of the new creature. This is the present fact of every quickened person. Now in John xvii. the Lord Jesus prays for such, “sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.” He thus desired that those who had eternal life, and who were loved with the very love in which He Himself rejoiced, should be practically conformed to the will of God,—in other words, He desired their practical sanctification.

This practical sanctification consists in internal and external subjection to the revealed mind of God. To train and mould the saints to this is the present object and work of the Holy Spirit in all instruction, discipline, and precept. For this end does that blessed Spirit lead the saints into the study and understanding of the word. But though the word is thus the appointed instrument of practical sanctification, it may be most safely affirmed, that neither the general and vague reading of the word, nor the arbitrary and disconnected reading of it, can ever bring into that subjection, internal or external, in which practical sanctification consists. And for this plain reason, that such reading of the word has not the power of truth connected with it. It is a disjointed and ignorant use of truth according to our own caprice or individual need, and is not *the mind of God concerning His own truth*.

If we were saved as isolated individuals, to whom the word was given merely for personal application in comfort, &c., then the habit which so extensively prevails of reading and using the word as I have deprecated, would be quite justifiable and indeed necessary. But we are not *so* blessed, or *so* spoken to, by our God. We are quickened *into a family*—whose history through every age, and whose final destiny, is thus the history and destiny of our own hea-

venly family. And the varied circumstances, responsibilities, and service of which family, during its sojourn in this old creation, teaches us at once the fulness of redeeming grace and our need of such grace. But not only are we thus by grace identified in life, experience, and hope with the redeemed family of God, but we are also, by the same act of mercy, separated from the world in which we dwell. But, though “not of the world,” still the prayer is, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John xvii. 14, 15, 16). Thus we are practically concerned to know what the evil is. And the history, character, and destiny of the world becomes as important to us, as the history &c., of our own redeemed household. The word furnishes these respective and contemporary histories. Therefore not being blessed as individuals merely, and not being yet taken out of the world, the whole scope and order of the word becomes our necessary means of practical sanctification. For we cannot have our affections intelligently resting in the heavenly family of faith, in which God dwelleth, if that family be unknown,—we cannot have our affections separated from the world, with which God dwelleth not, if we know not what the world is. And God’s word is our only true record of either.

And there is far more intimate connection between subjection of mind to the word, and external obedience to the word, than is often perceived or allowed. I have said that subjection of mind to God is the most important, as well as the most difficult, kind of subjection unto Him. And this is indeed so. For subjection of mind, of heart, is that which God so peculiarly desires,—“the ear opened morning by morning to hear as the learned.” But not only is subjection of mind important, because of this direct waiting upon the mind of God which it implies and secures, but also because it is the necessary and proper preparation for subjection of walk. “The Lord God opened *mine ear*, and *I was not rebellious, neither turned away back*” (Isa. l.) This is the order in which God now deals with His saints. For their standing is in life, and in the responsibility of life; so it is written to us—“if we *live* in the Spirit, let us also *walk* in the

Spirit." It is thus *life within* on which the Spirit works in order to mould and perfect *walk without*.*

Thus, again, are we exhorted "*as new born*," to "desire the sincere (unadulterated) *milk of the word*, that we may *grow thereby*." This is the aliment of the new creature; even the living truth of God. By this, as applied by the Spirit, the affections and understanding of the new life are developed, nurtured, and matured. Thus while the natural man may find in the word matters of curious interest and speculation, the saint finds food for his soul, and moral principles for his governance, in every page. Thus he grows in the knowledge of God. Thus a new inner man—a world within of spiritual thought, understanding, and reason—is formed. Thus intelligent communion with God is known; and accurate perception of His ways is attended by subordination of heart to His will. Yes, subordination of thought, of hope, of estimation. In a word—an inner world is formed of spiritual and yet subjected intelligence, which is ever active in the native energy of life, and yet ever obedient in the happy submission of love.

I speak not here of hindrances and resistances, in ourselves now, to this,—yet do I not therefore forget or deny them. Neither do I speak of personal attainment, as though I knew any thing of this, save as seeing the desire of God for us; but I speak of that which, as children of God, *we should labour for*, and *both power and means for large measure of which, are ours*. Power, by the gifts of eternal life and of the Holy Spirit; means, by the provision of the full and ordered word.

But this Christian maturity, and this intelligent fellowship with God, cannot even be advanced towards, if the divine order in the word is unknown, or disregarded. Because the appointed means—means having in them power of truth, are not used.

The holy dignity and strength and joy of such intelligent communion with "the Father of glory" must be instantly obvious. I will therefore, as to this, only refer you to the prayer of the Spirit, by the Apostle, in Ephesians i., and to the prayer of the Son in John xvii.

* The ear was *first* touched with the blood, and anointed with the oil—then the hand and the foot (Lev. viii.)

In one we see the blessed Son presenting the children in His own proved perfectness to His Father as meet, through Him, for the glory; and in the other, we see the blessed Spirit desiring of the Father of glory, that the believing and loving children should here on earth have the *eyes of their understanding enlightened, in order that they might* “KNOW *what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.*” In the prayer of the Son, we trace the things which are freely given to us of God; and in the prayer of the Spirit, we see that we should desire to *know* the riches of the glory of those things. And this very chapter shows that the means for this stand inseparably connected with knowledge of the dispensational wisdom of God (ver. 8, 9, 10).

But I would again remind you that there is the most intimate connection between such spiritual intelligence in the word and our external obedience,—between real holiness of mind and righteousness of life. And this is most plainly marked in 1 Pet. i. 13—16.—“Gird up the *loins of your mind*, &c., be ye *holy in all manner of conversation*,” &c. And why “gird up the loins of your mind?” Because to you the *defined order* (as well as the full measure) of revelation is given: this is surely plain from what goes before in the chapter. Thus the actual obedience, “in all manner of conversation,” of an instructed child of God, becomes “reasonable service.” It is not bondage under the letter, but it is the energy of life developed in the service of instructed love. Life walking in Love according to the Light. The word gladly taken as the lamp to the feet. In a word, it is the answer to the prayer, “Sanctify them through thy truth”,—a prayer made most definite by the added words, “*thy word is truth.*”

But as it is so important to know that this study of the word of God is really and necessarily connected with our walk in righteousness and true holiness—with our intelligent service of God as well as with our intelligence in the truth of God—I will ask you to refer to Rom. xii. 1, 2. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of

your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Here, as you have doubtless observed, the strictly practical part of this epistle commences. External obedience is enforced, and that whether in the family, in the Church, or in the world. Conformity to an age of multiplied and aggravated wilfulness—human will daring to arraign and at last condemning the truth of God—is to be avoided. We are to be *transformed*. And our service in, though against the body, is "reasonable service." Reasonable service that consists in non-conformity to the age in which we live, and in the present dying daily! This can be *reasonable* service only according to divine and heavenly reason, and therefore is only spoken of as the service of those who have their minds *renewed*. A mind according to God and not according to man must have been given, before the essential truth and moral fitness of such service, so contrary to the age and to the flesh, could be apprehended. But to those who have their minds renewed through grace, the word is, "present your bodies a living sacrifice," "be not conformed," &c.

But on what are these practical exhortations here founded? What has been presented to these renewed minds on which the Apostolic "*therefore*," rests. "I beseech you, *therefore*, brethren, *by the mercies of God*," &c. This at once directs us to what has gone before in this epistle. For these first practical exhortations in it are founded upon "mercies" previously revealed as ours. Ours, or else we could not be among the "brethren" exhorted. And what are these "mercies?"

First.—Mercy as found in that wonderful opening of "the redemption which is in Christ Jesus," from chap. iii. 20 to chap. viii. The utter and remediless ruin of the flesh having been shown in the first part of this epistle, the Spirit in this part of it fully traces out the principles and provisions of redemption. The justification, life, power and glory of all the redeemed are here most blessedly revealed. Every opposing power, such as the flesh, the law, &c., is shown to be met and victoriously overcome. And this so fully in Jesus even now, as to allow us to reckon as surely on the provisions of redemption for our present power of life in the Spirit, as on its final result in ultimate glory.

The unity in faith and in life of all the members of the great redeemed family, is here thus traced,—a unity wholly untouched by their dispensational differences. These their temporary differences being here cast into the shade, in order that their essential oneness in redemption blessing and glory might distinctly appear: and that thus the one end and the certain triumph of effectual mercy, in every age, might be proclaimed. For that mercy ever triumphs; surely pursuing its course amidst every measure or variety of natural or circumstantial hindrance!

Such is the burden of this epistle from chap. iii. 20 to chap. viii. And accordingly at the close of the eighth chapter the exclamation is—“who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” The reply being—“Not any creature shall be able to separate us from the *love of God*, which is *in Christ Jesus our Lord*?”

Love had laid up its treasures in Jesus, and the same love has united us to Jesus:—“all the promises of God are in Him,” and this “to the glory of God *by us*!” Who can separate from such effectual love!

This is that wondrous revelation of “mercy” which establishes the soul *in love*. The knowledge of which mercy, in the power of the Spirit, so filleth the heart of the child with divine and rejoicing affections.

But there is more “mercy” here than this. More mercy contained in the “mercies” of chap. xii. 1. For it is not immediately after chap. viii. that the revealed mercy is made the ground of practical exhortation. First we have, in chapters ix. x. xi., *instruction concerning the dispensational wisdom of God*; or, the wisdom and knowledge of God as seen in His varied (though always successful, whatever ensues to man) action in working out His one purpose in redemption. In these chapters we have a sketch of dispensational history and principles from Abraham, through the present, to the coming age. That is, from Abraham to the end. And the tracing out of this, calls forth the corresponding exclamation—“Oh the depth of the riches *both of the wisdom and knowledge of God*,” &c. The “Love” was the subject of confident joy before,—the “wisdom and knowledge” seen in all become the matter of exultation and wonder now.

This instruction in divine wisdom and knowledge thus fills up the mercies. Again most plainly telling us, that God desires the obedience not only of *love*, but also of *instructed* love. He desires the service of children confidently rejoicing in “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord;” hence by the mercy in chap. viii. “present your bodies a living sacrifice,” &c. : but He also desires “reasonable service;” hence by the mercy in chapters ix. x. xi. “present your bodies,” &c., and “be not conformed,” &c.

Thus it has appeared to me that the dispensational instruction in these latter chapters is as much marked as “mercy,” as the vital personal matter in the former chapters. And so it really is. For without we know what is in these chapters revealed, and thus know how and where we stand *dispensationally*, we cannot *reasonably or wisely serve*. For what was wise and obedient service in the last age, is absolute disobedience in this. And what will be godly obedience in the coming age, is in like manner positive disobedience now. But of this again. I now refer for a moment longer to the Romans, to remark that thus we have four great divisions in this epistle. And God’s order here also is most precious and merciful.

1st—To chap. iii. 20.—The utter evil of the flesh and ruin of all hope from it.

2nd—To chap. viii.—The principles and provisions of redeeming love.

3rd—To chap. xi.—Instruction in God’s dispensational wisdom.

4th—Chap. xii. to end.—Practical exhortation and personal salutations, &c.

And it is well for us to ponder this divine order of instruction. For it contains and displays infinite wisdom. First—the flesh is prostrated, its every claim silenced and its nothingness save for evil proved. Second—the soul is established in the confident security of redeeming love and might. Third—the established soul, already grounded in vital truth, is led into the knowledge of the marvellous wisdom and knowledge of God in His dispensational ways. Fourth—those thus established and instructed are, as thoroughly furnished, exhorted to all practical well-doing in holy service to God, and to each other, in love. And, I must add, so minute as to this last is

the watchful eye of the Spirit, that he not only gives the general rule—"the strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak," but He adds a most happy illustration hereof in the Apostolic, "I commend unto you Phebe our sister—servant of the Church at Cenchrea," and in the messages of personal love with which this wonderful book closes up.

This order we do well to note. For it is the order of the Spirit in His ministry to the saints of God.

And now still more forcibly to bring out the importance in this order of truth of chapters ix. x. xi.—*and thus the value of dispensational knowledge*—let us suppose a saint instructed in all the other divisions, but ignorant as to this. One who had learnt the real ruin of the flesh—who rejoiced in the sure effectual salvation of the believer in Jesus—and who recognised the practical obligations found in the close of this epistle,—but who was altogether ignorant of the dispensational principles and order of God as revealed in chapters ix. x. xi. I need not tell you that this is no merely hypothetical case; except it may be, as to the measure of understanding on these three points supposed. Substantially this is the present character of thousands of the most active and devoted of God's dear children.

Such may have simple and true faith in Jesus—much personal communion with God in love—much humility and real grace; but how could they serve God according to His present mind concerning His work? And therefore how could they have communion with God concerning things around them? Love might stir them to action, and personal grace might eminently fit them to influence others; but they must walk themselves and guide others in ignorance of what the Lord is now doing, and therefore of what He would have them do. For this, dispensational knowledge alone can supply.

And therefore the very love and grace of such may be most injuriously employed. And the most devoted must be most in this case, if they are not guided by precise knowledge of the dispensation in which, and according to which, they are called to serve,—knowledge which God has supplied for their guidance. I know of no more sorrowful matter than this—to see real love and grace and energy thus misdirected, and often real sin thus pleaded for and continued in.

The present consequences of this to such saints themselves, are most painful also. For ignorance of the peculiar character of this dispensation, will surely lead to most painful disappointment, because leading to the adoption of instrumentality or the expectation of results unscriptural and unfounded. God's declared end, and not our fancied one, will be brought about.

How many saints, in personal character such as I have described, are now teaching some or all of the following things.

I.—That Israel are for ever cast down by God from their earthly national pre-eminence.

II.—That the present Gentile dispensation is the final one.

III.—That the gospel as now preached is God's instrument for bringing in the time of universal blessing.

IV.—That the Lord Jesus will not return to this earth until the Millennial blessing shall have been fulfilled, and the end of the world is come.

But every one of these things is most plainly contradicted by Rom. xi. This may serve to disclose the value of this portion of the word: For thus we see that it casts the clearest possible light on the proper testimony, service, and hope of the saints in this present dispensation.

I.—“I say then hath God *cast away* his people? God forbid: at this present time also there is (amidst nationally rejected Israel) an election according to grace. I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid; but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them (Israel) to jealousy.” And so verses 12 to 15: in which the results of the national conversion and restoration of Israel are as plainly taught, as are the effects of their present casting off. And this while their Jewish distinctness is recognised, and the present dispensational supremacy of the Gentiles is mentioned. And again, in verse 25, we have even the distinct period mentioned and most carefully defined, when Israel's partial (it has never been total) blindness shall cease. That “partial blindness” is come upon them “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” That is, this Gentile dispensation shall close, its appointed fruit being gathered in, and *then* the veil shall be taken from the heart of Israel. Thus we know that there is yet

another dispensation in which converted and restored Israel shall become as "*life from the dead*" to the world.

II.—Thus we know that this Gentile dispensation is not the final one.

III.—Thus also we know that the gospel, as now preached by the Gentile Churches and in forbearing grace, is not God's appointed instrumentality for bringing in universal blessing and the manifest triumph of Jesus; but that the avowed object of God, in this age, is to *take out of the Gentiles a people to His name* (Acts xv.) And that not until Israel are nationally converted will God begin to act in blessing on nations, as nations, and so cause the name of Jesus to be owned throughout the whole world, from the rising to the going down of the sun.

IV.—From the 26th verse of this same chapter we learn also that the Lord Jesus *will return to this earth at the commencement and not at the close* of the Millennial age. For this passage states in the clearest manner, that He will come *to Zion when the time of Israel's forgiveness comes*. That is, the moment of God's acting in mercy to Israel is the moment of the return of the Lord Jesus to the earth. And this we have before seen is the time when this Gentile Church dispensation will close, and the Millennial age will commence.

On none of these points have I referred to other scripture, though so abundantly confirming them all, because I have wished to indicate the amount of dispensational truth here given; and to ask that you will consider how the present service, and expectations, and prayers of the saints must be affected, either by their ignorance or their wisdom concerning it.

Every action and every feeling, every hope and every prayer, must immediately partake of such ignorance or such wisdom. And therefore our practical fellowship in service, with God and with each other, must be governed hereby. For you see that on essential vital truth, and on our obligation to live in personal holiness and grace, there may be scriptural unity between us; but united labour, or common hope of the end of our labour, we cannot have. For one will have before him an end of present service, which God has declared no instrumentality now in operation shall effect.

Surely that which can produce such dismal and disastrous effects as these should be solemnly considered. Especially so when the present character of much of the service of the saints of God around us is seen. For are not almost all claiming national or worldly aid, as though this were the age in which God was employing such instrumentality in the Church. And are not almost all asserting that the instrumentality now in operation, is that which, expanded and strengthened, will universally bless the world?

How ignorant does Rom. xi. shew all this to be; springing from love though it may. But uninstructed love always makes the most sad mistakes. The very alacrity of its movements aggravating the danger.

And how deluding to the world around must such false action and statements be. For thus the world is blinded by the notion that it can serve, or help to serve God, when He declares it to be under sentence of death; and that the dawn of glorious days is before it, when God has so plainly written that this present age of mercy shall close in sudden and desolating vengeance (see 1 Thess. i., Rev. vi.)

But our chapter, Rom. xi., most distinctly warns us of all this dispensational blindness and pride. Specially foreseeing that their temporary pre-eminence would call out Gentile vanity and conceit, the Spirit gave the warning—"Be not high-minded, but fear;" and the threatening also—"if thou continue in His goodness, otherwise thou also shall be cut off." Such high-mindedness has long since come in, and widely has it spread over the Gentile branch. That ingrafted branch has *not* continued in the goodness—witness the condition of christendom now, as compared with the Churches as planted by Paul—and the hour of its sure excision is at hand!

How fearful is the fact, that dispensational pride always ripens just when dispensational corruption is the foulest, and when the hour of dispensational judgment draws nigh. And how wonderful is the grace which at such a time always preserves and peculiarly teaches a remnant (see Mal. iii. 13 to end). Indeed scripture throughout tells the same story as to the end of every age. How does all that passed between the Lord Jesus and the Jews (see John viii. for example) show this.

But not one whit less evident is the dispensational pride and corruption of the present day. The witness of the rejection has also failed; and its utter darkness is proclaimed by its own boastful self-consequence. It proudly claims to be the chosen instrument of universal blessing; presumptuously rejecting its appointed place, and claiming the standing in the earth reserved for restored Israel, instead of standing as the witness of the long-suffering grace of God, and waiting for His Son from heaven (1 Thess. i. 9, 10).

And the hour of cutting off is at the door! The ingrafted olive branch, the corrupt Gentile professing body, is about to be visited with consuming wrath. The "end of the age" is near; the moment, that is, when the judicial action detailed in Matt. xiii. shall take place.

But who are looking for these things! Who are guided into watchful and holy service by reason of their intelligence in these revealed dispensational facts. Surely dispensational study is of present practical value to the saints!

Oh what must it be for the blessed Lord and Master to hear his own servants crying "Peace, peace," "where is the promise of His coming," amidst manifest and ruinous failure, the aboundings of aggravated iniquity, and multiplied presages of coming judgment! And all this too when His own abundant and most wise "*mercy*" has provided for them such plain instruction hereon. Surely Rom. xii. 1, 2, is exhortation needed now!

The Lord subject us in all things unto Himself!

I hope the latter part of my letter will be found to illustrate the general principles stated throughout it, as to the nature, the authority, and the practical value of the dispensational reading and use of the word of God.

In a future letter I should like to trace the leading characteristics of each dispensation from the fall to the end. And also, more minutely, the character and history of our own dispensation.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

THIS book is St. Luke's second letter to his friend Theophilus. It therefore takes up the history just where the first letter, that is the Gospel by St. Luke, had left it, linking, indeed, the two together by the notice of some common facts, that there may be nothing wanting in the narrative of such blessed scenes.

I do not propose to consider it minutely. Previous papers in the "Witness" have already opened important portions of it. But I desire to look at its general character, and the leading divine purposes of it. And it is a small thing to say, that the task is a happy one. O that it were in equal power to the soul! But we each of us, beloved, know full well the secret of deep personal humiliation.

The ministry of Jesus, which the gospels have already recorded, brought forth a manifestation of *the Father* and of *the Son*. The ministry of the Apostles, which this book now in its turn records, brings out as we shall find, a manifestation of *the Holy Ghost*. This is one divine principal purpose of it, and this is perceived at the very opening, as well as throughout and to the end, the Holy Ghost being present in the whole action of the book, his person owned, and his glory and place in leading the Church onward to her perfection and her rest, manifested and filled by him. This is much to be prized by the saints who have been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and who hold to that blessed name as connected with eternal life in their souls, and thus with all their confidence and hopes.

Accordingly at the very beginning of our book, the Holy Ghost is largely owned and set before us. Through him it is declared that the Lord gave commandments to his Apostles as he shewed himself to them alive after his passion. For him also the Apostles, according to the word of their risen Lord, were to wait, and by him to be endued with power for their ministry. So strikingly and at once is

the transition from the action of the Lord Jesus to that of the Holy Ghost here in this way recognised. And this character pervades the whole book, as will appear, from even but slight attention to it.

But the opening of this book suggests another thing very forcibly. It has been observed already in one of the papers on the Gospel by St. Luke. I mean the knowledge of the scriptures which the disciples have so suddenly attained to. This is truly wonderful and striking, when we recollect their deep unacquaintedness with them before. The 109th Psalm opens its treasures to them in our first chapter; then the 16th and 110th, and the prophecy of Joel, in the second; then the 18th of Deuteronomy in the third, and so on. This was a new and most blessed advantage. Their understandings had been opened. True indeed they have now changed the garment for the sword. While the Lord was with them, he kept them and none were lost (John xvii. 12). When he sent them forth, they lacked nothing (Luke xxii. 35). Thus they were sheltered and provided for. His presence was shield and storehouse to them. The *garment* was then the emblem of their condition. But now that their Lord had gone, they were exposed. They had taken his place of suffering testimony, and the *sword* becomes the symbol of their calling (see Luke xxii. 36). But though it were thus—though this exchange had been made, and the garment had been sold, and the sword bought, yet they have new and wondrous advantages also. It is indeed expedient for them that he went away. For though they know the opposition of men now, and conflict with the darkness of the world, yet they have the light of God in a way that even the presence of the Lord had not communicated. They understand the scriptures. By God's light that shone there, they could travel through the world's darkness. And to this light they are obedient. The 109th Psalm required that the bishoprick, now vacant through the apostacy of Judas, should be filled up, and accordingly, ere any thing else takes place, Matthias is brought in, and numbered with the eleven Apostles.

But an ordinance of the law had also required the arrival of the fiftieth day from the resurrection of the Lord, or the waving of the sheaf of first-fruits (Lev. xxiii.) That having also, however, come,

all is ready for the promised baptism with the Holy Ghost, and it comes accordingly. And it has a twofold character in it (ii.) There is both "a rushing mighty wind," and "cloven tongues like as of fire," or, as I judge, the Holy Ghost himself and his gifts. For they are filled with the Holy Ghost, and also speak with tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance. This is like the glory entering, and the cloud covering, the sanctuary which Moses reared (Ex. xl.) For this congregation of disciples was God's temple now, which the glory thus enters and the cloud thus rests on.

This was baptism with the Holy Ghost conferred by the glorified Son of man. The gifts of the Spirit were represented now in that of tongues. And fitly so, we may say, because a ministry was now going forth of reconciliation all the world over. By man's evil, languages had been formed and division thereby occasioned; but now in God's grace, reconciliation was to be published and all be formed together again. But this had not been within the personal ministry of Jesus, for he had not come save to the lost sheep of Israel, and so there was no gift of tongues accompanying that ministry. Through all the cities and villages of Israel, he healed and did his mercies, as expressing God's reconciliation there, but into the way of the Gentiles he did not enter.

And under this baptism another trial of the nation was made. But when the Son appeared it was either "Beelzebub," or at best "one of the prophets." So now the Holy Ghost in his manifestations is disallowed much in the same way. Some wonder, some mock. But the Spirit in the Apostles still waits on his blessed work and testimony. For though it is a manifestation of the Holy Ghost which we get here, yet it is in testimony to Jesus, we see him engaged. And as faithful, so to speak, is the Spirit now to glorify the Son, as the Son, in his ministry, had been to glorify the Father. It is indeed most blessed to see how the Holy Ghost now waits on his work of testifying to Jesus. We see this so strikingly in the early sermons in this book. It is Jesus they are full of, and Jesus now in exaltation and power. It was no longer so much a question of sin in man, but of lordship in Jesus. Of course man was known to be a sinner, incurably so, by any resources save in God. But Jesus was Lord. Jesus had risen.

That was the great fact. Jesus was conqueror and had been accepted in the heavens. And faith in such an one, was a sure escape from sin and all its judgment. For where was sin, where was judgment, where the enemy or the accuser? Could they appear in the presence of such a triumphant Lord as this? All was broken and trodden down by the strength of the risen Jesus. This was the great testimony. It was a witness to the victory, the glory, the ascension of the anointed Lord, and sin was necessarily disposed of. For such lordship as this cannot be understood without seeing that sin has been met, and he that had the power of death destroyed, in the path of such a conqueror as this.

It is Jesus who is thus kept before us. The lordship or resurrection of Jesus, is the object: that is the doctrine; and while it implies of necessity the sin of man and the judgment of the world, it rolls away every thing from before the eye or conscience of faith, to fill them with visions and thoughts of this triumphant one. And if the soul return to the sense of sin, as the Galatians after this were doing,—if the conscience were not fully purged, but was seeking its relief in something beyond Jesus,—all this condition of Jesus now in exaltation, and victory of resurrection, was misapprehended or denied. The sufficiency of the blood which had been previously shed, was involved of necessity in this present dignity and power of Jesus. And therefore it is *the Lord* Jesus that is henceforth preached. Salvation is to those who call on *the Lord*, to those who have faith in *the Lord*. This is a dignity which he has earned, and is now seated in, as having obtained victory for sinners. As many, therefore, as call on the name of *the Lord* shall be saved. We have but to arise and be baptized, and to wash away our sins, calling on his name. It is only to rejoice in the victory of Jesus, that the poor sinner has now to do. One has laboured, one has conquered, and others enter into the harvest and the spoils. “The same *Lord* is rich unto all that call upon him.”

The Son, in his ministry, had been teaching “the Father” to poor sinners. But now that the Holy Ghost has arisen and been manifested as ministering in the Apostles, he is teaching that Jesus is Lord. No man cometh to the Father, therefore, but by the Son (John

xiv. 6); and no man can call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. xii. 3). And the knowledge, in the Spirit, of these blessed lessons gives the saints their life and standing. The epistles addressed to them, consequently flow forth with grace from "God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." For to us, as the Apostle speaks, there is but one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ. And by and bye we are to enter the kingdom with this knowledge, every tongue there confessing that *Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father* (Phil. ii.) And thus the path is perfect. Our present instruction in the Father and the Lord leads us into our place and fellowship in the coming kingdom.

And besides, the resurrection had not as yet been openly shewn. The Lord had appeared only to witnesses chosen before of God, but now the Holy Ghost is manifested as the gift of the ascended Jesus, and thus the house of Israel were to know assuredly, as Peter here testifies to them, that God had made him whom they had crucified both Lord and Christ.

By this testimony a Church is gathered at Jerusalem, though the nation is still "an untoward generation." And it is this gathering, and not the nation, which at this time really keep the feast of Pentecost. For in them was brought out the loaves of fine flour made of the new corn, that is, the produce of the fruit of the risen Jesus, the sheaf of first-fruits—according to the beautiful type of Lev. xxiii.

And let me here observe that we shall find the history in the New Testament running in company with the course of the annual feasts, presented to us in that chapter. And we might have expected this. Because the ecclesiastical year among the Jews, or the succession of annual feasts, was designed to be a typical or mystic exhibition of the history of God's people, and of the divine dealings with them. Thus, the first of those annual feasts was the passover; and the true passover at Jerusalem was kept when the Lord and his twelve sat together at the table. Then, in the progress of the year, the sheaf of first-fruits was waved. This was done, when Jesus rose; and the offerings upon that were offered by the true Israel, when the disciples rejoiced in their risen Lord. But now the seven weeks having duly run out, the feast of Pentecost was held by the Israel of God

in the city of solemnities, according to the same chapter, by the Holy Ghost forming a Church at Jerusalem through the virtues of the risen Jesus, the wave loaves made of the new corn.

And while the true Israel are thus holding their feast to the Lord, the Lord with "another tongue" is speaking to the people, and, through Peter, publishing the rest wherewith the weary may rest (Isa. xxviii. 1 Cor. xiv.) The lame man that sat for alms at the gate of the temple is healed. The gate was called Beautiful, as though it could still be said of that house, "the temple of the Lord are these." But faith would have known that this could not be, for the staff beauty had been broken. The glory had gone from that house, when Jesus turned from it (Matt. xxiii. 38). Then was beauty gone. Then, in the language of the prophet, it should rather have been said, "our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised thee is burnt up with fire." The name of Jesus now hangs in this temple its only present beauty, this healed beggar, the trophy of his victory in resurrection. And the same name goes on still to publish similar mercy and power. The sick are healed, prison doors are opened, words of life and salvation are preached. But the people disown all, and the beautiful house is thus, to faith, still but a ruin (iii. v.)

But all this time also their own "upper room" and the "temple" divide as it were the disciples' attention. For Israel was still waited on in the patience of grace, that it might still be known whether their faith would now recall the glory to the temple, or whether, through their unbelief, it was to be known for a season elsewhere. Thus the ministers of God's grace are accordingly seen here and there. They break bread at home or from house to house, but continue daily in the temple also (see i. 13, ii. 46, iii. 1, v. 12). But the crisis comes. The scornful men which now rule Jerusalem (Isa. xxviii.) make a covenant with death, as though they could refuse God's goodness and live: They threaten, they imprison the witnesses of Jesus and of life. With all authority, they forbid that name to be published; and, at the last, this city of murderers casts Stephen out, and they stone him without the gates. And thus the Holy Ghost is now refused, as the Son had been in his day.

And as all the blessing, which was announced by one prophet as ready to follow the acceptance of the Son (Isa. ix. 1—6, Matt. iv. 15), was for the present lost to Israel; so all the blessing, announced by another prophet as ready to follow the acceptance of the Spirit (Joel ii. iii. Acts ii.), is now lost to Israel also. The glory and the kingdom and the power of the day of the Lord, and the waters flowing from Jerusalem are all interrupted and delayed, and other scenes occupy the grace and energy of God.

In the history of this transition our seventh chapter, as we know, is most important. The people of the earth cast out the faithful witness of the Lord, but he is stamped with heavenly glory, the glory of the children of the resurrection, for his face shines like that of an angel (Luke xx. 36). And accordingly it is of the God of glory that he now speaks to his persecutors. They had accused him of blasphemous words against God, the law, the temple, and Moses,—their earthly or Jewish thoughts linking those things together. But he, full of the Holy Ghost and of heavenly thoughts, breaks those links and shews the God of glory in other associations altogether, in company with those who had been either disowned or drawn out here on earth, as Abraham, Joseph, and Moses; not Moses, however, as minister of the law, but as refused by his nation.

But this chapter has been largely spoken of before (see vol. i. p. 99), so that I will not pursue it. Stephen seals his testimony with his blood in Jerusalem, and then Jerusalem becomes a place unfit for the feast of Pentecost, which till now the true Israel had been holding there. Accordingly they are scattered (viii.) But this gives further illustrations of the course of those annual feasts at which we have been looking. For Pentecost is now past, and, as that chapter shews us, the regular succession of feasts at Jerusalem is interrupted, not to be revived, till the seventh month comes round. And though this interruption in the holy days of Zion may have been dark before, yet now God has become his own interpreter. “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” There is a mystery which was hid then, but which is made manifest now,—lying unknown, as it were, in dark speeches of the prophets and types, but published now. The Gentiles have been called before

the gracious thoughts of the Lord of the harvest for a season, till Israel revive in the latter day after their present loss of their joyous feasts.

Saul of Tarsus was at this time the representative of the Jews. He was the minister of their enmity against the Lord and his anointed, and had his hand in the blood of Stephen. But mercy, brighter than the sun at noon-day, arrests him in the fullest strength of his wickedness, and thus his conversion is a pledge of Israel's final salvation. For as he was, as I have said, their representative at this time, presenting a sample of their sin, and of the ignorance through which they committed it (Acts iii. 17, 1 Tim. i. 13), so now does his conversion witness their's in the latter day, presenting a sample of God's grace abounding over all their sin. Thus his conversion and faith, in the progress of the history here, are kindred types with the feast of trumpets and the day of atonement in that same 23rd of Leviticus ; for they, in like manner, set forth the quickening and reconciliation of Israel after the interruption is past, or after the present dispensation of the call of the Gentiles has fulfilled its purpose under God.

But not only does his conversion thus pledge final mercy to Israel, but he receives a present ministry from Jesus in the heavenly glory, to gather sinners of all nations to the Lord. And that which follows is to be another witness of the same.

Peter had left Jerusalem at the report of the faith of Samaria, and had afterwards wandered through other places (ix. 32), the Holy Ghost thus gently drawing him off from the holy city ; and it is at Joppa that the vision of the sheet prepares him for the call of the Gentiles.

The ordinance that separated between clean and unclean animals (Lev. xi.) was of the same moral mystic character as the separation of the Jew from the Gentile. The unclean animals were, in the thoughts of a Jew, the same as "sinners of the Gentiles," and therefore as the use of the one was denied them, so was communion with the other, and a Jew would neither eat of the one nor with the other. But the ordinance for sanctifying was now to be changed, and so also was the subject. It was no longer the blood of bulls or goats at

Jerusalem, but the blood of Jesus accepted in heaven. Nor was it merely the fleshly seed of Abraham that could stand in the sprinkling of that blood, but the hearts of all might be purified by faith in it. Peter therefore sees the sheet descending from heaven and filled with all manner of beasts. And as the place of glory was heavenly as well as the sanctification, as the inheritance as well as the life or birth-place were there, Peter sees the sheet at length ascending also, and abiding there with all that it carried.

Strange all this to one who had been educated by Moses in the land of Israel. And strange it may be to human thoughts. Could not this holy vessel fill itself with worthier furniture? Being prepared of God and coming forth from his presence on high, could it not in its passage downwards find other and more suited treasure? The love of God and the glory of God must have it so. "It became him." He must pass by angels (Heb. ii.) This sheet must drag the bottoms of this defiled world, for the grace that leads the sons to glory finds out its objects there. "Preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." "If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people, should it be marvellous in mine eyes, saith the Lord of hosts."

This was significant, as the commission of St. Paul had been, and thus in the mouth of these witnesses the Lord's present purposes are established. The Son of man and the Holy Ghost had been both refused by Israel now; but though this book will give us, as we shall see, to the end of it, another instance of God's well known patience with an unfaithful steward, yet we have now to look to the Gentiles and God's election out of them. Cornelius, as we know, is made the first of this election. A Gentile Nathanael he appears to have been, one who had guilelessly followed the light as it had led him. But no matter—he is as much, as any other, part and parcel of the unclean contents of Peter's sheet which had received God's cleansing, which are now to be sealed with God's seal, and not with the seal of the temple. Circumcision had hitherto sealed the flesh of Abraham's seed, but the Holy Ghost is now God's seal impressed, as by his own hand, on whom he would. The Jews (ii.) and the Samaritans (viii.) had been thus sealed already, and so are

the Gentiles now. "They spake with tongues and magnified God." Who, then, could withstand this? Even they at Jerusalem and of the circumcision hold their peace, and say "then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (xi.)

Thus the virtues of the risen Jesus, the fruit of the waved sheaf, are used by the Gentiles. The interruption in the course of the feasts has taken place, as we have seen. The gleaners may be seen (token of a remnant by and bye, like Ruth in her day), but the interruption of the holy days of Jerusalem continues. Notice of the coming feast of trumpets and day of atonement, or of the revival and faith of Israel in the latter day, has also been given, as we saw in the conversion of Saul, and now all closes in the glorious deliverance of Peter by the hand of the Lord, a like figure with the feast of tabernacles, of the final rest and kingdom of Israel. Thus that chapter on the feasts and the history here keep in company to the close of the 12th chapter, which we have now reached.*

Israel was thus principal in all this action down to the 12th chapter. But this is the end of the first great division of our book. For having passed these chapters, we enter on something different, and which continues to the close of the book, forming what we may call the second great division of it. For the minister of the Gentiles, who had been called neither from Jerusalem nor through the Apostles there, but from heaven, takes the lead in service now, and fills, rather than any other, the field of action before us. It is no longer the ordered course of labour which owned Jerusalem and the twelve for its source, but the more immediate energy of the Holy Ghost sending whom and where he would.

I have before observed, beloved, that *the manifestation of the Holy Ghost himself, and his presence, power and grace in the Church of God, is the first great characteristic feature of this book*, which should rather have been called "The Acts of the Holy Ghost." This has been already said and somewhat enlarged on in another paper, and I would rather refer to that than go over it here again (see vol. vii. p. 207). It is, however, that character of the

* For more on the types of Lev. xxiii. see vol. iii. p. 230, and on the types of Saul's conversion, and Peter's deliverance, see vol. iv. p. 221.

book which has principally filled my own mind, and which, for edification of our souls, I would desire to dwell in the hearts of others. For sure I am we all have to know more of that which is connected with it. The love of God which the blessed Spirit sheds abroad in the heart, the liberty and joy, our present share in the victory of Christ, with the hope of the glory abounding through him, and all his rich and wondrous testimony to the Father and the Son, these we need to know and experience personally and individually more and more. And then the refreshing presence of the Spirit in our assemblies through the growing intelligence of the saints together and into one mind, the free and divine character of worship in the Spirit, and a brotherhood formed not by human sympathies, but by the flowing of the holy priestly oil through all (Ps. cxxxiii.), fresh and sweet as the dew of Hermon, these we need, too, as met together more and more. So that the doctrine and manifestation of the Holy Ghost in his person, indwelling, and gifts, should be matter of meditation and delight to us, as it is of such need and value. There may be a tendency to *multiply truths*, when the *deepening of the power of the truth* is rather to be sought and cultivated.

At the opening of this second great division of our book, as I have taken on me to call it, we still find the Holy Ghost, in the usual way, distinctly owned (xiii.) In the Church at Antioch “the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” This style was new and peculiar, and quite in character with this that I have been noticing.

It is the property of the wind, we know, to blow where it listeth. But we shall find all through even the ministry of the Apostle of the Gentiles in this book, that the Jews and their synagogues are the first to be visited by the current of the holy and gracious Spirit. For though the Lord had now risen up to call forth the Church, his new witness, and to form a family from among all the nations, yet *this book is the scene and witness of the Lord's gradual lingering departure from his ancient people*. That is its second great characteristic feature, as the manifestation of the Holy Ghost, as I have said, is its first. And there is sympathy between these two great subjects. For the ministry of the Holy Ghost by the Apostles

was the last ministry of the divine patience and grace to Israel. But there had been this same patient grace with them from the beginning. How often would he have gathered them by judges and prophets, but they would not. How did the dresser of the vineyard then wait year after year. And so now, in the ministry of the Apostles, the Holy Ghost is waiting and patient, if haply they will hear and live. At the beginning of this book, he rises upon the city and people of Israel in full glory, to shine first upon them (chap ii.), and all through it is gently and gradually withdrawing his light. "Walk while ye have the light," the Son said to the Jews in his day, and such is the language of the Holy Ghost here in the ministry of the Apostles. It is from the Jews St. Paul turns to the Gentiles. This is seen in his ministry in Asia (xiii.), in Greece (xviii.), and so to the furthest limits of the dispersion (xxviii.) It is the Jews he first seeks. And this lingering over them and their synagogues is a sight full of comfort, if we have simple faith to receive it. It is like the departure of the glory in Ezekiel, first leaving its native place in the holiest, then going up to the threshold of the house, then carried by the wheels and the wings of the cherubim to the mountain, till we lose sight of it altogether. The cross had finished the sin of Israel and fixed its judgment. But there was long-suffering, as there had been for one hundred and twenty years in the time of Noah, or during the interval from Manasseh to Zedekiah, though the sin of the former had drawn forth the full notice of the Lord. And so the time of this book is a season of similar long-suffering. During the one hundred and twenty years Noah preached. During the interval from Manasseh to Zedekiah, Jeremiah wept and warned and called to repentance. And so here we have the same ministry in Paul and others. For love "suffereth long and is kind"—it "thinketh no evil"—it "hopeth all things." And even the supremacy of the divine glory in *knowledge* will allow (so to speak) the divine *love* to retain these precious qualities. God knows all the evil, but he acts on it only as it manifests itself. "The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded." And again he says, "because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go

down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it which is come to me, and if not I will know." These words tell us of the ways of the divine love, and shew how it hopes all things, and thinks no evil, reserving and delaying to conclude against a thankless and rebellious people. And such is the voice of this book. It may be that the Master of the house had risen up; but he delays to shut the door. The battle of Megiddo which Josiah, in his obstinacy, fought, would appear to have been final, but the Lord tarries till Zedekiah's rebellion against Babylon. So the martyrdom of Stephen, or the cross of Calvary, in some sense, was final, but the Lord tarries till Paul testifies to the furthest dispersion of Israel.

All this strongly characterizes this book. But while there is this patience of grace with one unfaithful steward, there is the calling out of another. The Lord is giving up Israel as his witness, but he is also preparing the Church to be for him in the world. And this again was like his doing in days of old, as with Abraham and the Gentiles. The Gentiles, or nations that peopled the earth from Noah, had corrupted themselves, and the building of Babel was the great standard of their rebellion. God began to prepare Abraham and Abraham's seed to be his new witness in the world. But still he did not fully give up the Gentiles for centuries after he had begun to call out Abraham. His voice is heard even so late as in Balaam, till there is "no remedy," as it were, and the Gentiles are shut up to the hope of the distant promised Star, and Israel becomes God's witness in the earth.

Thus, the Lord's long-suffering was in exercise then towards the old Gentiles, when Israel was about to be called out, as here his long-suffering is in exercise towards Israel, as another witness from the present Gentiles is calling out. The minister of the Gentiles here in every place first seeks the Jews. Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Berea, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome, as well as Antioch, Iconium, and other places, all tell us this in their turn, and all this is the strong expression of the reluctancy of grace to leave the scene of its long-proved and well-known resources. But still there is clear intimation of what the end would be. At the close of the 12th chapter, Barnabas and Saul leave Jerusalem as soon as they had sealed to the

disciples there the fruit of Gentile fellowship in the gospel. And that ministry *to* and not *from* Jerusalem tells us, as though Jerusalem had for the present lost the place of "the better" (Heb. vii. 7), and was to be ministered to rather than to minister. But still, as I have said, on now going forth, it is the synagogues that they first seek (xiii. 5). St. Paul's sermon in that at Antioch is his principal one to the Jews. In it he rehearses the patient ways of God's grace with Israel from Egypt to the resurrection of Jesus, upon which resurrection he preaches "glad tidings" to Israel. For the resurrection was another giving of the Son to Israel (xiii. 33); and over it, as once over the birth of the Son in Bethlehem, the nation might have sung, "unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given." And as it were to lead them to that faith and joy, the Apostle here performs, in his way, the happy service of that heavenly host who had then brought Israel "the good tidings of great joy." For he now tells them of "glad tidings" and the resurrection (ver. 32). He was the heavenly witness of Jesus born, the second time by resurrection, to Israel. This was his first and fullest testimony to the Jews, a glorious display of God's patient and abounding mercy through every stage of their history. But as they had been from the beginning refusing and disappointing that mercy, so now the minister of it has to shake the dust of his feet against them. But if Israel forbear, the Gentiles must hear. For the lights were now set in the heavens, and they have to perform their journey round the earth that nothing may be hid from the heat thereof. Their going forth was to be from the end of the heaven, and the circuit unto the end of it. From Antioch they here go out and thence return (xiii. xiv.) But their line was to measure the whole world. As of old the sun was ordained both to *rule* the day and to *give light* also. For if the heavens have dignity over the earth, its debtors are they also. So these witnesses of heavenly grace and glory cannot but shine and be as signs in their sphere (see Psalm xix. and Rom. x.) Consciously filled with light and heat they could not but go forth in blessing. They were *debtors*. None can hold a blessing under God without being debtor to communicate it and share it with others. For such is God himself whom they serve, the God of communicating love.

And, therefore, beautiful *in the eyes of the Lord* (as was observed by another), beautiful *in the esteem of God himself*, are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things (Rom. x. 15).*

Such was the mind that now quickened and filled these heavenly witnesses. But all this was of God. Whatever is of man is of another quality; and so we soon find that these lights had not long risen to run their course, till the darkness contends with them. Some come from Jerusalem to Antioch, saying to the disciples there, "except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (xv.) But there was grace and wisdom at Antioch, in the Spirit, to meet this. They will have this matter tried at Jerusalem, for if the Jewish ordinances were still to be maintained, it is Jerusalem that promised them the best protection. Thus the present was a moment of great interest. Barnabas and Paul go up as from the saints at Antioch, and the Church at Jerusalem come together. Peter gives testimony to the fact of God having sealed the Gentiles with his own seal, as we saw in chap. x. He deposes to the fact; for having been more in action, more of an evangelist than any of the twelve, as well as the leader in Jewish ministry, he is now properly the witness of God's *works* in the Church. But James gives testimony of another character, though to the same intent. He being more a pastor or teacher, applies the words of a prophet to these new circumstances, thus revealing God's *ways or counsels* in the Church. He makes use of Peter's testimony as to facts, and then from those facts, and the words delivered of old by the prophet, he shews the divine purposes, and God's consistency in all. He shews that God's *first* purpose (ver. 14, Gr.) is to take out of the Gentiles *a certain* people; and then, as his *second* purpose, or his purpose after this, to build up the tabernacle of David, that then *all* the Gentiles might seek him. He then combines with Peter in the decision that the Lord for the present was about such a work as did not require or call for the ancient ordinances of God's house or David's tabernacle, and that thus the claims that had been made were not to be allowed, nor the present election from the Gentiles troubled about circumcision.

* I quite join with the meditations on Antioch, in vol. vii. page 32.

And the present act of God among the heathen, thus in harmony with the ancient voice of God by his prophet, taught James that "known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world."

Even the Church at Jerusalem can no longer hesitate. In the mouth of two such witnesses, God's *acts* and God's *words*, the testimony of Peter and the doctrine or teaching of James, the thing is established and the claims of the law of Moses are disallowed. But this is not declared to be the judgment of the twelve merely, as though all authority were still with them, but the elders and the brethren join in it, saying, "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us,"—the more enlarged mind of the Church in all her members, in the light and presence of that Spirit who had now been manifested, thus takes the place of previous authorities, and holds its court, as it were, on this solemn matter.

And thus the claims of circumcision and of that yoke which neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear, are disallowed in the very city of these solemnities; the liberty and presence of the Spirit rising above them. But the claims of brotherly forbearance are pleaded at the same time and granted, for the same letters now written from Jerusalem disavow the attempt of the Pharisaic believers, but exhort to all possible brotherly grace and forbearance.

There is, however, something in this attempt on the part of the Pharisees that may well be seriously looked at. It was quite according to the religion of man. For man, like Cain, is ever making his own religion,—faith, as in Abel, takes God's. And the religion which the blessed God would cultivate in our souls is that of pardoned sinners, in whom faith has known and allowed that God has a remedy for their sins. The love, and worship, and service of such, is now the suited furniture of his sanctuary. But this attempt of the Pharisees was man seeking to defile that place with his religion. We have the history of such attempts in the Churches at Colosse, and in Galatia, and elsewhere, and of the manner of St. Paul's withstanding them. The unprofitableness of the flesh however advantaged, the heavenly calling, tempers and hopes of the saints, their standing and liberty in Christ alone, and their possession of the Holy Ghost, the

condemnation of the world, and the Church's separation out of it to her head in heaven,—these and like truths he pleads against all the claims and boasts of the flesh, its return to the law, the rudiments of the world, and bodily exercise. He could not, as under the Holy Ghost, allow them for a moment. Gracious he would be (in the same Spirit) to the weakest, so as not to eat meat while the world stood if it offended them, but the claims and bondage of the flesh he could not allow. And more pleased are we naturally, beloved, by the bonds it puts on us than with the liberty of the Spirit. For the liberty of the Spirit brings us too near to the living God. The light and love that it introduces to us are felt to be too much for us. They rebuke. The element is too pure and fresh for us naturally; and the religion that will have us at more distance from the blessed one, though it impose its own bonds, will be more welcome. But the Lord can by no means have it so, and we should bless him. His house must be filled, not with the spirit of bondage and fear, but with the spirit of liberty, and the cry of Abba Father. It is the voice of children that his love seeks to listen to for ever and ever.

Thus the present moment was indeed one of deep interest in the history of the Church of God.* This was the *public* aspect of things at this time. But there arises also in this chapter (xv.) something of a *domestic* kind that is also to be noticed. I mean the contention between Barnabas and Paul. Barnabas had been Paul's earliest friend. He had introduced him to the confidence of the brethren in Jerusalem, and then sought him at Tarsus and brought him to the Church, in ministry with himself, at Antioch,—they had, after this, been sent forth in company by the Holy Ghost, and had travelled together to the city about the question of circumcision. But now after all this loving and intimate communion they are to be separated. Some private or human affections find occasion to stir themselves in the heart of Barnabas; he was tempted perhaps to know Mark “after the flesh,” and the great bond in the Spirit between him and

* It is remarkable that St. Paul never, in any one of his epistles, when enforcing the duty of brethren to bear with one another, alludes to this decision of the saints at Jerusalem. In this book of the Acts we see him bearing about this decision for the comfort and liberty of the Churches, but in his own epistles, the Holy Ghost does not use it at all, but teaches the same lessons on other ground.

Paul has to yield, and another soon after this takes that place of personal attachment and special companionship with our Apostle which Barnabas once filled.*

Such working of nature and such its fruits do we find, as we now look at some of the narrower circles within. And such changes in the peculiar friendships of the saints, are still to be often witnessed. Nothing is enduring but "the unity of the Spirit." But happy is it for us, beloved, that all such little scenes and changes and tempers, have thus passed under the notice, the recorded notice, of the Spirit of God. Gracious in him to give us such notice. He is no stranger to the most familiar thoughts that pass among us. He heeds the way of Paul and Barnabas with the care that he gave to the great assembly of the saints on the claims of Judaism. But how should we practise, in our intercourses, the denial of mere nature, that we may not grieve him, or hinder our common walk and fellowship in love.

After this separation, the Holy Ghost does not trace the labours of Barnabas and Mark, but of Paul, an intimation of his judgment upon the contention. And we have a similar intimation of the judgment of the brethren upon it also, for we read that they recommended Paul (no mention of Barnabas) to the grace of God, as he was going forth on his mission. And just as he goes forth he is additionally comforted in finding Timothy at Lystra. He is now for the first time brought before us, but from this moment to the end our Apostle becomes most deeply and personally united with him. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you," seems to be the utterance of the loving Apostle's heart over his dear Timothy from hence to the close of his labours.

And now St. Paul is seen ranging every where, here and there, tending onward and onward still, as though he would reach the furthest ends of the earth (xvi.—xx.) He passes from Asia into Europe and back again. The lights were now up in the firmament, some larger, some less. But they carried blessing with them, and therefore they were debtors, as I have said, to shine and dispense

* I would here refer to "Paul's companions" vol. iv. p. 83, and "Antioch" vol. vii. p. 32.

their beams. The law had been confined to Judea. It was a veiled thing. The Jews were never commanded to go forth and bring the world under the law. For the law carried no blessing. It only tested and convicted man, and that could be done in Judea. But grace or the gospel is an unveiled, unfolded thing. It carries blessing; and the saints who know it, are to own the claims of all to share it with them. And our Apostle owned this obligation. "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." It is true he had received Apostleship to all nations, and his commission made him debtor. But blessing being communicated, he was bound, as well by the very nature of that which he had thus received, as by his commission, to dispense and publish it every where.

The Holy Ghost eminently presided over his toils and journeys, giving them all an expression of himself in the freedom and sovereignty of that wind which blows where it lists. No measured or ordered line of things, but a line according to grace to reach to every creature under heaven (Col. i.) There is thus throughout a desultoriness in the action that bespeaks the energy of that Spirit who was now diffusing his power. And that power could work through other and strange channels. Aquila and his wife Priscilla were fellow-helpers of the truth, and Apollos arises to take his place in ministry, without any letters of authority save his eloquence and fervency of spirit, and might in the scriptures. All this and more of the same character appears in these chapters. There is glorious treasure abroad, but it is carried in earthen vessels.

St. Paul's sermon, at Athens, is his principal one to the Gentiles, as that at Antioch had been to the Jews. In it, he convicts the whole Gentile religion of a great error, by treating God rather as a receiver than as a giver; building an habitation for him and loading his altar with gifts, instead of understanding him as the One who gives life, and breath, and all things, and was not to be served (*θεραπεύετα* Gr. v. 25), as though he needed any thing. This was the capital error that pervaded all Gentile religion. It was founded in a mistake about God, a mistake into which the human heart will easily fall. But our Apostle calls on the Gentiles here to repent, to change their wrong and injurious thoughts of God, and to know him quite

after another manner from what their religion had thus hitherto taught them. For indeed all this left him to them, as their altar too truly, but perhaps unwittingly confessed "the unknown God."

Thus God, in grace, is preached by this famous testimony, to the Gentiles, as he had been by that at Antioch to the Jews. And these are Paul's two principal sermons in this book, giving us bright and blessed samples of his general ministry, wherever, in the energy of the Holy Ghost, he was carried to wait upon it. And the grace of this ministry is as large as the human family, for Paul, in the Spirit, could stand at Ephesus (xix. 21), and there propose, in his ministry, to reach Jerusalem, at the distant east, and Rome as at the furthest west.

It was the world that was thus visited with the light and salvation of God. Boundless grace. But from the world it is that our Apostle, like his Master, gets returns of enmity and suffering. And it is what we should count upon. For the Christian is a trespasser on the world. He intrudes on the course of it—his principles turn it upside down. And thus he should not wonder if it be said, "it is not fit that he should live." If one, in the consciousness of his own weakness, may speak for all, I could say, would that we had readiness of soul to lay down our lives in the streets of the great city of this world, and count on martyrdom as our *natural* death in such a place! Our Apostle was thus minded. Like his Lord, he here takes leave of his ministry (xx.), but he tells those around him, as Jesus had done, of the suffering that now awaited him. He was not, however, moved, for having now ended his course as the Lord's servant, he was ready to become the Lord's prisoner.

And this introduces us to the last period of his history in this book. We look at his sorrows as the Lord's prisoner all through these chapters (xxi.—xxviii.) And his path may still remind us of the Lord. He is brought before both the civil and religious authorities of the world. Ananias the high priest, the two Roman governors, with Agrippa the king, carry the thoughts back to Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod, and the misgivings of Pilate are seen, as it were, in the trembling of Felix, while the multitude and the witnesses that surrounded and stood against Jesus, have their likeness here in the

people, and the bonded company of forty. And withal, Jerusalem is still the scene.

But in perfectness of walk through either toil or sorrow, none are with Jesus. Moral glory, without defect or blemish, shone in him alone. For here, if we had nothing more, we find our Apostle compelled to recall his word ; while in Jesus, we know, there was not a single movement that did not go up to God as sacrifice and worship of the purest incense.

But here arises before us in the history of this dear and devoted servant, a matter which as we generally know has been much questioned among the saints. I mean Paul's compliance with the customs of the Jewish temple when he reached Jerusalem. Was such compliance a building again of the things which he had destroyed ? This is a question which the Apostle's conduct has allowed the saints to entertain. Many stand in doubt of his full Christian service here. Nor is it needed to vindicate him in all things, for he was a man of like passions with ourselves. Nor would I fill up the measure of my meditations here when I have no assurance of understanding. But still I may suggest a conclusion upon it, and the grounds of such ; and after some meditation I do judge that his course through all this was warranted. And there are many things that lead me to that judgment. Thus, he had done the same before (xviii. 18). And he had taken this present journey expressly to worship at a Jewish feast (xx. 16, xxiv. 11). So on a previous visit he had worshipped in the temple, and the Lord had owned him there (xxii. 17). And further—he afterwards in a solemn manner (as was once observed to me) recognises his own conduct in all this (xxiv. 18, xxvi. 21), which he scarcely would have done, had it not been warranted both by the Spirit and his own conscience. And the vision of the Lord at night, as he slept in the castle (xxiii. 11), may be judged as a further sanction of the present ways of his servant.

But still further. In the 22nd chapter he stands before the Jews of Jerusalem as their representative, their present conduct towards him, and Christ in him, being the same as his had once been towards others of the flock (see ver. 2, 3, 4). But yet he had been forgiven. All his sin had been removed from before God. And what grace

was it in the Lord to give Jerusalem such a token of mercy and salvation as this. As afterwards in the 26th chapter, he stands before the king at Cesarea, and again rehearses his sin and the abounding grace of God that rolled it all away. This was the refined and courtly assembly of the great estates, as the other had been the unruly multitude of the city. But these testimonies of grace, these tokens of salvation, would not have been published to these different portions of the same gainsaying people, had not Paul now gone up to Jerusalem.

These considerations are all strong, I judge, but the strongest still I feel to be that which we draw from that general character of this book of the Acts of the Apostles, to which I have before referred, namely, that it is the scene of God's long-suffering with Israel. For this conduct of St. Paul was an expression of that long-suffering, and thus of the mind of the Spirit, as pervading the whole of this book.

This is my judgment upon it. But as it has not been the divine good pleasure clearly to decide for us in the word, he had perhaps a great moral purpose in leaving it thus undetermined. For this may be the occasion of calling the hearts and consciences of the saints into profitable exercise. For, dear brethren, we at least join in this, that what the Spirit seeks to lead us to, is not mere conformity with the letter of a command, but to have the heart and conscience in constant exercise towards God. And thus many things will appear among us, which might not have been seen, when some sat in Moses' seat, and the people learnt the law at their mouth. Different forms of service and character will now appear. There is with us the principle of "being a Jew to the Jew," and there is also that of "not giving place by subjection even for an hour," and occasions arise which seem to put in claims on both of these principles. And such was the present moment in the history of St. Paul. We know how he acted. He became a Jew to the Jew. And our disposedness either to vindicate or condemn him, may arise from similar or opposing tendencies in ourselves, and thus we get a test of the ways of our own hearts, and are thereby instructed where to watch the working of our own moral constitutions. Mistakes, after all, may be made and will be made—as in many things we offend all—but *heart-*

less mistakes are the really bad things now, courses of conduct entered on and pursued without any exercise of soul or desire toward God. The Spirit alone can keep and guide these exercises in full soundness; but the saints have "the mind of Christ," and are "temples of the Holy Ghost," and the will and the understanding and the affections, should all be engaged, that our service may be "reasonable service" (λογικὴν λατρείαν Rom. xii. 1), or acts of spiritually intelligent worship.

I would rather thus leave our Apostle's conduct still before the judgment of the saints, as I have here suggested my own upon it. Most of us know that it has long been matter of meditation and intercourse among us. And would that all our enquiries, beloved, had more of the seal of the Spirit upon them. We should watch for this, and pray that they may be in the temple, or in the grace and energy of communion.

After these scenes of Paul's sufferings in Jerusalem, great space is given to the history of his voyage from Cesarea to Rome (xxvii.) This might lead us to judge that there was meaning in it, as we know there was a mystery in another storm in a history in the Old Testament. And thoughts may arise on all that is before us here. The vessel is wrecked, but the glory that it carried is safe; life is given for a prey, but all beside goes. It is a striking scene, and the Spirit of revelation has given much space to it. But I will not pursue it, for it might lead beyond our measure. It ends, however, in our Apostle's safe arrival at Rome, where he closes his history and ministry. Like his master he had been delivered by the Jews to the Gentiles. But it is at Rome and not at Jerusalem that he perishes. As yet out of Jerusalem no prophet had perished. Such had been the apostacy of the Jew. But now in the great Gentile city, the Apostle of the Gentiles is left a prisoner, soon to perish there, that such may be proved to be the apostacy of the Gentile also.

But I observe that our book preserves its character to the end. The manifestation of the Holy Ghost, and the display of God's patient grace with Israel, though he had begun to call out another witness, are, as I have already observed, the two principal bearings of it.

And these are seen here at the very close. For here, for the only time, the prophecy of Isaiah, so much referred to in the New Testament, is quoted as the word of the Holy Ghost; and we have here, in the furthest parts of the Jewish dispersion, Paul's patient and gracious testimony to Israel (xxviii.)

Thus it is to the end, as at the beginning and throughout. Like each of the gospels, this book, in its way, preserves its own peculiar character. As we open the epistles which follow, we at once read a further breaking away from Israel, St. Paul saying of his Apostleship, that it was "for obedience to the faith among all nations;" but does not add, "beginning from Jerusalem." But with happy assurance of heart I can join with our dear brother in his paper on "Antioch," already referred to, where he says, "we are apt to be more hasty in our thoughts than God is in his ways. He is slow to anger, and perhaps we are in danger of drawing too nice distinctions between the dispensations of God, so as exactly to say where one passed away and another began, and thus to lose much deep instruction in the ways of God." This book of the Acts of the Apostles fully verifies this, I judge. And if our souls, beloved, lose sight of *the ways* of our God, as our brother here speaks, indeed they lose much blessing. To trace and mark the paths of his Spirit, in their delicacy and tenderness and fervour, and the ways of his dispensations in their wisdom, and grace, and order,—to let all these rehearse themselves in the ear, and pass before the eye of faith, is of the heaven which he is preparing for his saints. And sad it is, when nature with her course and busy intellect dares to move so as to stir and grieve these paths and revelations of the blessed Spirit of God in the saints.

But this only as we pass. It is Paul the prisoner whom we leave here preaching the kingdom of God. This is to be much observed, being quite in character with God's testimony in such a world as ours. Joseph came out of a dungeon to be God's interpreter. David, with the prophet and the priest, dwelt in the wilderness and the cave. Prophets prophesied in sackcloth, Elijah was a fugitive, Daniel a captive, and John an exile. The faithful and true witness himself had not where to lay his head. And yet all these could speak, in their turn, of the kingdom of God. And so now with our

Apostle. He was another prophet of God in chains. And withal, what largeness of grace towards others, and yet what consciousness of dignity in himself break forth through his bonds. "Would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me, were not only almost, but altogether such as I am, except these bonds." How sure was Paul the prisoner (as was once observed) that he was the blessed man in the whole assembly. In the eye of man he was the pitied object, but in his own happy consciousness he was the glory and the joy there; and to be altogether like him, save in the bonds which man had put on him, was the best desire which the warmest truest love could utter for them.

And all this is so expressive of God's great principle. He puts the glory in earthen vessels. It is the prisoner that prophesies of God's secrets in the ship, and receives the life of all that sailed with him. It is the prisoner that casts off the venomous beast from his hand and then dries up the bloody flux. It is the prisoner who preaches the kingdom of God. What a voice all this has. The glory of God shines forth from Paul the prisoner of man. And the sense of this glory leads into grace and service. Paul could gather sticks. He could take courage from the sight of his weakest brethren. He could receive day after day for two whole years in his own hired house all who came to him, and minister to them. He was conscious of a glory within, and before him. His own fortune was made, as people speak. His own true liberty was secure. He was rich in glory, and free in Christ; and thus, on divine principles, he was at the disposal of others, the servant of their need, their sorrows, their joy, and their blessing. This was divine. This was Jesus. This was of the spirit of him who knowing that all things were delivered into his hand, and that he came from God and went to God, took a towel and water and began to wash his disciples' feet.

Thus was it now with our beloved Apostle. And thus the second great division of our book closes with Paul the prisoner; as the first had closed with Peter the prisoner. But the histories of these two prisoners close differently, and this may have its meaning. Peter is a prisoner only for a season, and is then released to walk abroad on the earth again, his persecutor falling under the signal judgment

of God. Paul, on the contrary, is left in bonds, and finally offered up. There was no release for him to walk abroad again on the earth. He passes from before us as a prisoner. The veil here drops, and hides him from us in that character. It is not judgment on the enemy and his deliverance for the earth again, but he himself is offered up at the hands of man. For his hope was not here, but within the veil. He meets the world's full enmity, but waits, as a child of resurrection, to stand among the crowned elders round the throne on the top of the hill. Thus is Paul the prisoner different from Peter the prisoner. The one taken out of the earth, the other preserved for it. It is as Enoch and Noah again, the one led out of and above the earth into heaven, the other preserved for power and honour here again—samples, thus, of the glories and joys of that day, when the Lord shall display himself in the kingdom, and the heavens and the earth, the Church and the nations, shall rejoice in him together.

But here, beloved, we leave these labours and sorrows of these dear servants of our blessed Master, whom the Spirit had thus girded for the service of the gospel of God. And all through, after that the Holy Ghost had made them his vessels, what heavenly grace and power shew themselves in them! The river of God had set in and was flowing, with strong current, through their souls, and this sustained them in all their sorrows in the gospel. “None of these things move me,” Paul could say, though the Spirit witnessed in every place that bonds and afflictions awaited him. The flow of the Spirit within was unruffled by the testimony of the Spirit without. And this is what we want, beloved,—more of the blessed consciousness of the presence of the Holy Ghost. What calmness, what power, what steadfastness and yet tenderness would it impart. How would the head be lifted up, the feet kept as hind's feet, and the outgoings from us tell whence they came, even from that source which is in God himself, where this river rises.—May it be so with us, beloved, more and more, for Jesus' sake!

And here in taking leave of this happy occupation, turning from the din that is abroad, to look at the gracious glorious One who has

told us of himself and of his counsels, let me just observe, dear brethren, that a line of truth opens before us through the scriptures of the New Testament. The gospels, which begin the volume, give us a manifestation of the Father and the Son through the ministry of Jesus; the Acts then gives us a manifestation of the Holy Ghost through the ministry of the Apostles; the epistles, which follow, present the forming and instructing of the saints by the Holy Ghost in their communion with the Father and the Son; and the Revelation, which closes the volume (after shewing the judgments), gives us a manifestation of the Church in glory and power as the golden city. Many things incidental to all this is, of course, introduced; but these manifestations are the great themes, forming a beauteous path of light through this region of the book of God.

On the moral, if I may so speak, of these manifestations, I would say, almost in the words of another,—“as our Father, God is seen cherishing the purposes of his everlasting love toward us,—as the Son from the bosom of the Father, “God with us,” he is bringing into actual effect all these counsels of the Father to meet our circumstances, and raise us up from our own misery and ruin to his blessedness and glory,—and again, as the same God, the Holy Ghost, he is bringing us to the riches of the full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of the Father and of Christ, anointing all the members of the body with that unction that was immeasurably shed upon the head, working in all till all be conformed to the head, and the whole be presented at last without spot unto God and the Father. This is for our comfort and edification. It is the honour of a Redeemer our God has come down to this world to gather for his great name. In that work his glorious name, “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,” is revealed, and such mysteries as angels wait to learn through the Church. It is the praise of being the Repairer of a mighty breach, and the Saviour of sinners, that God has descended to our world to gain. And this being his blessed way and purpose in this fallen world of ours, it is the poor sinner who learns him. Before such the Lord sets himself, to be known and read. He is a sealed book to all other disciples. He will not be discovered by the wise and prudent. He is too holy to

be touched or understood by any but by the affections and conscience and light of poor sinners. With such he dwells even in the high and holy place. But the intellect or powers of man are too coarse to enter the sanctuary. If Nicodemus come to be taught, in the assumption that he has faculty to learn, he must needs go back again, and begin his journey from the brazen serpent, like a poor sinner (John iii. 1—14). “Ye must be born again.” We must all of us begin at the brazen serpent, and walk with God and learn of God as poor sinners who have felt the healing of his love through Jesus. Then we shall know him indeed, learning him in that glory in which we are to enjoy him for ever; and to gather which, in the midst of us, he has thus visited this world, having not laid hold on angels, but on the seed of Abraham. And may we always, beloved, learn the blessed lessons thus, like poor sinners saved by grace. Too deep, too high they are for any other disciples. “I washed and do see,” may well express the nature of all our desirable knowledge. For the Saviour says, “for judgment am I come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind.”

May we all be kept, through the presence of the Holy Ghost, in the knowledge and communion of the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, that we may thus even here be richly, happily, led into the spirit of that coming kingdom, when every tongue is to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father! Amen.

THOUGHTS ON MINISTRY.

VERY humbling is it, the Church of God having existed on earth for so many centuries, that we should have no more than thoughts, and those scattered ones, on such a momentous subject as the building up, in service, of this Church. The poverty of our views upon it only the more calls for deep sorrow of heart, that the needs of the

saints, so far from being entered into, should only be so little understood. Our sorrow should be deeper, when we reflect that this is but one out of the many points in which consists the health of the mystical body of Christ, all, it may be said, as little known. These things were once known, but "how are the mighty fallen."

Yet perhaps ministry is a question which, as much as any other, occupies the minds of the Lord's people in the present day, we mean those who are meeting simply in the name of Jesus; especially in that bearing which it has on the Church as an operation of the Spirit, distinct and independent of that operation, of which we are all alike partakers, viz., the quickening of our souls. It was not astonishing, that, when great truths, long-neglected ones, first burst upon men's souls, to their own peace and joy,—when they first saw the Church's heavenly standing, and consequently our heavenly calling,—when they got an insight into those things of which the tabernacle was but a pattern (Heb. viii. 5, ix. 23), and perceived that every believer must be a spiritual priest (1 Pet. ii. 9, Rev. i. 5, 6) in order to approach God at all, this priesthood being in heavenly places, there being the great high priest (Heb. viii. 1, 2), and there consequently (as it was upon earth) the priests with him,—it was not astonishing we say, that as they had discovered a common standing as to priesthood, so they should think this was the case in ministry, for they had been brought up to link the two ideas together. And we desire even now in setting out, to guard ourselves against being misinterpreted, as if we were saying, that in one sense, all are not ministers. Doubtless washing the saints' feet, the giving a cup of cold water, which all must and ought to do, is service to his people and so to the Lord; and in this there is a common standing, but we speak of ministry now in another sense.

These men so instructed, rightly rejecting such phraseology as would make a minister, one who stands up between a living God and a dying people, and also the dogma of a successional order of men appointed to administer the sacraments, and to confer grace, had not arrived at seeing either the place for the springing up and sustenance of ministry, viz., the Church itself, nor the end of this ministry, "ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. iv. 5).

They did not distinguish between the way and place of access, alike free to all, and the gifts developed to some in the body, to assist that body in its walk on earth, and to build it up in its fulness of manhood in Christ. There were other reasons, indeed, which fostered such an idea; one was that little ministry was needed to those whose souls compassed all the truth they knew in their understandings, and who, when they met together in fellowship at the first upon blessed truth new to their souls, had, as it were, the fragrance of the garden of Eden in their midst. It was not only that their souls had been hindered by the exclusive ministry of one man,—it was not only that this one, though a child of God, was perhaps a very weak one,—it was not only that they doubted altogether in ordination as conferring gift;—but to these must be added their old habits of connecting ministry and priesthood, and—of an opposite tendency—their newly-acquired ones of being blessed apart from it, and of seizing truth apart from it. These were hindrances. But this was not all; as their knowledge of the word increased, whatever they might see out of that word, as to what real ministry in the Church is, they were prevented from giving the subject its due consideration, from seeing the woful errors, which a body of persons, many of them the Lord's children, had fallen into, in setting up orders of ministry, because they came to see, what indeed is true, that these several orders belonged to the Church of God, that is, that the Church had once been constituted with such. It was obvious that the Lord did not recognise those whom man had set up in office, whatever the piety of those so appointing, or appointed might be, any more than he recognised those appointed upon the rule of Apostolical succession; and consequently there was a still greater distaste for any recognition of special ministry in the body. In fact the low estate of the Church now appeared; we were going to say, the Apostacy. It became her to be humble—to mourn and deplore the loss of her pristine beauty—before gift, even that following upon grace, could be expected to be bestowed. It was, and is thought by many, that the Church having fallen away from her first estate,—having joined herself to the world,—having lost sight of herself as the chaste virgin espoused to Christ; and, above all, having disallowed in her ministrations the sovereign

will of the Holy Ghost, as “dividing to every man severally as he will,” the outward or manifest gifts (so to speak) which signalised the Church as being the elect of God in the midst of a wicked world (even as the pillar of fire and cloud signalised the Lord’s people in the wilderness) never will be restored :—however this may be, this question of outward gifts seems for the present to be merged into this other, viz., the operation of the Holy Ghost in gift profitably used as following grace, in ministry, specially with regard to the care of the Church. It is on this point in one or two of its actings, on which we wish to throw out a few detached thoughts.

But to continue. When it was found that even amongst weak believers, the principle of meeting simply in the name of the Lord Jesus, could be understood and admitted; and that with a disposition so to meet (their motives being various), their hearts were often unsubdued by the truths which they knew, and old forms of evil, as to outward things, were still acting on them; there could yet be no question of admitting them to fellowship :—“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations;”—“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant, to his own master he standeth or falleth?” (Rom. xiv. 1, 4.) The result was, and will be, that many would bring weakness instead of strength into such gatherings,—many would get profit and give none. Hence was seen the need, nay the necessity, of pastorate; and hence of considering from scripture, what is the place it holds in the body. It was fairly reasoned, that whatever may be the nature of the Apostacy,—whether those who come out from it are involved in it or not,—whether gifts are to be restored or not,—still the order of God’s government remains the same. If there was ministry once in the Church,—if the word is still to guide us whether individually or corporately,—then the same forms of action ought to be developed and acknowledged in those gatherings of the Lord’s people where the Spirit is allowed free to act. We do not say in a moment, we do not say irresistibly to the discovery of obtuse observers; but we do think that at some time or other, powers of rule, of teaching, &c., though in weakness, will shew themselves.

Shortly then, that ministry, whether of teaching or rule, must belong to the body, as long as the epistles belong to believers, no

one can reasonably doubt. In Phil. i. 1, we have the address—“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” All were saints, some were also bishops and deacons. The office of bishops as stated to themselves (Acts xx. 28, &c.), is one of watchfulness, care, service, and yet rule:—“Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over whom the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God.” When we speak of rule, we mean not, as will be seen presently, rule derived or used after the manner of the world, but still rule. Whilst the Apostle could say, “We have not dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy” (2 Cor. i. 24), he could say to the Church, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves to them as those that must give an account” (Heb. xiii. 17). We use these two or three simple passages, because they are apart from all question of manifestation of gift, whilst, at the same time, they prove rule; and here we drop this part of the subject.

We have already said that ministry was little needed by those who held not lightly the truths which they had discovered to their own souls' joy; and, indeed, we believe that if the Church was realising in power, her hope, viz., the coming of the Lord, there would now, though ministry as an ordinance were fully recognised and rejoiced in, be less cry for it, in that form alas, in which it is most prized and looked for, viz., what is commonly called preaching and teaching. Though held, it would be held in its right place. We think we can see in the structure of some of Paul's epistles, that there was a state of soul, as it were, above all ministry of this kind, when the singing of a hymn, or, it may be, the shortest exhortation, would so bring and keep the Church in remembrance of her calling, that little else would be needed. If we examine the parts of his writings perhaps the most opposite in their character, we speak of the Epistles to the Corinthians as distinguished from those to the Thessalonians, we find in the former that their worse than disorder had its origin in their putting ministry in its wrong place. It would seem (1 Cor. i. 12), they got to admire the various gifts and powers of Peter as distinct from Paul and Apollos, and so on; and thus

they made themselves into parties hanging on the words of their several favourites, as if they were given out from the intellectual powers alone (not indeed that these are unused), instead of considering them as being spoken in the power of the Spirit, intended to lead them up to the Father, that they might walk before him in love. This is the end of all ministry. "The end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. i. 5). In the 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians (ii. 13), we find the Apostle "thanking God, because when they received the word of God, which they heard of him, they received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also ('*ὡς καὶ ἐνεργεῖται*') in them that believe;" that is, whilst it was by the mouth of man that teaching and preaching came, such man was not to be followed as if he were the giver, but it was to lead them to look up to and to follow God. They were consequently led into suffering (1 Thess. ii. 14, 15), the true place of honour for the Church; whilst at Corinth, they got into a false position, namely, to be reigning as kings, and that without the Apostle (1 Cor. iv. 8, 9). Hence in the Epistle to the Thessalonians, ministry being acknowledged, but still in its right place, it is not until the fifth chapter (ver. 12) that a word about ministry of any kind is mentioned, and then only in a very simple form, coming in as a matter of course. They are exhorted "to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." Yet no where do we remark the outflowings of the Apostle's heart in such fulness as here: such words as "being affectionately desirous of you"—"gentle among you"—"joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, &c., &c. (1 Thess. ii. 7, 8, iii. 9, 10), bespeak indeed an overflowing heart, lawfully however, brought into exercise, because he was not afraid that they would be setting him up in a wrong place; whilst had he used like expressions to the Corinthians, he might have been fearful of encouraging their sectarianism,—they would still have been following him instead of the Lord. Love to man, love to a minister is lawful, if subservient to love to the Lord; but if it centres,

however blessed the doctrine preached, or holy the life led, in love to man as man, instead of as the servant of Christ, to whom supreme love is due, surely it is in 'its wrong place. Do we not get in the superscription, "Paul and Timotheus and Silvanus unto the Church of the Thessalonians," as distinguished from "Paul called an Apostle (*κλητος αποστολος*) to the Church at Corinth," a little index of the Apostle's mind, as well as a characteristic of ministry itself. To the Thessalonians he seems glad, as the Church could bear it, to divest himself of all title,—to merge himself into the common standing of the Church; to form which indeed, only had his Apostleship been given him, where however he is going to reprove, it is Paul a called Apostle, able to use authority, his calling being such, sorry as he was he could not come down to the state of common Church membership. The comparison of these two epistles helps to shew a characteristic standing of ministry in the body; viz., there is authority in it to repress the unruly—gentleness and persuasion when the body is healthy—and always love and succour.

Is there not already a lesson for those who speak and those who listen? For the one that they seek in all their ministrations to make Jesus the centre into which all ministerings and teachings should flow; for the others, that whatever the gifts or graces possessed by those teaching, that they never put them in the place of the Lord. A great danger in the present day, is that unhealthy tendency which too often appears for something new whether in persons or things. Liberty of ministry, which had better be called obedience to the Spirit, helps to this (though of course not necessarily); so then knowledge comes to be the centre of our thoughts, instead of Jesus. "That I may know him," was Paul's highest aim, not "that I may know knowledge." Hence ministry often fails in direct exhortation, and sometimes in edification, and takes much the character of teaching. Men are prone to extremes. The old divines found in every circumstance and history of the Old Testament, something whereout to draw profitable meditation and exhortation for the individual, or for the congregation; they erred in that they refused to see the Jew dispensationally throughout, and a future restoration, apart from the Church. The tendency now is to seek in every one of

these same facts and histories, something that shall give a character of newness, historical, typical or dispensational newness, apart from the individual profit of hearer or minister. Ought not the soul to have fed upon every thing which it gives out; and is not this the secret of successful preaching.

If then we allow ministry in the body, there being unity and yet divisibility, how, in the present fallen state of the Church, do we expect to get it? how does it develop itself? and how is it to be used? We presume the first question is to be answered by saying, the need felt on the part of the saints for it, a consequent humbling of themselves before the throne of grace, in sorrow for the weakness of the Church, will bring it: for its development (we suppose always the free acknowledgment of the Spirit's Lordship in the body), we apprehend that ministry will appear at first in much weakness, and it may be so indistinctly, that one person may be pastor, teacher, evangelist, exhorter, before it shall appear that he has a preponderance in any of these; for its use, we doubt not that humbleness of soul and a feeling of what are we, and who made us to differ, on the part of those who minister, and thankfulness and obedience on the part of those ministered to, is the state of mind which will know how to use, and make it stronger. Let us be careful not to expect too much, or that an express single gift should be markedly shewn. The Church is in great weakness. If she were strong, still it is a place of grace, a place where there is room for the exercise of all tenderness and love. The fixing or separating off duties and injunctions very definedly, viz., with that order and discipline with which a regiment of soldiers find their places, is contrary enough to the actings of grace in love, though there be, notwithstanding, order, and that of a very high character.

It is important to observe, when we speak of there being ministry in the body, that it is of course limited (speaking with reverence) to the Holy Ghost's choice. Hence, as has been before said, liberty of ministry is obedience in the Spirit, in those who speak and in those who hear. Hence, also, it must be open, or how can the Holy Ghost ever add to it, according to the needs of the Church? There is ministry then in the Church, it may be only in two or three, but the

Spirit may extend it to ten or twenty; and the indwelling of the Spirit in the body, having the mind of Christ, gives consent that what is spoken is truth.

It is evident that these remarks have been, as yet, towards ministry in the sense of speaking, whether teaching, exhorting, &c. &c. May we not look at it in another point of view, viz., in that of ruling? the two however having agreement in many respects:—"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and doctrine" (1 Tim. v. 17). Viewing pastor and elder as the same office, yet each word having a distinct character attached to it, how would rule and pastorship develope itself? The Lord Jesus himself shews clearly how (Luke xxii. 24—27); and surely never were the principles of the Church and of the world seen to be more distinct, in their manner of arriving at the same result—rule; yea, and continuing that result—rule. "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth." Here then, we venture to think, the Lord does not repudiate rule, but he shews the difference of its origin and character from that in the world. There kings exercise lordship (*κυριευσουσιν*), those exercising authority (*οἱ ἐξουσιάζοντες*) are called benefactors. That is, those by descent—inheritance—this is the origin, those who use it, are called benefactors, or good doers; but with the Church, he that is greatest, that is, there is or there are greatest, but whence comes the authority, and how is it deferred to? It arises and is acknowledged (its origin and its character is), owing to the lowest service being done by him who exercises it; and more than this, it is not as with the world, where once in station always in station, and where the higher we get, the more do we leave behind those things which belong to a lower station; but here the authority, as it only comes from being the servant of all, so it only continues to

be acknowledged (often indeed unperceived by him who exercises it) in a continued course of service. It is all in the present tense, "I am among you as he that serveth"—the king of glory—the one bowed to as their Lord. Those are benefactors in the world who, from some higher place, confer benefits on those in a lower one. Those are so in the Church, who in the lowest place urge the Church into a higher one. So then whilst, as regards teaching, it is manifest, once a teacher, always a teacher; and, once an evangelist, always an evangelist (though even in this class of ministry, it does not follow that once an exhorter, always one; because this must depend upon the knowledge of the wants of the Church); yet as regards rule, no one can come authoritatively and claim it, because there needs time for the acknowledgment of its exercise, so that it would seem to be intended of the Lord, to be a gift as belonging to the body of a distinct nature from others, that is of a local nature. A teacher who had taught the Church at Corinth, must have been acknowledged (*cæteris paribus*) at Thessalonica. The spiritual palates must be of the same nature, though even here it would require spiritual discernment of the case of the persons to be taught, in the exercise of the gift. But a ruler at Corinth (if we may be allowed the term) in passing to Thessalonica, would have come into the Church (so we judge) as a common brother. It would not follow absolutely that his particular powers of rule, would shew so decidedly at the latter place as the former, and there must require time to take hold of the affections of the saints; at the same time it will be allowed, if there was the ready mind on both sides, the same place would be taken in a comparatively short time.*

It seems important to allow these two kinds of ministry in the Church of God, and to comprehend them both together under the one head of eldership, and to interchange this term upon occasions with

* Perhaps for the exercise of the office of pastor, not only the gift of rule is needed, but local and personal knowledge; knowledge of the wants and circumstances of the saints on the one side, and a knowledge of the personal character as well as of the gift of the pastor on the other. Confidence must spring from knowledge of character, and the confidence will be in proportion to this knowledge. Since then the exercise and the acknowledgment of the office of pastor is founded on this mutual knowledge, it is manifest the use, if not the development, of the gift must require time.

bishop. Who do we suppose obeyed the summons of Paul, when he called for the elders of Ephesus, as related in Acts xx. ? Doubtless those who had been previously acknowledged by the Apostle as such. What was their character ? That they fed the Church of God over whom the Holy Ghost had made them overseers. What a large thought, or rather truth, “to feed the Church of God.” How varied must have been the gift among them ; what room for educational differences,—what place for every disposition when subordinate to the Spirit of God,—what an expanded scene. The Church of God, whereon to let loose all the best affections of the heart, and all the best faculties of the mind (2 Cor. xii. 15). “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you ; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.” Although we say that both classes of ministry exist under the common head of elder, yet would we discriminate between ministry and eldership ; whilst it is evident that those who were elders, were generally those who ministered, upon the other hand, not always those who ministered were elders or pastors (the words being interchangeable), for it is said (Eph. iv. 11), “he gave some Apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” Hence then we have pastors—a gift, but not necessarily connected with evangelists, &c. ; and (Rom. xii. 8) “he that exhorteth on exhortation, he that ruleth, with diligence.” Again a distinction. Hence whilst there is eldership (rule) not necessarily (though generally) connected with ministry (speaking); upon the other hand there may be ministry, as that of an evangelist, or a teacher, and yet no gift of rule discernible, and hence the person no elder.

Is there not yet a third kind of ministry (we know not what else to call it), of a class which perhaps comes home to ourselves in the present day (when all things are in such disorder) more familiarly than either of the other two : we allude to such a passage as, “I beseech you brethren, ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted (*ἑραξαν*) themselves to the ministry of the saints, that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us and laboureth.” And does not this passage shew, that even in the Apostle’s time, there was a

self constitution of ministry and service, which had in it necessarily the character of rule, and which was yielded a willing obedience to by the saints. When we say a self-constituted ministry, we mean no more than this, that of course it was the mind of the Spirit entered into, and responded to by the saints. And where let it be asked is the source and title of ministry now, but in a ready mind in the power of such a word as, the “love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Cor. v. 14) on the part of those ministering, felt and acquiesced in on the part of those ministered to. There is no longer an Apostle or his delegates, to whom we can refer for a standard of qualification; there is no succession by order, as long as the Holy Ghost “divideth to every man severally as he will” (1 Cor. xii. 11); nor Church of a country pretending to spiritual power always, where (John iii. 8) “the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, and canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit; but there is always the test of love in service which the Lord himself gave (John xxi. 15), “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?—Feed my lambs;” and this will always be responded to by those, who (1 Pet. ii. 2) “as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby.” There comes, however, another question closely following upon acknowledgment of eldership, viz., discipline. Overseership implies discipline. It may be inquired, what is the measure of its exercise, and where resides the power. The measure of its exercise would seem to be the degree of grace in the Church, and the power, though of course in the Church, would be exercised by those who are recognised as elders. The majority are governed by the few, but these few can only govern in accordance with the mind of the Church. Here we see again the difference between the Church and the world. Scripture, when it talks of Gentile power, contemplates order as the result of the magistrate “bearing not the sword in vain” (Rom. xiii. 4). In the Church we are spoken to as “having the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. ii. 16), and, consequently, as being able to agree upon every subject, whilst indeed, in giving utterance to that mind, rule is vested in the few. Paul in his later epistles, as those to Philemon and Titus, merges down even his Apostleship to this (Titus i. 1, 2 Cor. ii. 2),

“according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness,”—there is an accordance of one with the other.—“If I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me?” In Philemon we see throughout persuasion used instead of authority. It is not always wise to expect in the Church that same life and conscience which is possessed by the few. The case of Ananias and Sapphira shews how discipline, nay judgment, “sin unto death,” may be carried where the Spirit of God is felt in power; and where the consciences are tender, offences, we humbly think, may be visited, where, when this is otherwise, it were prudent to pass them over. Did not the Apostle leave unnoticed, many a trying evil at Corinth, to come to the worst of all, the incestuous person? So it may be now. It were foolish to speak of trifles, when grievous sins are to be accounted for. He who is most anxious for the glory of God, will strive so to get at the conscience, as first to bring that into a lively state, before it be a question of rooting out habits of sin in the flesh. The breaking off from any thing evil, should not be in deference to authority, but owing to life; and so it is that the Apostle always asserts the life of the Church, and speaks to that life, before he says a word of precept, which indeed can only be felt according to the degree of spiritual life in the individual spoken to. It is evident, also, that discipline must first be exercised on themselves by those who are to exercise it on others; and as was said before, the eldership will take cognizance of that which is evil, yet the Church must concur in the decision. Nay, let us not forget that the Church is really the party concerned (1 Cor. v. 13), “therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person,” was said to (1 Cor i. 2) “the Church of God which is at Corinth,” there being no mention made of ministers. Hence then we see that the measure of the exercise of discipline is efficacious, according to the degree of grace in the Church. Its very character, viz., that righteousness is produced by means of grace (“The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God”—Heb. vii. 19), would lead us to see that there can be no law for any and every case, each must be judged according to its merits.

Hence perhaps "to one is given by the Spirit, the word of wisdom" (1 Cor. xii. 8).

One word upon "putting away," commonly called excommunication. Though doubtless the exercise of this awful power belongs to the body, yet oh! with what care-tenderness-concern should it be exercised, and then only when other means fail, such as those mentioned Matt. xviii. 15, 16; and even then with the object and hope of restoration, which surely is the end of all discipline. Yet let none think lightly of the effect of putting away (Matt. xviii. 18), "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." It matters little that those who, sinning grievously, have been put away shall be admitted (alas how the oneness of the Church on earth is lost) into other bodies. They do but aggravate the condemnation of the offending one by ministering to his self-delusion. If the putting away has been treated and considered solemnly by those who know that they stand in the presence of God, as his servants, seeking his glory, and that their position, as the gathered of the Lord, is a sound one, it is too solemn a subject to be touched on further than by reference to the passage above cited.

How needful is it that grace should be sprinkled on all we have been saying. We tremble lest we should be building up some huge thing of rules and regulations, apart from the Spirit of God, and that in pulling down one form, we should be building up another. We tremble lest we should in some fond fancy, play with the souls of men. With a single eye to the glory of God, and a life of dependance on him, things will fall into their places we know not how. Without this, the best form, nay the best intentions, will be worse than useless, even detrimental.

ON THE USE OF THE WORD "WATER" IN JOHN iii. 5.

THE use of Water as a symbol is various and difficult in the scriptures, but among the meanings of it is one which I believe applies to it in baptism, i.e. *death*. "The waters are come in unto my soul," Ps. lxxix. 1, a place that shows this force of the word Water. The waters of the deluge too, were the waters of death.

Now the *Spirit* is life, and though we find water used symbolically for the Spirit, it is "living water," water "springing up," &c. This is not therefore the water of baptism, whose signification is further fixed to death by the use of it in the Epistles. "Know ye not, that as many as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death?" I am not now expounding this, but fixing the sense of the word. "Buried with him by baptism into death, or, the death." Again, "buried with him in baptism." Characteristically here it stops. We are RAISED through faith of the operation of God that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead, which is the work of the living Spirit. And again, raised to the answer of a good conscience, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Not by the external ablution, though we were in the water baptised into the death. Romans vi. and Col. ii. will shew us what was buried there. In Rom. vi. it is the old man and his deeds, and we are to *reckon* that dead. In Col. ii., philosophy and vain deceit; the rudiments of the world; ordinances of touch not, taste not, handle not; every head-ship—the risen Jesus having taken all head-ship to himself. All these are buried, and we with them and with Jesus; and we are to reckon them dead, as dead as the Israelites saw the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and if ye be risen (and believing in the Lord Jesus you are risen), seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.

The separation of death and resurrection are precluded by the

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terms of Col. ii. 12, which I anxiously beg any enquirer to read with the context, for if we are thus dispensationally by baptism in the death, it is in the death of Christ through faith of the Spirit, we are risen: and I would believe everything to be there that belongs to the old man and his deeds, with all that God ordered to rule and tutor it, and raised trespasses by to it (Rom. iii. 25, Heb. ix. 15, which see); and it is in this sense, I believe, we account for the expression "baptised for the remission of sins," "wash away thy sins," &c.* "The law and the prophets were until John." *He* buried *them* and brought in repentance to the *Jew*, under covenant and promise. Christ brought in repentance unto life by faith of him; and he buried the law and John both, and the first Adam condition too; and brought in grace and the risen life. We must be born therefore of water (John iii. 5). All these things therefore which were nailed to the cross of Jesus, and dead and buried with him, must be always kept in the grave of Jesus; we looking at them as verily there, for they are there, while we are living by the Spirit to him who died for us, who was dead, but is alive again for evermore.

It is to be observed, which would be to the relief of many minds, that the soul can have no experience of death. We look therefore by *faith* to God's mind in these things; but there is experience of life; and by life we have the power of death over death, and the things that bring forth death, which action is the circumcision of Christ made without hands. And may moreover the eyes of our understanding be enlightened to see what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, *which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead*, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenlies, far above all principality &c. Eph. i. 18, to end.

The ordinary method of seeking the meaning of water in baptism, has been to endeavour to find it amidst those things that we are receiving as it were with it, but detached from it; thinking it the symbol of the Spirit, of the blood, or of the word, or even to vary its meaning by its place; but while we have above plainly shown its definite

* When the covenant was buried, all the sins which were raised by it, were buried necessarily with it. Baptism therefore now puts everything on the ground of grace to us, and we should see it always so in the mind of God.

meaning not as detached from, but connected with it, and not with the mere action of immersion, but in the sense given to itself by the scriptures themselves, we would add beyond what is said above, why it *cannot* mean any of these three in the New Testament. As to signifying the Spirit, it becomes impossible by this very place of John iii., for it is mentioned with the Spirit. For the same reason it cannot mean the blood, for it is mentioned as distinct and with peculiar expression distinct in 1 John v. 6. And it cannot mean the word, because it is mentioned with it in Eph. v. 26. The scripture will be found always, if our souls and intelligence are rightly directed, to supply a sure answer to every error and every temptation in whatever form or variety it may show itself, in all succeeding ages, and we are in this case bound up from entering on this variety of interpretation.

THE SONS OF LEVI BEARING THE TABERNACLE.

(NUMBERS iii. 14.)

THERE was nothing that belonged to the camp of Israel, as it journeyed through the wilderness, so precious to the eye of faith as the Tabernacle of Congregation, for it was the meeting place between Israel—all Israel and God, in blessing. It was the place of their instruction in the knowledge of God. It was there that they learned how sin was atoned for; there also they could bring the willing sacrifice and offer gifts upon his altar. The holiness of the consuming fire could not be learned except in the Tabernacle, nor the preciousness of the sacrifice it consumed—the odour of a sweet smelling savour. All the blessings of the priesthood also were connected with the Tabernacle.

One of the most happy services of the wilderness therefore must have been to care for the Tabernacle. Many of the parts which composed it were costly and delicate and little suited to the waste

howling wilderness. The fine white linen, the blue and the purple and the scarlet; the costly vessels, the sockets and the bars; might soon be injured or lost in the damps and perils of the wilderness. No office therefore could be more honourable, no service more happy, than to have the charge of these things, these precious things which, though in one sense peculiarly God's, were yet, through his gift, the possession of Israel too. It might be a happy thing for the Israelite to serve God with sacrifices and gifts,—to bring the offering from his flocks, or his herds or his possessions; but it was a more blessed thing to be serving in the care of God's possessions and of God's treasures.

Other service comparatively places far off in the distance, but this brings very nigh; for *they* must be brought very nigh to God who are entrusted with the charge of the things of his sanctuary. Yet this is part of the calling of his Church.

The Levites were the family to whom the charge of the Tabernacle was specially delivered. To them was committed the care of the curtains, the vessels, and the boards of the Tabernacle, that they might bear them onward from day to day, and that none might be injured and none be lost. A type of our happy calling as the Church of God, whilst going onward into the rest. The truths of God have been entrusted to us, that we might bear them onward through a dark world, where the power of the Liar and the Deceiver is. The coverings, the vessels, and the boards, were the three divisions of the Levites' charge; to us it is the character, the offices, and the nature of the Lord Jesus. For when the Lord Jesus said "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up, he sufficiently shewed whom the Temple prefigured, and the Temple is but the Tabernacle in other circumstances. One typical use of the Tabernacle then, though not the exclusive use, is to prefigure Him. The altar, the laver, and all the vessels of ministration, speak for themselves. They all shew some covenant relation of the Lord to us. The curtains are to the Tabernacle what garments are to the individual, whether rude or costly, white or defiled, they indicate the condition and character of him who wears them. Of the boards encased in gold I will speak directly.

The family of the Levites was divided into three, in order to meet this threefold distribution of the parts of the Tabernacle. These were the sons of Levi by their names; Gershon and Kohath and Merari. The charge of the sons of Gershon was the hangings and curtains of the Tabernacle. And thus we may learn, that care for the truths which are connected with the character, the developed character of the Lord Jesus, is one great branch of service in the Church of God. Accordingly we still see some saints bearing as it were the curtains of the Tabernacle through the wilderness. The developed character of the Lord Jesus is the truth peculiarly dear to their souls; and their chief desire as to the saints, is to see it manifested in them; and for this they labour. These are the family of the Gershonites—"strangers here,"* for it is only such, only those who have the spirit of strangership here, who care for, or are fit to care for, the character and ways of Jesus; whether as developed in himself or in his saints.

Here too the Gershonite, in spirit, may learn the fitting object of his care; not arbitrary and self-chosen thoughts respecting the pilgrim character, and plans of his own for seeking it, but strangership *as seen in Jesus*; for wherever the character of the Lord Jesus is most developed, there will be most found true practical strangership here.

The Gershonites were to carry not only the badgers' skins, and the rude external covering of the sanctuary, but likewise the inner curtains of blue, and fine white linen of cunning workmanship, which no eye saw that was not able in virtue of the priestly anointing to enter within the sanctuary. Blue is the heavenly colour; in a garment or covering it is the sign of heavenly character, and white linen is the sign of righteousness. The garments of the priest and the garments of the saints by and bye are white linen. "The fine linen is the righteousness of saints." To see Christ as he was outwardly amongst men having no form or comeliness, and no beauty that he should be admired; and to care for him thus, and to seek to follow him thus, is one part of our Gershonite character. Without it there cannot be strangership here; for what if the Church has the

* The word "Gershon" signifies "a stranger here."

comeliness of nature, it cannot have the comeliness of God. Condescension to men of low estate—the not seeking our lives here—the not laying up treasures upon earth—the spending for others—the bidding the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind—the girding with the towel that we may wash the feet,—all such things are the care of the Gershonite, the stranger here. He would not seek that the Church should reign as kings, but he says be fools for Christ's sake—weak—despised, yea the offscouring of all things ; for badgers' skins must cover the Tabernacle whilst it remains in the wilderness. Yet whilst such things produce separation from this present evil world, and he who seeks them *in the Spirit* will be a stranger here ; yet are there other features of character in Christ, and in his saints, which the eye that can discern outward things only, never detects and never could appreciate. Mere human nature can toil and suffer, and evince much patient endurance and self-denial under many hardships, but there is nothing divine—nothing heavenly—nothing that has the beauty of the blue nor the purity of the fine linen, in the sufferings or in the plans of nature. The outward forms of the badgers' skins, without the knowledge of the inner curtains of the sanctuary, would ruin the service of the Church. Sometimes we are careful of the outer coverings, but are less sensible of the value of that which is hid beneath. Whereas on the other hand there may be, and there are, cases in which the hand that thinks itself honoured in bearing the curtain of blue, is comparatively heedless of the rude external covering. Indeed the Holy Spirit alone can rightly combine these two things even in our apprehensions, much more in our actings. Yet there is nothing more practically blessed, than for the heavenliness and beauty of Christian character to be found in those who outwardly are without form and comeliness for Christ's sake. Our Gershonite service is not faithfully performed where either of these things is neglected. It is needful also to the worship of the Church ; for the priests of Israel could not worship if either the badgers' skins or the fine white linen were left behind.

The Gershonites were divided into two families. These are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families ; Libni, which means

“for edification,” and Shimei “hearing” (of prayer by God). The application of these names is almost too obvious to need remark, for surely there is nothing which so “makes for edifying” as the cultivation of the feelings and ways of Christ. The strength that always attends the development of true Christian grace in the character and walk of the saints, must be well known by all who watch their progress. And where these things are found, there also will prayer be offered, and prayer be heard; for prayer must be hindered, and the answer to prayer also, where these things are not. But if, as strangers in spirit, we seek to cherish those things which cause the character of Christ to be developed in our feelings, our judgments, and our outward ways, we shall soon find the reason why the names of Libni and Shimei are given to the “strangers” who bear the curtains of the sanctuary. The chief also of the house of the Gershonites was Eliasaph the son of Lael. Lael means “dedication to God;” and Eliasaph, “God addeth increase.” Thus then dedication to God—increase from him—strangership here—edification—and supplication answered, are all connected with those who guard through the wilderness, those truths which touch the character and the ways of the Lord. Anxious that none be lost and that none be injured, and not forgetting the value of the outward badger skin because the eye of the worshipper finds its own more proper object in the curtain of blue.

The next division of the family of Levi were the Koathites. Koath means “congregation,” and leads our thoughts to *associated* and *united* blessing. The importance of this name will be felt by those who may have known what it is to have had their souls awakened to a sense, perhaps a lively sense, of the excellency and beauty of developed Christian character, without seeing so clearly the union of the Church together in redemption and resurrection-blessing through Christ. Oneness with Christ is not learnt by contemplating the grace that was developed in him, it rather separates into distance; neither is oneness *in* Christ learnt by observing the manifold diversities and measures of grace discoverable in our brethren,—diversity produces rather a feeling of difference, and difference destroys communion. But it was the business of the Koathites to bear those

vessels of the sanctuary around which the united *consecrated* worship of Israel centred. Each vessel spoke of some covenanted blessing in which all alike participated. The altar and the vessels thereof, the laver, the table of the shew bread, and the mercy seat,—all these things represent to us not the character of the blessed Lord, but his relation to us as known in redemption and in resurrection within the holy place where all blessings are held in common, and where the joy of one is the joy of all.

Any ministration therefore that would ground the Church in these her common blessings, the blessings of all saints together, would fall under the character of service performed by the sons of Kohath. How precious, how strengthening such ministration is, I need not say, to the soul that values it. To see the excellency of Christ's character is blessed; but it is yet more blessed to see how all the value of this excellency is made, through redemption, to rest upon the Church, and that in union one with another. He whose character is seen in the blue and the white linen and the badger's skin, is found in all the value of that character in the blood of the altar, in the water of the laver, and in the shew bread of the golden table; and there he becomes our food, our food together. In all his history I see that he was the heavenly One, heavenly in his character, heavenly in all his ways; but when he has finished his character here, and departed to be with the Father, what does he teach us? Not merely that he has glorified the Father, and has a character worthy of the glory on which he is entering; but that the results of that character are given to us, even his own glory and his own joy. Here we find, as I believe, the true shew bread for the first time presented. Presented so that it might be our food,—that we might have his joy fulfilled in ourselves and so be strengthened. Ministration of this character has a dignity and value peculiarly its own; and therefore the Kohathites are said to be the chief of the Levites (iii. 32). The experience of the soul of every saint, who has ever felt the preciousness of truth like this, will abundantly attest their title to this pre-eminence. Ministry that does not embrace the *application* of the excellency of Christ's character, so as to give the Church all the results thereof, in acceptance and blessing, will never effectually unite and knit

together in love. But union in love is the great end of God in his dealings with those whom he has chosen, and therefore if we comprehend, it is *with all saints*, what is the length and breadth and depth and height &c. The epistles of Paul perhaps will best shew what Kohathite ministration means.

The names of the sons of Kohath are remarkable, and shew the high and happy character of blessing that attaches to those who are taught to bear the *vessels* of the sanctuary. "Of Kohath was the family of the Amramites, and the family of the Izecharites, and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites: these are the families of the Kohathites."

Amram means a "high or exalted people"—a people taught to know their heavenly calling. I scarcely need observe, that it is the knowledge of Jesus, as typified by the vessels of the Tabernacle, that teaches us how we are brought in association with him, into the Holiest, to share his priesthood, and to feed on the bread of the golden table. The Amramites had to carry though not to handle these. Izechar means "oil"—oil from the olive tree. Both "oil" and "olive tree," are symbols too frequently used in scripture to need much explanation. It was oil that was taken both for the lights of the sanctuary and for the holy ointment. It was oil that anointed both the priest and the king. It is oil that soothes the wound and gladdens the countenance. The anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth (Zech. iv.) are described as sons of Izechar—i.e. sons of oil. The olive tree is the tree of fatness. The olive tree said, "should I leave my fatness wherewith by me they honour God and man."

As known by us, the Church, it is a tree which God hath planted in the earth, whose fatness never faileth: because it stands in the power of gift and calling never to be repented of. Indeed the great principle of Kohathite ministration (and in this it is contrasted with that of the families of Gershon) is, that it leads our thoughts to that which his grace confers, rather than to that which we dedicate or return to him. The unction received, is the result of establishment in Christ. "Now he that establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us," &c. And again,

“he that hath wrought us for this self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” Amram therefore leads our thoughts to the *high calling*. Izehar to the *anointing* of the Church. The one the gift, the other the calling; but there is another character of blessing marked on these things, that the Church holds its calling and its gifts in strict association and fellowship together, and therefore the Hebronite gives us another family feature of the house of Kohath; for Hebron means “association or confederation together.” The Church is congregated (Kohath), that it may be united (Hebron). And as I have already said, the true power of union is found in our knowledge of our common blessings, as learnt in the altar, the laver, and the vessels of the sanctuary; for selfishness is best extinguished by the sight of what grace has given. But they are not merely united to one another, they are also united to God. “Ye are in him that is true;” “God dwelleth in you.” This is the real strong hold of their strength. And therefore Uzziel means “my strength is God.”

Yet although endowed with all these blessings, and that by the sure and everlasting gift of God, even the very knowledge of them brings necessary conflict here. No one knew better than St. Paul that the Church’s strength and *his* strength was God; yet this did not set him above the need of daily help and sympathy, and kind protection from him who is over the house of God; accordingly we find him saying, “as the sufferings of Christ abound in me, so my consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” And again, “who delivered us from so great a death and doth deliver, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver;” for knowledge of the Church’s strength in God must not be separated from the knowledge of the love and sympathy and care of Christ. This may teach us the reason of Eleazar the high priest being chief over the chief of the Levites; for Eleazar means “God is my help.” And thus while “dedication to God,” is the pervading feature of the family of Gershon, help received *from* God and the knowledge of it, is the great characteristic of the family of Kohath.

The father of the third family of the Levites was Merari, which means “my bitterness or sorrow.” The boards of the Tabernacle

were their burthen, together with the sockets of silver on which they stood, and which separated them from contact with the ground. The boards were encased in gold, and formed of course the framework of the Tabernacle. Wood is, in Leviticus, always, I believe, typical of the weak "Enosh" nature of man. It is that which the fire consumes. Gold is the type not merely of the strength, but of the intrinsic excellency also of the nature of God. Combined, they typify his nature who was God manifest in the flesh.

It was the office of the Merarite family to bear these golden boards, and as often as they rested to place them fitly together on their sockets of silver, and there their service ended. The coverings which were to cover them, were borne by other hands; it was theirs to leave them in all their preciousness, naked and bare in the midst of the wilderness. How entire the contrast between the golden framework of God's Tabernacle, raised on its sockets of silver, and the rude and barren wilderness in which it stood.

Yet this is one necessary part of our Levite lesson. Divine nature, whether seen in its perfectness as in Christ, or less perfectly as known in ourselves, is known and must be known in sorrowful contrast with all that groaneth in the bondage of corruption here. The very feeblest apprehension of the difference between God and the world—between the nature of God and the nature of man, will instantly put a bitter ingredient into our cup; and if it increases in power will surely lead us to say, "O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest; I would hasten my escape from the stormy wind and tempest." The very circumstance of knowing Jesus as divine, and the understanding (though it be but in a very feeble measure) what separation in the power of divine nature means, will necessarily bring sorrow with it. It shows us the loveliness of him who was perfect in the midst of this lost world,—it opens to us the secret of his grief,—it shows us the nature of his sorrowful separation from all that was of the world; and makes us feel how distant the thoughts and ways of nature are from the ways of God. But this lesson cannot be learnt without much discipline of soul. Our human feelings and sympathies (even where there is no question about positive evil) will feel the painfulness of separa-

tion ; but even if this were otherwise, the Spirit in us groans because of the condition of that which is separated from. Sorrow therefore will attend the lesson, and it will not be learned without a struggle. But it humbles us and teaches us what human weakness means. But the same blessed One, the strength of whose ways humbles us, is he who has become our Refuge. For this is what his marvellous grace has done. He places himself before us, that in seeing him we might learn God, and the ways of God, in the midst of the world's evil. We feel it to be a lesson of sorrow. And thus we may learn the meaning of Merari. It humbles us also, and teaches us our weakness. And this gives us the character of the Mahlite. But in him, in whom we learn the difference between man and God, we find a refuge also ; and this is the meaning of Mushi ; "one who has found a refuge." Of Merari was the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites. These are the families of Merari. And the chief of the house of the father of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail :—Zuriel, my rock is God ; and Abihail, Father of strength.

Both of these names are names indicative of strength, but of strength shielding weakness, rather than as in the case of Eleazer strength supplied in energy and power of service. Yet we must not despise this Merarite lesson. It may seem the least important ; yet surely unless there be a deep foundation laid in the knowledge of the difference between humanity and God, and unless we understand how weakness has been made strength in him who has become our refuge, we shall be ill-prepared for other service. The Merarite feature therefore will always be found strongly marked in the true servants of the Tabernacle.

For although it is the manner of divine teaching in the scriptures, to separate the constituent parts of that about which it teaches, that by learning each part distinctly we might more easily apprehend the nature of the whole, in which they are combined ; yet we must be careful not to hold in division those things which are practically known by us only in combination. The colours of the rainbow are learned most easily by being presented to us one by one ; but we should have little conception of the bow itself, if we had never seen

its colours in their marvellous combination there. So is it with Christ and the Church. All perfectness of character, all fulness of grace is found in him; and out of his fulness have all we received, and grace corresponding to the grace in Him. We have therefore to covet earnestly the best things; and to seek to unite the divine features of character and service, which, in order that we may more clearly apprehend them, are in the types presented to us one by one. He who is antitypically a Levite is also a Priest, and he who is a Priest is also a King, for all things are ours. If therefore we find our feet turned chiefly into the Merarite or Gershonite path of service, yet let us not think that the path of the Kohathites cannot be ours; neither on the other hand, if our souls have found their chief delight in bearing the *vessels* of the sanctuary, let us on that account neglect the curtains or the boards. It is a happy thing when any having learned the depths of nature's weakness in contrast with the character of God, and having surely proved the refuge, are yet able as Gershonites in spirit, to show that his own divine power hath been given them in all things that pertain unto life and godliness; and that it may be used in the joy and gladness of the acceptance of grace, as taught in the names of the sons of Kohath. Yet if any who may, through grace, be enabled to regard themselves as belonging to the "chief of the families of Levi," should behold another servant, devoted perhaps too exclusively to the services of Gershon or Merari; let them not despise him or undervalue his gifts, but rather seek to temper their thoughts by his, or it may be his thoughts by theirs. To combine rather than to reject is frequently the true work of wisdom among the saints.

It may perhaps be thought that I have viewed the Levite too much, as though he were the Priest; and ascribed to the former therefore a knowledge which attaches only to the latter. This would be true, if I were speaking only of the types; for the eye of the Priest alone was permitted to see the curtain and the vessels of the sanctuary. But in the antitype, every Levite is also a Priest; and therefore we bear not things that we know not, but things which we know,—things which our eyes have seen. It is an honour and a blessing to bear the things of God, even though untaught in their use and in

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their value ; but it is a still higher calling to bear, and to be instructed in the preciousness of what we bear. This is the calling of the Church ; and therefore we read of “ the riches of the full assurance of understanding ; and of knowing the things that are freely given to us of God. May we have grace to remember our happy Levite service, and we shall never find ourselves unprovided with employment in the wilderness.