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Greetings for the New Year Our Year Text for 1938

"It is written, Be Ye Holy; for I am Holy." - 1 Peter 1:16.

IT IS with more or less interest and mingled emotions that one looks upon the passing of time. The manner in which one has spent his days has much to do with the way he accepts the fact, the solemn fact, that moment by moment life is coming to a close, when the silver cord is loosed, when soon the dust returns to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to the God who gave it.

Far back have men marked this passing of time by some token associated usually with the seasons. This was also the case with the nation of Israel, especially before the days of their exile, when they reckoned the beginning of their year with the autumn, at which time the product of field and vineyard were all gathered in. In addition to this we find that God commanded them to celebrate the passover as the beginning of a new year: "This month shall be unto you-the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you." He who has a true conception of the import of this latter command in its typical aspect, and who has taken refuge under the blood, can say with another as he meditates upon the past and looks with hope upon the future

" I stand upon the threshold of two years,
And backward look, and forward strain my eyes;
Upon a blotted record fall my tears.
While brushing them aside, a sweet surprise
Breaks like the day-dawn on my upturned face
As I remember all Thy grace.
Thou hast been good to me: the burdened past
Thou hast borne with me, and the future days
Are in Thy hands. I tremble not, but cast
My care on Thee, and in prayer and praise
Prepare to make the coming year the best,
Because of noble work and sweeter rest."

God has kindly veiled our eyes so that we can not see far into the future, but we do see "these things" of which He spoke "coming to pass," and therefore should he able to lift up our hearts and

rejoice because our deliverance draweth nigh. Our confidence rests in His ransom work, for because of that we can be acceptable sacrifices in the eyes of God, and through the resurrection of our beloved Master we have the assurance of faith and of hope. We know that it is to this class of consecrated believers that the Apostle referred when he said

"If Ye be Christ's, then are Ye Abraham's Seed, and Heirs According to the Promise."

This statement of his is a most definite one concerning the standing of those to whom he was writing. He refers to a relationship which exists between them and Christ, and that this relationship is according to certain promises made by One who was in a position to make promises, and to one whose standing in His sight was of such a character as to warrant the promise.

It indicates that Abraham's seed and the heirs according to the promise are one. The fact that he speaks of them as being Christ's indicates also that he has in his thoughts something of momentous importance to them and others to whom this truth may be extended.

The Apostle speaks with authority here as elsewhere when setting before his hearers things of importance relating to the Christian life with its privileges and its responsibilities. He did not take lightly his position as the messenger to the Gentiles, and his services to them show his deep understanding of all phases of the experiences which should come to them in their endeavor to make their calling and election sure.

He speaks with authority because he had been carried into the third heaven and there had revealed to him great truths of, which he dare not speak, but which revelation had given him an assurance that never failed in all his life of service as a servant of God and as one of the brethren of whom he spoke when he said, "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren; in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee." (Hdb. 2:11, 12.) This heirship to God, as the Apostle speaks of it, is one of sonship. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." - Gal. 4:6, 7.

This special relationship is positively limited to those who are Christ's, for again he says, "To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." - Gal. 3:16, 17.

The sincerity and force of the Apostle's argument here leads to a consideration of the basis upon which he founds it, and as this basis seems to have much to do with the patriarch Abraham and through him with his posterity, or certain of them-those who are Christ's, a study of Abraham's life may throw much light upon this message of Paul's to the Church at Galatia; especially so since he refers to a certain covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, and also to the fact that Abraham's life and his family relationships were an allegory and that this allegory illustrates two covenants coming under and dependent upon the original blanket covenant, "in thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

The Oath-Bound Covenant

Abraham was separated from others of his people because God saw in him certain qualities of heart and spirit which well fitted him to carry out this first step in the types pointing to the antitypes; and this special quality of character was integrity, dependability, honesty of purpose.

Because of these was he drawn out from Ur of the Chaldees; and after the account of the death of Terah in Haran where they had for a time dwelt, we read that "The Lord had said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation. and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed:

This was, the first definite promise made to and concerning the fallen race, though vague intimations had been given before. Here was the selecting of the man to whom God repeated eight times the positive promise that in his seed and through, his seed should be worked out the various features of the eternal purpose of God, or the divine Plan of the Ages, which should reach out to all men, including even those who had gone into the greatest depths of depravity and degradation.

The Apostle calls attention 'to the fact that God's dealing with Abraham is of interest to these "heirs according to the promise" in a very special way, because He not only made the promise, but because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, 'as we read: "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into 'that within the veil: whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec."

Because of these definite promises and this oath of God we can realize in a great measure the importance of the covenant to the Church, which is being separated from the world during this Gospel Age; and to that world itself in the restitution features of the Plan. These promises may well be called the "Oath-bound Covenant." Abraham's reaction was indicated by his faith as demonstrated in his future conduct, for: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and 'he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange. country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." - Heb. 11:8-10.

"It is written, that Abraham had two sons; the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise, which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar . . . and answereth to Jerusalem which 'now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free. . . Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." - Gal. 4:22-28.

Thus the Apostle points to the, law covenant. which was added four hundred and thirty years afterward, and which was represented by Hagar and failed to accomplish the deliverance of the Jewish nation and the world of mankind: because the law was the measure of a perfect man's ability -- and none of the fallen race were perfect, hence no man could redeem his brother. All had sinned and come under condemnation. There was "none perfect, no not one. "All the families of the earth" could not be blessed through the law, nor could it bring forth the heirs to the promise.

New Covenant Blessings to All Mankind

Manifestly the blessing of the world must depend upon a new covenant, with a better mediator than Moses. The sacrifice of bulls and goats of the old law covenant must give way to a better sacrifice, and' so we find by the mouth of, Jeremiah a prophecy to the effect that God will make such "a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," under which new covenant He will put His law, in their inward parts and write it in their hearts and forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.

This points to the times of restitution- of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets from the beginning, when the law shall go forth out of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; when "His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley: and half of the mountain shall move toward the north, and half of it toward the south."

Of what special import to Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise is this blessing of the world of mankind during those days when "the Lord' shall make known His salvation: and His righteousness shall be openly shown in the sight of the nations"?

The Master answers this question when He makes a statement to the effect that those who have done good shall come forth from their graves unto the resurrection of life. And again, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne." He refers to that day when the world shall be established that it shall not be moved, and they shall sing unto the Lord with the harp: with the harp and the voice of a psalm. When "all the ends of the earth 'Ball see the salvation of our God."

We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the "children of promise"-not under the law but under grace, being fitted to be of the Body of Christ, a part of the Messiah, and destined to have a share in the work of restitution: for He "hath made us [potential] kings and priests unto God and His Father." - Rev. 1:6.

Looking on down the ages the Revelator could say as he saw the plan unfolding: "For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." - Rev. 19:6-8.

Here can be seen in the type the blessed arrangement whereby the child of promise shall bless' the child of the bondwoman and the children of Keturah-the world of mankind. As Isaac was heir to all of Abraham's possessions and through him the others were blessed, so God's possessions were given to, and the blessings shall come through, the antitypical Isaac-Jesus, to those who were bound under the law, and to those with whom God has had no direct dealings-the world at large.

Heirs According to the Promise

Sharing in this work of blessing and showing forth the glory of God shall be found these heirs according to the promise. Those like unto the stars of heaven; those who have been filled with all the fulness of God; those who have covenanted with Him by sacrifice, have presented their bodies a living sacrifice and are being transformed by the renewing of their minds-not merely reformed, but transformed. They are new creatures, begotten of the Spirit of God, dead to their sins and alive unto Christ, and inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. These shall be born upon the spirit plane, shall partake of immortality, and over them the second death shall have no power, for they will have had a part in the first resurrection. They are called "blessed and holy" by the risen and ascended Lord, through the mouth of the Revelator, John. Thus "shall come the glorification of the Church, the heirs according to the promise.

Then shall begin the Millennial reign of Christ during which all evil influences shall be restrained, "the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the deep." Then shall the seed like unto the sands of the sea be perfected and brought into harmony with God's righteous principles, or go into the second death from which there shall be no further awakening. These Millennial blessings and trials for life on the human plane shall extend to all who have lived upon the earth from the beginning, for "all in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth," unto judgment or opportunity, under a full knowledge of God's truth; for He "cometh to judge the earth; with righteousness shall He judge the world, and the people with equity." - Psalm 98:9.

At the beginning of this period God's people, the Israelites indeed, shall be found in the land of promise with Abraham himself, for the promise was to Abraham and to his seed after him. And thus shall begin the reign of Christ upon earth with the beginning of the fulfillment of the Master's prayer - "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Thus does the Holy Spirit lead on in the unfolding of the truth embodied in the eternal purpose of God, and it becomes ever more clear that these developments are dependent upon a changed order of things. That change again depends upon a new covenant relationship with His people,-Judah and Israel, under which relationship the blessings of restitution shall extend to all men; for ultimately God's Kingdom shall be established on the earth and His will be done as it is in heaven. Then the prayer of the Master shall be answered in full, and the "heirs according to the promise" shall have a part in the restoration of all things.

Wholesome Introspection

This statement of the Apostle is ever a comforting subject for meditation to the consecrated believer as one of the "precious promises," but perhaps becomes more so at this season of the New Year when a wholesome introspection may be a valuable check as to our progress in the Master's service; and one may well ask himself if he is growing in the power and might of the Holy Spirit and developing a character pleasing to the Heavenly Father. Are we using every means of grace possible to promote a healthy growth from the standpoint of the new creature? Are we seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God? Are we setting our minds on things above, not on things on the earth

To one versed in present truth these features of the Gospel stand out with a new meaning and an added beauty. With this measure of light and understanding "what manner of persons ought we to be?" Are we developing a character which shall receive His commendation-"Well done, thou good and faithful servant"?

It might be well to briefly look into the meaning of character in this respect. In 1 Cor. 12, we find the Apostle setting forth the various gifts of the Holy Spirit to those of the early Church, and for certain reasons their consideration was especially desirable for the Corinthian Church at that time. Some of them had evidently failed and were in danger of spiritual harm. They probably showed signs of spiritual pride in the possession of these special gifts, and spiritual pride is one of the gravest defects in the character of one so afflicted, for it seems impossible to be able to discern it or realize it in oneself. The tendency in such cases leads to self-glorification instead of the glorification of the Heavenly Father. Some of these gifts were of a rather mysterious nature and were designated by such terms as "the gift of tongues," "of prophecy," "healing," etc., and were evidently given for some special purpose in the inauguration of the Gospel Age, and- to expedite the spread of the message among men: These gifts, after serving their purpose in that day, have passed away; we no longer see them for they are no longer needed.

But is it not true that they may exist in this day in a modified way-in talents and abilities which may be an equivalent of those special gifts of the early days? And is it not possible that these abilities may lead one to think more highly of himself than he ought to think? Those gifts of which the Apostle speaks and those abilities and talents of the present day were not and are not condemned by him, 'but he urges upon them a more excellent way than coveting these gifts, a more surpassing way. And then he says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal."

Then follows his exhortation on love-the most outstanding classic on the subject to be found in any language. How he contrasts the misuse of gifts and talents when ministered without that God-given quality, love! How easy to become dogmatic or dictatorial when one possesses intellectual qualifications, such as a command of many languages or a keen foresight and the ability to make deductions from present indications; and thus lead to strife, hatred, separations and sectarianism, that most potent weapon of the Adversary, effectively used by him since the day of Pentecost!

"Be Ye Holy

Since God is love and since the Apostle assures us that "He which hath called you is holy," we see clearly that if he desires to develop a Christ-like, a God-like character, the child of God must strive toward that goal of perfection-love, and thus realize in himself the fulfillment of the Scripture, "Be ye holy: for I am holy.

Can one who professes consecration give a stronger evidence that his consecration is true, than to resolve at this beginning of a new year to yield himself fully, if he has not already done so, and enter more thoroughly into- the process of transformation by the renewing of the mind?

The test upon the Church today is character love, holiness, God-likeness, Christ-likeness; and only by its development can one expect to be found among the seed of Abraham and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, in that day which seems so rapidly drawing near. May we put off the things of the flesh-anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy communication out of our mouths; if any be guilty, and let us search the Scriptures that we may realize more deeply just what the Apostle

means by these deeds of the old man. Let us search our hearts, for we may be harboring within our breasts some of these soul-destroying qualities. Let us put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.

A Snare, a Trap, a Stumbling-Block

"And David saith, Let their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling-block, and as recompense unto them; let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see." - Rom. 11:9, 10.

AT ONE TIME these words seemed irreconcilable with either justice or love. Supposing that the poor Jews who were blinded, stumbled into eternal torment, God's conduct seemed inscrutable-no matter if, through the Apostle, He did promise (vss. 25, 26) that, generations after, the blindness should be turned away after the fullness of the elect Church, the Gentiles, had been brought into divine favor.

We reasoned that the recovery of a man's great-great-great-grand-children could never compensate for his own loss, if he went to, eternal misery. And although trained in Presbyterian thought it seemed terrible to read the calm, cold assertion, "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which lie seeketh for; but the elect bath obtained it, and the rest were blinded"- "stumbled" "snared," "trap peed."

Knowledge of the Divine Plan Enables Us to Understand the Scriptures Properly

But, thank God, our own blindness was removed and the breaking of the Millennial dawn, revealing the Divine Plan, set our ideas right, enabled us to rightly divide and apply the Scriptures and brought the grandest order out of our confusion. We found that the hell to which Israel went was the grave-hades; that there is no consciousness in hell (Heb. sheol; Greek, hades - Ezek. 37:12; Psa. 6:5); that blinded, stumbled Israel is still there, and that not merely their grand-children, centuries after, will have their blindness removed and their sins forgiven, but all of them will individually enjoy these favors.

They all were included in the unbelief and blindness and stumbling, that God might have mercy upon all and recover every one of them from that blindness and bring every one of them to that full, clear knowledge which will render every man without excuse and fully responsible for his choice of life through obedience 'to Christ, or of the "second death" through disobedience. See verses 27-32; John 5:28; Ezek. 37:12, 13; John 1:9.

To see the matter thus clearly was a great relief; but still our heart cried out to God for an explanation and a, just reason for the blinding, stumbling, and entrapping of all but an elect few of a nation to which, as a whole, He had made many gracious promises and for whom He had already done so much, for eighteen centuries-a nation which alone of all the nations of earth recognized Him as its Ruler and were under covenant relations to Him and His Law.

Israel's Promises Earthly-Not Heavenly

The answer of God's Word is that, while He had called Israel by His promises to a great and noble part in His Plan of salvation, He did not call -them to the place of chief favor and honor. His promises to them were earthly, not heavenly. And although all of the sons of Jacob were called or invited, it was a conditional call which the nation as a whole never complied with. Only the few ever kept His laws (or were reckoned to have kept them by proper intention) and hence, all along, it was true that some children of Jacob, professedly children of God, were really of their father the Devil (John 8:44), because they were not all Israelites that were of the nation of Israel.- Rom. 9:6.

When God's due time came for the great Atonement for sin to be made by our Redeemer's sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 7:27), that also was His due time for beginning the selection of His spiritual Israel, to whom He extends heavenly promises and for whom He has reserved the very highest place in His great Plan-next to Himself.

Earthly Israel Set Aside Until the Completion of the Spiritual Israel

Christ Himself became the Head and Chief of this spiritual or heavenly Israel, of which fleshly Israel with its precious but earthly promises had so long been a type or shadow. And as soon as Christ's sacrifice was completed the work of selecting the spiritual Israel as His "Bride" or "Body" or "brethren" and "joint-heirs"- was due to begin.

It was not God's purpose that the two Israels should continue side by side; hence, as soon as the spiritual was begun, the earthly was set aside; not set aside forever, but merely until the spiritual Israel had been selected. But although the fleshly house of Israel was set aside at the time of Christ's crucifixion (Matt. 23:38), yet the first opportunity for membership in, spiritual Israel was given to that people.

It is not surprising that only a handful, a "remnant," of fleshly Israel was able to stand the tests of faith and sacrifice exacted of the spiritual Israelites. Those "hypocrites" to whom it was said, "Ye are of your father the Devil," would surely not be in condition to be attracted by the Truth and its spirit into fellowship in the new spiritual Israel. And even of those who were Israelites indeed, who trusted in the promises of God, we cannot suppose that many would be without guile, pure in heart, and just ready for faith and obedience under the Gospel Age call. By the divine arrangement, therefore, the preaching of the Gospel of the Cross skimmed off, as it were, into the Gospel Church the cream class of that people "and the rest were blinded"; and God was agreeable to their being blinded.

The Great Gulf Between the Earthly and the Heavenly Israel to be Destroyed

God would allow "a great gulf" to be fixed by their prejudices between them and the spiritual Israel; He would make of them a spectacle before the world, and although outcasts from His favor for a time they should, as a dead nation, be, witnesses to His Word throughout the world; and, finally, when He shall have selected and polished and glorified His spiritual Israel, He will destroy the "great gulf," turn away their blindness as a people, and receive back to favor all of them who then will come-showing mercy upon them through the glorified spiritual Israel-vss. 31, 32.

"O, the depth ,of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God"! How grandly systematic and reasonable and just is the Divine Plan of the Ages! - Rom. 11:33.

How Their Table Became a Snare, a Trap and a Cause of Stumbling

But now another point deserves consideration In what way was their table their snare and trap and cause of stumbling?

Their "table"" signifies their food; and the table or food spread before fleshly Israel, God's fleshly children, consisted of those special favors and promises of God to them as His chosen people. (Matt. 15:26, 27.) Thus seen, it was God's goodness and favor toward them that stumbled and entrapped them and prejudiced their unconsecrated hearts. They presumed upon God's favor. They said within themselves, "We have Abraham to our father." (Matt. 3:9.) They concluded that God must keep His promises to Abraham and that they, being His children, the Kingdom to bless the world must, sooner or later be themselves. They trusted in themselves and, despised others; they became arrogant, haughty and self-confident, and hence that much the less the humble-spirited, that the Lord sought, for His spiritual Israel.

Pride Led to Oversight of Certain Scriptures Foretelling "the Sufferings of Christ"

Their pride led them to look only at the promises of glory and honor and power to accompany the exaltation of Israel, and led them to ignore the passages which tell that Messiah must first be rejected and "led as a lamb to the slaughter" and "pour out His soul unto death," being smitten for our sins, "the chastisement of our peace being laid upon Him."

For the same reason they overlooked the statements of God's Prophets that they should first be scattered amongst all nations, where God would show them no favor; and that their later, blessing would be in connection with their regathering out of all nations (Jer. 16:13-17; Deut. 4:26-28; 28:36, 37, 63-65),, and that when the Lord shall deliver them "they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as for an only son." - Zech. 12:10.

Thus, their "table" became their "trap," which still holds them tightly-their pride of heart, built upon those promises, still blinds them. But we should notice carefully that their stumbling was not because of any wrong done them by God. No;

"His way is perfect." "Every good and perfect gift cometh down from our Father." "He is not a God of confusion" and "He is the same yesterday, today, and forever." The "table" which He provided was good. The entire difficulty was that Israel's consecration was incomplete; hence the majority of them were not of the class whom the Lord intended should know the Truth before the Messianic Age, when the eyes of all shall be opened and all shall -come to an accurate knowledge of the Truth.

The Things Written were Specially for Our Learning

But now we come to the most important feature of this subject. These things were written for our learning, upon whom the ends of the Ages are come. (1 Cor. 10:11.) As fleshly Israel was a shadow or type of spiritual Israel, so the stumbling, trapping, snaring in the harvest of their Age foreshadowed a similar sifting out of all except a faithful "remnant" here.

Here, as there, many in nominal spiritual Israel are not Israelites, but "hypocrites," and of their father the Devil. Here, as there, all who are really of Israel and before whom the "table of God's bounties has been spread with Providential care -"exceeding great and precious promises"-all of these do not digest and appropriate God's promises to the upbuilding of characters pleasing to God and fit for the Kingdom; and hence, even while feeding at His "table," such receive the grace of God in **vain**. To these, as well as to their prototypes, the "table" of Truth which they delight in is sure to become a snare, a trap, a stumbling-block. And it is specially for the sake of such that we now write to put them on guard as to **how they use**, the "food" now so abundantly supplied to us. - Luke 12:37.

Only those who have at least some hunger and thirst after righteousness [Truth] are at all welcomed at this "table"; it is the children's table and others than God's true children may gather and eat only the crumbs that fall from it.

Unlawful for any Except the Priests to Eat the Shew-Bread

It is the table of the consecrated believers at which others "have no right to eat." (Heb. 13:10.) The truly consecrated are the antitypical or Royal Priesthood, whose "table" was typified in the Tabernacle and in the Temple by the table of shewbread, of which it was not lawful for any except the priests to eat. If, therefore, you have "tasted that the Lord is gracious if you have "tasted of the good Word of God if you have had "meat [food] to eat that the world knoweth not of"; if you have tasted the "present truth"- "meat in due season"-it implies either that you are one of the consecrated ones, one of the Royal Priests, or else that you are in contact with them and receiving crumbs from their "table."

The giving of all truth, and especially "present truth," implies an object. That object is the sanctifying or setting apart to God and to His holy service. The crumbs of truth are to awaken a desire for and to lead to the act, of consecration or sanctification. The full table of bounties is for those who have taken the step of fully consecrating themselves, their wills and their all to the Lord-and the bountiful supply of exceeding great and precious promises then granted to them is that by these they might be strengthened and enabled to carry out fully, step by step, the full consecration they have made-even unto death.

The object of our consecration and subsequent disciplining under the guidance and power of the truth is for the formation of character, for "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." The Apostle clearly shows the object of our precious promises, our spiritual food, saying, "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." (2 Cor. 7:1.) He assures us that knowledge may be received and used for a different purpose and produce a bad, instead of good effect and puff up or make proud and self-willed.

What Effect has the Truth upon Our Hearts?

It becomes each of us to ask himself the questions, Have not I received considerable knowledge of the Truth of God's character and Plan? Has it had the bad effect of puffing me up and making me feel that I am somebody? Has it caused a self satisfied feeling, which ignores my own weaknesses and failings and merely relies on God's mercy and seeks to exaggerate that mercy and to ignore Scripture texts which clearly show that "God is angry with the wicked every day"; that "the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness," for "all unrighteousness is sin"; that "whosoever committeth sin [willfully] is [a child] of the Devil," and that "all the [intelligently and willfully] wicked will God destroy"? Or has it caused me to feel more humble and dependent on the Giver of all good? And has it, properly, caused me to feel divine approval and rest and security, only under the merit of the precious blood when I am using my best endeavors for righteousness, godliness, purity, and truth?

The latter is the only legitimate and proper use of the truth. If the true view of God's character, seen in His Plan and the exceeding great and precious promises held out to the overcomers, reaching our ears and our hearts, fails to awaken there a responsive adoration of things that are true, things that are honest, things that are just, things that are pure, and things that are lovely, and a desire to be more and more transformed to that Godlikeness and accordingly to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and to become more and more perfected in holiness-if these are not the effects of the truth upon our flesh and our spirits (minds, dispositions) we are receiving the grace of God in vain; for it was given for no other purpose. And if we receive God's grace and truth in vain, we may be sure it will be but a little while until it will slip from us and be replaced by misconceptions.

Let us, therefore, take heed to the illustration given us in God's typical people, lest our table, so bountifully spread and served by the Master Himself, become to us a snare, a trap, and a stumbling block into blindness -- the "outer darkness" of the world, because of a failure to properly use its blessings already received.

"Let us fear lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest [by full consecration and perfecting holiness in our hearts and conduct and thus developing our characters and being changed from glory to glory into the likeness of 'God's dear Son] any of us should seem to come short of it." - *Heb.4:1 -The Watch Tower*.

"The Old Year and the New"

"Into the Silent Places
The Old Year goes tonight,
Bearing old pain, old sadness,
Old care, and old delight;
Mistakes and fears and failures, -
The things that could not last
But naught that e'er was truly ours
Goes with him to the Past.

"Out of the Silent Places
The Young Year comes tonight,
Bringing new pain, new sadness,
New care and new delight;
Go forth to meet him bravely,
The New Year all untried;
The things the Old Year left with us
Faith, Hope, and Love-abide."

Life Through Death, or Lessons from the Flowers of the Field

(Continued from last issue)

WE CAN not feel a consciousness of death the words are a contradiction in terms. If we had literally passed out of this life and been resurrected in the next, we would not feel dead; we would only be conscious of a new and wonderful life within us. Our consciousness of death would be an entirely negative matter the old pains would be unable to touch us, the old bonds would be unable to fetter us. Our actual consciousness would have passed into the new existence; we would be independent of the old. And a like independence is the characteristic of the new flood of resurrection life that comes to us as we learn this fresh lesson of dying-a grand independence of any earthly thing to satisfy our souls; the liberty of those who have nothing to lose, because they have nothing to keep. Our little all has been given to our heavenly Father. No one can any longer take anything away from us: if they take it, they take it from our Father. And our Father has power -to prevent their taking it, or, to give it to them, or to make them pay for that taken whatever price He sees fit to exact of them. "Vengeance belongeth unto Me; I will recompense, saith the Lord." (Heb. 10:30.) As for ourselves, we can do without anything while we have God. Praise His name.

See the expression of abandonment about a wild rose calyx as time goes on, and it begins to grow towards the end for which it has had to count all things but loss: the look of emptiness has gone it is flung back joyously now, for simultaneously with the new dying a richer life has begun to work at its heart, for

"Ever with death it weaveth
The warp and woof of the world."

The lovely wild-rose petals -that have drifted away are almost forgotten in the "reaching forth unto the things that are before": -the seed-vessel has begun to form; it is "yielded, to bring forth fruit." - Rom. 6:19; 7:4.

Yes, there is another stage to be developed in us after the lesson of absolute, unquestioning surrender to God has been learned. A life that has been poured forth to Him must find its, crown, its completion, in being poured forth for man; out of surrender must grow forth sacrifice. "They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." - 2 Cor. 8:5.

Back to the Cross once more; if there is any place where this fresh lesson can be learned, it is there. "Hereby perceive we the love [of Christ], because He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (1 John 3:16.) It is the very love from Calvary that must come down into our hearts. "Yea, and if I be poured forth upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." (Phil. 2:17.) So spake the Apostle who drank most deeply of the Master's spirit; and again, "Death worketh in us, but life in you." (2 Cor. 4:12.) "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish . . . the ministry." - Acts 20:24.

Deeper and deeper must be the dying, for wider and fuller is the life tide that it is to liberate no longer limited by the narrow range of our own being, but with endless powers of multiplying in other souls. Death must reach the very springs of our nature to set it free. It is not this -or that thing that must go now: it is blindly, helplessly! recklessly, our very selves. A dying must come upon all that would hinder God's working through us-all interests, all impulses, all energies that are "born of the flesh" -- all that is of the flesh and apart from His Spirit. Only thus can the life of Jesus in its intensity of love for all mankind have its way in our souls. Then --

Death to Self is the Way Out into a Life of Sacrifice

The dry dandelion with its ball of silver down has long ago surrendered its golden petals, and has reached its crowning stage of dying; the delicate seed-globe must break up now; it gives and gives until it has nothing left. What a revolution would come over the world of starving souls if something like this were the standard of giving; if all who claim to be God's people ventured on "making themselves poor" as Jesus did, for, the sake of the need around; if the "I-me-mine" were practically delivered up, no longer to be recognized when they clash with the needs of others

The hour of this new dying is clearly defined to the dandelion globe; it is marked by detachment. There is no sense of wrenching; it stands ready, holding up its little life, not knowing when or where or how the wind that bloweth where it listeth may carry it away. It holds itself no longer for its own keeping: only as something to be given; a breath does the rest, turning the "readiness to will" into the "performance." (2 Cor. 8:11.) And to a soul that through "deaths oft" has been brought to this point, even acts that look as if they must involve sacrifice become something natural, spontaneous, full of a "heavenly involuntariness," so simply are, they the outcome of the indwelling love of Christ.

Shall we not ask God to convict us as to wherein lies the hindrance to -this self-emptying? It is not alone mere selfishness, in its ordinary sense, that prevents it; long after this has been cleared away by the precious Blood there may remain, unrecognized, the self-life in more subtle forms. It may coexist with much that looks like sacrifice; there may be much of usefulness and of outward self-denial, and yet below the surface may remain a clinging to our own judgment, a confidence in our own resources, an unconscious taking of our own way, even in God's service. And these

things hold down, hold in, our souls, and frustrate the Spirit in its working. The latent self-life needs to be brought down into the place of death before God's breath can carry us hither and thither as the wind wafts the seeds. Are we ready for this last surrender?

Do you ask, "Does God really mean the emptying to reach so far as this?" Study the life of Jesus: "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself." (John 14:10.) "I can of Mine own self do nothing, . because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me." (John 5:30.) His human self-life, sinless though it was, was laid down, that He might live by the Father; and our self-life, defiled and worthless shall we not lay it down that we may live by Him?

But how? Again, not by struggling and wrestling, but by dying to it in Christ Jesus. "I am crucified with Christ"-I, myself, in the very essence of my being. I must let myself go to that death, and by the mysterious power with which God meets faith, I shall find that He has made it true; that the bonds are loosed, and He can have His way with me.

"Break Every Tender Tie"

In the wild-iris pods, which somewhat resemble a pea-pod, and in which the seeds are each held by a little thread, see how, when the pod has dried and opened, the tiny thread holding each seed must be broken. With that loosing, all 'the plant has is free for God's use in His world around. All reluctance, all calculating, all holding in is gone; the husks are opened wide, the seeds can shed themselves unhindered. Again and again has a breaking come: the seed broke to let go the shoot; the leaf-bud broke to let go the leaf, and the flower bud to let go the flower; but all to no practical avail if there is a holding back-now. "Love is the fulfilling of the law," and sacrifice is the very life breath of love. May God show us every withholding thread of self that needs breaking still, and may His own touch shrivel it into death.

See how a piece of oat-grass empties itself out. As it dries, each separate glume or seed sheath spreads wide and allows the grain to fall out. Look at the wide-openness with which the seed sheaths loose all that they, have to yield, and then the patient content with which they fold their hands the content of finished work. "She hath done what she could." Oh, the depth of rest that falls on the soul when the voice of the Beloved speaks those words! Will they be said to us?

The seed-vessel hopes for nothing in return; it seeks only the opportunity of shedding itself; its purpose is fulfilled when the wind shakes forth the last seed, and the flower-stalk is beaten low by the autumn storms. It not only spends, but, as the Revised Version expresses it, is "spent out" at last. (2 Cor. 12:15.) It is through Christ's poverty that we are made rich; "as poor" in their turn, "yet making many rich" is the mark of those who follow in His steps.

Have you ever noticed how often the emptied calyx grows into a diadem, and the developing seed pod stands crowned for its ministry as if it gloried in its power to give, as the time draws near? The wild rose, for instance, and some of the climbing roses, when the blossoms are gone, produce a round, red seed-ball, and the triangular points of the calyx in circular formation about the top form a perfect little crown upon it. Thus even in nature, in a measure, the faithfulness unto death and the crown of life go together. So we, if we suffer with Him, shall also reign with Him.

It is when the sun goes out from our horizon to light up the dayspring in far-away lands that the sunset, the glory of the day, comes. It is in the autumn, when the harvest is gathered and the fruit

is stored for the use of man, that the glow of red and gold touches and transfigures bush and tree with a beauty that summer days never knew.

So with us: The clear pure dawn of cleansing through the blood, the sunrise and gladness of resurrection life; the mid-day light and warmth of growth and service-all are good in their own order; but he who stops short there, misses the crown of glory beside which the brightness of former days grows poor and cold. It is when the glow and radiance of a life delivered up to death begins to gather, a life poured forth to Jesus, and for His sake to others-it is then that even the commonest things put on a new beauty, as in 'the sunset; for His life becomes "manifest in our mortal flesh;" a bloom comes on the life like the bloom on the fruit as its hour of sacrifice arrives. Oh, that **we** may learn to die to all that is of self, with this royal joyfulness that swallows up death in victory in God's world of nature around us! **He** can make every step of the path full of the triumph of the gladness that glows in the golden sheaves. Glory to His name!

And the outcome, like the outcome of the autumn, is this: There is a new power set free; a power of multiplying life around. The promise to Christ was that because He poured forth His soul unto death, He should see His seed; and God leads His children in their little measure by the same road. Over and over the promise of seed is linked with sacrifice, as with Abraham, and Rebekah, and Ruth; those who at His bidding have forsaken all, receive an hundred fold more now, in this time, for sacrifice is God's factor in His work of multiplying. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."-John 12:24.

If it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. Whether it is laid down in toil among those who know not God, to bring them unto Him, or in travail of soul among His children that Christ be formed in them, either way there will be life brought forth.

But even when the plant's goal is reached, it is not *a* finality. Emerson says: "There is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning. Every ultimate fact is only the beginning of a new series." While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest . . . shall not cease. (Gen. 8:22.) Life leads on to new death, and new death back to life again. Over and over, when we think we know our lesson, we find ourselves beginning another round of God's divine spiral "In deaths oft" is the measure of our growth, "**always** delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." - 2 Cor. 4:11.

We are all familiar with sphagnum, or soft moss, which grows in bogs and other damp' places, and is used by gardeners in packing plants for shipment. As it dies, a new layer grows above the old, layer upon layer, until the whole forms a soft cushion. A bit of this moss shows in miniature the process of which we have just been speaking: stage after stage of dying has come, and each has been crowned again with life. Each time the crown has sunk down into death, that death has again been crowned in the act of dying; and the life all the time is the apparent thing -- it is always green on the top; the daily dying that underlies it is out of sight to the passing glance.

Yes, life is the uppermost; life, radiant and joyful and strong, for we represent down here Him who liveth and was dead. and behold. He is alive for evermore. Stress had to be laid on the death **gateway**, but a gateway is never a dwelling-place; the death-stage was never meant for *us* to stay in and brood over, but to pass through with a will into the light beyond. We may, and must, like the plants, ;bear its marks; but they should be visible to God rather than to man, for above all and through all is the inflowing, overflowing life of Jesus. Oh, let us not dim it by a shadow of morbidity or of gloom. He is not a God of the dead, but of the living, and He would have us let the glory of His gladness shine out.

Think of the wonder of having the Fountain of *Life*, as it were. Himself welling -tip within us, taking the place of all we have delivered, bit by bit, into the grave. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Little have we proved, most of -us, the resources that lie in that indwelling; little have we learned what it is to have all our soul-fibres penetrated by its power. May God lead *us*, no matter what the cost, into all that can be known of it here on earth.

We have seen the life withdrawn from the blossoms into the seed-vessels, and then withdrawn further still, as ripeness comes, from the seed-vessel into the seed, that the seed itself may come, to maturity. When the Apostle says in Col. 1:28, "That we may present every man perfect" in Christ Jesus," the real sense of the word "perfect" is "ripeness of maturity." Let us surrender our selves to be brought to that ripeness -of maturity as rapidly *as* possible.

Now let *us* consider the seed itself. What a marvel it is, endynamited for its ministry! 'Just, an atom of whiteness, folded up in its smooth brown shell. Could we imagine anything more. insignificant? And yet they are brimful of a vitality that will last, given the necessary conditions, "while the earth remaineth," through harvest after harvest, *in* ever widening circles. The careless feet that tread it down can *only* hasten the burial that is its next stage onward; the autumn storms can bring it nothing but fresh draughts of quickening.

Such is the power of multiplication in the seeds of the flowers of the field that it requires a constant battle, and the survival of the fittest, to keep us from being overrun with them. The henbane for instance, by no means the most prolific, if every seed produced every year for five years, would bring forth from a single plant ten thousand billions-enough to cover the whole area of the dry land of -the world, allowing 73 plants to the square meter, says the Natural History -of Plants (Kerner and Oliver). Perhaps God permits the seeming waste of such an overwhelming proportion of the seed formed to show us the Fountain of Life that there is in Him, and to teach us that there is no straitening in the Spirit of the Lord. "There is no limit," one has said, "to what God can do with man, provided he (the man) will not touch the glory."

The plants show us a love that seeketh not her own. No one knows whence the seeds came when they reach their journey's end; no glory can possibly gather round the plants that surrendered their lives to form and shed them. They just give, with no aim but to be bare stalks when all is done. Everything is loosened and spent without a shade of calculation or self-interest. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory" (Psa. 115:1), they are all saying in spirit. They teach us absolute indifference as to whether our service is appreciated, or even recognized, so long as the work is done, and the Lord is glorified. The plant itself asks for nothing to keep, nothing to show, nothing to glory in from its whole life of toil.

So, no matter if we never see the full up-springing on earth of the spirit-seed scattered. It is all the more likely that God may trust us with a great multiplying if our faith does not need to witness it. He can grant us spiritual harvests out of sight, of which He only gains the glory.

All that matters is that our part shall be done. We are responsible for sowing to the spirit-responsible like the seed-vessel for fulfilling our ministry to the last and the uttermost. Let the cry be on our hearts, as it was on the heart of Jesus, to "finish the work" that the Father has given us. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work," said Jesus. And on He went with it, though it cost Him the strong crying and tears of Gethsemane to fight through to the end, to live on to the "It is finished" of Calvary. Is it our souls' hunger and thirst that, before He calls us from earth, we may have given every message He had for us to deliver, prevailed in every intercession to which He summoned us, distributed for His Kingdom and the necessity of saints every dollar He wanted, shared with Him every call to the fellowship of His sufferings for others,

poured out His love and sympathy and help as He poured them out on earth? Are we **longing** that He should find when He comes to us, no unspent treasure, no talent laid up in a napkin, like the unshed seed in its shelly fold? Are we **acting** as if that were our longing? "By Him actions [not longings] are weighed." - 1 Sam. 2:3.

Can we learn this last lesson? Here in service, we see the same goal as in the history of the inner life. Both end in Christ alone. For the highest aim of ministry is to bring His immediate presence into contact with -others-so to bring Him and them face to face that He can act on them directly, while we stand aside, like John the Baptist, rejoicing greatly.

Perhaps we used to look at our inner life as separate from our service; but as we go on, they merge into one-Christ; whether folded to our hearts in His secret temple, like the seed in its husk, or set free in contact with those around to carry on His quickening work-all and only Christ. Christ is the beginning, and the end is Christ. We saw how the soul's first step is to let' Him in as its life; the last step, in a sense, can go no further. It is only that the apprehension of Him has increased and the hindrances and limitations have been swept away.

Christ-Christ-Christ, filling all the horizon. Everything **in** us, everything **to** us, everything through us: 'For **me to live** is Christ.'

And the results need not end with our earthly days. The closing in of the signs around us make it seem as if the time left us to work and suffer for Him were growing very short. But if not, when that last gate of death has been passed, God may use the things that He has wrought in us, for the blessing of souls unknown to us; as the twigs and leaves of bygone years, whose individuality is forgotten, pass on vitality to the new born plants which succeed them. God only knows the endless possibilities that lie enfolded in each one of us!

Shall we not let Him have His way? Shall we not go all lengths with Him in His plans for us, not as these green things upon the earth in their unconsciousness, but with the glory of free choice? Shall we not translate the story of their little lives into our own? For all their teaching of surrender and sacrifice is no fanciful mysticism; it is a simple reality that can be tested at every turn-nay, that must be tested: for if we are apprehending Christ's death in its delivering power, those in our homes will not be slow to find it out.

Oh, Jesus, the Crucified! Shall we not follow Him in all His path? May He inspire us for the next step, whether it leads down into the shadow, or up into the light. And may our hearts echo the words of Ittai, the faithful servant of David (2 Sam. 15:21), "Surely in what place my Lord the King shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." *Amen.*

- *Contributed.*

"The Anthem of the Flowers"

"Almighty Jehovah, we adore Thee! Thou who studded the earth with our beautiful faces. Decked in all the colors of thy glorious rainbow, we glow with tender radiance in the soft moonlight or unfold in a thousand brilliant hues 'neath the sun. We carpet the hillsides. We riot *in* the meadow. We fill with fragrance and beauty the dim aisles of the forest. The waters lovingly reflect our sweet faces, and the snow proudly wears us as gems on her bosom. With rapture little children hold us to their hearts and in their own language prattle sweet love words. We bring to the bedside of the weary and sick the breath of the forest, the glory of the meadows and the wealth of the roadside and garden. We rejoice in our loveliness. We rejoice in our mission to delight the eyes of men and to lift up their hearts to Thee in worship and adoration.

"Oh! Jehovah our Creator! If all the glory and beauty of our tiny faces *is* but an infinitesimal reflection of Thee, what must Thou Thyself be in all the glory and beauty of Thy Being! And what must be the rapture, not only of those who behold Thee, but those also who shall yet have the glorious privilege, not only to look upon Thee, but to be made like Thee. As they fall before Thee in praise and worship, we too, lift our thousand faces up to Thee in silent adoration.

"Jehovah, we adore *Thee!*"

- *Rebecca Fair Doney.*

The Parable of the Sower

(Continued from last issue)

"Behold a sower went forth to sow." - Matt. 13:3; Mark 4:3; Luke 8:5.

"He that was Sown upon the Rocky Places"

THE SECOND unprofitable hearer is he to whom the Word is as seed sown in rocky places. In the great field in which the sower goes forth bearing precious seed, there are places in which the hard rock crops up close to the surface; and the seed which falls into the shallow soil that covers the face of the rock, springs up very quickly in the heat which the rock holds and radiates; but because there is little moisture and no depth of earth, the sun scorches them, and they wither as quickly as they grow. And, says our Lord, translating these familiar, natural symbols into spiritual truths: "He that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that heareth the Word, and straightway with joy receiveth it; yet he hath not root in himself, but endureth for a while; and where tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, straightway he stumbleth."

This second hearer, then, is a man of shallow, superficial, character, who does nothing thoroughly, brings nothing to perfection.

And that, surely, is a very true touch, which describes a roan of this superficial stamp as being of a hard and impenetrable heart. Under the light, thin, surface of easily stirred dust, there lies a bed

of rock. For it is among those who lead a life of light enjoyment, and who tread a round of trivial cares, and ambitions, and pleasures, that we learn how heartless men can be. It is not among the poor, or the busy, but among the elegant votaries of pleasure and fashion, that men, and women too, are trained to stifle emotion, to harden themselves into indifference, to cultivate that selfishness which is death to all love, and to nobility of character.

And when a man of this sensitive, yet shallow character, has the Word of God earnestly pressed upon him, it often happens that, struck by its novelty, and moved by the emotion of the moment, he forthwith receives it with joy; not only understands and assents to it, but, like 'the good hearer, receives it unto himself, suffers it to dwell and work in him, and shape his course. For a while his life is changed; he is eager to give his susceptible and easily moved heart altogether to this new, stimulating excitement. Nothing in his experience was ever comparable to it. He will break through all rules of good taste, and good sense, to show his esteem for it, and to make others esteem it as he does. He lives in a rapture, and would have all men share it with him.

But, like all other raptures, it is quickly past, its force is soon spent. The times change, and he changes with the time. He has no root in himself, and cannot withstand any influence that is brought to bear upon him. A strong temptation comes, and he has no strong faith with which to meet it. The excitement is over, and now the consecrated life looks as dreary to him as all previous forms of life had looked. "Tribulation or persecution ariseth and immediately he is offended." He does not keep the Word; his nerveless hands cannot hold it fast. As quickly as he received it,, so quickly lie lets it go.

"He Who Received Seed Among the Thorns"

The third unprofitable hearer is he to whom the Word is as seed sown among thorns. For, besides the trodden and rocky places, there are broad patches in the field which are thick with the seeds of thorns; and these spring up with the good seed, but faster than the good seed, so that it is choked before it can yield fruit.

Now, if we ask: "Who among all the hearers of the Word corresponds to this thorn-infested soil?" our Lord Jesus replies: "He who received seed among the thorns is he who, when he has heard the Word, goeth his way; and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of life, and the lust of other things entering in, choke the Word, and he bringeth no fruit to perfection."

We observe that the ground is good enough to grow either wheat or thorns, but not good enough to grow both; that is to say, not good enough to bring 'both to perfection. Here, on this soil, the seed has a better chance than before. It gets into the soil, takes root, springs up, forms the ear, even. It is not trodden down, nor snatched away; nor is it scorched up for want of moisture or depth. Long after the farmer, going his rounds, has discovered that the sides of the path will be bare, and seen the withered stalks of the seed sown on rocky places, he has hopes that this on the thorny ground is doing fairly well, though there are too many weeds among it. But when it has well-nigh accomplished its task, and its promise is at its best, it is choked by quicker growths, and not suffered to mature the full corn in the ear.

Now it is thus with some hearers of the Word. Like the good hearer, they understand, receive, they even hold fast the seed. They do not suffer the impression it has produced to fade away instantly, like seed picked up by the birds, the very moment it has fallen; nor do they renounce it as

soon as it demands a firm resistance to temptation, or a patient endurance of trial, like the seed that, after it has sprung up, withers in the stalk. They keep the Word through all such trials and tests as these. Nevertheless they suffer it to be choked when it is on the point of bearing. Much as they love it, they love much besides it; and these other loves grow very quickly, and overtop the growth of the good seed, and suck away the juices which should nourish it; insomuch that the life and power of the Gospel Message are gradually neutralized and drawn out of them, and though fruit is formed in them, they do not bring it to perfection.

What are the Thorns Which Choke the Word?

What are the thorns which thwart and choke the Word? Some of them are: "The cares of this world," those daily recurring anxieties about what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and wherewith we shall be clothed, which distract our attention; so that while the Word of God draws us one way, these petty cares and worries draw us another way.

Other of these thorns spring from the deceitfulness of riches, from the peculiar and subtle cunning with which they beguile us from the simplicity that is in Christ. And though, like the cares of the world, riches are not in themselves evil, yet all careful observers of human life have admitted that wealth has a special trick of gradually withdrawing men from the love and service of the truth. As a rule rich men are content with the world as it is naturally -- for, as they think, the world has dealt very kindly by them, and therefore they see no need' for bettering it. Wealth has many wiles; it is full of deceit; and no man is worthy of greater honor than the rich man who keeps himself unspotted from the world and its ways. As we recall from time to time, the many examples of Christian grace which characterized Brother Russell's ministry, we may well pause once and again to remember that among the many tests he successfully endured was this one which few to whom it is applied prove able to withstand.

The pleasures of life and the lust of other things are more common weeds or thorns, but hardly less fatal. They ruin thousands where the deceitfulness of riches ruins one. Who that has gone through life with open eyes, has not again and again, seen the young man, who, while still young, gave himself ardently to God, beguiled away from the simplicity of Christ by the lure of pleasure and the excessive pursuit of other objects? He does not suddenly and completely fall away. But first this object attracts him and then that, and between them they choke his early devotion. There is not one of these objects, perhaps, which, if the issue were distinctly raised, he would not sacrifice for Christ's sake. But among so many quick springing thorns, the good seed has but a poor chance, and seldom brings its fruit to perfection. How many a fair, bright, promise has been thus nipped in the bud! Let us see to it that we come not into their number. Let us see to it that these deadly thorns do not make us unfruitful hearers of the word of truth and grace.

"He that Receiveth Seed into Good Ground"

We come now to a happier task, the consideration of the good hearer. And, as we note the various points in our Lord's description of him, may we be encouraged and strengthened in our determination to develop in ourselves, by God's grace, the characteristics he portrays, characteristics which if found in us, will enable us to yield a rich fruitage from the good seed of the Word of God which He has sown in us.

Each of the three Evangelists will be found to help us; for St. Matthew tells us that "he that receiveth seed into the good ground is he that heareth the Word and understandeth it"; St. Mark, that it is he that heareth the Word and "receiveth" it; and St. Luke, that it is he, who, "having heard the Word, keepeth it in an honest and good heart, and bringeth forth fruit with patience."

The first characteristic of the good hearer is that he understands the Word. Scholars tell us that the Greek word here rendered "understand" is very significant. It denotes a state of mind in which, having compared one statement with another, -having weighed each apart, and then placed them side by side, having viewed truth as truth, and then in its relation to himself, a man gives it the assent of his whole intelligent being, and affirms, not only that it is true, but that it shall be true for him; that he believes it, will act upon it, and, so far as lieth in him, will see that his life is governed by it. It includes the assent of the reason, or the intellect, the determination of the will, and the sympathy of the heart. So that the very first characteristic of the good hearer of the Word, is a very large and comprehensive one. Before any one of us can claim to be such a hearer, we must have personally studied and considered the truth as it is in Jesus, and have weighed any objections to it of which we have been cognizant, and found such objections wanting. We must have felt how well adapted it is to our own individual needs, and been gripped with a strong conviction that it is from God, and that it is for us. Not only must our reason, our intellect, consent to its being true; we must also determine to act upon it, and find our sympathies and affections engaged by it. This done, we will have the first qualification of the good hearer; for we hear nothing to advantage while we doubt it, or dislike it, or do not mean to let it influence our life. It is only when we listen in faith, in love, and with a resolve to benefit by what we hear, that we are in a condition, to make the most of the divine Word of truth, and to get the most from it.

St. Mark's word is equally significant with St. Matthew's, and carries the thought still farther. According to St. Mark, the good hearer is one who receiveth it; -- and to receive it, in St. Mark's sense of the word, is "to take it into one's self." It implies that the good hearer is so charmed and won by the peculiar fitness of the gracious Gospel Message to his own dire need, so touched and penetrated by it, that "with joy" he embraceth it, receives it into his inner life, and suffers it to become part of his very being; he prepares, so to speak, a habitation, a sanctuary, for it, "in the innermost recesses of his spirit, from which, like the Shekinah in the Tabernacle and the Temple, it sheds a hallowing and enlightening influence, through all the courts and avenues of his life.

The model hearer, then, is one, who not only understands the Word, not only gives it the sanction of his intelligence, and will; and affection, but in virtue of this sanction, admits it into himself, to become a part of him, to become the guiding and shaping spirit of his life.

"In a Good and Honest Heart"

St. Luke tells us that in the good hearer the heart into which the -Word is received, will be "a good and honest" heart; that is to say, a heart sincere and earnest. Obviously a man with an untrue heart will not make a good hearer of the truth. We cannot be good hearers unless, our hearts are good-candid, open, sincere; hearts like little children's; hearts like Nathanael's, of whom our Lord could say: "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." If we would know the secrets of the truth, we must become: unselfish, unprejudiced. We must care rather to be on the side of truth, than to find the truth on our side.

Then, too, having received the Word into an honest heart, the good hearers will keep it, or "hold it fast." He will not let it go, whatever allurements he may meet. He will not suffer the good seed to

be withered by wayside influences, nor choked by incoming cares or pleasures of life, nor obstructed by rocky 'impenitences.' He has found it hard to get the truth, and having got it, he will not part with it. At times it may be very difficult to hold it fast. A great gain maybe his, or an intense delight purchasable at a very small cost of being untrue to his convictions; a terrible danger may be averted, by a lie on his part or even by "being evasive or by leaving a wrong impression a friend he greatly desires to please' may be made happy-by-only a slight deviation from the path of integrity; but he will hold fast his integrity and truth. He will be assured that the laws which he has deduced from the Word, the laws by which lie commonly governs his life, **must** not be reconsidered, much less repealed, while the **storm of passionate desire is** beating upon him; that then, most of all, he needs to: abide **by them**. This is the good hearer -- the man who is a doer of the Word, and a doer when doing is most difficult, not a hearer only. He never forgets what manner of man he is, or should be; but, looking with a constant gaze into the perfect law of our liberty, walks by it, and is blessed in his deed.

Brings Forth Fruit with Cheerful Constancy

Again, the good hearer, who understands the Word, who receives it into, a good and honest heart, and holds it fast, also brings forth fruit, "with patience." And of all his characteristics, this, as it is the most valuable, so also is it the hardest to attain. To wait, is even harder than to labor and to obey. Unless we are to have our harvest *very* soon, we have hardly the heart to' sow. 'The husbandman has long patience -- must have it -- till he receives the early and the latter rain. The winter-frost must mellow the seed lying in the genial bosom of the earth; the rains of spring must swell it, and the suns of summer mature it. So with us. To become a good hearer, that is, a good doer of the Word, is a task which requires long patience. We must suffer many a killing frost, many a darkening shower, many a burning sun, before the wood seed cast into our heart by the great Sower will gladden us with its thirty, or its sixty, or it may be its hundred fold. But, if we do' but wait with patience, or with "**cheerful constancy**," as the word here translated "patience" more exactly means; if with cheerful constant endurance we bring forth fruit, the more precious will be the harvest. It is only ill weeds that spring up apace; and, God is not unjust that He should forget our labor of love. In due time we shall reap, if we faint not. We shall reap all that we have sown, and more than we sowed. For He that giveth seed to the husbandman and bread to the eater, will multiply the seed we have sown, and give us to eat of the fruit of our toils. One day, a day nearer, somewhat, than when we first believed, all the seeds He has planted in us, which we have received in a good and honest heart, which we have kept, and cultivated, will have grown to maturity, and we shall awake "in His likeness." Let us be patient. therefore, let us be steadfast; let us establish our hearts before Him. Thus may it be with us all, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Another year of progress,
Another year of praise;
Another year of proving
Thy presence all the days.

"Another year, of service;
Of witness for Thy love;
Another year of training.
For holier work above."