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Redeeming the Time

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time." -- Col. 4:5.

TO MOST members of the household of faith, at least to those who are not unmindful of the Lord's oft-repeated admonition to be watchful at all times, it would hardly seem necessary to have to defend the proposition that the study of current events as viewed in the light of Divine Revelation is in no sense to be regarded as time wasted or that it constitutes any violation of our vows of separation from the world. The privilege, perhaps even the duty, of the children of light to keep themselves informed of those events in world history that seem to have a bearing upon the Divine Plan would appear to most of us to be of so obvious a nature as to scarcely need stressing.

Yet, some few of our most helpful and zealous brethren seem to have such a horror of a course as simple and harmless as the glancing through the columns of a secular newspaper or of listening to the voice of a news commentator coming over the radio networks, as to cause some of the Lord's little ones over whom they may have some influence to experience an uncomfortable feeling of guilt if they allow their minds to dwell for a few moments upon some outstanding political or international occurrence, news of which has come to them via press or radio.

Some of these zealous brethren appear to feel so strongly about the matter as to use their platform time at meetings of the friends to inveigh against the "folly" of using consecrated time in listening to or reading about any subject that does not embody some form of sermon or dissertation upon religious matters. We find much to admire in their solicitude for the welfare of the Lord's people and we too realize how easy it is to allow ourselves to become trapped into giving ear to some of the unedifying matters which from hour to hour each day are being directed via press and radio at the minds of people everywhere. It is easy to convince ourselves that we ought on behalf of the Lord's people or in our own spiritual interests to read of or listen to a thousand matters which, in reality, mean little or nothing to the saints of God. The Adversary is ever watchful and ready to stake advantage of any slackness on our part by directing our attention away from the things that are unseen and eternal, and towards those far less important matters which are for the moment occupying the attention of the world's people. It therefore becomes necessary for us all to exercise much care and self-discipline in our use of such media for public expression.

The matter seems to us, however, to be of necessity one which lies between each consecrated child of God and his heavenly Master. If such a one reaches the decision that the act of listening to a broadcast of news or reading a newspaper or magazine article constitutes a violation of his or her vows, then it is plainly manifest that he or she should refrain from so doing, however harmless the action might seem to be to another. Even those of our number who are glad to take advantage of these modern methods of news dissemination and whose consciences are quite clear in the matter, even we will freely admit that if in the Lord's providences a condition were to obtain whereby we were cut off from all connections with the outside world such as those we have now, and had to depend entirely upon the knowledge of the Lord's plans we have stored up in our minds for guidance through the dark night, we should nevertheless find, as indeed we do now, our chiefest delight to be in the streams of that river which makes glad the city of God (Psa. 46:4), and like John on Patmos, we should commune with the Lord in spirit though separated from all else. However, unless or until such a contingency arises, we esteem it to (be a divinely bestowed privilege for us to avail ourselves of conditions whereby news of important events taking place even in the remoter corners of the earth is conveyed almost instantaneously to every part of our planet. We reflect that in the future this will probably 'be the method whereby the Word of the Lord will emanate from Jerusalem and be diffused over the whole world. (Isa. 2:3.) Meanwhile, it seems to be one of the methods used by our Heavenly Father in enabling his children to follow with loving interest the developments of his purposes as they move majestically toward their glorious culmination.

THE SEQUENTIAL NATURE OF GOD'S DESIGNS

Concerning this feature of Present Truth, a question sometimes put to Bible Students by their well-meaning but uninformed friends in the denominations is of interest. It is this one: "Why cannot you Truth people attend some of our services or Bible studies and give us the benefit of your Scriptural knowledge? You would be helped by the warmth and encouragement which comes from large gatherings of spiritually-minded people and you would find that our pastors and teachers are no longer as finicky about doctrinal matters as their fathers used to be back in the nineties." All of which is perhaps quite true. The tendency among modern churchgoers is to ignore doctrine entirely and to concentrate upon such things as the good influence of the Church upon the world of which they are certainly a part. But even laying aside the resolution of the Lord's enlightened followers to obey his injunction to "Come out of her my people" and to remain aloof from every Babylonian influence, the mature Christian who has tasted the good word of God and the powers of the Age to come, could no more find the spiritual food his soul craves in such a gathering, than could any adult subsist indefinitely upon the ice cream and cake served at a children's party.

At best, the nominal church assemblies are but nurseries for spiritual infants, and very sickly, undernourished infants too, for few (indeed were ever reared upon the pure milk of the Word, but rather upon some noxious creedal formula which has retarded instead of increased their growth. Yet many of us were once forced to rely upon such adulterated food for our spiritual sustenance, because we knew of nothing better. What then was the great beacon light of Present Truth which flashed into our minds like a new revolution? What was it that kindled our imagination, quickened our pulse and captured our heart? Was it not our discovery of the *progressive dispensational* nature of the "Plan of the Ages," our realization of the stupendous fact that the establishment of the long-hoped-for Kingdom was impending yes, was even at the doors and might take place even in our own lifetime? Here, we found, was the greatest drama in all history being enacted before our very eyes, one in which we ourselves were invited to have a part, in harmony with the designs of its great Author. A far cry indeed was all this from the "beggary elements" upon which the hosts of Christendom were trying to satisfy their hunger.

Can anyone then consider it strange that we whose eyes have been opened (to the heavenly vision should have been ever since eager to follow the mysterious unfolding of the scroll of the Divine Plan as it is daily being worked out against the background of human hopes and ambitions giving design and meaning to the changing pattern of international events, a meaning which is hidden from all save from the perception of those who have been entrusted with the secret of the Lord. - Psa. 25:14.

Yet even in this laudable effort to follow the developments of God's plans, there is need for us to exercise much self-discipline. Most of us have discovered that an ever present danger exists of our becoming so interested and engrossed in the passing panorama of human affairs, especially as they touch upon such things as the fortunes of Palestine, the rise of the image of the Gentile beast, etc., things which herald the advent of a new Age, as to allow ourselves to grow careless about feeding upon our daily bread from heaven, that heavenly manna which alone can make us spiritually strong and vigorous. It is a high privilege indeed, and one that needs to be zealously guarded, which we possess today, off "redeeming the time," and of working while it is yet called day; for all our expectations point to the fact that ere long' the night will come in which no man can work. (John 9:4.) The great Apostle was well aware of the danger of giving rein to his earthly and nationalistic inclinations, saying, "I keep my body under lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Cor. 9:27.) We are by nature and environment of the earth, earthy, and therefore unavoidably susceptible to the beguiling influence of the things of earth. Our human instincts prompt us to be continually reaching out for these things, and we need to be constantly on the alert to set and keep resetting our affections upon the things above: (Col. 3:2.) Some of us may have had the experience of trying to train some creeping plant such as the morning glory, to climb up some upright structure in order to form a floral archway. If so, we can hardly have failed to notice how persistently the plant by means of its shoots or tendrils, strives to entwine itself around every garden flower or object within its reach. It has to be constantly disentangled from these things and to be reset around the upright we wish it to cling to. Thus it is with our affections and inclinations. If left to follow their own devices they will persist in becoming entangled with earthly things before we realize the dangerous trend our thoughts are staking.

Therefore, in our use of the many means by which knowledge of current events is being brought to our attention in these crucial days, we need to take careful heed lest what we intended to be a harmless seeking for information should be made an occasion for stumbling. Our very faith in the sure promises of God and our interest in the progress of the fulfillment of those promises enables us to appreciate, understand, and even to some extent to visualize something of what the restored Edenic earth will be like, and what a glorious destiny awaits the children of the resurrection. It was plainly' a manifestation of Divine Wisdom for our Heavenly Father to purpose that the opportunity for sacrifice should be presented to us at a time when the shadows of sin, misery, and death were still shedding their baneful influence over God's fair footstool, and while the conception of a world of harmony, peace, and brotherly kindness still remained a vision only to be seen through the eyes of faith, and one which contrasted so forcibly with the realities of the present, that we were glad to flee for refuge to the hope set before us. Our comprehension of the nature of "the things above," our conception of spirit life beyond the veil-these are things the understanding of which is of necessity, circumscribed by our human limitations. As the Apostle puts it, "Beloved . . . it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know ... that we shall be like him." - 1 John 3:2.

"The things above," then, upon which our affections are set, are not of a tangible nature. They are not matters which anything in human experience qualifies us to understand. We receive our

valuation of them only through the spirit, and that only in proportion as we are dead to self and figuratively risen with Christ. What then is the great incentive which prompts the spirit-begotten one to strive to attain something of which he has a very imperfect understanding? (1 Cor. 13:9-12.) To the comprehension of the natural man there could be no intelligible answer to that question, for it is part of the "mystery of God" (Eph. 3:9), and therefore hidden from the mind of the natural man, and even we who have the first-fruits of the spirit, find it difficult to explain to others or even to ourselves, just why those impelling motives which we find in our hearts, prompt us to set such a high valuation upon things of the spirit that even the prospect of a restored earth cannot vie in our estimation with the "exceeding great and precious promises" held out to those who love the Lord supremely. - 2 Pet. 1:4.

Perhaps the best and simplest explanation may be found in the words of Jesus to his disciples, recorded in John 14:3: "I will come and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also." This is (the real underlying reason why the Lord's servants are being favored at this time by being served with that special food from his table which we call "Present Truth." It is in order that our hearts may be drawn, through our love for the Truth, into such a warm personal affection for its great Author and for the Captain of Our Salvation, that no prospect can compare with that of being with him through all eternity and sharing in his glory.

LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN

But to return to our 'thesis concerning the use of our time: even if we through fear of becoming involved in the affairs of this present evil world, were to resolve to pay no attention to the hopes, fears, and anxieties that are stirring great Babylon in this, the hour of her final crisis, in the sense of refusing to read or listen to any recital of her woes, it is exceedingly doubtful whether we should be able to do any such thing. Men are discovering that the world can be no longer considered as being divided into a series of separate compartments called national states; each one subdivided into political, economic, social, Or ecclesiastical cells. It has become in many respects one world, and whatever' affects one part of it affects the whole. It has been said that in nature, a stone cast into the waters of any one ocean will, in some measure, raise the water level of every other ocean on earth. We call them by different names such as Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, etc., but in effect they are all parts of the great world-ocean, and so it is with earth's millions of people. Modern conditions have made of them, in many respects, one vast family, and their happiness or misery, the cry of triumph or the wail of despair that emanates from any one section is reflected in the state of the people in every other part of the habitable earth. So, however well intentioned we may be in our desire to remain aloof from all of earth's affairs, those same affairs, with their hopes, their fears, their disputes and complaints, are daily, hourly, impinging upon our consciousness, and demanding a share of our attention, and so long as we are parts of the human family they will continue to do so.

Although we are not of the world, we are very definitely in it and cannot avoid being affected by its troubles. And this condition, it seems to us, is just as it should be. The closer we approach to the likeness of our Lord, the deeper must become our sympathies with poor stumbling, blinded mankind, and the more intense must become our longing to see it delivered from the bondage of corruption and ushered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. In proportion as we become imbued with the sympathetic, compassionate spirit of Jesus, to that same extent are we impelled to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with the sad-hearted. As for shutting our eyes and our ears to the sights and sounds that attend the passing of an old and the birth of a new order, in order that we may concentrate exclusively upon the working out of our own individual salvation, such a course would seem to us to be the very opposite to that spirit which their fellowship with the Lord engenders in the hearts of his followers. Mankind is being reduced to a condition of

hopeless perplexity. The world is rapidly approaching the state seen in prophetic vision by the Psalmist: "They stagger like a drunken man and are at their wit's end." (Psa. 107:27.) Ere long we may hope to see the fulfillment of the 28th verse (Psa. 107:28): "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses."

There are, it is true, certain dangers arising from a too great degree of absorption in the matters which are occupying the minds of the world's people in these crucial times, and as has been pointed out, the Lord's followers need to exercise much self-restraint in order to avoid viewing these matters from any other standpoint than that of the Bible student. However; with this spirit of moderation governing all our efforts, we are of the firm conviction that our study of current events from that standpoint will bring blessing and encouragement to us all, as we take note of the constantly recurring signs which point to the impending fall of Babylon, and the fruition of our hopes in the not so distant future.

Surely as we pass the milestones in our pilgrim journey, we need such help and encouragement, not only for the strengthening of our own faith but in order that we may do our part in binding up the broken hearts and proclaiming liberty to the captives of sin and death. - Isa. 61:1.

There were, during the dark ages, certain people who for the sake of avoiding contamination from the sinful world withdrew themselves into monastic retreats, there to commune with their souls, far removed (as they thought) from the temptations of the world. The extent to which they deceived themselves is a matter of historical record. Introspection is a good thing for all of us when not carried to excess. It is beyond doubt a wholesome exercise for a consecrated person to subject himself daily to a critical survey of his spiritual condition in so far as he is able to discern it, and in prayerful communion with the Lord to seek divine guidance and help to correct his mistakes; but for such a one to become so preoccupied with his own spiritual welfare as to even unconsciously come to regard himself as the center of his own universe, is to be betrayed into a condition of heart -which is quite contrary to the Lord's designs concerning his followers. He is in reality trusting in his own strength instead of in the power of the One whose strength is made perfect in our weakness. Thus, he is neglecting to "hold the head" (Col. 2:19) and is in danger of relapsing into mere will worship. Such a course usually leads either to an attitude of spiritual complacency, which is an abomination to the Lord, or going to the other extreme, to an exaggerated and unnecessary discouragement which weakens our determination to continue fighting the good fight. The Lord's people need to keep ever in mind the fact that they are not expected to do the impossible of attempting to transform themselves into the image of the Lord, but simply by faithful submission to his will to allow themselves to be transformed through the operation of his spirit working in them.

The Apostle Peter, in his enumeration of the qualities we are to add to our faith (2 Pet. 1:5-7) begins with those virtues which primarily have to do with the conquest of self: fortitude, knowledge, patience, self-control, etc., and proceeds from these in an ascending scale of development to those higher manifestations of Christian character which govern us in our relationship to each other. He places the quality of brotherly-kindness very high on the list, next in order to the ultimate achievement of character development, that all-embracing love which marks the Lord's own spirit. No one can meditate upon that character, or notice the development shown by the Apostles and reflected in their writings without becoming convinced that love for the brethren leads inevitably to that broadening of our sympathies which takes in the entire human family for whom Christ died.

The beloved Apostle tells us in that text which we all love to quote (John 3:16) that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" for our sakes. Yes, the great Creator of

everything, perfect and pure and lovely, loved the fallen race so much that even while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8) and we also, as we become imbued with his spirit become deeply interested in all that affects the human family, and desire fervently that their eyes may be opened and that they may be led to the only sure way in which their desire, the desire of all nations, may be brought about. Love is in its very nature, an extrovert quality. It cannot continue to exist where the one who wishes to cultivate it is solely concerned about self, not even when that concern is in reference to so laudable a matter as spiritual self-interest. The Christian who fears the bestowing of some of his care and attention upon the perplexities and worries of a world that is desperately striving to find some way out of its difficulties, lest that attention should interfere in some small measure with what he conceives to be his spiritual progress is, we believe, defeating his own purpose in life. The question that the Lord once asked his disciples: "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" (Matt. 6:27) has, we firmly believe, a spiritual as well as a physical application.

So it is our conviction that the evincing of sympathy and interest in the forlorn struggle of stumbling, blinded humanity, the race of which we are all members, is in no wise inconsistent with our vows of sacrifice, nor does it interfere in any way with our pressing on toward the goal of our hopes. Rather, we believe such a spirit to be pleading to the Lord.

The world may be and probably is, entering into a period which is unique in human history in respect to the universality of the trouble. The prophetic Scriptures grow eloquent in their warnings concerning it. It is an awe-inspiring matter to take note of the amount of time and space given in the Word to this subject of the "great time of trouble." That fact alone should give us some idea of the importance attached to the matter by the Lord of Hosts, and the need of watchfulness and prayer we should all realize during the months or years to come. Let us then make use of the means he has so graciously provided for our benefit in tracing the course of his purposes, as they become revealed in the sequence of current events, and in so doing, have our own faith strengthened in the ultimate victory of the forces of righteousness.

- J. R. Hughes.

THE HOPES OF THE EARLY CHURCH RESPECTING OUR LORD'S SECOND COMING

"SOME earnest and faithful Bible student has published a little tract treating the above subject so simply and beautifully that we feel constrained to lay before our readers copious extracts therefrom as follows: --

"No one can read the New Testament with care without discovering that the members of the early Church were men of hope as well as men of faith. Indeed hope seems, more than faith, to have been the outstanding feature of the character. Not that they really had more of this than that; the twain were one; they formed one noble edifice, one stately ship. But faith was the foundation work; hope, raised upon it, caught the eye of the beholder. Faith lay beneath the water line; hope reared the mast and spread the sail high in the sight of men. Their faith looked back to Calvary but, in a sense, it was an act completed. They were not always looking backward; forward they peered with steady gaze. The attitude of expectation was their daily, hourly attitude. Something was about to happen -- someone was coming -- and they are seen to be on tip-toe, looking for and

hasting unto the event. To them it clearly seemed a consummation most devoutly to be wished. They constantly referred to it as 'a lively hope,' 'that blessed hope,' 'this hope,' 'one hope,' 'our hope,' 'the hope of our calling,' 'the hope set before us.' Every reference shows that it completely filled their hearts, and was the dominating influence in their lives. It almost diverted them from ordinary work and duty, the warning being required not to stand 'gazing up into heaven.'

"The hope thus cherished was not of a private kind attainable by this believer at a certain time, and that one at another. It was one great hope, to be fulfilled to all the church, not even excluding them that slept at one defined and selfsame time. 'No prophecy of Scripture is of a private interpretation,' and this hope it is evident, was not to be fulfilled to individual believers. It was not a matter of personal and private experience; not the coming of Christ to the individual heart, nor the approach of death to each separate person; but something affecting the entire community of Christians at the same point of time.

"I. What was that hope which so controlled and cheered those early saints? None other than 'that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.' They believed with all their hearts in Jesus Christ, in his wondrous life of miracle and grace, and in his sacrificial death on Calvary's sad tree. They believed that he had triumphed o'er the grave, and had come forth to resurrection life. Many of them had seen him in his resurrection form, and had been witnesses of his ascension to the heavens. They remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said unto them, 'I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.' They had heard 'two men in white apparel' say, 'This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.' With simple faith they all accepted these great promises. The authority appeared to them sufficient the meaning transparent. The Lord had gone the Lord would come. He had disappeared from view, but only for 'a little while,' until the 'times of restitution.' When these times came, he would appear again, and each one seemed to say, 'Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.' This was to them the 'one far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves.'

IT WAS THE LODESTAR OF THEIR LIFE

the goal and climax of their being, and round it their communion with each other, like their testimony to the world, continually revolved.

"Even if men try, they cannot keep this subject out of sight, so long as the New Testament is read. The late beloved evangelist, D. L. Moody, made the admission that he was originally much opposed to this doctrine 'until,' said he, 'from constantly meeting with it in the reading of Scripture, I was constrained to become a believer in it; and now it is, to my mind, one of the most precious truths in the whole Bible.' One verse in every thirteen in the New Testament refers to it more or less directly; in the Epistles alone the proportion is much greater, being more like one in ten. In First Thessalonians it is fully one in seven, and in the Second Epistle nearly one in three.

"First Thessalonians is usually recognized as the earliest Epistle we possess. In our inquiry now it is of value, then, to note that the belief in Christ's return was a conspicuous feature of the Church to which it was addressed. In the opening chapter the apostle testifies 'Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.' The second chapter ends with a reference to the prospect of meeting 'in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.' At the close of chapter three the prayer is offered. 'That he may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.' Chapter four finishes with the announcement, made by direct inspiration, that 'the

Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God.' In chapter five the letter is brought to a conclusion with the prayer that they who received it may be 'preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

"In Second Thessalonians there are but forty-seven verses, yet in no fewer than fifteen reference to the Lord's return is made. The apostle declares 'the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.' He beseeches the brethren to steadfastness 'by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him.' He speaks of 'the brightness of his coming,' and the 'consolation and good hope' it brings; also he prays, 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.'

"First Corinthians is another of the older writings and it proves that there at Corinth, as at Thessalonica the Church had taken up the hope of which we speak. 'Ye come behind in no gift,' says the apostle, 'waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' He tells them not to sit in judgment upon one another, but to wait 'until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.' Above the table where they sit to celebrate the scene on Calvary, he writes the superscription

'TILL HE COME'

and over all the tombs where sleep the silent saints, he carves the sentence, bringing hope and joy, 'Christ the Firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.' Even when the apostle has to utter the dread word 'Anathema,' he straightway softens it with 'Maranatha,' 'The Lord comes,' as though to let them know that, after all, judgment belongeth to another; men need not quickly curse their fellows.

"In the Epistle to Philippians the time of the Advent is repeatedly referred to as 'The Day of Jesus Christ,' and for it they are taught to wait. 'He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.' 'That ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.' 'That I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain.' It is clear that the Philippians shared the apostle's hope because he says, 'Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.'

"In the Epistle to Colossian saints, the same glad note is rung; 'When Christ who is our life shall appear then shall ye also appear with him in glory.' Everything in the early Church was made to hinge upon the coming of the Lord.

"To Timothy, the apostle Paul gives various charges and he makes each binding 'until the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.' In view of the same event he shows that he can hold death in contempt: 'I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.'

"To Titus, too, he makes it clear that, by this truth not only is the fear of death removed, but life is made pure and beautiful, men 'live soberly, righteously, and godly,' 'looking for that blessed hope.'

"The Epistle to the Hebrews agrees with all the other apostolic writings. Repeatedly it speaks of the expected day.

'UNTO THEM THAT LOOK FOR HIM

"shall he appear the second time, without sin unto salvation.' 'Consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works...and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.' 'Cast not away therefore your confidence...for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.'

"The apostle James adopts the same appeal; 'Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.'

"The apostle Peter makes much use of Second Advent truth. It is the vermilion and the gold with which he illuminates his precious manuscripts. To saints in suffering he writes, and thus he seeks to cheer their hearts: 'Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations that the trial of your faith...might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.' 'Hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' 'When his glory shall be revealed, ye shall be glad with exceeding great joy.' 'When the Chief Shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of life that fadeth not away.' 'There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation....But, beloved ...the Lord is not slack concerning his promises as some men count slackness, ... but the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.' 'What manner of persons ought ye to be, ... looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God?' 'Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.'

"Saint John cherishes the same glad hope, and seeks by it to strengthen and to stimulate the Church. 'My little children, abide in him, that, when he shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.' 'We know that, when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is; and every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure.'

"As for the Book of the Revelation, it really is the 'Revelation of Jesus Christ,' and is all about the Second Advent. In it we have the facts, circumstances and judgments connected with the Lord's unveiling, or apocalypse. 'Behold he cometh,' is the burden of the book; and there can be no understanding of the 'words of this prophecy,' if the coming of the Lord be doubted or be lost to view. Again and again, in the midst of its mysteries, the Master's voice is heard crying, 'Hold fast till I come!' 'Behold I come as a thief

BLESSED IS HE THAT WATCHETH.'

"Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be.' To this, the seer himself would have us all say, 'Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.'

"It is well for us to scan the Scriptures thus, in order that, by line on line, we may convince ourselves what was the hope that cheered and edified the early Church. After a reading, such as this, there is no room for doubt regarding it. The hope they had was that of Jesus Christ's return, and nothing else can be maintained as answering to the language they employed.

"It could not be a spirit blessing they were looking for -- a coming of the Lord into their hearts, for quickening and enlightenment; for such sweet spiritual presence they had never lost. 'Lo, I am with you alway,' he had said, 'even to the end of the world' and evermore 'Christ in the heart the hope of glory' was to them a living, grand reality. They did not need a coming of that kind.

"Nor could they mean the destruction of the city of Jerusalem; and passing strange it seems that this should ever have been thought to have fulfilled the prophecy. What was there in this sad event to constitute a hope? It was a hope these men possessed! What had this city's fall to do with Gentile saints? Yet they, as well as Jews, were made partakers of the Church's hope. Above all, why, if the destruction of Jerusalem fulfilled the Scriptures relative to Christ's return -- why was the coming of the Lord proclaimed, and eagerly desired long after Salem's towers were in the dust? The Gospel according to John was surely written after that. So were his three Epistles, and the Book of Revelation. The testimony of the early Fathers is also to the effect that the hope of Christ's return remained, like a meteor in the heavens, long after Jerusalem was removed. Clement of Rome, in his first Epistle, written about A.D. 95, says, 'Let us be followers of those who went about in goat skins and sheep skins, preaching the coming of Christ.' Ignatius of Antioch, about A.D. 100 wrote to Polycarp, 'Be every day better than another consider the times, and expect him who is above all time, eternal, invisible, though for our sakes made visible.' Polycarp, in an Epistle dated about A.D. 108 said, 'that God had raised up our Lord Jesus from the dead, and that he will come to judge the world and raise the saints, when if we walk worthy of him we shall reign together with him.' Papias of Hierapolis the intimate friend and companion of Polycarp, taught the coming of the Lord in all the churches that he visited. Justin Martyr, about A.D. 150, spoke of those as 'destitute of just reason who did not understand that which is clear from all Scripture, that

TWO COMINGS OF CHRIST ARE ANNOUNCED.'

"Ireneus also, who flourished as a writer about A.D. 180 says, 'The Lord shall come from heaven in the clouds with the glory of his Father, casting the Antichrist and them that obey him into a lake of fire; but bringing to the just the times of the kingdom.' These men all, with one accord, waited for the coming of God's Son from heaven. They did nothing so ridiculous as to believe that the promises to that end were fulfilled when Jerusalem was burned.

"Nor was it death for which these early saints were waiting. Not one of them is known to have confounded that with Christ's return. In no epistle is death set before the Christian as the object of his hope. The approach of death, the enemy, can never be the coming of the Lord -- his friend. It may be that the time between the hour of death and the morn of resurrection shall pass even as 'the twinkling of an eye'; one moment may be heard the voices of earthly friends around the bed, and the next (as it appears) that call that wakes the sleepers in the tomb. But we must carefully distinguish between things that differ. Falling asleep is not the same as waking, though hardly an instant may appear to pass between them; nor is grim death the coming of the Lord, though no time seems to elapse between the two events. If it be otherwise, and the return of Christ means the believer's death, then is the Resurrection 'past already,' for that is always associated with the Lord's return. But against this heresy we are expressly warned.

"No; if Greek and English words have any meaning those employed by the apostles and the Fathers with their equivalents in our own mother tongue, all go to show that a personal and glorious coming of the Lord was what those men of God were waiting for. No other coming ever crossed their minds. It was not till the middle of the Third century that serious opposition or even question, arose as to the doctrine of the personal coming and reign of Jesus Christ. 'Now,' says Mosheim, 'its credit began to decline, principally through the influence and authority of Origen,

who opposed it with the greatest warmth, because it was incompatible with some of his favorite sentiments.'

"The English Baptist churches in their Confession of Faith, presented to Charles II. in 1660, said, 'We believe ...that the same Lord Jesus who showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, which was taken up from the disciples and carried into heaven, shall so come in like manner as he was seen to go into heaven, and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory; for then shall he be King of kings and Lord of lords.' Here there is quite enough to show what was the hope within them when the early Christians spoke with one another of the coming of the Lord. It was 'the Lord himself' -- for whom they looked and longed.

"II. The reason for such unanimity and enthusiasm in the entertainment of this hope must have been both weighty and worthy. The early Christians did not lightly hold it, and it would not be with light and careless hand they took it up. They must have had as cogent reasons for believing in, and hoping for, their Lord's return, as they possessed for trusting and rejoicing in his first appearing. Back to the first by faith, and forward to the next by hope, they looked, with as solid assurance in one case as in the other. These were the two pivots on which revolved their Christian life, the two wings on which they mounted up as eagles; neither pivot could be weakened, nor could either wing be clipped, without grave injury immediately ensuing. 'Take unto you the whole armour of God,' said the apostles, and we may be sure they gave as good reasons why the Christian should 'take for a helmet the hope of salvation,' as for his 'putting on the breastplate of faith and love.'

"The foremost reason must have been, that Christ himself had said he would return. The word of seers and prophets, of apostles and of angels, was of use; and these had all united to affirm that he would come again but, after all, the Master of the House, rather than any servant, was the One whose word was to be heard. If he said, even once, he would return, that would be quite sufficient for the faithful heart. Already we have seen that many times the

LORD HAD PLEDGED HIS WORD

"to this effect. He said distinctly, 'If I go...I will come again.' 'I will come to you.' 'I go away and come again unto you.' He spoke of himself as the 'Son of man,' who should 'come in the glory of his Father'; as the 'Nobleman' who 'went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return' as the 'Master' for whose coming the servants were to watch; the 'Bridegroom,' whose appearing the wise virgins all would hail; and as the 'Lord' who yet would come and reckon with the stewards of his house. In these, and many ways beside, the gracious Lord assured his loved ones he would come again, and they with trustful hearts, just took him at his word. 'To doubt would be disloyalty, to falter would be sin.' Then, as their faith laid hold, their hope was born; for they soon found, wrapped in the promises of his return as in a garment fair, all scented with sweet lavender things rare and beautiful, that made those precious promises the richest heirloom of the Christian Church.

"The first thing they discovered there was this, that in the certainty of Christ's return there lay the guarantee -- the only guarantee they had -- that they would see their Lord. Some of those early saints had seen the Saviour when he stood on earth; but now his words were true, 'You see me no more.' Oh, how they longed to view him once again. To many of them the apostle Peter's words were more appropriate, 'Whom having not seen, ye love; and in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice.' But all the Church most earnestly desired to look on him whose

love had won their hearts. There is evidence that at a very early date the words of Isaiah were appropriated, 'Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty.'

"Apart from the Saviour's coming most assuredly there is no warrant given that these anticipations shall be realized. It is then that 'every eye shall see him.' No wonder that the early Christians 'panted for the appointed hour.' Then would be the revelation, the unveiling of the Lord; 'the day of his appearing and his kingdom;' and till it came they could not be at rest.

WE SHALL BE 'CHANGED' AND 'SEE HIM AS HE IS.'

"They also learned to say, 'when he shall appear,' and 'we shall see him as he is,' 'we shall be like him,' 'changed into the same image, from glory to glory' for 'as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.' This is a marvelous announcement, and hardly could we credit it unless it were most clearly given in God's most Holy Word. For the assistance of our faith, it is even given repeatedly, and we can only gratefully accept the truth. The early Christians certainly did this.

"They believed that this 'glad change' in them 'which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord,' would be accompanied by the awakening of them 'which sleep in Jesus.' For their dear ones who were dead, as well as for themselves, their only hope lay in the Second Advent. They did not say, 'There is no death; what seems so is transition.' No, they accepted death as a reality. 'We believe that Jesus died,' they said, 'even so,' there are 'them also which sleep in Jesus.' 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.' Still, they are dead, and Resurrection is required to make them live. Not by making light of death did they attempt to comfort one another; but by making much, yea, everything, of the sure and certain hope of joyful Resurrection, to take place at the coming of the Lord. He was the mighty magnet that would yet 'descend from heaven,' and as steel is drawn to steel, so they declared 'the dead in Christ' would rise to him.

"They believed that that would be the day of their presentation to the King. By the apostle Paul they were distinctly so informed. In writing to Corinthian saints, he said: 'Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.' Until that day, on various grounds, they could not be presented. Christ would not even, until then, be King. So long as he was Priest within the veil, they could not go to him. The type forbade it: 'There shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out.' The Lord himself declared it: 'Whither I go ye cannot come.' 'I will come again and receive you unto myself.' For that day of joyful welcome to his court they had to wait. They did not dream of 'going to heaven one by one'; they would 'be caught up together to meet the Lord.' They could not think of entering his glorious presence until they were 'presented.' They could not be presented until they were prepared and fitly robed. Not in the drab dress of this mortal body could they stand before him. 'This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.' But they believed that when he came this necessary change in their apparel would be wrought and then should they be brought into the presence of the King in 'raiment of needlework and clothing of wrought gold,' 'a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.'

"That would be the time, then, of their triumph and reward. Sometimes when men die their friends affirm they have gone to their reward; but

NOT SO SAID THE EARLY CHURCH.

"They could not; for the Lord had definitely named another time than that of death: 'Thou shalt be recompensed,' said he, 'at the resurrection of the just' 'in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory.' 'Behold, I come... and my reward is with me to give every man [then] according as his work shall be.' The apostle Peter confirms that with the word, 'When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory.' 'We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ' before reward can be distributed, and we are distinctly told it is at 'His appearing' that this seat shall be set up. 'Henceforth,' said the expiring Paul, 'there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.' He had no thought of going by

himself into the presence chamber, and in some private way receiving his Lord's 'welcome' and 'well done.' No! he wanted 'all them, also,' whom he had known on earth to be beside him then; especially those whom he had led to taste redeeming love. 'For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?' It is when the nobleman returns that he will call his servants, and hold reckoning with them. No wonder, then, that faithful men kept ever in their minds that great event. The coming of the Lord was not denied, nor lost to view, until, in later days than those of which we speak the Christian Church had lost its zeal, and in sad, wanton ways was walking with the world.

"Thy kingdom come,' he had himself instructed them to pray thus, and they believed that till he came the kingdom would not come. Not for the gradual spread of truth, and the conversion of the world, they looked....They knew that all the purposes of God regarding men would be fulfilled, but they appear not to have thought of that as one. The Gospel must be preached in all the world, 'tis true; but they accepted Christ's own words, that this should be but 'for a witness unto all nations'; and as James the apostle said 'to take out of them a people for his name.' They did not vainly hope the world would better and yet better grow; they knew that 'evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse.' They never said that things would so improve that the last days of this dark age would be its brightest and its best. 'This know,' said they 'that in the last days

PERILOUS TIMES SHALL COME'

"for wickedness shall be rampant even with 'a form of godliness.' With one consent these early Christians waited for the Lord. By his appearing would his kingdom be secured.

"Many members of the early Church were Jews and for their nation's sake they wanted Christ to come. That day would be a glorious day for them, the time of Israel's repentance and recovery. Then 'the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth,' and from their eyes the veil shall be removed. 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced and mourn.' 'And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation.'

"The thought of Israel's salvation at the Lord's return would make glad the hearts of the Gentile saints as well as Jews; for Israel's restoration, they were told would girdle the whole globe with the glory of the Lord. 'If the fall of them be the riches of the world and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles how much more their fulness?' Then it is that the Lord, by his Advent, 'shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel'; then it is, and not in this the Gospel day, that 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.' Then 'He shall judge among the nations and rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.'

"Peace shall spread through all the earth

"When the Lord doth come.

"Truth and righteousness go forth

"When the Lord doth come.

"God with men shall then be found

"Every place be hallowed ground

"Life and beauty shall abound

"When the Lord doth come.

"With such results expected from the coming of the King, it is no surprise that it became the early Christian's hope. Each member of the Church seems to have held it. A Christian who had not this hope was an anomaly. Milner says, 'This constituted in the second century so decidedly an article of faith that Justin held it up as a criterion of orthodoxy.' Bishop Newton says, 'It was generally believed in the

FIRST THREE, AND PUREST, AGES [CENTURIES].'

"Bishop Russell, though an anti-Millennarian, says 'Down to the beginning of the fourth century the belief was universal and undisputed.' While Gibbon, with no prejudice either way, says, 'It appears to have been the reigning sentiment of orthodox believers.' He also adds, 'It was productive of the most salutary effects on the faith and practice of Christians.' Of course its effects were salutary! It disposed the Church to prayerfulness and patience, to purity and peace, to sincerity and soberness, to loyalty and love, to fidelity and firmness to watchfulness and work. Solace it gave in suffering and in bereavement balm; in persecution perfect peace, and even in the martyr's fire the Master's joy.

"Would God this were the Church's hope to-day! Only comparatively few within her bounds lay hold of it. The doctrine of the Second Advent is by most neglected, altho the word of God is full of it.

"When not entirely relegated to the lumber room, it is often held up to ridicule, and they who dare to say that they believe in it are treated as -- well-meaning folk perhaps, but -- simple souls, and far behind the age. Well, some of us are quite content to be behind the age. Whenever it, in any matter, goes ahead of Jesus Christ and his immediate followers, we shall let it go. 'The goodly fellowship of the apostles' is good enough for us, and on the subject now before us we are with that noble company. Simple we may seem to modern men to be; but it is the ancient truth we hold, the good old way we tread."

- R2953-R2956.

Procrastination

"That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke." - Phil. 2:15.

If Providence with smiling face
Strews roses on our way,
When shall we stoop to pick them up?
Today, my friend, *today*.
But if fate frowns with face of care,
And forecasts coming sorrow,
When shall we grieve, if grieve we must?
Tomorrow, friend, *tomorrow!*

If those who wrong us own their fault,
And our forgiveness pray,
When shall we pardon and forget?
Today -- ah yes, TODAY.
But if stern Justice urge rebuke,
And wrath from Memory borrow,
When shall we chide, if chide we dare?
TOMORROW, oh, TOMORROW

If those to whom we owe a debt
Are harmed unless we pay,
When shall we struggle to be just?
TODAY, my friend, TODAY,
But if our debtor fail our hope,
And plead his ruin thorough,
When shall we weigh his breach of faith?
Ah, let it be TOMORROW !

For virtuous acts and harmless joys
The moments will not stay;
We should not fail to welcome them
TODAY, my friend, TODAY.
But care, resentment, angry words,
And unavailing sorrow,
Come far too soon if they appear
Tomorrow, yes, tomorrow!

- *Anonymous*

The Question Box

Question:

What is the lesson to be drawn from St. Paul's words in Romans 9:21, which read: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?"

Answer:

Amongst the writings of St. Paul there are some things which the Apostle Peter says are "hard to understand." (2 Pet. 3:16.) This, doubtless, is one of them. Not only have scoffers failed to grasp the import of these words, but sincere Christians have been puzzled, and not only puzzled but burdened, by them. They have seemed to shut out hope. Instead of being a part of, or at least in harmony with, the glad tidings that God has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11), these words seem only to proclaim his absolute sovereignty. Not in these words as St. Paul meant them, but in their misunderstanding, lies the germ of all that is most repulsive in the Calvinist doctrine of election. It is in a similarly wrong conception of this and related passages that the Mohammedan finds justification for his acceptance of the will of Allah as a destiny which he cannot understand, but to which he must, perforce, submit.

To get our bearings on the question we must go back to the time of Jeremiah. It was in a dark and troublous time that Jeremiah was called upon to serve as the Lord's mouthpiece. His counsel went unheeded; his ministry seemed a failure. In fact, he was put in the stocks by the false leaders of his time. In these circumstances his spirits sank; he decided to preach the word of the Lord no more. (Jer. 20:9.) It was while he was in this mood that there came to him an inner prompting in which, either then or later, he recognized "the word of the Lord." (Jer. 18:1.) Acting on that impulse, he went "down to the potter's house," and watched him at work molding clay into form and fashioning it according to his purpose. When he began his task, the potter had a design or pattern in mind, which Jeremiah knew not. That lump which the potter had taken shapeless into his hands might be for honor or dishonor; a vessel for the king's table, a vase for fruit or flowers, a basin in which men might wash their hands or feet.

The Prophet looked and saw that here too, as well as in his own experience, was apparent failure. "The vessel that he wrought was marred in the hands of the potter." The clay did not take shape; there was some hidden defect that seemed to resist the plastic guidance of wheel and hand. The Prophet stood and gazed -- quite possibly was beginning, in his mind, to criticize the potter for his lack of skill when he looked again and saw what followed. "So he [the potter] returned, and made it another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." It was not a lack of skill which Jeremiah saw, but skill in its highest form -- a skill not baffled by seeming or even by real failure -- triumphing over difficulties. And then, by one of those flashes of insight which the world calls genius, but which we recognize as inspiration, he was taught to read the meaning of the parable. "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel." - Jer. 18:5, 6.

Did this "word of the Lord" as it came rushing in on his mind, crush him as with the sense of a destiny arbitrary, supreme, not necessarily righteous, against which men struggled in vain, and in whose hands they had no freedom and therefore no responsibility? No indeed! Quite to the contrary. To Jeremiah that which he saw was a parable of wisdom and love, working patiently

and slowly; the groundwork of a call to repentance and conversion. Hear him further: "At what instant I [the Lord] shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up,, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." (Jer. 18:7,8.) *That* "word of the Lord" we must believe, was one that brought light and hope into the thick darkness in which the Prophet's mind had before been wrapped.*

* It had as its necessary complement that which, dealing with the case of apparent failure which frustrated the purpose of the Divine Craftsman, involves what seems a change of another kind in that purpose. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them." (18:9, 10.) But this, no less than the other, showed that what seemed to the Prophet the one great lesson taught by the parable of the Potter and the Clay was not that the decrees of God are irreversible, but that man is free to choose, and that though God may be constrained to punish, he delights rather to forgive.

As in thought he thus passed from the potter and his wheel to the operations of the great Master Workman, as seen in the history of nations, Jeremiah saw in them the vessels that were being molded, as on the wheel of Providence. Here was clay, indeed, but with one important difference—they were not masses of dead, inert matter. Each was, as it were, instinct with a self-determining power, which, either yielded to or resisted the plastic workings of the potter's hand. The urn or vase designed for kingly use refused its high calling, and chose another and less seemly shape. The Supreme Artisan, who had determined in the history of mankind the times before appointed, and the bounds of men's habitations, had, for example, called Israel to be the pattern of a righteous people, the witness of Truth to the nations, a kingdom of priests, the first-fruits of humanity. That purpose had been frustrated. Israel had refused that calling, had chosen to be as the nations round it, in its worship, its sensuality, its greed of gain, the tyranny of its oppressors. It had, therefore, to be brought under another discipline, fitted for another work: "He returned, and made it another vessel." The pressure of the Potter's hand was to be harder, and the vessel was to be fashioned for less noble uses. Shame and suffering and exile -- their land left desolate, and they themselves weeping by the waters of Babylon -- this was the process to which they were now called on to submit. *But at any moment in the process, repentance, acceptance, submission might modify its character and its issues.*

True it was that a little later on in the Prophet's work the teaching of the parable was carried one step further, to a tragic conclusion. This time it was not enough to point to the potter's patient skill. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah again, "Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests, and go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom" (Jer. 19:1) and there in their sight he was to break the bottle as a witness that, in one sense, their day of grace was over, that something had been forfeited which now could never be regained. Israel and Judah had been unfaithful to the ideal of their national existence. Never again was that form of their existence to be renewed. The form and use of this vessel of the Master Potter were to be altered altogether. But did this mean that the purposes of God had been frustrated? By no means. Israel had still a calling and an election. They were still to be used by God as witnesses to the nations, stewards of the treasure of Truth. In that thought the Prophet's heart could and did find hope and comfort. He could accept the doom of exile and shame for himself and for his people, because he looked beyond it to that remolded life which might be theirs after the period of servitude and desolation had expired. Those who, instead of accepting it, were rebelling and resisting, questioning the wisdom or the righteousness of God, were as the thing formed saying to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

The age in which St. Paul lived was like that of Jeremiah, a dark and troublous time for one whose heart was with his brethren, the children of Abraham according to the flesh. Once again the potter was fashioning the clay to high and noble uses. Israel might have taken their place as the first-fruits of the Church of Christ, as the prophets and teachers of mankind. God started, one might say, speaking as men, in the hope that it would be so. "To the Jew first," was the rule invariably followed. But here, also, there was apparent failure. Blindness, hardness, unbelief, these marred the shape of the vessels made to honor. Because this was true, did St. Paul cease to believe in the righteousness and faithfulness of God? Did he see no loving purpose behind the seeming severity? No -- the vessel would be made for what men held to be dishonor -- exile lasting through the centuries, dispersion over all the world; but this would prove to be but the preparation and discipline for the far-off future, fitting them in the end for nobler uses. The gifts and calling of God were without repentance, and the wisdom of the great Master

Workman would eventually be made manifest, when, "in that day" He who 'had concluded all in sin and unbelief, should have mercy on all. Did any Israelite, zealous, impatient, eager to anticipate the purpose of him who sees the end from the beginning, question yet once more the wisdom or righteousness of God in this discipline-for him the Apostle had the answer: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Hath not the potter power over the clay?"

We have spoken thus far on the bearing of the parable on God's dealings with the nations -- especially that of Israel. That, obviously, is what was prominent in the thoughts of both Prophet and Apostle in their interpretation. But we need not shrink from accepting it as it bears on the individual life of every one of *us*. *The lesson to be drawn is a lesson of the matchless skill and infinite love and patience of the Master Potter.* One less skilled and less patient, less inclined to mercy and forgiveness, would have discarded this wretched clay long ago. But not he! *This* Potter would fain return and mold and remold till the vessel is fit for some use in the great house of which he is the Supreme Head. By the discipline of life, by warnings and reproofs, by failures and disappointments, by prosperity and success, by sickness and health, by varying work and ever-fresh opportunities, he 'has been educating us in the school of Christ, leading us to know and to do his will. Who is there of us who does not realize that this is a true account of the various experiences of life through which we pass? May not the language of our hearts continue to be, as the hymn writer has so well expressed:

"Have Thine own way, Lord,
'Have Thine own way,
'Thou art the potter,
I am the *clay*.
Take me and mold me
After Thy will,
While I am waiting,
Yielded and still."

- P. L. Read.

The Certainty of the New Testament Text

The question has often been asked, What evidence, what assurance can be given that we really have the words of our Lord and the Apostles today? May not the ravages of time, the centuries of pagan persecution, forgery, interpolation, errors incident in copying, and the many centuries of opposition of a professing Christianity in its attempt to suppress and destroy the Scriptures -- may not all these give us serious doubts as to the trustworthiness, the correctness of our present New Testament text?

The Early Christian Writers

Many writings of about twenty of the earliest Christian authors have come down to us and have been translated into English and published in 24 volumes of 500 pages each. In these 12,000 pages, we have the still existing writings of the most eminent Christian authors who lived and wrote before the year A.D. 325, the date of the Council of Nicea. These men, some of them contemporary with the last years of the Apostles or the Apostles' friends, have given us in their writings the most positive and unmistakable evidence as to how the New Testament was received and the estimation in which it was held in their time.

At an English literary gathering over a century ago, the following question was asked, "Supposing all the New Testament manuscripts had been destroyed by the enforcement of the edict of the Roman Emperor Diocletian in A.D. 303, which demanded the surrender and burning of the Christian writings, could their contents have been recovered from the still-existing writings of the Christians of the first three centuries?"

A certain Bible student was present to whom this question appealed and who also had that turn or antiquarian taste of mind to investigate such a subject. Having the needed publications at hand, also the time, he spent two whole months in research, some of the results of which may be tabulated as follows:

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who was martyred in A.D. 155 or 156 at the age of 86, and who lived about 30 years in the Apostle John's time and conversed with him, wrote an epistle to the Philippians containing 410 quotations from the New Testament.

Justin Martyr, writing about 140, quotes again and again the very words we now read in the New Testament.

Irenaeus, A.D. 178, a pupil of Polycarp, quotes 76,7 passages.

Clement, A.D. 194, quotes 389 passages.

Tertullian, A.D. 200, makes 1802 quotations, or if repetitions are included, more than three thousand. In his book "Against Heretics," he says that in his time the very authentic letters of the Apostles were still to be seen at Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, and Rome.

Origen, A.D. 230, made such an extensive use of the New Testament that 5,765 quotations or two-thirds of the New Testament have been found in his writings.

In the writings of these men have been found all but ten verses of the New Testament as we acknowledge it today. They quote passage after passage, page after page, of the very same

Scriptures we quote today; they received them with the same authority we receive them, and this, long before the Council of Nicea or any other council.

- Selection from *Who Made the New Testament* by H. L. Hastings.

A Secondary Evidence

The number of New Testament manuscripts, either complete or fragmentary, now known exceed seventeen hundred, dating from about A.D. 330 onward.

"Westcott and Hort, New Testament scholars, who for twenty-eight years have specialized in the comparison of old manuscripts, have summed up their work as follows: Seven-eighths of the total of the various readings are altogether of a very minor importance, being mere verbal variations. One-eighth concern differences of real importance, involving 40 passages in all. Dr. Hort says that if we imagine the New Testament consisting of 5,00 pages, the various readings that relate to points of vital consequence would not occupy more than half of one page, or one-tenth of one per cent."

- *Martin*.

The Apocrypha

It is a matter of real astonishment that outside of the four Gospels, so few incidents are preserved of Christ. It is amazing that history and tradition have preserved no certain saying or circumstance except that of Paul, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Some apocryphal sayings may be a faint echo of what he said, but not one of them add a new light or lesson. Our Lord stood so high that whenever men give rein to, their imagination respecting him, they immediately dwarf, degrade his majesty. Melancholy proof is furnished that very early, many 'Christians had begun to form distorted and wrong opinions of our Lord, meaningless miracles, thus giving striking proof of the unapproachable, immeasurable superiority of the four Gospels.

-*F. W. Farrar -- R2027.*

Recently Deceased

Miss Eva McCabe, Portland, Ore. - (May).
Mrs. Dorcas Spears, Columbus, Ohio-(May).
Mrs. Clara Berry, Dayton, Ohio-(June).
Mr. Frank Frost, Marblehead, Mass. - (June).
Mrs. Lena Grunst, Rochester, N. Y. - (June).
Mr. H. R. Hoffman, Wausau, Wis. - (June).
Mr. George J. Richards, Waukesha, Wis. - (June).

The Daily Cross

It is only after we are crucified to the carnal nature that we can bear our cross in the true spirit of the Master. It is by the denial or death of sinful self that we enter the state of perfect obedience in which the daily trials and crosses can be borne in deep fellowship with Jesus. The very order of the words of our Savior seems to indicate the steps of experience. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Here we have, first, the crucifixion of the natural self-life, then the purified soul bearing the daily sufferings and hindrances, which brings it into constant fellowship with Christ. It is this daily cross which leads the sanctified soul into a deeper death to self, according to its love and fervor of obedience.

What is our daily cross? It is that one or more things which are unavoidable in our lives, and which produce suffering of body or mind or heart. It is that thing which in our poor judgment seems to hinder the easy flow of our religious life. Sometimes our cross may be composed of a combination of things, but as a general rule, it is some one instrument or cause of suffering to the soul. Where there is no suffering of some kind involved, then there could be no cross at all, for the only thing in a cross is its pain. The outward form of the daily cross may change with years, or the same cross may continue till death, but in some form it abides.

It is as impossible for the true saint not to have some cross as it is to walk in the sunshine without having a shadow. The Holy Spirit gives us to understand plainly that the multitudes of jolly, ease loving, and easygoing religionists, who bear no daily suffering with Jesus, are only sectarian-born religious bastards, and not really kingdom-born souls. (See Heb. 12:8.) It is your daily cross, that makes you weep more than any other thing; that sends you to frequent prayer; that leads you to ransack the promises, that makes you cry out like Jesus, "Father, why is this?"; that causes you to put both arms around the neck of your Savior in yearning love; that makes you sick of earth and self; that gives you wishful longing for heaven. Oh precious old homely, daily cross! what deep, tender, far-reaching effects thou hast wrought through all these prayer paved years!

There is an hallucination about getting free from our daily cross which needs to be broken; it is a day-dream worked up in our minds, a beautiful vision that just hangs ahead of us, that some day we will be rid of our cross, that we will have no painful annoyances, and then our feet can fly unimpeded toward heaven. Alas! that so many saints should get their eyes set on the will-o-the-wisp dream. If you want deep union with Jesus, getting rid of your cross is the very thing to defeat it. There is a better victory than freedom from the daily instrument of pain, and that is to pass into that ocean depth of the Christ-life, where every trial can be borne in exactly the same spirit that Jesus bore. Boundless tender love is the condition for triumphant bearing of our daily cross. When our cross has driven us *so* deep into, the warm ocean-heart of Jesus that we are kept melted and flooded with quiet, lowly, tender, yearning love for God and his Kingdom, then the cross will have proved its balsam, and then every trial will be fuel to the flame of love.

To love the cross is understood by only a few Christians. People fancy it means loving the cross on which Christ died. No; it means loving that `very cross in our lives that drives us into deep oneness with Christ; it is to meekly, patiently, lovingly embrace to our inner hearts the very principle of self-abnegation and self-nothingness. It is often the case that devout Romanists wear hair-cloth and iron or knotted cords next to their skin. All that is too superficial, it does not enter deep enough. Jesus did no such foolish thing. To bear our daily trials as Jesus did, we must take it into our heart's love, and bear it meekly, quietly, lovingly, as unto God, and not to man.

How long it takes to accept our daily trial as a gift direct from the hand of our Lord! His eyes are on us; he notices the inner feelings, thoughts and choices as to our cross. The spirit in which we bear our trials here will mark the grade of our standing in the world to come. It is by persevering prayer that we get on the sunny side of every trial. It is the sharp -grain of sand cutting its way into the oyster that is enveloped with life-juices of the creature and turned into a pearl; so our daily cross, cutting its way into our life's core by being folded round and round with thanksgivings and loving prayers, becomes in our soul the very pearl of Christ-likeness, and more valuable than all our own chosen blessings.

The Holy Spirit reveals to us the very disposition in which Jesus bore his daily trials, and when we bear ours in the same spirit, then indeed do we have fellowship with him. If it does not please our Father to remove our trials, it is because he wants us to seek and receive an overflow of tender love that will bear us on over the trials and in spite of them. Pure limitless love is the only true victory over trials. Intense love for Jesus is the only water that can make our thorny cross ripen its fruit; so do not cut down your cross, but water it with more love and prayers, and wait for its golden apples.

- From Soul Food by G. D. Watson.

Encouraging Messages

Dear Brethren:

... We are looking forward to meeting Brother Read in the not far distant future, at any rate at the London Convention, which we are praying will be greatly blessed of the Lord. It is very wonderful to realize that after all the terrible, ordeals through which we have passed it is still possible to look forward to this happy reunion. . . .

There is a large synagogue at the end of our road, and just recently the sacred Rolls were burnt by some revengeful anti-Semitist as a reprisal for recent outrages, and often feeling runs very high, which is very sad. So many of the Jewish citizens are good, quiet citizens, and as always they too suffer.

I wish to express my thanks for the beautiful and inspiring articles in the "Herald," and also for the real spirit of loving tolerance manifested. This is what we so very greatly need. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God for God is love." (1 John 4:7, 8.) May God's rich blessing rest upon you.

With warmest Christian love and prayers,
Mrs. V. H. N. -- Eng.

[The following letter has been unavoidably delayed through lack of space.]

Dear Brethren:

I greatly appreciated the copy of the Herald you sent. ... Tonight we shall meet with the brethren in memory of Calvary, so I have set apart this day to drink in something of all the wealth of blessedness that springs from that hallowed place. As the years roll by earth's center of attraction lessens its grip on our affections; only those times and places of historic note have interest. We think of Bethany, and Emmaus, of the shore of Galilea on that morning when they ate the bread and fish together, but most of all in spirit we walk in the garden with him, and gaze on that most wondrous of all scenes, Calvary. Thus the transformation goes on and we are being "changed," from glory to glory into that same image by the Spirit of the Lord.

How quiet and effectual is his work, and who can hinder it, "for it is God who worketh both to will and to do of his own good pleasure." How true are Isaiah's words, "'This people have I formed for myself. They shall show forth my praise.'" Calvary is the "dark room" where our negatives will bring forth the positives, and as we with uncovered face behold his glory, we also prepare ourselves to be reflectors of that glory, when, "in the ages to come he shall show the exceeding riches of his Grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

My prayer for you all at this hallowed season is that you may with all saints, myself also, be favored with those precious tokens of his love, his interest, and his presence, that when they are remembered in later days we can say with Peter, "It was good to be there."

"To Calvary Lord in spirit now
Our weary hearts repair,
To dwell upon thy dying love
And taste its sweetness there.

"Sweet resting place of every heart
That knows the plague of sin,
Yet knows that deep mysterious joy
Of peace with God within.

"There, through Thine hour of deepest woe
Thy suffering spirit passed;
Grace there its wondrous victory gained,
And love endured its last."

Your brother in Him,
J. C. -- Idaho.

Items of Interest

Assistance to Foreign Brethren

Inquiries are being made as to whether items may be sent here to be forwarded to brethren in need in Europe. To do so would mean one extra handling of the package and a slight addition to the expense-postage being paid twice -- and nothing to be gained. Postal clerks anywhere will supply the labels and give instructions as to their use.

The post office will accept packages up to 22 pounds in weight and that do not measure "more than 36 inches in length or 72 inches in length and girth combined."

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