

The Mystery of God. . .

By J. A. Trench.

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INTRODUCTORY.

WHAT a complete revolution was involved in the ways of God, when, by divine inspiration, the prophecy of Caiaphas was recorded, "that Jesus should die for that nation, and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John xi. 51, 52). Nothing of the kind had ever been intimated in Old Testament Scriptures. It announced the close of the special exclusive relationship of the nation of Israel to God which had been maintained for long centuries. Of them He could say, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos iii. 2).

The accomplishment of the purposes of God as to that nation was most surely before the Lord Jesus as one object of His death, even as Caiaphas (not of himself) had prophesied. But there was another object nearer and dearer to His heart; and I desire to raise the question as to how far this object has been laid hold of by us in the faith of our souls. If we have rested on His death for our sins, and know anything of the deliverance He has wrought for us by that death, from sin, and from the law which was the strength of sin, and from the world, there is nothing that should touch our hearts more deeply than the knowledge that

the blessed Lord died that the children of God, hitherto scattered, with no consciousness of their relationship to Him, or to one another, should be in that condition no longer, but gathered together in one on earth.

“ONE FLOCK.”

There were children of God then, owned in this relationship by God, but awaiting the revelation of the truth, for any enjoyment of it. They were of the Jews and of the Gentiles, but had no sense of the family bond. Nay, by God's own institution they of the Jews were separated from those of the Gentiles by a middle wall of partition—the law of commandments contained in ordinances—that acted both to keep them at a distance from God and from each other. We learn how real the barrier was, and how impossible for even those that were of God to be one while it existed, from the very remarkable steps that were taken by God to induce Peter to carry to the Gentile Cornelius words whereby he might be saved, so that he might be consciously brought on to the ground of accomplished redemption, albeit he had already evidently been born again, and manifested many a fruit of the work of grace in him.

But there were divine forces preparing the way for such a drawing together of those who had been the subjects of God's mighty operation in grace. John x. teaches us that the Lord Jesus had entered into the sheepfold of Judaism as the Shepherd of the sheep; not to shepherd them more directly than heretofore amid the mass of the people, but

that they might hear His voice calling His own sheep by name, to lead them all out of the fold, Himself going before them as their guarantee for the path, and forming the attractive object for their hearts as they followed Him.

But not only so, in verse 16 He says : “ Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold : them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice : and there shall be one flock (no longer fold), one Shepherd ” (N.T.). By His own voice heard in the inmost soul of Gentile as well as Jew, a precious link was formed between each sheep and Christ Himself ; and thus His flock was constituted in all the blessing that He had been opening out for those who entered in by Christ as the door (*vv.* 9–15), founded as all blessing is on His laying down His life for the sheep.

If there was no actual relationship between the sheep, there was between each of them and Christ in the most real way. They had heard, and hear His voice as it still speaks through His word ; He knew them each one, as none other could ; He had loved them with a love that gave Himself for them, and they had but to follow Him. He would impart to them eternal life, and none should ever catch them from His hand ; they were the Father’s gift to Him, and His Father’s hand was also laid upon them to secure them to Him : there could be no perishing of the life within, and no force without could separate them from that all-powerful grasp, for the Father and Son are one. What a Shepherd ! and how blessed to be of His flock ! But “ the Mystery ” was not yet.

ONE FAMILY.

But more than this was involved in the relationship of children. There was a family that God had formed for Himself. When the Creator of the world came into it, it knew Him not; when He came to His own special circle of Israel, it received Him not; but to as many as received Him God gave the right to become children of God, "even to them that believed on His name; which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 12, 13). By the death of Christ, as one cherished object of it to Him, these were to be gathered together in one, in relationship with each other, as with Him.

John xvii. helps us to enter a little into the deep place this oneness of the family of God had in the heart of the Son; there we are allowed to draw near, and hear Him pour out all His hitherto untold desires for them into His Father's ear. This oneness comes out in three aspects of it. (1) The Son had kept those whom the Father had given Him out of the world in the Father's name, while He was with them: in leaving them He commits them to the Father to keep in that same blessed name of Father, of which He had been the full revelation—"Holy Father, keep them in Thy name which Thou has given Me [as it must be read], that they may be *one as We*" (vv. 11, 12). What a thought! They were to be one among themselves, in heart and mind and object, even as the Father and the Son were one, in an identity of interest He had just expressed in the words—"All Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine."

We may see how, for a brief moment, in the power of the Spirit and of the grace that was upon them all in the early chapters of Acts, this oneness was realized, when “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul ; neither said any of them that ought of the things he possessed was his own ” (iv. 32). It was a lovely expression of what grace by the power of God could produce ; but it did not last.

(2) The Lord then gives another character to the oneness that He sought for us. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word ; that they all may be one ; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they may also be one in Us : that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me ” (vv. 20, 21).

Here we all are expressly brought in, as those who have believed through the apostolic word. “One *in Us* ”—this oneness then was to be brought about as we each one abode in the Son and in the Father, enjoying fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, which is the essential privilege of the life we have been brought into (see 1 John i. 3 ; ii. 24). For what is fellowship with the Father but to have common thoughts with Him about His beloved Son, as He presents Him to us as the object of His own delight ; and what is fellowship with the Son but having communion of thought with Him about the Father, whom He has made known to us. Oh, if we knew and had but walked in the power of such communion, we should then have had no other thoughts but what

we shared in this communion, and so have been kept in oneness with each other ; then the world might have seen and believed that the Father sent the Son.

Well may we hide our faces in shame as we look upon the scattering of the family of God that began so early, and has been ever increasing, and own in sorrow of heart before Him—all the deeper because of the grace of the Son that makes no allusion to it to the Father—how complete our failure has been, and how we have each contributed to it. No wonder the world is sceptical !

(3) But all is not told yet. The Lord passes on in His unfathomable love to present us before the Father in a character of oneness that nothing can disrupt, where no failure is possible, and which He can speak of as “ perfect ” for the first time. It is the oneness of the given glory of Christ—“ And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given them, that they may be one, *even as We are one* : I in them ”—Christ to be displayed in us as perfectly as the Father in the Son—“ and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know ”—if too late for it to believe, and enter into the blessing—“ that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me ” (*v.* 22, 23). Thus in spite of the work of the enemy, and the heart-breaking collapse of faithfulness in us, our blessed Lord will see of the travail of His soul in His heavenly people, as well as His earthly. He will be able to display us perfect in one in His glory to the astonished world. But who could

have conceived His adding to this, that the world should know, when it sees us in that glory, that we have been loved of the Father, even as Jesus was loved when He was here.

ONE ASSEMBLY.

But all this was anticipative: “the hour was come” for the heart of the Lord, and He was claiming the consequences of it for Himself, and for those given Him out of the world. The full truth of the relationship into which they had been brought would only burst upon the disciples when, from a Risen Christ, they received that wonderful message through dear Mary of Magdala, “Go to My brethren” (now first owned as such) “and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.” It was the wonderful fulfilment of the first clause of Psalm xxii. 22, “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren.” The Sanctifier and the sanctified ones were “all of one” (as set forth in the reality of the Lord’s Manhood in resurrection), “for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb. ii. 11).

And now the second part of Psalm xxii. 22, was to be fulfilled—“In the midst of the congregation” (or “assembly,” as the Holy Spirit interprets in quoting the verse in Heb. ii.) “will I sing praise unto Thee.” For the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, came Jesus, and “stood *in the midst*” of them (John xx. 19). He had walked alone as man, in blessed relationship with God and the Father. This relationship found its first full

expression down here in Him ; but now, as the fruit of the work accomplished, when the precious seed of corn fell into the ground and died, He is no longer alone ; but is able to declare the full association of His own with Himself, in all He was about to enter into as the ascended Man—His Father their Father, His God their God—and He could lead them too as in their midst, in the song of praise, a song which was His own first, as He came out of the darkness and sorrow, but which is now also suited to us whom He has brought into the light and joy into which He has entered.

As regards what is individual, nothing could go beyond the blessedness of this present, heavenly association with Christ, which is doctrinally opened out to us in the teaching of the Epistles, especially of Paul and John, and of which the Holy Ghost has come to be the power of our enjoyment. And as we have seen, it involves our relationship with one another as brethren, that the divine love where with we are loved may be expressed in our ways with one another.

But we have not yet exhausted the fulness of the resources of that love, nor touched upon the subject which forms the heading to this paper, viz., “The Mystery.” That was still “hid in God,” and we must now seek grace, and the power of the Spirit of God, to enter into that which can only be known by *revelation*.

This is really the force of “mystery.” It does not mean what is mysterious, for there is nothing of this when it is known ; but it is that into which we need to be initiated by divine revelation and

teaching. There will be no such initiation needed, for instance, when the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. The Kingdom, as such, does not enter into the mystery, is not the subject of it.

The first intimation of a corporate relationship in which the saints were to be formed (while as to accomplishment it was yet future), is found in Matt. xvi., where, in answer to a direct revelation from the Father, Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

This confession involved the complete triumph of the One whose glory Peter thus confessed, over him that had the power of death—a triumph evidenced and proved by His resurrection.

The Lord also revealed to Peter, that upon the rock of the glory of His Person, thus confessed, He would build His assembly; nor could all the power of Satan prevail against this divine work. Peter was proved by his faith to be already a living stone, ready to be put in its place when the building should begin. In 1 Peter ii. this privilege is made good to all who by faith come to the living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious. These are, as living stones, being built up a spiritual house, and are ever growing, as Paul puts it in Eph. ii., by this divine workmanship to a holy temple in the Lord—a structure yet to come out in a new heaven and new earth as the Tabernacle of God, the eternal habitation of the brightest manifestation of the glory of God (Rev. xxi. 3).

The building began at Pentecost, when the

Holy Ghost came down upon all who were His, and God thus took up His abode even from the first in the dwelling formed for Him.

But this aspect of the Assembly formed no part of the mystery. The blessed thought and purpose of the heart of God, to take up His dwelling-place among a redeemed people, had not been hid from other ages. He brought it out when He delivered Israel from the power of Pharaoh (figure of the prince of this world), who held them captive, and the first full type of redemption is presented not only in the blood on the door-posts of their houses for God's eye in Egypt, but in the death and resurrection of Christ as shadowed forth in the Red Sea.

If it is not certain that it comes so early into the song of Moses and Israel as verse 2 of Exod. xv., we find it fully in verse 17, where it becomes a revelation. "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established." (See also chap. xxix. verses 42 and 46.) This was a material sanctuary; His dwelling place is now a spiritual house, the one the shadowing forth of the other; though a material sanctuary will have its place again on the millennial earth.

But "the Mystery" was still unrevealed. Yet it was brought about by that to which we have already referred, viz., the advent of another Divine Person, the Spirit, given from the glory of Christ, to dwell in and with us; but revelation

was needed to bring us into heart-intelligence of what had taken place.

Taking up again the little company of disciples where we left them in John xx., with the Lord in the midst, we note the significant action with which, as the last Adam, a quickening Spirit, He breathes on them on that resurrection day, saying, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit." This was not the Spirit actually given, as we shall see, but rather the Spirit as the power of life, to bring them into the new position of that life as it now existed in a risen Christ, a life past every question of sin, death and the judgment of God, the power of Satan being wholly broken—"life . . . more abundantly," as He had spoken of it.

But they had yet to wait for the promise of the Father, "which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. For . . . ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." They were already associated individually with Christ as the Risen One, in all His place of life and relationship with His Father and God; but now the Holy Ghost was about to come to form them into *corporate* relationships, on the one hand with God as His house, as we have seen, and on the other with Christ as His body, of which there had been no word as yet in Scripture.

THE ONE BODY.

Who can estimate sufficiently the momentous consequences of that wonderful Pentecost, when, by the descent of the Holy Ghost the building

of the Assembly began, and God took up His dwelling-place in it ! But at the same moment those who believed were all baptized into one body by the same blessed Spirit given to them. God had thus not only carried into effect His declared purpose to dwell in and amongst His redeemed as His house ; but also, all unconsciously to them, had formed them into corporate relationship with Christ. Of this latter no hint had been given in Scripture.

It was one thing that a Divine Person should thus have come down upon earth to fulfil what had been in the counsel of God from eternity : quite another that He should be pleased to reveal what He had done, that we might be brought into the intelligence of it. But it is His desire that we should know this great truth. Of what absorbing interest then it will be if we may be allowed, with bowed hearts before God, and in dependence upon divine teaching, to trace the progress of the revelation.

• The martyrdom of Stephen prepared the way for this revelation, for it was the answer of the guilty nation to the last testimony God had to address to it by the Spirit, through Stephen, according to the intercession of Christ for them on the cross, “ Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do.” Pending the result of this testimony, the Lord Jesus is seen by His servant, *standing* at the right hand of God—not yet sat down. But when they stoned Stephen all was over.

It is recorded that they who stoned Stephen

laid down their clothes at the feet of the young man, Saul of Tarsus, who thus became the formal witness of the last possible expression of man's enmity against Christ in the glory of God ; but God, in infinite grace, took up this same young man to be the vessel of the testimony of the last and greatest possible expression of the love of God to the man that could only hate Him. Thus it is that he speaks of himself as the chief of sinners, in whom, "chief" as he was, the whole long-suffering of God had been shown forth, "for a delineation of those about to believe on Him to life eternal" (1 Tim. i. 15, 16. New Trans.).

We all have been converted on the same principle as Saul of Tarsus : namely, that all God's ways with the race, putting man to the proof of what was in him, are over, with the result of man's proved irreconcilable enmity against God. And now if sovereign grace breaks down our proud wills before God in the discovery of it, and subjects our hearts to the Son of God in glory (in whom, in the judgment of the cross, the end of all flesh had been reached for God and for faith), it is that, taken up in Him as our life, righteousness, and acceptance, God may show in us to ages yet to come how far His grace could go.

THE REVELATION OF IT.

But I am anticipating : Acts ix. gives us the astonishing details. Saul, true to the characteristics of his tribe, ravening as a wolf (Gen. xlix. 27) against the lowly men and women who dared to confess Jesus the Lord, thought to blot out the

very memory of His name from the earth by dragging them to prison and to death ; and “ being exceedingly mad against them, he persecuted them even unto strange cities,” and so was on his way “ with authority and commission from the chief priests ” to prosecute his deadly work at Damascus, when suddenly the arrest came. A light from heaven above the brightness of the mid-day sun shines round about him, and, fallen to the ground, he hears a voice saying, “ Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me ? ” and to Saul’s immediate question, “ Who art thou, Lord ? ” the answer is, “ I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”

What a revolution does this effect in his whole being ! what a discovery of what man is at his best before God ! By all his strict conscientiousness, earnest religiousness, and blameless outward walk, he was the most avowed enemy of Christ in glory the world had ever seen. But I do not dwell upon that pattern of every subsequent conversion, but call attention to the marvellous revelation contained in the words by which the Lord convicted Saul, “ Why persecutest thou Me ? ”

What meant that “ Me ” ? It meant that the persecuted saints were every one of them united to Christ in glory by the Spirit who dwelt in them : they were members of His Body, that which He accounts to be Himself, even as He had become their life. There had been nothing like this before. The Assembly had been formed into this relationship at Pentecost, but this was the first intimation of it : the whole truth of it was involved in the

words that fell so strangely from heaven upon the ears of Saul. It was, in principle, the Mystery, which was ever after to characterize his ministry ; even as the Lord had further to say to him, “ I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things *which thou hast seen*, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee ” (Acts xxvi. 12–16).

The doctrine of the Mystery, till now so carefully kept out of the divine communications, had yet to come fully out through Paul, the vessel raised up to be the minister of it. But when all is told, nothing can surpass what was contained in the precious words of the Lord, “ I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” Let us put it to ourselves individually: Have I entered into the reality of being united to the Lord in glory by the Spirit dwelling in me ; and that thus I am a member of the Body of which He is Head, and of which all who are Christ’s are fellow members ? To really believe this will affect the whole current of our lives from the moment it bursts upon the soul : first, in drawing out adoring affections to Him who has taken us into such intimate union with Himself in love so inconceivable ; then in all my relations with my fellow Christians, every one of whom is, with myself, a member of that one Body by one Spirit. Scripture, I need hardly add, knows nothing of any other body.

THE MINISTRY OF IT.

Let us turn then to the ministry of the Apostle through whom it has pleased God to bring out

this wonderful secret of eternity. It is not the subject of the Epistle to the Romans, wherein we have that which is of primary importance for our souls : how in righteousness God can take up sinners, such as we are, to justify them, and set them in Christ before Him, by His death and resurrection, and the power of the Spirit given to dwell in them. But he cannot close the epistle without letting out what was in his heart :

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was *kept secret since the world began*.

But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets [or prophetic writings], according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.

(Rom. xvi. 25, 26.)

How magnificent the outburst of it, now that it was God's will that what had had such a deep place in His heart, but which had been hidden there throughout all the ages of earth's history, should come out, and be made known to all nations : and that by His commandment ! Nor was it to be made known merely to enlighten and establish us, but to produce the very real subjection of our souls to the revelation ; for "*the obedience of faith*" is what God looks for now as the only true answer to His wonderful grace.

To the Corinthians Paul can only allude to it (1 Cor. ii. 6-10), for though still outwardly one, the spirit of division was amongst them. They

were carnal, walking as men, and making much of their knowledge and gifts. But enough comes out in the Apostle's words to have moved any heart, as to what they were losing by their low state spiritually. There was the wisdom of God, which was not of this world nor of its leaders. Those who were in Christ in the faith of their souls, would recognise it as this. This wisdom was contained in the "Mystery," which is brought in here, not as the subject-matter of revelation, but as giving its character to this hidden wisdom of God, which was "ordained before the world unto our glory," as he does not hesitate to tell us.

And now mark the principle of it. The wisdom of God centred in the Lord of Glory, whom the leaders of the world crucified; and, to bring out its characteristic blessedness into the strongest relief, the Apostle quotes from the prophecy of Isaiah as to how it had been in his day: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." And there the quotation is too often left, whereas the Apostle's design is to *contrast* the present state of things with what existed in the prophet's day, and so he adds, "But God *hath revealed them* unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." So that all that had been wrapped up in the heart of God for those that love Him, unseen, unheard of by them, and never for a moment conceived of, had now come out to be the revealed and possessed portion of faith by the power of the Spirit. The inspired revelation

of these blessed things of God's own nature and counsel is alone by the Spirit, the communication of them is in words that He alone could teach, and our reception of them is as equally and absolutely by that same blessed Spirit (*vv.* 10-14).

Oh! how incalculable the loss, if our state is such that the power and the blessedness of such a revelation of God's wisdom in the Mystery is hindered! Yet so intimately does the truth contained in it affect the practical walk of the saints in their relations with one another, that when the Apostle comes to this latter subject in Romans, and much more fully in 1 Corinthians, he cannot but bring in what flows from union with Christ by the Holy Ghost according to the mystery. I refer to Rom. xii. 4, 5, and 1 Cor. xii. But he does not there enter into any development of those counsels of God for the glory of Christ, which give the Mystery its full blessed character. For this we must go to the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Having seen then the Mystery, which had been hidden in God from ages and generations, now revealed to Paul and committed to him as minister thereof, we must pass on to his epistle to the Ephesians, in order to trace the full unfolding of this precious truth.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOD'S COUNSELS.

And now how important it is for us to observe the way God takes with us, when, in such grace, He would communicate what had ever been in the depths of His own being. All His thoughts

and counsels centre in Christ ; and we find that He first of all sets us in the light of these counsels as to our *individual* place in Christ (Eph. i. 4-7).

But before the Apostle can go into the orderly presentation to us of what was filling his heart, he finds relief in worship (for worship is simply the overflow to God of a heart too full to contain itself) :—" Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ." May this be the effect produced upon us as the fulness of the blessing opens out to us.

The standpoint to which the Spirit conducts us, is that of the eternal nature of God ; for we read, " according as He hath *chosen* us in Him [Christ Jesus] before the foundation of the world." For " choice " is simply the expression of what perfectly suits him who chooses. It is not the activity of counsel yet, but just the expression of God's own nature ; and how astonishing the thought : " He chose us in Christ ! " But if in Christ, it will be found to be in all that He ever was to God ; and so we read " that we should be holy and without blame," and " before Him "—before His own satisfied gaze—and " in love," as the object of God's delight : just what Christ is, and was manifested to be when here (see Matt. iii. 16, 17). True Christ was alone then in the place He had before God ; and only by redemption could He bring us into it. But it is not our being brought into it that is in question in these opening verses : it is how God saw us in Him in His own thoughts about us, before ever the foundation of the world was laid.

But in what *relationship* will divine and sovereign love be pleased to set us who are the objects of that love? Would angelic relationship have ever been conceived possible by us? It would not do for God. He had myriads of angels that excelled in strength, and ever did His pleasure: but they were only servants. He wanted *sons*—sons to surround Him in His home of light and love with the cry of Abba Father: accordingly we read, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children [or ‘sonship’] by Jesus Christ to Himself” (Eph. i. 5). Sweet thought: He had counselled this for His own ineffable satisfaction: not merely for our blessing, but according to the *good pleasure* of *His* will. And this relationship was set forth in Christ when the voice from heaven (Matt. iii. 17)* addressed Him as the Son. Nor is even what was there connected with the place the Son had in His Father’s heart—“This is My *beloved* Son”—reserved from us; for to the *praise* of the *glory* of His grace “He has taken us into favour in the Beloved” (Eph. i. 6, New Translation: where see note).

Then once more His grace is brought out, not in the glory of it in this case, as in verse 6, but in its riches to meet us in the poverty of our need—“In whom we have redemption through His blood . . . according to the riches of His grace.” For this was the righteous ground of the accomplishment of all that was thus projected upon the

* The verb *eudokeo*, used in Matt. iii. 17: “I am well pleased,” answers to the substantive *eudokia* used in Eph. i. 5 “the good pleasure.”

page of revelation, of what had been in His heart for us from eternity.

Now it is only when the revelation of the individual Christian position according to these wonderful counsels of God is thus complete, and revealed by the Holy Ghost for faith to enter into and enjoy by the power of the same Spirit, that God counts upon our being free, so to speak, to enter into His interests for *Christ*. His grace is then seen abounding in all wisdom and prudence in bringing out to us these counsels. "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one [or 'head up,' as it really should read] all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth." This is the Mystery then in its widest range: for what could go beyond not only all things being put into *subjection to Him* (which had been announced before, and will be fulfilled in the last of earth's times, *i.e.*, the kingdom), but the whole universe being brought into relationship with Him as its Head; which, when the times have reached their fulness, is now revealed to be the end and object of God in instituting them? What an expanse of glory opens up to our souls as we are enabled to delight in the place which God had purposed in Himself for Christ, and which He in unspeakable grace is now pleased to make known to us.

But that is not all, for in the very next words we learn that in Him we have been made heirs of

that whole inheritance of glory, having been predestined even to this “according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will : that we should be to the praise of His glory.” The opening verses presented to us His calling in what is, beyond all thought, above us : here we have what is below us, in the inheritance that answers to such a calling—“the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (v. 18). Only it is to be carefully observed that this expression does not mean that the saints *are* His inheritance, as is constantly said of Israel. *We are heirs* of the inheritance which is Christ’s, and which has been presented in the whole extent of it in verse 10. But if it is in Him we enter into it, it is in us He takes possession of it. Dan. vii. helps to explain the thought. In verse 14 of that chapter we read, “there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom ;” in verse 18 we read that “the saints of the high places” (margin) take it and possess it for ever. The sign of His taking up the inheritance is that He puts them into possession. So here in Ephesians it is “the riches of the glory of His inheritance,” but taken up before the universe by putting the saints into it, and hence it is “in the saints.”

That this is the force of the expression is greatly confirmed to us when we find that, because we do not enter upon any part of the inheritance till Christ does (when it will be time enough for us), we have meantime been given an earnest of it (Eph. i. 13, 14). In Him we have been sealed for

God with the Holy Ghost, when we believed the glad tidings of our salvation. But the Holy Ghost is also the earnest for us of our inheritance, until the day when redemption is put forth in power, and the inheritance is actually taken up. Could anything give a greater conception of the extent and glory of it than to have such an Earnest ?

And yet what is more precious still for our hearts is the way we enter into the inheritance. When God set Adam at the head of everything in the lower world, He gave him Eve to share with him the fair inheritance, so soon to be dragged down by him into the bondage of corruption. But no thought of God will fail of its accomplishment. Adam was but the type of Him that was to come ; whom God will set, according to His counsels for His glory, at the head of everything in heaven and earth. Nor will He be alone in that day of glory : He will have His heavenly Eve to be heir and sharer with Him of it all. And so the wonderful Eph. i. of God's counsels does not close without bringing Christ out as " Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all " (Eph. i. 22, 23).

THE DIVINE MASTERPIECE.

Eph. i. is then the unfolding to us of the thoughts and counsels of divine love that centred in the Beloved Son of the Father, involving for us not only an individual place before Him in Christ, but a corporate relationship to Christ as His Body, the Assembly. And in this epistle alone, as

connected with the counsels of eternity, the Body embraces the aggregate of those who are Christ's, from Pentecost till He comes again, when the Assembly will be complete, and "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." In every other passage the Body of Christ is either the whole company of the saints at any given time on the earth, where the Holy Ghost is to maintain it in its unity : or the local expression of this in all who are His in any given place.

In chapter ii. we come to the wonderful work of God in time, by which the Body is formed out of the material of Jew and Gentile, who were both alike dead in sins, but who are quickened together with Christ, raised up together, and seated together in Him in the heavenlies : that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (*vv.* 6, 7).

In the latter half of the chapter we have the actual subsisting Assembly here on earth viewed also as the household of God, and as a building fitly framed together, growing to a holy temple in the Lord, but which even in its present state has become the habitation of God through the Spirit (*vv.* 19-22).

Chapter iii. comes in parenthetically to give us Paul's part in the work ; and there is a further development of the Mystery, made known to him by revelation, "which in other ages was *not* made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit ; that the Gentiles should be co-heirs and of a co-body and co-partakers [if we could read it in

this way to help as to the force of his words] of His promise in Christ by the Gospel ” (vv. 5, 6).

Observe how he especially presses the aspect of it as it concerns us Gentiles, for there had been thousands of Jews formed into the body from Pentecost, before one Gentile was brought in.

The Apostle had a double ministry, and he himself was greatly affected by what he carried to others, for he felt himself to be less than the least of all saints. Would that we were affected in our little measure in the same way! This double ministry was (1st) “to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”—what a gospel that was for the preacher!—and (2nd) “to make all see”—this is the word for the eyes of the heart being “enlightened,” see chap. i. 18,—“what is the administration of the Mystery.” *Fellowship*, the word used here by the transcribers, is a very precious part of it: but the Apostle really uses the larger word (like the one used in sound, and therefore easily mistaken for it by the copyists) which takes in the whole practical carrying out of the Assembly’s relationship to Christ as His Body on the earth (vv. 8, 9).

But oh, if only we had hearts to be more affected by the truth, how well it might move us to have the truth of the Mystery, that from the beginning of the ages had been hid in God, thus revealed to us! By the mighty fiat of His word He had called all things into being, and therein displayed His eternal power and Godhead, but He had kept this hid in Himself throughout the lapse of the ages. But now that the Assembly was formed,

and united to Christ as His Body by the Holy Ghost come down at Pentecost,—one body out of the most opposed nationalities of the world,—and the administration of it committed to Paul, it was God's intent that now unto the principalities and powers (the highest created intelligences) in the heavenlies, might be known by the Assembly the *manifold* wisdom of God.

To use an earthly illustration of what is so far beyond our conceptions, it is as if a painter, having produced many works of art, had resolved to concentrate all his resources upon one great masterpiece. This is what God has done in His own divine way: this is what the Assembly is to Him; His masterpiece, in which all the varied resources of His wisdom are seen. For if little (alas, how little!) thought of by us, who are of the Assembly, yet the heavenly intelligences can discern the skill and beauty of the divine workmanship; even though through our unfaithfulness to the light and truth of it communicated through the Apostle, the Assembly that should have answered to it, has become, on its responsible side, the sport of Satan, and the scene of the worst failure ever manifested in His people here.

Beloved in the Lord, who can read the inspired words, and enter in any measure into the place of the Assembly before God, whether as the fruit of the counsels of His love, or as the effect of His mighty operations in time, or as now made the depository of all He had planned and carried out for the glory of Christ in it, without being filled with shame: not only as to the way the whole

truth of it was lost for ages, but as to the feeble impression made upon any of us, when in these last days, by an energy of the Spirit in testimony, God has presented the truth to the hearts and consciences of numbers of His own? What insensibility and indifference and practical unbelief has been manifested by us! May we be humbled in His holy presence, that the highest truth—always the easiest to let slip—may be once more revived in the affections of His saints.

How perfectly in place it is then, that before the Apostle leads us on to the practical carrying out of these great truths in our walk (chapter iv.), he is led to bow his knees in prayer (v. 14): not now for that which is indeed the first need of souls, that we should be brought in the full knowledge of Him into the intelligence of these truths, as in chapter i., but for that which is far deeper, communion with Him in what we know, without which the most precious truth is inoperative. And so he prays the Father of our Lord Jesus, of whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, “that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His [the Father’s] Spirit in the inner man.”

What infinite resources of power and glory are here to be made available, that in effect Christ, who dwells in the Father’s heart as the centre of all His counsels, may also dwell in our hearts by faith, that, being at the centre, we may look out upon the illimitable expanse of these counsels for

His glory, and that we may know that which is just as illimitable and undefinable—the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and thus be filled into all the fulness of God, for it is contained and revealed in that love (*vv.* 17–19).

Power, too, is ready to answer to all that the Apostle seeks for us : power that works in us, and is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think, that there may be glory to Him in the Assembly in Christ Jesus “ unto all generations of the age of ages ”—the strongest expression for eternity of which the language was capable. There will be no failure there, blessed be God !

THE WALK WORTHY OF THE CALLING.

In the presence then of such divine resources how great are the possibilities opened out to faith for our path through this world, as with subdued hearts we follow the Apostle, who proceeds in chapter iv. to trace out a walk worthy of such a calling—first in the corporate and then in the individual aspects of it. Deeply important as it is for us to do so, the attempt would lead too far away from the subject of this paper. Only let us note and hold firmly in our souls, that what chapters i. and ii. have brought out as to our relationships, individually with God the Father, and corporately with Christ as His body, and with the Holy Ghost by whom God dwells in His house—these precious relationships form immutably the calling of the Assembly. No failure of ours to walk worthy of that calling affects the great foundation principles of it. God does not lower

the standard of it to suit our fallen condition : faith and obedience seek to maintain it at its full height unto the end, even if the path has to become more and more individual.

What then is the great leading principle of a walk worthy of our wonderful calling ? The place this has in our hearts and lives will serve to test how far we are in unison with the mind of God for the glory of Christ in the Assembly ; it is seen in chapter iv. 3, which literally translated reads : “ Using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond [*sundesmos*] of peace ” ; but we must not overlook the moral conditions in which alone, even in the brightest days of the Assembly, such a path could be maintained—conditions more necessary than ever now—namely, with all “ lowliness ” as before God, “ meekness ” in relation to each other : “ longsuffering and forbearing one another in love ” (v. 2).

The gathering together in one of God’s children, for which Christ died, has had a wonderful realization before God when, besides their family relationship with the Father and with Christ as His brethren, they were formed by one Spirit into one body, the body of which Christ is the Head in heavenly glory, and which is maintained in its unity on earth by the Holy Ghost who is here. Oh ! do we know anything of the faith which with every energy of our whole being would seek to own and realize by the Holy Ghost this unity in which we have been formed with all who belong to Christ ? For “ there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.”

Do any object that the failure of ages has made it impossible now to walk according to such a unity? Scripture has anticipated the difficulty: for in the wisdom of God the Apostles were not withdrawn from the scene of their labours before the ruin of the Assembly began, and thus we have inspired instructions to suit the changed conditions in which the great principles of our calling have to be carried out; as in 2 Timothy. But I must not further pursue the wide theme of the responsible walk of the Christian in the last days, but revert to the light of the positive truth that forms it.

THE CHURCH AS THE BRIDE.

Nothing can be more blessed than to find that the Lord is not satisfied yet, even with all the wealth of divine relationships that have been unfolded to us in the epistle. For when (chapter v. 22, 23) the Apostle is led to take up the relationships that belong to our natural condition, and begins with the source of all others, that of husband and wife, the Spirit at once seizes the opportunity to bring out what the Assembly is to Christ, as proved in the immeasurable love that gave Himself for it, and which engages Him, with the love that ever delights to serve its object, in just that service needed to extricate it from all that is unsuited to His heart, and form it like Himself, till He shall be able to present it to Himself such as He can delight in for ever—"a glorious Assembly not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing."

Not that this is some new relationship, but that when the truth of the Body was not sufficient to express the place of the Assembly in the affections of Christ, the Spirit finds the occasion to bring this out in speaking of what marriage was as God first instituted it. Eve, who was given to Adam to be his wife, was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh : she could be recognised to be himself. "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies : he that loveth his wife, loveth himself : for no man ever yet hated his own flesh." And this is applied to Christ and the Assembly, though the mystery be great (*v.* 32). Neither is any detail of tender care wanting to it on His part, "for we are members of His body" (*vv.* 29, 30).

It is given to John to carry out the precious truth of the relationship to the full. In *Rev.* xix. he writes of a day for which we wait, when the "marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." In chapter xxi. from verse 9 she comes out as the Bride, the Lamb's wife, displayed in all the glory of the Kingdom. Then, when the thousand years are over, she is seen in the eternal state (*vv.* 1-8) in the unchanging affections of Christ, as a Bride still, only now adorned for His own eye and heart alone. How blessed for us that even now, before the day of our heavenly espousals, being made conscious by the indwelling Spirit of our relationship, and with hearts formed by it, we may be able to respond when He presents Himself, so that "the Spirit and the Bride say Come" (*Rev.* xxii. 17) ; and thus is drawn out the expression of our love

which is so precious to Him. Oh, for hearts more deeply responsive to His great love !

CHRIST IN THE SAINTS.

But there is one more aspect of this Mystery needed to complete the glorious revelation. It is found in the Epistle to the Colossians. Once more the double ministry of the Apostle comes before us : the ministry of the Gospel to every creature (ch. i. 23), and that of the Mystery, whereby it was given him to complete the Word of God. For it is the centrepiece of the whole. Without the apprehension of it many precious truths may be known, but detached from one another like pearls on a string. By the Mystery they are found to be co-ordinated in one perfect whole of the truth. It had been "hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to His saints" (for God would touch this chord in our hearts again and again), "to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory." Thus, by the way the Mystery is presented here, Colossians becomes the counterpart of Ephesians in the truth. In Ephesians it is the richest unfolding of the place of the saints and *the Assembly in Christ* : here it is the wonderful answer to this, namely, *Christ in the saints*. Christ among Jews would have been the long-promised glory come. But "the Mystery" involved Christ coming out among and in Gentiles as their life ; this had never been heard of before.

In Ephesians, our identification with Christ as

quickened together with Him was carried out to its full consequence as seated in Him in the heavenlies. In Colossians it is arrested at the point of our being risen with Christ, that the mind might be directed to heaven to find not only its life but its object there in Christ, who had been presented in such a concentration of the glories of His person in chapter i. of the epistle—Christ become all things as Object to the one in whom He is life (ch. iii. 3, 4 and 11), so that being formed by that glorious Object, the traits of His life may be reproduced in us down here, of which the beautiful detail is given in verses 12–17. Thus in unspeakable privilege the Assembly—in the walk of the saints that compose it, for all is individual here—has been set to be descriptive of Christ in the scene of His rejection, in word or deed alike representing Him, doing all in His name, with thanksgiving welling up out of full hearts to God the Father by Him.

But where is there to be found such an answer to the place in which we have been set according to the counsels of God for the glory of Christ? It must have been the thought of this that affected the Apostle so deeply, when he tells us (ch. ii. 1) of the “great conflict” he had for them of Colosse and Laodicea, and wherever he had not been able to reach in his wonderful ministry. He uses the strongest terms. Where he had laboured he “agonized” for the saints according to His working which worked in him in power (i. 29, *lit.*) He would have those whom he had not seen know the “agony” he had for them.

But what moved him so powerfully ? Nothing can be more solemnly suggestive for us, my beloved brethren. There was no lack of godly order, nor of steadfastness of faith in Christ amongst those addressed. At Colosse both could be owned to the Apostle's joy. What they lacked, and what he sought so earnestly for them, was the full knowledge of "the Mystery of God, in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." For this is the connection of verse 3 (the intervening words are not rightly there).

To how many does this apply now ? Let us put it to ourselves : do we, do I, enter into what the Apostle felt to be of such incomparable importance for Christians ? Has it ever come home to the soul in power, in the light that streams upon us from those heavens opened to faith, that the Christian is "one Spirit" with that blessed Lord, united to Him in the glory of God, by the Spirit of God dwelling in him ; and if so, that all who are His are similarly united, now to hold Him as the Head from whom the whole body derives all, for its nourishment and increase according to God ? And that we have been left here that He, who is our life, by the power of Christ known as our all as Object, may come out displayed in the characteristic traits of that blessed life once seen in all its perfection in Him here !

If we have none to labour among us, like Paul, to this end, or even few like Epaphras who "agonized" for the saints in prayer, that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (ch. iv. 12), does it not behove us all the

more earnestly to seek from Him the knowledge of what He has fully revealed. Serious, indeed, must be the lack of it when we hear the Apostle speak as he does.

I only note in conclusion, that, as ever when truth from God is in question, there must be first a state produced in us by His grace suitable to its reception ; and hence the Apostle's desire for them, and us, "*that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment ['full knowledge'] of the Mystery of God.*" In such a soil alone the truth of it could be looked for. Only as hearts were *comforted and knit together in love*, could it flourish. Are we not too sadly conscious that there has been a hindrance ? Let us each be exercised and humbled before God as to anything that may have obstructed the truth laying hold of us in power, when He who had hid it in His counsels from eternity, has been pleased to bring it all out so fully for the riches of the full assurance of the understanding of it in our souls.

Then may we not look for a renewed ministry of the Mystery in the power of the Spirit to be answered by a widespread revival of heart-attachment to Christ, and with this an increased appreciation of what the Assembly is to Him ? Then lifted into the light of this, above the mists of earth and all the confusion brought in by our failure, we shall see clearly to discern the path of it, still marked out for us by the unchanging principles of our calling, even if it were to come

to this, that but two or three were found to be gathered to His name in the faith of it. But there will He be in the midst of them, and the Assembly had nothing beyond that Presence in its brightest day. It is secured to the faith that counts Him all its sufficiency to the end.

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