

THE
CHARACTER OF THE LAST DAYS

Six Lectures delivered at Bradford

BY

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thus postponing the return of the Lord Jesus; but when John wrote these words, all that the Scriptures spoke of had been fulfilled, and there was nothing revealed to prevent the immediate return of Christ. And so he calls it "the last hour."

The Lord Jesus told His disciples, as recorded in John's Gospel, chap. xiv. 3, "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." And again, when the cloud received Him out of their sight, as they stood on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, the two angels that appeared to them assured them that "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." And that was the promise, that was the hope that He left to them, to which they were to hold fast, and which was to mark their life and testimony, as of those who were waiting for God's Son from heaven. Now it was only consistent with this, that there should be nothing to prevent the waiting ones from expecting the Lord Jesus at any moment. On the one hand, He had finished the work which His Father gave Him to do, and had gone back to God's right hand. On the other hand, the testimony of the Holy Spirit had been borne to Jews and Gentiles, and the departure from the truth which had set in left nothing in the way of Christ's immediate return. So on the one hand, the Lord Jesus could say to His beloved servant John, "Surely I come quickly"; while on the other hand, the Apostle could say with equal truth, "Little children, it is the last hour." Well, then, so much as to any general objection that the term "the last time" has lost its effect, because it was used so long ago, while we are using it still.

But the character of the last times is further developed now. The Spirit of God foretold in 2 Tim., iii. 13, that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived," while the Apostle John has told us that "even now are there many antichrists." We are thus led to see that the same character that will be displayed in the open, unveiled, unrestrained blasphemy of the Man of Sin, will mark the action of the devil all through this present dispensation, only it will be hidden and veiled to some extent. "Even now are there many antichrists," and the many antichrists are only faint foreshadowings of the Man of Sin.

Turn again to 2 Thes., ii. 1-4. You remember that the last book in the Bible is called the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The word revelation, as probably most of us know, is from the Greek word *apocalypse*, which means the lifting up of the veil; so that this book literally is the unveiling of Jesus Christ. For Jesus on earth was veiled; His glory was hidden. Man only saw in Him Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son. They could "see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him." He was the veiled one of God all the time of His life here, and even after His resurrection from the dead. For after His resurrection He appeared to none but His disciples, so that the world never saw Him, from the time His dead body was lifted down from the cross and laid in Joseph's tomb. Jesus had been the perfect servant; willing to divest Himself of His glory, willing to be misunderstood, willing to be reproached and cast out, willing to go back to His glory without ever having been seen in glory by the world. Even on the throne He is still the obedient One, subject to the words "Sit Thou on My right hand till I make Thy foes Thy footstool." So, meanwhile, God granted Him this unveiling of Himself, that He might make more fully known to His servants "things which must shortly come to pass."

Now in this second chapter of 2 Thes. we have the unveiling (the same word as that translated revelation) of the Antichrist—"That day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed (or, unveiled) the son of perdition" (*verse 3*). Further on, in the seventh verse, we are told "The mystery of iniquity doth already work." The mystery is working now; the day is coming when it will be revealed. As the Lord Jesus was veiled upon earth, and as, when He comes again in glory, He will not be another, but the same Jesus; so, when this mystery is unveiled, it will not be another power, but it will simply be the taking away of the veil; for that Man of Sin will be the consummation of all Satan's working. Read further, verses seven to twelve. Now you see how fully this passage brings out what I have been trying to show you, that all the characteristics of the present day, whether in the world that does not profess to acknowledge Jesus, or in professing Christianity, apart from the reality of those who know Him, are only the partly-veiled actings of the same power that will be revealed when Satan's masterpiece, the Man of Sin, appears

on the scene. This is true socially, politically and religiously. Notice how the political features of the Antichrist will sum up and unite the whole characteristics of Gentile rule, ever since God took kingly authority out of the hands of His earthly people and gave it to the Gentile nations. Compare a few verses in the seventh of Daniel with a passage in the Revelation. In Daniel vii. 3-8, we get the characteristics of the four succeeding Gentile kingdoms. Compare these with Revelation xiii, 1-2. You see how this beast, which presently we find to be the Antichrist, the Man of Sin, unites in himself the whole of the four. He has the lion character of the first, the bear features of the second, the leopard qualities of the third, and the ten horns and other marks of the fourth. And this will hold good in all other respects. The knowledge of what that Wicked One will be when he is unveiled, will help us to discern the workings of Satan in the present day. We understand, then, that the last times date from the beginning of apostacy, or falling away, in professing Christendom; and though God's long-suffering has been the occasion of the last times holding out so long, we need not mind the scoff of the world on this account, any more than when they refuse to believe in the coming of the Lord Jesus because He has tarried so long. We can answer that the long-suffering of God is salvation; and, at the same time, that "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

Man refused God's Christ, and he will accept the devil's antichrist. God's judgment upon man's rejection of His Son is at last to give man up to Satan's delusion. God deals in long-suffering with man; He presents His infinite redemption for man's acceptance; but when man persists in refusing and turning away from His love, God at last gives him up to that which he has chosen, in all its awful completeness. If you turn again to the thirteenth chapter of the Revelation, you will find a still further feature there (*verse 11*)—"And I beheld another beast coming out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon." Read to the end of the chapter. Now in this chapter we get the trinity of evil. We have the dragon, whose characteristics are more specially mentioned in the chapter before, the ninth verse—"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil (or slanderer, for that is the force of the word), and Satan (or the adversary)." We have first this dragon,

who gives his throne and his authority to the first beast. Then we have the first beast, with all the power which Satan has given him, the one who receives the homage of all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life. And then we get this third person, the second beast (for the beasts, of course, are only figures of persons), who exercises the power of the first beast in his presence, who has power to make the image of the first beast speak, so that men should worship the image of the beast. Here we have the counterpart of the Holy Spirit, whose blessed work it is to open the eyes of men to see and know the Lord Jesus. Now we will turn to another reference to this trinity of evil, sixteenth chapter, thirteenth verse:—"I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet." The false prophet is another name for the second beast, and I ask you to notice that from this trinity of evil come forth these three unclean spirits, which are to complete the work of deluding the great ones of the world, and to "gather them together to the battle of that great day of God Almighty," when God shall execute judgment upon them, because they have refused the testimony concerning His Christ. There are two more passages in which the trinity of evil is mentioned, and which we shall do well to read—chap. xix. 20: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" . . . "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years." (chap. xx. 1, 2.) There you see we have the beast and the false prophet cast into the lake of fire, and the devil bound; but the work of the latter is not quite done. He is bound and cast into the bottomless pit for a thousand years, but he has to be released again at the end of that time. A little further on, however, in the tenth verse of chap. xx., we read of his final judgment: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." Here we see this trinity of evil as the first inhabitants of the lake of fire, the place which was

prepared for the devil and his angels ; but to which the Lord Jesus must consign those who choose for their portion the lie of the Wicked One instead of the truth of God.

And this opens up to us the special part of our subject for to-night. I have been showing you what the work of seducing spirits in that latter day will be ; how God will give men up to their terrible delusions, and how, by the action of those seducing spirits, men will be hurrying on to their own destruction, while they are boasting themselves in their wisdom and knowledge. And what I want to show you now is, that in the present day that feature of the antichrist working, specially pre-figured in the second beast, or false prophet, is already being developed. There is nothing in Satan's work now that will materially differ from what it will be like in the future or what has been in the past ; and when we speak of the last days it is only Satan beginning over again. This work of seducing spirits, or lying demons, taking possession of men, and speaking to and through them, is an old thing, dating far, far back. But before going further, let me remind you that these seducing spirits are not really called " devils," but " demons," in the Scriptures. The Devil (*Diabolos*, the slanderer) is one of the proper names given to Satan. Now I would just ask you to notice (omitting the many passages in the Gospels) a few passages in the Epistles that refer to these demons, of whom the Devil is the prince and chief. First, then, 1 Cor. x. 19-21 : " What say I then ? that the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything ? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to devils, and not to God : and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils : ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." This solemnly teaches that those who are worshipping gods of their own making, are in reality presenting their worship to demons ; and that, in thus offering worship to demons they put themselves peculiarly in the power of these unclean spirits, while the demons are able to take to themselves what is offered to the idols. For the idol is merely a representative of something else. The heathen, when he bows down to his idol, is not afraid of and does not desire to appease the idol itself. It is to him a representation of some god who, he thinks, will accept his worship through the idol. In reality he is worshipping demons.

Refer next to 1 Tim. iv. 1: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." Here we have something more. It is not now speaking of those blinded idol-worshippers who have no knowledge of God; but of men, who have made a profession of Christianity, departing from the faith and putting themselves under the power of seducing spirits, which teach demoniacal doctrines. Read also James iii. 15: "This wisdom is earthly, sensual (that is natural, as distinguished from spiritual), devilish (or, demonish)"; also Rev. ix. 20: "The rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues, yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood;"—these are the days of the Anti-christ, and of the full-fledged abomination and wickedness which will then exist.

We live in a day when, to an extent that few are aware of, this latter day working of Satan is developing enormously; a day in which men openly boast that they can communicate with, and have revelations from, the unseen world. If you were to read the periodicals of the so-called Spiritualists (and there are plenty of them now, evidencing the enormous extent of the widespread delusion), you would scarcely ever take one up that does not vaunt their so-called revelations as a far better basis for faith than the Scriptures. Their ways of dealing with the Scriptures vary considerably, as they are ready to adapt themselves to the circumstances of all classes of people. At one moment they talk of the Jehovah of the Hebrews as a blood-thirsty deceiver; while at another they write as if they accepted the testimony of the Bible. Their main claim for acceptance, however, is that they can offer something much more definite and certain than anything the Scriptures can give.

"The Bible" they say, "is very vague about the future state, and gives you no certainty as to the truth of the little it does tell you. We, on the other hand, can put you in direct communication with the spirits of those whom you have known, and they will talk to you of their present experience; and testimony like that is worth immensely more than any other kind of testimony that could possibly be given you."

What is the answer of the child of God to all that? And, remember, I am not speaking to-night to convince unbelievers. I am speaking to God's children, and I am speaking in order that we may not, in any unguarded and unwatchful moments, be drawn aside into what might betray us into terrible sin. Now I ask you to turn with me to the eighth chapter of the prophet Isaiah, eighteenth verse:—"Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel, from the Lord of Hosts which dwelleth in Mount Zion." You will remember that part of that passage is quoted in the second of Hebrews. There are three quotations in that chapter, all given to show that the Lord Jesus, the Sanctifier, is not ashamed to call "brethren" those whom He has sanctified. The first quotation is from Psalm xxii. 22, "I will declare Thy name unto my brethren." The second from Psalm xviii. 2, "I will put my trust in Him." The third quotation is from the words I have just read in Isaiah. The scene of the first was the cross, when, as we read in the beginning of the same Psalm, the Lord Jesus uttered the agonising cry "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" The second quotation is from a resurrection Psalm; while the third speaks to us of the day when the Lord is coming back in glory. Read further (*verse 19*): "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." There is the answer. So when they say to you "We can put you into communication with the spirits of the dead," here is God's answer ready to our hand:—"Shall not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? (shall we appeal to the dead on behalf of the living). To the law and to the testimony."

We have all through the Word of God the most absolute prohibition of seeking to know anything by the agency of these spirits. But a few passages will suffice. Lev. xix. 21: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them." And the twentieth chapter, verse 6: "And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after

them, I will even set My face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people." Verse 27: "A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them." Deut. xviii. 10: "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer." Now in this passage particularly, God seems to exhaust every possible name, by which that which is now called spiritualism could be described. Notice the words "consulter with familiar spirits." The modern term "medium" is only the name for the person who has a familiar spirit. In two of their journals I have noticed contradictory statements as to the word necromancer. In one it is admitted that the word means "a consulter of the dead," and the Scripture commandment is openly defied. In another it is declared that the Greek word "*nekros*" only means a dead body, and that the reference is to the practice of examining the entrails of corpses, to get auguries therefrom. As a matter of fact, this is a false pretence; for the Greek poet Homer continually uses the word "*nekros*" in reference to the spirits of the departed, whom he represents as coming back to take an unseen part among the living. To the believer, therefore, the commandment is absolute and unmistakable.

But we must refer to one more passage, in dealing with what the Scriptures say about necromancy. We are continually referred by Spiritualists to the witch of Endor, and to the fact, as they regard it, that she actually brought up the spirit of Samuel. Now let me take this opportunity of pressing on you, that while men may seek to communicate with the spirits of the departed, in reality they only obtain communications from demons. Nothing can be more certain than that men on earth have no power to interfere in any way with the spirits of the departed, for the Lord is reserving "the unjust unto the day of judgment, to be punished" (2 Peter ii. 9); while the spirits of the departed saints are with the Lord Jesus, as is shown in Phil. i. 23-24, where the being "with Christ" is put in contrast with being "in the flesh." But we will turn to 1 Sam. xxviii., and we shall find that this case of the witch of

Endor is emphatically the exception that proves the rule. In verse 3 we learn that "Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land"; and on this account, this woman, the witch of Endor, was in hiding. We find that Saul had gathered all Israel together and had pitched in Gilboa, while the Philistines were also assembled in force, and a decisive battle was imminent. Under these circumstances Saul was anxious to inquire of the Lord, but the Lord had departed from him because of his disobedience; and although Saul enquired, he was not answered. In his intense anxiety to know what the issue of the battle on the morrow would be, he bids his servants seek for a woman with a familiar spirit, that he might enquire of her; and directly they tell him of one, he disguises himself and goes to her. We will just read the few verses that describe what took place—verses 8-12: ". . . Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel. And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul." Now what does that show? That the woman got something she never expected. She undertook to bring Samuel up, but she never expected really to see Samuel. She intended to practice her old trick, and to lead Saul to believe that what was spoken to her by her power of witchcraft was the utterance of Samuel. But on this occasion, God stepped in and actually brought Samuel up, that he might give a last message to Saul; and when the woman saw Samuel she was filled with terror, for she knew that this was something quite different from what she was accustomed to. The reality of the appearance of Samuel made her sure that for no one less than Saul himself would one from the dead have thus appeared. "And the king said unto her, Be not afraid, for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth." This word "gods" in the plural does not imply that she saw more figures than one. The Hebrew word *Elohim* (gods) is continually used thus. The first mention of God in the Scriptures, in Gen. i. 1, is "In the beginning God (*Elohim*) created." The plural is often used in Hebrew to give force or emphasis, and Saul's reply shows that he did not understand her to mean more than one person; for he says "What form is *he* of? And she said, An old man cometh up, and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that

it was Samuel." Then follows a conversation between Samuel and Saul, in which the woman has no part; and this is wholly different from what takes place in connection with spiritualistic manifestations. In those, the spirit of the departed one is supposed to speak through the voice of the medium; but here, God is sending a message by His servant Samuel, whom He has brought up for the purpose, and the medium has no further part in the matter. The whole narrative, then, only confirms the truth we have learned elsewhere, that while mediums may ordinarily receive demoniacal communications, they have no power to interfere with the spirits of the departed, who are in the hands of God, whether for blessing or for judgment.

I will now read you a few extracts from Spiritualist publications, showing how entirely they deny all the foundations of the Gospel. But I may first of all mention an incident that occurred some twenty-one years ago, as illustrating how this anticipation of the work of the second beast, or false prophet, of the Revelation, came in with the lamb-like appearance we read of in Rev. xiii., but presently spoke with the voice of the dragon. I was staying a few days, at the period I refer to, in the house of a Christian lady, and was much shocked to find that she had been attending spiritualistic meetings, and was much captivated with what she had heard, even declaring that she had been greatly helped through their teachings. I expostulated with her on her seeking after what God had so solemnly forbidden; and assured her that it would not be long before spiritualism would show itself in its real colours, as wholly opposed to the Gospel. She sought to defend herself by saying what good they had done her, and declared there was nothing in their teaching contrary to Christianity. While we were talking, the post came in, and among other things it brought a journal she was accustomed to take, advocating spiritualistic doctrines. Without opening it, she handed it to me, saying that I could there see for myself that there was nothing in it which would be hurtful to the child of God. I opened it, and the very first thing that I read was an article, saying that the time was come to throw off the cloak spiritualism had been wearing, while it went on to deny every fundamental doctrine of the Scriptures. Mercifully for her, it was the means of putting an end to her connection with spiritualism.

I now propose to read a few extracts from accredited journals of the Spiritualists, in order to show that they absolutely deny the whole of the faith of the Gospel. We will take first a report of a lecture, given by Mr. J. B. Tetlow, at Sowerby Bridge, on September 6th, 1885, and reported in *The Medium and Daybreak* of the 18th September, which lecture, by the way, was professedly delivered under spirit influence. The extracts which I will read contain, as you will see, an absolute repudiation of the doctrine of the atoning work of Christ:—

On September 6th, Mr. J. B. TETLOW, at Sowerby Bridge. “Thus, the spiritual faculties of man, aided by his reason and experience, entirely repudiate the doctrine of the atonement. Where there is sin there is suffering, is a universal experience. To permit another to bear that suffering in our stead is to extend the evil. Reason proclaims that the consequences of an act are not felt in advance of the act being committed. How then can the sins of to-day be borne by any one who lived in the past? Reason and the spiritual faculty in man alike demand that Church doctrines shall be levelled with the dust, that the truth may arise and guide men. . . . A good Christian mother has two children. One of them has a superior brain, endowed with intellectual and aspirational faculties. His intuitive sense of truth prevents him from accepting the dogmas of Christianity. He lives the self-denying life of a spiritual pioneer, leads many to the truth, and leaves the world better than he found it. The hour of his death comes, the minister is sent for. He says to the dying man: ‘Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross to save you from your sins?’ ‘No, sir!’ is the reply. ‘Then I am of no use here; prayers are of no avail unless you thus believe’; and the dying philanthropist is consigned to eternal torments in hell. The other child of this Christian mother is of the opposite kind. His is an impure and wasted life, through the sins of which many are led to ruin. His vices bring him to an early grave. The minister also attends his death-bed. ‘Do you lay all your sins on the Saviour?’ the minister asks the dying man, who never scrupled in the best of days to shrink from his honest responsibilities. Wicked to the end, he readily answers ‘Yes!’ Then laudatory prayers are offered up, and the abject sinner is transformed into a saint, and supposed to be as fit for the companionship of heaven, as his good brother was for the pains of hell.”

Then in the same number of this journal we have a letter from the notorious Mrs. EMMA HARDINGE BRITTEN, who delivers what are described as inspirational orations. Describing a visit to Bradford, she writes as follows:—"In nearly all the places I have named, I remain over the Monday as well as the Sunday, to invite questions and not infrequently to promote friendly discussion. One invariable feature of these Monday evening meetings is the presence of two, three, or more 'local preachers' as they are called; persons who never fail to show their good breeding and Christian charity by interrupting and rudely invading the order of the exercises; and who seem to think it is absolutely necessary, whatever the subject of the address may be, or the character of the questions called for, that they must come and testify for Jesus and the 'vicarious atonement.' Sometimes these gentlemen treat me to a little Christian abuse, and plainly promise me a *warmer* reception hereafter than ever my warm-hearted friends gave me here. The general burden of their dreary platitudes are, however: 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,' and 'The *blood* of Christ which cleanseth from all sin.' I would not waste time and space upon these nuisances, were it not proper to do them justice, and acknowledge that they are still doing the spirit's work by advertising us. At a recent discussion in Bradford, after the immense audience had been formally dismissed, I found two or three of these Christian gentlemen, who having made all the disturbance they possibly could within the hall, were outside busy in haranguing a somewhat irreverent crowd on the efficacy of 'blood,' as 'the sole means of salvation.' As my carriage drove off, I heard one of my late audience, one too of the true Yorkshire type, and what that is the world is beginning to understand, advising the preacher in the most fraternal manner to 'shut up,' 'seeing that the people in that part of the country had outgrown such a butchery kind of religion.'"

I will next read from an article by ALFRED KITSON, on "Heaven: What is it; and where located?" printed in the same journal, January 1st, 1886, to show that their denial of the doctrine of justification by faith is equally distinct:—"We cannot but honour such reformers as Buddha, Confucius, and Jesus, who, while trying to inculcate a higher morality, endeavoured to live consistent lives therewith; and we are forced to the conclusion that our modern priesthood and

clergy have greatly erred in losing sight of the principle of theology—moral development—which they have sacrificed for creed, dogma, and authority. After a careful study of these creeds we are of opinion that the bulk of the sin that is committed to-day is attributable to the priesthood, and is fostered by their teachings, and the vicarious atonement theory which may be summed up thus:—*I am a miserable sinner, and corrupt from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet. Nothing of merit do I possess. Totally unworthy am I in Thy sight to enjoy eternal life. Works avail me nought. Nothing that I can do will give me grace in Thy sight if I do not believe in the redemptive power of Thy only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And though my sins be as scarlet wool, yet, if I do but believe, I shall be made whiter than snow.* Thus right doing is at a discount, while belief is the one thing needful. How can humanity rise to a higher moral life under this pernicious, soul-blasting theory? To expect it is the height of folly. If salvation is so easily purchased, it is not worth while denying ourselves of opportunities to enrich ourselves at the expense of others, when by one magic word, BELIEF, all can be made right for us. No wonder that the man who tries to do as he would like to be done by is looked upon as a fool.”

To show you what these people say with regard to heaven and hell, I will read a few passages from an address given at Cavendish Rooms, London, by Mr. MORSE, professedly under spirit control, on Sunday, August 28th, 1872:—“Spiritualism, then, if its manifestations, as they purport to be, do really come from the inhabitants of the other life, must support the doctrines of Christianity. And we should naturally expect to receive from this supermundane source the ideas that constitute Christianity. But, as a rule, the direct contrary takes place; for communicating spirits are nearly always opposed to the theological ideas of the present day. They overturn, demolish, and annihilate these dogmas of total depravity, and heaven or hell being the destiny of man, &c. Spiritualism claims a higher destiny for man. It reveals to the mind of the investigator that the life of the better land is a counterpart of this, saving that there the intellect has more scope for development, and is consequently more perfect in its manifestations than on this side of life. It reveals also the fact that the heaven and hell of the Christian theologian are mythical existences, built upon the fanatical zeal of partisan intolerance. Spiritualism teaches

that man has inherent power to improve within himself, both in this life and the life to come; that he shall progress infinitely, and thus be his own saviour. Hence individual reform is the burden of spiritualism, and knowledge is a necessity connected therewith."

These passages from their addresses and writings are by no means exceptional or isolated. I have looked through a large number of their periodicals, and find exactly the same things occurring again and again. Whatever need was felt at first for keeping up the lamb-like character, they have long got past anything of the sort; and in thousands of places they are sending forth a continual flow of the bitterest abuse of all that is truly Christian.

Before concluding, I would point out how very closely Spiritualism is connected with the darkness of Romanism. It is a feature that comes out very prominently in their writings, and the following extracts are but a sample of scores more.

In "Some parting words," by Dr. T. L. NICHOLS, in *The Spiritual Record* for July, 1884, he says:—"The Roman Catholic Church, as well as the Eastern, is evidently more Spiritualistic than the Anglican Church or most Protestant denominations. The Church Catholic teaches that every member has a guardian angel, and that he may, and ought to pray to him and to the saints, consisting of patriarchs, apostles, martyrs, and all holy persons recognised by the act of canonisation. The invocation of saints and prayers for the dead are alike practical recognitions of Spiritualism, and the fact is well-known that many Spiritualists, educated as Protestants, have perhaps, on this account, become Roman Catholics."

In an editorial notice in the same number, we find the following sentence:—"And of all religions the Roman Catholic has least to fear from Spiritualism. We have heard of many Spiritualists becoming Catholics, but never heard of any one becoming a Calvinist." In order to understand the full force of this last sentence, it is necessary to know that, with the Spiritualists, the term Calvinist is used to describe any one who believes in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and justification by faith. This, then, is their own

emphatic testimony as to the effect of their own teaching ; and to those who love the Lord Jesus, and praise God for redemption through His precious blood, this must be sufficient evidence of the character of the whole thing. I have made no comment upon the extracts I have read, for, as I said before, I am speaking for believers, and no words of mine can be needed to satisfy such, that a system which has borne such fruit, comes from the father of lies.



II.—LAWLESSNESS.

THE special subject before us to-night is lawlessness. This is one feature of the character of the last days, as brought before us in the Word of God. It is true that in the authorised version, the English translation of the Scriptures, that we are in the habit of using, we do not get that exact word, though again and again the word occurs in the New Testament, and is translated iniquity. The word really means—what itself it expresses—the being without law, the setting aside of law altogether. It is something distinct from simple transgression of law. In the first epistle of John, the third chapter and the fourth verse, there is a definition of sin, which, in the authorised version reads thus: “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” Literally translated, the words are “Whosoever is committing sin (the tense implies not a single act, but a continued practice) is committing lawlessness: for sin is lawlessness.” Now I say that lawlessness is something very distinct from transgression of law. A law-abiding citizen, to bring it down to things of this life, may, under provocation or temptation, be led into an act of transgression of the law; and the instant he has committed the act, recognising the authority of the law, he may submit himself to the executive, to be dealt with according to law. That man is not a lawless man, though he is a transgressor of the law. On the other hand, we may have a man who, while carefully watching his steps to see that he does not outwardly transgress the law, in his heart has a hatred to law altogether. He would, if he could, free himself from its control. That man is a lawless man, although he does not outwardly transgress the law. The other man is not a lawless man, though in an unguarded moment he has transgressed the law. Now the definition of sin in this chapter is most important. Sin in its essence is lawlessness; and, whether openly and avowedly or not, it is downright rebellion against the authority of God. And this is what is presented to us as one of the marked characteristics of the last days.

Turning to the Scripture which is connected with the notice of to-night's subject—the third chapter of second Timothy, we will read the first five verses: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." 'Perilous times'—the word means, strictly, difficult or hard times, in the sense of perplexing. Because, remember, this description is not a description of the world as such. It is, as the fifth verse says, a description of those who "have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof," of those who make a profession of belonging to Christ; and that is what makes it so perplexing. If you and I were taken to Central Africa, there would not be any temptation to join in the abominable rites and orgies and objectionable ways of the natives. But it is a different thing when our lot is cast among professing Christians, who yet are bearing many of these characteristic marks of the last days. Then the times become difficult indeed. And that is what is referred to here. I will ask you to compare these verses with the description in Rom. i. 28-31, of what God has given the Gentile nations over to, because they did not want to retain Him in their knowledge; and you will see how remarkably the two correspond one with the other. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful." You will notice that certain outward features of the more gross and open wickedness are wanting in 2 Timothy, just because there is a form of godliness thrown over the whole thing; but in all their essential characteristics the two descriptions agree very closely. If we were to read these two lists in the original language, we should find that they resembled one another even more closely

than in our translation. But even as we read them in our authorised version, there is quite enough to make it manifest that these two pictures must both have a common origin. As, in the one case, the Gentiles did not wish to retain God in their knowledge, and He gave them over to a reprobate mind ; so, in the other case, all the characteristics of professing Christendom in the last days, come of men refusing to submit to the Christ of God, and for this reason they will be given over to serve the devil's anti-christ. I have been much struck in carefully examining each one of the different features in this catalogue in 2nd Timothy, to notice how many of them are negative words. Besides those in which this is apparent in our translation,—such as disobedient, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection,—there are other expressions which equally partake of this negative form. For instance, fierce is “not gentle” ; truce-breakers is “without a drink-offering,” and was used by the Greeks for a person who could not be appeased, with whom no peace could be made ; despisers of those that are good is “not lovers-of-good” ; and so on. So that all the way through God has given us a picture of what Christians should be, while pointing out that these professors are just the opposite. They have a form of godliness, they profess to belong to Christ, but they are wholly unlike that which He desires His people to be.

Now just look at the first two characteristics. “Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous.” Literally, self-lovers, money-lovers. Here at the very start we find the most complete contrast between this anti-christ character and the Christ character. The Lord Jesus is set before us as the One who did not love Himself, who did not please Himself ; and who, though He was rich, did not love His riches, but emptied Himself and for our sakes became poor. And here, in contrast to that, the very foundation, the root of all the rest, lies in these two things. They are lovers of self and lovers of money. People love money because it procures what they wish for. When people love themselves they wish to please themselves, and then they love that by which they are able to gratify their own desires. Now if we keep this well in mind—that this is the root of all the things that follow—it will be a help to us, both in discerning that which is displeasing to God, and in learning, by way of contrast, what God would have us as His children to be. As I said before, the Lord Jesus is specially brought before us as the One who

pleased not Himself; and if we are to be preserved from the lawless character of all that is round about us, then remember we must be delivered from self-love, and from the consequent aiming at what will gratify self.

Now I think, before we go any further, it will be well to turn to a few passages that show what is the true character of lawlessness, what is God's thought about it, and how it has developed itself. We will begin with Matt. xxiii. 27:—"Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." The word iniquity is really the same word—lawlessness—that we are occupied with. Notice from these two words, hypocrisy and lawlessness, that the character of these Jews is just what we have in 2nd Timothy. In the description of the Gentiles in Rom. i., there is no hypocrisy mentioned, for they did not cloak over their true character; it was all outward and manifest. But here there is the cloak, and the Lord not only reveals to us the lawlessness of the hearts, but the putting on of the cloak to hide it. Turn now to the seventh chapter of the same Gospel, verses 22-23. "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name? And in Thy Name have cast out devils? And in Thy Name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity (lawlessness)." You will notice that here, again, the Lord is dealing with professors of religion, with those who are so satisfied with themselves that they can appeal to the Lord as to what they have done. But He answers them: "I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity (lawlessness)." And remember the lawlessness was nothing of the outward character of law-breaking, but was that of the heart that did not submit itself to Him whom God has made both Lord and Christ; so that they are rejected as lawless ones, though they make this great profession.

Look now at Titus ii. 11-14: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared (see margin); teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious

appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity (lawlessness), and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." "That He might redeem us from *all* lawlessness." That the self-will, the loving of self and that which enables us to gratify self, should be replaced by a heart-subjection to Him. That we may not in our hearts be saying: "We will not have this man to reign over us," even while with the lips we may be professing to worship Him; but that the enquiry of our hearts may ever be "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" This is what it is to be redeemed from all lawlessness. Now turn to 2 Cor. vi. 14:—"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness (lawlessness)?" God gives us here the complete contrast; for the unregenerate heart is not merely unrighteous, it is lawless. This lawlessness manifests itself first of all in the rejection of the Gospel; and the rejection of all the government of God just comes from the same self-will in the heart.

You see we have had two passages that speak of lawlessness as characteristic of the religious unsaved, and two passages that tell of the purpose of God—that we should be redeemed from all lawlessness and walk in separation from it. Now if we turn to Hebrews i. 8-9, we shall find that the Lord Jesus is presented to us as the One who hated lawlessness: "But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity (lawlessness); therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." Oh, what a marvellous exhibition of that hatred of lawlessness we have in Him, who, as He came from the throne of God, could say—"In the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart." He hated *lawlessness*; not simply iniquity, not simply the outward wrong-doing, but the inward disowning of God's authority, which is the worst of all wrong-doing. Now it is interesting to note that the word transgressors, which we get in Mark xv. 28: "And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, And He was numbered with the transgressors,"—is, literally, lawless ones. Oh, how touching it is, as we read of Him as the One who hates lawlessness, to find Him

numbered with the lawless ones. Truly we shall never know what it cost the obedient Son of God to be numbered with the lawless ones. We shall never know what it was to Him to have our sins made to meet upon Himself; for we can never know how deeply He hated lawlessness, nor how terrible a thing sin was to Him. But deep as His hatred of it was, terrible as was the anguish His soul passed through, His delight in doing the will of the Father who sent Him, sustained Him in the whole of His appointed sufferings.

Now, in complete contrast with what is said of the Lord Jesus, we will turn to 2 Thess. ii. 7-8: "For the mystery of iniquity (lawlessness) doth already work: only he who now letteth, will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked (the lawless one) be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming." If the Lord Jesus was the hater of lawlessness, the Antichrist is the very essence of it; he is **THE LAWLESS ONE**. I think these Scriptures, looked at together, will make the matter very plain. They sum the whole thing up as follows:—First we have lawlessness as the true character of professing Christians, who have not accepted the Gospel of God's grace, and in whose heart His law is not laid up. Next, we have it as that from which the true children of God have been redeemed, and from which they are to walk in entire separation. Then we have it as that which Christ hates, but which marked the character of those among whom He was numbered, when He came to take our place. And, lastly, we have it all gathered up together, in its completely developed form, in the person of the Antichrist; while he, at the very zenith of his power, is destroyed by the manifestation of Christ in glory.

And now as to some of the features of that lawlessness, as it manifests itself in the different circumstances under which God has placed us here in the world. First, in connection with our family and household relationships; next, as put under the government of this world, in the country we live in; and last, in connection with our responsibilities in the churches or assemblies of His saints. But first we will look at a passage in 2 Peter ii. 9, 10. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of

uncleanness, and despise government : presumptuous are they, self-willed ; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities." I read this passage specially with reference to the words "Walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government." The word translated "government" is literally "lordship," and corresponds with the word that is always applied to the Lord Jesus in His character of the owner of His redeemed people, the One to whom they belong. There are no circumstances in which we are called upon to submit to authority, whether in our homes, in the church, or in the commonwealth, where that authority does not derive its power from the Lord Himself. It is He who commands children to be subject to parents, wives to husbands, servants to masters, the younger ones in the church to the elder ones, and all of us to be subject to the powers that be. Wherever in the Scriptures obedience is called for from children of God, you will always find that it is to be *in* the Lord, or *to* the Lord. And before we begin to look at any of the passages to which I have referred, just let me point out that unless it is recognised that it is the Lord Himself who claims our obedience, the obedience will often be a hard and bitter thing, and consequently we shall break down in attempting to carry it out. The only thing that will enable us to render obedience in all the different circumstances in which we are placed, is to have the truth deep down in our own hearts "He put me here, He put me under this authority, and He calls me to obey Him in it." It does not matter whether it is an inconsistent father provoking his children to anger by a self-willed exercise of his authority, or a tyrannical master acting unjustly towards his servants. God will bring them into judgment for what they are doing, but He would have us accept it as from Himself.

You remember when Paul was before Ananias, the High Priest, and Ananias gave command to smite him on the mouth, Paul answered, "God shalt smite thee, thou whited wall : for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law ?" (Acts xxiii. 3). But as soon as he was told who Ananias was, he said : "I wist not, brethren, that he was the High Priest ; for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." He owned himself a transgressor and humbled himself for his fault. Ananias had been guilty of a gross breach of the law,

such as would be sufficient to oust any judge of the English bench from his position ; but the moment Paul found out that he was God's High Priest, he submitted himself. Now you see Paul's subjection was to God and to the Word of God, and not to Ananias. So long as he did not know that Ananias was the High Priest, he felt free to tell him of the sin he was guilty of ; but the moment he was made aware to whom he was speaking, he expressed regret for what he had done. This is a clear example of the root-principle that lies at the bottom of the whole question of subjection to God-appointed authority, as contrasted with lawlessness.

Now beginning with the smallest circle, the family circle, we will read of what concerns our relationships there. Turn to Eph. v. 22 : "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Leave out the last four words, and the submission will often be a difficult and even impossible task. But keep them in, and let it be simply done as part of the wife's obedience to the Lord ; then, day by day, just as there is a growing love for Him and a growing perception of His love for her, this subjection will become increasingly the delight of her heart. And remember that all these injunctions are given, irrespectively of whether the one to be obeyed is even a child of God. We will read the other two passages—in Col. and 1 Peter—that speak of the same subject. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (Col. iii. 18). "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your husbands ; that if any obey not the word, they also may, without the word, be won by the chaste conversation of the wives." (1 Peter iii. 1). Now, as I said before, in this and in all the other cases that we have to deal with, the commandment of the Lord to be subject and to obey is not dependent upon whether the one to whom that subjection is to be given is a child of God. Still less is it dependent upon whether that one occupies that position as he ought to do. God claims our obedience, not because the one to whom it is to be rendered is worthy of it ; He claims it because *He Himself* is worthy of it. It is only to be "in the Lord." It may be that the wife has been converted and the husband remains unconverted. Nevertheless, the same obedience is to be rendered "in the Lord."

Pray do not imagine that I want to ignore the other side of the matter. Wherever God gives a measure of authority,

He will hold the one to whom it is given responsible for the way in which it is exercised. So if I do not dwell on this side of the subject, it is solely because it is not the special matter before us. If we look around, we cannot fail to see in what a marked manner women are rebelling against the position that God has appointed to them. I quite admit that it is the professed unbelievers who are in the forefront in claiming what they call "women's rights"; but, unhappily, professing Christian women, and in many cases those who are really Christians, are joining in the cry and helping to lead others away. Remember there is no question involved as to whether women are inferior to men. God does not say that they are. It needs the whole grace and power of God, and nothing short of it, for the Christian woman to fulfil the duties of the place God has put her in, to His glory; and the man needs exactly the same grace and power. Each one, apart from that grace, is helpless, is nothing; but each one has a claim upon the power of God.

Now turn back again to these same epistles, and see what is said to children. Eph. vi. 1: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." And then again in Col. iii. 20: "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." It is not a question of what the parents are like; it is not because this honour is due to them for their personal character or worth. God has put children in the place of subjection to parents; and if parents use their authority wrongly, God will deal with them about it. As I said before, authority carries with it great responsibility, and the greater the authority the greater the responsibility. But the command to obey is just as distinctly a command between God and the one to whom it is given, as is the command how to exercise authority. Children are called upon to obey their parents in the Lord, nor can they escape from that commandment on the ground that father or mother is unreasonable or unjust. We were noticing that the words "perilous times" are literally difficult times. Oh, how immensely the difficulty of the times would be removed from our hearts, if we were recognising this principle—that whatever God has commanded us to do, we are to do it to Him. We are not to quarrel with the channel through which the commandment comes; we are not to obey when it pleases us; but we are to obey in the Lord. Of course, in all cases there are limits to every kind of authority,

and if we are asked to do that which the Word of God forbids, we can answer "whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." But this is very different from refusing to do a thing, because we consider it unjust or harsh towards ourselves.

We will now turn to the same epistles, to see what is said about the obedience servants are to render to masters. First, in Eph. vi. 5-8: "Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ. Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men. Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." Also in Col. iii. 22-24: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh: not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." And again, in 1 Peter iii. 18-20: "Servants be subject to your masters with all fear: not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." The word servants in all these places is really slaves. It is addressed primarily to the household servants, who were all slaves in those days. And you will find that because their circumstances are the hardest and most trying, God has the most to say to them about how their obedience to their masters, if rendered to Himself, is well pleasing to Him. To the slave of a cruel, tyrannical master, the slave who was never allowed to meet with fellow saints, who was liable to harsh, brutal treatment, not because he had done wrong, but because his master was in a captious mood; to that one, more than to all others, God takes pains to show that obedience, rendered not with eye service, but for conscience towards God, is well pleasing to Him.

May God help us again and again and again to listen to these words and to get the meaning and the power of them

into our hearts: "This is thankworthy if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully." Oh how we rebel against that! How the natural heart rises up and says "It is not fair, it is not just." And because it is neither fair nor just, God says to those who suffer it for His sake, that it is "thankworthy." Oh, do we not desire that God should be able in the secret of our hearts to say to us "That pleased Me, that made Me glad." Do we not wish that presently the Lord Jesus shall be able to give us a reward, in token of what we have done. Then here we have that which He assures us is always pleasing to Him, and for which it will be His delight to reward us. By enduring the injury we are following the steps of the Lord Jesus, and fulfilling the very thing to which we are called; for we read further on "even hereunto were ye called." It is in the very nature of our calling that we should do well, suffer for it, and take it patiently.

Now we will look at the obedience to be rendered to earthly rulers, and we may begin at the same chapter 1 Peter ii. 13-15: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." But before going further we will glance at a verse lower down, which bears upon the whole of the subject we are occupied with. The Lord Jesus is put before us as the pattern One in the whole thing. And we are told how it was that He was enabled to continue steadfast in His obedience. Let us look at verses 21-23: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." Remember, that when the sufferings of Christ are set before us as an example, it is not speaking of what He suffered at the hands of God. The Lord Jesus as the sin-bearer is not an example to you and me. We are not called upon to bear afresh the load of sin and the judgment of God on account of it. But here we have an example that we are to follow, an example of suffering for doing well. He never suffered at the hands of God for doing well.

Though He was the spotless One, He suffered at the hands of God as the sin-bearer. He willingly accepted that place from God, and, while Himself the just One, the sins of guilty sinners were laid upon Him, and He received at the hands of God the penalty due to sin. But at the hands of men He suffered for well-doing. He went about doing good all His life, but nevertheless they hated Him and crucified Him. Therefore it is the endurance of this suffering at men's hands, the cruellest, the wickedest, the most unjust suffering that ever was meted out by man to man, in which we are called upon to imitate Him. "When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." He did not seek to avoid one bitter pang, He did not resist anything that man could do to Him, for on the one hand He said: "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" and on the other hand, in the drinking of it, in the submitting Himself to all that was appointed, He was not submitting to unrighteous men, but to God, who would judge righteously. So, "for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God." There is the whole thing summed up in that one sentence. He believed in God right through from first to last. He believed that God was able to deliver Him *out of* death, even though He must needs go down *into* death. And because He trusted God He was able to obey God. On the other hand, the whole character of the lawlessness of the present day and of every age is just that of those who do not trust God, and therefore do not obey Him. The first beginning of submission to God in the soul, comes in with the first beginning of faith in Him. The Gospel offers a gift for our acceptance, but it is also a commandment claiming our obedience. So the sight of Christ on the cross, bearing my judgment, making atonement for my sin, resulted not only in my trusting Him, but also in my yielding myself to Him. And ever since I have only been able to walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, as far as I have been sustained in simple faith in Him, committing myself to Him that judgeth righteously.

We will now turn back to Rom. xiii. 1-2: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the

ordinance of God: and they shall receive to themselves damnation." Here again we are called upon to submit ourselves, without regard to the character of the rule. God will deal with unjust rulers. God smote Herod and he was eaten up of worms, but the people were not to rebel against him while he was king. So Nero, with every other tyrant, will receive his judgment at the hands of God. But as long as they are in a position of authority, God bids His people to submit themselves to the powers that be, as put in their place by Himself. Here, as elsewhere, there are limits to the authority, and if earth-rulers infringe on that which belongs to God only, we are not called upon to obey them. The Lord's answer to the Herodians in Matt. xxii. 16-22, clearly lays down the principle that must guide us: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." So that if the rulers demand my practice of certain religious rites, or require me to subscribe to certain doctrines, I may tell them quietly and humbly, yet boldly: "That belongs to God, that does not belong to you; you may put me to death or in prison for it, but in this I am not called on to obey you." But to whatever rightly belongs to the administration of the law, however unfair, I am to submit myself in the Lord, because that is the sphere where "Cæsar" has authority.

And now, briefly, as to rule in the Church, for the same principle applies there. Let us read Heb. xiii. 17: "Obey them that have the rule over you (*or, guide you—see margin*), and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Also 1 Peter v. 5: "Likewise ye younger, submit yourself unto the elder." Here, as elsewhere, authority entrusted to man carries with it corresponding responsibility; and a stricter judgment will be enforced by God in regard to those to whom He has entrusted the oversight of the flock. But remember that this is a matter between God and those to whom He entrusts the authority. Consequently, believers are not warranted in refusing to submit themselves to those who are placed over them in the Lord, because they do not approve of the action of such overseers. Of course the limitations come in here also, and if elder brethren seek our submission to that which is contrary to the Word of God, we cannot yield to them; for we should not be submitting to God in that case. As I said in regard to the other matters,

so here also, the secret of obedience is confidence in God. We just come back to the truth of Matt. xviii. 20: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Do we believe that? Have we any confidence in the Lord? I had recently to speak to a brother at a distance from here, who was going to withdraw himself from fellowship with an assembly, because he had not confidence in the overseers to deal scripturally with him for wrong-doing to which he had confessed. "Remember," I said to him, "you have taken your place among God's saints on the ground of the Lord Jesus being in the midst; you have professed that His presence was sufficient for worship and for ministry. Now if he is sufficient for these, is He not enough for discipline? What does the whole profession of owning Him in the midst come to, if you say you cannot trust brethren to act rightly? In reality you cannot trust Him to act rightly. For He never said, 'Obey them when they use their authority in a wise and gracious way.' He said, 'Obey them in the Lord.'" This is the foundation of the whole thing; and it is this want of confidence in the Lord that is the cause of all the lawlessness that pervades Christendom at the present day.

I need not stop to point out the examples of these things. They are well known. The subjection which the Scriptures teach wives to render to their husbands is treated as a matter of joke. Children set their parents' authority on one side, and in a town like this, where they can soon earn their own living, they think nothing of going to lodge elsewhere if any attempt is made to put restrictions upon their liberty. It is the same with servants. If they do not like what is said to them, they give a month's notice and get another place, without ever considering if the Lord put them in their situation, and whether He will not have them glorify Him where He has placed them. Workmen's combinations and strikes, too, are exactly of the same character. While, on the other hand, the same lawlessness, the same rebellion of heart against Christ, makes harsh parents, selfish husbands, and tyrannical masters. But in the Church, as well as in the family and in the State, the same rule holds good, and on that ground God claims our obedience. Oh, dear friends, we shall feel something of the force of that word "difficult times" as we seek to walk in obedience to Him. But He is the God for difficult times, for He is the Almighty God. And

He who said to Abraham "I am the Almighty God, walk before Me and be thou perfect," says to you and me, to each one of us, "I am the Almighty God, walk before Me." You, dear wives, who have heartless husbands, walk before God: children who have parents whom you find it hard to obey, brethren and sisters in the assembly with much to bear one from another, *walk before God*. Oh, it is only as we walk before Him, and commit our souls to Him as to a righteous Judge, that the very difficult times shall be turned into occasions for glorifying Him, and we shall learn that the Almighty God can make them plain for us.



III.—“A Form of Godliness, but Denying the Power Thereof.”

2 Tim. iii. 5.

OUR special subject for to-night is contained in a few words in the fifth verse of the third chapter of 2nd Timothy. Last Saturday night we were occupied chiefly with the four preceding verses, which give a general description of the features of Satan's working in these last days ; and in this fifth verse, there is added to all the other marks, this special characteristic of some “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,” with the solemn injunction “from such turn away.” Now you know we have already been dwelling upon the fact that “the mystery of lawlessness doth already work.” I have sought to point out that that which will presently be fully developed, when all the restraining power is removed, and when Satan's masterpiece, the Man of Sin, has risen to the height of his power and of his wickedness, is working now, only more or less in a hidden way ; and one part of the veil (I use that word, because we saw last week that presently this mystery is to be unveiled, so that meanwhile the veil is over it), one part of the veil, with which the mystery of lawlessness is so covered that we do not at once recognise its true character, is what we have in these words—“a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” Now it is well that we should distinctly understand what is meant by this word “godliness.” It is a word that is never used until we come to the epistle to Timothy. It occurs in the first epistle to Timothy eight times, four times in Peter, and once in Titus. These are the only cases in which it is to be found in the New Testament, so that it stamps a distinctive character upon this portion of the Scriptures. The word is derived from a root that means to reverence or stand in awe, and it is generally used with

the meaning which we attach to the word "piety." It does not in itself contain the word God at all, and the whole idea that it conveys is that of the outward demeanour of persons who profess to reverence or stand in awe of God. This is, indeed, the special subject of those epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus. You remember in the first epistle to Timothy he says, "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly," but meanwhile he has written those things, that Timothy might know how to behave himself in the house of God: and then comes that important declaration (perhaps we had better turn to it though we are all familiar with it), 1 Tim. iii. 16, "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." It is a question of behaviour, a question of the outward testimony of those who belong to Christ, and so constitute the house of God, the assembly or Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Now you will notice that the great fundamental truths here set before us, are declared to be the mystery of godliness or piety. That is, of the outward behaviour of those who hold them and are under their power. So you see that this contrasts with what we had in the verse we started with. There it was a form of godliness, while the power of true godliness was denied. Here we have the hidden, mighty source of all true godliness, and great is the mystery of this godliness or piety. Its root is in the important truth "God was manifest in the flesh." He, who was manifest in the flesh, is as much the source of godliness in us, the people of God, as He is the foundation of all that concerns our salvation. So, while we never cease to press that He is the only foundation in regard to the sinner's salvation, we need also to press that He is the only foundation in regard to the believer's obedience and walk of godliness before the world.

Now we have already noticed that the lawlessness, that presently is to be developed in its fulness, is at present working in mystery. Just so with this great mystery of godliness. The source of it is not to be seen by the natural eye. It is manifested as the result of that unseen change of heart, when a sinner takes Jesus for his Saviour. It is to be perceived by its fruits. But, while the fruits are the outward

thing that the world can take account of, the only thing that can produce those fruits is the inward thing, that which is unseen.

Before leaving this passage, I should like to say just a word or two respecting the previous verse, regarding those who are to bear God's testimony, and who are to be the witnesses for His truth. We read in verse 14, "These things write I unto thee . . . that thou mayest know how to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." There we get four distinct descriptions of the people of God, here on earth, in this present dispensation. It is well to note that in reality there is no definite article attached to any one of them. It is not very easy to convey the exact force of this to our English ears. Sometimes the absence of the article in Greek may be correctly expressed by supplying the indefinite article "a" in English. But that by no means always holds good; and in this case to say "a house of God, which is a church," &c., would be quite misleading. This absence of article is generally intended to tell us that it is the character of the thing spoken of to which our attention is called. Let me give you an example from the opening of the epistle to the Hebrews. Read Chapter i. 1, 2. "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." Now there is no word "His" before Son, in the original, neither is there any article. The revised version says, in the margin, "a Son." But that gives a totally false idea, for it conveys the thought that He was but one of many. In reality, a contrast is being drawn between the character of those through whom God spoke in the past and that of the One by whom He is now speaking. Then it was prophets, now it is One who shares His glory and His Godhead, One who stands to Him in the relationship of Son. And this is conveyed by the omission of the article. Now, applying this thought to the passage we are occupied with, it is as though the apostle would say "that thou mayest know how to behave thyself in that which bears the character of a house for God, of the church, or assembly, of the living God." And then this house, this assembly, possesses further the two-fold characteristics of pillar and base, or foundation. It does not matter whether it is a large assembly of God's saints, or whether but two or three are gathered together, this

is its character. It is Church of God. It stands in the eyes of God and by Him it is set before the world as having this character stamped upon it, a dwelling place for Himself. We get precisely the same thought in Matthew xviii. 20: "For where two or three are gathered together in (or, unto) My Name, there am I in the midst of them"; and it is this that makes the complete character of the house of God to attach even to the two or three thus gathered. It is as if Paul said to Timothy, He who was manifest in the flesh is the basis and foundation of it all; and I write these things before I come, that you might know that right behaviour in the Church of the living God, depends entirely upon giving the Lord Jesus His place, and owning the whole truth about Him.

Now a word as to the titles given here—Verse 15. The first is the house. A house is a place to live in, and God speaks of the Church as that which is His place of habitation. In connection with this I would ask you to notice two well-known verses at the end of the second of Ephesians, verses 21-2: "In whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Now there we get two distinct views of God's dwelling-place. In one we see the house of God in course of building, right through the age, and presently to be completed in glory; but in the other we learn that, even now, God, will have a habitation here, wherever believers are gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus: "In whom ye also"—that is the saints at Ephesus to whom the epistle is written—"are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." The one as much bears the character of the house of God as the other does. The one will be a complete thing, an eternal thing; the other is fragmentary and for the present time only. But this distinctive character holds good of both alike, and belongs as much to those believers at Ephesus, as it will do eternally to the whole of the redeemed. This corresponds exactly with the first two uses of the word "church" in the 16th and 18th chapters of Matthew. In the 16th chapter the Lord says "Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." That is the complete thing in glory; but in the 18th chapter we have the present aspect of it, and the rules laid down for discipline in the Church now; and all of it is based upon the passage we have already quoted, "Where two or three are gathered together

in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." It is with this thought, then, of believers gathered together, and bearing the character of a dwelling place for God, that Paul writes to Timothy, and says "that thou mayest know how to behave thyself in the house of God."

The next descriptive feature is contained in the words "Church of the living God." This word "Church" signifies *that which is called out*, and points to the character of the assembly as a witness bearer. And it is in the fuller development of this character that we get the other two expressions, "the pillar and ground (or, base) of the truth." The thought of the base tells us how the truth is committed to the Church's care to be preserved; nay, that it is actually embodied in the very character and calling of the Church. The pillar, on the other hand, the lifted up thing, speaks of the testimony that the Church is to bear, that the truth may be seen and known of all men. And these four distinct characters, of which the Spirit of God here speaks, are stamped upon believers, as those to whom God has committed His testimony, and in whom, as having charge of that testimony, and being gathered in accordance with it unto the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, He makes His dwelling-place.

As I said before, one of Satan's ways of veiling the real character of the lawlessness that already abounds, is to cover it over with an outward form of godliness, which, however, denies the power. Now in accordance with this, we find that on all sides, at the present day, men are exalting much that the Scriptures say concerning the fruits of the grace of God in a believer, but they imagine that those things can be produced apart from the grace which is the source of them all. God manifest in flesh, is the root of all true godliness; and yet men exhort you to produce the fruits of godliness while the power of it is taken away. I propose, therefore, to turn to a few Scriptures which point out what alone is the power that can produce true godliness. We will begin with the opening words of the second Epistle of Peter: "Simon Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us, through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: grace and peace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given unto us all

things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue."

You notice here it is His divine power that hath given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness; the same word that we get in the other passages which we have been looking at. And both these are given to us through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue. So that the source of life and the source of godliness, the fruit of life, are one and the same. And that is why the Apostle speaks of the faith that receives the gift of life, and that which receives the power for godliness as precious faith. Of course faith, in itself, is not a precious thing. The faith that believes a lie is not a precious thing; that only leads to destruction. But as soon as faith is fixed upon God, it receives every precious thing that God has to bestow, and so becomes precious faith.

Turn next to the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians. At the close of that chapter we have a prayer, beginning at the 15th verse. "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding (or, more correctly, the eyes of your heart) being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." Now it is specially that last clause of the prayer that we are concerned with, in connection with our present subject: "That ye may know . . . the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe." We have been called to glory and virtue, and we need to know the power, which is able to fulfil in us all that God has called us to. Now the blessed foundation of the whole of the epistle to the Ephesians is given us in the earlier verses of this chapter, where we have pointed out to us the work of the three persons of the Godhead, in connection with our redemption. First we have God the Father, the author of it all: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. According as He hath chosen us in Him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love : having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.” There, I say, we have the Father as the author of the whole thing ; it was all to be carried out according to the eternal purpose that He purposed in Himself, and it was all to redound to the praise of the glory of His grace. Oh, dear friends, familiar probably as these words are to every one of us, we cannot too often dwell upon them, going back to the foundation of everything concerning our redemption, and remembering that God is the author of it, that He purposed it Himself from all eternity ; and that, in the coming eternity, the fruition of His work shall be to the praise of the glory of His grace.

We have next the part which the Son takes in the mighty work of redemption. “He hath made us accepted in the beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ; wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence ; having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to the good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.” Here we are shewn the Son accomplishing that which was purposed by the Father. We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, and it is all, as before, “according to the riches of His grace” ; and “that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ.” And, now, the 13th verse brings us to the work of the Holy Spirit. I will read it from the Revised Version, which is much more exact here : “In whom ye also—having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation,—in whom—having also believed,—ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God’s own possession.” You first heard ; hearing, you believed ; and believing, you were sealed. And there comes in the work of the blessed Holy Spirit, who opens the heart and understanding to receive the knowledge of the truth, and then seals us, puts God’s seal upon us, claiming us for Himself. But that is not all, for He also comes to dwell in our hearts, as the earnest of all that God has promised us. This is the double character of the

Spirit's work : sealing us, to claim us for God Himself, and also dwelling in us, to make sure to us all that God has promised, and to give us a foretaste of its blessedness. Thus we get the whole of our redemption as worked out by the three-one God. The Father is the planner ; the blessed Lord Jesus is the One who carries out the purpose of the Father, by shedding His blood for our redemption ; and the Spirit opens our hearts to receive the truth of God and then seals us for God.

And now, the apostle goes on to pray that those, who have thus been made the objects of God's dealings, might know, first, the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints ; and next, the exceeding greatness of His power, the same power that wrought in Christ, when God raised Him from the dead. Oh, dear friends, how important it is that we should know the reality of the power of God. That is the power that is denied on all hands by those who have only a form of godliness. As I said before, true godliness is produced from within. There must have been the working of the Spirit of God in our souls first, bringing us to a knowledge of the truth, by the remission of sins through the blood of Christ ; and then, as a result of that, the same blessed Spirit dwelling within us, the only power that is able to fulfil in us all the will of God.

Let us turn next to the prayer that closes the third chapter. After the apostle has declared, in the course of the chapter, that the mystery that had been hid from the beginning of the world had now been made known, he once more breaks out into prayer. A marvellous prayer, finishing with the request that these Ephesian saints might be filled with all the fulness of God. And then he adds an ascription of glory to "Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKETH IN US." Dear children of God, what more power has God than that which already works in each believer ? The power that created the heavens and the earth ; the power that brought man into being ; the power that raised up Christ from the dead ; the power that presently is going to raise to eternal glory all the multitude of the redeemed, and make them like their blessed Lord ; aye, and the power that is going finally and completely to overcome and cast down the trinity of evil, and to execute judgment upon all that

have accepted the lie of the devil ; that is the power that now worketh in us. And if God is to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, He will do it according to the power that already works in us. For the Holy Spirit of God dwells, as we have been seeing, in each believer ; and it is not another power that we need, but just to know the power that already works in us. The secret of the unhindered working of that power in each one of us, is that we “grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption.” Now all this bears directly upon the special subject we are dealing with—“a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” If it needed the power of the three-one God to accomplish a sinner’s salvation, it needs exactly the same power to produce what God owns as godliness. And yet on all hands, in these last days, men are scoffing at the grace of God that brings salvation, they are denying the very foundation truths of the Gospel, and then professing to be able to produce and present to God, godliness after a pattern that they think He is bound to accept. God knows what our salvation has cost, and he knows what is the only power that can produce real godliness ; and He puts the two things exactly on the same basis. Produce godliness without the power of God, and you can produce salvation without the power of God.

We will turn now to the second chapter of the epistle to Titus. Here, as in the epistle to Timothy, the great matter before us is godliness, the outward walk that befits, as well as springs from, God’s grace. Beginning at verse 11, we read, “For the grace of God, that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared, teaching us that, denying ungodliness (whilst in the passage we began with, there is a denial of the power of God, here grace teaches us to deny ungodliness) and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world ; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Now here we have the entire acting of grace. It begins by bringing salvation, and then it not only sets before us what we ought to do, but empowers us to do it. If a child were told to do something which was rather difficult, with how much more readiness and with what greater confidence would the command be obeyed, if the parents’

help could be counted upon. It is the same thing with regard to every command given by God to His children. Each one gives us a fresh claim upon His power and grace, upon His wisdom and love.

Now I would like to go back again to the second chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, to notice how that thought of the grace of God comes in in the same way. The beginning of the chapter calls to mind how we once walked. Verse 2 : "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." What a solemn thought for our consideration : we are either inwrought by the prince of the power of the air, or by the Spirit of God ; the one the power of ungodliness, the other the power of godliness. Verse 3 : "Among whom also we had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." When we were inwrought by the prince of the power of the air, that just led to the fulfilling of the desires of the flesh and mind. But now, as children of God, we have got another mind, which is continually at war with the fleshly mind. And remember this, that the great enemy of God is always on the side of the fleshly mind in the child of God ; and though we have now got another mind, there is the carnal mind in us too. When we were unregenerate, before we had the mind of the Spirit at all, then Satan, working in us as the power, led us on continually to the fulfilment of the desires of the flesh and mind. Now it does not matter a bit whether those desires took the form of open ungodliness and uncleanness, or whether they took the form of outward godliness ; for the flesh can take just as much delight in self-mortification, can be just as much satisfied by a voluntary humility in one man, as by open uncleanness and lasciviousness in another. But while the work of the great enemy of God and man is always to fulfil in us the desires of the flesh and mind, the grace of God leads to the opposite, to the denial of ungodliness and fleshly lusts ; and, therefore, let us be very sure of this, that all that the grace of God presents to us, whether in the Gospel, at the first, or in producing the fruits of godliness afterwards, will be contrary to the natural mind, contrary to our natural wisdom, and, consequently, contrary to that which we naturally love. Verse 4 : "But

God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Jesus Christ. For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." You see how exactly we get the same thing brought out here, that we had in Titus: God's grace beginning and carrying the whole thing through, until the top-stone of the structure shall be set in its place. Is it not the case, then, that to deny the power of godliness, just means what man expresses nowadays by saying, "I am doing my best?" For when man rejects the grace of God, he rejects all that that grace brings. So the power of godliness is the grace of God; or, in other words, it is God Himself.

We may look, next, at a passage in 2 Thes. i. 11: "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." It just helps to establish our hearts in the truth, as, from place to place, we see the same thing brought before us. Here it is specially in connection with the thought of the coming day, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ;" and when He shall be "glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe." And then this prayer, at the end of the chapter, shows us what it is that corresponds in us, now, to this wonderful calling. So that, whether we look back to the power of God in the work of our redemption, or, look forward to the ultimate end of it, in future glory for the redeemed and judgment upon the grace-rejectors, each alike is intended to bring this power to bear upon the present of our lives in the world.

Now before we close, I should like to say a little as to the application of this truth to our collective character. It

does not matter what position God puts us in, or what circumstances we have to pass through, He, and He only, must be the power to enable us to fulfil His will. It is quite possible that, with regard to our individual life, we may own His power, while as to our assembly character we are denying it; and, unhappily, this is what we see on all sides in the days in which we live. Ask many believers what hope they have for eternity, and they will give you as clear an answer as you could wish. They will tell you that they are saved because Christ died for them, and that they have eternal life because they believe on Him. Ask them further how they expect to be preserved, day by day, until the Lord Jesus comes, and they will speak of the grace of God as the only power that can keep them. They own His power as to their individual life. But question them about their assembly life, ask them as to their coming together for worship and edification, and they will begin to explain what they call themselves and to what denomination they belong. And if you ask them, further, for the chapter and verse in the Bible, which authorises them to belong to such a thing, and to bear such a name, they will tell you "Oh, of course, it is not mentioned in the Bible." "But how is it," you may say to them, "that you are calling yourself by a name for which you find no warrant in God's word? How is it that you are attaching yourself to that which man has invented, and leaving the principles which God lays down in the Scriptures? Is not He sufficient? Is it possible that, after all, God has left something out, and that He did not foresee the circumstances of the present day, and provide for them?" "Why, you see," many Christians will answer, "circumstances are so different now to what they were then. It would not be possible for us to meet in the way that the early Christians did. That was very well when their numbers were few; but now we must have some organization. Besides the increase of education and intelligence makes it necessary to have a properly qualified ministry." And so excuses for not simply gathering together around the Lord Jesus are made on all hands; one saying one thing and another another. But what lies beneath the whole thing? Simply this: that they deny in their collective capacity what they own as individuals. They deny the power of God. If you look at the fifth chapter of first Corinthians, and the fourth verse, you will see that when there was something to be done in the name of the

One to whom the Corinthian saints were gathered, the power of the Lord Jesus in the midst was that which alone could enable them to do it. When Christians meet together and take a vote about a matter, and decide a thing by a majority, is *that* the power of our Lord Jesus Christ? The beginning of this epistle enjoins that all are to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. That is what the power of the Lord Jesus is able to accomplish, and if we have not His power, making us of one mind, neither have we power to act in His name in any matter.

The whole system, by which men attempt to carry things by a majority, is an absolute denial of the power of the presence of the Lord Jesus. Do not let us blink the matter. If we see that the only thing that God can accept as godliness, as pleasant fruit to His eyes and heart, is that which is produced by the acceptance of all that He says, and by the receiving of His gifts in our hearts, we must also see that God must be the power for it as much in our assembly life as in our individual life. On all hands there are those who are firm and unflinching about the truth, when it belongs to their individual testimony; yet who think nothing about setting it on one side and putting on a form of godliness, while they deny the power thereof, in regard to their collective responsibilities. Once let the Lord Jesus have His true place, and all the inventions of men in regard to what is called "the ministry" will be swept completely away. The same principle is applied in the first epistle to the Corinthians, 12th chapter. Let us read from the first verse: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed." Now that sounds rather strange, someone might say. Why tell us that? Who would think of calling Jesus accursed? Even unbelievers would not do that. Yet practically, if not in actual words, that is what they do say. For consider a moment; when the Lord Jesus hung upon the cross for our sins, He was made a curse for us, as we read in Gal. iii. 13. As long as our sins were upon Him He was under the curse. But He died, and by His death He put away sin, and satisfied God's claims in regard to it. As the result of this God raised Him from the dead and declared Him to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness. So Jesus on

the throne, with power to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, is the witness that the curse has been removed and that He has become the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. If you deny His power to save, you practically put Him under the curse again. The unsaved sinner is in reality putting the Lord Jesus under the curse, when he wants to do something to add to the finished work of Christ. Now the same thing is equally true with regard to this other matter—as with the individual, so with the assembly. He is not only at the right hand of God with power to save sinners, and to uphold and maintain His individual saints; but also with power to bestow everything needed upon His gathered saints, to make them what an assembly of the living God out to be. You remember the fourth of Ephesians points that out particularly. Speaking of the provision which God has made for the building up and edification of His saints, the Spirit of God says in the 8th verse “He gave gifts unto men,” and gives the detail of these gifts in verse 11: “He gave some, apostles; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers, etc.,” and He bestows these gifts in order that the whole Church may be instructed to the edifying one of another, and that they may be built up together in love. Now the moment we begin to bring in any of our human devices for the supply and regulation of the ministry, we deny the power and grace of Christ in the whole matter. We deny His right to sit upon the throne as the Lord, just in the same way that the unsaved sinner, who wants to save his own soul, is denying His right to sit upon the throne as the Saviour. I do not say that those who thus act are aware what they are doing. Far from it. But this passage in 1 Cor. xii. tells us that, if they were acting by the Spirit of God, and following the teachings of the Word of God, they could not thus make Jesus accursed. While, as individuals, they may be led by the Word of God, in assembly matters they follow men’s devices. Following traditions, instead of God’s Word, they deny to the Lord Jesus His place on the throne, when they refuse Him His place in the midst, as the One to whom all authority is given; so that, in effect, they make Him the Anathema once more. But with those who are truly owning Jesus as Lord, and are acting upon the principles laid down in God’s Word, the three-one God will see to it that, as bearing the character of the house of God, of the Church of the living God, each

little company of redeemed ones, gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus, shall be furnished with all they need. Can we trust Him for our individual salvation and walk, can we say individually "I am content to have the three-one God, Father, Son and Spirit, in all their perfection of wisdom and power, to arrange for me, to provide for me, to lead me on?" If we can say that as to all that concerns our individual salvation, why is it that we fear to make the same confession as to all that concerns us as assemblies of God's people? Do you charge me with want of love because I speak thus? You do not call it want of love, when we speak plainly to unsaved sinners, as to the true character of their putting their ways and thoughts in place of the Word of God. Just in the same way, real love to fellow-saints, as well as faithfulness to God, demands that we shall speak out plainly as to the God-dishonouring character of the religious associations which rob the Lord Jesus of His true place and glory. Unless we give Him His place "in the midst," and that, not by a mere correct observance of outward arrangements, but in the exercise of faith and subjection of heart to Himself, the judgment of God as to our coming together will declare it to be only "a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."



IV.—JANNES & JAMBRES.

2 Tim. iii. 8.

THE subject announced for our consideration to-night is “Jannes and Jambres”; and in connection with this, I propose to make reference to what are known as “Latter-day Saints,” and other manifestations of more or less kindred character. I need scarcely tell you that Jannes and Jambres are the names of two of Pharaoh’s magicians, who withstood Moses, when he was appointed by God to act on behalf of the children of Israel. It is true, that in the account in the book of Exodus, their names are not mentioned; but, apart from any outside testimony, there can be no possible mistake as to who the persons are to whom the apostle refers. Last week, we were specially reminded that the men of whom Paul is writing, had a form of godliness, while they denied its power. And now we are told that this imitation of the truth is used to resist the truth itself, just as the Egyptian sorcerers withstood Moses by imitating his acts.

I may mention, as a matter of interest, that these two names are frequently mentioned, as those of well-known magicians of Pharaoh’s court, in a variety of ancient records, both Jewish and heathen. Their names were evidently familiar in the days of Paul, for he refers to them just as we to-day might refer to any person celebrated in history.

But before proceeding further, I will ask you to turn to the 2nd epistle of Paul to Timothy, and to read once again the whole passage where these names occur. “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power

thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith." Now we have only got to go back in our memories to the time when these Egyptian magicians withstood Moses, to be reminded of the character of their resistance. All of you know that their resistance consisted entirely of imitating the things that Moses did, and seeking, by means of their imitation, to cast discredit upon the message that was brought from God. Moses was the deliverer of a communication from God. This communication had reference to God's people Israel, who were held in bondage by the Egyptians. To Israel themselves, it was an assurance of deliverance and help; to Pharaoh and his subjects, it was a demand that they should let the Israelites go. And Moses, as the messenger of God, was to have his claim to be Jehovah's messenger attested by His power to perform wonders in the sight of the people. We might go back to the book of Exodus and read the narrative. In the 7th chapter, verse 8, we read: "And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent. And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the Lord had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. And He hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said."

Now notice the character of this resistance of Moses by the magicians. Called upon by Pharaoh to perform a miracle, to prove his divine calling and the authority of the message he has brought, Moses has no sooner done so, than the magicians begin to practise exactly the same thing; and the result is recorded--"Pharaoh's heart was hardened." The fact that Jannes and Jambres were able so effectually to produce an imitation, helped Pharaoh to resist God's message.

Let us go on to the next instance—the 19th verse: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in the vessels of wood, and in the vessels of stone. And Moses and Aaron did so, as the Lord commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. And the fish in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the Lord had said.” Again you notice the result of their withstanding Moses. They did what he did, they imitated his action, and thereby Pharaoh was helped still further to harden his heart against God.

The next chapter continues the narrative. We will read from verse 5. “And the Lord spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch forth thine hand with thy rod over the streams, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt, and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.”

Now, three times they had been able to perform what Moses performed; three times, as far as appearance went, their power had been as great as his; and, consequently, the effect of his testimony had been lost through their imitation of his miracles.

But now we come to a fourth occasion, and here we find them unable to keep up the imitation. We will read from the 16th verse of the same chapter: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man and beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice,

but they could not : so there were lice upon man, and upon beast. Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God : and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them ; as the Lord had said."

How intensely solemn ! God has put His limit to the powers of darkness ; and just as we were reminded in that passage in Timothy that there shall be an end to what those latter day deceivers will be able to do, here we see God putting a limit to the working of Satan through these heathen magicians. Three times they were successful ; but the fourth time, when it was a question of bringing forth teaming multitudes of living creatures, even of the lowest order, they broke down utterly. And the magicians were constrained to confess, "This was the finger of God," just as the demons, again and again, confessed to the greater power of God in His blessed Son, when He was upon earth.

We have one more mention of the magicians in the 9th chapter, verse 8 : "And the Lord said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the light of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt. And they took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh ; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven ; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast. And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils ; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them ; as the Lord had spoken unto Moses."

Not only did the magicians fail any further to imitate the wonders wrought by Moses ; but they themselves became subject to the judgments of God, so that they could not stand before God's servants. After this we lose sight of them altogether.

As for Pharaoh, God hardened his heart that He might more fully show in him His power and sovereignty. But Pharaoh had hardened his own heart first ; and having refused to submit himself to God, he is given over to delusion ; judical hardening of his heart being God's judgment upon him for his resistance. It is just the counterpart of

what we have in the second chapter of the second epistle to the Thessalonians, where we are told how God will give men over to the strong delusion, to believe the lie, because they had refused to believe the truth. Pharaoh was an example of the self same thing. The magicians, as long as they were successful with their enchantments, helped to encourage the king in his rebellion against God. Presently the time came when God would not suffer them to proceed any further ; but, by that time, Pharaoh's heart was so much hardened and his mind so blinded, that neither the failure of the magicians nor the succeeding judgment of God moved him from his determination. We have a further development of the parallel in Revelation xvi., where men had become so hardened and blinded by the delusions of the beast and the false prophet, that they gnawed their tongues for pain, because of the judgment God was pouring out upon them ; yet they repented not of their deeds, but blasphemed the God of heaven. Now if you refer back to our passage in Timothy, you will find that in the 8th verse it reads : " Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so these also resist the truth." The word "as" there is very clear and expressive. It means "in like manner." Their resistance was similar in method. But in the opposition of these latter days there is a difference as well as a likeness. Jannes and Jambres, it is true imitated the works of Moses ; but they did not conceal that they were acting in direct antagonism to Israel's Jehovah. There is the difference. The character and aim of the resistance will be the same ; but the persons who resist will occupy a very different position, for they will profess to act for God, and, by so doing, the more effectually undermine the authority of His word.

Going on to the sixth verse, we are told "Of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women, laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Many of the latter day devices are propagated, not simply by public teaching and testimony, but by the private going into houses, and persuading individuals with much subtlety. Women are perhaps more susceptible to this kind of persuasion than men. Certain it is that such practices are adopted to a very large extent in the present day by the propagators of religious delusions. And it is not only unbelievers, but also children of God who are not grounded

in the Scriptures, that fall a prey to such devices. These words, "ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth," are solemnly descriptive of so many around us. In the present day there is a running to and fro to become acquainted with the newest thing; a readiness to be always hearing the last new doctrine on the part of many who profess to be Christians; yes, and of many who really are believers. Oh, dear friends, the terrible quickness with which all kinds of false doctrines are received, results but too surely from the want of a simple desire to know and do the will of God, of a whole-hearted purpose to please Him. Knowledge that is run after simply that we may know, never leads to real acknowledging of the truth. One little grain of truth received into the heart with the sole aim to please God and to render Him obedience, will surely lead on to more knowledge, and so to more obedience. Let us seek for knowledge only that God may be glorified in us, and that we may be made subject to His will. Unless we do this, the very thirst after knowledge will make us an easier prey to these emissaries of Satan.

One marked characteristic of many of these latter day devices, is the profession of close adherence to the Word of God. Wherever God has revived a longing after His word; wherever, in His grace, He has enabled His people to rescue again, from under the heaps of rubbish, forgotten and neglected truth, there assuredly we shall see this mark of Satan's working. As long as any truth of God is hidden out of sight, so long Satan will not take the trouble to call attention to it, by imitating it. But if God has enabled His people to break away from human traditions, and to get back simply to what is written, we shall find that Satan will produce a counterfeit to bring the revived truth into discredit. He has, doubtless, a double purpose in this. On the one hand, where any are seeking after truth, he endeavours to palm off the imitation upon them: on the other hand, he lulls to sleep again the consciences of those that had been awakened as to the unscripturalness of their ways, by pointing to the discreditable doctrines and ways of some who are making a great boast of literally carrying out the Word of God.

The Mormons, or Latter-day Saints, are a marked example of what I have just been saying; and Satan's method of working in connection with this abominable

system, corresponds closely with the case of Jannes and Jambres. Probably it will be a surprise to many here to learn how very much of New Testament doctrine and practice is taught by the Mormon leaders. I have copied out their points of faith, as laid down by Joseph Smith, in the year 1842, in his "Rise, Progress, Persecutions and Faith of the Latter-day Saints," and will read them over before going further.

"We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost."

"We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression."

"We believe that, through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel,"

"We believe that these ordinances are : First, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ; second, Repentance ; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins ; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost."

"We believe that a man must be called by God, by 'prophecy and by laying on of hands' by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof."

"We believe in the same organisation that existed in the primitive Church, viz. : apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc."

"We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, etc."

"We believe the Bible to be the Word of God, as far as it is translated correctly ; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the Word of God."

"We believe all that God has revealed, and that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

"We believe in the literal gathering of Israel, and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes, that Zion will be built upon this continent, that Christ will reign personally upon the earth, and that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisaic glory."

"We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may."

"We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honouring, and sustaining the law."

"We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to *all men* ; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul. We believe all things, we hope all things ; we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy, we seek after these things."

Now I say that from what little is generally known about their proceedings, few among us would have supposed that Mormons profess belief in so much that is in accordance with

the Word of God. But many things have been added since this profession of faith was first put forth. The doctrine of polygamy was never heard of in the early days of Mormonism; it is altogether a later introduction. But the devil took care not to introduce it, until the adherents of the system were thoroughly imbued with the belief that their leaders were the recipients of fresh revelations from God. It was to people thus prepared for any delusion, however gross, that this new permission, or rather commandment, was offered, to marry as many wives as possible, and so to raise women to the privileges of saintship. Thus, a system, which was intended to give full play to all the grosser lusts of the flesh, began with the pretence of the closest adherence to the Scriptures.

Mormonism has only been brought into existence since the mighty reviving by the grace and power of God, which has gathered so many of His people, during the last sixty years, around the name of the Lord Jesus, to own Him as Lord, and to carry out the practices taught by the apostles to the first Churches. Did the apostles baptize by immersion those who made a profession of faith? So would the Mormons. Did they teach the disciples to come together on the first day of the week to break bread? So did the Mormons. Did the New Testament tell of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers? The Mormons professed to possess them all. Many were entrapped by all this appearance of scriptural order; while others, perceiving how much that was false was associated with it, were emboldened to resist the testimony that God was calling out to much forgotten truth.

I believe that this has been Satan's object in connection with many of the religious movements of these last days. The Campbellites, the Irvingites, the Christadelphians, the Swedenborgians, all differ widely from one another, and from Mormonism; yet they all have certain features in common. They meet the awakened desires of seeking hearts with something that professes to be from God, while it is only a sham; and, on the other hand, they help to stifle the consciences that the Spirit of God is awakening as to neglected truths, by associating the craving after a fuller knowledge and practice of God's will, with folly, extravagance, and even gross immorality.

But to return for a little time to the Mormons. It is the

most complete exhibition of the appalling results that follow the handling of the Word of God by the carnal mind. Whatever they discovered in the letter of the New Testament, they professed to carry out. But, being wholly without the enlightenment which alone enables us to receive the things of God, the attempt led to most outrageous results. Take one marked example of this. One of their earliest doctrines was that there was no salvation outside the Church. They soon found, however, that this was very distasteful to their disciples, as it compelled them to believe that departed relatives, who had died in the faith of Christ, had gone to hell. But in 1 Corinthians xv., there was something said about being baptized for the dead. This was enough; and on this slender foundation, a wonderful theory was built up. Mormonism was being preached, they said, in the Spirit world, by departed Mormon Saints, and many were receiving its truths. The living prophets were able to tell when any spirit received the truth; but the ordinances of baptism and laying on of hands could not be dispensed with. In this, however, those on earth might be proxies for those who had died; so men were baptized over and over again, each time in the name of some departed relative. In the same way, as women could only receive the covenant blessings through marriage to a saint, women were married again and again as proxies for their dead friends.

We should smile at the folly of all this, doubtless, if it were not at the same time so terrible. But is there not in it all a solemnly instructive lesson to us? We have been brought up in a country where children of God, with their bibles in their hands, are parties to as monstrous a delusion. What difference is there between being proxy for an unconscious baby and for a departed grandfather. The sponsor professes repentance and faith in the infant's name, and thereupon the priest sprinkles it with water and thanks God that it is regenerate. The Mormons have at least found such words as "baptized for the dead" in the bible; but the infant sprinklers have never yet unearthed a single line about sprinkling in connection with baptism, or about baptizing infants after any fashion. It is another form of the Jannes and Jambres resistance of the truth "Ye must be born again." May God help us to be true to Him in dealing with these things; not treating them as matters of indifference, because they are so common, nor yielding to the spurious charity which dares not speak the truth.

One point more. Mormonism claims to have miraculous evidence of its truth, particularly in the matter of gifts of healing; and there is abundance of the most unquestionable evidence, that persons have been raised up from severe sickness, in the most remarkable manner, through the laying on of the hands of Mormon elders. But this holds good with many other Satanic systems. Irvingism can point to equally authentic cases; and there is nothing more dangerous than to suppose that supernatural healing of diseases is a proof of Divine interference. The permission given to Satan to lay diseases on people, or to remove them, is barely hinted at in the Scriptures; but enough is said to make us responsible not to accept anything but what is found in God's revelation, however it may appear to be attested by miraculous signs.

Among the false systems with which I am now more especially dealing, there are two distinct classes. The one class consists of those who, like the Mormons, the Irvingites, and the Swedenborgians, profess to have fresh revelations from God in addition to the Scriptures. The other, of whom the Campbellites and the Christadelphians are specimens, profess to acknowledge no other standard than the bible, and emphatically protest that they take the whole Word of God and reject all traditions of men. The father of lies is exceedingly subtle, and he adapts his various devices to meet every phase of the human mind, so that he may be able to offer to each individual something to gratify his particular bent. We were noticing last week, in the second chapter of Ephesians, verses 2 and 3, how, while each individual was gratifying the desires of the flesh and mind, all were walking according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. In the same way with these false religious systems; Satan is the master mind, the moving spirit of them all, while each offers its peculiar attractions to some special class. As Mormonism makes a pretence of great zeal for God, while it opens a door for the gratification of the grossest fleshly lusts, so Christadelphianism makes a like parade of zeal for truth, while it panders to the lusts of the mind, the pride of the natural understanding. Many a man who would dislike to be considered an infidel, or even a sceptic, hates the truths of the Word of God from the bottom of his heart. The Christadelphian system is admirably suited for such. It boasts of a rigid adherence to the New Testament; it has its baptism by immersion, its weekly breaking

of bread, and so on; yet all the time it destroys the whole foundation. I remember, when it was in its infancy in England, its head-quarters were in Birmingham, and there was exhibited a monster placard outside the meeting-room. At the head of this placard, in immense letters, were the words "CHRISTADELPHIANS DO NOT BELIEVE:" and then, in much smaller type, followed a long list of points that they did not believe. This list included nearly every fundamental truth of the Word of God; and I well remember, when I came to the bottom of the list, remarking to a brother in the Lord, "They might as well have left out the small type, for the first four words express the whole matter." It is indeed a system of the grossest infidelity, covered over with an outside form of rigid adherence to New Testament order. The Jannes and Jambres kind of opposition once more.

I must say a word about the Campbellites, or "Disciples of Christ," as they call themselves. I desire to be very careful here, for I well know that large numbers of God's children are to be found in this connection. But this is an indication of how successfully the enemy has prepared his trap. Mormonism and Christadelphianism are loathful to every true believer and serve mainly to throw contempt upon a faithful adherence to the practices of the apostles in primitive days; leading casual observers to suppose, that any profession of zeal for obedience to every commandment of the Lord must needs be associated with something corrupt or extravagant. But the Campbellite system is especially calculated to lead astray the children of God. Where the conscience has been reached as to the unscripturalness of the various sects, with their entirely human order and arrangements, this system presents itself as a simple return to the Word of God and the practice of the first disciples. Here, once more, we find a weekly breaking of bread, and baptism by immersion, upon the profession of faith in Christ. There is none of the fleshly filthiness of Mormonism about it, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, there is none of the denial of the Godhead of the Lord Jesus, of the personality of the Holy Spirit, of the everlasting punishment of the ungodly, which so plainly proclaims the Satanic source of Christadelphianism. Yet, none the less, Campbellite doctrine cuts at the root of the Gospel. It does not assail the person of Christ, or the character of His atoning work; but it tampers with what Martin Luther once called "the question of a standing or a

falling Church"—Justification by faith. Indeed, Campbellite teachers join hands with the Pope in their denunciation of Martin Luther in regard to this doctrine. Four things they say are necessary to salvation; Repentance, Faith, Confession with the mouth, and Baptism; and salvation cannot be received if any of the four be wanting. Believing, they argue, gives a man a *right to become* a Son of God; but he only actually becomes a son in baptism. I will only stop to point out one effect of this doctrine. As, according to their teaching, a man is only born again in baptism, they cannot look for one single fruit of the new birth until people have been baptized. Hence, they cannot refuse to baptize anyone who makes a profession of faith. When the cross is preached, and the sinner is told how a simple faith in the Son of God, who died for our sins, brings salvation; unless there has been a work of God's Spirit leading the individual to see his ruined condition, he either rejects, or is indifferent to the whole thing. But if you tell him that, if he believes what he has heard, that is not enough for salvation, for there is something for him to do now, he will eagerly jump at such a doctrine. Thus while many believers are drawn into this system, because of the outward resemblance of its congregations to scriptural assemblies, large numbers of unsaved persons get a footing in it also, to the great injury of both, and to the entire subversion of godly order. Indeed, the greater the approximation in outward appearance to the real thing, the more mischievous does the Jannes and Jambres resistance of the truth become.

Time will not suffer me to speak in detail of other similar delusions. I must say a few words, however, about the Irvingites, or "Catholic Apostolic Church," as the followers of the late Edward Irving choose to style themselves. Here the imitation of the truth is not at all in connection with Church order and ministry. Along with the revival of truths relative to these matters, or, even preceding it, the goodness of God had led to a wonderful stirring in the hearts of many of His people, to search the prophetic scriptures. In this way, the long-forgotten hope of the coming again of the Lord Jesus was brought to light once more, and became a living and purifying power in the hearts of many of God's people. No wonder that Satan should oppose this precious truth. One means was to entrench Christians behind the barriers of ignorance and tradition. But that would not

answer in all cases ; and so the Jannes and Jambres method was brought into use in regard to this matter, as well as others. A sketch of their present practice will illustrate what I mean. They will placard a whole town with bills, announcing that an evangelist will give a series of lectures on the coming of the Lord. Sometimes he is announced as " an evangelist serving under the Lord's restored apostles ; " in other cases no hint of his associations is given. If you go to the first of these lectures, you will probably think it all that can be desired, so entirely will it appear in accordance with Scripture. Well, what is that for ? To lead you on to have a little confidence in them, and a belief that they are honest and sound in their handling of the Word of God. But as the course proceeds, there comes a gradual unfolding of very strange doctrines indeed. They tell you that they have got a lot of fresh apostles in these latter days ; that they have been commissioned to seal the 144,000 spoken of in the Revelation, and that if you want to escape the woes of the great tribulation, you must go to them to be sealed. And what follows after that ? Why, most of the doctrines of the Church of Rome over again. Priests in gorgeous vestments, incense burning, baptismal regeneration, and all the rest of it. All this lies behind those simple special meetings about the coming of the Lord, which are made so attractive, in order to lead the unwary into the adoption of their false ideas.

I must not detain you now to speak of Swedenborgianism, save for one brief word. Swedenborg's writings are set forth as a valuable antidote against materialism. By materialism we understand the denial of the supernatural in the affairs of this world ; the confining God to what men call the laws of nature, and refusing to own any direct interference of His in anything here. Of course, it often goes far beyond this, till it makes mind into matter, and the creation into God, the utter blindness of Atheism. Swedenborg meets all this by a theory of spirit communion, with which he was so carried away, that he gave out, and doubtless believed, that he had actually been caught up to heaven. But, while materialism suits one phase of the carnal mind, the sham spirituality of Swedenborg, instead of being an antidote to the other thing, only serves to deceive the degenerate heart with the flattering delusion of great superiority.

But I must now draw to a close.

In giving you a brief sketch of these different systems, I have naturally not been able to turn so much to Scripture, as in the other parts of our subject. Yet, although we do not find the actual things themselves named in Scripture, we have their essential character given us in the passage we commenced with. It is all summed up in those few words: "As Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the truth. But (we are told, and we may thank God for it) they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men." Not only was this fulfilled in the case of Jannes and Jambres, but it holds equally good in the case of these latter-day counterparts:—"they shall proceed no further." Satan is continually resorting to new devices, but they are all on the old pattern, and the folly of them "shall be manifest unto all men." The epistle goes on: "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience." Oh, dear friends, while it is well to have an understanding of the mighty working of Satan at the present time, and of what terrible delusions we have escaped from, it is just as essential for us, as it was for Paul, to go on patiently and quietly, guided by the Word of God, and enabled by God's grace to live godly, righteously, and soberly in this present evil world. That is what God wants from each one of us. In spite of all the confusing systems around us, we may remember for our comfort that all these things shall fulfil the purposes of God; and while it is Satanic power that lies behind every false doctrine—whether Satan makes it to bear a near resemblance to the truth, and thus appears as an angel of light, or does not disguise his hostility—we have the armour of light, equipped in which, we shall be able to resist every assault of the adversary.



V.—RATIONALISM.

THE subject that is to occupy our attention to-night, is rationalism. This is a word that signifies the acceptance of, or belief in, nothing more than what can be accounted for by our reason; nothing that the natural faculty of the mind, by itself, is not able to apprehend. It is the exact opposite of faith. It says: "I will believe what I can see. I will believe what I can grasp with my natural understanding, but I will go no further." Looking at this subject as one of the especial characteristics of the last days, I propose to base my remarks on a Scripture in the second epistle of Peter, 3rd chapter, 8th verse: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." It will be interesting to notice that, before the word ignorant, there should be a very emphatic you—"Be not *you* ignorant." It is just put in contrast to those who were willingly ignorant, in verse 5. Moreover, we do not quite get the force of the idea in the word "ignorant." Literally, it would be more correct to say, "This was hidden from them, they being willing." And then the 8th verse would read: "Let not this one thing be hidden from *you*, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Unbelief, that is only content to walk by sight, never can have the patience to wait for God. Faith, that is occupied with the living God, alone is able to wait for the accomplishment of what He is doing. Unbelief says, "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were," and wilfully shuts its eyes to all that would prove the contrary. Faith knows, that God—who once fulfilled His intention of visiting a guilty world with judgment, though in long-suffering He waited a hundred and twenty years ere He carried it out, and overthrew the world that then was, with the deluge of water—by the same power by which He formerly created and upheld the world, is still reserving the world unto judgment; and in connection

with His purposes, He tells us that one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. And this one thing must never be hidden from us, the beloved ones of God, if we are patiently to walk on in the path of simple faith; because it is only the consciousness of this truth that can enable us to wait for God. But we are told further, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness." Now this word rendered "slack" means dull, heavy, sluggish, implying a person whose slowness to do a thing is not the result of patience, but arises simply from his sluggishness. They must not suppose that God is indifferent about His promises, because He does not hurry in fulfilling them.

But we had better read a few of the earlier verses of this chapter; verse 3: "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. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." Now the special feature of the last days, set before us in this Scripture, is that scoffers—the word means those who jest or make a joke of a thing—are walking *after their own lusts*, all the time they are saying "Where is the promise of His coming? What have we to tell us that God is ever going to interfere personally in the affairs of the world?" and while they are jesting and making it a thought for mirth, that God, who made the world, should uphold that which He has made, and control everything that takes place, and should presently manifest Himself in judgment. "After their own lusts." Remember, that word lust means the desires of the natural heart. It may take the form of gross carnal appetite; or, it may assume a more refined appearance, though one quite as wicked in the sight of God; and it may even take the form of religiousness. To bear this out we might turn to 2 Ephesians ii.: "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Paul is addressing Ephesian believers, who had formerly been idolators, worshippers of the goddess Diana. Consequently

they would be well acquainted with all the abominations of that worship, and would readily understand the meaning of the words that follow: "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the Prince of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

You are well aware what a marked contrast is brought before us in the Word of God, between the Jew and the Gentile. The Jew, brought near to God in his national character, while the Gentile was afar off. The Jew, with all his knowledge of God, and with his zeal for the Scriptures and the ordinances; the Gentile having no knowledge of God, outside the household, and going on in the grossest superstition and idolatry. Now, bearing this in mind, and remembering the description the apostle gives of himself in the epistle to the Philippians, where he only traces back his genealogy, proving himself to be a Hebrew of the Hebrews, but declares how he was a zealous Pharisee, and a persecutor of all he thought to be in opposition to God; full of zeal and earnestness, and, as regards righteousness, so blameless that no one could point the finger of accusation against him; oh, how vividly it brings out the hollowness of it all when he classes himself among the sinful, God-hating Gentiles, and says: "Among whom also *we* all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of flesh." All his religion, all his zeal, without the true knowledge of God and without a broken heart, all this he now sees to be as much a fulfilling of the desires of the flesh and mind, as the openly profane and unclean ways of the Gentiles at Ephesus. Now identically in the same way, these scoffers of the last days, with all their boast of knowledge and understanding, and their attainments of every kind, are walking after their own lusts. It does not matter whether it is men plunged in the most open of outward sins, or men, in the pride and boastfulness of their heart, seeking to set aside the word of God, and rejecting all that God says about his work in creation, they are walking after their own lusts just as much in the one thing as in the other.

Now I am not going to attempt to-night to deal with

infidel arguments, or with sceptical reasonings of any sort whatever. I rather want to point out a little, from the Word of God, of the way in which God himself connects the whole of His grace towards us, as sinners, with the glory of His creatorship. To show that these two things are inseparable the one from the other. That the Creator God is the Redeemer God; and that we cannot be partakers of His saving grace, and not, at the same time, own Him as Creator and upholder of all things. It is in this way alone, I am persuaded, that every child of God will be enabled to meet and to ward off the assaults of infidelity. These sceptics ask "where is the promise of His coming?" They say that they can trace back the History of creation written in the strata of the earth, and that there they find conclusive evidence of the incorrectness of what is written in the scriptures. They carry back the creation hundreds of thousands of years, and they say that it has been a continuous order of things without a break. They are continually pushing back the period at which creation began. And they can look forward as far as they have looked back, and talk in the glibbest way of so many millions of years that present developments still need for their working out. It is this class of people that the Spirit of God sets before us in Peter's epistle; men who simply look at that which they can see, and say "We don't believe in a coming Lord; we don't believe that one who made and controls all things is presently coming to close the present scene." Well, what is our answer to that? Oh, dear friends, all of us who have received the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ, all of us who have tasted and found that the Lord is gracious, we only need to go back and see what God Himself says about the whole matter. As I said before, there is one thing we must take care we are not ignorant of; that God is patiently carrying out his own purpose; and that He can afford to wait, though the day of its fulfilment be thousands of years distant. Meanwhile, Satan, as god of this world, appears to be getting more and more power, and is organising men to more and more of defiance and open rebellion against God. Yet all the time God is assuring us that one day with Him is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, and that the day of the Lord will surely come. And as God is seated upon His throne, and as, in answer to all the scoffs of the world, He says "Yet have I set my King upon

my holy hill of Zion," so your faith and mine should be established by the simple going back to the record of what God has done in the past. For He who spake, and it was done, who commanded, and it stood fast, sits above the water floods to-day; and He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry.

We will turn, back, then, to the beginning of God's Word, and see what He Himself declares. The very first sentence of God's revealed word to man, is the foundation of everything, and for that very reason, infidelity never ceases to attack it. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Most of you have heard before that the word "God" in that verse is in the plural, whilst the verb "created" is in the singular. Therefore, in that one sentence you have the Trinity in unity. For you recollect that in the Hebrew language there are three numbers, the singular, the dual, and the plural. When the singular is used, only one person or thing is referred to; when the dual, two are spoken of; whereas the plural always refers to more than two. Now here "God" is in the plural, and yet the word "created" is put in the singular to agree with it, for after all it is only one God who creates. So we learn from this plural noun with a verb in the singular, that it was a three-one God who was the Creator of the world. Let us now turn to the first chapter of John's Gospel. It is very familiar ground that we are travelling over, but I just want to start from the foundation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." A little further down we read in the 14th verse: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." Now we may stop for a moment and compare these two passages, these two records of that which was in the beginning. "In the beginning" takes us back to before any act of creation. How far back it is impossible for man's mind to grasp. While in Genesis we are told that in the beginning the three-one God created the heavens and the earth; here in John's Gospel we read that that Word which was with God in the beginning was made flesh and dwelt among us. Now in connection with

God's work of creation, He is said to always act through the second person of the Trinity. While God the Father is spoken of as the author, in the sense of the One who plans and purposes and works all things after the counsel of His own will; the Son of God is always set before us as the One through whom all things are created. "All things," therefore, we are assured, "were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." And in this character, as the One by whom God creates and makes all things, He is set before us as the Word of God. Now we can at once see that when God speaks of His Word, He means something more than a mere spoken expression. The Word implies the whole of the creating and life-giving power put forth in connection with the Lord Jesus. In the Greek language, as used in the New Testament, we have two distinct words, both translated "Word." The one used here is "*logos*," and the other one is "*rema*." The word "*rema*" is literally "a saying," a single utterance, and does not speak of the whole mind or purpose as "*logos*" does. And whereas "*logos*" is used specially in connection with creation, whether the natural or the new creation, "*rema*" is used (as a saying or utterance of God) in connection with the arrangement or putting in order of that which has been created.

I will now ask you to turn to the 11th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, 3rd verse: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." While I have no wish to introduce needless difficulties, by referring frequently to the original, yet we are never to neglect any help we can get, by a more careful examination of the exact words as given by the Spirit of God. The word "worlds" is really "ages"; and if we read for "the worlds were framed," "the ages were re-set in order," we shall be nearer the mark. And this time the Word of God is the "*rema*," not the "*logos*." But to connect the thought here with the Lord Jesus, we must go back to the first chapter of the epistle, where we learn that it was by the Son that God ordered the ages. Let us read from verse 1: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds." Here again, the word should be "ages." It is not a

question of the creation of worlds at all, but of the ordering of the ages. If, in the beginning, God created all things by Jesus Christ as the Word, the *logos*, of God, the One in whom His creative power was manifested; by Him also, as the "*rema*," God ordered the ages. God's actings, ever since the beginning of His creation work, pointed forward to the Lord Jesus. And, as everything looked forward to Him, before He came to earth; so now, everything looks back to Him, as the centre of all things.

I may take this opportunity to say a brief word as to the alleged discrepancies between the discoveries of science and the statements of Scripture. The scientific men, who have searched into the crust of the earth, tell us that they find fossilized remains of creatures that once had life, and that must have existed many thousands of years before the time at which it is supposed God created all things. But the truth is, that no one knows when God created the world; for in Genesis i. 1, it says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and, as I said before, we are not told how far back that takes us. There may have been a very long interval between what is spoken of in the first and in the second verses. But we are not concerned with that interval at all. It has nothing to do with our relationship to God, or with what He is to us. If He has left the record of it in the earth's crust, well and good. We have no need nor desire to quarrel with it. But we are not called upon to accept every shifting wind of scientific doctrine, with which these would-be expounders of the record seek to overthrow the written Word.

Now if you turn to the first epistle of Peter, the first chapter, you will find the same truth about the Word of God brought out in connection with the new creation. Verse 23: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word (*logos*) of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." It is creation work here; and it matters not whether it be the creation of a world or the new creation of the sinner, the Lord Jesus in His *logos* character as the creating One, the One in whom is life, is the One by whom it is carried out. Now let us connect this with a word in the fourth chapter of Matthew, fourth verse: "He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

“Every word” is “every *rema*,” every utterance. There again we have the sustaining and ordering of that which had first been created. Now is it not very beautiful to see God, in the natural creation, at the commencement bringing things into existence by His creative Word, and then by His ordering Word, maintaining, and, if need be, restoring what He had created ; and then to see this as a figure of what He does in the new creation? Man, first of all, born again, by the creative Word of God, a new creation, as we have it in Galatians, “If any man be in Christ he is a new creation” : and then, as the child of God, sustained by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

We will look, now, at the first of Romans, and there see how God appeals to His works in creation, as giving a plain revelation of Himself, and so leaving without excuse those who do not want to retain God in their knowledge. Verse 18 : “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. The word “hold” is translated “hold down” in the revised version. It is not holding the truth, it is resisting it, holding it down, keeping it back. Verses 19-22 : “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are already seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead ; so that they are without excuse. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful ; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.” “Professing themselves to be wise,” means professing that they had knowledge and understanding of their own ; and it is by this that we can trace the whole matter.

In every direction, men that put away the truth of God, and have not the knowledge of God, become fools. For all imagined wisdom, apart from the wisdom that God has given, only darkens our vain minds and renders us blinded and foolish. Verse 23 : “And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator,

who is blessed for ever, Amen." In the Revised Version, that last verse reads as follows: "For that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator." And this brings out more clearly the character of the idolatry of the would-be wise ones of these latter days. The heathen make images of some of the creatures God has made, and bow down to them and worship them. How blind! how ignorant! we say. But what are many of the mightiest intellects of civilized lands doing at the present time? They have given up the truth of God, and exchanged it for "*the* lie," for so it should be rendered. The old lie of the serpent in the garden, who persuaded the woman that the wisdom to be snatched at, apart from God, was better than all that God had given. So these men of science have set God's Word on one side, and will only learn from the book of nature—and the result is that practically they become worshippers of nature—of the creature, or created thing—rather than of the Creator. Verse 28: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things that are not convenient."

Now in connection with this part of our subject we will turn to the book of Job, the closing chapter, and notice how instructive the character of God's dealings with Job is to us. Job had been questioning the ways of God. Job had been as good as saying that God did not deal fairly with him. He had presumed to put himself in the position of a judge. He had taken his place on the judgment-seat, and had been arraigning God at his bar. In answer to Job, God first sent Elihu to reason with Job and show him his folly, and then God speaks Himself. And what does He say? He simply gives a description of His own works in creation, and uses that to break down Job's stubborn and self-righteous heart, and to bring him to know himself as a sinner. In the thirty-eighth chapter, verse 1, we read: "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man: for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it?"

If you were to read right on, you would find that God, after first speaking of the work of creation, goes on to single out a number of specimens of His works; the treasures of the earth, of the air and of the sea, the living creatures of the water and of the dry land. He sets these things before Job, and asks him what he has to say about these things, as to their origin, and the power that brought them forth. And this is the whole of God's appeal. There is nothing else. God makes Job to feel his utter feebleness and insufficiency, in the face of the wonderful works of creation. And that carries all besides along with it. Job had said himself (for he knew something of God in the character of the Redeemer) "I know that my Redeemer liveth." He had declared his assurance that, though his body should go down to the grave, yet, in the latter days, he should see God with his own eyes. But all the time he was crying out against God's dealings with him, and questioning both His righteousness and His love. Then God just reveals Himself, by His works in creation; and when Job finds himself face to face with God, he sees that he is nothing but a poor worm of the earth. Then, because he was indeed a child of God, he is humbled in God's presence, and led to make the confession of chapter 42, verse 1: "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak: I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto me. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Now I think that this is most instructive for us, in connection with our subject. In the first of Romans we have men, in the pride of their hearts, refusing to see God in His works, because they did not like to retain Him in their knowledge. The result of this is that they exalt the creature above the Creator; and God, in solemn retribution, gives them up, first to worship created things, and then to corrupt and defile their own bodies and to commit every abomination. On the other hand, in the case of Job, we have God revealing Himself, in all the majesty of His omnipotence in creation, to one of His children, who had been betrayed into the sin

of challenging God's ways and rebelling against them. And what is the result in the latter case? Job is humbled by God's revelation of Himself as the mighty Creator. He takes His true place and says, in effect, "Oh, I have been meddling with things that belonged to God, and not to me; now I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

In further illustration of our subject let us turn to the nineteenth Psalm. This psalm is dedicated to the Chief Musician. And who is the Chief Musician but the One who says in the second of Hebrews "I will declare Thy name unto my brethren. In the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee." There we have the Lord Jesus in the character of the Chief Musician. He is the One who leads the song of eternal praise, all because, as the fortieth Psalm tells us, He Himself had been down to the depths of the horrible pit, and had proved the power to save of the God he had trusted. We often use the language of the fortieth Psalm in regard to ourselves; but none of us has ever tasted the terrors of that horrible pit as He did. And just because He went deeper down than any of us, He now occupies the place of Chief Musician, the leader of the choirs of all who have learned the new song of redemption. This Psalm, then, is prepared, so to speak, for His own use, and it is divided into two parts—the word of God in creation, and the word of God in His dealings with His people. Read the opening of the Psalm, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." And now turn to verse 7: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." And it concludes with the prayer that should ever go up from our hearts when we seek to bring our songs of praise to God: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer."

You see the character of the whole thing. You see how this song, fitted for the lips of the Chief Musician, acknowledges God both as Creator and Redeemer; the One who makes and upholds all things by His power, and who also, by His word, converts and makes wise the simple one, draws him to Himself, and gives him all he needs.

But if the Creator God is the God of redeeming grace, He is also the God who will judge the ungodly. We find this set before us in Psalm xxxiii. We will read from verse 6: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: He layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect."

We might also refer to Psalm cxxxvi. After every verse there is, you remember, that sweet refrain, "For His mercy endureth for ever." The Psalm begins with creation. It goes on to speak of judgment upon the heathen. It refers to the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness. All these varied utterances lead up to one and the same conclusion. At every stage we are assured, "His mercy endureth for ever"—that the God who created all things, and who will judge the ungodly, is the God of everlasting mercy to His people.

We might also refer to the 8th of Proverbs, where the Lord Jesus is personified as wisdom. Verses 22 to 30: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old When he appointed the foundations of the earth, then I was by Him, as One brought up with Him"—or, as the Revised Version gives it, as "a master workman; that is, as one who has been apprenticed and made perfect master of his art. He is there in the character of the *logos*,—for "without Him was not anything made that was made"—as the master workman, the One who minutely carried out all that God had designed. And verses 35 and 36 tell us that whoso findeth Him findeth life, while those who hate Him love death. We will look next at Isaiah xl. In the earlier part of this chapter God has been promising wonderful things to His people, who were in a sorely distressed and broken condition; then He has been dealing with idolatry, with the folly of men who make images after the fancy of their own minds, and bow down to them and expect help from them; then He proceeds in the 27th verse: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from

my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." It may be long to wait for the accomplishment of all that God promises in this chapter, but the same truth applies here, "Be not you ignorant that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." God comforts and sustains the fainting hearts of His people, in the midst of all their sorrow, by reminding them that He, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, and that those who wait on Him shall not faint either.

Now, if you will turn to the 29th of Deuteronomy, and the last verse, we may connect these words with all that has been before us. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." Now is not that sweet? God *has* His secret things. Job tried to find them out, but failed. He tried to probe into the mystery of God's unrevealed things, and the conclusion he came to was that he was running against a stone wall, and would only succeed in breaking his own head. What God keeps secret, nobody will be able to fathom. But, oh! dear friends, while the secret things belong unto the Lord our God, those things which it has pleased Him to reveal belong to *us* and to our children for ever. And what for? That we may be pleasing to God. Only let there be in us a heart that wants to please God, that takes delight in doing His will; and all the revealed things shall be to us such an inheritance, such a treasure, that no words will be able to express the blessedness of our portion.

There is one other Scripture that I wish to refer to before I close. It is the well-known appeal of God in the 36th verse of the fourteenth chapter of first Corinthians: "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?" Now most of you recollect the occasion of that question. This fourteenth of first Corinthians gives

a number of very minute instructions connected with the assembly of God, as to the worship and ways of those who are gathered by the power of the Holy Spirit to the name of the Lord Jesus. It is a most remarkable thing, and one to be taken account of, that this chapter has, with one consent, been set aside by almost the whole of Christendom. Ask any one of the existing denominations "How is it that you do not put the fourteenth of first Corinthians into practice?" and they will tell you that it is not suited for the present time. It would not do for these days. But notice the question that God asks here: "Came the word of God *out from* you, or came it *unto* you only?" When did the word of God begin with each of you? When it came as the mighty creating power, to create you anew for God. It came *unto* you. It did not come *from* you. The Lord Jesus, speaking of the Old Testament Scriptures, declared that it was easier for heaven and earth to fail, than for one jot or one tittle of God's law to be annulled. And the precious Scriptures of the New Testament have not one whit less of authority. "If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord," added the apostle. But these are the very things that those who profess to be teachers to-day refuse to own any obligation to obey.

Now, a very solemn consideration arises from all this. How is it that scepticism is no longer confined to the ranks of the irreligious, but that the professing churches are, in many cases, saturated with it? How is that Mr. Spurgeon finds himself compelled to withdraw from the Baptist Union, because many of its ministers are subverting the very foundations of the truth? Alas! it is not in vain that the Deceiver has persuaded God's children to trifle with God's Word. It may have seemed a small thing to give up apostolic practices, because changed circumstances made them inconvenient. Expediency may have appeared a sufficient excuse for obeying the human tradition, and so making the commandment of God of none effect. These were the non-essentials, about which the world's religion proclaims liberty. But let the authority of God's word once be challenged on the smallest matter, and who can tell what the end may be? It is the opening of the flood-gates, and none can afterwards stay the flood. Christians, do you want to be preserved from the

assaults of modern unbelief? Do you wish to see your children kept from the Devil's most subtle and seducing snare? Oh, then, cleave to the whole Word of God. Let your heart be subject to its every commandment, and count each precept as more precious than your necessary food. The revealed things belong unto us and to our children for ever. Do not let go one jot of the precious heritage; for if you venture to trifle with one line, one word, of what God has spoken, how can you take your stand against the man who would rob you of the whole?



VI.—MANY ANTICHRISTS.

THE subject of this, the last of these addresses, is to be found in the second chapter of first epistle of John, where, in the 18th verse, we read: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." In order to a right understanding of what the apostle would convey to those to whom he was writing, it is needful that we should look at the whole passage, of which this forms a part. I would ask you, therefore, to read with me from the 12th verse: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sakes. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." Now let us stop for a moment, just to think of these three divisions of the family—the fathers, the young men, and the little children. It will be necessary to point out the exact thought connected with this title of "little children." For the "little children" of the twelfth verse is quite a different word, with a distinct meaning, from the "little children" of the thirteenth verse. In the twelfth verse, "I write unto you little children," the word that the apostle uses is one that designates the whole family. Literally, it does not mean *little ones* at all. It is the same word that is translated "sons" in the third chapter and 1st verse: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." That is the title that belongs to the whole family of God; for, of course, we understand that in all such passages where the masculine noun "sons" is used, it includes both sons and daughters. That,

I say, is the same word here in this 12th verse. It implies all who have been born of God, and, therefore, are of His family. In the 12th verse, the apostle is addressing the whole family at once, and in the 13th verse he divides that family into three classes—the fathers, young men, and little children. Now, you may ask me,—If this be so, why have the translators translated the word “*little children*” in the 12th verse? Well, in the Greek language, as in a great many modern languages, it is customary to use what are called diminutive words, as words of endearment and affection. That comes out strikingly in this epistle, for this word occurs again and again; and wherever the apostle uses it in addressing those to whom he writes, he always uses the diminutive form, giving a specially endearing character to the word, as though to say, “beloved sons of God.” Whenever he speaks of, and not to, them, he uses the ordinary, instead of the diminutive, form. Let me give you a few examples. The first is in the beginning of the second chapter of this epistle: “My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not.” It may, perhaps, help to impress it on your minds if I mention the Greek words which form the two distinctions. The word “*tekna*” includes the whole family, of all ages, both sons and daughters, without distinguishing them. The other word is “*paida*,” and that really signifies the little ones of the family. The diminutive form in Greek is always given by the insertion of the letter “i” in the last syllable, making *tekna* into *teknia*, and *paida* into *paidia*. And if we look into this passage carefully, we shall find that there is much light thrown upon it through these distinctions.

Now in this 12th verse of the 2nd chapter, the apostle is addressing those to whom he writes by this term, and he accordingly uses the diminutive or endearing form of it—*teknia*. It is the same in the 28th verse of the same chapter, “And now, little children, abide in Him.” There again we get the word *teknia*, the diminutive form. But in the first verse of the next chapter, where the word is translated “sons,” the apostle does not speak *to*, but *of*, them and therefore he does not use the endearing form, but says, “that we should be called the *tekna* of God.” But in every case this includes each member of the family, the new-born babe, as much as the full grown sons and daughters. In the next verse, too, the same form of the word is used, because it is still speaking *of* them. In the 10th verse we have the same

thing again both in connection with the whole family of God and the whole family of the Devil; *tekna* in each case. Then in verse 18 it is once more the diminutive form *teknia*, or dear children; because he speaks *to* them. The next instance is the 5th chapter and 2nd verse, "We know that we love the children of God, &c." Here John is writing about and not to them, and he therefore uses the ordinary form *tekna*; whereas, finally, in the last verse of the epistle, he is again speaking to them, and he therefore reverts to the more affectionate diminutive; equal to, "Beloved children, keep yourselves from idols." These are all the places in the epistle where we get this word in its two forms—the ordinary form, which the apostle uses when writing about the children of God; the diminutive, when speaking to them personally.

Now the other word, "*paida*," only occurs twice in the epistle and both times in the second chapter, which we are going to be occupied with. We had it in the close of the 13th verse, and we get it again in the 18th. But in order to see clearly the distinction between that word and the one with which we have been dealing, we will turn to one or two other Scriptures where this word "*paida*" occurs. In Matthew ii. 8, Herod says, "Go and search diligently for the young child." That is the word "*pais*," which is the singular of *paida*, and it at once tells you that *pais* means a little child. You get it again in Matthew xviii. 2: "Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them." We might multiply instances, but I will only ask you to look at one more passage, in 1 Cor. xiv. 20: "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." Now the twice repeated "children" of that verse is two quite distinct words in the original. The first one is the word *paida* we are now looking at. The second word translated children is, literally "infants." In the revised version it is given as "babes." Aim to be full-grown in understanding; do not satisfy yourselves with being children there. But in malice, oh, be less than little children; be as infants, who do not understand what malice is.

Now I think we have had sufficient to show the difference between the "*paida*" and the "*tekna*," the former really meaning the younger members of the family, while the latter includes every son and daughter.

Now this helps us at once to draw a distinction that

otherwise would not be apparent. It is commonly supposed that the division of the family into its three classes as given in the second chapter of John's 1st epistle, begins at the twelfth verse, and that the apostle addresses the youngest class first. "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." Then comes the word to the "fathers," and, lastly to the "young men." But in reality the twelfth verse is quite general in character, and is addressed, as we have already seen, to the whole of the family. It is just as though the words ran: "I write unto you, the sons and the daughters of God." It is a general foundation for all that he has to say before any division of the family into classes takes place. We can see in a moment how appropriate this is. Whatever differences there may be, there is one that characterizes them all—their sins are forgiven. It is equally true of the weakest, youngest babe, as of the oldest father and of the strongest young man in Christ. And having taken that as his foundation, he proceeds to divide the family into different groups, and to give a suited word to each. He begins, first, with the fathers, and not with the little ones, as, before this explanation, we may have been led to suppose; and takes them in the natural order—fathers; young men; little children. Then, having addressed a few words to each, marking their character and attainments, he begins over again, and addresses each class a second time. To the fathers he only repeats what he had said before, as though nothing could be added in their case. But to the young men he gives a lengthened exhortation; and to the children a still longer one. Now then, with this explanation, we will read the whole chapter from the 13th verse: "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust

thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

This closes the address to the young men, and now you notice he comes again the second time to the little children—the *paida* word, that corresponds with the last clause of the 13th verse. Though he does not commence with the words "I have written unto you"—as he does to each of the other two classes, in his second address to them—yet a comparison with verses 21 and 26 shows us that this form of address is actually maintained, and we see clearly that from verse 18 to 27 is the exhortation to the third division, the little children. "Little children," he begins, "it is the last time"; or, as I remarked in the first of this series of addresses, "it is the last *hour*." Now, passing, for the moment from the 18th to 20th verses, we will briefly notice the remainder of the passage. Verse 21 "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." It is very important to note here that there is the definite article before both liar and antichrist. The apostle is looking forward to the time when the great antichrist, the great liar, shall come; and he is showing how the antichrists of to-day resemble in character the antichrist who is to come. That is lost sight of when we say "*a* liar." The antichrist characteristic is to deny the Son, and, consequently, the Father; for the next verse proceeds: "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but he that acknowledgeth the Son, hath the Father also."

You will find in your Bibles that the whole of that clause is in italics. But there is no necessity for its being so, because it is unquestionably part of the Word of God. The reason it is printed as if it were a doubtful passage, is that some of the Greek manuscripts did not contain these words. Evidently they had been missed out by somebody in copying, and in King James the First's time, when the English translation was made, the translators were uncertain whether the passage was genuine or not. But since that time a number of much older manuscripts have been brought to light, and all of them, without exception, contain the passage. In the Revised Version it is printed in the ordinary type, because it has long since been made quite clear that it is authentic.

"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." Special emphasis is laid upon the word "you," in the first clause of this verse. It is made the first word in the sentence, to mark the contrast between the believers and the deniers of the previous verse. It really reads, "You, therefore, let that abide in you," giving great emphasis to the exhortation. It is well to notice, also, that the three words "abide," "remain," and "continue," are, in reality, all one and the same. Much of the character of this epistle is weakened, through the many different words used in translating this one word, "abide." In the Revised Version, the simple word, "abide," is kept to all the way through, with great advantage, as it is one of the key-notes of the epistle. "And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received abideth in you, and ye need not that any man should teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him."

This closes the address to the little children. The apostle now goes back to the word that includes the whole family: "And now, little children (*teknia*) abide in Him: that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." That helps, then, to plan out the whole passage for us. It begins by addressing them all as the family of God, whose sins are forgiven. And then, having divided them into three classes, and given a message to each, suitable to their special circumstances, comes back to the word that embraces the whole, and says, beloved children of God, abide in Him.

Now, having thus mapped out the whole passage distinctly, we are enabled to see that the message about the antichrist and the many antichrists is all contained in the special address to the little children, to the younger ones of the family. Very often, when we begin to touch upon such subjects as this, and to point out the character of the Man of Sin, who will presently be revealed, and the corresponding character of that mystery of iniquity which is already working, we are told that these are not suitable subjects for

general teaching. They may be very well, it is said, for older brethren; but let us have simpler food for the babes. But that is not God's way; and it is most important to see that God would have the children, the infants of the family, grounded in the solemn truths that are set before us, as to the antichrist character and workings. I desire, therefore, to call your attention to these two messages; the one to little children, and the other to young men. In each case what is said to the fathers is the same: "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning." We shall do well to notice, before going further, the contrast between this and the first word addressed to the children, as marking the attainment in spiritual understanding of each. To these latter he says, "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known **THE FATHER**." Now it is always instructive to notice that whatever the name God calls Himself by on any occasion, it is exactly suited to the special matter in hand, and reveals Him in the relationship peculiarly applicable thereto. Here, then, we are told that the apostle writes to the fathers in Christ, because they had known God as the *One who was from the beginning*: whereas the special unfolding of what God is to the capacity of the understanding of the little child, is put before us in the words, "because ye have known *the Father*."

This blessed relationship of the child and the Father begins with the new birth, and is the first that is apprehended by the babe in Christ. The Spirit who seals and indwells each believing one, is the Spirit of Sonship, and teaches us with our first spiritual breath to say, "Abba Father." Our first experience, too, corresponds with our first knowledge. In natural things, the trustful dependence of the little child on the strong man, and the confidence with which it counts upon him for everything, tell unmistakably what relationship exists between them. Just so with the new-born soul. The simplicity with which it looks to God for everything, and asks Him for all it wants, shows that whatever it does not know of God, it does know Him as "*the Father*." But as we grow and increase in the knowledge of God, other relationships are brought to light. Those who are addressed by the apostle as "fathers," have been taught by divine enlightenment to look back and to look forward. They know that the God whom they love and trust is the God of eternity. He is Jehovah, the One who says of Himself, "I am, I was,

I shall be," the eternal, ever-present, ever-living God, the Creator and upholder of all things. They have known "Him who was from the beginning." Having said that in His first word to the fathers, he can say no more. It just connects the God of to-day, who loved me and brought me near to Himself; who has taught me, a poor, helpless sinner, to recline on His bosom and to know Him as my Father, with all the infinite resources of power and wisdom and majesty and glory. There is nothing that can be added to the fathomless depths of those words "Ye have known Him who was from the beginning." As the Lord Jesus said in the 17th of John's Gospel, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

But to the young men he says, "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one." That takes us a long stage from the first condition of simply knowing God as the Father; from the simplicity and helplessness of the babe that just delights in God's goodness and in the consciousness of sins forgiven, to a scene of conflict and warfare. What does the little babe on its mother's bosom know about conflict? Its present experience is entirely one of dependence upon the one who bore it, and who now nourishes it and gives it all it needs. But with growth comes the experience of trial and conflict, and the proving of the resources of that strength by which alone victory in the warfare can be obtained. Failures there will have been, doubtless, but those very failures have been part of the training, and have taught the secret of victory. It is not all God's children who grow to be young men, still less to be fathers in Christ. It does not follow, because I have been a Christian for such and such a time, that I have passed from babyhood and become a young man or a father. Alas, that it should be so, but we know well that there are Christians who have been saved many years, and who have lost nearly all the characteristics of the little child, yet have not attained to anything that is distinctive of the young man. Indeed, it is just because they had lost the one that they are unable to attain to the other; for the latter stages are never meant to supersede the earlier.

But if, when addressing the fathers, the apostle can do no more the second time than repeat what he had said before,

it is not so in the case of the young men. Let us read the passage—verse 14 :--“I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” There is no spiritual strength without spiritual food and spiritual exercise, and since the young men are strong, it is because they have had both the one and the other.

But now comes a word as to their special danger: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Take particular notice of that last clause. It says, “the love of THE FATHER is not in him.” We shall see the force of that by what had previously been said to the little children. And oh, dear friends, if in our growing up from the condition of little children, into that of young men, the love of the Father begins to die out; if we are getting boastful and proud in our strength and in our knowledge of the Word of God, and in the victories we have got over the wicked one, and so are beginning to lose the dependence and trustfulness of the little child that owns God as its Father; very soon the whole thing will be undermined. For in our growth we are not to lose one character as we gain another. It is here that the natural illustration fails altogether. Once I was a little child, depending upon my parents; but as I grew up, I grew out of that condition, and I became in turn a father, with children depending upon me; till at last my father was taken from the scene altogether. But that never takes place in the spiritual family; for instead of our growing up out of the condition of dependence and subjection that characterises the little child, the more real growth there is, the more will our dependence and subjection be perfected. When we get to be young men, therefore, there is not to be an end of the little child character, but an adding of something more, built upon the first, as upon an indispensable foundation. When we have got to the father stage, too, the need of the Word of God to nourish our souls, is equally as great as in the case of the little child, or the young man. That word in Peter, “As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby,” is not, as it is often supposed, addressed exclusively to the babes in Christ. It says, “*as* new-born babes,” so do you desire the sincere milk. It is addressed to all the children of God, teaching us that when we have grown up to be young men or fathers in Christ,

there still needs to be the same infant's appetite for the unadulterated milk of the word. That wants to be borne in mind, as we look at the special word of caution to the young men. "If the young man loves the world," says the apostle, "the love of *the Father* is not in him." Mind, it does not say that the love of God is not in him. But the sense of God's love has lost, to him, the character of the love of the Father, since the love of the world has crept into his heart. That which, in large measure, is inevitable in the natural relationship, has come in in the spiritual. And while, in natural things, the new occupations and cares of a family and business and pursuits of one's own, are lawful; in the spiritual sphere, as our position towards God never changes, the coming in of another love is wholly unlawful. It is, in one form or another, the "love of the world," and is not of the Father. What God will have in His children is, that with our continued growth, the love of the Father should be in us just as at the beginning; so that we should still retain the simplicity of the little child's trust and obedience. Now if the love of the world is creeping into the heart, all this will surely be destroyed.

We now pass on to second message to the children. Verse 18: "Little children, it is the last hour; and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists." This must be taken in connection with the previous message to the young men. What is it that is to keep young men from being ensnared with the love of the world, in any of its varied forms? If we would save young men from all that is in the world, we must warn them, while they are yet children, as to the true character of what they are surrounded by. Why even among ourselves, says the apostle, there have been many antichrists. They had actually had a part in the fellowship of the children of God; "but they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us." Now, as throwing further light upon the point, look at the 20th chapter of the Acts and the 28th verse, addressed, as you know, to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, those who were acting in the capacity of fathers:—"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the

flock.” “Also of yourselves”—you who are now acting as guides in the assembly; you who are now set before the saints in a prominent position, and that by the Spirit of God (for they were not men who had made themselves what God had never meant them to be: witness the words of Paul, “Take heed . . . to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers); even from among you “shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” And that which is to preserve us in such difficult circumstances as these, is given in the 32nd verse, where the apostle commends these Ephesian believers “to God, and to the word of His grace.”

Now all this helps us to understand what the many antichrists are. Everything that leads to exalt the individual, and to gather the disciples around him, is what the Spirit of God speaks of as marking the antichrist character. The purpose of God is to gather us unto His blessed Son, whom He has made Head and Lord over all. Satan’s aim, on the other hand, is to scatter what God is gathering, and he does this most effectually, by gathering the disciples around other centres. When antichrist comes, he will seek to gather all men unto himself; and Satan will give him all his own power and authority, to enable him to do so, so that men may be drawn away from Christ. And all that in the present time acts in the same manner has this antichrist character stamped upon it. It may not be easy to detect the true character of the lawlessness, while it is working in mystery; but that is what makes the prophetic teaching, as to the fully-developed antichrist, of so much value to us. He is the one who will come in his own name, who will exalt himself and will gather men unto himself; and all the “many antichrists” of to-day will show the same features. There may be religious systems that bear the antichrist character, in this sense. There may be individuals in God-gathered assemblies who bear the same character, and those individuals may themselves be children of God. They were “made manifest that they were not *all* of us,” says John. Some of those who had gone out were deceivers, who had crept in unawares; but others were believers, and may even have been shepherds and guides in the assembly, as at Ephesus. But if gifts and knowledge are used to exalt ourselves, and to gather the disciples around us, they become helpers of the antichrist workings. This may be done, not intentionally or con-

sciously, but none the less, very effectually. The gifted brother in the meeting may gradually get into the position of a lord over God's heritage, without ever having intended it; and, too often, the assembly is willing to have it so. In the religious systems, this has been fully accepted as the proper thing. The congregation choose the man and call him "our minister," while He, without a blush, says "my flock, my people." Thus, the Lord Jesus is robbed of His place and glory, as the Lord in the midst; and God's children have not a suspicion that things are otherwise than they should be.

Now the word of God does not mince matters. It does not use soft expressions to tone down the truth. It tells us that that which does not give to the Son His true place, practically affects the Father's honour, too. If we refuse to give to the Son all the glory that the Father has put upon Him, we are setting aside the authority of the Father, as well as robbing the Son of His glory; and, so, the Father and the Son are denied together. It is true that with many of the antichrists of to-day, the denial is only in measure, while, with the antichrist, it will be absolute and complete; but the character of the thing is the same. And the Word of God bids us instruct the little children of the family as to these things. If, as little children in Christ, we were led to suppose that these are matters of small moment; if we saw older ones, under the plea of love and charity, going where this dishonour to Christ is systematically practised; what wonder if we should go somewhat further than our instructors. Thus the way is prepared for the love of the world, in one of its diverse forms, to come in. It needs but little discernment to see that the world reigns triumphantly in the religious systems, while those of God's children, who have not succumbed to its power, groan under the unequal yoke. Many, it is true, have, in large measure, got outside their sects; and are labouring for the salvation of souls on independent lines. But there is no owning Jesus as the Lord in this, though for a time, in ignorance of the real nature of their disobedience, they have much joy in seeing sinners saved. But presently something must be done with the saved ones; and they are either allowed to drift into the sects, or a new party is formed, with an individual at the head of it.

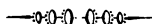
Now, in conclusion, I would only remind you that it is in this connection that the apostle writes, "It is the last

hour," True, that hour has extended through eighteen hundred years, but it is no less the last hour. Paul and Peter did not say that the last hour had come : it was reserved for John to do so, and there was, doubtless, a reason for it. The last days, as we have already seen, include all the time since the Lord Jesus was finally rejected by Israel. From that time His people are to go on preaching the gospel, till He comes back to receive them to Himself.

Did you ever wonder why the Acts of the Apostles finished so abruptly, as it seems to do? We should have liked to know something further about Paul ; about the fruit of his labours at Rome, and the martyr's testimony that closed its course. But just at the point of deepest interest, naturally speaking, the narrative is cut short. Yet this abrupt ending is most significant. Jesus, as the Christ of God, must be fully offered to, and rejected by, the nation of Israel, before the times and seasons were done with. Consequently, wherever Paul went, though he calls himself the apostle of the Gentiles, he, as much as Peter or James, delivers his message to the Jew first. It was not, therefore, till Jewish hatred and rejection of his testimony had sent him a prisoner to Rome, and till he there, for the last time, had gathered the chief of the Jews together, and expounded the kingdom of God unto them, that the nation was finally set aside till after this dispensation. Not till then, if I may say so, was the Lord Jesus free from the earthly people, and able to come for the heavenly.

But when John wrote his epistle, all that was long past. Paul had gone, and Peter had gone, while John alone, of all the apostles, remained behind : and he, knowing that all things that had been foretold were now fulfilled, could say confidently, "Little children, it is the last hour." Since John penned those words, God, in His grace and long-suffering, has been extending that last hour ; but it is no less the last hour to our faith and hope. To John's witness is added the last precious love-token of the Lord Himself ; "Surely I come quickly. Amen." Oh, for hearts, full of adoring expectation, continually to respond, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

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