

## VIEWS FROM THE WATCH TOWER

## IS BELIEF IN MIRACLES ESSENTIAL TO CHRISTIANITY?

No question in modern religious thought is weightier than this one which Professor Charles W. Pearson's much-discussed utterance has served to bring once more into prominence. The problem, of course, is far from being a new one. Indeed, it has been noted in several quarters that the Methodist professor used much the same arguments as those embodied in Hume's essay on miracles, published a hundred and fifty years ago. In none of the theological controversies of the past century was the conflict more earnest than in this one over miracles, Renan, Strauss, and Huxley ranging themselves actively on the one side, Bishop Lightfoot, Dean Farrar, and Mr. Gladstone on the other. The Rev. Dr. W. Robertson Nicoll, who is best known as a journalist, but who has also done considerable work in the field of theology as editor of the London *Expositor* and "The Expositor's Bible," goes over the ground again in his new book, "The Church's One Foundation." The first few sentences of the book show that this "foundation," according to Dr. Nicoll, is the miraculous Christ, and that, if there be no such Christ, "Christianity passes into the mist and goes down the wind." He declares:—

"The church cannot without disloyalty and cowardice, quarrel with criticism as such. It is not held absolutely to any theory of any book. It asks, and it is entitled to ask, the critic: Do you believe in the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ? If his reply is in the affirmative, his process and results are to be examined earnestly and calmly. If he replies in the negative, he has missed the way, and has put himself outside the church of Christ. If he refuses to answer, his silence has to be interpreted. . . . No one argues against the right of philosophers to affirm that goodness is everything, that miracles are impossible, and that nothing in Jesus Christ has any importance except his moral teaching. But Christian believers in revelation are compelled to say that these philosophers are not Christians. If they refuse to do so, they are declaring that in their opinion these beliefs have no supreme importance. To say this is to incur the penalty of extinction. For Christianity dies when it passes altogether into the philosophic region. To believe in the Incarnation and the Resurrection is to put these facts in the foreground. Either they are first or they are nowhere. The man who thinks he can hold them and keep them in the background deceives himself. They are, and they ever must be, first of all. So, then, the battle turns on their truth or falsehood. It does not turn on the inerrancy of the Gospel narrative. It does not turn even on the authorship of the Gospels. Faith is not a belief in a book, but a belief in a living Christ."

Dr. Nichol holds that here is a discussion which every Christian believer must enter upon with the keenest zest, since "it is a controversy not for theologians merely, but for every man who has seen the face of Christ, and can bear personal testimony to his power and glory." He continues:—

"If we assume at the threshold of Gospel study that everything in the nature of miracle is impossible, then the specific questions are decided before the criticism begins to operate in earnest. The naturalistic critics approach the Christian records with an *a priori* theory, and impose it upon them, twisting the history into agreement with it, and cutting out what can not be twisted. For example, the earlier naturalistic critic, Paulus, Eichhorn, and the rest, insisted on giving a non-miraculous interpretation. Strauss perceived the unscientific character of this method, and set out with the mythical hypothesis. Baur set to work with a belief in the all-sufficiency of the Hegelian theory of development through antagonism. He saw tendency everywhere. . . . Dr. Abbott sets out with the foregone conclusion of the impossibility of miracles. Matthew Arnold says: 'Our popular religion at present conceives the birth, ministry, and death of Christ as altogether steeped in prodigy, brimful of miracles, and *miracles do not happen*.'"—

The trouble with all these and similar critics, declares Dr. Nicoll, lies in the fact that they start out with the assumption that "God can not visit and redeem his people" and that "His arm is chained and can not save." Is it not much more rational, he asks, to take the view that miracle is "the fit accompaniment of a religion that moves and satisfies the soul of men, and that asserts itself to be derived directly from God?" He goes on to say:—

"Miracle is part of the accompaniment, as well as part of the content, of a true revelation, its appropriate countersign. Of course, those who take this ground do not deny, but rather firmly assert, the steadfast and glorious order

of nature. But they hold with equal firmness that God has made man for Himself, and that if He has sent His Son to die for them, the physical order can not set the rule for the way of grace. If God has relented, nature may relent. They believe that if there is a personal God miracles are possible, and revelation, which is a miracle, is also possible. They are not dismayed when they are told that the Gospel age was the age when legendary stories and superstitions and miraculous pretensions of the most fanciful and grotesque kind abounded. Nay, rather their faith is firmer, for they take these stories and compare them with the Gospel miracles, and they say, How is it that the stories of the New Testament are lofty and tender and beautiful and significant, while the rest are monstrosities? . . . Granting the entrance of the Son of God into human history, granting the miracle of the Incarnation of the Supreme, there is little to cause any difficulty. Without the Incarnation, without the Resurrection, we have no form of religion left to us that will control or serve or comfort mankind."

—Literary Digest.

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It is comforting to find some few of God's servants, tho still in "Babylon," keen enough to discern the real situation, and courageous enough to lift up voice and pen in defense of his cause. Very evidently, however, the nominal "Christian ministry" has gone or is rapidly going so far into unbelief of the very fundamentals of Christianity as to forfeit all claim to the name Christian,—as Rev. Nicoll suggests. It is not *Christian faith* to acknowledge that Jesus lived a noble life, superior to that of other men, and that his teachings were superior to others of his day. It is not *Christian faith* to claim what the Bible denies respecting "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man;" nor to proceed on this basis to claim that Jesus was a son of God in common with all others of our race, and peculiarly acceptable in proportion as he was superior to others of his race.

No, this is not Christianity: will not, and do not Jews, Mohammedans, Confucians, Buddhists and many others,—admit all this respecting our Master,—and some of them more? Are these all Christians? And if not, are those ministers Christians who still wear the livery of Christ in colleges and pulpits, for valuable considerations, and who are still under solemn vows to a faith which they sometimes publicly, but more often semi-privately, disavow? Assuredly not. Let us get back to that honesty of thought and word which calls *disbelief* in the fundamentals of Christianity, "*unbelief*," *i. e.*, "*infidelity*."

We are told that Infidelity has disappeared;—that Renan, Paine and Ingersoll have lost their place and power as opposers of Christianity. The very contrary is true: every college and seminary, secular and theological, has become a hotbed of infidelity, in which the leaders in world-politics, world-business, and world-religion are being taught, under the sanction of the "highest authorities," the very disbelief in the Bible which Infidelity has all along urged. The places of Renan, Paine and Ingersoll are more than filled by classical, scientific and theological doctors;—blind leaders of the blind.

Let no one be confused by these false shepherds, who are rapidly leading astray their confiding flocks; saying, Peace and safety! All who follow them will soon find in their hearts an aching void,—a leanness of soul,—a Christlessness which will render miserable indeed all who have once "tasted of the heavenly gift and been made partakers of the holy spirit."

Christ and the apostles were either right or wrong in their teachings;—their claims were either true or false. If false, everything built upon them must logically fall with them;—including the very name Christianity, their synonym. If they were true, all that they taught stands together; and the name Christian belongs to these doctrines, and its application to other teachings is a sin; and its appropriation by others is grand larceny—robbery.

The fundamental teachings of Christ and his apostles (true Christianity) are (1) The *fall* of man into sin and under its penalty—death. (Rom. 5:12, 17-19; 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:14; Rom. 6:23). (2) The *ransom* of the race from condemnation by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ "finished" at Calvary. (1 Tim. 2:5, 6; Rom. 5:18; Jno. 19:30) (3) The salvation, or recovery of the race, or so many of the same as will accept the grace of God in Christ when brought to a knowledge of the same, by a judgment-trial and restitution, called *resurrection*. (Acts 3:19, 23; Jno. 5:28, 29) (4) The previous and preparatory trial, testing, judgment of an "elect" class whose resurrection to "glory, honor and im-

mortality" will be instantaneous at the second advent of the Redeemer for the establishment of the kingdom of heaven in the earth.—Rom. 2:7; 8:17, 28, 29; 2 Tim. 2:11, 12; 1 Pet. 4:12, 13; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; 1 Thess. 4:15-17.

Upon these scriptural premises the entire fabric of Christianity was built, and in proportion as any one of them is either denied or omitted "the faith once delivered to the saints" is lost, and the door is opened to false beliefs, and ultimately to utter unbelief;—cutting the cables by which the anchor of faith serves securely to hold us to heavenly hopes. The cutting of these faith-cables means the temporary, if not the eternal loss of vital union with our Lord the Life-giver. The growingly popular evolution theory is diametrically opposed to all these fundamentals of Christianity, and that is warning enough to the wise, but no others.

#### FORTY MILLION DOLLARS FOR RELIGION

At the beginning of the twentieth century, an interdenominational movement was organized in England and this country for the purpose of raising \$50,000,000 as a special fund to be devoted to various projects for the furtherance of religion, such as the payment of church debts, home missionary work, the endowment of religious institutions, etc. *The Church Economist* (New York), which has been making an investigation into the present condition of this fund, finds that about \$40,000,000 has already been raised. "If it be true that money talks," comments the *Chicago Tribune*, "then it is talking in a most convincing way as to the great interest at present in the cause of religion and the fundamental prospect of the churches."

Fully half of this great total, declares *The Church Economist*, was raised in this country, the Methodists North alone claiming \$17,000,000. The Canadian Methodists and Presbyterians, each of which bodies set out to raise \$1,000,000, have collected respectively \$1,250,000 and \$1,430,000. The English Wesleys have secured \$4,500,000; and the English Congregationalists \$3,312,000. Congregationalists in Wales have raised \$860,000; in Australia \$415,000.—*Digest*.

#### RELIGION MIXING IN POLITICS

The National Reform Bureau has established what corresponds to a mercantile agency concerning the leading people in every town in the United States, except that their religious status instead of their financial capital and resources is the subject of the work. Old telephone books have been secured of every town in the United States having a telephone system, and these books have a large share of the people of prominence on their rolls. This is the nucleus of the index. Then, through trusted confidential helpers in each town, the names are checked off with signs showing what each individual can be depended on to do. Perhaps one man will be decidedly irreligious, and not interested in [political] reforms, but, for personal or family concerns may be greatly agitated over the question of temperance. The same may be true with divorce legislation, and with Sunday questions of all kinds. The bureau has twelve lines of work, but it does not limit its requests for assistance to persons who happen to sympathize with it in all of its lines. Of course, the records show a large number of names as in favor of everything.

The Congressman who is "shaky" on any vital measure finds himself deluged with communications. Perhaps the churches in his district adopt resolutions which are forwarded to him. Petitions from the Women's Christian Temperance Unions are hastily transmitted. And there is no overestimating the influence of such things on the congressional mind. . . . Senator Blackburn, of Kentucky, once said to Dr. Crafts: "Why, you have put my whole state in a turmoil over this matter. I would wager that I have got as many as twenty letters about it." Since twenty votes would not be a large percentage in Kentucky, the impression which a few letters make can not be better illustrated.

A few years ago, during the congressional recess, all of the wise men of this latitude were habitually ridiculing the idea that Congress could take any action regarding the duly elected representatives from the State of Utah. These wise men went into discussions of the constitutional phases of the question, and of how impossible it would be to do anything consistent with our fundamental law and the rights under it of a sovereign State. Any man who ventured to dissent from this prediction had but one argument: "Do not forget the Southern Presbyterianism. Brigham H. Roberts must look to his Democratic associates of the South for support, if he is to have any, but they can not forget the rugged Presbyterianism of a large share of their constituents." The prediction was entirely sound. There was little constitutional ground for throwing Mr. Roberts out, but he had to go, and this very Reform Bureau played no small part in bringing that result to pass.

Seven bills have been passed as drawn by the Bureau and introduced at its request, including the new and drastic divorce law of the District of Columbia, which will seemingly compel the establishment of a divorce colony at Chevy Chase, across the Maryland line. Others are the new divorce law in the Territories, the anti-canteen law, the resolution proposing a treaty to prevent the sale of intoxicants and opium to native races of the South Seas, and the Sunday-closing amendment to the St. Louis fair bill. The Bureau, by similar activities, doubtless prevents the passage of such legislation as might otherwise get through.—*N. Y. Evening Post*.

#### AUSTRIA'S TROUBLES

It is stated that the Austrian Government has grave reason to fear an agrarian rising in Galicia, where in the last rising nearly two thousand landlords were murdered. The landlords of Galicia are Poles, and, being doubtless pressed by the low prices, are reducing wages already too low for even tolerable existence. The peasantry, who are Ruthenians, and have a traditional quarrel of race with the gentry, are therefore rioting in all directions; and there is a demand from the nobles that the province shall be placed in a state of siege. The demand will probably be granted, and the peasantry cannot resist the troops; but unless its views have greatly altered of late, the Government of Vienna will be greatly annoyed and perplexed, the Ruthenians being far more loyal to the house of Hapsburg than the Polish aristocracy are. This question of tenure is becoming a very serious one throughout Eastern Europe. From the Ural to the Danube the actual cultivators of the soil hardly get enough to live on, and, partly from suffering, partly from a growing consciousness that others are happier, are beginning to demand proprietary rights. A wealthy Government could manage a compromise through large loans, but in Eastern Europe there is no money to spare, and the policy adopted both in Russia and Austria is to enforce a nearly impossible *status quo*.—*London Spectator*.

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The industrial boom of recent years, combined with the phenomenal crops of this favored land, have tendered to close the eyes of the world to the fact that the conditions of the gold standard are unfavorable to the agriculturists. As already pointed out, from Scripture, these conditions *will not be changed* by any political party; but will eventuate in the cry of the reapers, the agriculturists; and be followed by anarchy, which shall cause "all faces to gather blackness" and "the mighty man shall weep there bitterly;"—the time described as the "time of trouble, such as was not since there was a nation," in view of which the Apostle says: "Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for the miseries which shall come upon you."—James 5:1-4; Joel 2:6-11; Zeph. 1:14-18; Dan. 12:1.

### "MY COVENANT WILL I NOT BREAK"

"My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips."—Psa. 89:34.

These words of Jehovah God are very comforting and satisfying to his faithful children. As faith becomes a basis for things hoped for, so confidence and experience constitute a basis for faith to rest upon. The unchangeableness of our God is one of the attractive features of his character: his assurance is, "I am the same, I change not." Even when the Lord's word or sentence is against us—as in the case of his pronouncement against sin and sinners—and even though his unchangeableness will not permit him to excuse sin or clear the guilty, this very constancy becomes an assurance to us that as God has been strict and unchangeable in regard to the penalty pronounced, he will be equally strict and

equally unchangeable concerning all the good promises and covenants which he has made to us.

As an illustration of this unchangeableness, we note the fact that under the death sentence six thousand years have elapsed, and over 50,000,000,000 of our race have gone into the prisonhouse of death;—yet God has not relented or shown the slightest sign of change. His sentence was a just one, and it could not be revoked. Then came in his love; and without violating his justice he provided a great sin offering,—a ransom for all." In connection with this manifestation of love, in man's redemption, the Creator gave certain covenants and promises; and as we have learned of his un-

changeableness in respect to the curse, the sentence, we learn proportionately to have confidence in his unchangeableness in respect to the promises he has made our race, based upon the great redemption effected for us.

"O, what comfort it brings,  
My soul sweetly sings,  
I am safe from all danger  
While under his wings."

It is considered worldly wisdom to take for granted that no man will keep a covenant which he subsequently finds to be to his own disadvantage, unless he is bound by some kind of penalty—by the law. And those who have not learned to expect something of this kind of worldly wisdom in connection with their worldly affairs, have oftentimes been sadly disappointed and worsted; and their plans and arrangements based upon the covenants of others have been marred. The tendency of such experiences is to shake our confidence in humanity in general—and alas, sometimes, to shake our confidence even in some who have named the name of Christ and professed to be our brethren. Nevertheless, even such trying experiences have always worked blessings to such of the Lord's children as have accepted them in the proper manner. Such have said to themselves, The more I find of unfaithfulness and injustice in mankind, the more do I appreciate the absolute faithfulness and justice of the Lord, and of such of his people as do prove themselves loyal to principle; and the more earnestly do I determine that my own course in life shall be such as will always acknowledge the principle of justice, and make my positive and finished bargain and engagement like our Lord's—unbreakable, unalterable.

The Lord indicates not only his own estimation of this principle but his desire to see it in all who aspire to membership in his family. To such he says, "Blessed is the man who voweth to his own hurt and altereth not." The Lord would have us careful how we would make covenants, vows, either to him or to others; but having made them, his will is that we shall consider them sacred, inviolate; even though we should find subsequently that the arrangement was working out unfavorably as respects our temporal interests. There are some limitations in this direction which we will consider later on.

#### DIVINE COVENANTS AND PROMISES

There is a difference between conditional and unconditional promises which should not be overlooked. Some of the Lord's covenants are conditional, as for instance, the Law Covenant, which begins, "If ye obey my laws and keep my statutes," etc., I will do thus and so unto you. The Covenant of the Law, while it did bring to Israel "much advantage every way, chiefly in that to them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1, 2), was, nevertheless, a conditional covenant; and since Israel did not and could not keep its side of that covenant, therefore the divine promises attached to it and made conditional upon obedience, passed away so far as the people of Israel were concerned. All of the law's demand were met by our Lord Jesus, and to him and him alone passed all the divine agreements and obligations under that covenant. The Lord has, however, made unconditional covenants with mankind: the first of these was through our representative, Noah, after the flood. As representing the race, God covenanted with Noah that he would never again destroy the world with a flood of waters; and the pledge of that covenant was the rainbow. It was wholly unconditional—it did not stipulate that no flood would come if Noah and his posterity would be faithful to the Lord, etc.

Another unconditional covenant was that made with Abraham which reads, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3) There are no conditions or limitations here. It does not say, If you and your seed will be faithful, I will bless all the families of the earth through them; nor does it say, If all the families of the earth will seek me, they shall be blessed through your seed. There are no conditions or limitations whatever. As a matter of fact, God knew from the beginning that the natural seed of Abraham would not be fit to be the channel of blessing. From the very beginning he foreknew Jesus as the seed of Abraham and the Head of the Gospel church, his body—as unitedly the foreseen and promised "seed of Abraham." He foresaw, even, that many who would be called during this Gospel age would fail to make their calling and election sure; and from the very beginning he had in mind as the seed of Abraham only the "called and chosen and faithful."

God knew the end from the beginning, he knew that he would find such a class. He has been seeking them throughout this Gospel age, out of every kindred and people and tongue: he has been trying them, as the Apostle Peter says,

with "fiery trials;"—proving their love and loyalty, and developing in them fruits and graces of spirit, in harmony with his own, such as will fit and prepare them as a whole, under their Lord and Head, for the great work of blessing the world, when the appointed time shall have fully arrived—during the Millennial age. Nor was it necessary to place limitations upon the blessing of all the families of the earth; because the blessing to be conferred upon all is not an everlasting one, but merely a blessing of knowledge, of opportunity, of assistance—to the intent that so many of mankind as will to do so may come to a full knowledge of the truth, into harmony with God, and to full perfection of being. Afterward they will be tested as to their loyalty, and only the worthy will be granted life everlasting—all others being ultimately destroyed in the second death. Evidently there was no necessity for putting conditions and limitations upon this covenant. It represents God's good and benevolent purposes toward our race. He knew that his only begotten Son would be glad to become man's Redeemer, for the joy that he would set before him; he knew also that, in the time appointed for it, he could find amongst mankind a sufficient number who would appreciate the privilege of fellowship and joint-heirship with their Redeemer, and gladly and faithfully endure the tests, and acquire the character necessary to this work of blessing which he had purposed in himself.

Another covenant mentioned in the Scriptures as an unconditional one was that made to Israel's king, David—that his throne should be established forever—that of the fruit of his loins he would raise up a great one to sit on his throne in perpetuity. God could make this covenant without any limitations whatever, because he had already arranged that Jesus, according to the flesh, should be born of the house, of the lineage, of David and that his throne should be forever. David's throne, we are to remember, was the throne of the Lord, as we read, "Solomon sat upon the throne of the Lord in the room of his father David." God never acknowledged any throne in Israel except his own. It was entrusted to David for a time, and after him for a time to his posterity according to the flesh: it has been "overturned" during "the times of the Gentiles," but eventually, "he shall come whose right it is," and the Lord will give it unto him—the throne of the Lord, the throne of David. Indeed, even the name of David was a synonym for Immanuel, since its meaning is "Beloved." Christ is God's beloved Son in whom he is well pleased, and to whom therefore he has appointed the honors, dignities and authority of the kingdom which is to bless all the families of the earth, according to the promises made to Abraham.

Another unconditional promise, or covenant, is called the "New Covenant." This one is also without limitations, without conditions; the divine Word says, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the Land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not [that being a conditional covenant], saith the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."—Heb. 8:8-12.

Nothing can be more clear than that this New Covenant is without a solitary condition, so far as the people to be blessed by it are concerned. It is a covenant or agreement wholly on one side—an unconditional promise on the Lord's part of what he will do for the world. We say for the world advisedly, because we are to remember that in respect to the Day of Atonement sacrifices and the blessings therefrom, Israel is a type of all the world of mankind desiring to come into covenant relationship with the Lord, as the Levites represented the household of faith, and the priesthood was typical of the royal priesthood, the church.—Jesus the High Priest, and consecrated believers the underpriesthood.—1 Pet. 2:9.

What a wealth of blessing God has bound himself to accomplish for our race! How glad we are that there are no human conditions or limitations to hinder the fulfilment of these gracious promises, nor to unsettle our faith and our rejoicing therein! We do not mean to say that man will ultimately have nothing to do toward his own deliverance from sin and death; on the contrary, he will certainly not be delivered against his own will. But the blessings men-

tioned in these covenants are not the everlasting blessings pertaining to the eternity beyond the Millennium: they relate to the blessings of the Millennial age, which are, in divine providence, arranged to be world wide—to include “all the families of the earth” for all of whom a blessing of knowledge and assistance and opportunity for return to divine favor has been provided by the Creator.

But how could God do this, may be inquired,—if he is just and will not clear the guilty? How could he promise all these blessings and opportunities to those who are admittedly guilty—sinners? We answer that this part of the divine program and arrangement is specified particularly in the prophecy of Isaiah (42:1-7.) There Jehovah points out his honored servant, the Lord Jesus, through whose faithfulness the entire work of blessing the world shall be accomplished; and the key to the entire matter is found in the statement “I . . . will appoint thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations.”—Vs. 6, *Leeser*.

Israel's experiences under the Law Covenant prove to us what God knew beforehand; namely, that the fallen race was so out of condition as to be unable to keep any covenant which he could properly make with them. The proposition, therefore, upon which the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant are based, is that God would provide a substitute for Adam in the person of his well beloved Son, who, first demonstrating his own worthiness, would delight in carrying out his Father's plan for the blessing of our race: and with him God would make the covenant for the blessing of the world. As the world's representative, he would appoint or enter into a covenant with him, on behalf of the people. And to this our Lord assents, declaring that his death was “for the sins of the whole world” and that it was “the blood of the New Covenant” that sealed, made binding, made effective, God's New Covenant. The New Covenant is given to Israel and the world only indirectly: the Father's dealings are not with Israel nor with the world under this New Covenant, but with the Mediator of the New Covenant,—the Christ. During this Gospel age he is accepting the church as the members of the body of this great Mediator, through the merit of the Head. When the entire Mediator shall be complete, the covenant will come into force, become effective to all the families of the earth,—thus constituting the blessing mentioned in the covenant made with Abraham.

The curse of the divine sentence will then end, and divine favor and power will be given the great Mediator who shall then begin his great work of ruling and teaching mankind in righteousness, and administering laws and regulations for their benefit;—for their physical, social, mental and moral uplifting. The whole arrangement shall be in the hands of the Mediator and his work of helping and restoring the race which he purchased with his blood shall progress throughout the Millennial age. At the close of the Millennial age, having accomplished all that can possibly be accomplished for the race,—having brought all to a knowledge of the truth, having given all an opportunity of restoration to divine favor and restitution to perfection,—there will be a final testing on the Father's part, and all found worthy—all who shall have learned to appreciate the divine character and the principles of the divine law—will be granted life-everlasting; and all found contrary to this shall be esteemed wicked, and shall be destroyed from amongst the people.—Acts 3:23; Psa. 145:20.

**“THAT WE MIGHT HAVE STRONG CONSOLATION, WHO HAVE FLED FOR REFUGE TO LAY HOLD UPON THE HOPE SET BEFORE US: WHICH HOPE WE HAVE AS AN ANCHOR OF THE SOUL, BOTH SURE AND STEADFAST”—HEB. 6:18, 19**

The words of our text apply to these exceeding great and precious covenant-promises of the divine Word. They assure us that our God will never break these covenants—yea, more, that he will not even alter, or amend, or change them in any particular. We can rest in hope, assured that he who has begun the good work in us and on behalf of the world, is able not only to complete the work in us, but to accomplish more for the world than it or we can ask or comprehend. Does not this knowledge of the immutability of the divine covenants give us a confidence, a faith in the Lord which brings it strong consolation for every trial, every difficulty, every disappointment of this present time—assuring us that all of our experiences are working together as parts of a great whole of the divine program, not only for our glory, honor, immortality, but for the blessing of the world of mankind? They surely do! Hallelujah, what a Savior!

If now we allow our minds to gather in to some extent the scope of these promises as expanded and explained by the apostles in the New Testament, we see that they take hold of, not only the life which is to come, but also of that which

now is. They give us new joy, new courage, new zeal, new incentive in connection with the common tasks and duties of life,—to our families, to our neighbors, and to ourselves, and above all to our God. And they give us confidence and assurances in all the great and gracious hopes set before us in the Gospel—in the Lord's willingness to do for us, and in his power to do exceedingly and abundantly more than we can ask or think.

#### GODLIKE FAITHFULNESS TO COVENANTS

In two ways we who are pupils in the school of Christ are instructed. (1) By being shown through the perfect law of liberty our weakness and imperfections. (2) By being shown God's greatness and perfection. We need to see that we are not right, that we come far short of the glorious condition in which we (in Adam) were created, and which condition alone God could pronounce or consider “very good.” The longer and more intently we look into the perfect law of liberty, the more we will discern our own blemishes, and the less favorably we are likely to think of ourselves; so that we might become discouraged were it not for the Lord's assurance that while he knows our imperfections better than we do, yet he is not regarding these, but covering them—allowing the merit of our dear Redeemer as a robe of righteousness to make us perfect and acceptable before him;—and that this acceptance and covering applies to us as long as we are seeking to walk in the Lord's way—“not after the flesh, but after the spirit.” We see the Lord's character portrayed in his law given to Israel; and again in the still higher statement of that law, expressed by Jesus as the perfect law, the comprehensive law, the Law of Love—God's law, necessarily representing his character. Furthermore, God's promises also represent his character, and this double revealing to us of the divine character is with a view to an incitement of our love for those principles of righteousness, goodness, truth.

While seeking to copy the Lord in every particular, and to be fully rounded out in character-likeness to him, let us now have specially in mind as a part of the lesson of this text, God's faithfulness to his engagements; and let us, as his people, resolve that by his assistance and grace we will grow daily in this quality, in his likeness—that we, also, may say of ourselves, concerning our covenants or agreements, as the Lord says of himself, “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.”

#### COVENANTS COMPLETE AND INCOMPLETE

As there are some who are not sufficiently conscientious in their covenants and engagements—not sufficiently aware of the responsibilities assumed in making a covenant, and who are, therefore, disposed to break them or to alter them, so there are some, on the other hand, who have not their conscience sufficiently balanced by their other reasoning faculties to understand the difference between complete and incomplete agreements. These have need of a word of caution on what constitutes a final and irrevocable covenant, bargain, agreement. Mankind in general has long recognized the difference between the discussion of an agreement and the consummation of the same; hence it is that civil law, in the interest of peace and justice, makes the arrangement that in matters pertaining to the purchase or sale of real estate, a binding agreement or contract shall be in writing, and shall be signed and sealed as final and irrevocable. The conversation respecting the matter may progress for minutes, for hours, for weeks, for months, as the case may be, and one feature after another may be discussed pro and con, and terms may be discussed over and over,—but the bargain is not complete until the matter has been finally stated in writing in a manner acceptable to both parties, and their acceptance of the same indicated by their signatures, and the passing of some money or other consideration. Once such an absolute contract has been made, no child of God should think of breaking it, unless it should develop that he had been the subject of fraud and misrepresentation, and through this had been induced to sign. But the point we wish to make is, that there was a definite time when the covenant was made, after which it must not be broken, and that up to that time either party had the unquestionable right to alter, change, or amend his views respecting it and to act accordingly. The Lord's people should learn more and more, to exercise the “spirit of a sound mind;”—to think well of what they are about to do, before doing it;—and this implies also that they will seek for divine guidance in what they do. Indeed, having covenanted themselves to the Lord, with all of their interests and affairs, they are to treat every matter from this standpoint, and to consult the divine will and to follow it to the best of their understanding, leaving all the subsequent consequences and results in the Lord's care.

A matter which sometimes has given rise to considerable

difficulty among the Lord's people, is marriage engagements. There is confusion of thought as to how much obligation goes with an "engagement." Under the Jewish arrangement the betrothal preceded the marriage festivities by about a year, but the betrothal was really the marriage. It was discussed pro and con by the friends of the bride and bridegroom, and all particulars arranged and put into writing and signed. It was so binding that unfaithfulness on the part of the bride to her betrothal vows was punishable under the law. This Jewish custom was evidently arranged purposely to be a type of the betrothal of the Gospel church to Christ, her heavenly Bridegroom. Our contract of union with the Lord, both in his part and ours, is entered into now, during the Gospel age, but the actual union or "nuptial feast," will not take place until, at his second advent, the entire company of the bride shall have passed beyond the veil, "changed"—entered into the joys of her Lord. But marriage "engagements," as they are known amongst us today, are totally different from Jewish "betrothals."

According to our custom, the marriage covenant is entered into in a legal manner either before an officer representing the civil authorities, or by a ceremony performed by a minister of the Gospel. This is the marriage covenant; this is binding; this is unalterable; this must not be broken; the pledges here made must be observed, in letter and spirit. But the "engagements," which frequently last for weeks, months, or years preceding the marriage covenant, are not covenants at all—in the strict, proper sense of the word. They are merely *provisional* arrangements between the parties looking forward to a marriage covenant and ceremony as their consummation;—and so much so, that any treating of the "engagement" as a consummated union is declared illegal, unlawful. Of course it might be possible for two persons to make such vows to each other without the presence of a minister or other ceremony, as to be properly binding and obligatory throughout life; but this is unusual, extremely exceptional and generally forbidden by State laws.

The marriage "engagement" therefore properly understood is merely a provisional agreement between a man and

a woman eligible to marriage to keep each other's company with a view to marriage—with a view to such an intimate acquaintance with each other's characters, dispositions, affairs, etc., as would give to each reasonable opportunity of judging as to the desirability of consummating a marriage covenant. Of course this implies equally an opportunity and right to decide not to marry if in his or her judgment it would not be desirable. In breaking any ordinary agreement or "engagement" for marriage there is nothing, therefore, that is dishonorable or covenant breaking,—but everything that is reasonable, right, proper. It is in the interests of both parties that it should be so. If either party is disposed to cancel the "engagement," it would certainly be unwise, as well as unjust, for the other party to selfishly insist on consummating it with a marriage covenant, which would be binding; because a marriage is only for those who are *one*, and if either party feels to the contrary of this, it is the very best reason why both should conclude they are not *one* in their interests, tastes, preferences, etc.

We mention this matter here particularly because it is a question that is frequently referred to us by persons engaged to be married at the time the truth reaches them. They come to see matters in a new light: life comes to have a new meaning for them under the illumination of the truth, and marriage comes to have a new force and weight; a decision respecting a partner in life comes to be a question in which the Lord's will is recognized as paramount. The other party to the engagement generally fails to see the change in conditions, and perhaps admires the proposed companion all the more, because of the graces which the truth adds to character. The unregenerate may perhaps incline to be insistent, and to urge that it would be wrong for the Christian to break an "engagement." This is unsound reasoning, wholly sophistical; and those who use it are generally fully aware of this; and yet it is sufficient at times to cause great trouble of conscience to some who are anxious to fulfil their obligations in every particular.

This is our justification for these extended remarks on this phase of the subject.

## GIDEON'S BAND TRIUMPHANT

[Reprinted in issue of November 1, 1907, which please see.]

### "THY PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE"

RUTH 1:16-22.—DECEMBER 7.

*"Be kindly affectioned one toward another."—Rom. 12:10.*

While the Book of Ruth is not prophetic, but merely historical, it is valuable to us in various ways. (1) It furnishes an important link in the chronological chain leading down to King David and, hence, a part of the chronological line leading down to the Man Christ Jesus. (2) It gives a glimpse of the habits and customs of the Israelites in general as an agricultural people. In this respect it is in marked contrast with the Books of Judges, Kings and Chronicles, which dealt more particularly with the rulers, generals and wars. (3) The story of Ruth points a very beautiful lesson of fidelity, sympathy and love amongst the people at that time, and inculcates a similar lesson of kindness of disposition amongst the spiritual Israelites, guaranteeing them, along this line, blessings both for the present and for the future.

Somewhere about Gideon's time, when scarcity amounting almost to famine prevailed in Palestine, as a judgment of the Lord upon his people for some measure of coldness or unfaithfulness to him and to their covenant, Naomi's husband determined to emigrate with his family to the other side of the Dead Sea—to the land of Moab. The Moabites were the descendants of Lot, but, nevertheless, the Lord marked out to his people Israel that they were not to be considered the children of Abraham—that they were not fellow-heirs of the promises made to Abraham, and, therefore, they were not subjects of special dealings, disciplines, providences, etc., as were the Israelites. Naomi and her two sons went with her husband apparently without regret, to the land of Moab, hoping thereby to better the prospects of the family. It was a mistake, however, as she afterwards realized, to attempt to regulate their own affairs when they were specially under the Lord's protection and guidance.

As Israelites they should have esteemed the divine promises so highly that they would not have left the land of promise and the people of promise to commingle with those who were strangers to those promises and more or less idolaters.

To be on the Lord's side amongst the Lord's people should have been esteemed far more important than earthly prospects. Naomi, however, is not to blame in connection with this matter; the responsibility rested with her husband, and it is evident that her heart was never fully in sympathy with the move, because about ten years subsequently, when her husband and two sons died, she promptly determined on a return to the Lord's people and to the land which he had given them.

Human nature is much the same everywhere and always. How many there are today who mistakenly seek to map out their plans for the present life in disregard of their highest interests, in disregard of the Lord's promises and the relationship which they have entered into by covenant with him! How many there are who forget that the Lord's arrangement with all of his covenant people is that he will supervise their affairs and cause all things to work together for good to them! Instead of making temporal interests the chief concern, Naomi's husband should have been making the religious interests of himself and family his chief concern, so that if he had been living in Moab under greater prosperity, he should rather have been willing to go into the land of promise amongst the Lord's people, though such a course would seem to mean a blighting of some of his earthly interests.

The Lord's people of Spiritual Israel will do well to bear this thought continually in mind—that spiritual interests are to be given the preference always; that temporal affairs are to be managed and controlled from the standpoint of the everlasting welfare;—from the standpoint of spiritual growth and development and prosperity;—from the standpoint of the best interests and influences upon their children. They should not only hesitate to follow any suggestion that would take themselves and their families into unfavorable, godless surroundings, but they should determine that not under any



consideration would they follow such a suggestion;—that on the contrary the Lord's people should be their people, even though this meant less of the comforts and luxuries of this present life: it would surely mean greater spiritual blessings and favors for the present time, and persevering would mean the gaining of the glorious reward which our Lord has promised to the faithful who love him more than they love houses and lands and kindred, etc.

Evidently Naomi's life and example and her faithfulness to the Lord had made an impression amongst those with whom she was specially in contact,—her two daughters-in-law, both of whom resolved to go back with her to the land of Canaan. On the journey, however, she reflected that these two young women would be sacrificing much—leaving kindred, homes, acquaintances, customs, and good prospects to go with her to a land where they would be considered foreigners and probably be discriminated against. She, therefore, urged them to return to their own people, to the religious worship, etc., to which they had been accustomed. She feared that their resolution to accompany her would result in disappointment later on. Her disinterested course in this matter reminds us very much of our Lord's words to some who proposed to become his disciples. He advised them first of all to sit down and count the cost; this he did, not because he wished to stumble or to turn back any who had inclinations to follow in his footsteps, but because it is best on general principles that people should not undertake that in which their hearts are not fully and deeply interested; because otherwise they are sure to make a failure. They who sit down and count the cost and then rejoicingly follow in the Lord's footsteps of suffering and trial glad to be accounted worthy to suffer for his name's sake and to walk in his footsteps,—they alone are the kind who will gain the prize. Those who would follow without the spirit of sacrifice would be sure to miss the prize and all the sacrificing they might do would be burdensome and measurably disappointing.

Naomi's argument appealed to one of her daughters-in-law, who did return to her Moabitish home, concluding that after all it would be too much of a sacrifice for her to part with her kindred, etc. Ruth, on the contrary, had come to love her mother-in-law so deeply and to respect her religion so thoroughly that although it cost a tear to part with home and kindred and to contemplate the trials of poverty in a foreign land, she, nevertheless, fully resolved that such a home amongst those who revered the true God and were heirs of his promises was more to be esteemed than anything she was leaving. Her impassioned words to her mother-in-law are noted throughout the world as being amongst the most beautiful expressions of sympathy, kindness and devotion. Some one has arranged them in poetic form, thus:—

"Entreat me not to leave thee,  
And to return from following after thee;  
For whither thou goest, I will go;  
And where thou lodgest, I will lodge;  
Thy people shall be my people,  
And thy God, my God;  
Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried,  
The Lord do so to me, and more also,  
If aught but death part thee and me."—Vs. 16, 17.

A good and faithful, God-fearing, God-serving, God-honoring mother-in-law, Naomi surely was, to have so deeply interested Ruth in herself and in her God and in his promises to her people. There is a lesson here, not only for mothers-in-law, but for all of the Lord's people. Not all are able to preach and to teach the Word of God publicly or privately, but all can teach through their daily lives and glorify their Father in heaven in their bodies and spirits which are his, by living a godly life, by telling in the simplest manner of the hopes and promises which control their own hearts and inspire their own courage and devotion. The Apostle Paul had in mind this same thought of the general influence of life and character when he said, "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ." Our Lord had the same thought in mind when he declared, "Ye are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." That Naomi had told her daughters-in-law respecting her God and his promises to his people is evident; but to have told them of this and not to have acted and spoken and lived in accord with this faith and hope, would have been contradictory and, undoubtedly, never would have influenced Ruth to forsake her own people and her father's house, and to cast in her lot with her mother-in-law and the Israelites.

Arrived at her home city, Bethlehem, Naomi, who had been well known ten years before, and whose friends probably never expected to see her again, was greeted by her name; but she replied, Call me no longer Naomi (which signifies lovable, pleasant), but call me rather Marah (which signifies bitter). She explained to them that the Lord's providences in respect to her affairs had been severe afflictions;—the Lord had testified against her course—had not prospered herself and family in the course they had taken. No doubt later on she came to see that the Lord's afflictions upon her had really been for her good, bringing her back to the land of promise and to fellowship with her people, so that her last days were probably the best of her life.

So at times it may be with some of the Lord's spiritual Israelites; his chastisements and afflictions and disciplines may seem to indicate his displeasure, but really, from the standpoint of faith and knowledge, they may afterward be seen to have been blessings in disguise. However, much depends upon the way in which the Lord's disciplines are received. Had Naomi suffered herself to become sour and morose and rebellious against the Lord, no blessing would have followed her trying experiences; but the fact that she permitted these to draw her closer to the Lord and to his people formed the channel of her blessings. And this lesson also is easily applied by us all as spiritual Israelites to our experiences.

The remainder of the lesson gives us an insight into the customs of the time, and incidentally shows us how the Lord rewarded the noble character and faith of Ruth. That she did not come to Bethlehem with great expectations and selfish motives is evidenced by the fact that she set out to earn a living for herself and her mother-in-law. She was young and strong, and could, after the manner of the times, go into the harvest fields and glean such stray handfuls of the grain as were missed by the men who did the reaping. This was permitted by the Jewish law; the grain growing in the fence corners might be gathered by any of the poor for their own use. Providentially Ruth was guided in her humble efforts to make a living, to the field of a man who was a kinsman to Naomi, and to whom she (Ruth) was subsequently married and became one of the mothers in Israel, from whom descended King David and ultimately Mary, the mother of Jesus.

It is well that the Lord's people note even in this little incident something that may be helpful to them. We are to commit our way to the Lord and sincerely and unselfishly determine to follow the path of righteousness; then the Lord shall be our God; then his people shall be our people. Testings will come as to whether or not we are willing to do our duty in respect to the common affairs of life, laboring with our hands, providing things honest in the sight of all men. As we go forward in the line of duty, the Lord guides our steps and overrules in our affairs and brings us blessings, but if we fail to take the proper steps and to do with our might what our hands find to do, we miss the blessings.

The fact that these two women could journey from Moab to Bethlehem by themselves and without molestation, and the fact that Ruth, unknown and unprotected, could safely glean in the fields without interference of any kind, speaks to us strongly of the general law and order prevalent amongst the Israelites—the general recognition of the divine law and the general conformity thereto. We are to remember, too, that at this time the laws were liberally administered, and that, so far as we are made aware, there was neither army or police organization to enforce them. The people were comparatively free and evidently in some respects moral, noble and trustworthy. This is illustrated further in the course of Boaz. How few employers of labor today, as they visit their farms, would be in any degree inclined to salute laborers as Boaz did his; saying, "The Lord be with you!" And how few farm laborers of today would respond as did these of Boaz;—"They answered him, The Lord bless thee." Evidently the employers and employees of our day could learn some profitable lessons from the past, notwithstanding the fact that Evolutionists would endeavor to convince us that back in the days of Boaz men must have been much nearer the monkey condition than today. The facts are to the contrary.

Furthermore, we notice the generosity of Boaz, that instead of dealing selfishly and miserly in respect to the gleanings of the woman, he gave directions to his servants that they purposely let fall an occasional handful when binding the grain, that Ruth's gleanings might thus be enlarged. Christian employers and employees need not to go back to the Jewish Law and to the customs of the Jews as illustrated by Boaz and his laborers; for we have a still higher