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Calamities—Why Permitted

"There were present at that season some who told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

"Or, those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."—Luke 13:1-5.

NOBLE and good in the sight of both God and man are the generous impulses of charity and sympathy, awakened by great calamities in recent years. And when this is said, it leaves little more to be said favorable to calamities or their influence.

While these charities should not be misconstrued to signify that God's consecrated saints are rapidly multiplying—for many of the charitable are not the consecrated, and some are even infidels—yet they are an evidence that at least some of the original God-likeness of our race remains; that it has not been wholly obliterated by the degradation of the fall, nor wholly poisoned by the bad theology of the dark ages. While we live in a period, perhaps, as selfish and money-loving as any known to history, yet millions of dollars are generously poured forth to aid suffering humanity. And yet many who in times of calamitous distress show that they have a tender spot somewhere in their hearts, would and do at other times lend time and brain and skill to the arts of war, and in designing the most horrible implements of warfare; and on occasions when bitter passions are aroused would relentlessly and pitilessly slaughter a thousand times as many as meet death by the accidents of nature. Yet, for all this showing of the two elements in the same men, we rejoice that the God-like element of sympathy exists, as a partial offset to the devilish qualities of selfishness and heartlessness, which, under the degrading influence of man's fallen state, have grown strong during the past six thousand years.

Preparatory to looking carefully, reasonably and Scripturally at the question, Why does God permit calamities? let us note some of the absurd views of some Christian people, who should know God's Word and character much better than they seem to know them. Some, whose hearts in the presence of great calamities overflow with sympathy and God-like love (which proves their hearts better and more sound than their theology), declare that God is the director and cause of all disasters and troubles. Hence, whatever men may do to alleviate such distresses would, according to this false view, be so much done in opposition to God; and whatever love and sympathy they feel, is so much sentiment opposed to God's sentiments—which are thus made to appear malicious.

But it seems a very slight thing to charge the Almighty with causing earth's calamities—in comparison with the general thought of Christendom, that God has premeditated, planned, from before the foundation of the world, their everlasting torture—the direst calamity imaginable. Tornadoes, earthquakes, epidemics of disease, would be mercies and kindnesses in comparison with such diabolical schemes and preparations as are accredited to the Lord by the vast majority of his children, who suffer still from the superstition, ignorance and blindness of the "dark ages," and its creeds. Alas, that such false conceptions of the justice and love of our Creator should ever have gained a foothold in our minds—to distort our every conception of every right and good quality. O Lord, grant Thy people a great opening of the eyes of their understanding, that we may be able to comprehend with all saints, the lengths and the breadths, the heights and the depths of Thy love and mercy toward Thy creatures through Jesus Christ, our Lord! The difficulty is that men have been led to consider the very Bible which de-

clares God's true character of love and justice as authority for these devilish doctrines; and these false interpretations were originated in the "dark ages" by those who instigated or assisted in burning, and otherwise tormenting, real Bible believers.

God's Sympathy—How Shown.

When we declare that whatever there is of love and sympathy in man is only the remnant of the original divine likeness in which Adam was created, not wholly effaced by six thousand years of degradation in sin, it at once arouses the question: In what way does God manifest his sympathy and love in such emergencies, when even the hearts of fallen human beings are touched, with sympathy and love—to acts of kindness and succor?

A correct answer is, that God is represented in every act of kindness done, whether by his children or by the world; because their actions under such circumstances are the result of their possession of some measure of his character and disposition. This answer is not full enough to be satisfactory; but, thank God, a fuller investigation, in the light of his Word, reveals a boundless sympathy on his part—providing an abundant succor, which is shortly to be revealed.

But why does not God immediately succor his creatures from calamities? Or, to go still further back, why does he, who has all wisdom to know and all power to prevent, permit calamities—cyclones, earthquakes, tidal waves, destructive floods, pestilences, etc.? And while we are about it, we may as well include all the evils which God could prevent, if he would—all the forms of sickness and pain and death; every manner of destruction—wars, murders, etc.; everything which causes pain or trouble to those willing to do and to be in harmony with God? The answer to one of these questions will be the answer to every question on the subject; for all human evils are related and have a common source or cause.

To comprehend this cause fully, we must go far back, to the very beginning of sickness, pain, death and sorrow—to the Garden of Eden, where neither famine, pestilence, cyclone, earthquake, nor death in any form was permitted; where man and his surroundings and conditions were pronounced "very good," even by God himself, and must certainly have been greatly appreciated by man, who had to be driven out and prevented from returning by the fiery sword which kept the way of access to the life-sustaining fruits of the Garden.

And this Creator, who so graciously provided for the life and comfort of his creatures, and who communed with them and gave them his blessing and the promise of everlasting life upon the sole condition of continued obedience—how came it that he should so change in his attitude toward his creatures as to drive them from the enjoyments of those Eden comforts and blessings, out into the unprepared earth—to toil and weariness and insufficient sustenance, and thus to death?

We must remember that the Creator

specially or miraculously "prepared" in advance the Garden of Eden, only, for man's comfortable enjoyment of the favors of life, and a fitting place for his trial. God foresaw the fall of his creature, and provided that the penalty of sin, "dying thou shalt die," instead of being suddenly inflicted, as by a lightning stroke or other speedy method, should be served out gradually by conflict with the unfavorable conditions (of climate, sterility of soil, storms, miasma, thorns, weeds, etc.), of the unprepared earth; the preparation of which would require seven thousand years more to entirely fit it for the habitation of perfect, obedient, human children of God.

Man a Convict.

Adam and Eve, therefore, went forth from Eden convicts, under sentence of death; self-convicted under the most just of all judges, their Creator and friend. The convicts esteemed it a mercy to be let die gradually rather than suddenly; while to the Creator and Judge this was expedient because of his plan for their future, in which such experience with imperfect conditions would be of great value—a plan for the increase of the race, and for its discipline and final redemption and restoration.

The death penalty, inflicted in this manner, God foresaw would, through experience, furnish man such a lesson on the exceeding sinfulness of sin and its baneful results as would never need to be repeated—a lesson, therefore, which would profit all who learn it to all eternity; especially when Christ's Millennial reign of righteousness shall manifest in contrast the fruits of righteousness. God also designed that the exercise of man's mental faculties in coping with the disturbances and imperfections of his surroundings and in inventing reliefs, and the exercise of his moral faculties in combating his own weaknesses, and the calls upon his sympathy, should prove beneficial.

Had the sentence of God (in addition to a loss of Eden's comforts and experience with sin and death) condemned his creatures to an eternity of torment and anguish, as so many now believe and teach, who could defend such a sentence, or call the Judge just, or loving, or in any sense good? Surely no one of a sound mind!

But when it is seen that the Scriptures teach that death (extinction), and not life in torment, was the penalty pronounced and inflicted, all is reasonable. God has a right to demand perfect obedience from his perfect creature when placed under perfect conditions, as in Adam's case. And the decree that none shall live everlastingly except the perfect, is both a wise and a just provision for the everlasting welfare of all God's creatures.

There is a depth of meaning in the Creator's words, as he sent forth his fairly tried and justly condemned creatures, among the thorns and briars, to labor and pain, and sorrow, and distress and to be subject to the casualties and calamities of nature's unfinished work. He said, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake;" i. e., The earth in general is in its present imperfect condition for your profit and experience; even though you may not esteem it so. Adam would have sought to retain continual access to the garden fruits, to avoid severe labor and to enable him to fully sustain his vital powers and live forever; but in loving consideration for man's ultimate good, no less than in justice, and in respect for his own sentence of death, God prevented this and guarded the way back to the Garden; in order that the death sentence should not fail of execution, in order that sinners should not live forever and thus perpetuate sin.

The children of the condemned pair inherited their fall, imperfections and weaknesses, and also the penalties of these; for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" The whole race, therefore, as convict laborers, have not only been learning what sin and evil are, and their undesirable results, but by their labor and skill they are serving to prepare the earth and bring it as

a whole to the full perfection designed for it, and illustrated in the condition of Eden—ready for a further purpose of God of which none but his children (and not all of them) are made aware through the Scriptures.

We can see, then, that labor and toil were prescribed for man's good. They have kept him so employed that he could not plan and consummate evil to the same extent that he otherwise would have done. And as the earth becomes more fertile, approaching perfection, man's vitality becomes less; so that now, with greater leisure to plot and scheme and grow wise in evil, the period of life in which to do so is shorter. What a mercy in disguise is present shortness of life, under present circumstances! Were some of our "shrewd business men" who accumulate millions of money, and grasp great power in a few short years, to live 930 years, as Adam did, what might we expect but that one man, or at most a syndicate or trust, would own every foot of land, control every drop of water and every breath of air, and have the rest of the race for their dupes and slaves?

God's action, then, in exposing his creatures to death, pain and various calamities, it must be seen, was, first of all, one which related only to his present life on earth, and to no other; for of any continuance of life, in any other locality, God did not give him the slightest intimation. On the contrary, the words of the penalty were: "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return"—"dying thou shalt die."—Gen. 3:19; 2:17, margin.

True, God gave promise that, somehow and at some time, a son of the woman should accomplish a deliverance. But it was then vague and indefinite, merely a glimmer of hope, to show them that though God dealt severely with them, and on lines of law and justice, yet he sympathized with them, and would, ultimately, without violating justice or ignoring his own righteous sentence of death, bring succor.

God Just, Yet the Justifier of Sinners

Paul tells us that God adopted a method for the recovery of man from that original sentence of death that came upon all as the result of Adam's fall, which would show the justice of his sentence and the unchangeableness of his decrees, and yet permit such as are sick of sin to use their experience wisely, and to return to harmony and obedience to their Creator and his just and reasonable laws and regulations.

This Divine Plan, by which God could remain just and unchangeable in his attitude toward sin and sinners, and yet release the well-disposed from the penalty of sin (death and disfavor), is stated by the Apostle in Rom. 3:24-26.

In brief, this plan provided that another man who, by obedience to the law of God, should prove his worthiness of eternal life, might, by the willing sacrifice of the life to which he was thus proved worthy, redeem the forfeited life of Adam and of his posterity who lost life through him; for it is written, "In Adam all die," and "By the offense of one, sentence of condemnation came on all men."—I Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:12, 18.

The Redeemer

Since the condemnation to death was thus upon all men, and since another man newly created and inexperienced as Adam was, though just as favorably situated, would have been similarly liable to fall, God devised the marvelous

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plan of transferring his only begotten Son from the spiritual to the human nature, and thus provided a man fit for sacrifice—"the man Christ Jesus who gave himself a ransom for all;" "who, though he was rich [though he was possessed of glory and honor and riches of wisdom and power above both angels and men], nevertheless for our sakes became poor (humbling himself to a lower nature, that of a man, becoming obedient even unto death) that we through his poverty might be made rich."—I Tim. 2:5, 6; 2 Cor. 8:9.

Thus the one first created, "the first-born of all creation" (Col. 1:15), "the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14), the one who had known God's character longer, more fully and more intimately than any other being, the one in fact who had been Jehovah's chief and honored, intelligent and active Agent in the creation of angels as well as of men, the one by whom all things were made, and aside from whom not anything was made (John 1:3; Col. 1:16, 17)—this great being, Jehovah's Prime Minister, and next to himself in dignity, the Almighty entrusted with the great work of redeeming and restoring mankind.

To redeem them would cost the sacrifice of the Son's own life as their ransom price, with all that that implied of suffering and self-denial. To restore them (such of them as should prove worthy—whosever wills) would require the exercise of divine power to open the prison-house of death, and to break the fetters of sin and prejudice and superstition, and give to all the redeemed the fullest opportunity to decide whether they love good or evil, righteousness or sin, truth or error—to destroy all who love and work iniquity, and to develop and perfect again all who love and choose life upon its only condition—righteousness.

To know the Father's plan and his privilege of co-operation in its execution, was to appreciate it and joyfully engage therein. Willingly our Lord Jesus laid aside the glory of the higher nature which he had had with the Father from before the creation of man. (John 17:5; 2 Cor. 8:9). He was "made flesh" (John 1:14; Heb. 2:14), became a man at thirty years of age, and then began the great work of sacrifice, the sacrifice of himself, for the cancellation of the sin of the first man, to recover Adam and his race by dying on their behalf, as their Redeemer. By giving Justice the price of their liberty from Divine condemnation, he secures the legal right to cancel the sentence of condemnation to death against them, and hence the right to resurrect or restore to life and to all the lost estate and blessings, "whomsoever he wills." (John 5:21.) And he wills to restore all who shall prove worthy. And to prove who are worthy of everlasting life will be the object of the Millennial reign.—I Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9.

This fact that our Lord's mission to earth at the first advent was to die for the race, that he might undo the results of Adam's transgression, and to secure the right to resurrect them and restore them, is clearly stated by the Apostle.—See, Rom. 5:6-12, 16-19, 21; I Cor. 15:21-24.

By His Knowledge

Though tempted in all points like as we (his "brethren") are, he ignored his own will (Luke 22:42; John 4:34; 5:30) and all suggestions from others contrary to God's plan (Matt. 16:23; Luke 4:4, 8, 12), and obeyed God implicitly. And therein lay the secret of his success. Temptations did not overcome him, as they did even the perfect man Adam, because of the fullness of his consecration to the Divine will and plan; and this fullness of consecration and trust was the result of his intimate knowledge of the Father and his unbounded confidence

in his wisdom, love and power. He had knowledge of his previous existence as a spirit being with the Father (John 17:5; 3:12, 13). Our Lord's success, then, was the result of being rightly exercised by his knowledge of God; as it is written, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, while bearing their iniquities."—Isa. 53:11.

The suggestive thoughts here are two: First, that even a perfect man failed in trial because of the lack of full appreciation of God's greatness, goodness and resources. Secondly, the knowledge (as in Satan's case) would be valueless, if unaccompanied by sincere love and consecration to God's will. A lesson further, to Christ's "brethren," is, that knowledge and consecration are both essential to their following in the Master's footsteps.

Among men he and his mission were not really known; even his most ardent followers and admirers at first supposed that his mission was merely to heal some of the sick Jews, and to advance their nation to the rulership of a dying world, and to be a teacher of morals; they saw not at first that his mission was to lay the foundation of a world-wide empire, which should include not only the living, but also the dead, of Adam's race, and which should insure everlastingly peace and joy to all the worthy, by eradicating, forever, sin and all who love it after fully comprehending its character in contrast with righteousness. Even his friends and disciples were slow to realize these grand dimensions of his work, though he continually repeated them, and bore witness, saying: "The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many;" "Verily, verily, the hour is coming* when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear [heed] shall live." "The Lord hath sent me to preach deliverance to the captives [of death] and recovering of sight to the [mentally, morally and physically] blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised"—injured by the Adamic fall.—Matt. 20:28; John 5:25; Luke 4:18.

The sacrifice of the Redeemer's all, as man's ransom price, was offered at the time he was thirty years old—at his baptism. And there the offering was accepted by Jehovah, as marked by his anointing with the spirit. Thenceforth, he spent the three and a half years of his ministry in using up the consecrated life already offered; and this he completed at Calvary. There the price of our liberty was paid in full. "It is finished!" It holds good; it is acceptable by the grace of God, as the offset and covering for every weakness and sin of the first man, and his posterity, resulting either directly, or indirectly, from the first disobedience and its fall. All that is necessary since, for a full return to divine favor and communion and to an inheritance in the Paradise of God, which the great Redeemer in due time has promised to establish in the entire earth, as at first in the Garden of Eden, is a recognition of sin, full repentance, and a turning from sin to righteousness. Christ will establish righteousness in the earth by the Kingdom of God, which he has promised shall be established and for which he has bidden us wait and hope, and for which he taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth even as it is done in heaven."

"YE SHALL ALL LIKEWISE PERISH"

Death, in whatever form it may come, is perishing, ceasing to exist. All mankind, through Adam's transgression, came under condemnation to loss of life, to "perish," "to be as though they had not been." And only one way of escape from that condemnation has been provided (Acts 4:12.) Because of Christ's redemptive work all may escape perishing by accepting the conditions of life. During Christ's Millennial reign those whom Pilate slew, and those upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and all others of the race, sharers in the death penalty now upon all, will be released from the tomb, brought to a knowledge of Christ, his ransom work, and their privilege of repentance and full restitution to divine favor—life, etc. Thus seen, the Adamic death penalty was—to perish; but it will be canceled by Christ's Ransom, so far as it relates to those who, when brought to know the Redeemer, shall forsake sin. No longer should it be regarded as a perished condition, but as a "sleep" (John 11:11-14; Matt. 9:24; I Thes. 4:14; 5:10), from which the Redeemer will awaken all, to give each who did not have it before being overtaken by Adamic death, a full, individual opportunity to escape perishing and live forever. Yet, finally, all who shall fail to repent and lay hold upon the gracious Life-giver shall perish; they will fail to obtain the full

restitution provided; they shall never see [perfect] life [full restitution] for the wrath or condemnation of God will abide on them, condemning them to death as unworthy of life. As this will be their second condemnation, and an individual one, so the penalty will be the Second Death, which will not be general to the race, but only upon such individuals as refuse God's favor of reconciliation and life.

Under that blessed and wise rule of Christ as King of nations,* all the evil, depraved tendencies inherited from the fall and from the six thousand years of degradation, will be restrained, held in check, by superhuman wisdom, love and power; and all being brought to a clear knowledge of the truth in its every phase, all will be fairly and fully tested. The lovers of righteousness will be perfected and given control of the perfected earth, while those loving unrighteousness under that clear light of knowledge and experience will, as followers of Satan's example, be utterly destroyed in the Second Death. The first death is the destruction to which all were subjected by Adam's in, but from which all will be recovered by the Lord Jesus' sacrifice; and the Second Death is that destruction which will overtake those who, though redeemed by Christ from the first death, shall, by their own wilful conduct, merit and receive death again. This Second Death means their utter destruction, without hope of another redemption or resurrection, for Christ dieth no more. Nor could any good reason for their further trial be assigned; for the trial granted during the Millennial age under Christ, as Judge, will be a thorough and fair and individual and final trial.—I Cor. 15:25.

As our Lord Jesus used the calamities of his time as illustrating the just penalty against all who do not flee sin and lay hold upon the Redeemer and Life-giver, so we use them. We declare that destruction, perishing, is the just penalty of sin taught in the Scriptures. We denounce as un-Scriptural the eternal torment theory, so generally believed by God's children, as one of Satan's blasphemous slanders against God's character. And we proclaim that only by faith in the Redeemer, repentance and reformation, can the gift of God, eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, be obtained. Whoever hears the offer of life is responsible to the extent that he understands it; and according to God's promise and plan all mankind shall, at some time, either during the Gospel age, or during the coming Millennial Age, be brought to a full, clear appreciation of these conditions and opportunities, with fullest opportunities for repentance and life.

Calamities, then, are to be regarded, generally, as accidents, attributable to human imperfection and lack of experience, or to disturbances incidental to the preparation of the earth for its more quiet and perfect condition during the Sabbath, or Seventh Thousand years (the Millennium), and for its state of absolute perfection forever after the Millennium, during which, under Christ's direction, it shall be given its finishing touches and be made fully ready for the redeemed race, which his reign shall prepare also to rightly use and enjoy and rule the perfected earth. And man is exposed to these calamities and accidents, and not defended from them by his Almighty Creator, because, first, man is a sinner condemned to death, and is not to be spared from it, but must be allowed to pass through it; and secondly, by the present experiences with trouble and sorrow and pain, all of which are but elements of death, mankind is learning a lesson and laying up in store an experience with sin and its awful concomitants, sorrow, pain and death, which will be valuable in that Millennial Age, when each shall be required to choose between good and evil. The evil they now learn first; the good, and its blessed results and rewards, but dimly seen at present, will be fully displayed then—during the Millennium.

Special Providences for the Saints.

But some one inquires, If this be God's plan for redeeming the world by the death of his Son, and justifying and restoring all who believe in and accept of him, and obey and love righteousness, why did not the Millen-

* Not visible in flesh, however, for he is no longer flesh, having been highly exalted again after he had finished the flesh-life by giving it as our ransom price.

nial reign of Christ, with its favorable conditions and powerful restraints, begin at once, as soon as Christ had given the ransom-price at Calvary; instead of compelling those who would follow righteousness to "sail through bloody seas" and suffer for righteousness' sake? Or else, why not have postponed the giving of the ransom until the close of the six thousand years of evil and the inauguration of the Millennial reign? Or, at least, if the present order of events is best in the Divine wisdom, why does not God specially protect from calamities, accidents, sorrow, pain, death, etc., those who have fully accepted of Christ and who have sacrificed and are using their all in the service of righteousness?

Ah, yes! The subject would be incomplete were this point left untouched. The consecrated saints, the Church of the Gospel Age, are a "peculiar people," different from the remainder of the race; and God's dealings with them are peculiar and different also. Calamities, great and small, continually involve God's saints as well as the worldly, and seemingly as much by accident. But herein the Lord provides tests for our faith—intended either to turn us back, if we have not sufficient faith to permit further progress, or to develop and strengthen and increase our faith if we have it, and will exercise it under Divine direction.

The Lord's assurance to his truly consecrated, spirit-begotten children is, that all things shall work together for good to them. (Rom. 8:28.) God assures them that having entered into a new relationship with him, all of their affairs are henceforth his affairs and concern. Consequently, they may realize, fully, that however the world may be subject to accidents, incidental to present imperfect conditions under the curse, God's "little ones" are his peculiar care. Not a hair of their heads may suffer injury without his knowledge and consent. (Matt. 10:30; Luke 12:7.) How wonderful! And yet how reasonable when we recall the assurance that, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that reverence him."—Psalm 103:13.

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* Sinaitic MS. omits the words "and now is."

Pressing Toward the Mark

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things that are before, I press down upon the Mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus."—Phil. 3:13, 14.

WE ARE glad that, by the grace of God, we have been delivered from the terrible nightmare of eternal torment which for so many of us for years darkened our understanding of the Divine purposes set before us in the Bible. We are glad, not merely for our own sakes, but for the world of mankind, that we now see that the wilful rejectors of Divine Love and its provision will die the Second Death, perish, "Be as though they had not been." We are glad that the Apostle so explicitly stated this, saying, "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction"—a destruction from which there shall be no redemption, no recovery, no resurrection.—2 Thes. 1:9.

But it is not enough for us to know that our Creator has no fiendish intentions towards us. Rather this knowledge of the mercy and love of God should draw our hearts to him and incline us to love him in return, and to seek to do those things which would please God, and which incidentally would bring to us, according to his arrangement, the highest amount of favor and blessing. This also is the Apostle's suggestion, saying, "Not that we first loved God, but that he first loved us, and sent his Son to be a satisfaction for our sins." (1 John 4:10.) And again, "The love of Christ constraineth us, for we thus judge * * * that we henceforth live not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us."—2 Cor. 5:14, 15.

Our text addresses those who have responded to God's love, and who have become "followers of God, as dear children," followers of the Redeemer, "walking in his footsteps," as he hath set us an example. Notice the statement, "I count not myself to have apprehended"—to have grasped or taken possession of. In the preceding verse the Apostle tells us that the Lord apprehended him—laid hold upon him, when he was in a hopeless condition. He laid hold upon Saul because he was honest-hearted, even while wrong-headed. He opened Saul's eyes and gave him a helping hand out of his condition as a wanderer from God and a member of the fallen race. He offered to keep hold of him and to lead him, if he were willing, to exceeding glory and the divine nature, though the way would be a narrow and difficult and self-sacrificing one—impossible for all except those who at heart love the Lord and desire to avail themselves of the Lord's assisting grace. Note that the Apostle had not laid hold upon our Lord, but reversely the Lord had laid hold upon him, and had opened his eyes of understanding to discern the prize of the high calling, promising everything in the way of assistance and grace, if he continued sincerely earnest in his endeavor to grasp that prize, to lay hold upon it, to apprehend it.

Follow Us Who Follow Jesus.

It is a mistake to suppose that the Apostles and the early Church were called with any different calling or privilege from that which appertains to the entire Gospel Age. It is a mistake to suppose that the Scriptures recognize a clerical class and laity in the Church, and that the terms and conditions and narrow way and sacrifices and crown of glory at the end were intended only for the clergy. On the contrary the Scriptures assure us that the Church as a whole is a Royal Priesthood and that each faithful one is to be a sharer in the work of sacrificing, as well as in the coming glory of the Millennial Kingdom.

In order to understand what the Apostle meant by forgetting the things behind, let us note the context preceding and apply it individually, each to himself. St. Paul had been accused of disrespect to the Jewish Law of Circumcision, because he pointed out that it was not intended for nor necessary to the Gentiles—because he pointed out that it was merely a type of the cutting off or putting away of the filth of the flesh from our minds and hearts. But "circumcision of the heart" has in the Church taken the place of circumcision of the flesh commanded to the Jewish Church, whose day passed with Pentecost. The Apostle proceeds to show that if he chose to boast of his zeal for the Law, he would have as much to say for himself as could any Jew. But he declares that those things which he had before counted as gain, as something to be boastful of, as something to glory in, he now counted as loss and dross for the privilege of having a share with Christ in the sufferings of this present time, and by and by a share in his

glorious Millennial Kingdom. He was willing to count everything of his previous hopes and ambitions as "loss and dross," as unworthy of the slightest notice, because of the knowledge he had gained of Jesus as the Messiah, and because of the privilege that had come to him of being a follower of Jesus, in his footsteps of suffering in the present life and in joint-heirship with him in the glories of the future. These earthly things behind he was daily losing sight of, and hoped might never again have a place in his heart and ambitions, which were now turned in another direction entirely. And so, dear friends should it be with us.

That I May Know Him.

The Apostle, at the time he wrote these words, was far from ignorant of his Saviour, but intimates that the more he knew, the more he realized the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of God, "manifested in Jesus." He wanted to know him more and more. He wanted that intimate heart communion and fellowship which would enable him to take the Lord's view of every incident and experience of life, that thus he might be the partaker of the sufferings of Christ, and bearer of the cross of Christ daily. Nor was this the end of his ambitions. Beyond this, having heard of the Father's intention that all believers who would become "copies of his Son" should be sharers with him in his glorious nature and Kingdom, the Apostle was anxious to know the Lord to the full and to enter with him into the heavenly glory. That was the prize set before him in the Gospel of Messiah, which had changed his whole life current, so that those whom he once despised and persecuted he now loved and served; so that the things he used to enjoy were now repulsive, and the things he once disdained now filled his heart and enthused him and occupied his time and energy. The things before him were so glorious that the things behind, which once seemed grand, now seemed puny, insignificant, unworthy—dross.

What he saw before him he tells us. He calls it the "prize" and says that it is to be attained only by believers—and then only through consecration unto death. More than this, they would need a resurrection before they could enter into those glories; not such a resurrection as will be made possible to the remainder of Adam's race, but a special resurrection, called elsewhere the "First (chief) Resurrection." The Apostle here speaks of this resurrection, in which himself and all the faithful of the elect Church shall share as being a part of "His (Christ's) Resurrection." What can he mean? Was the resurrection of our Lord different from that which will come to mankind in general? Yes, indeed! Mankind in general will be privileged to be resurrected, raised up, not only out of the tomb to such a condition as is now enjoyed, but beyond this, gradually, during the Millennium, to be raised up, up, up to human perfection—to all that was lost in Adam and redeemed by Christ through his obedience even unto death, the death of the cross. But Christ's resurrection was different from that of the world. And the resurrection of the Church, "Which is his Body," will be like his, different from that provided for the world in general. (Eph. 1:23.) This resurrection of "The Christ (Jesus the Head and the Church, his Body)" the Apostle describes minutely in 1 Cor. 15:42-49.

He here speaks of the "First Resurrection," "His Resurrection," as "The Resurrection" of the special and peculiar class of the dead—"The dead in Christ"—those who lay down their lives in sacrificial service, as members of Christ. Note the Apostle's words, "If by any means I might attain unto THE resurrection of THE dead." (Phil. 3:11.) To attain this glorious resurrection, provided only for the spirit-begotten members of the Anointed, he was glad to have fellowship in the sufferings of Christ and to conform to his experiences so as to have share in his death. Is it so with us, dear brethren and sisters? Are we thus in earnest? Does the prize of the Divine calling thus shine before the eyes of our understanding, making every other ambition insignificant dross in comparison?

"This One Thing I Do."

Ah! this was the secret of the Apostle's great success—"This one thing I do." He concentrated his time, his thought, his energy, upon this one ob-

ject or goal, which proved the brighter and more valuable to his appreciation every hour. True, there were ordinary things of life, such as eating and drinking and resting and, at one time, tent-making, which occupied some of his hours. But these were not paramount, were not dominating. He aspired, not to be known as the greatest or most expert tent-maker. He aspired not to amass great wealth in that or any other labor or business. He lived not for his belly, nor did he, as a sluggard, waste valuable time in sleep. Every hour, every energy, had been devoted to God and his service—and was so applied, not of compulsion, nor of slavish fear, but out of a faithful heart, appreciating the privileges and anxious to show to the Lord his loving devotion. Is it so with us? If it has not been so with all of us in the past, shall it not be so with us now—our vow to the Lord renewed? Shall we not cast aside and forget the earthly aims and projects which occupied us and devote our time and energy and strength and thought to the Lord? Shall we not lay aside every weight, and whatever may be our besetting sin, and resolve or vow to the Lord today "To run with patience the race that is set before us?"—Heb. 12:1.

Whoever divides his heart, whoever attempts to serve the interests of several equally, will surely fail. Not only does such a half-way course fail to meet with the Divine approval as worthy of joint-heirship in the Kingdom with Christ, but it fails also to meet the world's approval and to gain the advantages of this present life. Each of us, therefore, should sit down and count the cost, and reap the benefits accruing. If we believe that it would pay us best to serve mammon, then we should serve mammon with all our hearts. But if experience and the Word of God bring us to the conclusion that only the service of God can bring us truest happiness in the present and the future life, and if we hear the Master's words to us, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," then let us determine to serve the Lord and not serve mammon, but merely use mammon and advantages of life as special assistances leading on to God, to righteousness, to self-sacrifices for joint-heirship in the Kingdom with our Lord and all the faithful.

Some Things to Be Remembered.

The Apostle surely never meant that everything behind should be forgotten; for, in that event, all the valuable lessons of life, which we have learned in the School of Christ, would be lost to us. We want to remember life's experiences. We want to profit by them. We desire that every failure shall be discerned, and its cause, that, by remembering the same, we shall not from similar weaknesses of the flesh, fall again into the same snare of the Adversary. We desire that all the lessons of life, which have cost us so much in the School of Christ, shall be cherished and grow more valuable to us every day. Let this also be our endeavor to see to it that no valuable lesson is lost, and that those lessons of the past are clearly and firmly held.

But, on the other hand, there are certain things connected with the experiences of God's children in the past that they are invited to forget, and to remember that God has forgotten them and blotted them out, in so far as there was a record against us.

But all this is faith; God's dealing with the Elect Church during this Gospel Age is on that basis. "We walk by faith, and not by sight." "Whoever cannot exercise faith cannot have the blessings now proffered to the believer, but must wait for the next Dispensation, in which sight will be granted and works will be required. And there are different degrees of faith; those standing the severest tests thereby evidence their preparation for God's favors of the future life beyond the veil. Let us, then, learn to exercise faith in all the glorious promises of God's Word, but not credulity in the words of man. One of the most beneficent uses of faith is in connection with the realization of the "forgiveness of our sins that are past, by the forbearance of God." In proportion as we can realize this and act upon it, it gives us confidence and joy and peace and preparation for further Divine leadings and blessings.

We have heretofore suggested what we now wish to further, if possible, emphasize; namely, the fact that there is a Divine standard of holiness, of righteousness, which, if it be not attained, will mean our non-acceptance by the Lord as members of his Elect Church; and, more than this, our unfitness for eternal life upon any plane. This standard of character, or mark of perfection, as we have pointed out, is not a standard or mark of fleshly perfection, because the Lord

accepts amongst his consecrated disciples those of various degrees of mental, moral and physical degeneracy. The justification which he provides makes up for the blemishes of each, for the more blemished as well as for the less blemished.

We are to bear in mind that there is no development in heaven, and hence perfection of character must be attained by the saints before they die. And, similarly, the world during the Millennium must attain this perfect development before the close of the age in order to be fit for eternal life, according to the Divine promise and standards.

Pressing Toward the Mark.

Is it asked to what extent will this standard of perfect love in the heart manifest itself in the flesh? We answer, that during the Millennial Age it will manifest itself perfectly in the flesh, for the world then will be judged according to the actual attainments in their flesh, and perfection by restitution will be not only possible, but required. But as for us of the Gospel Age, we who are being judged not according to the flesh but according to the spirit, to what extent will the new mind, the new nature, when at the Mark of Perfect Love, be able to govern and control the flesh? Our answer is, that the degrees of control will vary much according to the degrees of imperfection with which the mortal body is afflicted.

The only standard which we can set forth is that the new nature, new mind, new will, would be very regretful, very sorrowful, in respect to any laches, or errors, of its mortal body. The Lord would know (and perhaps the brethren also to some extent) of the New Creature's endeavor to control the mortal body by the degree of its grief in connection with every error, and its continually renewed effort to bring every power of the body, and even every thought, into complete subjection to the will of God in Christ. Any sympathy with sin is an evidence that the New Creature is not at the Mark. And no sympathy with sin, but constant endeavor for righteousness, is evidence that it is at the Mark.

Some may be at this Mark for a longer and some for a shorter period. Our Lord was surely at it from the beginning of his ministry. He was tested there, while at the Mark of perfect love. All the besetments of the Adversary and of the world failed to move him from that position of perfect love. He laid down his life at this Mark. St. Paul was surely at this Mark for many years before his actual death. He was continually laying down his life for the brethren, continually serving his enemies and praying for them; and surely he was continually loving and serving the Lord with his every power and talent.

No Christian should be satisfied with a long delay in reaching the Mark. The milk of the Word should be received, its strength should be appropriated, spiritual sight and spiritual energy should quickly follow, and strong meat of Divine Truth should speedily bring to full maturity the Christian character. And once attained, it should be held at any cost through all the trials and difficulties which the Adversary, and the world, and the flesh, might be permitted to bring against us. The severest temptations come after we have reached the Mark—temptations to slackness in service of God; temptations to withhold parts of our sacrifice; temptations to deal unkindly, uncharitably, unlovingly with the brethren, or unjustly with our neighbor, or ungenerously with our enemies. All of these must be resisted as we prize our eternal life, as we prize the promise of joint-heirship and fellowship with our Redeemer in His Kingdom.

Whoever sees this subject clearly must realize that as a Christian he has to do with a great proposition which will thoroughly test his loyalty, his courage, his zeal, his love. He will need to remember the Lord's comforting assurances of grace to help in every time of need if he would come off a victor and not be dismayed, nor have his courage beaten down by the Adversary's attacks.

So then, let us, with the Apostle, remember all of God's favors of the past, as well as of the present, and remember the lessons learned through our experiences, including our stumblings and failures. But let us put away every feeling of condemnation as respects the sins which God has freely forgiven, that "We may assure our hearts before him in love," and let us forget our worldly greatness, if we had any, our worldly prospects and aims and ambitions and triumphs and flatteries, and let us set our affections, aims, purposes, zeal, on the things that are before, and make haste towards them, with full assurance of faith in him who promised them. Thus may we come off conquerors and have most profitable years—by his grace!

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