

BIBLE GLEANINGS  
FROM CORNERS  
OF THE FIELD



*W. E. BURROUGHS.*

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CORNERS OF THE FIELD

BY THE  
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LONDON  
CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY  
SALISBURY SQUARE, E.C.

LONDON:  
PRINTED BY GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, LD.  
ST. JOHN'S HOUSE, CLERKENWELL, E.C.

## PREFACE.

THE Bible Gleanings which have been gathered together in this little volume, appeared from month to month during the year in the pages of the *Church Missionary Gleaner*. It was necessary to keep in mind those restrictions as to space which the Editor laid down, though not seldom those limits were somewhat overpassed. But the writer would wish his readers to think that these "Gleanings" are rather suggestive than exhaustive, rather an indication of lines of thought and meditation, which might be followed out by themselves, than an attempt on his part to lead them to the goal of any one such path. The members of the Gleaners' Union will remember that one of our objects, as faithful members of that worldwide Union, is to glean from the field of Scripture continually what may seem to us, under the Holy Spirit's teaching—to illustrate, or emphasize, or enforce the supreme duty of the world's evangelization. It is only when, with this purpose in view, we enter the harvest-field of Holy Scripture, that we discover how many "handfulls of purpose" have been left scattered all over its surface for our gathering and use. There are many

"corners of the field" seldom trodden or gleaned, where "precious seed" is still awaiting our finding. If the following pages send any dear fellow-gleaner to such *byeways* of revelation to replenish his basket and his store, they will not have been written in vain. It has been a labour of love to gather this modest sheaf; may the Lord of the Harvest, at Whose feet we lay it, graciously vouchsafe to accept and use it.

W. E. B.

*December, 1897.*

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# Bible Gleanings

from

## CORNERS of the Field.

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### “HIS PART THAT TARRIETH BY THE STUFF.”

“Thou shalt not go over . . . But —.”—(*Deut.* iii. 27, 28.)

God speaks, refusing to grant the longing desire of His servant in one direction, while at the same time He gives Moses opportunity of large and practical help in the very work which he may not directly take up. “Thou shalt *not* go over . . . But —.” Canaan was for Moses what the world is for you and me—the great plain and sphere for the fulfilment of God’s plans and purposes. The one as much as the other is “the promised land.” Every square yard of Canaan was to be God’s, every country and island is to be Christ’s. Moses’ ambition was to be God’s instrument in accomplishing this glorious end. His eagle eye was not “dim”; 120 years had not abated his “natural force.” Oh, to be allowed to lift up the wonder-working rod against the fortresses and

foes of Canaan, as forty years before against the might of Egypt and the rush and tide of the Red Sea! But no! "Thou shalt *not* go over."

Share we this strong desire? Have we grasped God's changeless *purpose*, God's eternal *plan*, to which are linked Christ's assured *Presence* and the Holy Spirit's *Power*? If so, has not your heart longed, has not your hand reached out, for a share in this enterprise? Have you prayed like Moses (ver. 25): "Let me go over, I pray thee"? And has the answer come to you clearly, unmistakably, by ways of providence which cannot be avoided, by home-ties which must not be loosed without forsaking a God-given place (*cf.* St. Mark v. 19), by lack of physical power, or by reason of advancing years. "Thou shalt not go over"? Then for you, as for Moses, there is a further "word of the Lord," soothing the disappointed spirit, compensating for the denial of your request, and assigning to you a very blessed and real share in your Lord's high enterprise and glorious work. Only be sure you have *really* asked your Master what His will about you is; only be sure He has said, "Thou shalt not go over;" then listen, as Moses did, to what follows, "Thou shalt not go over . . . But——." The Divine Will for Moses was expressed concerning *three things* which he was to do.

1. Moses was to climb to the top of Pisgah and gain a widely-reaching—probably a Spirit-aided—view of the promised land. He was "to see it with his eyes;"—



certainly not to gratify curiosity, which God never does (St. Luke xiii. 23 ; Acts i. 7), but for practical purposes, as shall presently appear. Who can tell what in range and detail that "Pisgah-view of Palestine" included ! Who can doubt that this servant of the Lord saw more than fertile plains and hillsides of terraced vines, even the strong fortresses, the embattled citadels, the entrenched fastnesses of Canaan ; Moses saw, surveyed, and sympathized with all that lay before God's soldiers who *were* to go over, and who were to win that land for God. Have not we a similar duty, for it is more than a privilege and an interest—we, who must stay "on this side Jordan" ? Does not the Divine command ring down the ages to us, "Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes" (ver. 27) ? Are we as well acquainted with the great Mission-field as we should be ? Do we know not only the past victories and the present triumphs of God's cause, but do we know, so as to sympathize with them, the difficulties and dangers which lie before those whom God has "sent forth" ? Stopped as we are from service in one corner of God's field, are we gaining, what could not else be secured, a grand *coup d'œil* of it all ? Our own *Church Missionary Gleaner*, if *honestly* studied month by month, would help to this ; but some of us should by now be wishful for an even wider range, such as the *C.M. Intelligencer* would afford, or the publications of kindred societies would make possible. How else can you *pray* as you should ? How else can you

*give* as you should? "Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes" (*cf.* St. John iv. 35).

2. Moses was to come down from Pisgah to choose and send forth a *substitute*, and that substitute was to be found *in his own house* (Exod. xxiv. 13, xxxiii. 11). God's work must not suffer because Moses may not go. Another must be found and commissioned. Dear reader, the matter, so far as you are concerned, is not ended when God has said to you, "Thou shalt not go"; to you and me this added "But" of our Master's suggests a grave responsibility and a grand possibility! The Levite was the *substitute* for the other tribesmen of Israel in the direct service of God (Num. iii. 12, 13), a substitute whom it was to be the duty and privilege of those tribes to support and keep (Num. xviii. 23, 24). To-day county associations, congregations, Gleaners' unions are awaking to this call of God, but we want the *individual* to face it too, the parent searching for God's Joshua in his own home, the pastor seeking for a younger and fitter man in his own congregation, and this one and that contributing to the "O.O.M." more proportionably to what it really implies, even that O.O.M. goes to do work in *my* place, work which I myself should now be engaged in had not my Master said, "Thou shalt not go over . . . but charge Joshua." How many are there who will read these lines who could, and *therefore should* have not O.O.M., but M.O.M. ("my own Missionary") in the foreign field?

3. Lastly, Moses was "to charge Joshua and encourage him, and strengthen him." By the counsel, the prayers, the sympathy, the help of a man who could not "go over," his substitute was to go "strong and of a good courage." The application to ourselves is obvious enough. We have not done with our "O.M." when he or she has been chosen and supported. Now comes in the use of our Pisgah view of Palestine, now can we assure our substitute of weekly, if not daily, interest and intercession. How often would such an one be "encouraged" and "strengthened" by a letter, a magazine with some helpful article which has cheered yourself, by a little Christmas or New Year's gift reminding of tender and real bonds uniting you and him, because he is doing not God's work only, *but yours also!*

Surely here is blessed practical work for us who stay at home; and in no spirit of disappointment, with no sense of being "shut out" of glorious work, nor of being "set aside," do we hear our wise and loving Master say, "Thou shalt not go over . . . But —." Let our reply be, "Thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint" (2 Sam. xv. 15).

## ABNER.—(1) THE LIVING INFLUENCE.

“Now then do it : for the Lord hath spoken.”—(2 *Sam.* iii. 18.)

“THERE was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David” (ver. 1). Progress there was towards the accomplishing of God’s purpose ; but all too slow, till Abner arose, a true hero of faith, to teach us, as the Baptist’s ministry in New Testament days, how much one earnest-minded man may do in a short time.

It matters not for my purpose to dwell on what led “the Son of Ner” to enlist in David’s cause. He would seem to have been influenced largely by a desire to follow the purposes of God in His Word. Certainly there is no grander missionary *resolve* than ver. 9, 10, nor any more splendid instance of whole-hearted consecration to God’s work than his story reveals.

Abner’s resolve is speedily put into execution :—

I. He deals with his new king (ver. 12). How simple that *question*, “Whose is the land?” Have we not often so pleaded with our King, as we thought of Ps. ii. 8 or Acts i. 8? How earnest the *request*, “Make thy league with me!” It was a veritable “offer of service” that day. David and Abner should henceforth be “workers together.” Hence the *promise*, “My hand shall be with thee to bring about all Israel unto thee,”

and across the intervening spaces the true-hearted Benjamite reached his hand to David, and David on his part grasped it, and said, "Well, I will make a league with thee" (ver. 13). Have we had with *our* King some such solemn, blessed, resultful business?

II. Next Abner had "communication" (ver. 17) with the elders of Israel. Having pledged himself to be God's agent in furthering God's plans for David, he proceeds to enlist others in the good cause. And what a wonderfully suggestive "communication" was this!—

1. He reminds these men of past longings and desires, which, however, had never hitherto been translated into action. "Ye sought for David in times past to be king" (ver. 17), earnest hopes, loyal aspirations for David's throne to be established, and God's will done, but nothing more! Dear reader, we have had our "times past" of talking and wishing and hoping about the days when Jesus shall be King; but oh, has there been the effort parallel with hope and desire? Many never think of this great work at all—they know nothing of it. We *do* know; we *do* think; we *do* pray; but what are we *doing*?

2. Abner reminds these elders of God's promise—he quotes God's own words: "The Lord hath spoken, saying." This man, more used to the sword than to the roll of inspired prophecy, gathers the elders (ver. 18) for a *Bible reading* on God's purposes as revealed in God's Word. Oh, never was cause better or more truly

laid than was David's that day when the son of Ner based his appeal for help on no transient, no personal, no local considerations, but on the granite rock of God's changeless purpose, of God's Holy Word. Let our recruiting of the ranks of helpers in God's missionary enterprise be like Abner's on the warrant of God's Word. Appeals to the sympathy and kindness of Christian hearts are not to be omitted ; it is well to recognize and urge the remedial effects of the Gospel, when applied as a balm and solace for the wrongs and sufferings of Heathenism ; we may often awaken a responsive chord when relating what the mission school can do to elevate, or the mission hospital to soften a savage nature—but never do we appeal so incontestably, never do we plead so powerfully as when, like Abner, we point to the promises, the hopes, the commands which God has given us in this behalf.

3. He reminds the elders of the part they should take in the matter. "Now then do it: for —." Abner would have them regard God's promises as for them God's commands. Some of us, perhaps, are waiting for "a call," clear, definite, personal. But does God always give this? Did He here say to each elder, "Go thou and make David king"? I trow not. Abner's view was that God's revealed plan, His express promise to David, *constituted a call* to each who knew them, and therefore cried, "Now then do it!" How or where, each hearer should obey, it was not for Abner then, nor

is it for us now, to say. We claim but this, could we claim less? that each of us should respond, with upward glance, "Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do?" (Acts ix. 6).

III. Lastly, notice the result. Abner came to David with some visible, tangible fruit—twenty men, the first-fruits of the harvest he hoped for, when he should "gather all Israel unto my lord the king" (ver. 21); and David fed and feasted Abner and his band, and very sweet and suggestive was their intercourse, till David sent them away "in peace."

How frequently our King deals so with His workers, making it their "meat" to do God's will and work (St. John iv. 34). There never is, nor can be, a necessary divorce between real work for God and the strengthening and refreshing of our own souls. Many a soul lacks the feasting because he has not been even "gleaning" (Ruth ii. 14).

"And he went in peace" (ver. 21). Strange words when you remember who he was that went and whither; the warrior "son of Ner" to (as he thought) conflict and toil! It is the privilege of God's soldier to have peace even in warfare (Eph. vi. 15), to know what Wordsworth calls, "Central peace subsisting at the heart of boundless agitation."

Yes! Abner, son of Ner, may we follow thee! and like thee, be true to our God, His Word, His King! and find in so being strength and peace.

## ABNER.—(2) THE BURIED WORKER

“Died Abner as a fool dieth?”—(2 *Sam.* iii. 33.)

It is essential to our point to notice that these words of the mourning king were spoken as a *question*. How often have we heard them read as a sad record of fact; whereas they are just the reverse,—David's triumphant challenge to his weeping company and to himself amid his tears: “Died Abner as a fool dieth?” Nay, nay! Rather, “Know ye not that there is a *prince* and a *great man* fallen this day in Israel?” (ver. 38).

We suggested in our last chapter, when dealing with the commencement of Abner's service for the king, that his story supplied an Old Testament parallel to the remarkable New Testament ministry of John the Baptist. In truth, the parallelism may be very fully worked out, not only as to the spirit which moved each, the position which each occupied between an old *régime* and a new, the hold which each gained on the popular ear, the success which so quickly each attained, but also as to the briefness of their respective services (a few months in the Baptist's case, and perhaps only a few weeks in the Benjamite's), as to the seemingly premature close of



each, when at the zenith of their efforts—and that by a murderer's hand—and, not least, in the fact—patent in each case after the worker was dead and gone—that he had *not* died prematurely, he had *not* been called away until his work was well and fully done. The kingdom of Israel *was* made ready for its king, David ; the way *was* prepared for Jesus Christ ! The graves of Abner and of the Baptist may well be venerated as “ holy ground ” by every worker for God ; here a king and nation wept and mourned, there the Lord Himself in spirit and sympathy grieved (St. Matt. xiv. 12, 13) “ Died Abner as a fool dieth ? ”

It is interesting to remember that we have at least two inspired narratives of a “ fool's ” dying—one in the Old Testament (1 Sam. xxv. 25, 37, 38), the other in the New Testament (St. Luke xii. 20) ; the one a real history, the other a parable. And the features in each case are strangely similar—in each prosperity and wealth accumulating, but in each isolation of heart, selfishness of life, and an entire forgetfulness of the claims of God and man. The heart became “ dead within ” and “ as a stone ” long before it ceased to beat ! And then death (like Abner's and the Baptist's) swift and sudden, and in each case a great burial, and no weeping ; nor any to ask, “ Died he as a fool dieth ? ” Because there was no question about it all, for God had said, “ Thou fool ! ”

It is in the light of such scenes as these that we can revert gladly to the event of the text, and can hear some

of that rallying tone which, beyond a doubt, overmastered his grief and sorrow, as David said or sang, "Died Abner as a fool dieth?"

We refer to all this because it may supply to our questioning hearts, or through us to our questioning friends, a reply to the objection so often urged when young lives are laid down for Jesus in the mission-field. The pouring forth of such preciousness from its broken casket calls out the old complaint, "To what purpose is this waste?" (St. Matt. xxvi. 8); young lives like Abner's, "thrown away"! Of course we must all die somewhere and somehow, but to die away from home (like Abner)—alone (like Abner)—perhaps at the hand of violence (like Abner)—is . . . well, folly! Friend, "Died Abner as a fool dieth?" He went forth because he grasped God's plan and purpose, and longed to have hand and part in their fulfilling (ver. 9—18); so did they. He went forth because his king needed him—*sent him* (ver. 21); so did they. His was a *successful* life. He accomplished in a brief space what he aimed at doing; so did they. His was a *resultful* life. The true and grand results of a nation gathered around David are rightly traceable to Abner, though unrealized till he was gone. Perhaps it was Abner's death, rather than his life, which effected this. The mourning hearts which gathered round the dead worker and his weeping king, clung to that king, and espoused his cause ever after. And we know, though but in part, how, round such graves of God's young ser-

vants as consecrate the soil of India, Africa, China, hearts have met all the world over, and, amid their sorrow, have pledged themselves for ever to the dead ones' King and cause. Abner's was a life of happy service up to the end (ver. 34). Wonderful description! No bonds, no fetters, no hindrances—one moment the king's service here, the next the King's Presence above! This is seldom the lot of those who grow old in service (*cf.* St. John xxi. 18). Then by age, infirmity, decreasing powers, the hands *are* bound and the feet put into fetters, till death at last is Christ's messenger "to open the prison to them that are bound." But who such would not gladly have gone home long before in a flash of light, like Abner? "Died Abner as a fool dieth?" His was an *honoured* life. How touching the one sentence (ver. 31), "And King David himself followed the bier." "King David!" The expression is not often used, and always in connexion with some stately, solemn event in his after-life. *Here we find it for the first time.* Yes, for it was the dead man who had done most and best to make that mourner, in fact as well as in title, "King David." "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. cxvi. 15). Much has been done by the lives of His people; much, too, by their deaths (Judges xvi. 30). The bridge which spans the river, and unites two shores, has its foundation laid on stones which had to be lowered to their quiet resting-places before the superstructure could be raised.

Abraham's first possession in Canaan was a *grave*; and, when he laid Sarah there, he practically pledged himself and his descendants to claim that land as theirs. No matter if, like Abner's, those earnest missionary lives were *short*. "Short" and "long" are terms which God knows not Himself (2 Pet. iii. 8), nor applies to others. In our Church's calendar are found, *side by side*, the holy days sacred to the memory of St. Stephen and of St. John—of him who *first* of Christ's Church went home to God, and of him who lingered *longest and last* of all the Apostolic band! No life is short, none such is prematurely closed, which has finished the work God gave it to do.

"Died Abner as a fool dieth?" "Let my last end be like his!" (Num. xxiii. 10).

## THE HINTERLAND OF HEATHENISM.

“Go out, quickly, into the . . . city! Go out into the highways . . . that My House may be filled!”—(*St. Luke* xiv. 21-23.)

It is no childish fancy who sees the oak in the divided acorn; the poet Campbell gives the aggregate of wide experience, when he says “Coming events cast their shadows before:” the eclipse has its forerunner in the “penumbra,” and the rising sun is heralded by the rosy dawn.

So before Jesus spake that mighty “Go ye,” which is yet to awake the Church of Christ to her world-wide mission, He uttered a like command under very different conditions, each time with a gathering force and an ever-distincter missionary emphasis.

We must not include in this reference the first recorded “Go” of Christ (*St. Matt.* viii. 32). That sharp monosyllable was a permission, not a commission—a service of death, not of life.

We would rather refer to such passages as *St. Matt.* ix. 13. “Go and learn” the principle underlying true missionary work, or *St. Matt.* x. 6, “Go rather”—restricting for the moment to the Jew what was yet to be for all; or again (*St. Luke* ix. 60)—“Go thou, and

preach"—laying the responsibility of proclaiming "the Kingdom of God" upon a larger than the Apostolic band.

And so we reach our parable—with its repeated, emphatic, urgent—"Go! . . . go!"

I. We must notice that the first "Go" was uttered by reason of an earlier "Come" (ver. 17), which had been neglected or despised. Of course we readily apply this to the Jews of our Lord's day. They had their opportunity, and from them the call was to spread to where it had not yet been heard, although the Apostles should have to leave behind them a very dark Jerusalem, a very partially Christianized Judæa, a very poorly evangelized Galilee. We are less inclined to apply such a parable to Christian England. Yet no country has had such Gospel privileges, nor for so long a time, as our land has had. If any part of England is dark to-day, it is because eyes and hearts there are closed against the light. Where is the town, or village, or hamlet, in which the name of Jesus is unheard, unknown? where there is no prayer, no Bible, no Sabbath? Surely it is where the Master's "Come, for all things are now ready" has become an "old, old story" that we may well listen for the "Go out quickly" elsewhere!

II. The first mission of the servants was to streets and lanes of the city, i.e. to places more or less obvious as fields for their labours, but which had hitherto been outside the range and reach of the message. And there

is furnished to them a list of qualifications for invitation—"the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" ver. 21 (they had been already referred to ver. 13). What a Lazar-house that banqueting-hall must have seemed! But the Church of Christ is no Lazar-house; the Gospel calls to *wholeness*, as well as to pardon and rest. David welcomed the poor cripple, "lame upon both his feet" (2 Sam. ix. 13), and gave him place at his own table, "as one of the King's sons;" but Mephibosheth lived and died in helplessness. Not so the Gospel for the Heathen which carries with it as much of Power as of Love. The "poor" Prodigal is clothed with the best robe (St. Luke xv. 22); the "maimed" has his withered hand "restored" for service (St. Matt. xii. 13); the "halt" walks, and leaps, and praises God (Acts iii. 8, 9); and the "blind" sees and follows Jesus in the way (St. Mark x. 52). What transformation scenes do our mission-fields supply! There is not a missionary of any experience who could not attest, as few home-workers could, that the Gospel "is the Power of God unto salvation" (Rom. i. 16).

III. It is done! The message has been delivered—and not uselessly,—but the Master's heart is not satisfied, because the Master's house is not "full" (ver. 23). King Saul noticed *one* empty seat at his table (1 Sam. xx. 25-27). The Great King will not come in to see the guests till His House is filled. It is these *empty places* which delay the King's return. Hence, the second

Mission—"Go out" again—and the range of service is widened, the servants are bid think of and go to "regions beyond." Now, for the first time, the "hinterland" of a partially evangelized heathendom is brought within the recognized field of effort. For this, the command had to be repeated: for this fresh energy had to be put forth, "Compel them to come in,"—for this, a new prospect of success, hitherto unachieved, was opened up. The House should be now "filled"! Our story goes no further. But who has not read with gladness the *unrecorded sequel*? The messengers, who embraced and acted on the wider command, were splendidly rewarded. It was theirs to see their Lord's purpose accomplished—their Lord's House filled—their Lord's Heart glad! Is not this the work for to-day? Have not recent events made possible, as never before, the evangelization of the hinterland of Africa from the West—as twenty years ago a way to the heart of that dark Continent was opened up from the East? May not the close of the Church Missionary Society's first—perhaps her last—century find us responding to that second urgent "Go out"? Then for us may there not be some near and glorious result? Shall we see the command fulfilled? Shall we see the House filled? Shall we see the Lord's return? To this we are called—for this let us pray—towards this let us work!



## THE CHURCH'S MISSIONARY WORK A LESSON-BOOK FOR ANGELS.

“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.”—(*Eph.* iii. 10.)

How little we know about “the principalities and powers in heavenly places”; how gladly would we know more of those who in ages to come shall share our worship—perhaps our service also. What we do know has been “written for our learning,” and should be “profitable for instruction” (2 Tim. iii. 16). Here are three matters we may safely conclude:—

1. That as angels were interested spectators of “the world’s birthday” (Job xxxviii. 7), and shall be active agents at the close of this dispensation (St. Matt. xiii. 41), so they are often now instruments of God’s providence (Ps. xci. 11; St. Matt. xviii. 10).

2. That as angels sang over the manger of Bethlehem, ministered to the Saviour’s needs under the olives of Gethsemane, occupied His empty tomb in the garden, and came forth to announce His return to glory, so they are deeply interested in, and wondrously sympathize with, the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on earth (St. Luke xv. 7, 10).

3. That as angels are learners in God's school, and long to know more of Him Who is their Creator and Lord, so they are permitted to advance in such knowledge by the study of the Gospel plan, and its practical unfolding in the story and work of Christ's Church on earth.

It is upon this last point St. Paul throws light in Eph. iii. 10—one of those flashes of search-light upon far-away things which can only be accounted for by Inspiration. The wording of the passage goes even beyond the statement of the fact that angels *do* learn of God's wisdom by means of His Church; it tells us that one purpose at least which God had in the Divine plans for that Church, its growth and service down here, was the instruction of His unfallen creatures.

Briefly notice—(i.) The scholars. (ii.) Their lesson. (iii.) The Book wherein it lies.

(i.) Angelic beings are learners. Heaven is a school as well as earth. It is Life eternal to know God and Jesus Christ (St. John xvii. 3), and it is the occupation of an endless life to know God better. St. Peter tells us that the angels "desire to look into" the Gospel with its story of the sufferings of Christ, the glory which should follow, and the missions of the Holy Ghost (1 Pet. i. 11, 12)—*παρακύψαι* "to stoop down for the purpose of looking closely into." What a vivid picture does this one word supply!

Do we realize this feature of our future state? Still learning! We shall but leave "the lower school" when

we have closed the lesson-book of this life, with its pages blotted by many a tear! Yea, this is but God's "preparatory school," wherein the chief lesson to be learnt is *obedience*. How strange to reflect that the Son of God came down to earth to learn what that meant (Heb. v. 8).

"Principalities and powers." There are degrees and ranks among the great hosts above, as amongst those who once were there (Eph. vi. 12). "Thrones, dominations, principedoms, virtues, powers." What vistas are here of ordered service, of progress, of education in heaven.

(ii.) The lesson is the manifold wisdom of God. The word used here is a beautiful and exceptional one, and may be rendered "very variegated," "many tinted," as the diverse blooms of a summer garden. God's wisdom is manifested in creation, in nature, in Providence, and perhaps in many another way, well known to angel-minds. But this "manifold" attribute of His has yet new and more glorious forms in which to reveal itself, and even seraphs may learn what they never dreamt of before; so they are permitted to study the volume of God's wisdom as displayed in His grace—in Redemption, in Sanctification, i.e. in His Church—"that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by means of the Church, the manifold wisdom of God." It is then of God, as "the only wise God," the angels would learn more and more (Rom. xvi. 27; 1 Tim. i. 17; Jude 25), and this may be found in the story of Christ's Church in

fuller measure than in the creation of a universe, or in the Providence of a millennium.

(iii.) Hence the Apostle says that the Church is a lesson-book for angels. It might be such in any part of its wondrous history. The conception of the idea, the inception of the plan, the slow but sure development of the purpose, the assured success of the design—and all at such cost to the Holy Trinity—reveal God's love and wisdom to the angels in a new and dazzling light. But St. Paul dwells only on one feature of the Church as displaying the wisdom of God, viz. her missionary character, and her missionary work.

That this is the Apostle's point and argument we must leave each reader to see for himself in Eph. i.-iii., and specially chap. iii.—the most wonderful parenthesis in the Bible, and almost the fullest and clearest declaration of the evangelization of the Heathen as the latest revelation of God's will, and the highest service of His Church. Surely there must be something very special in such missionary work that God should select it, not as the "Primer" for beginners in His school, but as the advanced study for intelligences who have for ages been learning of Him! Whether this missionary work reveals God's wisdom in His choice of time, or agency, or weapon, or in its steps of progress and triumph, we are forced to the conclusion that here more than elsewhere does His "manifold wisdom" shine forth. As to time, this work was given to Christ's Church as soon as that Church was

formed (Acts i.). As to agency, it was "unlearned and ignorant" men, but men "full of the Holy Ghost," who "went forth everywhere." As to weapon, it was only and always the Gospel message, the story of the Cross, which proved "the power of God unto salvation"; and as to progress, it was great or small just as the Church of Christ itself was warm or cold in love, was true or faithless to its Lord's command, was marked by consecration or the opposite in its life at home.

We must stop. Let it suffice to remark in closing how glorious must that work be to which cherubim and seraphim look for fresh views of God! What dignity gathers round the missionary's toil, amid the ice and loneliness of Blacklead Island, or amid the teeming millions of China or India, when we think of angels hovering round to learn how the love of Christ can constrain, and how the Holy Spirit can work so as neither Gabriel nor Michael could teach them! How solemn the responsibility on us Christ's servants on earth to let this highest, chiefest glory of God shine out in all its brightness! How grave the fault if the Church on earth should be so "busy here and there" (1 Kings xx. 40) about other things as to neglect or but half do that work for which it was founded! "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor. vi. 3). That may be ours hereafter. But, know ye not that we may *teach* angels now?

## OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY.

“ Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time  
(as this ? ”—*Esther* iv. 14.)

MILLIONS of hearts in that Empire of Great and Greater Britain upon which the sun never sets are beating this leafy month of June in unison and perfect accord. One feeling is abroad—gratitude to God for such a day as June 22nd, 1897 ; for it means that God has given us such a sovereign as never yet reigned on England's throne, and for such a time as none ever sat on human throne before. Yes ! this is a record month ! the world has never seen its equal, nor, probably, ever shall. Every quarter of the globe, one-fifth of the world's vast population will send heavenwards its note of praise—God save our Queen ! For us the prevailing thought as we glance backwards over the sixty years of Queen Victoria's reign is this—What zeal and blessed advance there has been in the effort to evangelize the world ! The report read in Exeter Hall on May 1st, 1838, of the C.M. Society's work in the year our gracious Queen ascended the throne records an income of not quite 83,500*l.*, a force of but 168 European labourers in the mission-field—exclusive of wives—and of only twenty-five men and one woman added to the forces, of whom only nine were in holy orders. To-day we thank God for an income of 297,626*l.* for 1036 European labourers, male and female, and for a contingent last year of eighty-two added to

our foreign force, while we can tell of missions opened during those sixty years in such fields as Yoruba, Niger, E. Equatorial Africa, Palestine, Persia, Punjab, Mauritius, South China, Mid China, Japan, and British Columbia.

With this review in mind may we not say to our beloved Queen in the words of Mordecai, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" If under God we owe to the wise rule of our Queen the peace, the prosperity and the extension of England's realm which have marked these sixty years, have not these very things favoured and fostered that marvellous spread of missionary enterprise which can only be gauged when we compare 1837 with 1897?

But while the words above quoted seem to have a reference to her who is just now in all our hearts and prayers, may they not speak their lesson also to us humble folk in *our* little kingdom?

I. *Position is given by God.*—"Thou art come to the kingdom." We remember how strangely the Jewish maiden came to be the queen of 127 provinces; we can see God's hand in every stage. No less is there divine assignment of *our* places. Eph. iv. 11 leaves no doubt on our minds that the sphere each occupies, from highest to humblest in the Church of Christ, is "given" by God. Let this still every ambition, quiet all restlessness, and promote true contentment and a desire to do our duty in the place God has given us.

II. *Position has its purpose*—"for such a time as this."

Opportunity is at least one of the measures of responsibility. The C.M. Report of 1837-8 speaks of the circumstances of that day thus :—"The moment is pressing . . . the moment is also favourable"—for new efforts and larger aims. How much more can we use those words of 1897-8? If so, who knoweth whether thou, dear reader, thou with thy gifts and capacities, thou with thy means and opportunities, thou with thy powers of influencing others, or of interceding with God, art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? When we know that within *two minutes* every part of Queen Victoria's realm can know, on June 22nd, that London is raising outside St. Paul's Cathedral its psalm of praise to God—what may not be done in spreading the message of the King of kings at "such a time as this" to all parts of the world?

III. *Failure on our part will not defeat God's purpose,* however it may delay it, but "enlargement and deliverance shall arise from another place." Where that "other place" was, Mordecai could not have told Esther. Just then there seemed no other quarter whence help could come save through her. But the aged servant of God well knew that God could provide Himself a help even if she failed. Let us remember we are in no wise necessary to God. "As truly as He lives all the earth shall be filled with His Glory" (Num. xiv. 21). It is for us to say whether or not we shall be God's "fellow-workers" in this, or if we shall allow "enlargement and deliver-



ance" (beautiful C.M.S. words!) to arise from another place.

IV. But worse; failure on our part must mean terrible *personal loss*. "Thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed." Perhaps England's work for God, at home and abroad, has been the very salt which has preserved her still from that destruction which has touched already some lands that were greater sixty years ago than they are to-day. There is no surer path to self-destruction than concentration of thought on self-preservation. There is a loving of life which is in truth losing it, and there is a losing of life which is truest saving of it (St. John xii. 25); cf. 2 Kings vii. 9; "If we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us," &c.

V. *Prayer must mark our work*. Esther will only enter on her enterprise upheld by public and private prayer—three wonderful days (ver. 16). Let it be said we have not nearly enough prayer in our missionary work. How small a part of our anniversaries is given to prayer. If the 3000 people gathered twice in Exeter Hall on May 4th, had met to talk to God about the past and future as well as to hear what God had done for them, there would be more wonderful things to record next May than have ever yet been told! The story of successful missionary work will ever be the story of prayer heard and answered.

VI. *Self-sacrifice* also marked Esther's work. "I perish, I perish!" She went with her life in her hand. So do

our beloved missionary brothers and sisters. But why should we at home know little or nothing of a like spirit? Robert Stewart used often to say, "you will never evangelize the world until you know what 'self-sacrifice' means." The missionary followers of Jesus must be "crusaders," each must go forth "bearing His cross" (St. John xix. 17).

You remember the blessed and glorious sequel. It reads like the last report of the Church Missionary Society which shall ever be written before "the end come." Esther's enterprise succeeded, prayer was heard, self-sacrifice was rewarded, and the king's message, in the king's name, went forth "to the rulers of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, an hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language (B. & F.B.S.), by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries. . . . And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, they had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day" (Esther viii. 9, 10, 17). And all this through *one*, who humbly, prayerfully, self-denyingly, used her position and opportunity to speed a message of life and joy and peace where were mourning and sorrow (ch. ix. 22).

Reader, shall you and I go and do likewise? "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the Kingdom for such a time as this?"

## THE WIDOW OF SAREPTA; OR GOD'S WORK FIRST.

“Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son.”—(1 *Kings* xvii. 13.)

WE read this story with New Testament light upon it (*cf.* St. Luke iv. 26). Jesus quotes it in illustration of the circumstances which led Him to exclude His own city, Nazareth, from a share in such wondrous works as had already been performed at Capernaum, and which had even reached Gentile homes and hearts (see St. Matt. iv. 13—16). Naturally this exclusion provoked complaint amongst the men of Nazareth, and here in their synagogue Jesus explains it, not by the exercise of a Divine prerogative of selection, but by the absence in the people of Nazareth of that reverence, faith, and trust, without which even He “could do no mighty work” (St. Matt. xiii. 58). To them Jesus was but the carpenter’s son (*ver.* 55). In Nazareth He could find no material on which to work in cleansing and healing. For this He had to look and go elsewhere. So had Elijah and Elisha in olden days. There were many widows in Israel, but none to hear God’s command

and obey it ; and Elijah had to go to a Gentile home in Sarepta to find a willing and obedient heart, even as afterwards a Gentile could by faith and obedience gain healing in the waters of Jordan, while leper sons of Abraham died in their unbelief.

Thus the New Testament explains as in perfect accord with its own principles events of Old Testament record; and we may study the case of this humble Gentile worker for God as suggesting many lessons for our learning. Especially do we notice her acceptance of life's duties *in God's order*. There is a Divine order in things, and we lose much, perhaps we even err much, if we classify these same things in another order of our own.

Here are a few suggestive passages which will repay study. (St. Matt. v. 24, vi. 33, vii. 5, xxii. 38, xxiii. 26 ; 2 Cor. viii. 5.) How important then is it for us to ask, "Am I setting things in their Divine order? Is God's 'first' my 'first'? or am I seeking to establish as my 'first' what God would not put 'first'?" (*cf.* St. Matt. viii. 21). Let the widow of Sarepta teach us.

(i.) Here was a *heart* which in Heathenism had yet learnt to know and obey God's voice. How much is suggested by those words, "I have *commanded* a widow woman there to sustain thee"; even as the ravens were "commanded" (ver. 4). Somehow God laid His command upon that lone heart because He found there a heart ready out of its poverty to give at His bidding "all the living which she had" (St. Luke xxi. 4). We, too,

are "commanded," and in a "more sure word" than could have spoken in the little room at Sarepta. God has not left us in doubt as to what His work claims at our hands.

(ii.) Here was a *Divine order* given. A duty no less dear to a mother's heart than it is clear on Bible page, is not now to be "first." That which represents God's demand, God's work, claims priority! "Do as thou hast said, but . . . *first!*" Parents, is not this a very searching word for you and me? It would have been comparatively easy for this mother to prefer the prophet's supply to the satisfying of *her own* hunger, but oh, how hard to have to take the *child's* last morsel and prepare it for that stranger! Yet this was the command—the demand—God first! Let us remember that this must be the rule in every home, in every family circle where Jesus is acknowledged as Lord. This must settle matters of education, of amusement, of expenditure; "tarry ye here . . . that I may know what the Lord will say unto me" (Num. xxii. 19). And yet it is not too much to say that an observance of "God first" will just *revolutionize* many a household order, and upset many a Christian man's plans. Things which seem as plainly a primary duty as the feeding of a hungry child may, in the light of God's Own Spirit, be seen to give way to somewhat else, across which God (not man) has written "*first.*" What an income would flow into His treasury for work at home and abroad, if when allocating our means

to our needs we said, "God first," instead of—as so many—providing for all possible contingencies, and then from the little residuum giving to His work!

(iii.) Here was a *promise* given. Seldom is there a command without its promise to follow. Seldom a promise without its conditioning command. It is the promise grasped by faith which enables the command to be obeyed. Had not this woman believed the promise she never would have done "according to the saying of Elijah" (ver. 15). Faith is not presumption. Love hears the command and obeys (St. John xiv. 15). Faith hears the promise and expects. "All things," both in service and in blessing, "are possible to him that believeth." She who believes that her handful of meal will not be less for giving it to God will surely make the little cake for the Master *first*, and *after* will make for herself and her son. Can you trust God for temporal blessing? Can you *trust* God to make all things work for good in your God-ordered home? If so, you will gladly say, "God first," and if not—then pray, "Lord, increase my faith."

(iv.) Here was a *sustained claim*, which we too seldom think of. Every day, two or three times a day, the same act of obedience had to be performed. If the handful of meal never grew less, neither was it ever more. The "little oil in the cruse" was just that same "little" all the while, until it grew natural to give Him all, and then to take all from His hands "Who satisfieth

the desire of every living thing" (Ps. cxlv. 16). God's work and its imperial and imperious claims are not for a day ; they are for "many days"; yea, they increase in world-wide extent, and we feel that the larger needs must be supplied, not so much by a larger number of Christian men and women, as by hearts already giving, growing more capable of gift and sacrifice as day by day they give to and get from their Master's hand. It is much to be doubted if the enlarged income of the Church Missionary Society this year means a much larger number of contributors ; rather do we believe it means larger faith, larger love, larger self-denial on the part of many a "poor widow" who has "learnt by experience" (Gen. xxx. 27) how safe and blessed it is to put God and His claims "first."

(v.) For here was a *blessed experience*: "they did eat many days." Famine was around, but not there. There was no want in that dwelling. And shall it not be so still? There is a tendency to regard foreign missions as intrusive upon our pressing home needs, as Elijah's demand might have seemed in presence of the widow's hungry son. But if the Heathen comes to the Christian, as in Sarepta the Jew came to the Gentile, bearing as his claim the Lord's command, the church, the congregation, the individual who once again puts God's command "first," will find the old experience renewed: "The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord" (ver. 16).

## THE INFLUENCE OF UNBELIEF ON THE PLANS OF GOD.

“ But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.”—(*Num.* xiv. 21.)

WHAT a glorious Church missionary promise, confirmed by God's solemn oath, and meeting us in a strange place. It sounds like a prophecy of Isaiah—seeing the glory afar (*Isa.* xi. 9), or that prayer of “David the son of Jesse” (*Ps.* lxxii. 19, 20), beyond which even inspired hopes could not go. But the words are neither prophecy nor prayer; they are the promise of God Himself, spoken just then. His people had most sadly thwarted His plans and grieved His heart. The incident of *Num.* xiii., xiv., is most instructive upon a matter which should be very clear in our minds, viz., the place which foreign missionary work holds—the part it must play—in the realization and accomplishment of God's great plan. Does God work out His purposes independently of man? That He could do so no one doubts, but *does He?* Are those designs so fixed and immovable as to date and day that at a given time they shall “come to pass,” just the same whether man aids them, neglects them, or opposes them? What if in response to the command “Prepare ye the way of the Lord” (*Isa.* xl. 3) there be no willing obedience, will He nevertheless come as and when He would? If, as it seems to me, we may help or hasten God's plans, or may hinder and delay them, then how



solemn our position, how grave our responsibility ! But is this really so ? Let the incident of these chapters teach us.

1. Here was God's purpose in unmistakable plainness. Ever since Abraham had obeyed God's call and went forth, not knowing whither he went, Jehovah had pledged Himself to give Canaan to his seed ; and now that promised land lay in all its loveliness before them.

"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood  
Stood dressed in living green."

For it they had left Egypt ; to it they had journeyed for weary months, led and fed by such loving Providence as might well have taught lessons of faith and trust.

2. Here was a Divinely directed searching of the land (xiii.). If there were difficulties and dangers, let them be known ; if encouragements, let them be ascertained. And there were both ; grapes of Eshcol, which could only be fully enjoyed when the land that bore them had been won for God ; "nevertheless" (xiii. 28) the opposition and difficulties were overwhelming—cities walled up to heaven and people tall as the Anakim. The advantages are summed up in one line, but the hindrances are spread over seven lines.

3. Here was a division, and a big majority (5 to 1) against a policy of faith and action ; and what a night of weeping and wailing ; what a morrow of murmuring and discontent !

4. Here were intercession prevailing and mercy be-

stowed. Reader, if you would learn how to wrestle with God in prayer, how to fill your mouth with arguments (Job xxiii. 4), study the sevenfold argument of this wonderful pleading.

And so our text comes in. "I have pardoned . . . but—" God vindicates His character of unchangeableness, and repeats most solemnly His purpose. He meant, He wished, that then and there His people should claim and win Canaan—the promised land. They refused, they disobeyed. There are no hands, no feet, no hearts ready for the Lord. What then? Shall the hosts of heaven spring forward to the enterprise which man refuses? Nay! Man is the factor which alone God would use to bring about His design, and if man is unwilling, and unready, then God (the God of Patience, Rom. xv. 5) must wait! He Who will not change His plan, must postpone it—"but," *only* postpone it—"but as truly as I live all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." A generation passed away. Forty years afterwards the sons of those unbelievers encamped on the same ground, and faced the same dangers. But they obeyed God's call, Canaan was won, and that little corner of God's earth *was* filled with His glory—"glory dwelt in that land" (Ps. lxxxv. 9).

It needs not a word more to point out how entirely the case of Israel 1500 years B.C. is our case 1900 years after Christ. Broaden out the scene until Canaan is all this world, even to its "uttermost parts," and the camp of Israel is the Church of Christ, but with more ex-

perience of God's feeding and leading than ever Israel had to encourage and enable her for forward movement. Is the voice of unbelief, albeit expressed in accents of humility and self-depreciation—"we are not able" (xiii. 31)—now unheard amongst us? When Joshua and Caleb (young men, perhaps) would rouse us to seek to evangelize the world, i.e. to win the promised land, in this generation, the only generation we have at our disposal, are there none to tell of impossibilities in the way, and so to turn us back again?

Remember God's promise is clear: "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." God's command to us is plain. Our opportunities are illimitable, and largely unused; our powers are not wholly at God's disposal. What then? Will His plans change? Will His purpose alter? Not so! But meanwhile they must be *delayed*. If we may *hasten* the Lord's coming (2 Pet. iii. 12, margin), so may we postpone it. If prayer could affect the season or the day of Jerusalem's destruction (St. Matt. xxiv. 20), may it not also affect the day of her glorious restoration? Reader, may you and I and others join the minority of to-day, who believe God can perform what He has promised (Rom. iv. 21), but only through us, or such as us, until that minority swell and grow by God's grace into that grand majority which shall yet "go up and possess the land." And if it be His will, may we "live still" (Num. xiv. 38) till our eyes shall see "the earth filled with the glory of the Lord." Amen and Amen.

## THE BIRTHPLACE OF MISSIONARY WORK.

“And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord”—(*Acts xi. 21.*)

WHAT fascination, what interest, attaches to the tracing up a great river to its humble, quiet birthplace in lonely mountain spring, or in still moorland pool. The mighty tide which hundreds of miles away from this spot bears on its bosom the commerce of the world has here its rising! So we may trace back a life, which has blessed mankind, to its cradle and its home; and so may we trace back a movement which to-day touches and tinges half the world with its influence, to its humble origin in some quiet room like that in which our own Church Missionary Society was born, or in the hearts and hands of a few unknown men, whose very names have perished out of record, but whose work will live, and grow, and bless, till time merges into eternity. By such a quiet spot, in presence of such unnamed men, we stand as we read *Acts xi. 19-21*. Yet this is in truth the birthplace of the greatest movement which ever sought to regenerate mankind; here is the source of that River of Life in whose waters *we* find cleansing and refreshing, and which is yet, for God has promised it, to cover with its benediction all the earth.

It is here we find the beginning of the evangelization of the Gentiles; it is here we see the true initiation of all Church missionary work. Dean Alford (*Greek Test.*,

*in loc.*) says, "Nothing to my mind can be plainer from what follows respecting Barnabas than that these Ἕλληνες were GENTILES, *uncircumcised*, and that their conversion took place *before any tidings had reached Jerusalem of the Divine sanction given in the case of Cornelius.*" The R.V. follows Dean Alford in adopting the reading Ἕλληνας and rejecting Ἑλληνιστας, a corruption of the text which Alford says was "apparently a correction, induced by the difficulty of the preaching to Greeks, as distinguished from Jews, having *preceded* the conversion of Cornelius." Dean Farrar takes the same view as his great predecessor (*cf. Life of St. Paul*, vol. i., p. 285, note).

Here, then, in Acts xi. rather than in Acts x. we are to find the true source of the Church's evangelistic work. Not St. Peter, whose great name is graven on the foundations of the Church, but humble men whose names were written in the sand, were the first Apostles to the Gentiles. Not by a vision from God at Joppa, thrice repeated, was this Divine commission inaugurated, but by a brief storm of persecution at Jerusalem, and its consequent flight of Christ-loving men to other places, "Phenice, Cyprus, Antioch." So strangely, quietly, unnoticed do rivers rise, and new eras dawn, and God's will is done. It cannot be uninteresting to spend a few moments in contemplation of this important place and scene and fact; we may learn much of how the same Gospel is to reach all the Gentile nations while we think of how it touched and blessed them at the first.

(i.) The occasion of the Gospel reaching the Gentiles

is noteworthy. After reading Acts i., ii., we should have expected that this "new departure" would have been resolved on and entered on by a council of Apostles, a deliberate and solemn step taken in dependence on the promise and in obedience to the command of Acts i. But how different was the fact! No thought of missionary work appears to have arisen in the mind of Apostle or Deacon. The young Christian community of Jerusalem was all-busied in fostering and building up *home-work*. Money is collected for distressed widows, the first pension list is formed, and, like many a later one, created much heart-burning. "Serving of tables" begins to burden the Apostles' time. "Prayer and the ministry of the Word" are in danger amid all this "home-organization"; the diaconate is formed, solely for home work. Where is there even a hope, a prayer, an effort at doing the great work and fulfilling the only commission which (so far as we know) the Master had entrusted to His Church? Then comes the Church's *first* martyrdom, the first life laid down for Jesus' sake, the first Christian funeral, the first Christian grave, with the resulting persecution. Dark deeds, dark days, for the home Church; some must have said it would prove its destruction; so tender a plant hurtled in so dire a storm! Well, it was just then and there and therefore that the Church of Christ became a missionary Church. Quite unconsciously, perhaps even unwillingly, she went forth from the shaking and tottering home work to begin her great crusade for which her Lord had signed her with His cross and armed

her with His sword. And, as we have said, it was not her great men who went or were sent forth (as in Acts xiii. 1—3), but unknown, unrecorded, unremembered men were the pioneers of the greatest, grandest work ever begun on earth! Oh, thank God for anything, even the martyr-death of a saint, which rouses the Church at home to go and work abroad. Thank God for lonely graves and fiery persecutions which have sent forth new prayers and efforts for the world's salvation. Who can tell whether the ordeal through which the infant Church of Uganda had to pass in 1885 had not a large share in making it the great missionary Church it is to-day? We are not accustomed to connect the death of Stephen with the dawn of the Church's missionary day—yet so it was.

(ii.) The scene of this new departure was at Antioch. That it was distinctly a *new departure* is plain from the contrast presented by vv. 19, 20. Three principal bands of fugitive disciples made for Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch respectively; but only in the last-named town were Gentiles sought and taught. Elsewhere the speakers addressed "none but the Jews only." One longs to know why it was the Antioch band acted differently. Was it the absence or opposition of Jewish hearers? or was it that amongst the little preaching band was one or another who grasped his Lord's Will and Word as none other had done, and boldly stood forth the first preacher to the Gentiles? Thus was it—at least—that the listening, learning Mary had grasped the truth of her Lord's death and resurrection, while still St. John and St. Peter

saw it not—and obtained an imperishable “memorial” in the Gospel, while they were yet “slow of heart to believe,” *cf.* St. Luke x. 39, 42 ; St. Matt. xxvi. 12, 13. And it would not be altogether strange or new if when Apostles were forgetting or neglecting their Divine Commission, some quite unknown and unremembered man should be mindful of it, and do his little best to fulfil it. Who can tell? “The day will declare it.” It was a bold step ; only a heart full of faith and hope and love could take it. How abundantly did the Lord own the action ; how speedily did He bless it !

(iii.) What simplicity there is in the message of these pioneer missionaries : “preaching the Lord Jesus.” One cannot fail to notice frequently in these earlier pages of the Acts the brief, suggestive summary of a sermon, or of a prolonged ministry in one word—“Jesus” (ch. viii. 5, 35, ix. 20, 22, &c., &c.). To preachers and speakers He was then “a living, bright reality.” Their eyes had seen Him ; they had heard Him themselves. Jesus was lifted up. Then there were no Creeds, no Articles ; but there was a Person around Whom all teaching centred—to Whom all eyes and hearts were directed. Was this the cause of the early success which that teaching had ? In this, home and foreign work are not unlike. Hearts of men are the same in heathen and Christian lands. It is as we, parsons and missionaries, adhere to the simplicity of the Apostles’ preaching, we shall have in our ministries Apostolic results.



## THE FIRST-FRUITS OF MISSIONARY WORK.

“And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”—  
(Acts xi. 26.)

WE saw in our last chapter that it was in Antioch the real missionary work of the Church of Christ began. There, before St. Peter had been sent to Cornelius by a sort of divine compulsion, humble, unknown, unremembered men had come, driven by persecution from Jerusalem, and with Christ's love in their hearts, and Christ's command in their minds, had ventured on a new departure, and preached to the *Gentiles*.

Having considered the circumstances which led to this earliest Church missionary achievement, the Gospel which was then preached, and the special Power which accompanied this fulfilling of the Master's command, we have yet to glance at the Results immediate and more remote, for they were far-reaching and have their memorial to day throughout half the world.

(iv.) “The hand of the Lord was with them.” When a man does, or seeks to do, what is in the *heart* of the Lord, he will surely have with him the *hand* of the Lord. The expression is not very common, only once elsewhere is it met in the Acts (xiii. 11), though it formed the subject of very definite prayer in Acts iv. 30. Just as, speaking after the manner of men, the heart of God reveals His love, and the eye of God is ever connected with His omniscience and guiding, and the ear of God is the concentration of His attention to His people's cry,

so "the hand of the Lord" is the expression in Old Testament and New for plain, palpable interposition on behalf of His servants. A Bible study on "the hand of the Lord" and "the hand of God" will teach some wonderful lessons as to how, when, why, and with what results God does so interpose. One cannot fail, then, to be struck by the fact that the words which many times before had been employed to denote the special help of God in times of emergency, and on occasions of solemn importance, are once again used to tell how the first missionaries of the Church experienced their Lord's most gracious and ready help. Nor is the case different to-day. What "parish magazine," or "diocesan calendar," or "year book" of the Church's home work in darkest England, with the "resources of Christianity" at our disposal, can tell of results such as are found, even as we write, in heathen lands? What "transformation scenes" were given in the *Gleaner* of July, 1895, from the North Pacific, from Japan, from N.-W. Provinces of India, to be supplemented to-day by yet more wondrous scenes in Uganda and elsewhere. Surely there is but one explanation: "The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord."

(v.) Not less striking was *the character* of the first Gentile converts than the fact of their conversion. When Barnabas came (ver. 23) from the Jerusalem Church, rather as it would seem to see whether the "tidings" of these things were true than to help them on, he was

struck by what *he saw*. "He saw the grace of God." In those primitive Gentile Christians grace had become *incarnate*. The credentials of St. Paul's Apostleship were his converts (1 Cor. ix. 2). Here were the "signs following," which were the truest confirmation of the divine character of this missionary enterprise. Not long ago two ladies in the street of a Chinese city were struck by the face of a young man approaching them. "Surely," one said to her companion, "he must be a Christian." It was even so. He saluted them, and told how but a few weeks before he had heard of Jesus and His love from the lips of one of those ladies as she spoke to a crowd in a native house. God's grace had changed his heart, and it was shining out in his face. "She saw the grace of God and was glad." Reader, could this be said of you and me? Remember a converted life—recognized as such by friend and neighbour—is nothing short of an inspired volume, and, like its companion volume the Bible, conveys its message of life to hearts and consciences (2 Cor. iii. 3).

(vi.) "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (ver. 26). Is it well remembered that we owe that wonderful, beautiful name to the converts of the Church's *first* missionary station? It is not possible now to say whether the name was the accepted designation of the members of the Church at Antioch, or the epithet imposed upon them by opponents; one might almost hope it was the latter rather than the former. It is

surely not without significance that the Master's own Name should be first impressed upon the results of *missionary work*, and wherever in all the world that Name is loved and cherished, wherever a humble heart rejoices in it, or a brave heart is ready to die for it, and wherever over the earth it has become known as a household word, let it be remembered that "the disciples were called Christians *first* in Antioch."

(vii.) Once more we have in Acts xiii. the oft-quoted first dismissal of missionaries to the Gentiles. But seldom is the fact emphasized that where the Gospel was first preached to the Gentiles, there was *the true birthplace of practical missionary work*. Antioch became afterwards one of the five great centres of the Christian Church, with Jerusalem, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople. Yet not to any of these four, but to the city which grew up on the banks of the Orontes, must we trace up all that evangelization of the world which ever since Acts xi. 20 has been slowly but surely overspreading the world, and is one day to cover the earth with its results.

Let us then give Antioch its own place. There was the first field of missionary labour among the Gentiles ; there first was seen the power of God's grace in Gentile converts to the Gospel of Jesus ; there first was given and accepted the name which now enshrines the religion of Jesus and designates His followers ; and thence were sent forth the first missionaries to the Gentiles. Bless the Lord ! Forget not all His benefits !

## PRAYER'S PLACE IN MISSIONARY WORK.

“And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times ; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it : whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.”—*(2 Kings xiii. 19.)*

THIS is the month (November) of missionary intercession in our churches and parishes; not that we should or would limit prayer on this behalf to one month or week, which ought to go up ceaselessly “day and night” (Isa. lxii. 6). But we bless God that since 1872 our Church has publicly owned her responsibility before God by setting apart a week for intercessions for Missions. Let us then consider how far our prayers are rather a limitation of “the Holy One of Israel” than a calling forth from Him of larger blessing.

“Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times . . . now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.”

The scene is a striking and suggestive one. The young king Joash, or Jehoash, had just lost his father, Jehoahaz, and had been called upon to assume alone the care and conduct of the kingdom, in which he had two years before been united with his father. Those two years were years of national disaster, and none could know better than this young prince how

hopeless was the state of Israel under the iron "hand of the Syrians"\* (ver. 5). And now, as if his cup of sorrow was not full enough, he hears that Elisha the prophet was lying on his death bed. Probably that aged servant of God was in his ninetieth year, and for forty-five years we have no mention of his name. Half his life unrecorded by the pen of fame! But his life was not a useless one all those years. Rather was he of such service to his king and country as made his dying to be a matter of national concern. Over the old man a king comes to weep and to confess in proverbial language what that man had been and still was to his nation, "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Could the aged prophet hear that royal lament and not remember how more than fifty years before he himself had so cried, as he saw his master disappear in the chariot of fire, leaving him helpless and lonely, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof"? (2 Kings ii. 12). Dear reader, your life may be like Elisha's, a quiet one, unmarked by such stirring scenes as gather round the Elijahs of God's history. You may live five-and-forty years unknown to the Church and the world, yet may you so live even thus as to be missed and mourned when you die.

But the prophet would turn away the young king's thoughts from the frail human friend so soon to leave

\* Vv. 5, 6, seem to be an epitome of Joash's victories promised by Elisha, and so would correspond with the fuller account of vv. 22-25.

him for ever, to the great Divine Friend, whose aid never fails those who seek it.

1. "Take bow and arrows" (ver. 15). Prayer is often set forth in Scripture under the figure of an arrow (e.g. Ps. v. 3). We use the expression "ejaculatory prayer" of those short, sharp cries for help, of which every needy soul knows well the use. And under this figure there is much to be learnt about prayer, as to its *definiteness* in aim, its *expectancy* of response (not as Acts xii. 5, 15), its requiring of real *force and energy* in its exercise. How much we need our heavenly Jonathan to teach us "the use of the bow" (2 Sam. i. 18).

2. Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands (ver. 16). Surely here is an emblematic action. Those trembling wrinkled hands on the strong man's hands meant guidance, control, in this matter of prayer. Jehoash must not shoot at his own undirected will. Now, as when he was a little child and took bow and arrows for a first lesson in archery, another hand is "on" his hand! And that hand is a prophet's hand—the earthly type of the Divine hand itself. Prayer may not, must not, be unguided. Rom. viii. 26 tells of our "infirmities" as affecting prayer, both as to its *matter* and its *manner*, and gives us, too, God's gracious provision against the same in the Person and office of the Holy Ghost. His is that mighty hand by whom "the hands of our arms" are to be "made strong" (Gen. xlix. 24). How much prayer is blunted and falls short because we have not asked or allowed the

Holy Spirit to guide our petitions. Stay, child of God, as you cast yourself upon your knees, your heart full of self-planned supplications, stay and say, "Lord, teach me to pray" (St. Luke xi. 1).

3. "Open the window eastward." The wooden shutters of that sick room were closed—for coolness, perhaps, or for quiet—but there could be no real shooting so long as they were so. They must be opened, and by the man who wanted to shoot.

"What various *hindrances* we meet  
When coming to the mercy seat."

Any sin regarded in the heart stops prayer (Ps. lxxvi. 18). Want of love in life's closest relationships "hinders" prayer (1 Pet. iii. 7; St. Matt. v. 23, 24). Disobedience to God's commands stifles prayer (1 Sam. xxviii. 6). All these are closed windows, and there are others besides, of which the Master says ere we dare to pray, "open the window," confess and forsake the sin, be reconciled to thy brother, fulfil the neglected duty, then draw near as Daniel, through "windows opened in your chamber towards Jerusalem" (Dan. vi. 10), and through God's "open windows of heaven" will He "pour you out a blessing" (Mal. iii. 10).

In this way was the deliverance to come. As Moses' rod became "the rod of God" (Exod. iv. 2, 20), so the arrow of Jehoshaphat became "the arrow of the Lord's deliverance," the poor feeble shaft which winged its



limited flight through the open window became the symbol and means of a glorious victory. Who shall estimate the place and power of prayer in the conquest of Heathendom? We think of and thank God for "the heroes of the Mission-field" who have lived and died to advance His kingdom. But what of those who, in quiet chambers, with tearful eyes and prayerful hearts, have grasped the bow of prayer and shot home to the very heart of God those intercessions which have been the true source of all lasting results? Fellow-Gleaners, can you and I take rank among such bowmen?

4. But Elisha has more to teach and Jehoash has more to learn. "Take the arrows," the many which were in his "quiver full" (Ps. cxxvii. 5), "and he said 'smite upon the ground,' and he smote thrice and stayed" (ver. 18). Those three strokes represented the hopes and desires of the king, not the purposes and plans of God. Elisha's faith and hope were larger, twice as large, "six times"! Had Jehoash asked more he would have got more. God gave him "according to his faith" (St. Matt. ix. 29), and prayer became rather a limitation of than a channel for the fulness of God's power. How much reason has our Master to say to us, "Ye should have smitten five or six times." "Expect great things from God" is one of those golden sentences which are embedded in C.M.S. memories. But our prayers are the expression of our expectations. Think what God has promised as regards the world's evan-

gelization. Remember what the work of Jesus Christ embraced on Calvary. Forget not that the Gospel is still "the power of God unto salvation to *every one* that believeth."

"Large petitions you may bring,  
For you're coming to a King,  
And His love and power are such,  
You can never ask too much."

And as you pray, hear Him in your quiet room say, "Smite five or six times." Ask more, yea, more. Ask that, if it be His will, "the world may be evangelized in this generation."\* He will not be angry. "O . . . great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (St. Matt. xv. 28).

\* The motto of the S.V.M.U.

## FRUIT, NOT GIFTS.\*

“Not because I desire a gift : but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.”—(*Phil.* iv. 17.)

ST. PAUL is speaking to some of the first and most generous contributors to Church missionary work. He was the Philippians' "Own Missionary" (ver. 15), and for a while, at least, was entirely dependent on their support. Three several occasions we know of on which the love of his earliest European converts found expression in a great collection for the Apostle's needs.

There is much to be learnt from this Apostolic thanks for a Church missionary offertory (ver. 10—19). St. Paul puts the matter *last* in his letter ; other things which touched on spiritual life and love and prayer have in his esteem a prior place. He thanks the givers as one who needed and valued their gifts, but as one who is in higher hands, where perfect content and enabling strength are his experience. He takes from the hand of Epaphroditus the gift, but longs to know that it is far more than a gift, even fruit, and for repayment, in the supply of their every need, the imprisoned missionary refers them to his God (ver. 19).

\* From notes of a Bible-reading given November 2nd at the Annual Meeting of the Gleaners' Union in Sheffield.

If in the whole passage there is a doubt on the Apostle's mind, a hesitation for a moment as to this Philippian contribution to himself and his work, it is in those words, "Not that I desire a gift : but I desire fruit." The same contribution might be the one or the other. It might be only a gift, springing from personal love to their great teacher, or from pity at the story of his sufferings—only "a gift," and so not "desired" by the Apostle; he would be almost tempted to send it back. Or it might be "fruit," and if so, how "sweet to his taste" (Cant. ii. 3). Yea, "wellpleasing to God" (ver. 18). A gift or fruit? What? Which?

Such inquiry is not frequent nowadays. Money, service, help of any kind, given by any means, seem all we care for. Who would like to name here all the methods to which Christian people resort to support God's work? What a rebuke oftenwhiles would those words convey as the resulting sum is exultingly recorded : "I desire not a gift : but I desire fruit." The Master can do without our gifts (Ps. l. 9-14), but He longs for our fruit (Cant. iv. 16, v. 1).

Wherein lies the difference—so great in St. Paul's estimation—between a gift and fruit? The one is *dead*; the other is *the living result of life*. The Christmas-trees, round whose laden boughs our little children will dance and sing, *carry* their abundant "gifts"; they have not *produced* them as fruit. Gifts hang outside; fruit grows from the inner life of the tree. Man who

looks on the outward appearance is satisfied with gifts ; God, who looketh on the heart, will only have fruit.

An illustration will help. St. Matt. v. 23, 24. A man comes to God with "a gift," but in his heart is lack of love to his "brother," and therefore (for we must bow to the Bible's ethics and logics) there too is lack of love to God (1 John iv. 20). Hence there is no love, no heart, no life in that thing in his hand. It is a "gift," not fruit. Notice the Lord's counsel: "Be reconciled." Let love rule the heart—love to man, born of love to God, and as the altar sanctifies the gift, so the hand will make it no longer a gift only, but *fruit*, because it will be the outcome of love and life ; therefore now "come and offer thy gift."

Or St. Mark ix. 41. A cup of cold water is to be had in everlasting remembrance. Why? Because it is not a gift ; it is fruit. The hand which holds it out does so because the thirsty one "belongs to Christ." The love of Christ constrains the act ; it flows from a heart of love to Jesus, as the cool draught itself flowed from its hidden spring, and so it shall ever be remembered. It is fruit ; not a gift.

Remember four things about fruit-bearing :—

1. The trees of the Lord's planting (Isa. lx. 21, lxi. 3). Be sure you are in the place your Master would have you to be. A tree which does badly in one place will be wonderfully improved by a wise *transplanting*. You complain of fruitlessness. Did you ever say to Him

"Whose you are," "Lord, if Thou wilt, move and remove me to country or town, to China or Africa—anywhere—so that I bear much fruit and that Thou be glorified" (St. John xv. 8)? Have you earnestly and honestly said, "Here am I; send me"?

2. Be "rooted in love" (Eph. iii. 17). Be "rooted in Him" (Col. ii. 7). This is the *underground*, quiet, silent growth, of which the *overground* evidence is not in gifts, but in fruit. There is much need to remind ourselves of the close connexion between root and fruit—between the quiet time in-doors with God and the active times out-of-doors for God (*cf.* Isa. vi. 2; St. Mark iii. 14).

"Take time to be holy"

might well begin each verse of our psalm of life—and holiness is fruitfulness (Rom. vi. 22).

3. "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. v. 18), for the only fruit which God accepts is "the fruit of the Spirit" (Eph. v. 9; Gal. v. 22), whose fruit is a cluster, like that of Eshcol (Num. xiii. 23).

4. All such fruit is reproductive (Gen. i. 11, the first mention of fruit in Scripture). Gifts are "dead works." They end in the giving, they perish in the using. Fruit holds more than sweetness. It contains the seed for future growing. "The fruit of righteousness is *sown* in peace" (James iii. 18). Have we never sorrowed over a ministry full of activity, which yet seemed to *produce* little results; over a Sunday class well instructed, but

barren of conversion to God; over work and labour in His service which was apparently "labour in vain"? Could it be that we were giving God but ministerial gifts—personal service—"gifts" with no element of life and love in them, not "fruit"? Forgive the honest word, the home-thrust; forgive and forget it as you ponder on the words, "Not that I desire a gift: but I desire fruit."

And why did the great Apostle "desire fruit"? That it might abound to their account. Alas! how much of life's work may not be entered in this account at all. The Nazarite knew what "lost days" were in his consecration to God (Num. vi. 12). "Wood, hay, stubble"—piled by Christian workers on the true foundation—will all be burned up (1 Cor. iii. 12). Reader, which is it in your case—a gift, or fruit? Though a giant's hand sow an ingot of gold, it produces nothing. If an infant drop an acorn into the open soil a great oak will be born. God takes account of fruit, the product and the producer of life. "Verily I say unto you, it shall in no wise lose its reward."