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A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

and a warning against the deception in the last days
foretold by Christ

"Take heed ye be not deceived"

AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD

REMEMBER YE THE LAW OF MOSES MY SERVANT

WALKING BY FAITH

THE SIGNS OF HIS COMING AND OF THE END OF THE WORLD

NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS

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At the Table of the Lord

“Receive My Spirit”

In the mercy of God, there is given much help to the seeking mind, in the struggle to overcome. Perhaps the greatest help is found in the example of men who were moved by The Spirit, in serving their Creator.

Stephen, it is recorded, was “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” He was called to witness before the high priests and scribes and did so without regard to consequences for himself. Because of the faithfulness of his witness, he was stoned by the Jews, and died ; as we read of his death, help can be found. His words at the end were : “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Acts 7 : 59. Here was a plea that his spirit might be found acceptable in the Lord’s eyes. What was the spirit of Stephen ? How did it become so, and how can we profit in discerning it ?

There is striking similarity in the last words of Stephen, to those of his Master. As the Lord Jesus obeyed to the end His Father’s Will, His words were . . . Luke 23 : 46 . . . “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit : and having said thus, he gave up the spirit.”

Here was revealed the spirit of God’s son, as He willingly died. His life had been one of continuously commending His spirit (life) to the Father. Was not Stephen’s like that, in a measure ? There was a fellowshipping of the suffering and reproach borne by Jesus, the Son of God, as Stephen also strove to be a son of God.

The words of Paul grow in significance and help, as we realise what Stephen’s mind was—

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God . . . The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God : . . .” Romans 8 : 14—17.

We can see what was working in Stephen—The Spirit, directing and shaping, in order that his spirit might become like it—to witness that here was a son of God, as it surely did with the Lord Jesus. Can we then begin to see that Stephen’s cry, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” was a culmination of his whole life’s desire ? What a delight such a spirit must have been to the Lord Jesus and to His Father. Brethren and Sisters, if only we, each of us, can enter into this Spirit, desiring before anything, that our spirit in all things be pleasing, and acceptable to God ! Does His Spirit bear witness with ours ? Are they alike ? What a great way we have to climb ! Yet, if we are to be sons, they must witness together.

The spirit of Stephen was such that those who saw him knew where his faith and trust was. Paul, who consented to his death,

later came to realise that this spirit in Stephen was of The Spirit, for his words are : “And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death . . .” Acts 22 : 20. Surely Paul here testifies to Stephen’s spirit—a martyr or witness. The word is used in Revelation 11, as those who are his “two witnesses,” who, through the Spirit will show forth the great power of God. They are described also as the “two olive trees” and the “two candlesticks” standing before the God of the earth. Do they not symbolize all those whose spirits have been willingly offered and will be received by the Father ? This was Stephen’s hope and the reason for his plea—“Receive my spirit.” It is also our hope, and must be our spirit. Only this will enable us to endure, and to expect tribulation and affliction, realizing that peace is not to be ours in this state. We have not yet found our rest.

A Chosen Vessel

Paul’s spirit was like Stephen’s. The Spirit also witnessed with it, because here was material which yielded to the Father’s hand, and therefore, was pleasing and useful to Him. The record concerning him in Acts 9 : 15, 16 :

“ . . . He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel : For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”

A chosen vessel ! It is what we fervently hope we are, is it not ? Now we know that a vessel is only useful because of its ability to be filled with and hold a substance. Such was Paul after his conversion—a filling up with the Spirit, so becoming a vessel useful to the Almighty, to bear His name. As he grew in the Spirit, Paul recognized that God’s hand was working with him in all things. His word in Romans 9 : 21, is—“Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour, and another to dishonour ? ” His chosen vessels must be vessels unto honour ; and what is meant by this ? The word “honour” reveals much. The same word is used in I Corinthians 6 : 20,

“For ye are bought with a price : therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

The honour, or price, was the Lord Jesus’ life, offered in submission and thus, became truly the vessel of honour, fit for His Father’s use, and so glorifying Him.

We, then, being bought with this price, are not our own at all, but must strive to the utmost, to become vessels of His life, and therefore, of value to His Father. Recognising this, we plead, “receive my spirit.”

Paul again helps, in II Timothy 2 : 20 :—

“But in a great house, there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth ; and some to honour and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.”

“Meet for the Master’s Use”

Here are seen those vessels, “meet” for His use. The word means “easily used,” and “profitable,” as used in II Timothy 4 : 11. “. . . Take Mark, and bring him with thee : for he is profitable to me for the ministry.”

Having in mind these spirit-given requirements, can we examine ourselves ? Does the Spirit bear witness with our spirit ? In the work—in the Ecclesia, in the family—are we “easily used,” profitable, not a source of anxiety ? Are we eager to help the brethren and sisters, quick to discern a need, and reach out to fill it ? Are we, by our spirit, bringing honour to His House, in everyday lives, by steadfastness for truth, by refusal to countenance error, by putting away the spirit which is so contrary to His ? Are we being filled up with that which is pleasing to our Father, in the same way that Stephen and Paul did, as they strove to reflect the life of the Lord Jesus ?

We who are striving to be chosen vessels, meet for His use, find that the way cannot be easy. The lives of Stephen and Paul reflect this, as did their Master’s. In Luke 12 : 50, the Lord Jesus told His disciples :

“But I have a baptism to be baptised with ; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished !”

His entire life was a struggle, a submitting, that He might be easily used by His Father. Paul, too, experienced the straitening, for in Acts Chapter 18 vs 5, it is written—“. . . Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified . . . that Jesus was Christ.” These words “pressed” and “straitened,” are the same, and are the experience of all who are striving to overcome. A pressing—a holding in, a constraining, that we may indeed partake of His baptism. We cannot now expect to find tranquillity as we contend for the purity, for it is a warfare ; tribulation has been promised, even “great tribulation,” and it comes to test our faith, to shape us into vessels unto honour. Shall we not, through this painful process, become more worthy of that peace and serenity which is soon to come—which even now is known in measure, as we are brought into harmony with the mind of Christ ? How vital, then, that our spirit be alive, growing, and ready, strengthened by The Spirit—to face each test as it is placed in our midst.

This Spirit's help is extended by our merciful Father to nurture that spirit in us. Do let us, brethren and sisters, be ready to receive that help and guidance, lest we find ourselves slipping away. If we reject the indications because they do not please us, then the warning of Paul is needful.

“Quench not The Spirit”

How easily such can be done. The Lord Jesus in the parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25, illustrates this sorry state. The record is of the five foolish virgins that their lamps had “gone out,” due to a lack of oil—the light of the Spirit having been quenched. How unacceptable was the spirit of those foolish ones, for the door was shut, and the reply to their plea was, “I know you not.”

Brethren and sisters, can we grasp, then, the help extended by this example of Stephen? Can we enter into his cry, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”—having hope that it will be found acceptable? Is our spirit patterned after His? Soon He will return to judge the spirit of those who claim to be His brethren and sisters. Among those found acceptable will be Stephen and Paul, for we know their spirit. What of ours? Will it bear witness with The Spirit, that we too are the sons of God? What will be the response as we cry, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”?

J.A. De F.

Remember Ye the Law of Moses My Servant

“If an ox gore a man . . .” (Exodus 21 v. 28)

Gentile agricultural regulations seem cold forbidding things; at the best, only punitive of wrong-doers. How different was the Law given through Moses which achieved a complete supervision of busy agricultural life, but at the same time lifted the minds of all from the beasts of the field to God the Maker and Provider of all things. The contrast is striking, making the divine law appear as high above men's regulations as the heavens are higher than the earth. The way the Law through Moses takes hold of the everyday things of life and by showing what should be done and why, leads the mind to the revelation of God in Christ, is proof beyond words of its divine authorship. It seems a long way from the control of oxen to Christ, and to the love of neighbour and the love of God seen in Him; but the Law makes this connection not only clear but sparkling with divine purpose. This item of the Law is stated in simple words:

“If an ox gore a man or woman that they die:
then shall the ox be surely stoned, and his flesh
shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall
be quit”

“But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in

time past, and it hath been testified to his owner and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or woman ; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death.”

(Exod. 21 vv. 28/29)

Here is much wisdom compressed into few words to ensure care that oxen might do no damage to any “neighbour.”

If, on the first occasion of an ox ‘pushing with his horns’ a man were killed, the ox must be destroyed. The flesh could not be sold for food as some compensation to the owner. The owner knowing this would exercise all the more care, but his liability did not end there. If the ox were known to be belligerent and the owner were told, and afterwards a fatality occurred due to the carelessness of the owner not keeping the ox in, then the owner must die as well as the ox. The Law could not have been more forceful to teach the careless that thoughtlessness is selfishness and might bring about their death. Nothing is more calculated to impress the human mind with the need for care than a realisation of what the penalty for ignoring instruction will bring. The death of a ‘neighbour’ by one’s ox is seen in certain circumstances to be so serious as meriting death as a punishment. That then is God’s view of the ‘neighbour’s’ life, transmitted through the Law to all responsible. God’s care in this case is a measure of His love. An obedience through the priest’s instruction would not be just because of fear of death, but from the heart-felt appreciation of what God required : that each would learn to care for, to “love his neighbour as himself.” As appreciation of His care became evident, a personal aspect would eventually be seen in all the Law, evoking a profound love of the Giver of such a good law.

Nowadays, if owners of vicious dogs are approached with the request to control them, abuse is often met. In this Law dealing with oxen, if “it hath been testified to his owner” that the ox is dangerous, then he must realise that to ignore might mean his own death. As the work of the Priests and the Levites showed how this gracious provision was for the benefit of all and the hurting of none, each would come to understand what was meant by the love of neighbour and the love of God. The law in question would, with enlightened understanding, be delivered from the mortuary of penal codes, and be given the warmth of love and care of a father for his children.

An alternative punishment

“If there be laid on him a sum of money then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him” (Exod. 21 v. 30)

This alternative to the death sentence allowed for those cases where the owner was judged not to be altogether culpable. The information about the ox's habits may not have been given to him in an adequate manner; his method of keeping the animal under control may have showed some care but not enough, and so in these mitigating circumstances some lighter punishment than death was just. The Law here recognises this, and makes provision for the judges to decide how much the owner should suffer in addition to the loss of his ox. Whatever the judges laid upon him must be paid; failing which he would have to realise his assets and possibly be sold himself as a servant.

In this discretionary punishment it is seen how that justice could be fairly administered in all cases. The guilty condemned—adequately—but no punishment being severer than the crime merited. In all this the great object was the prevention of damage to one's neighbour. The thought that it did not matter, or that some Insurance Company would pay, was out of the question. There was a personal responsibility under the Law of God which could never be evaded or shelved. That responsibility was to teach the valuable lesson that "to love one's neighbour as oneself" in any community is a precious thing.

If, in this modern age when there are so many accidents on the roads admittedly due to carelessness, the punishment were to be placed upon the driver by an impartial judge, on the basis of life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, the difference on the roads would be unbelievable. Instead of the selfish, "don't care for the other man" attitude, pace would be slowed, courtesy would take the place of rudeness and selfishness, and the result would be immeasurably better for all. There can be no true alleviation of this and many other evils in the present age until He comes to give the Law which will once more teach men the supreme value of what it means to love one's neighbour as oneself, and to realise that this blessedness is of God, thereby evoking a real love of Him, the Giver of the Law.

"A manservant or a maidservant"

"If the ox push a manservant or maidservant :
he shall give unto their master thirty shekels
of silver and the ox shall be stoned."

(Exod. 21 v. 32)

The servant was the master's property and cost money to buy and to redeem. In the event of loss of a servant due to carelessness of an owner of a dangerous ox, then the owner must make good by giving the servant's master sufficient money to buy another servant. The equity of the Law, which is good, is to repair damage where possible, but in the case of those who could not be replaced,

the brother responsible must pay the penalty with his life. This is further seen in the causing of any hazards even on one's own property.

“If a man shall open a pit . . . ” (Exod. 21 v. 33)

“And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein ; The owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money unto the owner of them ; and the dead beast shall be his.”

(Exod. 21 vv. 33/34)

Many law cases have been fought every year by Gentiles because of some damage resulting from one's action upon another. Particularly are these accompanied by serious strife when they occur between owners of adjoining properties. Real misery has been caused to many a family by the hard neighbour, conscious of his rights, and more, and determined to uphold them ; and in doing so disregarding the welfare of his next-door neighbour who by this time he regards as his arch-enemy. Here, instead of thought for neighbour amounting to love, there is hatred. He would not care what loss any action of his caused his neighbour if he did not have to suffer. Again it must be remembered, that the exhortations of the Priests based on this law would be towards a suppressing of such wretchedness in human nature and an instilling of a true and unfeigned love. In this item of the Law valuable opportunity is afforded for such teaching. The possibility of injury to another brother's cattle by opening or making a pit must be considered. If damage ensue due to thoughtlessness, then this must be made good. Even if the pit were upon one's own land, there must be the same care : a straying beast falling in must be made good to the brother-owner.

Throughout the Law, the lesson is impressed that we are all our brother's keeper ; responsible as before God to help and to protect him, which is true love. Failure, or even partial failure, must be obnoxious to our God. The ability to discern our brother's need must be keen and the desire strong to supply that need if it is wise. This is something taught in the Law as incumbent upon all brethren and sisters. It is not sufficient to receive only. The words of the Lord Jesus need to be recalled by each of us that it is more blessed to give than receive. In the true Body where there will be anxiety by all to give, a state of blessedness will exist the like of which cannot be found elsewhere. There will be no Cains, saying, “Am I my brother's keeper ?” These will be revealed and find their place where they belong—outside Israel among the Gentiles.

(To be continued)

Walking by Faith

When the Scriptures speak of the dangers of the latter days we can rest assured that there is no exaggeration on the part of the Spirit regarding these conditions, and that those who constitute the people of Yahweh, the members of the Body of His Son, will inevitably have these perils to face and overcome, if the end, everlasting life, is to be attained. In view of this the only wise thing to do is to make every preparation to meet the dangers of the times.

We are in the kindness of the Father assisted in this direction by the examples and experiences of those who in bygone ages have been subject to like perils, and by the way they have been met and overcome. He has graciously had these things placed on record and His overruling providence has preserved them for our sakes upon whom the ends of the ages are come.

The pre-requisite element in this preparation is faith: once one's faith becomes weak and is shaken, then one becomes an easy prey to the prevailing dangers and unless faith is regained, must inevitably be lost. The apostle John informs us that this is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith. (I. John 5 v. 4). The nature of faith however is left rather to be ascertained from illustrations with which the Scriptures abound than from formal definitions, and an examination of instances in which this characteristic has been exercised shows that the Scriptural idea of faith invariably includes, not only reliance on testimony but trustful confidence.

The main elements in faith in its relation to the invincible God are a firm conviction producing an unshakeable trust in His Revelation and implicit obedience to His truth in the love of it. This is pleasing to God. Its opposite is seen in the words of Paul to the Thessalonians (Ch. 2 vv. 10-12) where because the Truth was not received in the love of it and not believed, some were given over by the Almighty to "a working of error" (R.V. so that they might be condemned). Where true faith obtains, there is a complete surrender of oneself to the care and keeping of the Almighty; and one's walk will be inspired by such surrender. As Paul has said, we "walk" by faith and not by sight. (2 Cor. 5/7)

A walk by faith involves the whole round of the activities of individual life, as we see from the Testimony.

The command is, to walk in newness of life (Romans 6/4) in love (Eph. 5/2), in wisdom (Col. 4/5), in truth (2 Jno. 4), after the commandments of Yahweh (Ch. 5/6) and negatively, not after the flesh (Rom. 8/4), not after the manner of men (1 Cor. 3/3), not in craftiness (2 Cor. 4/2), not in the vanity

of the mind (Eph. 4/17), not disorderly (2 Thess. 3/6).

How all embracing is this walk in faith, and as such a faith entails a conflict, we are exhorted to fight the good fight of faith (I Tim. 6/12).

The words of the Lord Jesus here coincide with those of Paul when he said, "Strive, (agonise) to enter in at the 'strait gate' for many, I say unto you will seek to enter in and shall not be able" (Luke 13/24). What cause for self-examination this injunction gives! The 'strait gate' here mentioned is not the one we enter in at the beginning of our life of probation but the one through which the victor will enter, the one whose walk by faith has been successfully accomplished, who has fought the good fight of faith and has obeyed the rules governing that conflict and received the "stephanos." In other words it is 'the entrance' into life, the life of the aions. The context to these words of Christ reveals this. "When once the master of the house is risen up and hath shut to the door." All opportunity will then be over.

The Master of the 'house' was no exception to this conflict. Just prior to his death in the final crisis of the good fight of faith, of Him we read, "And being in an 'agony' he prayed the more earnestly (Luke 22/44).

All the main elements of faith are herein exhibited : an absolute belief in the word of the living God, a complete surrender to His will, though this involved His death. He has fought the good fight and has now entered the 'strait gate' : for Him the conflict is over but He has left us an example : all the members of His body will be perfected in like manner filling up the measure of the sufferings of the Christ.

In this connection the apostle exhorts Timothy when he says—

"I give thee charge in the sight of God who quickeneth all things, and before Jesus Christ, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession : that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Timothy, like the Lord Jesus, had professed, or confessed, a good confession before many witnesses. It was Paul's earnest desire that this mind should continue in him ; hence his appeal and the citing of the great example which all men follow if victory over the world is to be obtained.

Faith, we are informed, cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. This involves not merely physical hearing but a perception with understanding. Casual hearing would never sustain anyone through a severe test, especially where life was at stake.

The Hebrew equivalent to the word 'hearing' we find in Psalm 18 where speaking of the return of Christ and the overthrow of His enemies, we read "A people I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they shall obey me." Obedience is always manifest where true faith is in evidence.

The example of Stephen

How forcibly this is revealed in what is commonly called Stephen's defence, but which is in effect his witness to the veracity of the word of the Almighty, and an illustration of the exhibition of faith in a time of acute peril.

While we know very little about Stephen, what little we do know is certainly very comprehensive. He was one of the seven, the first choice among his brethren for a work of ministration. We must conclude that he was a man of honest report, to be well testified of, as having borne faithful witness to the truth ; also that he was full of wisdom and of the Holy Spirit. Something here, brethren and sisters, for us to aim at ! Could we be chosen if these characteristics were sought for in us ?

The testimony of the Spirit is that he was a man, full of faith, a virtue possessed in a high degree as events afterwards proved. It is of interest also to note that of the seven chosen, he and Philip are the only two ever mentioned again in the Scriptures after their appointment. A man, full of wisdom and of the Holy Spirit and of faith—what a powerful combination !

To possess these qualities in a measure would be an accomplishment but to be 'filled', (and this is the sense in which the word is used) is a greater attainment. What room could there be for anything pertaining to the flesh where such testimony could apply ? It would be excluded. Is this our lesson, on whom the end of the ages are come ?

Little wonder that it is recorded that "all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." Yes, "who is as the wise man ? And who knoweth the interpretation of a thing ? A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine. And the boldness of his face shall be changed." (Ecc. 8/1).

To charge such a one with blasphemy seems entirely out of place, yet how deadly is the flesh, especially when the Spirit Word is wrested to suit one's own ideas. It did however present Stephen with an opportunity to witness to the truth and exhibit his faith. Had a similar occurrence happened to us should we have looked upon it in the same way ?

In a brief and concise address he proceeded to recall the salient points in the history of his people, pointing out as opportunity afforded itself that from the first, acceptance with God depended

not on observing the ritual of the Law, but on the faith of Jesus Christ. Also, how, from the days of Moses they had rejected the messengers of God, filling up the cup of their iniquity in the rejection and killing of their Messiah, the one in whom the Law had been fulfilled. Like his Master, Stephen's faith was put to the extreme test, and his witness brought him to his death.

There must have been a reason for this, because the Divine record gives numerous examples of faith, having been put to the test, being followed by deliverance. We cannot doubt the wisdom and kindness of the Almighty here. Is it a case where His over-ruling care was exercised for the highest good? We just try and meditate upon the incident. Suppose the outcome had been different, and like others, deliverance had been brought about by the intervention of the Father. Would the course of events have been the same in those early days of the history of the Truth? Would the mind of Saul of Tarsus have been affected to the same degree? Would it have been affected at all? That a deep impression was made upon the mind of the future apostle of the Gentiles there is no doubt. It is quite within the bounds of reason to believe that what he had heard and had been a party to, had indelibly fixed itself upon his conscience, thus constituting the 'pricks' which he afterwards found hard to resist, and thus the way was opened for his conversion, an event which prepared the way for a wider diffusion of the Gospel, even to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And last, but not least, who amongst the sons of men can compute the value of the epistles of Paul, which have been such a help, a comfort and an encouragement through the ages to those who have been called unto the same hope?

Think you brethren and sisters that Stephen will have any regrets because his life was cut short when he stands in his lot at the end of the days and sees how all things have worked together for good under the mighty hand of God? Well, brethren and sisters, these things constitute our instructions: these examples are our patterns; times of danger are upon us and these perils will increase. Let us therefore endeavour to develop the qualities we have considered. Shall our endeavour, our aim, be to be full of wisdom, full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith so that we may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand?

C.J.M.

“ The Signs of His Coming and of the end of the world ”

One of the most significant facts about the many 'Signs' given to the disciples by the Lord Jesus is that they were invariably accompanied by warnings. For the most part, the warnings were

not addressed to unbelievers and the world at large, but were intended particularly for those professing to be awaiting His second coming.

A typical example was when some of the disciples asked Jesus privately, "What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?" In His reply, as recorded in Matthew 24, the Signs are punctuated with such warnings as "Take heed that no man deceive you . . . the love of many shall wax cold . . . at such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh . . ." But this was not all, for Jesus proceeded to exhort His disciples by a series of parables, all pointing to the fact that even amongst those awaiting His return, many would be found wanting and rejected at the Judgment Seat.

Later, this same feature distinguished the writings of the Apostles, of Peter, James, John and Paul. Their frequent references to the "time of the end" are clothed with humility and fear, born of a recognition that many would be rejected in that great day, and that even the righteous shall "scarcely be saved." Boastful prophecy of "things coming to pass" never found a place either in their writings or in their outlook. Let us observe, for example, the manner in which Peter wrote to his brethren about the "time of the end" :—

"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you ; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance : That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets . . . Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers . . . saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' . . . But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years . . . The Lord is not slack concerning his promises . . . but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish . . .

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night . . . What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens . . . shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ?

Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

(2 Peter 3)

His letter then ends with the fervent appeal :—

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness."

A new heavens and a new earth

A new heavens, and a new earth, "wherein dwelleth righteousness," has always been the one great hope of true believers, but as the Apostle implies, its fulfilment necessitates first the dissolution of the present "heavens and earth." Seven hundred years before Peter's time, the prophet Isaiah, in simple but telling language, had foretold the removal of the present order of things. The "heavens" would "vanish away like smoke," he declared, and the "earth" would "wax old as doth a garment." His words, addressed to "ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord," are:—

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon
the earth beneath : for the heavens shall vanish
away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old
like a garment . . ." (Isaiah 51.)

A little meditation upon this divine simile reveals a wealth of meaning, not immediately apparent. To liken the destruction of the world at the time of the end to a garment waxing old would not at first sight seem very appropriate : the apocalypsing of Christ, with all that it entails, is to be "with speed," whereas the "waxing old" of a garment is by comparison a slow and gradual process. What then is the divine message concealed in this reference to a garment ?

The "key" would seem to be supplied in the words of the prophet which follow:—

"Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law ; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool." (Isaiah 57 v 7, 8.)

Evidently the "waxing old" meant by the prophet was not to be the result of ordinary wear and tear, but rather on account of the depredation of the moth. This is confirmed by a reference in the previous chapter :

"Behold, the Lord God will help me ; who is he
that shall condemn me ? Lo, they shall all wax
old as a garment ; the moth shall eat them up"
(Ch. 50 v. 9)

"The moth shall eat them up"

Nearly everyone is familiar with the destructive habits of the moth. How often does one hear of a householder making the sudden and sad discovery that moths have got into his furniture ? Usually it is too late to do anything ; the damage has been done. Unseen and unnoticed, quietly and insidiously, the destruction has been proceeding for months or maybe years.

So also with garments. Many a woman has had the distressing experience of taking a coat from the wardrobe only to find the moths have been at work, not in one part but in many. Again it is usually too late ; nothing can be done ; the garment is useless, fit only for the fire.

The children of God are invited to meditate upon this, and then to perceive that the world, too, is like a garment at which the moths have long been at work. Outwardly the world may appear to be flourishing. Knowledge everywhere is rapidly increasing, nature is being harnessed to the service of man, medical science is advancing swiftly, and the general standard of living is certainly improving.

Yet this is but superficial progress, and underneath many evils have long been eating into human society, some so slowly as to be hardly noticeable. Men's regard for the Scriptures has been gradually declining ; moral standards have deteriorated enormously ; the roots of family life are decaying so that children no longer honour their parents and wives frequently cannot trust their husbands, nor husbands their wives. Reverence for the Creator has all but disappeared, and love for pleasure has replaced love for God. The moths have certainly been busy with their insidious work !

Suddenly Christ will be here and will expose the world for what it is—like a moth-eaten garment fit only for destruction—and to be replaced by a “new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

“Go to now . . . weep and howl”

As an antidote to possible arrogance in the denunciation of the present world order, one need only consider the strong words of James, addressed, it would seem, to some of his brethren :

“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl . . .
Your riches are corrupted, and your garments
are moth-eaten.” (James 5 v. 2)

Evidently the moths can also be busy amongst brethren's garments ! Here is a warning, a frightening one, affecting every brother and sister individually : the possibility of the “garment” which “covers” their flesh being “moth-eaten.”

Jesus Himself made reference to the destructive ways of the moth :—

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,
where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where
thieves break through and steal : But lay up for
yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither
moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do
not break through and steal . . .”

(Matthew 6 v. 19)

Then follows the most significant reminder : —

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Should not every brother and sister face the alarming possibility that his “clothing of righteousness” may be moth-eaten? How can we tell? What test must we use? These words of the Lord Jesus provide a simple test which all can apply. Where is our treasure, as revealed by the meditations of our heart? In the home or the garden, in some hobby or other pursuit where “moth and rust doth corrupt”? Or can we truthfully assert that our treasure is in heaven?

Truly, the earth is to vanish away, as a garment eaten by the moths. Can we, as brethren and sisters, plead for any different treatment if **our** garments should be found to be moth-eaten?

J.R.M.



News from the Ecclesias

Beeston (Notts.)—Adult School Room, Acacia Walk, Beeston. Sundays: Breaking of Bread, 11.0 a.m. Sunday School, 2.0 p.m. Bible Class, 3.0 p.m. Thursdays: 7.45 p.m.

The enjoyable and profitable time spent at the Fraternal Gathering at Manchester was indeed a time when the presence of the Father was felt.

At our lecture given during July interest was shown and thanks expressed, but, without further development up to the present.

The happy time we had with the visitors from the States passed all too soon, but we are grateful for this opportunity of meeting them yet again.

We have since had the pleasure of having Bro. and Sis. Robinson at the Lord's Table and also Bro. Butterfield who ministered to our needs

H.J.S.

Criccieth.—Pentrip, Black Rock, Portmadoc. Sundays: Breaking of Bread, 11.0 a.m. Revelation Study, 3.0 p.m.

At the lecture in Criccieth on August 1st four strangers attended and gave their addresses for further literature—also interest in Portmadoc continues.

A further lecture is being arranged in Criccieth for the end of August when we look forward to further visits of the brethren and sisters.

We have been very thankful to have had visits from brethren and sisters and are grateful for the help and encouragement received.

per J.R.M.

Eden, New York.—Grange Hall, Church Street. Sundays : Breaking of Bread, 11.15 a.m. Sunday School, 10.0 a.m. Revelation Study, 1.30 p.m. Bible Class : Mid-week alternately in Forestville and Hamburg.

Letters inviting enquiries and offering literature have been mailed throughout the Forestville area, as a follow up to the lecture given here in June.

We are grateful for the continued contacts permitted with those belonging to the Body across the seas, knowing that in these last difficult times the need is to be truly bound into one. It is anticipated with joy that Sister Peggy Crossley will accompany the Sisters Carter and Lois Carter on their return journey for a month's stay.

Contacts by letter in Canada, Texas and Illinois continue to provide opportunity to witness to the Word and we acknowledge the kindness of the Father in granting this constant encouragement so that we may indeed be employed in His work. J.A. DeF.

Enfield—6 Chase Hill, Enfield.

Sundays : Breaking of Bread, 11.30 a.m. Sunday School 2.30 p.m.

It was with joy we recently welcomed Brother and Sister Miller at the Table. We thank Brother Miller for his ministrations.

With great delight we were privileged to attend the Sunday School Party at Wythenshawe, also the Fraternal Gathering held at Manchester on August 6th, when we were again able to partake of the feast of good things so necessary to our frail minds.

How glad we were to meet Sister Carter and Sister Lois Carter from the States, bringing us closer together in true love and unity.

M. McD.

Manchester.—Memorial Hall, Albert Square, Manchester.

Sundays : Breaking of Bread, 11.30 a.m. Lecture, 3.15 p.m.

Thursdays : 7.15 p.m. at Onward Hall, Deansgate. Law of Moses Class : Second Saturday each month at 3.30 p.m.

A very enjoyable and encouraging time has been spent with Sister Carter and Sister Lois of the Eden Ecclesia, U.S.A., who have been with us about four weeks, leaving Manchester Airport on August 15th. On the same journey we saw off Sister D. M. Crossley who is to pay a visit to the States. These times together are most helpful in the binding together of the members of the Son's Body, making us all realise that though we are so scattered, many members can be "perfectly one."

On August 6th we were privileged to hold our Fraternal Gathering in Manchester. An uplifting time was spent together in the consideration of the theme "My presence shall go with thee."

On Saturday, August 4th, we held our Sunday School Outing where a most enjoyable time was spent by brethren and sisters.

W.V.B.