

The Bible as Our Life

Book II

(I Samuel — Esther)

Peggy M. Brook

THE FOUNDATIONAL BOOK COMPANY LIMITED
LONDON, ENGLAND

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(A series of articles on the Bible reprinted from "Ideas of Today")

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“The Bible as Our Life”

*(First series of twenty-four articles from
Genesis to Ruth were published in book form
in 1982)*

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INTRODUCTION

This book contains further reprints of articles on the Bible which appeared regularly in "Ideas of Today", a periodical published by The Foundational Book Company from 1951-1977. The purpose of this periodical was to show that it is ideas that are the important factors in every field. Also that behind all ideas is a governing universal Principle of being, the understanding of which is vital in leavening the whole range of human thought and endeavour.

The interpretation of these Bible stories owes its origin to a study of "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary Baker Eddy and to the work of John W. Doorly who used this "Key to the Scriptures" to unlock the spiritual Science of the Bible, lecturing and writing extensively on his findings.

Because of the universal motive behind "Ideas of Today" the endeavour was to write these articles in a terminology that might be understood by any honest spiritual seeker who loves the Bible and is prepared to approach it in a new and living way. Many have appreciated the first book of "The Bible as Our Life" published in 1982, and this is a continuation of the series promised in the Introduction to the first book.

The twenty-four articles which appeared in the paperback in 1982 covered the well-known stories from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Ruth. The twenty-seven stories interpreted in this volume are to be found in the Bible from I Samuel to the Book of Esther.

PEGGY M. BROOK
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June, 1983

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From the Creation Story to the Prophetic Era

(Genesis—Esther)

THE BIBLE is being increasingly understood as containing an exact Science of Life. No longer is it being read as a collection of isolated books relating somewhat inaccurate history, interspersed with inspired spiritual teaching, but it is being regarded as a spiritual *whole*. Based on the seven great fundamentals of Being stated at the beginning of Genesis, its message is seen to present an ordered way of life unfolding scientifically without a break from beginning to end.

In the twenty-four articles on the Bible published in the first book of this series—“The Bible as Our Life” (1982)—the well-known stories contained in the first three thousand years of Bible history were considered. Peter’s statement that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day,” have been taken as a guide to the overall plan of the Bible,—namely, that each thousand-year period illustrates the working out in human experience of the great spiritual fact symbolized in the corresponding day of creation.

The first day and the first thousand-year period

Thus we see at the outset how the divine nature operating as the light of a spiritual intelligence, a divine Mind—“the first day”—is the origin of all, and precludes the belief that man and the universe can spring from the darkness of non-intelligent dust. This eternal fact dawns on man as his awakening to the light of divine intelligence at work behind all creation. And so in the first thousand years of Bible history with its myth of Adam and Eve, we can see that even within the confines of the “garden of Eden”—the limited concepts which result from accepting a purely material view of creation—there is a way out. There is a “tree of life” in the midst of the garden and a river that leads out of the garden. This tree of life and the flowing river are symbols of spiritual enlightenment, which truly sustain man and carry him forward to freedom.

The divine Mind, which is man’s eternal heritage, is always

lighting the way to freedom through intelligent spiritual reasoning. “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light,” wrote Isaiah. And was not this the same light of divine intelligence forever operating which dawned on Paul on the Damascus road and carried him forward on his great mission? There are many instances in the Bible of the awakening power of this light of divine Mind.

The second day and the second thousand-year period

Then we come to the second thousand years of Bible history with its story of Noah and the ark, which shows the operation of the firmament of spiritual understanding. This “second day” declares that a developing understanding of the reality and substance of Spirit enables us to ride over the tempestuous waters arising from reliance on matter as having reality and power. We see how this great fact of the reality of Spirit impels alert and awakened thought to build an ark of spiritual understanding and to take all that it values into this ark,—to become aware of the spiritual essence of true values,—so that when the floods come, the true substance of these values can never be swept aside.

Moses’ mother put her son into an ark and thus preserved him. Jesus put his whole sense of life into an ark of spiritual understanding and so preserved it against all the floods of hatred, jealousy, malice, and envy.

The substance of Spirit which dawns on thought through spiritual understanding can never be destroyed.

The third day and the third thousand-year period

Then follows the third thousand-year period, which is treated at great length by the prophetic writers. It occupies eight books of the Bible, from Chapter 12 of Genesis up to and including the Book of Ruth. It is illustrative of the appearing of the dry land in the third day of creation,—that dry land which was called “Earth” and which brought forth grass, herb, and fruit tree yielding fruit.

The divine nature as the Soul or identity of all creation is brought out here. The “waters under the heaven” are “gathered together unto one place” on this day. Developing spiritual understanding begins to deal with the swirling waters of materialism. As they are faced up to with spiritual sense, there gradually

dawns on thought the conviction that there is only one identity or Soul behind all creation. This spiritual identity of all creation is no vague theory—it is definite, solid, and tangible idea, the “dry land.” Moreover, this land is fruitful and its fruitfulness has the “seed within itself.” The spiritual identity of all creation is self-existent and self-propagating, and we experience this as we understand and feel divine identity to be fundamental to all being.

The third thousand-year period of the Bible illustrates the working out of this spiritual fact in human experience through the sagas of the patriarchs, the story of Moses and Joshua leading the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage into the Promised Land and the settlement of the Israelites in this new land. All through this period the accent is on journeying and the goal is the Promised Land, the same symbol of divine identity as the fruitful land of the third day.

Returning to the order of the “days of creation,” how true it is that after awakening to the light of a divine intelligence which is our birthright, there follows so naturally the desire to build an ark of spiritual understanding; and this inevitably leads us forward on a great mental and spiritual journey where we have to face up to the multitudinous claims of sense. As we do this, we begin to see and feel in our innermost being that in spite of the testimony of the physical senses divine identity is the Soul of all.

In the stories of this period we can see how, in order to find this Promised Land of divine identity, it firstly demands the willingness of Abraham to come out of our “country”—separate ourselves from accustomed, rutted ways of merely human thinking. We find that this journey needs the faithfulness of Abraham, the joyful acceptance which is Isaac, the willingness to take up the struggle in spite of all set-backs as represented by Jacob; also some understanding of the workings of the spiritual idea as represented by his twelve sons, and then the wonderful womanhood of Joseph who illustrates that developing spiritual understanding which sees divine identity everywhere and therefore can turn every experience into a blessing. We realize also that this journey needs the manhood and the moral courage of Moses as the representative of man’s true Christ selfhood. These qualities empower freedom from bondage and lead thought to the acceptance of definite spiritual laws and rules. At this stage Moses was inspired to give the Israelites the Commandments and the Judg-

ments, even as today we are led to understand the Science of spiritual reality,—its laws and rules.

The last great character in this period is Joshua—“Saviour”—who took the children of Israel across the Jordan into the Promised Land. We certainly need “Joshua,” or that wonderful love which sees how to save everything that can be saved, even as Jesus, the great Saviour, did.

This period ends with the Books of Judges and Ruth. The Book of Judges shows us that time and time again spiritual sense arises in a very definite way and dominates the scene. It saves and delivers when the spiritual idea stands in danger of being swamped by its enemies. And the Book of Ruth, with its wedding of an Israelite to a Moabitess, illustrates the coincidence between the divine and the human. It serves as a link from the third day, where thought reaches the “dry land” of divine identity, to the fourth day, where the symbol of the stellar universe implies an attitude of looking out from the stars, looking *out from* the Principle of the universe and giving “light upon the earth.”

And so this great Soul of all is forever showing man his fundamental identity as undivided from the infinite One.

The fourth day and the fourth thousand-year period

Now here, in this fourth day, is the point that we have arrived at in this particular series of articles, and the symbol is again “light,” as on the first day. In what way does it differ, then? In the first day we read, “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” Here God says, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven. . . .” “Light” is now in the plural, which implies classification of light; it states that there is a greater and a lesser light and “the stars also.” Moreover, they are “set . . . in the firmament of the heaven”—these lights have certain offices and functions in the realm of spiritual understanding, which is the “firmament.” And they are to “give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night;” they are also to be “for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.” This fourth day, revealing the detailed operation of the light, is more complex than the first, for it symbolizes the activity of the divine nature as the great Principle of the universe, with its harmonious and orderly government forever operating through spiritual rules and laws.

The fourth thousand-year period of Bible history is known as

the kingdom period or the prophetic era, for it is the period when the children of Israel were in the Promised Land and were working out the question of government. Should it be judges, should it be kings, should it be prophets? For this was also the era when the great prophets of Israel arose. The government of Israel with its judges was unique, but the Israelites were not content with it. "Give us a king . . . that we also may be like all the nations" was their cry. And Samuel, who was their first prophet, had to give them a king. The history of this period, though, shows that when their king was obedient to the prophets, then all went well for Israel; but when the king disobeyed them and set himself above the spiritual seers, then Israel was headed for disaster and was taken into captivity by foreign nations. When spiritual government was supreme, all was harmonious, but when personal and material government held sway, the desolation of Israel began.

How true this is in man's own spiritual journey. Having seen and felt some measure of our fundamental spiritual identity and that of all creation, we naturally begin to live in a "promised land," conscious of the government of divine Principle behind all phenomena. If, in the working out of this, it should seem necessary to be associated with some human form of government, some temporary organization, in the spirit of "suffer it to be so now," then it is vital that the Spirit of God should dominate this step from start to finish. Never more true than with this development are Paul's words, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." No human form can become a prison when the Spirit of God is abounding; but if the Spirit is allowed to fade and to take second place to the temporary form or organization, then man becomes enslaved to material theories and beliefs.

This prophetic age, with its accent on the government of divine Principle, is alive with instances of the power of the spiritual, especially those in which something that seems small to material sense overcomes something that appears mighty; for instance—David and Goliath, Elijah and the "still, small voice," Daniel in the lions' den, the lone voices of the prophets in the midst of the multitudes. This is always a characteristic of spiritual power. It can never be measured in terms of great bulk or large numbers. "Who hath despised the day of small things?" cried Zechariah. "One on God's side is a majority." Paul wrote, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; . . . and the weak things of the world to confound the things

which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised . . . and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.” Spiritual power can never be reckoned by the world’s standards, and yet it is the one and only power that is impregnable and enduring. This fact can give us the greatest encouragement when we are tempted to fear the so-called powers of this world today.

And so this fourth thousand years of Bible history emphasizes the power of the one great spiritual Principle of the universe, which in that wonderful, abundant fifth thousand-year period to come Jesus proved so fully. If we follow through this majestic fourth period, we find that it is not the history of kings and nations that impresses us (though the reign of David stands out as an exception), but the tremendous message of the prophets of Israel. In the symbols of their age they declared the timeless facts of the divine Principle, whose operation is irresistible spiritual power. It is significant that it was the prophetic scribes of this period who were instrumental in writing the timeless creation story with its exact yet boundless basis of “seven days,”—seven great fundamental symbols of infinite spiritual power.

What enormous spiritual potentialities are contained in those simple symbols which we have so far considered—light, firmament, dry land, stellar universe. The prophetic writers of this creation story were spiritual seers, writing a spiritual story of timeless spiritual fundamentals. We may see them as the operation of an infinite intelligence or divine Mind, which is also Spirit, the only Soul of all creation, the one great Principle, Life, Truth, and Love. And these are not just words or terms. They are ever-present, living values universally at work in an exact and spiritually scientific way—*infinite* in scope and in detail, and always and forever good.

The Birth of Samuel—the First Prophet of Israel

(*I Samuel 1:1-2:11*)

The value of prophecy

THE FOURTH thousand-year period of the Bible, known as the kingdom period or the prophetic age, is mainly concerned with the question of government. Israel had now grown into a nation, in her own promised land, and the problem inevitably arose—how should she be governed?

As we have said, if we look at this period as a whole, it is not the kings and their reigns that stand out—though David is an exception. Rather is it the great prophets of Israel. The Hebrew canon contains sixteen inspired prophetic books as against the six historical books of this time. Moreover, it was no ordinary historian who gave us even the historical record of the kingdom period. What Scriptural records remain of this age to yield a spiritual message for us today were written by these great prophetic writers, whose love of God caused them to preserve the history of Israel, but not merely as history. Alice Parmilee in *A Guidebook to the Bible* writes of these historical books, “It has been said that history was a kind of sacrament to Israel. In the ‘outward and visible’ facts of history Israel saw the face of her God. No wonder, then, that this historical series was not classified as history but was named the Former Prophets.”

These prophets of Israel were spiritual seers, who saw beyond the events and happenings of their time to the spiritual facts that govern the universe. The realm of the spiritual was the real and powerful to them, and they realized that divine government was ultimately irresistible. In Ezekiel’s words they saw that it would “overturn, overturn, overturn, . . . until he come whose right it is,” because the divine Principle is the fundamental governing power in the universe.

Bearing this in mind, is it not natural that this fourth thousand-year period should start with the birth of Samuel, Israel’s first prophet? The history of Israel’s kingdom and the working out of its government had to begin with the appearing of a spiritual seer, for there can be no true or permanent government unless it be based on spiritual vision. As the Book

of Proverbs states, "Where there is no vision the people perish." Israel was constantly learning this fact and particularly during this period. When the prophet—the spiritual seer—was listened to and obeyed, the kingdom prospered, whereas when self-will, personal power, and prestige were uppermost, disaster ensued.

What is true for a nation in this respect is also true for the individual. This is the wonderful thing about the Bible—that whether the story is of nations or individuals, there is a universal spiritual law to be discerned behind it, a law which is applicable to each and every man at all levels of thought. And so one learns from this prophetic age that no man can consistently experience the wonderful fruitage of spiritual power in his life without first giving birth to prophecy or spiritual vision, and the first chapter of the first Book of Samuel relates in a very lovely way the birth of prophecy.

Hannah and Peninnah

This chapter tells of a man called Elkanah who had two wives—Hannah and Peninnah. "Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children." This caused her great grief, particularly as Peninnah chided her over this, and Hannah longed to bring forth. So she prayed silently and humbly and promised that if she had a child she would dedicate him to God. Eventually she did bear a son and called him Samuel, which means "asked of God." Samuel was the first prophet of Israel.

How often, as with Hannah, there is this longing for spiritual idealism to bring forth fruit. Hannah means "grace," and "grace" is defined as "any spiritual gift . . . the life of the soul." This is what one feels should be fruitful. The name Peninnah means "coral," and coral is a material symbol as opposed to grace.

This situation of Hannah and Peninnah can be seen in our experience today. Men look around and on all sides they observe "the children of this world" apparently prosperous and fruitful, whilst "the children of light" appear to be negligible and barren. This superficial estimate of power and consequent fruitfulness is always chiding thought which values the spiritual and has accepted it as its standard. For instance, take physical science. It has advanced to such an extent today that its fruits in terms of material progress are astounding. On the basis of these "outward" fruits merely, materialism mocks at spiritual reliances and points to barrenness in this field. But just as Christ Jesus challenged

the materialistic thought of his day with the words, "Ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" so today, for those who have eyes to see, the realization that the realm of the spiritual is the real and powerful is irresistibly dawning, although in unorthodox ways and perhaps through least expected channels. It takes prophets with spiritual discernment to see spiritual Truth appearing, but this is surely taking place.

From a human point of view, though, the things of the Spirit do not look mighty. The birth of the babe Jesus, for example, in a manger in Galilee was not reckoned as a major event in history at the time. The Roman empire with its power and wealth dominated the material scene. And today, when science would blind men's eyes with its power and its wonders, it needs spiritual vision to see that behind this uncovering of matter's claim to power is being born a great Science of spiritual reality, beyond creed or dogma, the key to spiritual power and government.

Pure and unselfed desire

So it is not in any spectacular way that great spiritual revelations are born. Here in the opening chapter of the prophetic age this spiritually-minded yet barren Hannah gives birth to Samuel, first by vowing a vow that she will dedicate him to God all the days of his life and he shall be a Nazarite, and secondly by silent, earnest, humble prayer. This unselfed and pure attitude, directed towards the realization of the allness and onliness of God, divine power, ensures spiritual birth.

Hannah vowed to dedicate her child to God. The law behind the releasing of spiritual power is—in Jesus' words—"I can of mine own self do nothing." This absolute surrender of reliance on a mortal selfhood apart from God, the great First Cause, brought tremendous vision and power into Jesus' life,—a power which overcame even the last enemy in its most violent form. In vowing to dedicate her child to God, Hannah symbolized this law that all belongs to God. The Psalmist and the Lord's Prayer re-echo this fact, declaring—"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." Man cannot reckon as his own that which he has brought forth spiritually, for it belongs to God, and in granting all initiative and fruitage to the divine Principle there is no end to the spiritual vision and consequent power that is unleashed.

Silent prayer

Coupled with this vow, the prayer of Hannah is silent and heartfelt. At first this silent prayer in the temple drew forth from Eli the priest the accusation that Hannah was drunk, for "her lips moved, but her voice was not heard." An old theological sense of religion cannot understand prayer that is unorthodox. It reckons that such prayer must have a background of unbalance. Today, theological thought may cling to creed and dogma and accuse of unbalance an unorthodox approach to God, but wherever there is honesty and purity of thought and desire in such an approach, those very qualities are God in action and therefore carry within themselves the seed of ultimate fulfilment.

Hannah's silent prayer emphasizes the power of *attitude* as opposed to words. Words are easy to come by, and so often verbal prayer, codes, or creeds can be uttered thoughtlessly or self-righteously. No matter what the words, the earnest, honest, deep desire that turns Spiritwards is the real link with spiritual power. As a well-known hymn puts it, "Prayer is the heart's sincere desire." And this prayer can be uttered constantly at any place at any time. Paul's demand to "pray without ceasing" would be an impossible injunction unless it means to have that attitude of mind which basically loves and desires the spiritual because it feels its reality. Such a desire remains through all the vicissitudes of human life, and it is constant prayer. Unspectacular, operating beyond the limits of physical sight and hearing, it is nevertheless the link to spiritual power, for it is of the very same nature and essence.

And so, in our story, Samuel is brought forth. Afterwards, Hannah is by no means barren and gives birth to other children also, but first she must give birth to all that Samuel stands for,—spiritual vision, spiritual seeing, the facts of spiritual truth in contrast to the testimony of material sense.

Weaning the child

Hannah vowed to give her child to God to be in His service and she kept this promise, but first she waited until she had weaned him. Then she took him to the house of the Lord in Shiloh. With the sacrifice of a bullock she dedicated Samuel to God and said, "as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."

This weaning process is essential with any spiritual birth. One

has a sense that it indicates spiritual education as opposed to fanaticism. Religious fanaticism would blindly give all to God at one sweep without first gently abiding with and culturing the specific idea that is born to thought. As one quietly abides with and mothers a spiritual idea that is born to one, the realization that it belongs to the divine Principle, its true origin, is a natural development. Fanaticism leaves so many ends untied. True motherhood gently educates out of matter and a selfhood apart from God into Spirit and the one Person or Principle with its infinite individuality.

Giving God the glory

Hannah's prophetic prayer after she had given up her child in Shiloh teems with the realization that all belongs to God, and that the divine is the great power behind all creation—"There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God . . . the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them." With such statements of the allness of divine power is the birth and mission of the first prophet of Israel ushered in.

And so one can see from this simple story how the spiritual vision which leads to spiritual power is born to any sincere seeker. There must be a pure desire and a willingness to give God the glory. Moreover, one must faithfully abide with this infant idea when it is born, cherish it and mother it, until it naturally leads to its divine origin and one intelligently identifies all power with God and experiences its continuous, certain, and blessed operation here and now.

The Call of Samuel

(*I Samuel 2:12-8:22*)

THROUGHOUT this fourth thousand years of Bible history there is the persistent growth of prophecy, or spiritual seeing. The period begins with the birth of Samuel, the first prophet. The historical books of the Hebrew canon were all written by seers who saw the hand of God in the events and happenings that took place with the Israelites; even the historical series which includes such Books as Samuel and Kings came to be known as the Former Prophets. In these, history is consistently illumined by prophecy—the facts of spiritual Truth outshine the mere material record. Finally, the Old Testament climaxes in the most powerful way with the sixteen prophetic books, each with its unique spiritual message. And so throughout this period we see prophecy growing from seed to its full flowering.

The evil sons of Eli

In the previous article in this series we considered the birth of Samuel, and how Hannah weaned him and dedicated him to God and he served in the temple. Now, in Chapter 2 of *I Samuel*, we can watch the contrast between priesthood and prophecy, for this chapter tells how the priestly office had gradually become degraded through the sons of Eli, but also how, growing alongside these evil practices, was the blessed development of Samuel, the young prophet.

A small incident is recorded here to show the state of the priesthood at that time. Contrary to the instructions regarding sacrifices, the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, ate their portion of the sacrifice *before* it had been burnt on the altar, and this they did in order to ensure their personal rights, which were that a portion of the meat was due to them *after* it had been burned on the altar.

To realize the significance of this we need to consider the spiritual meaning of the sacrificial ceremony. In general it involved sacrificing an animal to God—in other words, killing and giving to God something that was valued by man. What lies behind this? Birds and beasts stand for qualities of thought—birds for uplifted aspirations, the ox for patience and perseverance, the

lamb for purity and innocence, and so forth. Laying these on the altar, sacrificing and giving them to God surely means that we have to see there is no life in these moral qualities on a material basis, but that their life and essence belong to God. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." The fact that the priests were allowed a portion of meat *after* the sacrifice had taken place implies that man has a right to these qualities, but that he must first have sacrificed a mortal and personal sense of them and granted that they belong to God. Then he can truly take on his divine status as the reflection of Godlike qualities. In taking their portion *before* sacrificing to God, these priests were using their office primarily to satisfy their own ego, just as it may appear more important to a man to be reckoned as personally good on a moral basis rather than to be willing to see the *one* good—giving all to God. Jesus said, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God."

This incident makes one ask oneself: do I try to use the spiritual to serve myself? Am I being tempted to satisfy merely my personal ego, even as Jesus was tempted to do when the devil came to him in the wilderness and offered him all the kingdoms of the world? Jesus knew the allness of God and his Godlike status as reflection and so he was able to refuse this temptation. And so can we. Spiritual reality gives man his true status,—he has his portion of the sacrifice,—but it derives from recognizing the allness of God. Jesus was the Son of God. Could he have been more? Yet he never lost sight of the fact that he could do nothing of himself, that he and his Father were one, and that it was the Father that dwelt in him that did the works. We also have the right to call ourselves the sons of God—the apostle John declared, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God"—but our goodness is always derived from the one source and therefore never personal nor selfish.

The child Samuel

Contrasted with the evil practices of Hophni and Phinehas, and growing side by side, but probably little noticed by those in authority, was the infant idea of prophecy, represented by the child Samuel. In the midst of recording the evil deeds of Eli's priestly sons, the prophetic writer pauses and gives the other side of the picture: "But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod." Then he goes on to tell how Samuel's mother brought him a new coat every year when she

came to the yearly sacrifice and that “Samuel was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men.” Here, with prophecy, there was no personal pushing. Samuel served. “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven,” said Jesus. Prophecy, or spiritual seeing, has that childlike quality of purity and single-mindedness which serves God, and God only. May not the new coat every year which Samuel’s mother brought to him be a symbol of prophecy continually growing and being clothed with new, fresh, Godlike ideas? And are not these provided by that mothering which tends every seeking thought that turns Godward, and meets its every need?

Sometimes one is tempted to ask oneself: have I a right to interpret these Bible stories in this kind of way? And yet one’s spiritual sense cannot help but feel this deeper meaning. Maurice Nicoll writes in *The New Man*, “All sacred writings contain an outer and an inner meaning. Behind the literal words lies another range of meaning, another form of knowledge. According to an age-old tradition, Man was once in touch with this inner knowledge and inner meaning.” And as spiritual sense awakens in every man, he again feels “in touch with this inner knowledge and inner meaning” through a spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures, so that every story and incident is lifted out of history into the eternal “now” of ever-operative spiritual fact.

Prophecy is the “open vision”

Our next picture of Samuel is where he receives his call. The scene opens with Samuel in the temple, still as a young child, ministering to the Lord. Here the prophetic writer makes two significant statements. In verse 1 he says, “And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.” The Century Bible interprets this as “there was no frequent vision.” Vision was limited by reason of professional religionists, such as the priests, but with the birth and growth of prophecy that was destined to change. And so, in verse 15, after the call of Samuel, we read, “And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord.” This is just what prophecy does. Spiritual vision, which is not imprisoned by creed and dogma, and which looks beyond material evidence and has that faith which is defined in Hebrews as the “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” opens up vast realms of the

spiritual to consciousness. Orthodox priesthood qualities limit. There is "no open vision." Prophecy, or spontaneous spiritual vision, on the other hand, is free to all. It opens "the doors of the house of the Lord."

The call of Samuel

What is there in the call of Samuel that leads to the open vision? We are all familiar with this story of how Eli, the priest, lay down to sleep, and Samuel too, but "ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord . . . the Lord called Samuel." This He did three times. Each time Samuel ran to Eli believing that the old priest had called him. Finally, Eli realized that the child was being called of God and told him that if he heard the voice again he should reply, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." When the call came again, Samuel answered in these words and he received the message of the doom of Eli and his priestly house. From that time on "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground."

What a wonderful instance this is of listening to an individual revelation that comes to us from God. We may at first be like Samuel, and when a spiritual message comes to us direct, we may be tempted to turn to some religious authority or some respected creed, thinking in that to find authority for the spiritual message and the way to obey its import. But vision is free and unrestricted. It is open for all, and individual spiritual vision, cultured and illumined by God direct, should be heeded, for it is supremely valuable.

Spiritual progress is always restricted when one is afraid to listen to and act upon individual spiritual vision. All great spiritual reformers have had the courage of this "open vision." They may have cultured their vision through poring over the Scriptures but when their individual mission impressed itself on them more and more distinctly, they were not afraid to listen and to follow. And this need not be the experience of only one or two individuals. It is every man's right, and can be every man's experience. Did not Joel prophesy, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit"? So here Samuel, as a type

of prophecy, common to all spiritual seekers, opens “the doors of the house of the Lord.”

The capture of the ark

Now follows Chapter 4 of Samuel, which at first glance appears to have little connection with the specific chain of spiritual unfoldment that we have been feeling throughout these opening chapters. Chapter 4 tells of Israel going to battle with the Philistines. When at first they suffer defeat, they decide to bring out the ark of the Lord to save them. The ark was often carried into battle as a talisman. The mere presence of the ark does not save them, however. It is captured by the Philistines and Israel is desolated and the Philistines plagued until it returns to its natural home.

Is it not supremely logical that once the “open vision” of prophecy begins to grow, one can no longer trust blindly in a talisman, such as the ark? The ark contained the two tables of stone on which the Commandments were written—that powerful spiritual teaching which was given to Moses on the Mount. In our experience, the mere existence of those Commandments or introducing them into any struggle with only a blind obedience to them is of no avail. Prophecy has shown us that what is required is a living, active, individual vision. We cannot rely on a mere outward support, such as the belief that we are protected because we are an adherent of a particular religion, or because we regularly partake of certain rituals and ceremonies. If we are tempted to believe this, then we can be desolated when such reliances let us down, just as in this story Eli fell off his seat and died when he heard the ark had been captured by the enemy, and it was said, “The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.”

Nothing can rob a man of his individual spiritual vision when he sees its truly spiritual nature and that it is not confined or limited in creed, organization, person, or material symbol of any kind. What can capture, take away, or desolate infinity? And the true man is forever one with the infinite.

Samuel told to give the Israelites a king

Yet it would seem that “patience must have her perfect work.” The spiritual ultimate cannot be forced, and as Isaiah wrote,

“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.”

In Chapter 8 of I Samuel, therefore, we come to one of the major decisions in Israel’s history in this period, namely, to have a king to rule over them. Samuel figures prominently in this decision. He is against it, for prophecy clearly sees that the only true government is a theocracy,—government by God. Nevertheless he is commanded by God to give the Israelites a king as a “suffer it to be so now.” He is told to warn them of what it will mean in terms of their being in bondage to autocratic rule, but if this is the only form of government that they are ready for and through which they are going to learn their lessons, then a king it will have to be. Samuel chooses Saul as the first king of Israel; when he proves to be unsuccessful, he is then led to choose David, the greatest king that Israel ever had.

Today, as ever, we are closely engaged in working out questions of government, and on a world scale, for we have become one world. We need the spirit of prophecy or spiritual seeing in a greater degree than ever before, and it is universally available for every single individual as spiritual Science, unfettered by denominational adherences or organizations. It is Truth, the knowing of which will make every man free.

Saul, Israel's First King

(I Samuel 9:1-31:13)

SAUL was enthroned as the first of the kings of Israel. Up to this point the Israelites had been governed by judges, who were men raised up of God, but now the demand was for a king to rule over them "that we also may be like all the nations." Had Israel but realized it, what distinguished her from all the other nations, and was her unique achievement, was that her government took the form of a theocracy. But, as so often happens, when spiritual vision is not as brilliant as heretofore—the sons of Samuel the prophet "walked not in his ways"—a feeling of insecurity arises and thought seeks some authority to obey that is tangible to the human mind and appears reliable.

Samuel saw clearly that a king could never be a permanent answer to the question of government. It would be a compromise, a "suffer it to be so now," as all forms of organization are, for the ultimate ideal is every man governed directly by his divine Principle, God. This needs no human organization to support it or express it for it is its own integrating and operative power, even as the numbers in arithmetic or the notes in music are governed by their principle. Until this ideal state is attained, where all men become "kings and priests unto God," as it prophesies in Hebrews, it seems inevitable that various forms of organization should arise to meet the human need at every stage of experience, always bearing in mind the legendary saying of Jesus, "This world is a bridge. Ye shall pass over it. But ye shall build no houses upon it."

And so, when men are faced with the forming of an organized body of some kind, the great demand is that the Spirit should be uppermost and that the temporary forms of organization should be a secondary consideration.

Contrast between Saul and David

In the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David, we are presented with a clear contrast between an organized form of government that is in the hands of mentality susceptible to the temptations of personal sense with its pride, its envyings and jealousies, and such a form of government in the hands of

meekness, humility, a wonderful love, and above all an abiding trust in God's government.

Saul was not entirely bad, but it would seem that he depended on the human and not on the divine. He had faith in Samuel, but as a *person* rather than in the God whom Samuel represented and whom Saul could have understood and worshipped direct. Without a steady reliance on his innate spiritual identity Saul's experience was one of heights and depths—he was either transported into a state of ecstatic emotional exaltation or he was down in the depths of darkness. In contrast, David had a natural faith in God. He did not appear to rely on Samuel, but always prayed to God direct. True, David had his heights and depths also, but he never let go his trust in the divine. So many of the Psalms attributed to David echo this conviction of the ever-presence of God and His never-failing comfort and salvation even in the midst of trouble.

Saul seeks asses—David tends sheep

The manner in which these two kings were chosen offers an interesting comparison. The first we hear of Saul is that he and his servant are setting out to find the asses of Kish, Saul's father, which are lost. Samuel meets them and is told by God to anoint Saul king. David, on the other hand, is tending his father's sheep when Samuel is led by God to Jesse the Bethlehemite to appoint a king from among his sons.

In Chapter 9 of I Samuel where Saul is anointed king, one notices constant injunctions to Saul to rise—he has to go “up the hill to the city,” he is told to “go up before [Samuel] to the high place” to eat, and he has to go “to the top of the house” to commune with Samuel. The command to rise is insistent. In the East the ass was a domestic animal used for service. It was never used in religious ceremonies. Seeking for asses, therefore, would seem to symbolize pursuing good moral qualities. Because Saul was seeking merely moral values, Samuel's whole effort was to resurrect his thought to a spiritual standard, for he realized that there could be no successful kingship without the spiritual being uppermost in thought.

With David there was no conversion necessary. In the Scriptures the symbol of a sheep or a lamb has a more spiritual connotation than that of an ass. David was tending his father's sheep—mindful of the spiritual and alert to preserve it—even as

Moses was before the call came to him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. David's kinglike qualities already lay in his faithfulness over the few things of Spirit, which were leading him so naturally to be made "ruler over many," as they will with all of us.

The inward governs the outward

Through Samuel's ministrations Saul is exalted and being temporarily "turned into another man," he is anointed king. Great stress is laid here on his outward appearance—again a consideration which tends to be over-emphasized in organization of any kind. What the "outside" looks like becomes of paramount importance,—making clean merely "the outside of . . . the platter." It is true, though, that the "outside" will always be acceptable and taken care of when the Spirit is alive and cherished as the real substance of being. There is a right "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" when the spiritual is seen as the all and only. David had a "beautiful countenance" because a spiritual sense of things cannot help but express itself in beauty.

Unity in the Spirit of God

When the "Spirit of God" came upon Saul, which it did intermittently, he operated well, and this took place in the first recorded incident of his reign. The Ammonites came up against the men of Jabesh-gilead, and with the Spirit of God upon him, Saul roused the people to come out "with one consent" and they defeated the Ammonites.

One of the good outcomes of organized activity can be this unity of thought and action. There is no strength in actual numbers, but wherever there is a coming together in the spirit of "two or three . . . gathered together in my name," as Jesus said, then it is so very true that "there am I in the midst of them." Whenever individuals meet together "with one consent," turning not to one another but to the "Spirit of God," the divine Principle of the universe, great power for good can result. Paul seemed to see this clearly when he wrote in the Epistle to the Hebrews of man being free to "enter into the holiest," into "a new and living way" of individual unity with God. At the same time he says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,

as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Saul rejected as king

It would appear that Saul's conquest of the Ammonites when the Spirit of God came upon him was his only outstanding victory. He followed it by two fatal mistakes which, we are told, caused God to reject him as king.

In the first instance, in a battle against the Philistines, he was told to tarry seven days at Gilgal until Samuel came to offer sacrifices. But Samuel did not come at the appointed time and so Saul intruded into the priest's office and offered the sacrifices himself. Because of this, Samuel told Saul that his "kingdom shall not continue." Saul's excuse for taking Samuel's place was that he thought the people would scatter and he feared the enemy would destroy him. This is always a temptation with thought that is concerned with outside appearances. It is willing to trust the spiritual in the first place, but when the eleventh hour draws near and there are no visible results, the urge is very strong to use human will in spiritual matters. Even Saul says here, "I forced myself." So often, in organized bodies, to save a situation which looks disastrous from a limited human viewpoint, a decision is forced on the basis of human will or human wisdom, but is labelled divine, or the will of God.

Saul's second fatal mistake was against the Amalekites. He was told to destroy them utterly, but he was only partially obedient to this command, keeping back some of the spoil for himself, whilst blaming this disobedience on the people. Again, one can see how necessary it is in true government to be whole-hearted and single minded on the side of the spiritual. The temptation comes in any organized body to mix Spirit and matter. Power and fame and wealth often accompany organization, especially as the result of any kind of victory, and the human inclination is to want to hold on to these things in a material way. Jesus' great safety and his wonderful demonstration of spiritual power was dependent on his absolute conviction that all initiative lay with God. He said, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God;" "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do;" "The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." He never kept back any of the "spoil," and so he remained a king in the true

meaning of the title. Here Saul was utterly rejected as king and Samuel was led by God to appoint David in his place.

It is a significant fact that though Saul was still the legal ruler, David was now the God-crowned king. It is comforting to realize that whatever is claiming to rule in human experience that is “rejected of God” is not the basic governing factor. Spiritual sense, even though not as yet acknowledged by the world, is the powerful rule that is truly in operation.

Saul goes on as king for several years, however, whilst David remains the uncrowned ruler, and Chapters 16 until the end of I Samuel are concerned with the relationship between Saul and David.

Saul and David and Jonathan

Originally Saul loved David and engaged him as his armour-bearer. David also played on his harp to soothe Saul whenever an evil spirit troubled him, which by now had become a frequent happening. Often a calm, untroubled spiritual sense is like sweet music to a soul in distress, especially when such a one has had glimpses of the peace and joy of the spiritual.

As time went on, David began to become a successful warrior and to gain the affection of the people. Also a deep friendship arose between David and Saul's son, Jonathan. All this aroused Saul's jealousy and from then onwards he never ceased plotting to kill David.

If we look deeper into the relationship of these three characters, we cannot fail to see that they symbolize the three degrees of our human experience: Saul—the physical, Jonathan—the moral, and David—the spiritual. Jonathan was torn in his affections between Saul and David, even as the question before us has always seemed to be: Is the moral related to the *physical*, inasmuch as it can be seen as good on a material basis? Or is it related to the *spiritual*, being the outcome of the spiritual shining through the mists of materiality? The love of David and Jonathan for one another intimates that the true moral is sweetly related to the spiritual, and the fact that Jonathan bestowed all his possessions on David would indicate that the pure moral acknowledges that all it has and is belongs to the spiritual. A material and physical outlook resents this. In the main, Saul typifies such an outlook, particularly at this stage of the story. It wants good, it wants many satisfying moral qualities, but on its own terms. It

is enraged when it realizes that these can only be experienced through spiritual consciousness, as typified by David's lovely relationship to Jonathan, for it feels unable to live up to the demands of the spiritual.

Saul's attempts to slay David

Twice Saul attempts to slay David with a javelin whilst he is playing the harp to him, and both times David escapes. Then Saul tries to get him slain in battle, but to no avail. During this period Saul has moments of repentance and exaltation, but finally David is forced to flee the country because of Saul's constant threats. Even then Saul chases David to slay him.

On two occasions whilst Saul is engaged in pursuing David, the latter has Saul in his power and could have killed him, but David spares Saul's life, for he is convinced that he must not "stretch forth [his] hand against the Lord's anointed." When those who govern a religious organization abuse its spiritual purpose, for instance, so that it is no longer the inspired proposition it should be, it is often wiser to let the error destroy itself, if that is the way it must go, rather than attempt to deal the death blow through what might be termed rightful retribution.

The death of Saul

Finally, when Saul is facing the Philistines in a dreaded battle, he goes back on his own decrees which have put away wizards and those who have familiar spirits, and consults the witch of Endor. He asks her to call up Samuel, and when the spirit of Samuel appears, Saul is told that he will lose the battle against the Philistines and that he and his sons will be slain. This takes place and Saul is killed at the hands of his own servant, whom he asks to thrust him through. A personal sense of things is bound to bring about its own destruction, for it has limits that are present from the outset.

As one follows the reign of Saul step by step, one can clearly see the instability of government when a personal and merely moral sense holds sway and how stable government needs constant reliance on the unchanging divine Principle of the universe and its never-failing impulsion to right action.

The Young David

(*I Samuel 16:1-20:42*)

HISTORICALLY David was the first and only great king of Israel. He it was who united the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel into one kingdom after they had become divided through jealousy and envy. There were several other kings who did credit to themselves, but David was outstanding in so many directions because of his never-failing trust in God. Hastings writes, "The David of Israel is not simply the greatest of her kings; he is the man great in everything. He monopolizes all her institutions. He is her shepherd boy . . . He is her musician . . . He is her soldier . . . He is her priest . . . He is her prophet . . . He is her poet . . . The truth is, in the estimation of Israel this man is a personification of the nation itself—the embodiment of her qualities, the incarnation of her spirit, the type of her destiny."

David and Jesus

This regard for David permeates the Scriptures. Jesus is referred to many times in the New Testament as the "Son of David;" he was also the son of Jacob and the son of Solomon, but these associations are never stressed. It is David who is constantly mentioned as the great forerunner of Christ Jesus. John the Revelator also speaks of the Christ as having "the key of David," and in the last chapter of his Revelation he writes, "I Jesus. . . am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."

What, then, is David's spiritual significance in the Book of Life, particularly in relation to Jesus? David brings great comfort mainly as a symbol of the coincidence between the human and the divine. He illustrates through the medium of kingship not only how organization can serve as a temporary blessing when governed by the spiritual, but also how our human experience, which claims to be restricted by an organic structure, can be blessed and translated by the spiritual, no matter how many discouraging setbacks we may have to meet.

Jesus demonstrated this same coincidence between the human and the divine, but with the conscious authority of being the Son of God. David turned unreservedly to the power of God, and

that power never failed to operate in his experience to guide and deliver him; Jesus, however, was not only aware of God's power, but was also supremely aware of the Christ selfhood of man and of man's eternal spiritual estate as God's image and likeness.

All the time we can feel that David's experiences are foreshadowing the Wayshower. David was literally a shepherd; Jesus was known as the great Shepherd of mankind. David was literally a king; Jesus was figuratively hailed as the King of kings. David's career from shepherd boy to king symbolically illustrates the way of Life; Jesus as the great universal Shepherd and King actually *lived* the way of Life.

This is the difference between the Old and New Testament presentations of Truth. In the Old Testament myth, saga, allegory, history serve to illustrate the fundamental spiritual facts of Being, whilst in the New Testament we see these truths actually being lived, first by the greatest exemplar of their verity, Christ Jesus, and then by his followers. No wonder Jesus said that he came to fulfil the law and the prophets and not to destroy them. The Old Testament lays the foundation of spiritual fundamentals; the New Testament shows them in operation. Each is inseparable from the other. We cannot live the Truth if we do not know the Truth, and we do not really know the Truth if we are not living it. Is not this why the Old Testament is always looking forward to the living Saviour, and Jesus, in turn, constantly told his followers to search the Scriptures and expounded those same Scriptures to his disciples on the walk to Emmaus? The living Christ spirit is thus always needed to illumine these Old Testament stories.

David the youngest and eighth son

Returning to David, the first we read of him is in Chapter 16 of I Samuel. Saul has been rejected from kingship and now the prophet Samuel is sent to Jesse the Bethlehemite to choose a new king from among Jesse's sons. All the sons pass before Samuel, but none of them appears to him as the God-appointed king. Jesse is asked if he has any more sons and he replies, "There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep." This youngest, the eighth son, David, the keeper of sheep, is the one who is anointed king.

Here is a lovely illustration of the type of thought necessary for kingship in any sphere. Again and again in the Old Testament

we have the symbol of that which is youngest becoming supreme. What seems like new-born spiritual sense is fundamentally that which has always been man's innate identity. Our Christ selfhood can say with Jesus, "Before Abraham was, I am." Material history and personality may claim to have been with us longer but the spiritual will always assert its birthright and supersede them.

This is also in accord with David being the eighth son, for the symbol "eight" indicates a new beginning. E. C. Pressland says, "After the full course of 7, the 8th became the first of the next series—it introduced the new . . . 'Begin again' is the general thought of 8. And the character of the new beginning in Christ is a resurrection one." So we constantly have the opportunity to "begin again" by reckoning from our Christ selfhood which, though it may appear to be the "youngest," is "that which was from the beginning," and resurrects us from a mortal sense of ourselves.

David the keeper of sheep

As well as being the youngest and eighth son, David was a keeper of sheep. His faithfulness "over a few things" made him "ruler over many." Increasingly one realizes how necessary it is to watch over one's thoughts and not allow preying evil suggestions to rob one of pure spiritual ideas. Jesus, the great Shepherd, warned, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." And he also declared that effective watching comes from knowing your sheep—"I am the good shepherd, and *know* my sheep and am known of mine;" and also from loving and valuing your flock—"the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." David's history shows how he often drew on his shepherd's experience to help him in dangers and difficulties. Before he fought Goliath, he told Saul how he had once saved a lamb from "the paw of the lion" and "the paw of the bear" and remained unharmed.

It is just as true today that when any man is willing quietly to give the time, the thought, and the love to being a "shepherd,"—to cherishing an understanding of spiritual reality and being alert to detect that which would rob him of it,—then in time of stress and difficulty this "shepherding" will always stand him in good stead.

David the musician

When David is introduced into the Scriptural story, we learn of three sides of his character, which, spiritually interpreted, give three essential constituents of the dominion of kingship in any sphere.

First, he is shown as a shepherd. Next, he appears as a musician in the court of King Saul. He is engaged to play the harp to Saul whenever an evil spirit comes upon him. This sweet Psalmist of Israel, who could "play well," must have been sensitive to the beauties of harmony. Just as we need to be shepherds, do we not also need to have this love of spiritual harmony and be acutely sensitive to it? The true spirit of the Christ brings this sensitivity, so that we hear and respond to the music of Soul.

David the warrior

Almost in contrast to this—and yet essential to the shepherd and the musician—we have David introduced next as a warrior, when he defeated the giant Goliath single-handed.

Everyone is familiar with the story of how this Goliath of the Philistines presented himself day after day and challenged the armies of Israel to put forward an opponent to fight against him. David was not amongst the warriors. He was still minding his sheep, but his father sent him to the battle with some food for his brothers and to see how they fared. When David arrived on the battlefield and heard the giant's challenge, he immediately declared that he himself would take it up. His brothers scorned his bravery and Saul tried to dissuade him because of his youth. David, however, would not be put off. Seeing that he was determined to accept this challenge, Saul then arrayed him in his own armour, but David protested, "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them." He discarded Saul's armour and took instead his shepherd's sling and "five smooth stones out of the brook."

Goliath was of the Philistines, who symbolically stand for human knowledge. His giant proportions, his bravado in defying the armies of Israel, his constant presentation of himself morning and evening as an enemy are typical of the challenge made by human knowledge to the armies of Israel today,—to thought that is aware of the reality and power of the spiritual. Human

knowledge with its imposing armour of materially scientific facts, challenges metaphysics and every conviction of spiritual power. It speaks with a loud voice, instilling fear into all who hear it. Yet not "all." There are many "Davids" who are shepherds and who are convinced beyond a shadow of doubt of the reality and power of the spiritual.

It is to be noted that not with the weapons of the Philistine did David defeat this giant, but with the tools of his shepherd's calling,—with his sling and one smooth stone from the brook. This stone pierced clean through the giant's elaborate defences and smote him in the forehead, killing him outright. May not this stone be the same symbol as "the stone which the builders rejected," which Jesus said becomes "the head of the corner"? This stone is the rock-like fact of spiritual reality which slays the claims of human knowledge in the forehead, the so-called seat of intelligence, because spiritual reality is intelligent in the highest sense.

The Book of Revelation speaks of the "white stone" which is given to "him that overcometh" and "in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." As Jesus realized before Pilate, all the arguments in the world can never convince the carnal mind of the reality of the spiritual. It is not with clever words and human reason that materialistic theories can be met and disproved. Only when a man's spiritual sense is alerted to receive the Truth does he begin to know it and to know his "new name"—his fundamental spiritual nature—with a certainty which nothing can shake. The stone then becomes a rock.

So David was a shepherd, a musician, and a warrior. And in relation to the spiritual, do we not all need to be shepherds, musicians, and warriors? Do we not all need to care for and watch over our understanding of spiritual reality, to be sensitive to the beauty and harmony of the spiritual, and at the same time to be warriors for what we know to be true?

David and Jonathan

Saul was so impressed with David that he made him his armour-bearer. Whilst David was living in the court, a close love began to spring up between David and Jonathan, Saul's son. As we saw in the previous article in this series, these three—Saul,

Jonathan, and David—would seem to symbolize the three degrees of human experience—the physical, the moral, and the spiritual.

Jonathan loved David as his own soul. He even stripped himself of his garments and gave them to David “even to his sword, and to his bow and to his girdle.” It is interesting that after human knowledge, material hypotheses, in the form of Goliath, has been dealt its death-blow by David, typifying the spiritual, the story goes on to show that even the moral sense, symbolized by Jonathan, quite naturally acknowledges the supremacy of the spiritual.

An incident occurs in this phase of the story which gives food for thought. Saul, jealous of the close affection between David and Jonathan, now makes several attempts on David’s life, and at this particular period it is Jonathan who protects David by finding out Saul’s intentions and warning David to flee from the palace. Here, then, it is the moral that saves the spiritual from being killed. This is an important point to ponder, and in doing so one can see that our living of the spiritual in terms of a true humanity and a true morality does serve to keep alive the reality of the spiritual. In other words, preaching without practice appears to kill the spiritual in the mind of the preacher and also for his hearers. Divinity must be made manifest in humanity, or divinity will be lifeless.

So the morality or humanity as represented by Jonathan, when it is awake and alert and knows no separation from the spiritual, preserves the spiritual. Could one not define the true moral sense as letting the spiritual be real in one’s life here and now? Then, and only then, is one assured of a pure moral sense, as opposed to that which is based merely on custom and convention.

And so David flees from Saul and goes into the wilderness. Saul is still on the throne, yet side by side with the rule of this rejected king is a refining process going on with David, the great ruler-to-be, in his wilderness experience. Here we find him anointed as king, destined to be king, but working out a period of proving his divine qualities in all the vicissitudes of a wilderness experience. This testing time made him equal to the great task which lay before him.

David in the Wilderness

(I Samuel 21:1-II Samuel 2:4)

“AND DAVID abode in the wilderness in strong holds.” This verse from Chapter 23 of I Samuel summarizes this period of David’s life. He had times of hunger, times of exhaustion, and was continually being pursued by Saul, whose intention was to destroy him, but his great “strong hold” was an innate trust in God.

The purpose of the wilderness

The last article in this series concluded with David fleeing from King Saul’s court and taking refuge in the wilderness. David had seen that though he loved Jonathan and was willing to serve Saul, there was no room for him in the palace as long as Saul reigned. Does this mean that much as our spiritual sense may love the true moral (Jonathan) and much as it may desire to translate the physical (Saul), it cannot do this with power unless spiritual sense (David) is truly enthroned in consciousness? David had been anointed king, but he had to work through a wilderness period before actually reigning as king.

This is a familiar pattern in the Bible. In the Old Testament there is the great collective example of Moses taking the children of Israel, destined to be rulers in their own land, through the Red Sea and the wilderness. Later, the prophet Elijah was sustained in the wilderness before his great demonstration of spiritual power in the face of opposition from the prophets of Baal. In the New Testament it is recorded that Jesus too went into the wilderness for a period, which strengthened him to go forth and prove his spiritual kingship through his God-impelled acts of healing and regeneration.

What is there about this wilderness experience that is healthy? It leads man to exercise his spiritual sense and rely on divine power alone. It may be a barren land to material sense, but to spiritual sense it can “bud and blossom.” In the wilderness, Moses with his Israelite followers found manna falling miraculously from the sky and water pouring from the rock, to feed and sustain them. Elijah, having fled into the wilderness, was refreshed and strengthened by divine means when he felt inadequate to challenge the idolatry of Israel. It was in the wilderness

that Jesus, tempted to depend on material methods for his mission, saw that it was only through identification with the divine that he could fulfil his destiny.

David eats the shewbread

And so David in the wilderness undergoes a testing time when he learns to rely on his spiritual sense under turbulent conditions. First, hungry and alone, he flees to the priest of Nob, and demands to be given the shewbread to assuage his hunger. The rule was that only the priests were allowed to eat the shewbread, but here David persuades the priest to sustain him and his men with it.

Jesus refers to this incident of David eating the shewbread when the disciples were rebuked for plucking and eating corn on the sabbath day. The sabbath day stands for that restful attitude of thought which acknowledges the completeness and perfection of God and His creation. The argument is that six days men ought to work but not on the sabbath day, as if the perfection of God and man had no connection with man's everyday life. But man has a right to be sustained here and now by the spiritual fact of his original perfection as God's image and likeness, and eating the shewbread illustrates this. As Jesus said, "The sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath." This is a glimpse of the New Testament platform that man is saved by grace and not merely by human effort. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," said Jesus.

A captain in the wilderness

It would appear, however, that the goad behind David at this point was fear. It is related that Doeg the Edomite was present on that occasion, and Doeg means "fearful." David fled to the priest of Nob "for fear of Saul" and from there to Achish, the king of Gath, of whom also he was "sore afraid." Fear may seem to drive a man Godward, but it does not bring a permanent solution, and so David has to gather himself together and build anew and fearlessly on his own individual foundation with God. This he does in the cave of Adullam, to which he retreats. Adullam means "retreat, refuge, resting-place." Here many joined themselves to David and "he became a captain over them." As a boy he had been a shepherd in the wilderness and now he

was to be a captain in the wilderness. This is an experience we all have, namely, that if we are watchful and alert over the "flock" of pure, Christlike ideas and preserve them intact, we gain an increasing sense of rule and dominion. It is the old story of being "faithful over a few things," which inevitably leads to being made "ruler over many."

David flees from Keilah

All through this period Saul relentlessly seeks David to kill him. At one point he feels certain that he has his enemy in his hands, for David and his men are enclosed in Keilah and Saul declares triumphantly, "God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars." David is told by God that he will be destroyed if he remains in the city, in spite of its apparent safety, and so he escapes from it and his life is preserved. There is no safety in limitation. The very meaning of Keilah is "enclosed." If we limit or enclose in matter life, or substance, or intelligence, then they are subject to destruction. Nothing can kill that which is unconfined, incorporeal, infinite, and it is on this divine basis that we learn to establish all our values in order to preserve them.

One of the lovely touches in the story of this wilderness period is where Jonathan meets David in a wood and strengthens him. So often in our struggle for spiritual dominion, kindly affection or tenderness or compassion—some moral quality—encourages and comforts us, and shows us a glimpse of man's true destiny, even as Jonathan did with David.

David spares Saul's life

There were two occasions in Saul's determined pursuit of David when the latter could have killed the king. He had him in his power, but forbore to do so. The first was in a cave at En-gedi where David and his men were hiding. Saul, still hotly in pursuit, went into this cave to sleep. David's men urged him to slay Saul, but he merely cut off the skirt of King Saul's robe. When the king afterwards arose, David followed him and told him what he had done. This astounding display of mercy caused Saul temporarily to retract his vengeful attitude, but not for long.

Has not this incident a symbolic significance? The skirt is the outer edge or border of the robe. We have seen all along how

Saul stands for various states of thought—a personal sense of government held together by rigid organization, an emotional sense of religion which is in the heights at one moment and in the depths at another, and sometimes he represents the level of the physical as opposed to the moral and spiritual. But behind all Saul's misdemeanours David saw "the Lord's anointed," as he termed it, and he would not lift up his hand against that.

The Christly method of dealing with that which would oppose the spiritual is always translation rather than destruction. Jesus maintained that he had not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them. He took the negative commands of the Old Testament and "cut off their skirt" by showing the deeper positive truths that lay behind the merely formal and outer interpretation of the law, that interpretation which could be so distorted as even to seek the destruction of the Christ.

On a second occasion in the wilderness of Ziph, David spares Saul's life again. Many believe that it is a repetition of the original incident, but even if this were so, one feels that the Hebrew writers gave different details in order to bring out a new lesson. Here David takes the initiative and seeks out Saul, instead of Saul coming upon David unexpectedly as in the cave of Engedi. Here too, rather than cut off his skirt, he takes away Saul's spear and cruse of water. The spear was known as a symbol of authority and the water as a symbol of life. The Christ consciousness enables us to see through the surface presentation of every opposing phenomenon to the one and only Truth. But not only this: it also shows that there is no power nor authority in that which looks mighty on the outside. Jesus saw this clearly in his dealings with Pilate. He said to him, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." He mentally took away Pilate's "spear" and "cruse of water,"—the authority and life of any so-called power opposed to God.

David and Abigail

In each of these incidents David was striving to let divine power govern, instead of human will. Inserted between the two accounts of his sparing of Saul's life is one of the loveliest stories in the Book of Samuel. It is that of Nabal and his wife, Abigail, who was later to become David's wife.

Nabal means "foolish" or "churlish"—perhaps a symbol of

that state of thought expressed by Paul's words, "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." Contrary to the prevailing custom among the shepherds and the Bedouins in the wilderness, Nabal refused to give David and his men any perquisites at harvest time in return for their protection of his flock. When Nabal refused to give what was expected of him, David planned to kill him and his shepherds. This came to the ears of Abigail and through her brave interception of David she won mercy from him for Nabal and his household.

These Bible stories are based so squarely on eternal laws that although they lend themselves to many interpretations, yet always behind these interpretations can be discerned some specific spiritual law. For instance, the presence of David and his men in the wilderness, guarding and caring for Nabal's sheep, instances so clearly the fact that spiritual sense, alive and active in the world, takes care of many events and happenings that might otherwise turn to disaster. Human thought may or may not acknowledge this. Nabal did not. He counted David as of no consequence and would grant nothing to him. Those who uphold the spiritual may be tempted, as David was, to force its acknowledgment and to destroy violently that which withholds granting to the spiritual its rights. It is here that true womanhood comes in and prevails. Abigail gives David what is due to him. She shows him his royal destiny and how that will irresistibly deal with his enemies. He must not take justice into his own hands. David listens to her and shows mercy. It is later related that "the Lord smote Nabal, and he died."

We need to listen to the quality of womanhood in world thought. If we ourselves are open to spiritual intuition, bigness, impersonality, and a steadfast trust in good,—all qualities of true womanhood,—acknowledgment of the power of the spiritual will come perhaps in strange ways and where we least expect it. This quality of womanhood will also re-affirm in consciousness the kingship of spiritual power and remind us of Isaiah's words that "the government shall be upon his shoulder." It is noticeable that throughout David's reign it was the qualities of womanhood which enabled him to hold the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah together and to deal wisely and successfully with the rebellion of his son Absalom. This wilderness period indeed formed a background for David's great reign even as it equipped the Israelites for the Promised Land and Jesus proved his divine identity in the wilderness before starting his ministry.

David joins the Philistines

Before his opportunity came to be made king, once again David joined himself to the Philistines, the enemies of Israel. On a previous occasion his refuge with Achish, the Philistine king, had been in fear of Saul. True, even now it was to escape from Saul, but it was a considered step and not a headlong, fearful flight. Though joining issue with this foreign nation, he maintained his independence as an Israelite. He fought enemies that were common to both nations, and in a providential way was prevented from warring against Israel herself. It would seem that at times the worldly atmosphere, symbolized here by the Philistines, can serve as a protection to the spiritual idea, even as Joseph, and later the infant Jesus, were both preserved in Egypt.

It is at this very point in Chapter 28 of I Samuel that Saul stoops to consult the witch of Endor and his death is foretold. There is such a contrast in the steps taken by these two men at this point. David went to the Philistines as a free man, conscious of what he was doing and what he planned to do. He had dominion. Saul, on the other hand, went to the witch of Endor like a captive, not knowing what to do and with no sense of dominion.

David acknowledged as king

We all know the end of this duel between a personal sense of kingship, propped up only by name, and the impersonal sense of kingship earned through wilderness trials. Saul was slain in battle and David comes into his rightful estate as king of Israel. He had been anointed king by Samuel when he was only a shepherd boy, he had proved his kingship as a captain in the wilderness,—a captain not only of men but of his own soul,—and now he was accepted and acknowledged as king openly by the people. So must the spiritual dominion of every man be substantiated through a similar testing time.

King David Reigns

(II Samuel 2:4-13:39)

DAVID'S GREAT LOVE, his complete trust in God, and an innate sense of oneness made him the finest of Israel's kings.

These qualities were put to the test at the outset of his reign. No sooner had he been anointed king at Hebron over the house of Judah, than Abner, the captain of Saul's host, set up a rival kingdom consisting of the remaining eleven tribes with Ishbosheth, Saul's son, as king. After a while Abner fell foul of Ishbosheth and decided to turn the rival kingdom over to David. He made this proposition to David and then went to gather all Israel into this one united kingdom. Joab, who was captain of David's host, did not trust Abner to do this, and recalling him on a false pretext, he treacherously killed him. This violent action deeply grieved David. Nevertheless the kingdom became one kingdom, with David ruling over both Judah and Israel. After the reign of Solomon, the kingdom once more divided and remained thus until the children of Israel were taken into captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

The divided kingdom

This constantly divided kingdom was the great stumbling-block in Israel's history. It always weakened her. David alone drew and held the kingdom together as one. It is true that Solomon, following on David's reign, managed to maintain this unity, but at his death it again became divided.

This is a wonderful symbol for us to consider. Judah and Israel stand for manhood and womanhood, the letter and the spirit, understanding and proof. The belief is that it is not easy to keep these in balance in one undivided whole. For instance, one often hears the remark, "I can see these spiritual facts but I cannot prove them." Or, on the contrary, "I feel the spirit of Truth, but I am unable to explain it to anyone." Or again, "I have plenty of ideas but they never seem to come to fruition," which indicates the need to realize that man reflects both manhood and womanhood, the creative ability of the divine Fatherhood and theceptive ability of the divine Motherhood.

Jesus the Wayshower lived the coincidence of the human and

the divine more effectively than any man has ever done. He "united the two kingdoms." He expressed the courage and initiative of manhood and the patience and trust of womanhood; he knew the letter of the Old Testament and translated it into the spirit of the New Testament which he himself brought; moreover, he understood his Father's will and could prove that will here on earth in healing sickness and sin, and even in raising the dead.

This balanced sense of coincidence involves the process of translation. Translation never divides and destroys, but rather unites and restores. Though Jesus said, "I came not to send peace, but a sword," he also declared, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." He brought a sword to a *material concept* of existence, but at the same time he showed the harmonious spiritual facts which lie behind every manifestation, and this resulted in the stilling of the tempest, the walking on the water, the restoring of sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, feet to the lame. All these activities, faculties, and functions he translated through his awareness of the substance that lay behind the shadow. He did not ignore or destroy the human picture. He destroyed the material concept of it through his consciousness of the allness and onliness of Spirit, and this brought about a translation of the human picture here and now.

In this incident with David which we are considering, the Scriptural writers use the very term "translation." In II Samuel, Chapter 3, we read that Abner planned "to translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beer-sheba." David trusted in a peaceful translation—he trusted Abner. Joab trusted in human will and he killed Abner. Later he was to pay for his violence. David's way was always the way of true womanhood, and just as he refused to take action against Saul, but let the error destroy itself and translate the kingdom naturally into his hands, so he met this problem of uniting a divided kingdom. Thus David became king over the whole of Israel and made Jerusalem the capital of the kingdom.

Bringing the ark to Jerusalem

After defeating the Philistines, David's first positive step was to seek to bring the ark out of the house of Abinadab, where it had been resting, and to place it in the capital city of Jerusalem.

A truly wonderful symbol this, when one remembers what the ark stands for. At the time when Moses was instructed by God to make the tabernacle, he was also instructed to make the ark, which was to house the two tablets of stone on which the Commandments were written. The ark was a symbol of spiritual teaching, therefore, and David felt that these laws of God must have a permanent resting place in the capital city of his kingdom in order to ensure the permanence of that kingdom.

Does not this incident imply that if we want to abide with a sure and established sense of the kingdom of God in our experience we must make a place for the rules and laws of spiritual being in our consciousness? The vital point here, though, is that David had to bring the ark into the city in *God's* appointed way and not in the way of human will. He attempted first of all to bring it in on an ox cart. The oxen shook the ark. Uzzah tried to steady it and was struck dead. Scofield writes of this incident, "The story of David's new cart and its results is a striking illustration of the spiritual truth that blessing does not follow even the best intentions in the service of God except as that service is rendered in God's way. It is a constant point of failure. God had given explicit directions how the ark should be borne and David adopted a Philistine expedient."

"A Philistine expedient"—human knowledge again. We know that the kingdom of God cannot be realized permanently in our experience and be proof against all the enemies that assail it, unless it is based on a scientific understanding of spiritual rules and laws. If we try to acquire these, though, through a mere intellectual learning of spiritual fundamentals, impelled by human will or because we believe we *should* acquaint ourselves with them, they can be shaken, even as the oxen shook the ark. When they are shaken, then we often try to steady the situation humanly, but that method is of no avail. One experiences time and again that the divine laws of being mean the destruction of human methods in spiritual matters, even though those human methods may have the best intentions behind them. On the other hand they bring great strength and blessing to thought that is willing to abide by the purely spiritual way. When the fundamentals of spiritual being come to us naturally and sweetly and in God's way, we become truly at one with them and feel their reality, presence, and power.

And so David had to house the ark for three months in the house of Obed-edom, until he brought it into Jerusalem in the

right way—in God's way. This time it was carried by the priestly family of the Kohathites, as in Moses' instructions. The Century Bible comments, "The Ark on this occasion is reverently carried, not driven." And so, "reverently carried" by spiritual sense and not driven by human will, our ark will also be established with much rejoicing.

David dances before the ark

The procession into Jerusalem was headed by David dancing before the ark. His wife, Michal, looked out of a window and saw David in a linen ephod "leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart." It was because she despised David on this occasion that Michal went childless to her grave. Michal was Saul's daughter and stands for a narrow religious sense. How often such a sense—rigid and stereotyped—peers forth from its confined outlook and despises free, unorthodox ways of worshipping God. It is true too that this limited, religious sense which fears to be unorthodox is often barren. We need to have that bigness and love that recognizes and welcomes the expression of Godlikeness under whatever guise. And we also need thought that does not fear to do as David did—he "danced before the Lord with all his might." Whatever unorthodox way God impels us to express His power and goodness, let us do it with all our might! David was never childless. He brought forth abundantly through his single-minded obedience to the impulsion of the divine.

Building a house for the Lord

David, at peace with his enemies and blessed on every hand, now desires to build a house for the Lord. We too may have such a sense of peace and happiness and gratitude for some understanding of the healing and saving Truth, that we desire with all our heart to play our part in safeguarding that Truth. So we plan to build some structure, some organization, that we believe will preserve it. But God would not allow David to build a house for Him. Rather did God say that He would build *him* a house. We do not have to preserve Truth. Truth preserves us.

David, prefiguring so closely Jesus' mission, was impelled to trust God and His divine ways and means for the preservation of the wonderful Truth he was experiencing. Later we find the

Wayshower establishing no church, writing no books, and yet saying with authority and power, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." A temporary form of organization may be necessary at a certain period, but only in obedience to God and with the realization of its temporary nature. Solomon had to build the temple, but the material concept of it was destined to be destroyed in order to find the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." It was the same with Jesus and his body. The material concept of his body had to go in order to prove the incorporeal structure of the true man.

David shows mercy to all

David, having defeated all his enemies, wishes to show kindness to any who are left of Saul's house. He brings Saul's lame son, Mephibosheth, to the court and gives instructions that he is to eat bread always at the king's table. This is a lovely illustration of the compassionate conclusion in Hebrews, "Therefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." When we remember that Saul and his issue stand for a religious sense and a merely moral sense, David's action in bringing Mephibosheth to the court and insisting that he eat bread at the king's table shows us that once spiritual sense is enthroned in consciousness, upward-tending moral sense begins to realize the spiritual as its home, and is fed and sustained by the power of the spiritual.

It is interesting how the next chapter illustrates that we cannot show mercy to that which is an enemy to the spiritual idea. David tried to show kindness to the Ammonites, with disastrous effects. It is right to show mercy to thought that is tending towards the spiritual, as Mephibosheth was, but one needs to be alert not to be over-indulgent towards the mortal sense of things, which the Ammonites represented. Jesus said, "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." And here David had to learn this lesson.

David and Bathsheba

After this incident there follows the well-known story of David and Bathsheba. David was on the roof of his palace when he saw Bathsheba washing herself on a neighbouring roof. Attracted by

her, he sent for her and lay with her. Afterwards she found she was going to have a child. David then tried in many subtle ways to make it appear that Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, was the legitimate father of the child. This plan did not succeed and so he eventually had Uriah cunningly killed in battle. David then wedded Bathsheba and the baby was born to them. It was a son, who soon became very sick. David mourned for him, fasted and prayed, but finally the child died. David then was compelled to repent of his sin. He comforted Bathsheba and eventually they had another son, Solomon.

This was always regarded as David's great sin, and yet, spiritually interpreted, is not this a mistake which any of us may make, and indeed often do make, in our spiritual journey? Bathsheba means "daughter of the seventh day or of the sabbath" and as such stands for a perfect ideal. David desired her, regardless of the fact that she was someone else's wife, the ideal of another. Uriah means "the light of the Lord." He was a worker, and illustrates that the ideal is wedded to the light of Truth and to the need to watch and pray and be active in understanding and proving this light. David was always aware of this necessity, but it seemed that he was temporarily off his guard. He believed that he could bring forth from an ideal that was attractive and lovely and yet was not truly his own. In killing Uriah, he attempted to blot out the law of individuality. This only brought him sorrow and anguish. The child of this union died.

If we try to claim a relationship to an ideal that is not truly ours, whatever is born from that union will never come to fruition.

But David loved; and he loved Bathsheba and was willing to stand by her in spite of everything. He was faithful to Bathsheba until the end of his days. And so he had a second chance. After a period of sorrowing and deep repentance he was truly related to Bathsheba, and Solomon was the outcome of this union. Solomon means "peace," and truly a peaceful and rich outcome is always the result of uniting ourselves to a well-loved spiritual ideal and working for it in our own individual way as God directs us.

Just as David's mercy to Mephibosheth and attempted mercy to the Ammonites are in contrast to one another, so this incident of David and Bathsheba is followed by a contrasting story of how Amnon, David's son, desired Tamar, his sister. Whereas David's overriding pure love for the ideal and his willingness to stand by it saved him, Amnon had only a selfish and temporary

desire for the ideal and his passion for Tamar turned to hate almost immediately. And so he was killed by Absalom.

Absalom now takes the stage. Though he was the beloved son of David, nevertheless he usurped his father's throne. Again, as we shall see, the situation was saved through these three outstanding qualities of David's—namely, his great love, his complete trust in God, and an innate sense of oneness.

David and Absalom

(II Samuel 14:1-18:33)

DAVID had the unique record that he was the only king of Israel who brought the divided kingdom into one and kept it as one throughout his reign. Though Solomon, his son, who succeeded him, ruled also over the whole of Israel, he merely took over the legacy of David. Finally, because of Solomon's unfaithfulness to the one God, the nation became divided again at his death and remained so until both kingdoms were taken into captivity.

This ability to maintain the oneness of the kingdom was due to David's great love and his absolute conviction that the one God was governing,—that the divine power is the only power behind all creation. From his youth David's conviction of the one divine power at work had given him the courage never to meet force with force in the internal development of Israel's progress. Throughout his difficult relationship with Saul, when Saul was determined to destroy him, David would not lift up his hand against "the Lord's anointed" (as he thought of Saul), though he could easily have killed him on several occasions.

Yet David was no compromiser with evil. He went forward and slew Goliath where others were afraid of the giant. Moreover, Saul's original jealousy of David partly arose because the Israelitish women sang, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." So David was a warrior, but his love of God and of Israel as the symbol of the spiritual idea enabled him to watch over her development as a mother. He saw the internal conflicts, but he realized that a much greater unity was being born than that which he might have longed to see exist between the personalities involved, and that these surface antagonisms would burn themselves out before the irresistible impulsion of God's government.

Absalom plots to seize the throne

A real testing time in this respect came to David after he had been reigning for several years. It was a period when he had to stand by and trust God's care for a situation where it looked as though personal power and a dictatorial rulership were holding sway and would again divide the kingdom of Israel. His son,

Absalom, usurped his father's throne and began to reign in his stead.

David had a great love for Absalom. Maybe he saw in this proud and impetuous son the force and manhood that he might have felt he lacked. The truth was, though, that he himself manifested qualities of real manhood and womanhood far superior to anything that Absalom represented. Absalom stood for the type of thought that is concerned merely with "the outside of the platter." It was said of him that "in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he polled his head . . . he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels." Pride in external appearances characterized this ambitious son of David. Coupled with this, he was headstrong and relied on a magnetic personality.

This type of thought often tries to influence mentality that is not prepared to think for itself. It promises to take on responsibility for others who appear weaker than itself, it flatters and cajoles. This pattern Absalom followed with the Israelites, with the result that in Chapter 15 of II Samuel we read, "So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." In this way he planned to seize the throne.

David flees into the wilderness

How did David react to this? When it was found that Absalom had gone to Hebron to gather men to him in order to usurp the throne, David at once decided not to fight his son but to flee from Jerusalem with his household and leave the way open for Absalom. This action might be criticized as not standing up to the error of the situation but, as we have noted, no one could ever accuse David of lack of courage. He had learned, though, in his long relationship with Saul, to trust God's government in the development of the spiritual idea, letting error build itself up and fall by its own lack of foundation, thus showing itself up for what it is. This had taken place with Saul, and here again David was impelled not to fight the error but to let it uncover and destroy itself even with his beloved son. So with his household he "tarried in a place that was far off."

Sometimes we have to take the same steps in a situation and tarry "in a place that [is] far off." We may see that personal will, pride, and dictatorial methods are claiming to govern, but that

it is not propitious to fight them. Rather is one called upon to trust Truth and its government of the situation, realizing that it is Truth which is overturning and overturning until "he come whose right it is." Jesus also adjured us, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place . . . then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains."

It is interesting that David would not let every Israelite who wished to do so follow him into the wilderness on this occasion. Some he took with him and some he advised to stay behind. This seems to indicate that not all thought is ready to take the stand that David was taking. It may sound a contradiction in terms to say that David *was* taking a stand when he appeared to be fleeing. But he was taking a similar stand in his way to that of Jesus when he "opened not his mouth" before Pilate. David knew that the answer was to let the error have its head and fall by its own weight, but if spiritual sense has not risen to that certainty,—that conviction of the allness of Truth's operation,—then the situation must be worked out on a more relative plane. Thought is always at different states and stages of development.

For instance, to advocate pacifism for all in a community where there is little conscious realization of man's spiritual heritage and the innate spiritual unity that exists between all creation, would be unwise. On the other hand, as man rises to become truly conscious of his spiritual estate, the prophetic vision will be realized, that "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" and "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks." The real consciousness of spiritual fact is an impregnable defence, as it was with Jesus, but man must have risen to the standpoint of spiritually understanding the law of turning the other cheek in order to take the Wayshower's apparently non-resistant attitude towards his attackers. Jesus had no mere moral acceptance of this law, but an intelligent spiritual understanding of it, and so it operated in its essentially preserving and protecting nature.

The ark and the priests must remain in Jerusalem

Another significant fact about David's flight on this occasion was that he made the priest Zadok and the Levites return to Jerusalem and carry the ark of God back with them. They had

started to flee with David and his household, bearing the ark with them, but David would not allow that.

As we have seen, the ark was a token of God's presence. It contained the two tables of stone with the Commandments written on them, and it was always carried before the army when the Israelites went into battle, as a symbol of God with them. The fact that David made Zadok and the priests return to Jerusalem with the ark signified two things. Firstly, that David knew that God was with him whether the symbol of the ark was physically present or not. And secondly, which is really much more significant, by insisting that Zadok (to whom David specifically referred as a "seer") remain in Jerusalem with the ark, he showed that spiritual sense cannot be withdrawn from any situation, even though there may not appear to be an appreciation of it. We may not see any ray of light in a problem where personal control and domination claim to be holding sway, and yet should we not acknowledge, even as Jesus did before Pilate, that right in the midst God is in command? The ark containing the divine Commandments was to remain in the central place in the city of Jerusalem, even though that city appeared to be in enemy hands. Jesus expressed his realization of this ever-presence of God's government when he said to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."

Unmoved by praise or blame

Whenever we have taken such a step as David took in dealing with an adversary, there will always follow both blessing and cursing. The great necessity is to remain undisturbed, which we can always do if the decision has come through spiritual sense. Spiritual sense in its very essence is sure and certain. It is not swayed by praise or blame. It knows, and it knows that it knows.

So when in the wilderness Ziba joined David as an opportunist and brought him presents, whilst on the other hand Shimei cursed him and threw stones at him as he passed by, for deeds which he had never done, David remained untroubled by both treatments. Nor would he allow retribution against Shimei.

Here one recalls the story told of the emperor Constantine when he was informed that the mob were throwing stones at his statue. It was reported that he put his hand to his head and said, "It is very surprising, but I don't feel hurt in the least." What are people throwing "stones" at in any case? A decision or an

action that *they* feel is wrong. Are they not therefore throwing stones at their own misconception? If we are honestly convinced that we are acting in accord with the dictates of spiritual sense in its clear understanding of Truth, then we are identified with that spiritual decision emanating from Truth. And what can touch Truth? To try to turn back Truth would be like attempting to destroy the sun's rays. Barriers may be erected to shut out the rays, or clouds may hide them, but can those obstructions ever reach high enough to cut the rays off from their source? Never. The sun would have to be blotted out first.

David crosses the Jordan

Absalom then plotted to smite David. Here Hushai, as David's friend, came to his rescue. Through a clever appeal to Absalom's vanity he persuaded him to go into battle himself against David with all Israel gathered together, rather than let Ahithophel, Absalom's counsellor, secretly kill David for him. This gave the latter time to gather his forces together should he be attacked by Absalom.

It is here that another incident takes place that has great significance symbolically. Hushai counsels David to go over the Jordan. He says he must not lodge "in the plains of the wilderness," but must go beyond Jordan, where he cannot be followed and destroyed. Jordan was the boundary which divided the kingdom of Israel from her neighbours on the east, and so David was encouraged to leave the confines of the kingdom of Israel at this point.

If we stay in a little limited circle in thought, what the immediate situation looks like at its face value and from close quarters will frighten us and swallow us up, but if we "cross the Jordan,"—get a wider, bigger sense of the omnipresence and omnipotence of God,—we shall be preserved. David had proved this before when he fled into enemy territory away from Saul. Many years previously Joseph too had proved it when he was forced out of Canaan by his brethren and had to dwell in Egypt. Here, when David crossed into Mahanaim, the people of the country brought him all kinds of provisions and helped and comforted him and his men. Always when we gain a broader view in any situation, we find a host of new and unexpected factors which sustain and support us in a rightful stand with Truth.

Absalom's end

Then came the battle at Mount Ephraim where David's men finally had to deal with Absalom and his revolutionaries. Even at that point David gave express command that Absalom was not to be killed.

The story is well known of how Absalom in the course of battle, riding his mule under a tree, caught his great head of hair in its branches and became suspended there. Joab, David's captain of the host, hearing of Absalom's predicament, disobeyed David. He sought out Absalom and thrust him through with three darts. Surely all Absaloms come to their end in a similar manner. Ambitious mentalities often ride forward on mules of unintelligent stubbornness. Eventually they become caught up by pride and self-glorification (Absalom's hair was his vanity), and they are left suspended with nothing to support them—a prey to revenge and destruction. One can see this pattern with all dictatorships. They are carried forward by mulish mass thinking, which deserts them when they are caught up and rendered helpless in the toils of pride and self-glorification.

And so Absalom was destroyed, although against David's will. Like Jesus with Peter, David's attitude was always. "Put up thy sword." In this particular instance too, David perhaps felt that the virile and dynamic manhood which he admired and loved in Absalom could have been translated into a true strength and reliability.

When David heard of his son's death, he wept and mourned. Spiritual idealism longs to see a situation translated, even as Jesus wept over Jerusalem—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" But we can never afford to linger with a situation which does not work out in the way that we would have desired with all our heart. And so David was impelled to rouse himself and go forward to see the vindication of his trust in God's government by his restoration to the throne of a united Israel. His trust in Truth led to Love's natural fulfilment of its plan, as it does in every situation.

David is Restored to Kingship

(II Samuel 19:1-24:25)

LOVE has been called “the greatest thing in the world” and David expressed this love, but it was not merely human love or personal affection that he expressed. It was the realization that the spiritual and purely good is fundamentally the only presence and power, and therefore that the continual unfoldment of a plan that is truly loving is irresistible. This realization enabled him to meet Saul’s jealous and murderous pursuit of him with equanimity and a complete lack of personal retaliation. It also enabled him to remain undisturbed and quietly to go along the way in which God was caring for him when Absalom, his beloved son, usurped his throne.

“Love suffereth long, and is kind” was certainly true in David’s case, though the word “suffer” in this context from the Epistle of John can be interpreted more in the sense of “endure.” One of the qualities which Love confers is endurance, for if one is convinced of the fundamental reality of that which is spiritual and purely good, endurance becomes an active state of satisfied certainty that good is at work, rather than a matter of suffering long under what one considers to be “real” adversity.

David is restored to the throne

After Absalom’s death, the people turned again to David and restored him to the throne. The spiritual idealism which David stood for was bound to be acknowledged as the supreme ruler ultimately, for the spiritual is supreme.

With the spiritual enthroned, everything finds its right relationship in the whole. Those who cursed David were forgiven, those who helped him were blessed, those who wanted to serve him were given the opportunity to do so. As one reads Chapter 19 of II Samuel, one has such a sense of divine Love as the Redeemer, the great Restorer, the Comforter, the Mother of man.

(1) Shimei is forgiven

The first to greet David on his return was Shimei, who had previously cursed him when he was fleeing from Absalom into the wilderness. Shimei now met David and begged his forgiveness.

Abishai, the king's nephew, urged the king to put him to death, but David said, "Shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel?" When Love reigns supreme, there is no destruction of anything that even hints of the spiritual, for Love's plan is infinite and in its range every least manifestation of good is seen to have its place.

(2) Mephibosheth finds his place

This comforting fact is exemplified here where many different types of thought presented themselves to David as soon as he was restored to kingship.

After Shimei came Mephibosheth, Saul's lame son, who stands for a merely moral sense of things,—that which moves haltingly towards the spiritual. At this point all that Mephibosheth cared about was the satisfying fact that David was once more enthroned as king. Mephibosheth therefore was given an inheritance in David's kingdom, for when the moral sense acknowledges and rejoices in the supremacy of the spiritual, its true place in the divine plan is seen. The moral is never a state in itself. It is always a servant of the spiritual, and when recognized as such, its values are safe and changeless. The good that emanates from the spiritual is always good, love based on the spiritual remains a constant love. The enduring and eternal—the greater—governs the lesser.

(3) Barzillai and David bless one another

At this point also Barzillai the Gileadite, with whom David had temporarily lodged in the wilderness, accompanied him over the Jordan on his way back to Jerusalem. The Scriptural writers say of Barzillai that "he was a very great man." He it was who provided David with necessities and comforts when David went over Jordan fleeing from Absalom. Now David wanted Barzillai to return with him to Jerusalem where he offered to provide for him. But Barzillai refused the offer.

Barzillai seems to accent qualities of human strength and support, the type of thought that is not ready as yet to go forward and devote itself to accurate spiritual thinking, though it appreciates the spiritual, for Barzillai valued David. He said he would go a little way over Jordan with him, but would then go back

to his own land. Nevertheless a great sense of affection and blessing entered into the relationship between these two. Is this not a symbol of the true sense of relationship that a living understanding of the spiritual plan brings to one? Human thought, in its different states and stages of translation by the divine, may not yet be prepared to go the whole way with new spiritual revelation, yet it recognizes the value of the spiritual and is willing and glad to aid its progress and bring about mutual blessing, for David and Barzillai blessed one another. Jesus declared that "he that is not against us is for us," and as advancing spiritual thought accepts and understands something of the divine plan and its universal operation, it can recognize this plan at work everywhere.

(4) Chimham follows David

Another interesting relationship arises here. Barzillai gave David his young servant, Chimham, to accompany David over the Jordan and serve him. Chimham means "longing, pining," and it would seem to symbolize the recognition that there is a great longing in human thought—particularly where it is young, fresh, and vigorous—for a progressive spiritual idealism that it can follow and serve consistently.

So we see that all David's experiences led him to the clear realization that divine Love's plan includes *all* ideas,—nothing can be outside of the infinite plan. Love shows that every state and stage of consciousness has a place in the great design of Being.

Universality demands a basis

Here is an important point, though, which one needs to consider. Is it not true that to have a universal conception that is pure, demands that some understanding of the spiritual fundamentals of being is first enthroned in thought? To attempt to have a universal sense without this can only mean accumulating fragmentary facts with no logical relationship. This is not universality at all. There is one mathematics, but to attempt to understand that oneness merely through learning a multitude of calculations would be an impossible task. Yet mathematics still remains one, and if we desire to understand its oneness and to experience an unfolding of the subject in its infinitude and

consistency, we need to acquaint ourselves with its fundamental system,—its numerals and calculus.

In the same way the Scriptural writers felt the innate unity of being. They symbolized it by the conception of one power at work which they called "God." The very first verse of the Bible declares, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"—one power behind all creation. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." Realizing that this oneness could not be grasped as a whole nor in a fragmentary way, they were inspired to present the few simple yet great fundamentals of Being through what are termed "the seven days of creation." These can be regarded as the "numerals of infinity," which operate through a spiritual calculus, a spiritual process of reasoning.

However one may arrive at these fundamental spiritual conceptions,—through whatever medium they may dawn on thought,—it is true that a living understanding of them enables one to be increasingly universal and to recognize intelligently the place and purpose of every manifestation of creation. They are what one might call "common spiritual denominators."

Sheba's revolt

In connection with this sevenfold symbolism, an interesting story follows the restoration of King David, with his great spiritual sense of Love embracing all ideas at every state and stage of development.

A minor revolt took place in his kingdom under the leadership of a man called Sheba, whose name means "seven." It arose out of a division between the men of Judah and the men of Israel. As we have seen, Judah and Israel stand for manhood and womanhood, the letter and the spirit, understanding and proof. And here, as so often in this fourth thousand-year period of divine government, the story symbolizes the attempt to divide the letter from the spirit, understanding from proof. And in what way is this attempt made? Through Sheba,—through a false sense of the "seven." He and his men say that they have no part in David. And certainly if an intellectual or rigid sense obtains of the seven great fundamentals of being which permeate the Scriptures and which lie behind all creation, it becomes a revolt against true spiritual consciousness. Wherever there is an order and a system in any presentation, there always exists the possi-

bility of having a rigid, limited sense of the subject. This lack of the true spirit leads to division, for immediately thought is imprisoned in symbols, limitations and barriers abound. Interestingly enough, Sheba also has the meaning of "captivity."

David suppresses this revolt, and it is significant that it is a woman who eventually destroys Sheba by cutting off his head. Literally these stories are brutal, but when one realizes that the prophetic writers were illustrating spiritual lessons through part allegory, part history, and using names that had moral and spiritual meanings, these incidents become alive with import to us today. Surely it is a true sense of womanhood with its love, its warmth, and its universality that cuts off a merely intellectual conception of the seven great fundamentals of Being that the Bible presents, and sees their deeper essence. Just as a true musician with a profound feeling for the spirit of his subject allows its fundamentals to lead him step by step to a higher, freer, and more limitless conception of the vast realm of music, so every spiritual seeker finds that his profound spiritual sense and love of God, good, allows the great fundamentals of Being to lead him step by step into a fuller, freer, and more universal conception of the infinitude of Truth. Without an understanding of the fundamentals, though, there is no true freedom in any subject.

Chapters 20 and 21 of II Samuel emphasize this symbol of "seven," for here we read that there was a famine in Israel which was not abated until David hanged seven sons of Saul's house. Were these seven sons the evil outcome of personal sense and egotism, which Saul represented? There is always a famine of spiritual sense when these qualities and their outcome hold sway, but a true love of the spiritual fundamentals impels us to deal with these evils and utterly destroy them as having no part nor place in man's true inheritance.

David numbers the people

Before David's reign came to an end, he was said to have committed the sin of numbering the people. II Samuel records that "the Lord" impelled David to do this in what appears to have been a mood of vengeance, but I Chronicles 21: 1 relates, "And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel." This version seems to put the impulsion where it belonged, on Satan or the carnal mind. It is the carnal mind,

operating through finite, personal sense, that would tempt us in connection with spiritual idealism to “number the people.” Truth is universal. Love’s plan is at work everywhere—it knows no limits, no boundaries, no confinement. How can the infinite be contained “in” anything? Surely if we are intelligently conscious of this, we can never be tempted to “number the people.” What a fallacious belief it is that numbers represent the basic power of Truth. It is ideas that are power, and the intelligent, active realization of the living and ever-present realm of spiritual ideas—be it realized by one or many—is more dynamic than a mass of unintelligent belief, which perhaps pays mere lip-service to spiritual idealism. Jesus was one individual, yet his “lone” mission ushered in what is called the Christian era.

Numbers in themselves mean nothing. And are not richness, abundance, and universality qualities which emanate from “within”?

Thou must be true thyself, if thou the truth would’st teach;
Thy heart must overflow, if thou another’s heart would’st
reach.

If ever there is a temptation to “number the people” in connection with spiritual ideas, should one not rather search one’s own heart to see if it is full to overflowing with the realization that Truth is universal and that the whole universe is embraced in Love’s plan? There is nothing outside of it. Wherever an individual’s heart has understood and cherished this ideal, his life has been a blessing to humanity.

That universal thinker, Mary Baker Eddy, wrote, “I saw the love of God encircling the universe and man, filling all space, and that divine Love so permeated my own consciousness that I loved with Christ-like compassion everything I saw. This realization of divine Love called into expression the beauty of holiness, the perfection of being which healed and regenerated and saved all who turned to me for help.” The universal kingdom of God is “within,” and when we find it “within,” we also experience it “without.”

David buys a threshingfloor

The Book of II Samuel ends with David buying a threshing-floor from Araunah the Jebusite, on which to build an altar. This eventually became the site for the temple of Solomon. A

threshingfloor is where the grain is beaten out from the stalks of the crops. It is really the crystallizing of the harvest, when the real substance of the crops is extracted. Here again one can detect the same theme that runs all through this latter part of David's reign,—namely, seeking the fundamental spiritual essences of being in which alone can unity be found. The true temple or body of spiritual consciousness can only be built on a "threshingfloor." The willingness to thresh the harvest of human experience, extracting from it the fundamental spiritual essences, gives us the basis for a unified spiritual body or temple, for the innate unity of all creation rests on spiritual fundamentals alone.

And so through all these instances it is as if Love is continually saying to man: use your spiritual sense to look beneath the surface, to plunge deeper, to rise higher, and you will truly find, as Pope wrote, that "All are but parts of one stupendous whole." In this lies man's certain hope and safety.

Solomon, King of Israel

(*I Kings 1:1-16:34*)

WHEN anyone mentions the name of Solomon, the first thing that usually springs to mind is his wisdom. Then perhaps his wealth and his many wives, and nowadays, with the filming of Old Testament stories, Solomon's relationship with the Queen of Sheba. Many also think of him as the great temple builder.

However one pictures Solomon, he was a man with wide intellectual interests, a great range of activities, and a broad sphere of influence, which was unusual in those days for the king of a small country such as Israel. Solomon was capable of contributing much towards the spread of the spiritual understanding of God that was appearing through the Israelitish people at this time. His wide interests and contacts would have irresistibly drawn all types of people to the one spiritual power had Solomon himself remained pure in thought. But his many wives with their foreign gods began to lead him astray, and when he mentally left the wonderful purity of monotheism, the kingdom of Israel divided and disintegrated and was eventually taken into captivity.

Solomon means “peace”

Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba, born after David had repented of his sin in organizing the death of Bathsheba's former husband, Uriah. The name “Solomon” means “peace,” and it is true that his reign was a peaceful one, though latterly the seeds of internal rebellion were sown through Solomon imposing heavy burdens on his subjects in order to maintain his kingdom in all its glory.

The Psalmist wrote, “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.” What is God's law that brings such a peace? The first commandment of the Hebrew law is “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” This makes possible the second commandment, which Jesus introduced, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” The Master said that “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Where there is the recognition of the allness of God, good, at work everywhere and the intelligent love of one's neighbour, there naturally exists a “great peace.” This peace

Solomon could have fulfilled in every way if he himself had not divided his allegiance spiritually. A divided kingdom of any kind must eventually lead to war. The belief in many gods, many conflicting forces at work, necessarily brings a warfare into one's own consciousness and in outward events. The understanding that there is only one power, one infinite God, good, expressing itself universally, brings that peace "which passeth understanding," for it translates all experience back into the One.

Solomon's claim to the throne

It may sound a paradox, but this peaceful reign of Solomon had to be fought for at the beginning, although fought for through qualities of prophecy and womanhood. Apparently David had promised that Solomon should succeed him as king, but when David began to decline, his son Adonijah planned to seize the throne, though David himself was unaware of it. It was Nathan the prophet who uncovered this plot, and with the aid of Bathsheba made David fulfil his promise to have Solomon anointed king. Thus Adonijah's scheme was foiled.

Adonijah was forceful and stood for human will. The reign of the Christ consciousness, the spiritual sense of being, as symbolized by David, can never be usurped nor maintained by human will, symbolized by Adonijah. Human will in its many guises may try and usurp the spiritual, but if spiritual vision as represented by the prophet Nathan and by the faithful qualities of true womanhood and motherhood (Bathsheba) are alert, the natural order of development, according to God's will, must establish itself.

This incident can be so helpful whenever man is faced with the fear that his individual place can be taken by another. In any such situation we are never basically dealing with the different personalities that may seem to be involved, but with the belief of human will. Spiritual sense will always make us alert to the fact that we are allowing human will in some form or another to take control. And then if we listen to the promptings of true womanhood and motherhood which show us that the divine plan is one and irresistible, and that whatever is man's individual place in that plan cannot be turned aside, we will naturally and with great joy experience the unfolding and establishment of our rightful place, even as Solomon was anointed king amidst much rejoicing.

Solomon prays for wisdom

After Solomon was firmly established as king, and the few dangerous claimants to the throne had been dealt with, the Bible records his humble prayer for wisdom. Solomon was asked what he wanted God to give him and he prayed for “an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?” It is related that God said that because Solomon had asked for understanding and not for a long life or riches or the life of his enemies, he would receive such an understanding that he would be unique. Added to this he would have both riches and honour, and if he remained obedient to God’s laws, he would also experience length of days.

Is not this whole contract summed up in Jesus’ words, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”? Again Jesus was emphasizing that the substance and essence of all being is found in the One, in the spiritual alone. Therefore there is nothing so valuable to any man as an “understanding heart,”—a heart that understands that spiritual values are the fundamental values of all being. Jesus said, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Solomon was to learn this very lesson, for in the early days of his reign he saw the supreme value of such understanding. Latterly, however, as his wealth and his material possessions increased, he allowed a material sense of things to fool him. He neglected the true substance of understanding for the fleeting shadow of material values. This was the cause of Israel’s internal division and eventual captivity. Deviating from the conscious evaluation of what constitutes true substance, that is, the realm of living spiritual ideas, always brings disintegration and bondage.

Solomon threatens to divide the child

This theme of oneness as opposed to a divided kingdom is an insistent one in the Bible record of the prophetic age or the kingdom period. It is the foundation of the story which immediately follows Solomon’s prayer for wisdom.

An incident is recorded of two harlots, living in the same house, who each had a baby. One woman’s child died in the night because she overlaid it. The other then accused her of

substituting the dead child for her live one whilst she was asleep. This argument as to whose was the dead child and whose was the living one was then brought before Solomon. Solomon tested the two women by asking for a sword and threatening to divide the child, giving half to each mother. When he announced his intention, the one whose child it was said, "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." But the other woman said, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it." Then Solomon knew that the babe belonged to the first woman and gave it to her. A true mother love could never allow its child to be divided. For the child to live is more important to it than pride of possession or personal justice.

This story is said to be symbolic of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah and to illustrate that if they would maintain a pure mother love for their "child," their spiritual heritage, then their kingdom would not suffer division. Though a united kingdom was not to be the destiny of Judah and Israel, nevertheless even in captivity the prophets never lost sight of the spiritual idea and preserved this living "child" so that their spiritual message remains alive even today.

How can we preserve in our own lives an undivided kingdom of spiritual understanding (true manhood, as represented by Judah) and the living proof of it (true womanhood, as represented by Israel)? Does not the answer lie in such a pure mother love for the spiritual idea that we are willing to sacrifice a personal and mortal concept of ourselves and of our universe, and accept the allness and supremacy of the spiritual in all experience everywhere? If we recognize the living nature of spiritual reality and we love it above all else, then we shall be tempted less and less to live part of our lives with spiritual ideas and part of our lives believing that we can operate from a human and material level. We shall be conscious of one undivided universe, reflecting the one infinite Spirit.

Solomon builds the temple

This was the wisdom of Solomon at the outset of his reign. He recognized the allness and supremacy of the spiritual. And with such wisdom he desired to build "a house unto the Lord." So Solomon built the great temple at Jerusalem. It was destined to be the Mecca of all Jewish worshippers, replacing the Israelite practice of worshipping at the various high places.

This building of one central temple was again symbolic of the urge to establish some symbol of the oneness of Being, of unity, of an undivided sense, but its purpose became materialized. The Israelites began to exalt the temple itself. They confined their worship to the symbol instead of acknowledging the universal spiritual idea behind it. This attitude was denounced by the prophets, many of whom foresaw the inevitable destruction of the temple. Spiritual sense can always see that any attempt to confine or personalize spiritual Truth is bound to crumble, for Truth is incorporeal and unconfined. Later the apostles made impassioned speeches to the same effect, for the Jews were still worshipping the rebuilt temple even after the time of Jesus. Stephen was stoned on this very point, quoting in his great freedom-appealing defence the sentiment of Isaiah that “the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”

Solomon seemed to be aware of this infinitude of God at the time he dedicated the temple, for he declared, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee: how much less this house that I have builded?” The infinite can never be confined in any building, any doctrine or creed, or indeed in any finite body or symbol.

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

As the reign of Solomon continued, his wealth increased and men came from afar to hear his wisdom. The Bible records, “King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.” The Queen of Sheba visited him and exclaimed, “The half was not told me.” She recognized not only the outstanding happiness and well-being of the kingdom of Israel, but also the greatness of the Israelites’ God. It was said that Solomon blessed and helped the Queen of Sheba, who came to him to ask him the answer “to all the problems that perplexed her.” Again there is the same feeling as one has all through the account of Solomon’s reign, namely, that if he had adhered to the spiritual, to the one God, he could have accomplished much towards the spread of the spiritual idea.

But Chapter 11 of I Kings records his deviation—“his wives turned away his heart after other gods.” Straightway came the prophecy of the disintegration and division of the kingdom, which actually took place after Solomon’s death.

A pattern for spiritual government

This record of the rise of the whole kingdom of Israel and its division under Solomon's successor has great significance for us. If we consider the Books of Samuel and Kings as one continuous story forming four Books of Kings, which was their original conception, we can trace a pattern for the demonstration of spiritual government in every man's life.

I Samuel opens with the birth of the prophet Samuel, and continues with the reign of Saul and the story of David rising from shepherd boy to king. II Samuel records the reign of David, leading to I Kings, which gives the accession and reign of Solomon, with its resultant dividing of the kingdom, concluding with the dynamic mission of the prophet Elijah.

So this illustration of government, which involves government individually, collectively, or universally, shows that true government must begin with the birth of prophecy or spiritual seeing, for the story starts with the birth of Samuel. "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Saul then illustrates the impossibility of mixing personal ambition, personal pride, and personal loves and hates with the demands of the spiritual. No government, either of our own lives or of a body of people, can be stable with a mixed idealism that sometimes exalts the spiritual and sometimes exalts personal will.

From this negative example the story turns to David, whose steadfast abiding with his sheep, humbly listening to the Word of God and being obedient to it, led him to be king of Israel. He was a perfect illustration of one who is "faithful over a few things" being made "ruler over many." This is a law in all forms of government and when we consider the development of the spiritual idea in our lives, it is so true that as we are "shepherds" mentally and spiritually, faithfully guarding our flock of thoughts and dealing with marauders who would attempt to rob and destroy our spiritual idealism, we are naturally led on to a state of spiritual dominion. We become conscious of the Christ ideal reigning in our lives.

Solomon, following on the rule of David, was called upon to maintain this blessed kingship and to expand the spiritual ideals which Israel cherished. Here was the seed of Christianity, for Solomon had the necessary width of interests and contacts, but those very interests and contacts fooled him, and he left the worship of the one God.

In our journey the love and culture of the spiritual ideal leads us, like David, to experience the reign of the Christ consciousness in our own lives. Then the demand comes to let these ideals prove themselves in wider and wider ways through the many differing relationships with which human existence presents us. This seems to be a testing time, as it was for Solomon. The question with all of us is this: Are we going to recognize the spiritual fact as fundamental and supreme in every instance, and so let it translate and inspire every situation? Or are we going to allow ourselves to be temporarily fooled into believing that there can be any manifestation or situation outside the omnipresence of the infinite, or “foreign” to God, even as Solomon was fooled by his foreign wives and their gods? Believing that anything can have independent existence outside the one infinite Principle of the universe is believing in a divided kingdom. This, in turn, leads into captivity, into bondage to material sense, until a further awakening takes place.

One thing is certain, though. “The Lord our God is one Lord” is a scientific fact. There can only be one primal Cause. Therefore the claims of the spiritual Science of Being in its harmony are irresistible, and whether through suffering or through positive spiritual understanding, man must eventually become conscious of his true spiritual estate in the one infinite plan.

Elijah, the Great Restorer

(*I Kings 17:1-18:46*)

ELIJAH is the second prophet whose mission is given some prominence in the Old Testament. Samuel, the first prophet, had been instrumental in establishing David on the throne, David who never failed to turn to God and trust His guidance in all the problems of his human experience. But now, under Solomon and subsequent kings, the Israelites were straying from the pure worship of one God, and it was necessary that an Elijah should arise to redeem the situation.

Elijah means "Jehovah is God." He was a dynamic and uncompromising prophet who suddenly burst upon the Israelitish scene as the great restorer of her spiritual heritage. Elijah did not present any new doctrine, but came rather to arouse Israel to a living understanding of the spiritual idea with which she was associated and from which she was rapidly departing. The fact that Israel did not wholly respond to Elijah's mission does not detract from its purpose which lives throughout all time and speaks to men in every age. Jesus, after his transfiguration, when it is recorded that Moses and Elias (Elijah) talked with him, told his disciples, "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things."

Elijah restores manhood to womanhood

What is it that Elias or Elijah has to restore? A true sense of the letter—not the dead letter but the necessity of a pure spiritual understanding.

This is apparent from several significant factors. First, his mission was to the northern kingdom of Israel, which had now become divided from the southern kingdom of Judah—the womanhood (Israel) from the manhood (Judah). Elijah's purpose was to restore to womanhood her lost manhood and therefore to bring a whole salvation. From one aspect, manhood qualities are those of a pure spiritual understanding, a true sense of the letter, whereas womanhood presents the living proof of this understanding in life, through a true sense of the spirit. To experience the consistent operation of spiritual power we need both the letter and the spirit. Manhood without womanhood, or the letter without the spirit, results in a misconception of the letter as cold

and intellectual. Womanhood without manhood, the spirit without the letter, drifts into vagueness and emotional, fragmentary thinking. Each is eventually ineffective without the other.

This leads to a second factor; it was to a widow woman that Elijah first appeared. She had lost her husband, her manhood, spiritual understanding. She had a son—some small measure of spiritual understanding—but in the course of time he also died, and it was Elijah who restored him.

In this same vein, there is a third factor, namely, that it was King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, a symbol of false womanhood, who was Elijah's greatest persecutor, even as today a false sense of womanhood, an emotional sense of the spirit, would persecute the demand to understand the letter. Believing the letter to be unnecessary and even a danger, it would attempt to cut it out and destroy it. But the true word is the Word of Life—it is a *living* Word and can never be destroyed.

Elijah fed by ravens and refreshed by the brook

Elijah's first appearance is in Chapter 17 of I Kings where he stands before Ahab and prophesies that "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to [God's] word." He then disappears and hides himself by the brook Cherith where he is fed by ravens and refreshed by the brook during the ensuing famine. It is as if thought that has drifted away from pure spiritual idealism has to be aroused to see that there is only one source of refreshment and inspiration, one sustaining power—God, the divine Mind. Elijah proved that man is not sustained by his own efforts, but through divine power.

The fact that eventually the brook dried up surely indicates that mere belief in divine support is not enough. It will dry up on us. We have to go further. And so Elijah was impelled on to Zarephath which means "the place of refining."

Elijah replenishes the widow's oil and meal

Spiritual understanding has to be "refined"—it has to be pure, clear-cut, distinct. This incident at Zarephath where Elijah was told to seek out the widow woman to sustain him, illustrates clearly that the womanhood of the spirit alone without the support of the manhood of spiritual understanding can eventually become weak, failing, and insecure. This widow had a little

oil—a little inspiration—and when Elijah met her, she told him that she was “gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” Here was a thin, fragmentary sense of sustenance—no richness, no hope, no continuity. No one can live on merely a vague sense of the spirit. Elijah commanded her to fear not, but to care for him first and he promised that if she did this the barrel of meal would not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail. She did so and continuous sustenance was the result. If we will care for the prophet first,—if we will cherish spiritual understanding and keep it alive in our thinking,—we shall never fail to have inspiration and an abiding sense of substance and support in every way.

Elijah resurrests the widow's son

After a while the son of the widow became sick and died, which event she blamed upon Elijah, virtually saying that if he had not come this would not have happened to her son.

So often in the development of a pure spiritual understanding, the belief may try to creep in that such an understanding can become cold and lifeless. Sometimes people even say that they wish they had never started on the spiritual way for it has robbed them instead of bringing abundant life, joy, and fulfilment. What is the answer? Surely one vital factor is for man to let go of a possessive, limited sense of spiritual understanding. Here Elijah took the child out of his mother's bosom and carried him up to the loft where he himself dwelt, and laid him on his own bed. Prophecy lifted the concept of spiritual understanding out of a sense of personal possession on to a higher foundation. Can we truly speak of “my” understanding, “his” understanding or “her” understanding? Spiritual understanding is inherent in the infinite Soul of the universe, which is the Soul of all men. As we become conscious of this fact we lose a finite, personal sense of “our” understanding and accept the free and uninterrupted flow of unfettered divine understanding, which all men naturally reflect.

So Elijah lifted up the child; then he stretched himself upon him three times and the child revived. The number “three” occurs frequently in the Bible as a symbol of resurrected thought. On the third day the earth rose out of the waters; after three days and nights Jonah was spewed out of the whale's belly on to dry

land. Jesus rose from the grave on the third day; Paul's temporarily blinded eyes were opened after three days.

Having resurrected the child, Elijah then delivered him to his mother. We always find the eternity of that which is truly our own "child"—our own individual expression of spiritual understanding—when we allow it to be resurrected out of a finite and personal sense of it into a specific reflection of the one universal spiritual consciousness—the one living Word and the one Christ spirit.

Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal

Only with this fundamental, balanced sense of spiritual reality—the letter and the spirit—is any man safe to challenge the Ahabs of this world. Chapter 18 of I Kings records specifically that it was in the *third* year that the command came to Elijah, "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab." To face the Ahabs of vacillating material beliefs with merely an intellectual sense of the letter or else with only an emotional feeling of the spirit is not being clothed with "the whole armour of God." It can avail little.

So now Elijah, fully equipped, came face to face with Ahab and challenged his prophets of Baal to a contest on Mount Carmel. There were four hundred and fifty of them versus the one prophet of the Lord. Elijah suggested they should choose two bullocks and each side should take one bullock, lay it on wood, put no fire under it, but call upon the name of their respective gods and see which god answered by fire and consumed the sacrifice.

Animals typify various qualities of thought, and to sacrifice an animal to God indicates that man is burning up the belief that any quality of true character can be material or belong to him personally and giving it to God. All qualities are in essence spiritual, and inhere in the First Cause. This is the deeper meaning of sacrificing an animal to God, a meaning which is still valid today.

Here, on Mount Carmel, two methods of salvation were to be tested. This is a very striking illustration of the difference between a supernatural sense of the spirit and a pure spiritual understanding. One leads to spiritual power, the other to failure and destruction.

First, the prophets of Baal tried to evoke spiritual power by leaping on the altar and cutting themselves with knives. The

Century Bible describes it as “a wild, convulsive frenzy in which they were no longer capable of self-control, but were supposed to have been taken possession of by a supernatural power.” This is not a far cry from many religious or mental practices today which involve a state of high emotion or fervent belief uninstructed by a deeper knowledge.

In contrast to this the method of Elijah is ordered and calm and typifies the way of salvation for all men. First he bade the people draw near. He paid tender regard to the people. The prophets of Baal were so absorbed in proving their own prowess that they appear to have paid no attention to the people. A personal sense of the spiritual brings division and often inhumanity between men. Scientific spiritual understanding unites.

Elijah then repaired the altar that was broken down. Does this mean that Elijah made use of all that had gone before? He did not destroy it, even as Jesus said, “I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” Elijah then built an altar of twelve stones “according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob.” The twelve tribes of Israel were a symbol of governmental perfection and wholeness. Elijah was here indicating that spiritual power results from building on a whole basis. Just as the children of Israel could never build their nation successfully on a divided kingdom, so man cannot experience the full flow of spiritual power with a divided or fragmentary idealism. The power of the spiritual ideal results from being based on the onliness of Spirit and operating with the consistency and wholeness of spiritual Science. Even in human experience one can see the power of wholeness. To be whole-hearted in any enterprise brings power and action into that enterprise.

Elijah, having built this altar of twelve stones, put a trench around which could contain two measures of seed—the symbol of two, indicating the seeds of true manhood and womanhood, the necessity of the letter and the spirit, of a pure spiritual understanding and the living proof of it in human experience. Then “he put the wood in order”—his whole method was ordered—“and cut the bullock in pieces”—perhaps symbolizing an analytical attitude towards the sacrifice, analyzing the claims of animal nature which an understanding of the spiritual enables one to do.

Elijah then poured four barrels of water on to the sacrifice three times. The symbolic use of numbers is evident in this narrative. “Four” always indicates a process of reasoning or

calculation. It came from the four points of the compass from which direction was calculated. "Three," symbolizing resurrection, sometimes indicates specifically the three levels of human thought—the physical, the moral and the spiritual. Elijah seemed to be illustrating here that even if the waters of the carnal mind with its false process of reasoning are poured over this firm spiritual foundation in the attempt to dampen it physically, morally or spiritually, it cannot stop the manifestation of spiritual power.

In the evening Elijah called upon his God with true humility. His prayer gives the sense that all he cared about was proving the power of the divine Principle. He was the servant of God and all that he wanted was that the divine Principle of the universe should be proved. And it was. "The fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice." The people acknowledged the one God and all the prophets of Baal were slain.

In this brief, graphic word picture of the contest on Carmel one is impressed with the ordered, unhurried, step-by-step method which Elijah employed and which led to a demonstration of spiritual power, in contrast with the superstitious, frenzied and unbalanced methods of the prophets of Baal which led only to destruction.

The rains come and the famine ends

After this exemplification of the ordered way to prove spiritual power, the rains came and the famine ended. When we learn how to put off the "old man" with his animal nature, and to put on the new through ordered spiritual understanding, then life abundant opens out to us. We may not realize it all at once, even as Elijah heard the sound of rain and knew it would come before his servant could even see any sign of rain. Obedience to the laws of God can never fail to bring an abundant sense of life, but not just health, wealth and happiness, for none of these things constitute life in themselves. Is not the true life a life of dominion accompanied by an inner peace because one understands and abides with living spiritual values, which all the ups and downs of human experience can never take away? Moreover, these spiritual values dominate human experience and bless it, but as a proof of the reality and allness of the spiritual and not merely as tools to mend and build up material existence.

Elijah as the great restorer, restored an intelligent and living

understanding of spiritual values, just as the mission of the prophets in their entirety had this very purpose behind it. Then, and only then, could there be "a sound of abundance of rain"—only then could come the New Testament and Jesus with his mission of abundant life. The whole purpose of his wonderful life example, though, was to prove that the spiritual values the prophets were stressing constituted life, the only life. Because Life is Spirit and All-in-all, these values permeate human existence and prove themselves in what the world sees as the healing of sin and sickness and death.

From this sequence in the Scriptures is it not clear how Elias has to come first and restore all things? We must realize the fundamental reality of spiritual values in order to demonstrate spiritual power.

The mission of the prophet Elijah yields to that of Elisha, and we shall see in the next story how naturally the concluding events of Elijah's experience lead on to Elisha's fruitful mission.

Elijah on Mount Horeb

(*I Kings 19:1-21*)

THE STORY of Elijah on Mount Horeb has been a comfort to many a spiritual pioneer who has had to face persecution, and who has been tempted to feel a weight of personal responsibility for his mission.

With the decline of monotheism the kingdom of Israel had suffered division and weakening. Israel, or womanhood, had become separated from Judah, or manhood. The purpose of Elijah's mission was to restore manhood to Israel, to give back to the "widow woman" the support of true manhood. The significance of this to every spiritual seeker is that no one can stand firmly and securely on merely an emotional acceptance of the spirit of Truth,—womanhood without manhood. If this is attempted, an Elijah is called for to arouse thought to the necessity of true manhood,—of an ordered spiritual understanding of Truth, which has no affinity with the dead letter, but is a living Word of Life.

Elijah, the great restorer of a spiritual conscience to Israel, had proved the power of an ordered spiritual understanding of God in his contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. In *I Kings*, Chapter 18, we read of how he destroyed these prophets, who typify an emotional and impure sense of religion, and how this action roused the fury and malice of Jezebel, the evil wife of Ahab, whose prophets they were. False womanhood in its zealous hatred of that which is logical and ordered in spiritual matters, will always fight for its existence when it witnesses the destruction of its superstitious and emotional methods of worship. And so Jezebel determined to slay Elijah.

Elijah in the wilderness

Elijah, fearing for his life, fled to Beersheba, which, interestingly enough, means "well of the seven." It was called this because it was the place where Abraham had given Abimelech seven ewe lambs in token of their covenant,—a covenant which sealed the relationship between the human and the divine, as an understanding of the pure sevenfold nature of God does. Elijah left his servant there and went on into the wilderness, and sitting

down under a juniper tree, in fear and hopelessness, prayed that he might die.

Many a time have spiritual pioneers gone through a similar depth of discouragement and an overwhelming feeling that they cannot go on any longer. But there is a law at work which men have constantly experienced and which has caused them to voice this law in phrases such as "the darkest hour precedes the dawn" and "man's extremity is God's opportunity." When a man feels the futility of his own efforts and knows in his heart that there is only *one* source of initiative, *one* power governing all creation, his very acknowledgment of the failure of his own personal efforts, though that failure be accompanied with discouragement, opens the door wide to experiencing the operation of a greater power, the one and only power.

At this point Elijah slept under the juniper tree, but true spiritual pioneers are not allowed to sleep the sleep of hopelessness. An angel—spiritual inspiration—will always arouse them, feed and sustain them, and impel them forward as the angel did here with Elijah.

Three times in this story of Elijah, he is fed by divine providence, firstly by ravens at the brook Cherith, secondly by the widow woman at Zarephath, and here in the wilderness by an angel. Do these three symbolize how we are sustained on our spiritual journey firstly by belief in the spiritual, then by faith, and finally by real spiritual understanding? Elijah was sustained by this food for forty days and forty nights, the same period that Jesus fasted in the wilderness, and the same "forty" (only measured in years) that the children of Israel wandered through the wilderness. It signifies a period in which man learns to rely on spiritual reckoning alone. Here Elijah went forward in the strength of divine sustenance, Jesus in the wilderness fasted from material sustenance, and the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness learned to turn to God for all their needs.

Elijah is impelled to go forward

The main emphasis here, though, with Elijah is that he was impelled to go forward. This is one of the great lessons one learns from this story. Everything surrounding Elijah at this point was attempting to crush out his mission and to bring him to a full stop. But in spite of what seemed like overwhelming opposition, he had to go forward. Though he slept, he was awakened,

refreshed, and sustained. Though he lay down, he was impelled to arise and go forward. Nothing can prevent a man from fulfilling his individual mission if fundamentally he loves the spiritual idea above all else. And truly this is so of all men since they are made in the image and likeness of God. As John Doorly used to say, "There is one thing that none of us will ever be able to escape, and that is salvation." Either here or hereafter every man must "awake in His likeness." Therefore the sooner we accept our wonderful destiny the better.

Elijah reaches Mount Horeb

And so Elijah came to Horeb and entered a cave. Hastings remarks that "The history of Israel has never touched Horeb since Moses left it, and it is not without significance that we are once more on that sacred ground." He draws a parallel between Moses and Elijah, calling one the founder of theocracy and the other the restorer,—"Elijah's mission was to restore in Israel the Law given in that very place through Moses." Elijah was returning to the vision that inspired Moses' teaching, the vision of "I AM THAT I AM,"—the one and only power at work outside of all human agencies and personalities.

When God asked Elijah what he was doing in a cave on Horeb, Elijah answered that all God's altars had been thrown down, His prophets slain, "and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." He still had a personal sense of his mission and this always brings fear and limitation. Even the fact that he was in a cave symbolizes a restricted sense which hems man in whenever he is fooled by a personal concept of his mission. But he was not to remain in the cave. He was later told, "Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord."

The "still small voice"

At this point Elijah learned the great lesson that all men learn at some time or another. The Bible says that God caused a strong wind to rend the mountains and break the rocks, then an earthquake, and then a fire, but the Lord was not in any of these manifestations. Finally, after the fire there was a "still small voice." Its import caused Elijah to go forth from the cave and to continue to be obedient to his God-impelled destiny.

Spiritual power is not a blind, destructive force. Wind, earth-

quake, and fire are all capable of being instruments of destruction, and truly when a man believes he is personally standing for spiritual Truth against the forces of evil, one against many, he is believing in two powers, both equally real, and that the greater has to destroy the lesser. Not so did Jesus, the great exemplar of spiritual power. Even when he was placed in such a position before Pilate that his senses could certainly have witnessed to there being conflicting elements at work, he said to his captor, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." He knew the omnipresence of the "still small voice" of Truth and that there was only one power in operation.

What does the "still small voice" signify? Hastings says of this incident, "Jehovah represented to Elijah, by a magnificent acted parable, the contrast between law and grace, judgment and mercy . . . in the calm which followed the tumult he heard a still small voice (R.V. marg.: 'a sound of gentle stillness') which thrilled his inmost being; he felt that God was there; . . . The storm-clouds do their work; earthquake and fire have their mission in the progress of the universe . . . though He answers by fire, that is not the best answer He gives to the questions of the spirit of man; that best answer He supplies in the quiet of the inward life . . . The kingdom of God comes not so much by startling miracles as through quiet human agencies and in the slow movements of history." Progressive revolutions and reforms have nearly always begun with a single individual giving birth to a right idea and remaining true to it. It is the inherent power of the idea itself that forms the leaven which eventually causes human consciousness to change and advance.

Elijah here realized that he had not to go out and take a stand for Truth in a personal way and fight single-handed against what he felt were his enemies, but that he had to recognize that the still small voice of Truth is at work everywhere with everyone. Each one of us eventually learns to listen to the still small voice speaking to us individually, for man's salvation is always a question between himself and his divine Cause. He is not asked to go forth fanatically and strive against the forces of evil. No. As he listens to the still small voice in a way that is warm and understandable to him, then because of its very universal nature his lifework inevitably flows out into wider channels, but a man's mission starts with his own awareness of his divine identity. In the words of a poem, "Thou must be true thyself if thou the

truth would'st teach, Thy heart must overflow if thou another's heart would'st reach."

Elijah's human need is met

Awakening to the fact that spiritual power does not lie in a personal, lone fight for the Truth we love, but in the still small voice which is omnipresent and omnipotent, opens our eyes to many signs of this power in operation which, in our "splendid isolation," we had not been aware of before. Elijah was informed that there were still seven thousand in Israel who had "not bowed unto Baal." And more than this, he was told exactly what to do humanly and was also given Elisha as a close follower to minister to him. It would seem that these human needs are not met until we cease our cry of "I, even I only, am left" and recognize the I AM as the only power at work, operating with all men through the still small voice of their Godlike nature.

Elijah and Elisha

Elisha was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen when he was called to follow Elijah. Elisha means "God is salvation" and it was as natural for him to be the successor to Elijah as it was for Joshua (whose name means "Jehovah is salvation") to be the successor to Moses. When the understanding of the living Word, the true letter, is restored, salvation in human experience is the inevitable result.

Elisha's mission is full of proofs of spiritual power. At their first encounter Elijah resisted Elisha's desire to follow him, even as one is sometimes so over-zealous for the pure understanding of God that all thought of salvation to human experience is religiously put to one side. It is regarded as unimportant. But salvation must follow, and Elisha, in sacrificing the twelve oxen with which he was ploughing, and casting in his lot with Elijah, symbolizes the alertness that sees there must be salvation to the human, and this not through a dreary "tilling the soil" process but as a result of a pure, ordered, spiritual understanding of God.

In the second Book of Kings we shall see how the accent changes from Elijah's mission to Elisha's with its blessing and salvation. This blessing and salvation can never take place with any of us unless "Elijah" comes first and restores a pure, spiritual understanding.

The Translation of Elijah

(II Kings 2:1-18)

THE TRANSLATION of Elijah has been the subject of many paintings, for it presents a tremendously dramatic scene,—this grand old prophet ascending in a whirlwind with a chariot and horses of fire surrounding him, whilst his mantle falls from above on to his faithful disciple, Elisha, who has followed his master persistently, refusing to leave him until he rises out of his sight. Whilst pictorially vivid, like all Bible stories, this one also carries with it an inspiring and eternal message applicable to every man on his spiritual journey.

In the Scriptural record there are only three instances of ascension,—Enoch, Elijah, and Christ Jesus. Early in Bible history Enoch ascended as an individual with no followers or disciples to witness his ascension. It was illustrative of rising out of the darkness into the light of God's Word. Elijah ascended before his single disciple, Elisha, who took his mission forward into a new phase. It symbolized the ascension from the Word to the first stirrings of the Christ. Jesus ascended in the presence of his eleven disciples, who were then commanded to go out into all the world preaching the gospel to every creature and healing the sick. It typified the ascension from the Christ to Christianity. Taking this process past the Bible, is today's ascension from Christianity to its Science, an ascension in the line of spiritual progress that has no personal symbolization? This ascension is represented by *all* mankind rising in thought to become consciously aware of the eternal spiritual facts of being as universal Truth or Science.

Elisha stays closely with Elijah

The translation of Elijah is recorded in Chapter 2 of II Kings. Elijah's mission was about to give place to that of Elisha—the pure understanding of the Word of God was leading to the demonstration of that Word through the Christ-spirit. Elijah means "Jehovah is God." Elisha means "God is salvation." Elijah had come to arouse Israel to a living understanding of her spiritual heritage, which she had neglected. His mission was to restore to her the manhood of the true letter, whilst Elisha took

that mission forward to demonstrate the proof of this true letter in salvation.

On the day of Elijah's ascension he and his faithful disciple set out together from Gilgal. Gilgal means "a circle,"—that which has no beginning nor end, a symbol of eternity, for this event was to illustrate something of the fetterless and unlimited nature of spiritual understanding and its proof in demonstrating salvation.

As they went forward, God led Elijah first to Bethel, then to Jericho, and finally to Jordan. Three times, before setting out for each of these destinations, the great prophet tested his earnest disciple, Elisha, by urging him to remain where he was and not to accompany him any farther. Always he received the same reply, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Elisha here typifies the divine wisdom that sees clearly that if there is to be true salvation, it can only come about as the result of abiding closely with the pure understanding of the Word of God, until the spirit of that understanding empowers man and proves the spiritual in fruitful ways. This is reminiscent of how Jesus at his ascension told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Ghost or divine Spirit came upon them. Then they could safely go forth on their missions. No sense of apathy, discouragement, nor self-satisfaction tempted Elisha to cease following Elijah,—the spiritual understanding of the inspired Word which he valued and loved. He realized that only an alert adherence to the way of Life, which is always a spiritual way, can bring the fruits of Spirit.

The two prophets pass through Bethel and Jericho

The first divine command to Elijah on leaving Gilgal was to go to Bethel, which was where the idolatrous king Jeroboam had set up his golden calf. Bethel means "the house of God," but instead of acknowledging the one God of Israel, Jeroboam had instituted this worship of an idol,—the worship of materialism. Elijah did not stay here, but again in obedience to the divine command he went on to Jericho. Jericho means "place of fragrance." It was the storehouse for Jerusalem and was the first city the children of Israel conquered after they had crossed the Jordan. The story is familiar of how they went seven times around this city until its walls fell down. Again, Elijah and Elisha did not

remain there, but were divinely led forward to Jordan, where Elijah's ascension took place.

Does this ordered journey symbolize how spiritual understanding touches the material and the human but has no abiding place in either? Men are constantly being aroused from the worship of materialism. Why? Because Spirit is fundamental reality, and the Word of God or the Spirit of God is always at work, touching and awakening human consciousness to this fact. This Spirit of God also touches human thought to realize that "fragrant" and pleasant as the human can be, a merely human basis can let us down unless spiritual values are uppermost in thought. There is no substance nor permanence in it on its own terms, that is, on the basis of reckoning the human as an amalgamation of Spirit and matter. Spirit translates out of the material and the human to bring salvation here and now, but it never mingles with them.

The two prophets at Jordan

At Jordan the two prophets stood still. Then Elijah wrapped his mantle together and smiting the waters of Jordan, they crossed that river on dry ground.

The Jordan plays an important part in Bible symbolism. It means "the river of God" or "the river of judgment" and would appear to stand for a process of spiritual education.

The children of Israel made two crossings over water when they came out of Egyptian bondage. One was through the Red Sea when they fled in fear and panic from Egypt into the wilderness; the other was through the Jordan, which they crossed in an ordered and unhurried manner when they left the wilderness to enter the Promised Land. In the wilderness Moses taught them of the one God and His laws, and it would seem that their subsequent crossing of the Jordan with its detailed instructions for carrying the ark and erecting twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan and twelve on the other side of it, symbolized the process of spiritual education that the Israelites had passed through in order to enter the Promised Land.

Later Naaman the leper was told by Elisha to wash in Jordan seven times in order to be cleansed of his leprosy—he needed to undergo a process of pure spiritual education. At the outset of the New Testament it is recorded that John the Baptist baptized the people in Jordan before the coming of the great Christ mission of Jesus. Jesus himself, who truly needed no spiritual education,

partook of this baptism, saying, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” Jesus showed men the way and is not true spiritual education the way for all men? But this education needs to be based on the realization that “Beloved, now are we the sons of God.” Jordan also has the meaning of “descender,”—descending from the heights. Spiritual education is the unfolding of man’s true God-given identity *from* God, rather than a process of accretion from the human to the divine.

The Jordan formed the eastern boundary of the Promised Land and once over the Jordan an Israelite was in the “outside” world.

Was the symbolic journey of Elijah at this point, therefore, illustrating that the inspired Word of God, the spiritual facts of being, is not remote from the material (Bethel) or the human (Jericho), but it resolves itself into demonstration or proof only through pure spiritual education (Jordan)? And through this education man is able to stand on the firm ground of fundamental spiritual fact and so go “beyond Jordan” and see these universal spiritual facts at work everywhere.

“A double portion of thy spirit”

At this point Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.” And Elisha replied, “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.” Elijah said it was a hard thing to ask, “nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee.” What did he mean by this? Does not the double portion of Elijah’s spirit typify understanding and the proof of that understanding in true salvation? This balance always seems to have been a “hard thing” in religious experience. Thought either tends towards the mystical and absolute, ignoring the human problem, or becomes bogged in the Christianity that is mere morality and which accepts sin, sickness, and death as real. Jesus was the one outstanding example of the perfect coincidence of the divine with the human. He manifested, without measure, a double portion of the spirit, and so was able to prove God’s will on earth as in heaven.

What is the criterion for possessing this “double portion”? Here it was if Elisha could see Elijah after he was taken from him. Remembering that Elijah stands for the Word of God, the pure letter, this surely means that when spiritual vision rises to

see beyond the letter, beyond the symbol, to its pure spiritual essence, then that living value proves itself in a man's experience—he has not only understanding, but demonstration as well.

It was Jesus' natural and clear vision of Spirit as All-in-all, that "it is the Spirit that quickeneth," and that man must be born of water and of the Spirit if he desires to enter into the kingdom of God, that made his healing work certain and quick. The realization of the reality and onliness of Spirit is the greatest healing factor. Understanding fulfils itself in demonstration only through the Spirit.

This may raise the question: in what way, then, does understanding differ from proof or demonstration? Understanding does not lie in the spiritual realm and demonstration in the human. Both processes inhere in the realm of the spiritual, though demonstration naturally manifests itself in what the human mind calls a tangible way. Understanding is the pure unfoldment of spiritual values to thought, whereas demonstration is adhering to the reality and onliness of these values in any situation where material sense would argue that they are not the real and only. In other words, these values prove or demonstrate themselves in our experience in proportion as we find them to be life itself, the one Truth, the only presence and power.

Elijah's mantle falls on Elisha

Here on the banks of Jordan Elisha saw Elijah ascend and witnessed the power of the spiritual, symbolized in Biblical language as Elijah going up into heaven in a whirlwind with a chariot and horses of fire.

Elisha then rent his own clothes into two pieces and took up Elijah's mantle that fell from him as he ascended, and with this mantle he again smote the waters of Jordan; they parted and he crossed on dry land back to Jericho. When any spiritual seeker sees past the letter or the symbol and is consciously aware of spiritual values as eternal presence and power, the only reality, he cannot help but rend his old garment of dualism and take up the mantle of spiritual wholeness and purity which clothed Elijah. Moreover, spiritual wholeness will always enable him to cross on firm soil from the Promised Land to Jordan and vice versa. When a man is certain of the oneness of being and begins to grasp the universal facts that constitute this oneness, he has no

barriers in his conscious universe, but can mentally walk with safety and assurance in any realm.

The sons of the prophets

When Elisha returned to Jericho, the sons of the prophets saw him coming and they said, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha." Yet they then proceeded to pester Elisha to let them go and seek Elijah to whom they believed some accident had happened since he had not returned with his disciple.

These sons of the prophets were the theological students of the time, and all through this story they represent a confined and ritualistic sense. This sense tends to keep the spiritual idea fettered in creed and dogma and finite symbols. All along they had feared Elijah leaving them. They had never come face to face with the true spiritual essence of what Elijah stood for. At his ascension the Bible records that "the sons of the prophets . . . stood to view afar off." That which clings on to the symbol is always "afar off" from the living, palpitating reality behind the symbol. Elisha saw further. He realized that the symbols change and are bound to change, but that the spiritual fact is permanent and forever alive. Had he not witnessed the spiritual fact behind the person of Elijah when his master was removed from his sight?

Elisha tried, therefore, to dissuade the sons of the prophets from seeking Elijah, but they insisted on going. They sought for him, but in vain. Spiritual progress is irresistible and even though old theological beliefs may claim to blind man to such progress, earnest, seeking thought is ultimately bound to let go of the old and to accept new vision of eternal truths.

Elisha goes forth on his mission

Thus, armed with a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit, Elisha set out on his life-work. It was one of salvation and blessing to Israel, trying to arouse her to the living, practical nature of her rich spiritual heritage. In nearly every instance his miracles and proofs of power were such that they drew forth from the individuals concerned the inherent spirituality that was theirs to express if they had but realized it. This was what Israel had to awaken to see. Is it not also what all men need to awaken to see?

The Miracles of Elisha—I

(II Kings 2:19-4:27)

ELISHA'S mission was one of salvation. His name means "God is salvation." The unique miracles of this great prophet, therefore, were proofs of the saving power of the spiritual. As one ponders these miracles, one can also discern that there is a common thread running through them all. With every one—directly or indirectly—there was the demand for the individual to realize the spiritual potentialities already within his grasp, in other words, to awaken to the ever-presence of his spiritual birthright and to prove its reality and power. In each instance the individual concerned had to be active about his birthright. It was a case of working out his own salvation, for "God worketh with you"—every man is one with his divine Source and is equipped with spiritual power if he will but let it use him.

Elijah and Elisha appeared on the Israelitish scene almost at the beginning of the disintegration of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Under Solomon the Israelites had begun to lapse from monotheism, their kingdom became divided, and it was in an effort to re-awaken Israel to her spiritual estate that Elijah came as the great restorer, followed by Elisha's mission of salvation. The Israelites, having lapsed from monotheism, were seeking salvation through many foreign gods,—through superstitious beliefs and practices. "Return to the one God," said Elijah, in effect. "Let this God be real to you—your very life and being" was Elisha's message. The latter was trying to show them that if they would only trust in and use their spiritual inheritance,—man's eternal unity with the one God, infinite Spirit,—they would experience salvation right where they were. True satisfaction and salvation are always at hand. It is man's natural, God-given heritage, but he must be conscious of this and be willing to let it use him in his life.

The waters of Jericho healed

The first miracle which Elisha performed in Jericho was symbolic of the way in which every spiritual seeker can find again the freshness and life-giving inspiration that pervades his

initial awakening to the Truth and which always brings with it great spiritual enthusiasm and courage.

At Jericho the men of the city found no water and a barren land. Elisha told them to fetch a new cruse and put salt into it, and when he cast the salt into the waters they were healed and there was no more "death or barren land." Like the Israelites, we start our spiritual journey full of new light and enthusiasm, but sometimes there comes a period when spiritual reality "goes dead" on us and our experience seems barren. What is the remedy? To take a "new cruse, and put salt therein." Salt is a symbol of life and is used as a preservative. At these times do we not need a "new cruse" of original, pure thinking that is full of life? Do we not need to think afresh on the realities of being and let them use us by living in accordance with them? When we are truly living what we see of the spiritual, there is no "death" nor "barren land."

The word "new" in the Scriptures always gives a sense of life. The New Testament which Jesus brought was a testament of a life lived and not just a theory taught. Newness is a present possibility if we are willing to use our spiritual sense and let it soar high enough and plunge deep enough,—away from the ruts of conventional, stereotyped human thinking and habits,—and then live in accordance with our vision. Staleness and deadness come from a surface acceptance of life and its spiritual teaching. Such surface acceptance leads to lip-service and a lack of vital spiritual living here and now.

Little children mock Elisha

After this miracle Elisha was mocked by little children who called him "thou bald head." Young, inexperienced thought sometimes scorns the fact that spiritual reality is the great fundamental power in the universe. Popular thought regards spirituality as outworn and outdated. Moreover, this mockery of the spiritual does not necessarily come from without. Often its voice whispers in our own consciousness. And we need to rebuke it fiercely even as Elisha cursed these children. The story then relates that two she-bears came out of the wood and destroyed these mockers. It is the watchful womanhood qualities, always alert to the value and power of the spiritual, that will arise in our thought and deal with such taunts of the carnal mind.

The Israelites dig ditches for victory

And so Elisha, increasingly strengthened in his reliance on the spiritual, set out to show the Israelites that man has only to awaken to the kingdom of heaven within to experience its presence and power at the place where he is.

The incident recorded next in Chapter 3 of II Kings emphasizes just this fact. The Moabites rebelled against Israel. The Israelites were faring badly and had no water for men or cattle. Under Elisha's inspired instructions, instead of going out to battle with the enemy, they were told to dig ditches at the place where they were. "For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water," and the Moabites shall be defeated. They obeyed this command and it happened as Elisha had foretold.

Taken symbolically, this story is essentially practical. We may be up against an enemy of evil or disease. When we lack inspiration and are in a weak state, it is foolish to rush out and try to gain a victory. Nor do we have to do this. Rather the divine command is to remain where we are and open our thought to be receptive to spiritual inspiration. We do not have to know how it is going to come, but if we are alert and awake and listen, then inspiration will flow and a victory ensue. Right where we stand lies the answer if we are spiritually awake.

The increase of the widow's oil

Immediately after this is recorded the miracle of the increase of the widow's oil, where again the same point is stressed.

This widow was poor and had two sons, who were about to be taken as slaves to the creditor. If any man neglects his spiritual heritage, he is poor and a "widow" in the sense that he is no longer wedded to spiritual idealism. His "sons"—any fruitage he may have—eventually become just slaves to human experience, the creditor that makes demands on all men. But what did Elisha say at once? He asked the widow, "What hast thou in the house?" Again—look within for the answer. The woman replied that she had nothing in the house except a pot of oil. But what a wonderful commodity to have in the house, no matter how little one may have! Oil was valuable and precious to the Hebrews. They used it in their daily life in many ways; also in their ritual and to consecrate kings, priests, and prophets. Its spiritual significance

has been defined in the Christian Science textbook as “Consecration; charity; gentleness; prayer; heavenly inspiration.” Elisha told this widow to borrow vessels of all her neighbours and then pour out her oil. This she did and found she had enough and to spare. Then Elisha said, “Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.”

When we feel poor and bereft and helpless against the encroaching demands of human experience, comfort and enrichment will always come as we awaken to the value and unlimited resources of our spiritual inheritance. We need to pour out the oil that we have “in the house”—avail ourselves of the spiritual consecration, heavenly inspiration, the charity, or love, and gentleness that is every man’s birthright. And more than this. In the previous story the Israelites had to dig trenches to receive the water that was to pour forth to refresh them. Here the command is similar. This widow was told to borrow empty vessels of all her neighbours in order to receive the abundance of oil that would pour forth from her pot. All the “empty” beliefs that are in the world and which claim to “neighbour” us lose their emptiness when the oil of heavenly inspiration and love is poured into them. Transformed by oil they become sources of sustenance and support. The woman was commanded by Elisha to sell the oil and then she and her sons could live on this exchange. When we let the oil of heavenly inspiration and love flow in our thought and life, it brings the exchange that Isaiah speaks of,—“beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness,”—but it all begins by realizing the richness and potentiality of what we already have in the house. Even if it only seems to be one pot of oil, this presence of heavenly inspiration and love multiplies itself from its infinite divine source in proportion as it is poured out freely.

The Shunammite and her son

Following this miracle is the story of the Shunammite, which is in many respects a direct contrast. The Shunammite was no widow. She had a husband, though he appears to represent a stereotyped religious ideal. Moreover, this woman was not poor but “great” and apparently a woman of substance. Unlike the widow she had no son until Elisha appeared and a son was given her by promise. Also unlike the widow this woman consecrated herself to the things of God—she had always used her “oil.”

Whenever Elisha passed by, he went in to lodge with her, and ultimately she and her husband made for him "a little chamber . . . on the wall." So the Shunammite was aware of her spiritual inheritance, but it was unfruitful—she had no child. Moreover her husband was old,—her idealism had not the freshness and newness nor certain expectancy of good that it must always have in order to be fruitful. When Elisha wanted to reward this great woman for her faithfulness, he promised that she would have a son and according to this promise a son was born to her.

One day she sent the lad out to her husband and the reapers in his fields and here he fell sick and subsequently died. Losing no time his mother laid the lad on the bed of the man of God, shut the door upon him and allowed nothing and no one to detain her from reaching Elisha. Her husband, not aware of the boy's death, queried why she wanted to go to the man of God since it was "neither new moon, nor sabbath." Her only reply was, "It shall be well."

In this woman's experience there were two types of manhood to which she was closely related. Her husband, standing for an idealism that had become old and stereotyped, and Elisha the prophet, typifying the salvation that brings a "new cruse" of ever-fresh spiritual ideas to man, which results in true fruitfulness. This woman had brought forth spiritually in a way that she had never believed possible and it was only when she allowed this wonderful new sense to come under the influence of conservatism and rigidity (when her son went out to the reapers in his father's field) that it sickened and died. But she knew the answer. She went at once to the man of God. And we know the answer when we are presented with a similar experience. When our faithfulness to the spiritual is rewarded by a new vision and we become fruitful in ways that we never believed possible, then if we allow this progressive sense to become dead to us through lapsing into conservative and stereotyped thinking, we must not waste time in sadness, regret and questionings, but return at once to the liberated new-found idealism that originally brought this fruitfulness into our experience. Conservatism will always try to clamp down on us and our fresh vision, but we must go forward. "Drive, and go forward," the Shunammite commanded her servant. "Slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee." The way is always forward, upward, outward, never losing sight of our highest vision.

An outstanding quality that the Shunammite expressed all

through this experience was her conviction that all was well. When Elisha saw her coming and questioned her through his servant, Gehazi, as to whether all was well with her and her family, she replied, "It is well." This woman had always had this wonderful satisfaction with her true individuality. Originally, when Elisha asked her how he could reward her for her faithfulness, she implied that she was satisfied and desired nothing. She was not self-satisfied, for she valued Elisha and what he represented. She knew, though, that at every stage she had all that she needed, and this attitude exemplifies so beautifully Jesus' words, "unto every one that hath shall be given." This realization stood her in good stead when the temptation came to believe that something born of the Spirit could "go dead" on her. She could not see the full answer. All she knew was that she had to cling tenaciously to the spiritual, and her spiritual sense would not allow her to declare anything else but "It is well." So often one has this experience. The material evidence is witnessing to discord and decay, but spiritual sense, conscious of the allness and onliness of God, knows that all is well, provided thought abides with the spiritual.

Once having reached Elisha, the Shunammite would not leave him. The prophet first sent his servant ahead with his own staff, telling him to lay it on the face of the child, but the mother declared, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." The boy was not resurrected until Elisha himself went to him and "put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands." He stretched himself upon him twice and then the child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. It seems as though Elisha was symbolizing the all-encompassing nature of the spiritual and how it overlies and touches every part of man and his experience. Anything that has come to us through spiritual vision will be cared for and revived by that spiritual vision if we go forward and hold steadfastly and trustingly to that vision. That the child sneezed seven times is surely symbolic. A sneeze clears some obstruction and may not this sneezing seven times signify removing all obstruction to a living, flowing and progressive consciousness of the divine nature, which is symbolized in the Bible in its fulness through the symbol of "seven."

And so with these miracles Elisha shows us, as he showed the Israelites, that whatever the enemy, every man is endowed with a spiritual birthright. It may seem to have become dormant, but

once any man awakens to it, uses it, and is faithful to it, no matter what the opposition is, it will always prove itself naturally and with power in his experience.

The Miracles of Elisha—II

(II Kings 4:38-5:27)

AS ONE studies the miracles of Elisha, one senses that each follows the other in such a way as to lead thought progressively onward, upward, and outward. As we have seen, these miracles (particularly the early ones) emphasize the need for the individual to awaken to his own spiritual potentialities and use them. This runs throughout Elisha's mission as the prime step in true salvation. But the three miracles that follow the magnificent story of the Shunammite and her son illustrate also the self-existent power of Truth; moreover, they show that Truth is universal and is always leavening thought and translating itself to every state and stage of human experience.

The healing of the poisonous pottage

It is related in II Kings, towards the end of Chapter 4, that on Elisha's return to Gilgal there was a famine in the land and that when the great pot was put on to "seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets," one of them, searching for food, gathered a lapful of wild gourds and tossed them into the pot. The effect of this was poisonous and they cried out to Elisha that there was "death in the pot." Elisha immediately instructed them to bring meal and cast it into the pot. They then ate of its contents without harm.

Here is a story rich in symbolic meaning. Often there appears to be a famine of satisfying idealism. Spiritual sense demands to be fed, and the human mind in its eagerness to clutch at any theory which looks as though it might be sustaining is sometimes fooled into adopting "wild," strange beliefs which have no true substance in them and become, in fact, poisonous to man's life and progress. What did Elisha do? He told them to introduce meal into the pot and there was no more harm in it. Grain was cultivated and meal was the most common food known to the Hebrews. It was basic to their diet and represents the spiritual truths of being which are normal to man, blessing and sustaining him. There is nothing strange, extraordinary, or harmful about the facts of Truth. Spiritual ideas are intelligent, natural, balanced, wholesome and easy to assimilate. If "wild," strange

beliefs enter thought through a panic induced by spiritual hunger, the prophet, or pure spiritual sense, which is innate in every man, will assert itself and take hold of the natural, clean facts of Truth. These will always supplant impure beliefs, render them harmless, and feed and sustain richly.

Elisha miraculously feeds one hundred men

Elisha's next miracle also involves feeding. A man from Baal-shalisha brought "bread of the firstfruits" to Elisha. This bread of the firstfruits was by law the property of the priests only. Here Elisha told his servant to give it to the hundred men who were surrounding him. Miraculously this bread multiplied itself and fed these men, even leaving something over.

The facts of Truth are impartial. Spiritual revelation is not only for the chosen few. The consciousness of spiritual reality is available to every man; all have the "inner light" and thus the power to become "kings and priests unto God." The fact that the bread appeared to multiply itself and everyone's need was met surely indicates the inexhaustible range of spiritual Truth and its ability to satisfy thought at every level of understanding.

Naaman the leper

The third miracle is the well-known story of the cleansing of Naaman the leper. Naaman was captain of the host in Syria. His name means "beautiful, agreeable, pleasantness." Throughout the Old Testament Syria is a symbol of the human level of thought, which is often agreeable and pleasant, but unless seen from the higher context of the spiritual, it is always subject to the changing testimony of sense.

Leprosy was one of the most dreaded diseases in the East. Associated with sin, it was regarded as unclean, and necessitated the individual being segregated from his fellow men. Intense personal sense is leprous, and it always leads to separation and segregation. When the children of Israel were in the wilderness Miriam, Moses' sister, was smitten with leprosy because she and Aaron murmured against Moses and said, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?" Here was the jealousy and pride of personal sense. As a result Miriam had to be shut out of the camp for seven days and then she was

healed. A similar cleansing process had to take place with Naaman.

A little maid, who had been brought as a captive from Israel, waited on Naaman's wife. She urged her mistress to persuade Naaman to go to the prophet in Israel, Elisha, for she knew he could heal him. There is always this "little maid," the pure spiritual sense of true womanhood, in the household or consciousness of every man, and it can lead to his salvation if he will but heed it. Naaman did heed it, though the pride of personal sense had not yet yielded completely. He was to learn that Truth does not come primarily through "official" channels, nor through pomp and ceremony. It comes in the quiet of meekness. Moreover it can never come second-hand. Spiritual fact must live for man as his very identity and being, and no one can *be* for another.

The first advance to the prophet in Israel was made by the king of Syria sending Naaman to the king of Israel with a chariot and horses and a display of wealth. The king of Israel was furious at the request that he should heal this man of his leprosy. Even though the God of Israel was known as a living God, a God of power, nevertheless to represent that power without having the living spirit of it within is of no avail. Here pride met with pride and the king's answer, born of his own spiritual lack, was merely one of anger and indignation.

Elisha heard of this encounter and asked that Naaman might come direct to him.

"Go and wash in Jordan seven times"

So Naaman "came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha." The prophet did not even go out to him, but sent a message, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." At this Naaman was very angered, thinking that Elisha would come out to him, call on his God and lay his hands on him and heal him. Moreover, why should he wash in the Jordan and be clean? Were not the rivers of Damascus better than any river in Israel? Why not wash in them and be clean? He therefore went away in a rage.

Jordan means "the river of God" and, as we saw at Elijah's translation which took place on its banks, the Jordan stands for a process of spiritual education. Personal sense with its pride of intellect and its belief that it has "got somewhere" needs to be

cleansed through the ordered way of pure spiritual education. But this demands meekness and humility. The Beatitudes teem with blessing on such a state of thought—"Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are the meek . . . Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness . . . Blessed are the pure in heart . . ." When true humility melts the hard core of self, then spiritual blessings flow abundantly.

The human mind may argue that there are other rivers of thought that can purify just as well as the "Jordan," but is it not true that there can only be one Truth, one universal Science of spiritual values? This does not mean that these values are exclusive, but just as the numerals of arithmetic are universal no matter what method one adopts to learn them, and no matter to what individual problems they are subsequently applied, so the fundamental values through which the Principle of the universe expresses itself are universal, and therefore one. Personal sense, engendering pride, prejudice, and conservatism, makes us cling to this or that finite channel for salvation, but true humility opens the door to the realization that Truth is universal and expresses itself through one channel of common spiritual values, no matter how they may be individually expressed.

Here the command is to wash in Jordan seven times. Why seven times? As we have seen, the number "seven" is used frequently by Scriptural writers to indicate the completeness of any concept. At the outset of the Bible the complete revelation of the spiritual fundamentals of being is given through the symbolism of seven days of creation. To wash in Jordan seven times, therefore, means to submerge one's thought in the cultured spiritual understanding of the great universal fundamentals of being.

Naaman's servant persuaded him to undergo this supremely natural cleansing, saying, "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" It was a simple thing Naaman was asked to do, a step that necessitated becoming as a little child. It is in keeping with Elisha's demands all the way through his miracles that Naaman had to be active, that he had to do something. As we look back, we can see how the three kings had to dig trenches to defeat the Moabites, the widow had to pour out her oil for it to increase, the Shunammite was active in caring for the prophet and so was given the gift of a son. She lost no time in going to Elisha when her son died, and he was

resuscitated. The sons of the prophets were commanded to “bring meal” in order to heal the poisonous pottage, and the servant was ordered, “give unto the people, that they may eat” when Elisha fed the hundred men miraculously. Jesus said to his disciples, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them,”—trenchant words for disciples throughout all ages.

To do “some great thing” only tends to enhance the pride of personal sense, but quietly to watch and pray, spiritually imbibing the great living values of being and letting them cleanse and purify our thoughts and actions day in and day out—this is the divine way of salvation. It may not appear spectacular humanly, but this faithfulness “over a few things” inevitably makes us “ruler over many.”

Naaman obediently washed in the Jordan, “and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” The humility and meekness which made him obedient brought to him true childlike purity and singleness of vision. Personal sense and pride were washed away and he saw the oneness and onliness of Spirit, Truth, evidenced in his words, “Now I know there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.” No longer was there division and separation in his thought, but one God, one power.

One universal Truth

Then Naaman asked for some earth from Israel in order to be able to worship God on that earth when he returned to Syria, for the belief was that only on the soil of Israel was the God of Israel operative. Moreover he begged that God would pardon him because he would still have to accompany his master, the king of Syria, when he went to worship in the house of Rimmon. It is as if man’s spiritual sense is awakened to the universal nature of Truth in its purity and Science, but to take radical human footsteps at once in accordance with this wider vision may not be wise nor possible, nor God-impelled. Today there may be many earnest thinkers in various churches or societies on whom the universal nature of Truth has dawned. They will never let this concept go, for it will not let them go. The “earth” from Israel will always be with them,—an increasing awareness of the fundamentals through which Truth is universally expressing itself,—and this living consciousness will irresistibly leaven their surroundings right where they are, “till we all come in the unity of the faith,” and recognize—as Paul avers—that there is truly

“one body, and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

Gehazi's sin and penalty

The story of Naaman ends with the sin of Gehazi, Elisha's servant, and its consequent penalty, which was that he became leprous, even as Naaman was leprous at the outset.

Elisha had refused all gifts from Naaman, but Gehazi followed after the Syrian captain and by deception obtained gifts for himself. Gehazi stands for the state of thought that has spiritual vision but does not realize the all-inclusiveness of that vision,—that it embraces man on every level, blessing him spiritually, morally, and physically. The Gehazi state of thought still has a sense of separation between understanding and demonstration. It enjoys the vision of spiritual fact, but continues to act on a human basis to ensure blessings for itself. Elisha rebuked this divided allegiance, and Gehazi was struck with the leprosy of Naaman. Again, one sees how the element of personal sense in any form leads to division and separation of every kind. Truth is All-in-all, and if we trust Truth it operates on every level to bless and satisfy.

And so through these three miracles we see Truth at work, purifying, sustaining, and feeding man with its pure substance, and all the while cleansing human thought of personal sense and division by reason of its universal nature and wholeness. As man actively opens his thought to Truth's activity, so he consciously receives its blessing.

The Miracles of Elisha—III

(II Kings 6:1-8:6)

THE CRY of the sons of the prophets recorded in the opening verse of Chapter 6 of II Kings is one that every sincere spiritual thinker utters at some period in his spiritual journey: "The place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go . . . unto Jordan . . . and let us make a place there, where we may dwell."

The sons of the prophets were theological students, and up to this point they had represented religious thought confined in creed and dogma, but here they were beginning to realize that Truth is universal and that their thought must expand to dwell in Jordan, "the river of God," the river that typifies in the Scriptures a process of spiritual education in the one universal Science of spiritual values. As we have seen, it was the Jordan in which Naaman had the humility to wash and was cleansed from the leprosy of pride and separateness. It was the Jordan in which John the Baptist baptized his followers before they could accept the universal Christ mission of Jesus, which opened the way for men out of the rigidity or straitness of the law into the universality of the Gospel. Jesus himself allowed John to baptize him in the Jordan, though he truly had no need to do so, but he was the Way-shower for all men, and therefore he undertook this baptism of spiritual education, saying, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

The recovery of the borrowed axe

When the sons of the prophets came to the Jordan, they began to fell wood to make themselves dwellings. It is related that one of them accidentally let an axe head fall into the water and he was distressed and cried, "Alas, master! for it was borrowed." He called to the man of God, showed him the place where it fell, and Elisha then cut a stick from a tree and threw it into the water. This caused the axe head to float so that the man could grasp it again and continue his work.

Is this a lesson that if any man partakes of the process of universal spiritual education, this awakening desire must come as a living impulsion "out of his own loins"? It cannot be "borrowed." To be carried along merely by a popular urge to be

universal in thought can have no firm basis. The move towards the universal conception of Truth is something that is born of individual conviction and a real understanding of the innate oneness of being. If it is not, one is always liable at some point to lose one's spiritual hold in this direction because one has been influenced by personal sense instead of being led by a living individual understanding of the universal nature of divine Principle.

The comforting factor in this incident, though, is that it shows salvation forever at hand. Elisha, who means "God is salvation," is always present to redeem the situation. Right at the place where the mistake occurred is the fact of Principle—a stick from the tree—which, used by the prophet or spiritual sense, brings the specific truth needed to the surface again so that it can be grasped and the building continued. So even if our desire to be universal and build on a wider basis has a "borrowed" element about it and has not developed naturally from our own spiritual conviction, there is always an Elisha to redeem it if we are honest and in earnest.

Elisha at Dothan

In the Scriptural record, immediately after this incident, we hear of the king of Syria again warring with Israel. Elisha, through prophetic insight, foresaw the Syrians' plans and warned the king of Israel not to pass a certain place, where he knew he would be attacked. The king of Syria discovered that it was Elisha who was revealing his secret intentions and so he set out to capture him at Dothan.

Syria stands for the human element, unillumined by the spiritual, and this element—consciously or unconsciously—wars against the spiritual. Human knowledge and merely human desires, aims, and ambitions are the persistent enemies of true spiritual progress, even as the Syrians were the persistent enemies of Israel. But alert spiritual vision has the divine insight to detect exactly where the danger lies, so that all that represents the spiritual idea is preserved. Human belief may then pursue this spiritual vision and try to overwhelm it, but it is powerless before the allness of the spiritual. This fact is beautifully illustrated in the well-known story of Elisha and his servant at Dothan, which means "two wells"—an interesting meaning when one realizes that Elisha was all the while proving the salvation of God both

divinely and humanly. His very mission began with his desire for “a double portion” of Elijah’s spirit, namely, spiritual understanding and the natural proof of that understanding in human experience.

The Syrians with all their “horses, and chariots, and a great host” came by night to Dothan and “compassed the city about.” Human belief often surrounds us with its impressive outward appearance and claims to have hosts of people believing in it and supporting it. Moreover, it operates by night—in the darkness of unenlightened thinking. When the morning came, Elisha’s servant saw the Syrian host and was afraid, but Elisha said, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” Spiritual vision can never be overwhelmed by the threatening potentialities of human belief because spiritual vision realizes the fundamental reality and consequent all-encompassing nature of the spiritual, the very essence of which is Love. It was this vision that made Daniel feel safe in the lions’ den, and enabled the three Hebrew young men to walk unharmed through the fiery furnace. It was this vision that enabled Jesus not only to say to Pilate, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above,” but also to prove that statement through resurrection and ascension against the whole gamut of human belief let loose in the form of hatred and crucifixion. Nothing is irresistible, nothing is fundamental, but Love’s plan of salvation.

Elisha prayed that his servant’s eyes might be opened to behold the allness of the spiritual, and the young man’s eyes were opened so that he saw that “the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” What a wonderful lesson lies in this incident! When we seem to be hedged in on every side by fearful, finite suggestions of human belief, we do not need to run away or summon up tremendous forces of will power to meet the enemy, but merely to “open our eyes” to what is really governing the whole situation. We do not have to create spiritual reality or make it operate, any more than we could make the sun shine and be warm. Spiritual reality is already omnipresent and omnipotent and what we have to do is to draw our mental blinds aside to feel the warm radiance of the Truth that is Love.

The eyes of Elisha’s servant were opened, but the eyes of the Syrians became blinded. The story relates that Elisha caused them to become temporarily blinded whilst he led them into the midst of Samaria, where their vision was restored and they were

fed and sent back to their master. When anyone realizes the power of the spiritual in any situation, human belief is seen to be blind and powerless. The human is completely in the hands of the spiritual and spiritual vision leads it to the place where it is surrounded by the spiritual and where it realizes that it is the spiritual that gives to the human any vision it has, and that it is the spiritual that feeds and sustains the human. This realization gives to the human its proper place of subordination to the divine.

The siege of Samaria

Before Elisha passes from the picture, he is once more involved with the defeat of the Syrians at Samaria. This time they attack the capital of Israel, and there is a siege which results in grievous famine in the city, so much so that women are eating their sons. It is believed that Elisha persuaded the king of Israel to hold out against the enemy thus far and so the king, beside himself with anxiety, curses Elisha, and wants to kill him.

Often when human beliefs besiege us on all sides, threatening to overwhelm us, and when there appears to be a complete famine of spiritual sense and no future in the situation at all, the temptation may come to wish that we had never heard of Truth and to turn against it. The children of Israel were constantly at this point in their journey through the wilderness, and murmured against Moses. Might it not also have been the pressure of disappointed material hopes and a famine of spiritual sense that made Judas turn against Jesus?

In Samaria, in contrast with the desperate situation of famined sense and in keeping with the calm attitude of spiritual vision, the Scriptures relate, "But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him." As at Dothan, so in Samaria, Elisha refused to be panicked. How can the vision of the allness of the spiritual ever be pushed or pressed or panicked? Elisha merely prophesied that the next day food would be sold in the gate of Samaria once again. This prophecy was not credited. Limited thought can never accept spiritual prophecy. Nevertheless it proved itself to be true.

The story says that through divine intervention the Syrians were made to hear the noise of chariots, horses, and a great host, and they fled. So finally the siege ended without a fight. Elisha's prophecy that there would be food sold in the gate of Samaria the next day was proved true and all limited thought was trodden

underfoot. God can always furnish a table in the wilderness, for there are no limits to the blessed power of divine Love, since it is All.

The Shunammite's house and land restored

A little incident is recorded in Chapter 8 of II Kings which is said to be out of chronological order, but which nevertheless has its place here, illustrating that no matter what famine there is or what land of human belief we may have to dwell in temporarily, we can never lose our Christ inheritance if we are faithful. Here Elisha told the Shunammite to go and sojourn in the land of the Philistines because of a famine in her land. This she did for seven years, at the end of which time she returned and pleaded with the king of Israel to restore to her her house and her land. This request was granted, everything was restored and all the fruits of the land were also given to her.

The Shunammite expressed the same type of spiritual consciousness as Joseph, who also had to dwell in the land of an enemy and experienced a famine of seven years' duration. Though he seemed to be deprived of his inheritance in Canaan, it was restored to him richly in Egypt, where he became ruler. The Shunammite had already experienced very vividly the restoring power of the spiritual when her son had died and Elisha brought him back to life, so she knew the truth of the Psalmist's words, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." When through faithfulness to the spiritual we experience the restoring, in all its living nature, of a new-found vision which seemed to be lost, then we realize that everything that is our true inheritance irresistibly belongs to us and nothing can keep it from us.

It was seven years of famine that this woman endured in the land of the Philistines. Joseph experienced seven lean years and seven fat years in Egypt. Naaman had to dip himself seven times in the Jordan. This symbol permeates so many of these stories, teaching through positive or negative illustrations that a living understanding of the great spiritual fundamentals of being as symbolized in the days of creation feeds and sustains man, preserves and protects him, enabling him to prove his completeness as the perfect expression of an infinite divine Cause.

It seems fitting that Elisha's final prophecies and his passing from the scene should be preceded by this story of restoration, for

it is as though the work of Elijah, the great Restorer, was symbolically fulfilled at the conclusion of Elisha's mission. Spiritual understanding fulfils itself in proof of that understanding, and the real proof is not creating harmony where there was discord, or health where there was sickness, but rather is it the restoring of man through understanding to his true estate of wholeness which in reality he has never left.

Elisha—His Final Prophecies

(*II Kings 8:7—13:20*)

ELISHA had given abundant proof of God's salvation from the time when the mantle of Elijah had fallen on him at the translation of his master on the Jordan's banks, to his great proof of divine deliverance when the children of Israel were saved from the Syrian host at Samaria. And now, before he passes from the earthly scene, he makes two final prophecies concerning Israel,—one to Hazael the Syrian, and one on his deathbed to Joash, the king of Israel.

Elisha's prophecy to Hazael

Elisha foresaw that salvation is irresistible, as any man must who—like this great prophet—has in some measure understood, felt, and proved the fundamental reality of the Christ, Truth. A clear vision, though, is also aware of the demands that the spiritual makes on man and the suffering that would seem to take place when the human mind offers resistance to these demands. This is the substance of Elisha's first prophecy to Hazael.

In Chapter 8 of II Kings the story reads that Benhadad, the king of Syria, was sick, and hearing that Elisha was at Damascus, sent his messenger Hazael to the man of God with a present and a question which amounted to a desire for help—"Shall I recover of this disease?" At first sight Elisha's reply seems extraordinary for a man of God. He answered, "Thou mayest certainly recover; howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die." And then Elisha wept. On Hazael questioning him as to the cause of his sorrow, he told him it was because he foresaw the evils that would come upon Israel, which were to be brought about by this very same Hazael as a future king of Syria.

Elisha's answer to Benhadad's question was not really an answer given to an individual person regarding his personal illness. Elisha was a prophet. His miracles had more meaning behind them than mere personal healings of individuals or the redeeming of personal situations. They carried a much wider implication, involving warnings and lessons relative to the whole salvation of Israel. And more than this: because Israel is a symbol

of the developing spiritual idea, which is fundamentally the same in all ages, no matter how it is represented, his miracles are warnings and lessons regarding the spiritual idea throughout all time.

Benhadad was the king of Syria, this same Syria which we have seen all along as a symbol of the human element unillumined by the spiritual, which is the constant enemy of the spiritual idea. When the human picture is sick,—either in health, happiness, or supply,—it turns to the spiritual for salvation. Elisha in his reply to Benhadad briefly voiced the fact that it is perfectly possible for the human to be redeemed and blessed if it is willing to be translated out of itself, but he foresaw that the human would resist such translation and so suffer and die.

The problem of suffering

The human suffers, but the way of salvation does not involve suffering for the true selfhood of any spiritual pioneer who has learned to be conscious of the allness and living reality of spiritual Truth and therefore of his oneness with that Truth. It is resistance to Truth's demands that causes suffering. One might ask, then, Why did Jesus, the greatest spiritual pioneer, suffer? It is significant that Luke records Jesus being "in an agony" in the garden of Gethsemane, but after that moment he records no further suffering. What took place in Gethsemane? Jesus wrestled with the demands of Truth. He prayed earnestly, and his prayer was "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." By this very prayer Jesus accepted fully his Godlike selfhood, subject only to the will of God. Accepting the demands of Truth, he must have seen that if God's will was being done then only good could be the outcome of this trial, only the salvation that stems from eternal Life, Truth, and Love. His continuous certainty of this one power at work was later evidenced in his clear, uncompromising statement to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."

Old theology has always emphasized the suffering of Jesus, and yet Jesus' true Godlike selfhood could never have suffered, for it could only have been conscious of the fact of eternal Life, spiritual Life, and that nothing could destroy it.

Suffering is a relative state of being and depends on an

individual's standpoint rather than his surroundings and outside circumstances. As the poet says:-

Two men looked out from prison bars,
One saw mud, the other stars.

What is this suffering, then, that Elisha foresaw would overtake Israel and which made him weep, and which also caused Jesus to weep over Jerusalem? Primarily, it is the suffering which results from believing in a selfhood apart from the infinite One. In the case of Elisha it was Syria, the human element, that was to inflict this suffering on Israel, and truly it is the human element that pulls at a man and fools him into resisting his oneness with the spiritual, thus causing him to suffer.

Pain or suffering are associated in the human mind with the belief of separation. In a physical sense, if a man cuts his finger, the flesh is separated—that which should be joined is severed—and he feels pain. When a child is separated from the womb, again the belief is of accompanying pain, though there are mothers who have experienced painless childbirth when a higher and all-embracing joy over the whole event transcends the material happening. Parting from loved ones temporarily or through what is termed death often brings pain and sorrow also. Yet basically all such pain and sorrow is resolved in the clear realization of the oneness of the spiritual universe and the infinite inseparability which this implies. Where there is no sense of separation or of parting, there can be no pain.

At this period in the history of the Israelites the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah were separated. This had taken place in the latter part of the reign of Solomon, after he had departed from the worship of the one God and had begun to bow down to the many false gods imported by his various foreign wives. The message of the prophets centred on the demand to return to the one God, the demand for the purity of oneness.

But Israel had strayed from this spiritual purity and oneness and believed she could prosper under the illusion of separateness. By its very nature separateness is finite. Oneness can never end. The infinite One, and all individuality within that infinite One, is endless. The prophets saw, though, that the demands of Truth—that which is fundamental to all creation—would cause suffering, inflicted by the human element. Without purity of vision, thought is unable to withstand the subtle inroads of human belief. The Israelites could not withstand the Syrians.

Jehu anointed king

Between Elisha's prophecy to Hazael and his final prophecy at his death to the Israelite king, Joash, we do not hear of him again, except that he commanded one of the sons of the prophets to go and anoint Jehu king of Israel in fulfilment of God's command given to Elijah on Mount Horeb. This again may seem an extraordinary appointment for a man of God to make, for Jehu's reign was one of bloodshed from beginning to end. Peloubet's Bible Dictionary says of Jehu that he "entered on a work of extermination hitherto unparalleled in the history of the Jewish monarchy." During his reign he destroyed the king of Israel, the king of Judah, Jezebel, the seventy sons and descendants of Ahab, former king of Israel, the forty-two princes of Judah, and all the Baal priests and worshippers. This mighty destruction, though, was seen as God's hand operating to cleanse Israel of her slackness and hypocrisy, her materialism and idolatry. These people whom Jehu destroyed, all stood for qualities of thought that would oppose the development of the spiritual idea. Yet, when a mighty destruction takes place, there must be a conscious awakening to the spiritual reality—the substantial Truth—that impels such destruction, or there can be a vacuum. Jesus said, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword," and he brought a sword to reliance on material values and contentment with the facade of Pharisaism. Yet in their place he taught and proved the rich substance and fundamental nature of spiritual values and the true dominion, authority, and freedom of the spiritual man.

The children of Israel seemed to have to experience the squeezing out of the last drop of human hope and ambition in their Babylonian captivity before they allowed the spiritual idea, which remained alive in their prophets, to struggle into expression. It was in captivity that their greatest contribution was made to the Old Testament message, namely, the creation story as given in the first chapter of Genesis, which symbolic record has yet to make its full impact on humanity as presenting the fundamental root notions of reality.

Elisha's final prophecy to Joash

In the middle of Chapter 12 of II Kings the death of Elisha is recorded, and again his final prophecy given here involves Israel's dealings with the Syrian enemy.

Elisha fell sick and Joash, the king of Israel, came down to him. One wonders whether Elisha's sickness was perhaps discouragement, due to his realization that Israel would not listen to her prophets and that he foresaw that Syria, the human element, could not be dealt with by Israel without suffering.

A well-known scene is enacted here. Elisha told Joash to take bow and arrows and to put his hand upon the bow. Elisha then put his hands upon the king's hands. After this he told him to open the window eastward and shoot. Joash shot whilst Elisha declared, "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria, for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them." Then the prophet commanded the king to take the arrows and smite on the ground with them. Joash took them and smote on the ground three times and then stopped. Elisha was angry with him, saying he should have smitten the ground five or six times. He prophesied that if he had done so, Syria would have been utterly consumed, but as it was, she would only be smitten three times and not destroyed, which prophecy came true.

What does this story mean as a present-day illustration? Does it not indicate that we need to take the spiritual fundamentals of being like a weapon in our hands? Allowing spiritual vision to guide our handling of spiritual ideas (Elisha's hands upon the king's hands), we must then open our thought to the ever-present Christ (in the four compass points the east is always a symbol of the Christ) and shoot,—be willing to deal with the human element and its constant warfare against the spiritual.

The incident does not end there, though, and neither can we. The smiting of the arrows on the ground five or six times instead of three must have a trenchant lesson in it. And is it not this? As so often with Hebrew symbolism, it related numbers to a specific day of creation. Here, the symbols are "three" compared with "five" and "six". The third day, when the dry land appears, symbolizes the definite spiritual understanding which Soul-sense brings to us, whilst the fifth day, where the teeming life in the waters and the air appears, symbolizes the active living expression of the one Life or spiritual being. And the sixth day, culminating in the creation of man in God's image and likeness with dominion over all the earth, presents the ever-present consciousness of God which *is* man, the forever man, the only man, the ideal of Truth. If we attempt to deal with the frustrating human element merely from the third day state of thought, we shall have intermittent

spiritual victories. What we all need to do is to let spiritual reality be what it in truth is—our actual life and being, our only consciousness, and therefore our very manhood. When spiritual truths take on in our thought the nature of life and truth to us, we are on the rock and “Syria” is consumed.

Two of Jesus’ most well-known statements concern life and truth,—“I am come that they might have life” and “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Jesus lived the Life divine and it was Truth to him. So he was able to defeat the temptations of the human element even to the point of resurrection and ascension.

And so Elisha passed from the picture. He and Elijah had fulfilled their missions, missions whose message has remained to inspire other spiritual seekers and to remind them that there is only one Being and that pure adherence to that one Being cannot help but bring a true salvation.

The Union of Judah and Israel: Its Timeless Significance

AFTER THE reign of Solomon the united kingdom of Judah and Israel split into two. According to the second Book of Kings, it was not long after the death of Elisha that the kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria. Before this took place, seven more kings of Israel came and went in rapid succession—the Scriptures spare little more than one chapter for their total reigns—and then, because of Israel's faithlessness to the one God, she was carried off by the great Assyria. Judah stayed the course longer, but finally was taken into Babylonian captivity.

Before leaving this period of Kings, let us consider these two kingdoms side by side, together with the various kings who reigned over them, spiritually interpreting the significance of the story.

The united kingdom of manhood and womanhood

As we have seen, Judah and Israel represent the manhood and womanhood of the spiritual idea,—the letter and the spirit, understanding and the proof of that understanding in human experience. In reality these dual conceptions can never be divided. They are two aspects of the one way of Life, inseparable from one another. The living letter cannot help but embrace the spirit, or else it is dead. The spirit cannot help but embrace the living letter, or it becomes static. A real understanding proves *itself*, and to have unfailing proof needs a basic understanding. Even human experience teaches us to express the united qualities of manhood and womanhood in order to be a real man or woman. If a man does not embrace such qualities of womanhood as affection, love, true tenderness, then he is merely male and not a whole man. If a woman does not embrace such qualities as intelligence, initiative, courage, then she is merely female and not a whole woman. So ideally, manhood and womanhood combine to form a complete whole.

At the beginning of this fourth thousand-year period of Bible history Judah and Israel formed one kingdom under the rule of

David. There was an attempted split at the start of his reign, through Abner, but David was instrumental in bringing the kingdoms together again and they remained united during his kingship.

What did David symbolize that made for unity of manhood and womanhood, the letter and the spirit, understanding and proof of that understanding? His life and actions emphasized the coincidence of the divine with the human. Unlike Saul, his predecessor, he always turned to God for guidance, and then tried to carry out the divine command in human experience. He did not divorce one from the other. When he did, he suffered. He learned the rule "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." And this he obeyed through love. David loved. He loved his brethren, he loved Jonathan, he loved his enemy Saul, he loved Bathsheba (a love which had to be purified), he loved his son Absalom, even when the latter plotted against him and seized his throne. David never ceased to love nor to forgive his enemies. In Love there can be no divorce, for Love unites. And so the kingdom remained undivided.

One might ask: Does the union of manhood and womanhood, the letter and the spirit, understanding and the proof of that understanding depend, then, on love? Primarily, yes, though it also depends on what one loves and how one loves. Jesus said that the two great commandments were, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." In other words he could have said, "Give your heart and your soul and your mind to the spiritual and then let that spiritual consciousness flow out in human experience to embrace your universe." These two commandments are one and entirely dependent on each other. In giving your all to the spiritual in the way of heart, soul, and mind,—affection, understanding, and true intelligence,—you find yourself, your true Godlike selfhood. And then, and only then, can you love your neighbour as that self,—as his true Godlike self also.

The divided kingdom of manhood and womanhood

David, the great ancestor of Jesus, exemplified obedience to these commandments, and so did Solomon at the outset of his reign, but his love gradually became impure. He disobeyed the first of these commandments and started to worship the foreign

gods imported by his many wives. So the kingdom became divided, Judah and Israel split into two, and were eventually taken into captivity.

This constitutes a lesson for all men throughout all time. As long as a man remains pure in his love of the spiritual and his desire to let it prove itself in human experience, the conflict in his life begins to lessen, for, through spiritual translation of the world around him, he finds he has one undivided universe. But if he loses his standard of purity and worships gods “foreign” to the spiritual,—the material values of money, merely physical well-being, sex, the pleasures of personal sense,—as Solomon did, then conflict, division, and captivity (bondage to sensuality) are the result.

After Solomon’s reign the divided kingdoms continued for another few hundred years, but they never united again as kingdoms. The symbol changes, though, and this fundamental spiritual union later appeared through other specific symbols.

As we consider these two kingdoms side by side, we are faced with nineteen kings and one queen of Judah and nineteen kings of Israel. The Book of Kings re-iterates a pronouncement which only varies slightly with each king, but which constitutes a judgment on every one of them, for the writers of the Book were mainly concerned with which king was obedient to God and which was not. The pronouncement is, “And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord” or “And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.” Following through this history with the judgments of the prophetic writers, we find that Israel had no kings at all who “did right in the sight of the Lord.” Her record is completely negative in this respect. Judah, on the other hand, had eight kings who obeyed God. They did not all contribute as much as one another, but the line of light appears to have shone more brightly through Judah’s record than through Israel’s.

The more constant occurrence of good kings in the kingdom of Judah—kings who set about reforming the people—seems to imply the importance of a pure spiritual understanding of the letter, the manhood for which Judah stood. But again, without the true womanhood of the spirit, without the resultant proof of this understanding in human experience, there is still no complete idea, no whole and undivided consciousness. Moreover, such an understanding still remains somewhat imprisoned in the mere letter.

Judah and the “high places”

When Judah's kings were classified as doing “right in the sight of the Lord,” it was because in some way they set aside idolatrous worship. Asa and Jehoshaphat, the first two good kings, dealt with the Sodomites and removed the idols. Then King Jehoash actually began to repair the temple, symbolic of renewing the spiritual structure of man's understanding of God. Amaziah, Azariah, and Jotham also dealt with false worship to a certain extent, though not a great deal is written about these kings. With all of them, though, there is this constant note—“nevertheless the high places were not taken away; for the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places.” With all the right doing of the kings of Judah, the high places were still not removed until the coming of the last two good kings of Judah, Hezekiah and Josiah.

What were these “high places” which are so often referred to as a feature of idolatry that had to be abolished? It was a custom in early times to erect altars and places of worship on high elevations and conspicuous spots. The Israelites did this also and though primarily the altars they erected were to Jehovah, as time went on all kinds of foreign gods were worshipped by the Israelites on these high places. In the united kingdom under David, his establishment of Jerusalem as the capital city and later Solomon's building of the temple, there were attempts to centralize worship, but with the divided kingdom the high places multiplied.

This whole story is deeply interesting to us symbolically. These many “high places” are as apparent to-day as in Biblical times. The one God is “fragmented” into many different gods. Some worship one type of god, others worship other types of god—all have their various “high places.” Even in a man's individual life his worship is often fragmentary, and at certain times—in times of distress or at conventionally appointed times—he will lift his thought to some high ideal or other. But to be conscious of God as a universal Principle,—a Principle which is mental and spiritual and whose laws and rules speak through everything in the universe,—makes this Principle a “constant” in a man's life and removes the sense of isolated “high places” and fragmentary truths.

One can trace through the Bible the gradual abolition of the belief in any specific localized place in which God must be

worshipped. When Jacob fled from the wrath of his brother Esau and, resting at Peniel, saw the vision of the ladder reaching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending upon it, and God's promise came to him, he exclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." The belief was that God was only in the land of Canaan, but here was a realization of the ever-presence of the divine Principle of the universe. Later, with Moses at the burning bush, the command came, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." In Stephen's defence before his accusers as recorded in the Book of Acts, he refers to this incident with Moses as illustrating the ever-presence of God, and makes the point all through his address that "the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands"—God cannot be localized. Was not this also Jesus' attitude when he said to the woman of Samaria at the well, "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth"?

Yet, in order to be conscious of God as the one great presence and power behind every phenomenon, entering into the minutiae of daily life, it is necessary to understand this power as a Principle, a divine Mind, operating through spiritual ideas which are fundamentally the life-current of all phenomena. Moreover, these ideas, being governed by Principle, cannot be fragmentary in their relationship to one another, any more than the fundamentals of music or mathematics are fragmentary. The ark of Noah, the tabernacle of Moses, the temple of Solomon and that of Ezekiel, the living body of Truth behind Jesus' life work, when spiritually interpreted, are each a composite symbol of the one system of divine Principle and its operation as a coherent whole. Today this operation is being understood as a divine Science. Thus we see the symbols change, though the spiritual values remain, and seeing this we cease to imprison our God in localized symbols, but rather worship through intelligent spiritual understanding, an ever-present Principle of ordered, eternal, spiritual ideas, speaking through all phenomena.

When Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah, one of his first actions was to remove the high places, and II Kings records that "the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth"—so much so that when the Assyrians came up to destroy Jerusalem, they were unable to do so, in spite of dire

threats and a long siege. Hezekiah sought Isaiah's spiritual counsel, and by adhering to this, he was able to stand firm and resist the Assyrians' attack on the city.

Josiah and the Book of the Law

Later, after the evil reigns of Manasseh and Amon, Josiah came to the throne, and it is in his reign that the well-known incident takes place of the finding of the Book of the Law in the temple when it was being repaired. It was delivered to the king. He read it, and after doing so he tore his clothes in repentance. Huldah the prophetess interpreted this book as a warning to God's people. Forthwith Josiah gathered all the people together and read to them the words of the covenant. There then began a thorough and detailed reform of the religious life of Judah. All the high places, together with their priests, and all the groves and the idolatrous altars were destroyed. A complete cleansing of false worship was set in motion through the Book of the Law. And yet Judah was eventually taken into captivity, just as Israel was.

Judah trying to stand alone with her many attempts at reform is like a man trying to establish the letter of the Law without the womanhood of the true spirit. Israel trying to stand alone is like a man trying to manifest the spirit or its fruits without a pure adherence, through spiritual understanding, to the living Word, the true letter. This shows us that there is no permanent peace and harmony without the balanced union of what these two kingdoms represent. The comforting truth is, though, that the true nature of his Cause being both Father and Mother, man has within himself the natural ability to be complete and to express manhood and womanhood with all that this stands for spiritually.

It is interesting that Elijah and Elisha, the two prophets who were not writing prophets but prophets of a living example, came to the Northern kingdom of Israel, and although their purpose to heal the widowhood of Israel did not appear to be fulfilled at that time, nevertheless their missions still remain as an exhortation to us today not to neglect a balanced sense of the letter and the spirit, which is our natural birthright.

The great majority of the writing prophets were in the kingdom of Judah, and Judah never lost its reverence for the Law even though the line of light was very dim during this period. However,

Judah had enough vision to value its law books and to take them into Babylonian captivity. It was in this captivity, as we know, that the great first chapter of Genesis was written, the chapter whose symbolic meaning contains the key to the whole Scriptures in their timeless and living content.

The Bible is the story of the spiritual idea as it developed through the Israelitish people. But what matters to us is not the history of Judah or Israel or of the many nations, tribes or individuals contained therein. What is of value to all men in all ages is the operation of the spiritual facts which lie behind these manifestations. It is by exercising our spiritual sense and discerning this, that its story can live in our lives today and be our story, our guide to eternal Life.

Rebuilding the Temple—I

The laying of the foundations

(Ezra 1:1–3:13)

THE STORY contained in the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther is one of the highlights of the Old Testament, for it tells of a re-birth for the Israelitish people. Together these books form the climax of the historical record of the Old Testament, leading quite naturally into the New, with its dynamic presentation, in the four Gospels, of the new man, the Christ man, coming forth from his divine Cause conscious of his spiritual birthright of dominion.

The Bible is the Book of Life, recording the workings of the spiritual idea and its eternal unfoldment in man's experience,—individually, collectively, and universally. It needs to be regarded as a whole in order for men to realize its full significance as the way of Life. Both the Old and New Testament messages, therefore, are necessary for a whole salvation. The Old Testament, with the emergence of the Israelites into their God-given inheritance, tells the story of the journey from a material sense of existence to the spiritual, whereby men lay off a mortal concept of themselves and their universe and realize their essential oneness with the divine Cause. Then, as they do this, they quite naturally begin to adopt the standpoint, which is man's fundamental birthright, of looking out from the divine Cause as sons of God, as Jesus did, and thus realizing the New Testament experience in their life—namely, an abiding consciousness of real good as the all and only, with its resultant healing power. Moreover, there is no time limit attached to this living way of salvation. On any man's journey spiritwards the substance of both the Old and New Testament messages is essential for him to experience in his life, but in proportion as he accepts the divine Principle of the universe as the one great Cause behind all creation, and is prepared to live his developing understanding of this fact, the way is shortened.

Israel's kingdom period

What stage of a man's spiritual journey, then, do these three Old Testament books illustrate? Historically, Ezra tells of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, Nehemiah of the rebuilding

of the walls of Jerusalem, and Esther of the salvation of the Jewish remnant who were still in captivity in Persia.

To understand the full spiritual significance of this rebuilding, this re-birth, let us briefly recall the events of this fourth thousand-year period in Israel's history, the period when she had at length reached the Promised Land, and when the dominant question before her was one of government. At the outset of this era the Israelites demanded a king to rule over them, in order to be like all their neighbours. Once they came under the government of kings, though, there arose the continual problem of whether they would adhere to spiritual vision and listen to their prophets, who were the spiritual leaders of the age, or be swayed by their kings, many of whom were evil. Unfortunately this latter infidelity eventually won the day for a while and the Israelites strayed from monotheism, became impure in their worship, and defiled their temple. This led to the eventual invasion by Assyria and Babylon, who sacked Jerusalem, destroyed their temple, and took the people away into captivity.

There is always a remnant, however, always salvation for "the people of God." Babylon was later overrun by the Medes and Persians, and under Persian rule the Israelites experienced a revival of their national status, beginning with the unexpected command to them from Cyrus, king of Persia, to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. A few years later, Nehemiah was permitted to return and build up the walls of the city. Meanwhile, those Israelites who remained in Persia were saved from extinction by the goodness and bravery of the Jewish queen, Esther.

So this concluding history of the Old Testament records a time of revival and new birth for the Jews, and it typifies such a period in the experience of every man who is seeking to realize increasingly his spiritual inheritance.

From the dawning of light to the Promised Land

In order to appreciate fully the significance of this period of revival, let us trace the Old Testament record symbolically as it affects every man's spiritual journey:—A man becomes aware of the light of the one intelligence or divine Mind that promises to take him out of a limited sense of being an earth-bound "Adam" mortal; he goes forward and, through spiritual understanding, experiences the power of Spirit to lift him—as the ark did with

Noah—out of the many floods of material beliefs that would engulf him. Then, as Abraham, he is impelled to undertake the journey from a material to a spiritual sense of his true identity. In this journey he finds that he needs all the qualities that Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Joshua stand for, if he is to reach the “promised land” of God-given identity—to realize his oneness with God. To be continually aware of this oneness is what it means to dwell in the Promised Land. The “promised land” is not a land of “goodly words,” nor a land of ritual,—it is a state of consciousness whereby man lives in active obedience to an understood Principle. He lives no more from the standpoint of being a separated mortal, perhaps using some measure of spiritual understanding to make his own personal life better, but rather he lives conscious of being an expression of a spiritual plan, naturally moving in harmony with every other expression of that plan. This demands constant obedience to the divine Principle of being and not to personal sense. On this point the Israelites fell down, and this is where we sometimes fall down. They listened to their kings rather than to their prophets. We too may listen to the promptings of personal sense rather than to the divine Principle. When the king himself respected spiritual prophecy and obeyed God, as in the case of David and one or two lesser kings, the situation was safe, but more often than not the kings went the way of selfishness, materialism, and personal sense. In our experience, where there may be a temporary organization or individual actively motivated by pure spiritual sense, then it may bring us temporary inspiration, guidance, and comfort, but ultimately we find that all inspiration, guidance, and comfort lies in the divine Principle itself, which is of the nature of Life, Truth, and Love.

The first temple

In the reign of Solomon the first temple was built, and it became the centre of Jewish worship. If one studies the building of this temple as a symbol and translates all its details of construction, it presents a perfect structure of spiritual ideas, just as the ark and the tabernacle had done before it. Today the form of our “ark” or “tabernacle” or “temple” is a mental one. It still represents the spiritual and eternal form of infinite Being, but its symbol is no longer a building; rather is it a Science of spiritual ideas.

Just as the Israelites defiled the purpose of the temple by drifting from the pure Spirit that lay behind it, and began worshipping other gods and accepting the temple merely as an accustomed and almost meaningless institution where ritual and ceremony went on, so we today can drift from the pure Spirit which lies behind the Science of spiritual ideas, lower our standards, and pay respect merely to accustomed words and phrases and spiritually scientific terminology that can become almost meaningless to us. Difficulties and troubles may then seem to overtake us. The “temple” or structure of spiritual Truth, having become stereotyped in our eyes, may be destroyed, and, for a time, we may even seem to be in captivity to world beliefs that are “foreign,” for they are never natural to the man of God’s creating,—to our true, basic identity.

The temple of the return

But there is always salvation. The command comes to rebuild the temple, and this time it has to be a living temple built by our own alert Christ selfhood. Whereas the previous structures had been known as “Noah’s ark,” “Moses’ tabernacle,” and “Solomon’s temple,”—all associated with a person,—this structure, this rebuilt temple, is known as “the temple of the return,”—the return of every man to his living identity in God. No single individual stands out predominantly as instrumental in the rebuilding of this particular temple. Rather was it the work, as Ezra says, of “all them whose spirit God had raised.”

There comes a time when each man awakens to his own Christ selfhood, the kingdom of heaven within, and this has nothing to do with being obedient to creed, dogma, formula, or merely to inspired persons or words; it is the awakening and the activity of the living, palpitating presence of the Christ spirit which is every man’s fundamental identity. The exercise of this spirit will bring about the vision of Hebrews: “They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.”

The universal impulsion to build

A surprising fact about the rebuilding of the temple was that the command to rebuild it came from the Persian king, Cyrus. It was not an accepted and forceful leader from among the

Israelites who arose and roused them to rebuild, but Cyrus, a Persian. Cyrus means "the sun," and the sun is a symbol of an impersonal, universal power which shines on the just and on the unjust. It gives the sense that we are impelled to rebuild a living consciousness of Truth, not merely by our own religious conscience, which may compel us through duty, remorse, or fear, and because of certain upbringing and training, but by the one great Principle of the whole universe; this is forever at work motivating men irresistibly to return to their native spiritual selfhood, that which alone can bring them peace, safety, and salvation, for in the spiritual Principle of the universe lies every man's true identity.

All ideas essential to the whole

The impulsion to spiritual building in a living way is a universal one. Moreover, each individual expression in creation has a place in this rebuilding.

Chapter 2 of Ezra lists the various groups of Israelites who went up to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Merely taken at its face value, this list might appear boring and one to be skipped. True, one does not want to lose sight of the wood for the trees in Bible study, but if one should pause to examine this list, one would find that it indicates every type of spiritual thought—every pure category of spiritual idea—as being essential to the whole. It is important in spiritual building never to lose sight of the whole, because one will then welcome and see the place of all categories of thought within that whole.

The order of building

To note the order in which the Israelites began to rebuild their temple is also of great significance to us. Before ever the foundations were laid, they built the altar of God and offered burnt offerings upon it. This symbolized their pure desire to put the spiritual first and to give everything to it, even before they started any construction work.

Surely the lesson implicit in this is that the first step in rebuilding a living structure of spiritual consciousness is to let our pure desire for the spiritual be foremost in our lives. We have tasted of it, as indeed the Israelites also had at this juncture, but just as they had drifted and become side-tracked to worship

other gods, so we are tempted today to “blur” the edges of our pure desire for the spiritual by lesser considerations. This pure desire must be our essential attitude before substantial building can take place.

The foundations laid

Then the Israelites went ahead and the builders laid the foundations of the temple. In any building the foundations are the important factor, and have to be firm if the building is to endure and fulfil its purpose. This is also true in spiritual building. Firm foundations are essential. Abraham looked for “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”; in the Book of Revelation the holy city described there had twelve foundations, and “in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” Why were those particular names engraved on the foundations? Surely because the disciples were students. Jesus imparted to them a cultivated spiritual understanding of his Father, the divine Principle of the universe, and any abiding spiritual structure must have deep, precise, and intelligent foundations, though necessarily foundations which are entirely spiritual and infinite in content.

At the laying of the foundations there was song and praise and thanksgiving, but many of the old people who remembered Solomon’s temple wept, for instead of the magnificent glory of that structure, all they could see were a few unadorned foundation stones of a new temple. Yet Haggai prophesied of this new temple, “The glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former.”

We may be tempted to be sad when the outside trappings of any religious organization or structure that we have revered disintegrate, or when the numbers of its adherents that made it so impressive dwindle and fall away, but on the other hand, for those who have eyes to see, there is great rejoicing when instead of merely outward glory and large numbers of adherents, there are signs of a real, solid, individual understanding of spiritual reality developing with ourselves and others. Though the visible growth may be small, nevertheless where there is pure desire, an awakening to the fact that the kingdom of heaven is within, a great sincerity to put first things first and to build a living spiritual structure on sure foundations, then there is occasion for gladness and gratitude.

All who follow along this living and substantial way, whereby sure spiritual foundations are laid, find that they have a house built on the rock, which neither the rains nor the floods nor the winds can overwhelm. Such a building stands for ever.

Rebuilding the Temple—II

Universality brings fulfilment

(Ezra 4:1-6:22)

SOON AFTER the Israelites began the rebuilding of their temple in Jerusalem, they came up against the Samaritans, who are called in Chapter 4 of Ezra “the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin.” The Samaritans were the foreigners with whom the Assyrian conquerors peopled Samaria after they had carried off the Israelites into captivity. They were instructed in Jahweh worship, but retained many of their former heathen practices. They were called “adversaries” here as a result of the incident that follows.

The Samaritans heard of the rebuilding of the temple and approached the Jews, saying, “Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him.” But the leaders of the Israelites would have no contact with them, returning the answer, “Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.” The Jews, recently returned from captivity, where they had tended to lose their identity as a nation, were now ultra-nationalistic, narrow, and separatist in their outlook, and so refused to allow the Samaritans to take part in this rebuilding.

Thus rebuked, the Samaritans became antagonistic towards the Jews and “weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building.” They interfered in every way possible with the building of the temple, until at length it ceased altogether, and its completion was delayed for sixteen years. It was not until the two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, began to prophesy in Jerusalem,—Haggai with his trenchant demand to delimit their conception of the spiritual idea and Zechariah painting the picture of the glory of the spiritual idea,—that the work again proceeded and the temple was completed.

Truth is universal

This was a major incident in the rebuilding of the temple in 520 B.C., but it also raises a major factor that has been predominant in spiritual progress of every kind throughout the ages; it

involves the whole subject of sects and denominations and their attitude towards one another. It poses the questions: Is there ultimately only one Truth? And are there many paths to God or Truth? To the first question one instinctively answers "Yes," for there cannot be many Truths. To the second question one needs to give pause. The history of religion has been rife with bitterness and persecution because this question has been answered mainly in the negative, and men have been prepared to go to any lengths to defend their particular path to Truth, often violating even their own Christian tenets in the attempt to uphold them.

All men and women everywhere who are feeling the impulsion of the spiritual Principle of the universe, who seek it, love it, and are striving with all their heart to let it use them and to be its expression in their daily living, are "rebuilding the temple." Through letting the spiritual facts of Truth establish themselves in a sure and practical way in their lives they are really being "lively stones."

Is not the demand on such builders today—perhaps more than ever before—to realize that Truth is universal? It has been all too common for narrow religious thought to give—mentally or audibly—the kind of curt reply that the Jews gave here to the Samaritans, "You have nothing to do with us. We will keep ourselves separate from you in our religious worship." Sincere spiritual thinkers, however, are coming to realize that dogmatic attitudes towards Truth are untenable. Apart from the fact that such narrowness turns people away from the spiritual and tends to make them ridicule and persecute it, even as the Samaritans did here, enlightenment as to the universal nature of spiritual Truth as Science is increasingly dawning on thought, and a science is always above creed, dogma, and mere belief. It is universal,—understandable and provable by anyone. An arithmetical fact, for instance, such as $5 + 5 = 10$, is true for all races, nations, creeds. It is the same for the child as for the adult. Moreover, it does not work better, worse, or differently if one writes down the figures in Chinese, Roman or Arabic. A man may go to an institute of learning to study the subject, but he does not have to identify himself with any sect or body in order to understand and prove arithmetic, for it is universal fact, available to anyone who seeks it and applies himself to it. How much more so must be the universal Truth,—the truth of man and the universe.

Jesus never put a fence round the Truth he knew, taught, and

lived. He wrote no books, built no church, founded no organization. Yet he said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." He was conscious of a universal spiritual law, available to all men in all ages, for he said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also." To accomplish this he foretold that another Comforter would come, namely, "the Spirit of truth," which would guide men "into all truth." And it is this "Spirit of truth" that is uniting all spiritual seekers, and which will draw all men nearer and nearer to one another as they understand it and let it use them.

There can be no merely intellectual answer to the ever-recurring question, "What is Truth?" Jesus declared, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." No one was so free from the bondage of materiality,—of sin, disease, and even death itself,—as Jesus was. And he freed others too, so he clearly must have known the Truth. Truth, therefore, must be spiritual, for the basis of the freedom and dominion he brought was, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." Moreover, he was supremely aware of the universal nature of Truth, as evidenced in his words to Pilate quoted many times in these articles, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." This declaration implies the realization of one power, one Truth, moving everything and everyone.

The spirit of Truth unites

If there is one universal Truth, why then are there differences between spiritual seekers, believing that their way to Truth is the only one? And how can they be resolved? Surely the differences arise because on the upward path to Truth we often see it "through a glass, darkly" and are somewhat imprisoned in the symbols which appear to be different on every path. These differences begin to be resolved when we advance to the point where we look out from the spiritual Principle itself, from the spirit of Truth, as Jesus did. Arriving at this point through spiritual understanding, we become intelligently conscious of only one power at work, one universal Truth, leavening thought everywhere. Then that which seemed limited or even contrary to the Truth, when viewed from a partial or circumscribed standpoint, becomes translated or reversed, and one can see facets of the one Truth at work behind all manifestations. It is as if the

pure spirit of absolute Truth enables one to pierce through the veil of lesser approximations and so discern the fundamental spiritual truth that must be behind them. In this way one is constantly aware of the underlying unity of all things and from this absolute point of view there can only be one path.

It is always in the spirit of Truth that unity basically lies. For instance, it is not in the doctrines, but in the spirit expressed by genuine religionists, that unity can be found. Again, there are many individuals who believe in and practise spiritual healing, whilst a great proportion of people believe in and practise medical healing. Where does any unity lie between these two methods? Fundamentally in the fact that love for mankind is the motive behind them both, and also that they both have the purpose of establishing health or wholeness. On the upward path we may say that they have a different foundation and therefore different methods for achieving this ideal. One has the physical body as its premise in healing, the other spiritual consciousness. On this level, which involves two different bases, there can be no unity. Experience teaches us, though, that in proportion as we base our reckoning of man and the universe on the spirit of Truth, we find that the power of the Spirit, which is basic to all men, overrules material, limited, and divided views. This brings about a greater mutual understanding between humanitarians and a closer approximation to the fundamental spiritual unity that exists behind all appearances.

Does it matter, then, what path a seeker takes to Truth? No one can legislate humanly what specific way another individual should take. The most important thing is to be vitally and consistently aware of the one spiritual Principle at work, and therefore of the innate oneness behind all creation. Then we should pursue with our whole heart and soul, in all humility and honesty, the path that is living and clear to us as individuals, sharing its spiritual facts with all who are drawn to it, and trusting the power of Truth to guide all men purely along the ordered way that leads to the one goal.

This way is essentially a living way. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." He had a right to say this because he *lived* the way. He was not speaking of the personal Jesus as a limited personality. He was speaking of his living expression of Truth, which is the universal way. If it could be said that there is only one way to Truth, then it can be said of Jesus' way as a living

way for everyone. To identify the spiritual facts that motivated Jesus (which were not original to him, but are universal), and to seek them in their pure Science and Truth, will accelerate any man's spiritual journey, but only if he will give himself to understanding, loving, and living them. Always the only real way is the way of Life,—of living the Truth. In sincerely following the living way, one inevitably finds a deeper unity with all other sincere seekers.

Aids and obstacles to spiritual progress

In the story under consideration the temple building was delayed because of the separatist attitude held by the Jews towards the Samaritans. How true this is with mankind's advance spiritually today. Progress spiritually seems to lag behind progress in scientific and other fields because of division and separation in the field of the spiritual, and because of the fact that, in general, religious thought has not been inclined to reason and think,—to think fearlessly out from the spiritual Principle and be expectant of new revelation. Rather has it gone along obeying unthinkingly a multitude of often conflicting and somewhat dogmatic rules. Today, though, the position is rapidly changing, and Truth is urging its intelligent, scientific, and universal nature upon men, rousing and enlightening spiritual thinkers everywhere to a freshness of vision that is sweeping through all religious bodies.

When Haggai and Zechariah came on the scene in Jerusalem, the stagnant attitude with regard to the rebuilding of the temple changed. Haggai was an old and experienced man, who saw that the outward structure of the temple did not matter. It was the inward spirit that counted. Consequently his message was one of taking the limits off spiritual progress. In prophetic language he exhorted the people to cease dwelling in their "cieled houses," to expand their thinking and go forward in the living spirit of Truth. Zechariah was a young and enthusiastic prophet, who did not so much rebuke and exhort the people as depict the glory and beauty of the spiritual idea. As the Century Bible says, Zechariah taught "more distinctly, perhaps, than any other prophet, how only man's co-operation, responding to the promptings of the Spirit of God, can ever bring in the golden age upon earth."

The Israelites listened to these forthright prophets and began

again to rebuild their temple. Once more the Samaritans approached them, but in this new spirit of a more universal sense of Truth, a gracious interchange took place between them and everyone helped to build the temple, the Samaritans bringing what they could to the work, and the Jews playing the major part in the actual building. And so the temple was finished and dedicated with joy.

With the realization that Truth is universal and based on a spiritual Principle, our approach to ways of seeking Truth other than our own inevitably changes. No longer do we attempt personally to put over our sense of Truth, nor bend every effort to convert everyone to it. Rather is our attitude one of "Come now, and let us reason together." Denominational labels begin to fall away in our contact with other seekers, because we are not so conscious of a universe of people adhering to this or that set of beliefs, as we are interested in ideas of Truth, whoever voices them. Instead of emphasizing the differences which arise in our upward paths to Truth, we are filled with the love that yearns to find meeting-points and to discern together the facts of Truth which are common to us all. From this standpoint of Love and Truth we can so often sort out our differences or else agree to disagree until further enlightenment dawns, trusting in Truth's irresistible leading, while loving and respecting every individual's right to seek Truth as he honestly feels impelled. In this way we come nearer to a fuller realization of the fundamental unity which lies at the heart of everything, and thus the building of our spiritual "temple" is accelerated and fulfilled.

The ordered way of building

So we see a wonderful lesson in this whole story of the rebuilding of the temple. The impulsion to build a spiritual structure is a universal one in the first place (Cyrus of Persia was the instigator of this work). Every individual spiritual seeker has a part in it. It involves establishing the spiritual as primary in one's life (the altar was the first thing to be erected). Then this whole structure must have firm foundations (the Israelites laid the foundations). As thought advances though, it is impelled to expand and to realize the universal nature of Truth. If a rigid, sectarian sense of Truth is allowed to enter in, it delays the fulfilment and ultimate glory of spiritual consciousness. But there are always spiritual seers who are awake to the infinite and

universal nature of Truth,—there are always Haggais and Zechariahs. And there are always alert seekers who listen and hear and follow and act.

As one reads Zechariah's words, couched in Bible language, one feels that today the truth of his prophecy is coming nearer to fulfilment: "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one."

Ezra and the Fulfilling of the Law

(*Ezra 7:1-10:44*)

EZRA does not figure in the Book called by his name until the seventh chapter. At that point he came to Jerusalem with an expedition, armed with a decree on his behalf from Artaxerxes, the Persian king, to the governor, authorizing him to assist Ezra in every way in his God-appointed mission to Jerusalem. Ezra's company carried with them silver and gold for the temple, together with its treasures, which were again to be lodged in their place in the restored temple.

Not only was Ezra the leader of this expedition, but he was also a scribe, and the most noted of the earlier scribes. A scribe was originally one who copied the law and other parts of the Scriptures, but later the term came to have a wider implication, meaning one who not only copied the law, but studied and taught it as well. Scribes were therefore also interpreters of the law, and many of them had disciples. It is said that with all their faults a great deal is owed to the scribes. Peloubet writes of them that "after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, they set themselves diligently to work to re-organize Judaism. They worked quietly and peacefully, avoided extremes, and were successful in keeping what was left of the nation faithful to the faith of their fathers. The ordinances of the oral law were at last written down, and to them is due the preservation of all the Hebrew scriptures which now exist." So these scribes were essential links in preserving the purity of the inspired Word.

Love fulfils the law

Ezra's outstanding qualities are simply and beautifully put forward in Chapter 7 of his Book, for after recording that he was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses," it says that he "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Ezra had prepared not so much his mind (as one might have expected of a scribe) as his heart. There is really no other way except through the heart, through love, that any man can not only seek the spiritual law, but also practise it and teach it successfully,—fulfilling its blessed purpose. The divine law can be fulfilled only through

love. The Psalmist realized this, saying of the righteous man, “The law of his God is in his heart: none of his steps shall slide.” When God’s law is in a man’s heart and not just his mind, something always prevents him from slipping, for he has truly identified his whole being with his divine Cause and its purpose. This was the message of grace that Jesus brought. He said that he had not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it, and then proceeded to reduce the law to two commandments only, both emphasizing love, namely, to love God and your neighbour as yourself. He declared that on those two commandments hung all the law and the prophets. Paul reiterated this theme, speaking at one time of the faithful followers amongst the Corinthians as “our epistle written in our hearts . . . written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God: not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” He also wrote of the servants of God as “doing the will of God from the heart.”

The law of God is essentially a law both of wisdom and of love. In fact, it is impossible to have divine law without the presence of both these great qualities. No one could conceive of a wise idea that was not also loving in its motive and purpose. Moreover, no one could be the vehicle to carry through to fulfilment a wise idea, stemming from the one intelligence of the universe, without also having love in his heart. Love is always the fulfilling of the law, because Love is conscious only of the power of infinite good, which knows no limited nor antagonistic force to oppose its blessed plan. A great truth also is that love is not love unless it is lived, for the very nature of love demands expression. Love lives in life, and divine law can be fulfilled only through living love.

So Ezra returned to Jerusalem to seek the law, to do it, and to teach it. This was an important factor in the spiritual progress of the Israelites at this time. They had just returned from captivity, they were going forward once more with their own temple at Jerusalem, and they needed to ponder and culture continuously the pure spiritual facts of Being, in order not to lapse back again into the worship of many strange gods and so become temporarily purposeless, scattered, and in bondage.

Around this time also in Jerusalem the prophet Malachi was prophesying. His message was for the restored remnant of Israel, and it was primarily to encourage the people to obey the spirit of the law. The Century Bible, writing of Malachi’s mission, says, “Naturally men’s neglect or observance of ritual rules was

a measure of their regard for God: but what Malachi demands is not the observance of these rules in themselves, but the spirit of worship, of reverence, and of faithfulness, which finds expression in them: he enforces the claims of the law, but only in so far as its forms are the expression of that spirit." Malachi's whole appeal to the people speaks of the loveliness of the law, illustrated in such phrases as "I have loved you, saith the Lord," and "Return unto me, and I will return unto you," and "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse . . . and prove me now herewith . . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Both Ezra's and Malachi's missions at this stage in the development of the Israelites' spiritual progress were concerned with preserving the law in its purity, but there was also the growing realization that such a thing could be done only through love and the living spirit of the law. Was it due to the increasing influence of this spirit being abroad that Artaxerxes, a Persian king, should be so spiritually awakened as to support Ezra's mission and to send a decree with him, authorizing him and his company to take the silver and gold and the treasures of the temple back to Jerusalem and also to re-establish the laws of his God there? Artaxerxes means "he who gives the lordship to holy law," and in every age this quality of loving and respecting the law of God, of Spirit, will be more and more apparent in many people and places least expected, in proportion as men practise the love that fulfils the law, rather than insist on mere intellectual or dutiful obedience to the letter of the law. This restrictive attitude has no permeating power, whereas love is outgoing and all-pervading in its very nature.

Spiritual understanding and its living correlative

On the way to Jerusalem, Ezra and his companions came to the river Ahava, where they remained for three days and where Ezra proclaimed a fast. Ahava was a running river, which the Bible commentaries contrast with the stagnant waters of Babylon. Its name means "constant flowing." It was here that Ezra, realizing the need for real spiritual understanding in his task of seeking, doing, and teaching the law, first gathered together what the Bible text terms "men of understanding" to be "ministers for the house of our God." Prominent among these was Elnathan, meaning "gift of God." Having done this, Ezra then declared a

fast, in order that they might find the right way and be protected on their journey. He said that he would be ashamed to ask for an army to protect them, because he had always maintained that God protected those who sought Him.

It is clear that if the knowledge of the law of God is to be realized and proved, it demands cultivated spiritual understanding. For “the earth [to] be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” cannot be a sudden, chance happening. It must be the result of a constant spiritual awareness and understanding, an understanding that is not humanly intellectual but the “gift of God,” as Elnathan’s prominence here symbolizes. Understanding is basic, reliable, and constant. Mere belief or faith can go up or down, be strong or weak according to the influences surrounding it, but advance faith to understanding and one has something that is rocklike and provable at all times and under all circumstances. Spiritual understanding involves not merely mental comprehension. It involves response to spiritual reality with one’s whole being and life.

That the place where Ezra stressed the value of understanding should have the symbolic name of Ahava, “constant flowing,” is a beautiful detail in this story. Real spiritual understanding is like the water that Jesus offered the woman at the well of Samaria,—a constant inspiration that never fails nor runs dry, because it is not acquired in a finite way, through accretion, but is an essential part of man’s eternal identity, the “gift of God” forever unfolding from an infinite source.

Bearing this in mind, it seems natural that Ezra, having called for “men of understanding,” should then proclaim a fast to ensure God’s protection. The fast was merely symbolic of the fact that to experience the law of God constantly in its expression of goodness and harmony, naturally necessitates fasting from a material sense of ourselves and the universe. Surely the great fast is from a dual sense of existence. To be “men of understanding” not only involves culturing the letter, as we have seen, but also recognizing that spiritual understanding is the Word of Life, the very substance of being. It involves fasting from the dualistic belief that man is spiritual but side by side with this he also has a personally individualized life, blessed or cursed according to the evidence of the material senses.

When the disciples questioned Jesus as to why they could not heal the epileptic boy, he answered them that “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” Jesus completely lived his

prayer, and this was his fasting. He fulfilled the law through so loving Spirit, God, that even in this human experience he let it be what it always is divinely, man's very substance, identity, and being. This purity, this single-mindedness, this consciousness of man's absolute oneness with God was the power which enabled Jesus to heal the sick and raise the dead.

To exercise spiritual sense and to probe the story of Ezra's activities as recorded in his Book is to find eternal spiritual laws at work which are as valid today as ever. In reading of Ezra's preparation of heart, we also see the need of preparing our own hearts to seek and to practise and to teach spiritual law. In his evaluation of "men of understanding" we too are reminded of the worth of spiritual understanding and the necessity of letting that understanding be so living to us that it makes us quite naturally fast from duality, from accepting spiritual truth and then believing in the fundamental reality of material existence for good or bad.

Valuing spiritual treasures in their wholeness

Ezra then committed to twelve priests the treasures for the temple that this company had brought with them, stressing the holiness of the priests and of the treasures, and bidding them watch over the latter carefully until they were in their place in Jerusalem. Spiritual treasures need to be valued and watched over. The spiritual understanding of Truth is certainly the pearl of great price. No wonder Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Moreover, spiritual consciousness is holy or whole, and when a man's spiritual consciousness is alert, he feels himself to be whole and rich beyond measure.

There is a lovely and important point to be seen in the fact that the Israelites had taken the treasures of the temple with them into captivity, and when they first received the call to rebuild their temple, they were told to take these treasures and return them to their place in the restored temple in Jerusalem. Symbolically this would seem to indicate that the treasures of the spiritual structure had remained with them through their darkest days,—even as we may cherish many valuable truths when we are going through difficulties. There comes a time, though, when we come out of bondage, the bondage in which the highest that we can do may be to hold fast to a few treasured spiritual facts.

Then we are led forward again to see those facts calmly, clearly, openly, in their relationship to a whole spiritual structure.

It is true that these treasures had always been part of the whole temple, but one feels all through this story that this structure was now beginning to mean something more to the Israelites in a living way than their earlier conception of it. This rebuilding of the temple was different from the erection of the first structure, Solomon's temple, in the sense that here everyone had a part to play in building it. Before, the idea to build had come to Solomon and it was somewhat exclusive to him and objective to the Israelites, but here "all them whose spirit God had raised" took part in this rebuilding. It was essentially a living structure, not so much conceived and built *for* the Israelites as *by* the Israelites. In the same way, the recognition of the wholeness of the structure of Truth today is lifeless and dogmatic if it is merely objective to us. But it is not so. This essentially whole operation of Truth is the very essence and life-current of every man, indeed the essence and life-current of man and the whole universe and must be recognized as such.

The purity of Truth as Science

After describing how the treasures were placed in the temple and Artaxerxes' decree had been delivered, the Book of Ezra ends with the voluntary separation of the Israelites from their foreign wives, husbands, and children. When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, the princes told him how the people of Israel had "not separated themselves from the people of the land,"—"the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands." This inter-marriage with other nations was contrary to the commandment that God gave to the Israelites when they were about to enter the Promised Land. It had been disobeyed, and their purity had been contaminated by these alien elements. This deeply distressed Ezra. He prayed earnestly to God, which prayer resulted in the people voluntarily putting away their foreign wives and husbands and the children of mixed marriages, thus preserving once again their original purity.

It may be that this incident literally took place, but as we have seen all along, a literal interpretation of the Bible yields little for us today and makes of small consequence the fact that the Bible is known as the Book of Life. Life is for living, and for living here and now, and therefore to take its lessons out of time and

finiteness into the eternal lessons of life that it symbolizes shows the Bible to be a real textbook for living.

This incident illustrates that there can be no deviation in absolute Truth. All the way through the Scriptures the Israelites stand for the spiritual idea of God. The spiritual idea must be kept pure in consciousness. For many years the remnant of the Israelites left in Jerusalem after the captivities had lost their vision, their standard, and their spiritual hope, and had become lax, lethargic, and consequently impure in their spiritual idealism. This can happen in any age until suddenly a new vision of the Christ, Truth, breaks through, a re-birth takes place, and there follows a consequent purification of spiritual idealism. With the rebuilding of the temple and the return of the captive remnant to Jerusalem this took the form of separating the Israelites from their foreign marriages. Later, with the advent of Jesus, it took the form of John the Baptist calling on the people to repent and baptizing them,—cleansing them from their old, outworn allegiances and sins. Jesus too demanded this purity from men, saying, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," and "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Today there is the same call on us to be consistent, and therefore pure, spiritual thinkers. Truth is being seen in the purity of its Science, with its clear-cut, intelligent, spiritual values. As with any science, it is impossible to reckon its values in a compromising, half-and-half way. Truth in its pure spiritual Science is an exact, consistent whole, and does not in its premises wed intelligence to non-intelligence, Spirit to the flesh, spiritual sense to material sense, the operation of an exact Principle to the chance beliefs of superstition and mere religious emotion. It is a Science of Life, never of death; of rocklike Truth, never associated with uncertainty nor vagueness; and of infinite Love, outlawing hatred or division. The command today, as always, is "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." This command does not refer to bodies of people and thus to isolating oneself on the basis of differing religious denominations or beliefs. Rather does it demand adhering purely to the spiritual facts of Being in all their goodness and exactness. The spiritual culture this entails inevitably results in discerning these spiritual facts at work everywhere. This pure adherence to spiritual fact has the completely opposite effect from that of isolation. Rather is it the great factor that unites, for it reverses and translates the material senses'

presentation of the universe, with its many conflicting theories, and recognizes the unity of good behind all things, stemming from a consistent spiritual Science.

This wonderful act of true separation climaxes the Book of Ezra. This Book began with the universal demand on every individual to rebuild the living temple, a temple built on sure foundations. For this building to go forward as it should, called for a universal sense of Truth. The temple established, Ezra's mission was to prepare his heart to seek, to do, and to teach the law of God in Jerusalem, and this he was to accomplish through the help of "men of understanding," who saw the living nature of God's law as all and who valued spiritual treasures above everything and were willing to care for them. Finally, there had to be established this absolute purity of Truth, in order for spiritual progress to develop naturally and infinitely.

This same story of spiritual building is true in every forward move of the spiritual idea, and as we spiritually understand and identify ourselves with this divine order of building, we shall find the truth of Paul's words, that "the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." A great vision of the one body and the one Spirit.

Nehemiah Rebuilds the Wall of Jerusalem—I

(Nehemiah 1:1-2:20)

THE BOOKS of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one Book, but later they were made into two, Ezra recording the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem, and Nehemiah the rebuilding of the walls, though it is believed that both undertakings were in progress about the same time.

To understand the difference in purpose between the rebuilding of the temple and that of the walls, it is useful to compare certain outstanding facts about these two activities. The command to rebuild the temple came from Cyrus of Persia to the whole body of Israelites. The command to rebuild the wall came to a single individual, Nehemiah, and it came directly through his own spiritual awakening. In the first instance, as we have seen, it was a universal impulsion, which inspired the Israelites collectively and individually. In the second, it was an individual impulsion which inspired Nehemiah, and through him led on to collective and universal activity. The rebuilding of the temple symbolizes the continuous universal impulsion to establish a consciousness of Truth wherein the spirit is uppermost. The temple or true body is divine consciousness, the spiritual essence of man's being. The rebuilding of the wall, with its gates, symbolizes the individual way each one of us has to go to build an intelligent and reliable understanding of the divine Word and its eternal operation in order to realize continuously man's birthright of oneness with God.

A city needs walls and gates

When the Book of Nehemiah opens, it portrays Nehemiah as cup-bearer to Artaxerxes, the Persian king. He was sitting in the palace at Shushan one day when one of his kinsmen, Hanani, came to him, together with a small band of men from Judah, and told him that the remnant of his fellow Israelites in Jerusalem were in great distress, and that the wall of the city was broken down and the gates "burned with fire." Nehemiah was desolated by this news. He wept and fasted and prayed to God for his

people. Eventually his prayer impelled him to request of King Artaxerxes that he might return to Jerusalem and rebuild.

This opening scene presents a picture of a city desolated, and without walls or gates, so that it is laid open to the attack and inroads of its enemies. In those days a wall was built around a city to protect it. It also formed a place from which to watch and keep guard over the city. Most often it was constructed as one interlocking continuous whole, broken only by the gates, which were to let people in and out of the city. Symbolically, the holy city in the Book of Revelation had "a wall great and high" and it also had twelve gates. So in spiritual building, "walls" and "gates" are essential for the protection and continuous growth of spiritual consciousness.

What are these walls and gates which seem so vital in spiritual building? The Book of Revelation describes the wall of the holy city as having "twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." These apostles or disciples were students. Jesus taught them the truth of being in a divinely ordered way. He instructed them continually so that they gained a cultivated understanding of the fundamentals of spiritual being. Every earnest spiritual seeker needs such cultivated spiritual understanding if his city of spiritual consciousness is to endure and withstand all that would come up against it.

The constituents of such wall-building are placed right at the beginning of the Bible in its opening chapter and three verses of the second, which present the seven days of creation. As is being increasingly realized, this is not a literal record of seven days in which the physical universe was created by an all-powerful God, but rather is it a symbolic presentation of the unfolding of great spiritual fundamentals which constitute the governing power behind the whole universe, including man. These spiritual fundamentals, entertained in thought, understood and accepted as the very substance and essence of man's being, are the "bricks" of man's spiritual wall-building. Never, though, do they become a sure wall of protection if they are approached as a mere study or an interesting objective theory. It is only as man finds his true being in them and as them that they quite naturally form his sure defence, for they are the basic, living, active values of life.

And the gates? The holy city had twelve gates, and at these gates there were "twelve angels," which had the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel written upon them. All the way through the Scriptures the twelve tribes of Israel symbolize

the workings of the spiritual idea of God. They represent, in type, the full range of human experience and its translation through the Christ spirit. The gates of a city opened to let its inhabitants go out of their home and return freely, and also to let strangers in, though a close watch was kept on strangers, and the soldiers on the wall were always alert to warn against approaching invaders. Man's "wall" of ordered spiritual understanding must be interspersed with "gates." In other words, his basic understanding of spiritual values must have that Christ spirit which enables him to go out into the whole range of human experience and translate and interpret it spiritually. At the same time, it must have that developing Christ consciousness which is continually admitting new ideas, new unfoldment. As with the alertness of the watchers on the wall, though, so with a cultured spiritual understanding of being, no evil, limited, nor malicious beliefs must be allowed entry, so that it increasingly comes to pass today, as with the city in Revelation, that "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie."

Seeking Truth for its own sake

To return to Chapter 2 of Nehemiah, it records that when Nehemiah was handing wine to King Artaxerxes one day, the king asked him, "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?" Nehemiah then told him how his heart yearned for the plight of his brethren in Jerusalem, and pleaded to be allowed to return there and rebuild the city.

A lovely and important point comes out here. Nehemiah, an Israelite, was serving Artaxerxes, a Persian king. Symbolically, it represents a state of affairs in which the spiritual idea is employed merely to serve the human. This situation occurs again and again in the Bible when the light of spiritual idealism became somewhat dim. It was the case when the children of Israel were servants or slaves in Egypt, and Moses had to rouse them and awaken them to their true spiritual inheritance and bring them out of Egyptian bondage. Today we can see the same thing happening whenever there is the belief operating that the sole purpose of spiritual Truth is to serve the human picture and make material existence more comfortable. Every man, when first touched by the light of spiritual Truth, is filled with the glory of that light. It becomes dim when he ceases to look at the

light, but rather lets his gaze drop to the objects on earth which this light may have illumined for him, and stresses *their* importance, rather than the light.

The merely human sense of things cannot see any further than this. For instance, here Artaxerxes could not imagine why Nehemiah should be sad if he were not sick! When all is well with the human, why should one worry? But Nehemiah saw further than this. He knew the importance of the spiritual as the great reality of existence. He was all right humanly, one might say, he did not need to change his human circumstances, but his spiritual sense would not allow him to rust away spiritually in Persia. He had to obey the positive impulsion of the Christ within him which demanded that he should go forward for the sake of Truth itself and not merely for his own sake. The demand is always to seek Truth for its own sake. It is true that Jesus said that if men sought Truth it would make them free, but this freedom is that of finding their free birthright as sons of God. True, this in turn results in dominion over all limiting, material beliefs, but it is not the main purpose in a man's search. Did not Jesus say, "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"?

Directly Nehemiah made the decision to go to Jerusalem and help rebuild the walls, the way was made possible; Artaxerxes gave him permission to go, and offered every assistance. When any man sees the need to rebuild spiritually and puts his whole self into it, regardless of what he may have to put aside to do this, he will find that all kinds of things aid him. If you "hitch your wagon to a star," as Emerson said, it is inevitably true that all that is good will help you on your way.

The enemy in secret

So Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, and it is at this point that Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah, his servant, enter into the story. They are only briefly referred to here, but later when the building of the wall got under way, Sanballat became the chief opponent of this wall-building and tried to obstruct and prevent it in every way possible. Here it merely says that when Sanballat and Tobiah heard of Nehemiah's purpose to rebuild, "it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel."

Sanballat means "the enemy in secret," and he stands for what

Paul calls “the carnal mind,” “enmity against God.” He was associated with Moab and Ammon, who were both descendants of Lot through his cohabiting with his own daughters; throughout the Bible, therefore, they symbolize selfish, sensual, inward-turning thought. This is the kind of form that opposition to spiritual rebuilding so often takes. It is hidden; man does not always realize what is attempting to influence him, but it is the carnal mind operating as sensual, selfish thinking, which secretly whispers, “Why bother with spiritual truth? Don’t ‘rebuild the walls.’ It is much easier to let things slide and accept a material view of life.” But there is something in every man, as there was in Nehemiah, which impels him forward spiritually. Nothing can stop the seed of spiritual Truth from coming to fruition, for it is every man’s fundamental identity.

Preparation for active rebuilding

So Nehemiah, after staying three days in the city, consolidating his purpose, as it were, then went out by night to make a complete tour of Jerusalem, seeing just what the position was,—which buildings remained standing and which needed to be built up. May not this correspond to our preparation for spiritual rebuilding? Having become purposeful and definite in our forward steps, we quietly analyze our present consciousness of spiritual things, seeing what is real to us and what is not,—what stands as substantial fact in our consciousness and what needs strengthening. And we do this in all humility (Nehemiah rode round the city on an ass).

Nehemiah then gathered the children of Israel together and encouraged them to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem with him, saying that the hand of God was with him. And the people replied, “Let us rise up and build.” At this point, therefore, the rebuilding became not only an individual enterprise, but also a collective one.

All the way through this story of the building both of the temple and of the wall, one has to remember that it is a *rebuilding*. The structure of the temple had been erected before, and the wall had stood, but this newly-built temple, as we have seen, was one in which every individual had to take part in building. It was not built *for* the Israelites, as the previous temple was, but they had to be active in building it *themselves*. Spiritual consciousness must be a living consciousness for every man. In the

same way if the temptation is present to build a “wall”—a cultured understanding of ordered spiritual fundamentals,—as something merely intellectual or objective to thought, the time will come when it can be broken down, and the demand to rebuild it in a living way will be a vital one. It will be clearly seen that without such a wall, a city is completely unprotected. Moreover, at this point Nehemiah advanced from having only an individual conviction that he himself must rebuild the wall, to the realization that it was a collective work. In other words, this ordered spiritual understanding is the true way for all seekers, even though within its framework every man approaches it individually, as we shall see.

Safety in forward spiritual footsteps

As soon as Sanballat and Tobiah heard that Nehemiah and the Israelites were going to rebuild the wall, they laughed at them, despised them, and said, “Will ye rebel against the king?” This is exactly what the carnal mind would claim to do. It would laugh at and despise all definite and forward spiritual steps, classifying those steps as rebellion against the accepted “rulers” of human experience. The carnal mind’s king is matter and material knowledge, and this whispering Sanballat would always say, “If you pursue spiritual values, you are going against that which governs everything. Matter and material knowledge is power and you cannot rebel against that and get away with it!”

Nehemiah, however, gave no quarter to Sanballat at all. He virtually declared that the great spiritual Principle of the universe was behind him and his brethren, and that they would go forward in giving themselves to spiritual values. Moreover he put Sanballat in his place by saying to him, “Ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem.” This is true of the carnal mind. It is “a liar, and the father of it.” As any man goes forward spiritually, conscious of the great universal Principle of being behind him and all who are moving forward in this one body of Truth-impelled consciousness, the “Sanballats” agitate in vain, and although they may whisper again and again, their whisperings are drowned in man’s sure, forward spiritual footsteps, impelled by his divine Principle.

And so the wall-building began.

Nehemiah Rebuilds the Wall of Jerusalem—II

(Nehemiah 3:1-6:19)

THIS CITY of Jerusalem, the walls and gates of which Nehemiah was engaged in rebuilding, symbolizes a living city of spiritual consciousness. As such, it represents the true man. This is beautifully expressed in words found on a papyrus in Egypt around 1897: "Strive therefore to know yourselves and ye shall be aware that ye are the sons of the Almighty Father; ye shall know that ye are in the city of God and that ye are the city." Therefore, in awakening to spiritual values, understanding them and identifying himself with them, man is finding the eternal structure of his own true being, the "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Build that which is natural to you

Chapter 3 of Nehemiah records the building of the wall and the twelve gates of Jerusalem in terms of listing the names of those who built each specific section. As a historical detail this does not mean very much. Yet, taken in its spiritual significance it contains a vital lesson, for the Bible commentaries say that every group of workers built the gate or part of the wall that was nearest to them. For instance, the priests built the sheep gate as it was adjacent to the temple, the Jericho contingent built the section of the wall closest to their home, and so on. In this way the entire wall with its gates was built.

Taken in its spiritual import, this says to all who are building a city of spiritual consciousness, "There is only one 'wall'. The same spiritual fundamentals are basic to all, but build that which is nearest to you. Don't think you have to do what others are doing. You don't have to make your way across the 'city' to build in some strange and unfamiliar surroundings. Build right where you are on familiar ground." If every man in his spiritual journey fulfills his part in the plan at the point where he is, then the wall with all its gates will be found to be one interlocking whole.

It is always a case of "To thine own self be true," and that self is every man's highest and purest sense of the universal funda-

mentals of the one Truth, expressing themselves to him and through him in the way which is most natural, living, and substantial to him. No matter how large or small it may seem, if a man sincerely and selflessly follows his individual spiritual conviction of the one fundamental Truth, he will inevitably find himself building an essential part of the whole structure of this city “not made with hands.” Every individuality is unique; this means that all are essential to the whole, and it also ensures a very living whole. If anyone strives slavishly merely to copy or to reproduce the work of another, it results in a dull monotony and deadness. The truth is, though, that no one can ultimately escape expressing their unique identity and individuality, for it is “built in” to every expression in creation. Even in the universe of nature no two blades of grass are alike, and their uniqueness is the forever pattern throughout all creation.

Dealing with subtle, discouraging arguments

To return to the story in Nehemiah: as soon as the wall began to be built, once again Sanballat entered the picture. This “enemy in secret” seems to increase its opposition wherever positive progress is being made, even as the stronger the light the darker the shadow, but it is always the light that counts. The light is the positive, motivating factor. Darkness is negative and has no initiative.

At first Sanballat and Tobiah were “grieved exceedingly” when they were given the news that “there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel;” next, they laughed at the Israelites and despised them when they heard that they purposed to build the walls and gates of Jerusalem. Then, when word came that the wall was actually under construction, Sanballat was furious and indignant and mocked them, saying, “What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?”

Have not these arguments always been the line that the so-called carnal mind takes when any spiritual enterprise is under way? First of all, “What do these feeble Jews?” In other words, “What you are trying to do spiritually is feeble and ineffective. There is no power to it.” This is virtually what Saul said to David when he volunteered to fight Goliath—“Thou art but a youth.” Yet spiritual power prevailed. “Will they fortify them-

selves?" The carnal mind's next taunt is that spiritual understanding can neither fortify nor protect you. One recalls Daniel praying three times a day, trusting in spiritual understanding to fortify and protect him in the lions' den, and it did. "Will they sacrifice?" "What is the point of acknowledging spiritual identity as supreme and surrendering a material sense of existence?" suggests the carnal mind. Immediately one's thought goes to the supreme exemplar of such a sacrifice, Christ Jesus, and his proof of the indestructibility and eternity of the true man, which was the outcome. "Will they make an end in a day?" This is the argument of discouragement,—that it takes so long to work out one's salvation, so why endure? Many instances in the Bible spring to mind here,—Abraham, who never lost faith in the promise that his ideal, Sarah, would bring forth, which promise was ultimately fulfilled; Jacob, who served seven years for his ideal, Rachel, and "they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her;" Job, who refused to resign himself to being a sinner; he knew that his Redeemer lived, and his conviction was justified. "Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" The inference here is that spiritual idealism cannot be revived once it has gone dead. The truth is that spiritual reality is eternally living and vital. The various symbols through which it expresses itself may appear stereotyped and lifeless as a result of confusing the living spirit with the symbol and thus burying it in the symbol, but the spirit is always alive, fresh, new, and pregnant with power, needing only inspiration to give continuous rebirth to it here and now. When Jesus said that he had not come to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfil them, surely he was reviving "the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish,"—rebuilding in a vital and fresh way the city of spiritual consciousness on its eternal, changeless foundations.

Nehemiah refused to listen to these whisperings. He uncovered them for what they were and continued to build the wall. And we need to do just this today, knowing that spiritual Truth is power, strength, and protection; it is the pearl of great price, and nothing else matters. We may have to endure at times, but Truth is irresistible and it is impossible to overthrow or turn back that which is fundamental to all being. The arguments of the "Sanballats" and the "Tobiahhs" will come up, but we shall always defeat them if we go forward with the living understanding of Truth and never turn aside from it.

Dealing with open warfare

These subtle arguments having no effect, the opposition then developed into open warfare, and so Nehemiah prayed to God, setting a watch against the enemy day and night. Jesus was insistent that men should watch. He commanded his disciples, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." Many times he instructed them, "Watch and pray." A number of the great Scriptural leaders were originally shepherds, who in their youth were taught to watch over their flocks so that no enemy could rob them of their sheep. Moses, destined to be a deliverer of his people, was a shepherd. David, the finest king ever to sit on Israel's throne, was trained as a shepherd. To have dominion over the inroads that the carnal mind would attempt to make upon our spiritual progress, we need to watch. True watching primarily necessitates constant, intimate acquaintance with the spiritual ideal. No man can make an effective watch unless he is continually dwelling with the ideal and is therefore alert to recognize all that does not approximate it. When awake and alert spiritually and mentally, such watchers are unfailingly warned of approaching danger through some channel or other, just as here their fellow Jews warned the builders of the enemy's intent.

In this enterprise, Nehemiah formed an effective watch by having half his servants working on the wall and half of them bearing weapons. Moreover, those who were actually engaged in the construction work built the wall with one hand and held a weapon with the other. Surely this is the "Yea, Yea" and the "Nay, Nay" of which Jesus spoke. It is the prayer and the watchfulness essential to all spiritual progress. On the one hand every spiritual seeker needs to build solidly and continuously through pondering spiritual values in an ordered and progressive way, and on the other he must be prepared to deal actively with any attempt of the carnal mind to stop his spiritual progress through subtle arguments or open warfare.

One of the outstanding points in this alert defence of the wall-building was that when any section of the wall was attacked, a trumpet had to be sounded, which alerted all the builders to go to the defence of those at that particular part of the wall. This emphasizes the fact that it was one wall which was being built and that the defence of any part of it was the defence of it all.

Is this not so with spiritual building? We are concerned with universal Truth, and not with separated sects nor isolated and

personal Truth-seekers with divided interests. Therefore the understanding love and active support of all who are upholding the standard of Truth, when they come under attack, is the defence of all Truth. "All are but parts of one stupendous whole," wrote Pope, and the signs are that this great fact of oneness is being realized and voiced increasingly today. It is *one* "wall" that is being built, and men will recognize this fact even more rapidly as they become spiritually acquainted with the great fundamentals of being that are at work everywhere and are symbolized in their unfolding order and relationship in the first chapter of Genesis and the first three verses of the second.

Irresistible fulfilment of the "seed within itself"

During the building of the wall a difficult situation arose with which Nehemiah had to deal. Many of the Jews had sacrificed everything in order to give themselves to this task. It was a labour of love, and being undertaken voluntarily it left those who were concerned with it very little time to earn a living. The result was that their richer brethren lent the builders money, demanding from them in return their lands, vineyards, houses, and even their sons and daughters as mortgage. When Nehemiah heard of this, he made these wealthy Jews restore everything to their brethren.

Naturally this illustrates that in building spiritually man can never lose anything of value. But it also illustrates another important point in attaining spiritual consciousness, namely, that in this process no man should "sell" himself to another, nor to any limited channel. Sometimes it may seem that a spiritual teacher or leader is richer in vision than oneself, and the subtle temptation is to hand over mentally and spiritually one's individuality to that person, which is virtually selling one's soul. Or this can also happen with an individual and his relationship to an organized body, which body may appear important and rich materially or spiritually. To be safe from this temptation one should never put Spirit into matter, and so personalize it, nor confuse the idea with the symbol. Every idea has its identity in the infinite divine Source, and realizing this means that it is free to develop in unconfined ways. Other individuals or organizations may be temporary channels through which Truth comes to a man, but he should watch that he never "sells" himself to any finite channel through a belief in his own lack of the richness of spiritual revelation, development, and support. Every man has

“the seed within” himself of pure spiritual identity, which must irresistibly grow and bring forth.

Nehemiah saw this fact so clearly himself that he did not take anything from the governors in order to live, but relied on God’s support for himself and many others who fed at his table. The whole of Chapter 5 of Nehemiah speaks of the self-sustaining nature of spiritual sense.

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Dealing with three personal temptations

Sanballat tried three more tricks to prevent the completion of the wall. The first of these was an invitation to Nehemiah to come down and meet him in one of the villages in the plain of Ono. “Ono” means “safe abode; strong; rich; gain-bringing.” Spiritually interpreted, this is the temptation that comes to all of us to cease building on the heights and come down into the valleys of human ways and means, which are believed by the human mind to be safer, stronger methods, with greater rewards. Nehemiah saw through this subtle suggestion and answered Sanballat in the way that all such inferior suggestions should be answered: “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” To go forward, steadfastly building with spiritual values, always brings to man a lasting dominion, safety, and satisfaction, whilst merely human ways and means are temporary, always limited, and so often involve bondage.

The second subtle trick that Sanballat tried was to write an open letter, stating that Nehemiah and the Jews were rebelling against their rulers and that Nehemiah planned to set himself up as king and appoint prophets to preach in Judah. All these lies Nehemiah repudiated, saying that there was no word of truth in them. When any man is going forward spiritually, so often the carnal mind will circulate lies about him, declaring that he just wants to make himself great and spread his personal sense of Truth around. But if a man is honestly and sincerely adhering to his clear understanding of divine Principle, conscious of the fact that of himself he can do nothing, but that it is God with him that enables him to accomplish anything worth while, and also that he is merely fulfilling his part in the divine plan along with everyone else, then he need not fear any of these accusations of pride and personality.

Finally, Sanballat secretly hired Shemaiah to try to persuade

Nehemiah to meet the latter in the temple and shut the doors on them both in order to forestall a plot to slay Nehemiah. Again this was subtle trickery on Sanballat's part, and Nehemiah saw this and refused to shut himself up through fear. As forward steps are taken, the carnal mind often seeks to frighten a spiritual pioneer by saying, "Don't expose yourself. Shut yourself up in an 'ivory tower' spiritually, and do not go forward with your pioneer work or you will be killed." It has often been said, though, that the safest place in battle is in the front line, and in any case the only thing a man can do to fulfil his destiny successfully and safely is to go forward in the way God is leading him. Humanly Jesus need never have gone to Jerusalem and faced the mob, but he was impelled by the divine plan to do so in order to prove the dominion and eternity of the true man. In the garden of Gethsemane when he was able to say, "Not my will, but thine, be done," he was letting all his private defences down and surrendering himself to the divine plan. Through being willing to fulfil his place in this universal plan, his own true individuality was naturally taken care of also, as it will always be with every sincere spiritual pioneer.

The wall completed

And so the wall was completed. Every subtle suggestion of the carnal mind was detected and rejected by Nehemiah. His single-mindedness and persistence are surely a lesson for all spiritual seekers and pioneers. Yet a man will find that once he has begun to build his wall of understanding spiritual values in a truly living way, seeing them as the very substance and essence of his being, he is not tempted to pay any attention to the "enemy in secret." His positive, forward course inevitably gives him dominion over all the carnal mind's wiles, for it increasingly establishes him in his alert, sure, and Godlike identity, from which he can never be drawn aside.

Life in the Rebuilt City

(Nehemiah 7:1-13:31)

THE TEMPLE and the walls of Jerusalem having been rebuilt, there naturally followed the question of what form the government of the city should take, and how the purity of monotheism could be maintained among the people.

The standpoint of grace

This question of adhering to a pure idealism arises frequently in spiritual building. There is often great enthusiasm when new steps are being taken, but the day-by-day maintaining of a pure spiritual consciousness does not always seem so easy. This is only so, however, if spiritual understanding is thought of as a personally acquired possession, instead of as constituting the birthright of man,—a state of consciousness that is fundamentally natural to him. Or, again, to maintain spiritual consciousness may seem difficult if a man is tempted to measure spiritual understanding in terms of its effects in his human life; then he can become elated or discouraged according to material evidence. But any man will find that he experiences the constancy of spiritual consciousness in proportion as he reckons his being as primarily spiritual, and as stemming from and sustained by an eternal Cause, which is constantly unfolding new facets of his true individuality from a sure foundation of infinite good.

This basic attitude with regard to what governs and upholds true consciousness is implied in the meaning of the names of the two men, Hanani and Hananiah, who, in Chapter 7 of Nehemiah, are put in charge of the city from the outset. Hanani means "my grace," and Hananiah means "grace, gift of the Lord." Grace is the keynote of Jesus' mission and of the New Testament outlook. It is the fulfilling of the law. Understanding of exact spiritual laws is vital to man, but there arrives a stage when he sees that this conscious spiritual understanding is his birthright. It comes to him through grace, as the gift of God. He then realizes the truth of John's standpoint, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." When a man has reached the altitude of allowing the grace of God to govern him, he begins to feel what it is like to take on his true status as a son of God, as man

with dominion,—and this quite naturally and consistently, not as an acquired condition liable to fluctuation.

Opening and closing the gates

In the story under consideration Nehemiah, having put Hanani and Hananiah in charge of the city, then commands the Israelites not to let the gates of Jerusalem be opened “until the sun is hot” and also to shut the gates at night and to watch.

When “the sun is hot,” or in the full light of understanding, man can fearlessly open the gates of his consciousness to examine and receive new ideas; but when the way is dark, then he is wise quietly to remain with the spiritual facts that are familiar to him and watch until the light dawns. In the day-by-day maintaining of spiritual consciousness, there are always periods when new vision, new ideas come to one, but there are also times when one needs just to be patient, yet alert, and dwell with what is near and clear and dear to one until the light dawns.

The classification of divine ideas

A great proportion of this Chapter 7 is then given over to a list of names, which constitutes a complete register of the genealogy of the people. At first sight one is always tempted to skip over these lists of names, which occur frequently in the Scriptures, particularly if translating the Bible into its living spiritual import. Yet they too have a spiritual import, and on analyzing this list, for instance, one finds that there are seven different classifications of the people. All their names have a significance, and it surely implies that in the “city” of spiritual consciousness there exists a true classification of ideas, fundamentally sevenfold, as outlined in the great pattern of being given in the seven “days” of creation, yet endlessly detailed, as symbolized here by the many families and their generations and intermarriages. Whether these lists are historical or not, the fact still remains that in the Scriptures names define certain specific mental and spiritual characteristics, and these living characteristics (not the physical tribes and families) in their spiritual order, definiteness and purpose, are the motivating facts in this living story which is the Bible.

This company all brought with them their substance and their gifts. Again, spiritually interpreted, how true it is that as one

dwells with the infinite ideas of spiritual consciousness, they do bring to man a sense of real substance and good, and truly as “the gift of God,” through grace.

Reading from the book of the law

The first thing the Israelites themselves requested in this newly built city was that Ezra the scribe should bring the book of the law of Moses and read it to them in “the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday.” Chapter 8, verse 8, reads, “So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” This verse gives a clear, patient, and mature sense of pondering and understanding spiritual law. Moreover, it was the people themselves who had asked Ezra to read the law. This spiritual discipline was not imposed on them from their leaders, but came from the people. In an alive, rebuilt city of spiritual consciousness, every man finds himself turning spontaneously and with a new eagerness to spiritual study, reading truths he may have read many times in the past, but now in a clearer way, feeling that he understands them as never before.

Moreover, when the people heard the law they became aware of their sins and wept, even as any man today may feel depressed at his human shortcomings in the face of a deeper understanding of divine law and of the great potentialities of man in God’s image and likeness. But Nehemiah, whose name means “consolation,” comforted the people, telling them to go forward, for “this day is holy unto the Lord; neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” It is no good mourning over our personal sins and mistakes. It is a waste of time. To face up to them, resolve to forsake them, and then to go ahead more conscious of one’s life as being undivided from the one infinite Life is the only positive and fruitful way of redemption, and certainly proves that “the joy of the Lord is [our] strength,” and not our personal sense of joy, which can be present at one moment and absent at the next.

The feast of tabernacles

As a result of reading the book of the law they re-established the feast of tabernacles, which was a feast at which the Israelites built themselves booths or arbors of branches of trees and dwelt

in them for seven days to commemorate their wilderness experience, when they had no fixed home. It was also a reminder to them that man is but a pilgrim on earth.

It seems so apt that this feast followed the reading of the law, as if to remind man that though the divine law is exact, ordered, and definite, one must be alert not to finitize this definiteness by attempting to confine spiritual Truth in human symbols. In other words, one must always hold the "outward and visible signs" flexible, opening thought to the unconfined, spontaneous, and progressive nature of Life. Stephen declared, "The most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." Paul also wrote, "For here have we no continuing city." We need to realize that the spiritual facts of existence are not likely to embed man in comfortable, static ruts in his journey through life. Everything changes and progresses. The one great certainty is spiritual fact, and to this man can always turn with assurance and a rock-like dependence, but its very changelessness may enforce frequent changes in his human life. It is obvious that in becoming more aware of divine identity and individuality, many bonds and temporary human reliances will be loosened and translated, and this is cause for rejoicing. With the Israelites the feast of tabernacles was always a joyful occasion.

Life as infinite progression

The next chapter of Nehemiah takes up this same strain of infinite progression, for after the Israelites had resolved to obey the divine law and let impure alliances go, the priests and the Levites then put before the people a long history of their emergence from Ur of the Chaldees up to the present time.

They began by stressing the allness of the one spiritual Cause, God, who "made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein," saying "Thou preservest them all." From this premise of the one Spirit, God, as the great first Cause, the varied fortunes of the Israelites were then set forth. This history, interpreted spiritually as the life story of any man, shows clearly the persistence of spiritual identity throughout differing circumstances impelled by the progressive nature of Life. The changing experiences of the children of Israel are type and symbol of any man's changing experiences. Yet always with the Israelites, as with all men, the infinite progression of Life carried them forward

whilst there remained the changelessness of their divine identity, which could not be obscured nor lost even in Ur, in Egyptian bondage, in the wilderness, in the finally degenerate promised land of Canaan nor in the captivities. Their human position and environment changed as divine Life moved them on, yet through it all their divine identity persisted and eventually came forth to rebuild and inhabit this city of Jerusalem. True, their progress could have been more peaceful if they had remained pure in heart and adhered to Spirit alone, but nevertheless as the infinite progression of Life carried them forward, true identity endured, as it does with us, no matter what circumstances we go through. Really the only thing Life's infinite expression can do is to push us nearer to the acceptance of our fundamental spiritual identity in the divine plan. This status is basic to us all, and ultimate salvation, therefore, is inevitable.

Signing the covenant with God

The next thing the Israelites did was to sign a covenant that they would obey God's law and would keep themselves pure and not give their daughters in marriage to strangers. They also agreed to keep the sabbath day holy, to remit debts every seventh year, and to bring their firstfruits and tithes to the house of God. In other words, in every thought and act they had to acknowledge Spirit, God, as primary.

This real monotheism is the most vital attitude in maintaining spiritual consciousness, with its resultant spiritual power. Jesus fulfilled every one of these conditions of the covenant. First, he consciously and willingly obeyed divine law. Then, it was his consistent conviction that "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" that enabled him unwaveringly to heal with authority and power. He operated from the sabbath day standpoint in that he saw that everything that God had made was good and blessed, and he was so conscious of this divine universe here and now that any man's debts in the way of lack of perfection were remitted. Finally, he granted to God all his "firstfruits" and "tithes," meaning by this that he recognized the divine power as the source of his natural and fruitful spiritual understanding and its resultant blessings in human experience. Jesus' covenant with God was based fairly and squarely on his realization that "I and my Father are one." Slowly but surely men are beginning to realize that this premise is true for them

too. Then to acknowledge Spirit, God, as primary, becomes a matter of the natural grace of conscious oneness, rather than a struggle to unite two opposites,—a material man and a spiritual God.

Populating the city

The Century Bible writes of Chapter 11, which follows the signing of the covenant, that it involved the question of how to fill the now well-defended capital. "The walls are completed, there is room for a large population, but how can it be secured?" It then records how they arranged that the rulers should dwell in Jerusalem and certain tribes in other cities. Everyone had their appointed place, governed by the rulers in Jerusalem, the capital city.

One can take all these details as merely historical and perhaps not deeply interesting at that. When one penetrates deeper to the underlying spiritual purpose behind all Scriptural writing, however, even dull passages such as these leap to life. As we saw before, the register of the genealogy of the Israelites symbolized that the ideas of God are ordered and classified, and here in the populating of the cities one feels that it illustrates that as a result of divine order and classification every man has his rightful place and purpose in the operating of the divine plan, all governed by the great Principle of the universe. As Paul writes, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." Paul stresses the one body, saying that "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, help, governments, diversities of tongues." How important it is to realize this fact, and that all men constitute one body, individualized in various ways, so that no man can do the work of another, but each has to fulfil his appointed God-given place in harmony with every other expression. This is another essential factor in maintaining spiritual consciousness, for it deals with lust for power, envy, and jealousy, and thus preserves a harmonious whole.

Dedicating the walls

Before the Book of Nehemiah ends, it records the dedication of the walls, followed by the restoration of the temple order and Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem which, in its essence, was a cleansing and purifying one.

The Israelites dedicated the walls of the city with gladness, thanksgiving, and singing. The great feature in this dedication, though, was that they formed themselves into two bands and made a procession round the walls, half of the princes and priests going to the right hand and half to the left. A significant factor in this ceremony was that Ezra was in the procession which went to the right and Nehemiah in the one that went to the left. It would seem to symbolize that the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah encircle the whole project of the rebuilding of the city, one building the temple, the other the walls,—the centre and circumference. In spiritual building there are always these two factors to be considered,—namely, on one hand, the subjective standpoint of God-consciousness, which is eternally at the centre of every man's being, the true temple, and on the other, spiritual education, the wall-building, which each one needs to undertake in order to realize intelligently and consistently his forever birthright of oneness with God. In actual fact the latter operation springs from the former, and in reality they are one, just as these two companies which encircled the wall met as one.

Maintaining the purity of the spiritual idea

After this ceremony the temple order was restored and its purity enforced. There is one incident of preserving the purity of the temple which is specifically mentioned. The story is told of how Eliashib the priest allowed Tobiah, who was not even a priest but was secretary to Sanballat and stood for merely human and personal good, to live in the courts of the house of God. When Nehemiah came to the city and heard of this, he turned Tobiah out of the courts and cleansed them, filling them with "the vessels of the house of God." This story contains an important lesson in that it illustrates that merely human and personal good should not be exalted to a position to which it is not entitled. It speaks of Nehemiah removing all Tobiah's "household stuff," and this is an apt description of the many personal considerations that often tend to clutter up spiritual fact in working out problems in human experience. All kinds of personal "household stuff" of human will, human expediency, and emotional feelings are allowed to lodge alongside spiritual fact until it is seen, as Nehemiah saw, that if consciousness is not kept pure, then the strength and authority of the spiritual will temporarily dwindle and delay a right solution.

This concluding chapter of the Book of Nehemiah continues to be concerned with purity, which is one of the most important factors in maintaining spiritual consciousness. A man may start his spiritual journey with high and pure ideals, but the comings and goings of human experience tend to make him lower the standard of these ideals or lose them altogether. But this can only take place if hemingles the spiritual with the material in his idealism, or puts it on a personal basis. Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." He never mingled Spirit and matter nor looked for perfection in the mortal picture. That is impossible, for "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other." Yet because he was aware at all times of the purity and perfection of Spirit and the spiritual ideal, this consciousness translated the mortal picture, so that the spiritual shone through, looking to human sense like healing and regeneration.

On this second visit to Jerusalem Nehemiah found two specific laws being broken,—one was the keeping of the sabbath, and the other was not intermarrying with foreign wives. He found the Israelites bartering and doing business on the sabbath, and he rebuked them and made them cease this practice. All through the history of the Israelites they had to keep the sabbath and to do no work on that day. It was a day to be given over to God, and this means acknowledging the fact that it is not through man's efforts that anything is accomplished, but that it is the divine power that has done and is doing everything, and man reflects it. It involves giving all power and glory to God. For man this brings a state of resting in action, conscious of the one power at work behind him and all creation.

Finally Nehemiah was insistent that there should be no mixed marriages. Spiritually interpreted, this means that man must watch that he weds himself only to pure ideals. In all progress in any worth-while field it is true that those who adhere purely to one overriding purpose grow strong in that field. How much more important is it in the things of the Spirit. It involves not serving God and mammon, but having the "single eye" of which Jesus spoke. This is the all-important factor in maintaining spiritual consciousness and experiencing its resultant power.

These Chapters 7 to 13 of Nehemiah are valuable in terms of giving inspired instruction as to how to maintain the "city" of spiritual consciousness which men feel the impulsion to build.

The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah bring a wonderful sense of renewal after the Israelite captivities. They speak of rebirth, the rebuilding of spiritual consciousness through its eternal Christ (the temple) and its inspired Word (the walls). From here the little Book of Esther then deals with life amongst the Israelites remaining under Persian rule, so leading on naturally to the development of the Christ idea in a universal setting, and therefore to the basic facts of Christianity.

The story of the Bible is one story of spiritual fundamentals, reappearing in ordered and developing relationships showing forth the underlying divine design that lies behind every man's life in all ages.

Esther—I

Manhood needs womanhood

(*Esther 1:1-2:18*)

THE BOOK OF ESTHER is one of the gems of the Bible. The story is well known of how a young Jewish maiden, Esther, under the watchful care of her guardian, Mordecai, became queen of Persia, and thus was able to save her people, the Jewish remnant, from being exterminated in captivity. It is a beautiful, lively tale—cruel in parts when taken literally; interpreted spiritually, however, it has a vital message, particularly pertinent today.

The need for living the spiritual ideal

Essentially practical, the Book of Esther involves specifically the living of the spiritual ideal in the world. The preceding Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are concerned respectively with the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem,—the rebuilding of spiritual consciousness through its eternal Christ and its inspired Word. Here in Esther the whole background changes, and the scene is set away from Jerusalem and out in the world, where the spiritual ideal has to be lived by a minority group, amidst misunderstanding and persecution. Literally the action takes place in the kingdom of Ahasuerus, the Persian king, who “reigned from India even unto Ethiopia,” as the first chapter tells us. The majority of the Jewish people did not return to Jerusalem to rebuild, but remained under Persian rule, and here, through the actions of Mordecai and Esther, we see how this remnant was preserved when in peril of their lives. Spiritually, this story shows how the development of the spiritual idea is saved from being overwhelmed by worldly beliefs and forces, and this through the active living of spiritual Truth as true manhood and womanhood.

In this age, when it is said that materialism is reaching its peak and causing men to believe in God no longer, it is strengthening to ponder a story where the spiritual idea also appeared in danger of being blotted out, and to identify the spiritual forces that were quietly at work saving the situation. Today, as then, those who have eyes to see can discern the same spiritual forces in operation, and be encouraged by the signs of the times.

We speak of men today as no longer believing in God; yet millions would acknowledge a supreme power outside of themselves, or have an innate belief in the ultimate triumph of that which is truly good. It is the almost superstitious emotions that the word "God" evokes in so many that have caused them to voice their disbelief in God. Interestingly enough, in this Book of Esther, which deals with the preserving of the spiritual idea in a wordly setting, the word "God" does not occur once. It is the only book of the Bible in which "God" is not mentioned. On the other hand, the story shows true Godlikeness or goodness actively lived, rather than spoken about. The lesson to be learned here is surely that "God" is not a name for an abstract, objective force, but is the supreme and infinitely good nature to be loved and lived here and now in men's experience.

The inherent power of "small things"

Another illuminating factor in this story is that the name "Mordecai" means "taught of God, . . . little man." One of the recurring themes of the Scriptures is that that which is of God or infinite good, though it may look small to human sense, will nevertheless overcome what appears to be large and powerful material opposition, and reign supreme. This is the significance of the stories of David and Goliath and of the "still small voice" that spoke to Elijah on Mount Horeb after the wind, the earthquake, and the fire had spent themselves. Elisha at Dothan, seeming to be in the minority against a powerful army, was protected by invisible "horses and chariots of fire." One lone man, Daniel, relying solely on prayer, was safe in the den of lions. In another vein, the Saviour of mankind, Christ Jesus, did not enter the world arena born in a palace or with influential connections to support his mission. He was born so humbly and lived so simply that probably not a whisper of his birth reached the world of so-called power politics and the learned circles of his day. Yet his advent was later to date the Christian era, and the influence of his life and teachings to permeate our civilization.

It is true, as Paul says, that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called . . . God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty . . . that no flesh should glory in his presence." Zechariah, before him, knew this law, and declared, "For who hath despised the day of small things?"

So this story of Esther serves as an encouragement to all “little men” everywhere who give themselves to being “taught of God,” who listen for the “still small voice” of Truth to instruct them, guide them, and interpret the universe to them. It illustrates the saving power that results from faithfulness to this spiritual ideal and alert and active obedience to its demands. It also shows that this obedience needs womanhood qualities as well as those of manhood; in fact, it emphasizes the need for this balanced consciousness in the living practice of spiritual law.

The effect of manhood separated from womanhood

Chapter I of the Book of Esther presents King Ahasuerus, seated on his throne in Shushan, holding a feast for all his princes and servants and the nobles in Persia and Media. His purpose was to display the riches of his kingdom and his great power. Ahasuerus is a symbol of the mortal man—man reckoned merely on a human basis. Today too we see men glorying in their achievements and power, and this may be natural and legitimate, but what a difference will come with the increasing recognition of the great spiritual forces impelling man in his progressive achievements. Conscious of the reality and supremacy of these forces, men will begin to experience dominion over themselves and their bodies, as Jesus did, and the progress of mankind will have less sorrow, calamity, and disaster. Progress is always more painless where there is spiritual awareness.

This quality of spiritual awareness, which recognizes the one spiritual Cause behind all intelligence, substance, and life, is that of womanhood. Womanhood is that innate spiritual sense which intuitively accepts Spirit as All-in-all. The great Exemplar, Christ Jesus, presented the ideal man,—a whole man embracing the qualities of manhood and womanhood. What characterized the manhood of Jesus? In the main, the fact that he was a doer of works. He was always actively about his Father’s business, as he said of himself. In doing the works he expressed intelligence, true reasoning, courage, strength, forthrightness—all manhood qualities. But what of his womanhood? This, surely, was manifest in his never-failing acceptance of the divine origin of his works,—the divine origin of all that he was and all that he did. It was the quality of womanhood that made Jesus so certain of the fact that “I and my Father are one,” and which caused him to declare, “I can of mine own self do nothing” and “The Father

that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." This spiritual conviction also brings with it the assurance of the infinite sustenance and protection of all that is good.

To return to the first chapter of Esther, we witness here manhood separated from womanhood—mortal man glorying in his personal achievements, completely regardless of the divine origin of all things. True, there is a symbol of womanhood in this first chapter, for Ahasuerus had a wife, Queen Vashti, but we read in verse 9 that she was holding a separate feast from the king,—a feast for the women of the royal house. Bible commentaries remark that it was a very unusual occurrence for a queen to hold a separate feast from her husband, and one feels that it is introduced to emphasize the effect of manhood separated from womanhood,—to present a picture of the empty build-up of false values without the wedding of true progress to spiritual intuition and conviction.

When King Ahasuerus summoned the queen to come to him, she refused. This much angered him and eventuated in a royal command that Vashti be deposed from being queen. Vashti means "The desired one . . . wish, desire, beauty," and it is said that Ahasuerus desired her to come to the feast merely because he wanted "to shew the people and the princes her beauty." Male and female qualities, in a wordly sense, often present a dominating, possessive character on the one hand and merely outward beauty on the other, which engender unsatisfied desire and constitute no basis for progressive fulfilment. This false sense of male and female can find no real unity, and one senses that Ahasuerus, in deposing the queen, was beginning his awakening to a new conception of womanhood, though unaware of what was destined to fill this vacuum and bring him peace and satisfaction. Many seekers go through this same experience of discarding that which no longer satisfies them, and though this may bring them a "wilderness" period and they may not be able even to visualize the nature of the "promised land," nevertheless their very yearnings bring them nearer to it.

There later came a time when King Ahasuerus began to feel the need of a queen, even as today men are seeking for satisfaction and peace of mind which ultimately can come only with the recognition of spiritual origin. As the Psalmist wrote, "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." The king's servants then sought for young virgins to be brought to the palace; these were put in charge of Hege, the king's chamberlain and keeper

of the women, whose job it was to prepare them to go in to the king for him to choose his bride.

Manhood wisely cherishes womanhood

At this point Esther comes into the picture. She was the ward and cousin of Mordecai, a Jew, who served in the palace, having been carried away captive from Jerusalem when it was sacked by Nebuchadnezzar. Esther was "fair and beautiful." She had no father nor mother, but was brought up by Mordecai as his own daughter. Esther means "a star." Her Hebrew name "Hadassah" means "bride." Mordecai, as we have seen, means "taught of God . . . little man."

One is touched spiritually by the picture of Mordecai, a servant in the palace, quietly and faithfully cherishing this fair and beautiful young maid, preparing her for what he seemed to know instinctively was her destiny. Symbolically it speaks of the all-importance of every "little man" who quietly determines to be "taught of God" and to listen to the "still small voice," and who cherishes and cares for the spiritual ideal, conscious of its great destiny and ultimate power as the Saviour of mankind.

When Mordecai brought Esther to Hege, keeper of the women, she pleased him immediately, and he gave her the best place in the house of the women. The virgins chosen for the king had to undergo a period of purification, and during this time Mordecai kept a watchful eye on Esther, as he had always done. In the development of spiritual consciousness it is wise to allow our manhood to watch over our womanhood. Mary Baker Eddy put this beautifully in one of her prayers concerning completeness: "My manhood takes care of my womanhood, defends, protects, and supports her. My joy is defended and protected by my courage. My love is protected and defended by my understanding, by the strength of my scientific understanding, which is omnipotence. I am never undefended."

Esther had to undergo twelve months of preparation in the palace before being brought to the king. May this not symbolize woman thought being humble enough to become acquainted with whatever seems necessary of the human set-up, before entering upon its mission? In any man's lifework, a great desire to fulfil his true mission will always bring into his experience just the surroundings and circumstances that he needs in order to equip him to fulfil his destiny.

The irresistible appeal of true womanhood

A great point is made here of the fact that Mordecai had charged Esther not to reveal her kindred,—not to say that she was a Jewess,—and this charge she was under bonds to keep until very much later in the story,—in fact, until after she had become queen.

There is such a lesson in this detail. Esther had to prove herself by what she was. Today the world is rapidly tiring of labels, and one feels that in every worth-while adherence it is the living values operating in practice that weigh with men, regardless of what label is given to its body of truths. One is reminded of the birth of Moses in Egypt, when the decree of Pharaoh was in force that every Israelite babe should be slaughtered. Moses' mother hid him and cherished him, and when she was no longer able to hide him, she put him in an ark of bulrushes on the river's edge. Pharaoh's daughter, suddenly finding him, could not resist the appeal of this babe, regardless of the fact that it was a Hebrew child. His innocence and purity spoke for themselves, and she accepted him. In a more developed way, Esther's pure womanhood was to speak for itself and her people.

When Esther's turn came to go in to the king, it is said that she neither required nor desired the extra beautifying that was available to the women. She went in as she was, and immediately the king loved Esther and made her his queen. How simple and how completely free of complications was this natural attraction! And today one will find many who are weary of the unsatisfying nature of materiality and are seeking to wed themselves to spiritual values, responding naturally and warmly to the expression of pure spiritual sense. One feels that Esther took it for granted that she would be loved. She did not expect rejection. Moreover, she did not feel she had to "gild the lily," but needed only to let her natural loveliness speak for itself.

Spiritual sense is the birthright of every man, and the realization of this breaks down barriers so that heart speaks to heart on a spiritual level in a completely natural way. Paul, who was instrumental in bringing many into the awareness of the Christ spirit, wrote to the Corinthians about this natural appeal of spiritual sense, "And I brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God . . . And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of

the Spirit and of power." The things of the Spirit do speak to man, because spiritual being is native to everyone.

A story is told of a poetry reading in the home of Sir Henry Irving, the actor, when everyone in turn read through the twenty-third Psalm. Later, Sir Henry was asked why his rendering of the Psalm, though perfectly executed, did not move his listeners, whereas the reading of these words by a little unknown woman in the group touched their very hearts. He replied, "I knew the twenty-third Psalm. She knew the Shepherd." And it is so that spiritual sense, which is at the core of every man's identity, responds to the great reality of Spirit, wherever it is naturally and purely expressed.

Manhood and womanhood one

So Ahasuerus wedded Esther and gave a great feast in celebration, but a different kind of feast from the one with which the book opens. Here he set prisoners free and gave gifts. There is always a release from imprisoning conditions, and an ability to give out and to share blessing, when manhood weds itself to true womanhood. This wedding comes about when all that is progressive and that speaks of initiative, intelligence, and uncompromising Truth weds itself to a truly meek and pure acceptance of the divine origin of this activity and indeed of all creation, with its consequent assurance of infinite sustenance and protection. The unsatisfied desire to be ceaselessly "getting" and maintaining what one has "got" is refreshingly laid off before the realization of already being the fulfilled and complete reflection of a divine Cause. It is a natural acceptance of "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

In this story, as we shall see, it is this union of true manhood and womanhood that is destined to foil and offset all the subtleties of the carnal mind which now enter into the picture through Haman, the chief minister of the king. If men will put on "the whole armour of God" in a living spiritual way, it will enable them "to stand against the wiles of the devil" today, as it has always done and always will do.

Esther—II

Womanhood puts on manhood

(Esther 2:19–7:10)

AT THE OUTSET of this story we saw how manhood needs womanhood, symbolized by King Ahasuerus finding his peace and satisfaction in a union with Esther. Now we are to witness how womanhood also needs manhood, for here, under the alert, intelligent, and wise guidance of Mordecai, Esther had to take her courage in both hands and possibly face the king's wrath, in order to save her people from destruction.

Material beliefs versus true manhood

The violent decree to exterminate the Jewish people came about through the evil machinations of Haman, a wicked counsellor of the king, who enters into the picture in Chapter 2 of Esther. He was a descendant of Esau, and an Amalekite. Esau is always a type of the flesh and the meaning of the Amalekites is "a people who takes away all." How true it is that a belief in the reality and substance of the material concept of man eventually does claim to take away all. It claims to take away man's youth, his faculties and functions, and to deplete his manhood. To worship the flesh is to worship a false god, false to the status of true manhood, which is ageless, unlimited, and knows no lack nor incompleteness, based as it is on the eternal spiritual qualities of being.

At this point in our story a plot to kill Ahasuerus had just been detected and foiled by Mordecai, but this fact was unknown to the king. He himself, now wedded to Esther, was happy and prosperous again, and was impressed by his counsellor, Haman; indeed, he "set his seat above all the princes that were with him." It often happens that when all is going well for man, he is fooled into valuing and relying on fleshly beliefs, unaware that he is building up that which will eventually destroy the one thing which has brought him happiness, peace, and satisfaction—his spiritual ideal. If Haman's plot had gone unchecked, Esther would have been slaughtered with all her fellow Jews.

However, true manhood—alert, intelligent, and wise—will

never bow down to fleshly beliefs and their insidious ways. Mordecai refused to do Haman reverence. This so annoyed Haman that he plotted this decree to kill all the Jews throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus, and took it to the king to sign. He influenced him to authorize it by saying that these Jewish people were different from all the people of Persia, they did not keep the king's laws, and it was not in the royal interest to put up with them in the land. Ahasuerus was fooled into signing the decree, and it was then published in every province.

This is the way that the carnal mind argues to mortal man. It says that the spiritual idea of being is different from all commonly accepted beliefs and practices, it does not obey so-called laws of materiality and it is against man's interests to accept it. Listening to these suggestions and arraying himself against the spiritual idea, man will eventually find that he is operating against his well-being, his own happiness and satisfaction, for ultimately only the awareness of eternal spiritual identity can satisfy a man—"I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

The murderous decree against the Jews was set in motion, and the Bible then records the various reactions to it of the people concerned. First it says, "The king and Haman sat down to drink,"—mortal man, temporarily companioned by the fleshly beliefs of the carnal mind, indulges in the attitude, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Of the people's reaction we are told, "But the city Shushan was perplexed,"—human thought is continuously being leavened by Truth and so does not accept unquestioningly antagonism towards the spiritual idea; it doubts such policy and questions it. And then we read of Mordecai that he "put on sackcloth and ashes . . . and cried with a loud and bitter cry,"—all "little men" who are "taught of God" and who are awake to Truth, are at once sensitive to any attempt to destroy the spiritual idea; they cannot be apathetic. Spiritual thought is touched and aroused to play its God-given part in the preserving of spiritual consciousness. This was certainly the case with Mordecai.

Womanhood awakens to put on manhood

At this point we see how womanhood is moved step by step to put on its manhood in such a critical situation. When Esther heard that Mordecai mourned in sackcloth, she was "exceedingly

grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not.” It is often a characteristic of womanhood, before it is alerted to the intelligent and trenchant ways of manhood, to want merely to bring human comfort, even as Mary and the other women brought spices and ointment to the sepulchre of Jesus. But, in that instance, the demand was not for such comfort, for Jesus was not there; he had risen. To Mary, who perhaps yearned to bring human affection into her meeting with Jesus after his crucifixion, he said, “Touch me not,” and indicated that this was no human situation needing human love and sympathy, but a forward spiritual step into proving the present reality of eternal Life. He urged her to return to the disciples and share this vision with them,—to unite with manhood in a progressive, far-seeing step forward.

Here Esther turned to the king’s chamberlain, Hatach, asking him to find out from Mordecai just what was going on, for she appeared to be ignorant of the king’s decree. Hatach means “verity; he that strikes.” It is as if, when the spiritual idea is undergoing persecution, human sympathy, or an endeavour to restore harmony through mere human affection, is not sufficient. Womanhood or spiritual sense needs to turn to the clear truth that will be trenchant in its analysis and uncovering of the evil and positive in its destruction of it.

Mordecai sent back to Esther by Hatach a copy of the decree and a message that she must go into the king and plead for her people. This must have seemed a terrifying demand to make upon Esther, for it was well known that anyone who went into the king in the inner court, without first being called by him, was put to death, unless the king held out the golden sceptre. Esther sent word back to Mordecai to this effect, adding that she had not been called to her royal husband for thirty days. Mordacai returned the answer to Esther that she could not hope to escape if the Jews were destroyed, warning her, “If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Then Esther, asking the Jews to fast for her, as she and her maidens would also do, agreed to go into the king and so break the law, saying, “If I perish, I perish.”

There comes a time when womanhood has to put on its

manhood and exercise true moral courage, taking a stand for the spiritual idea. Spiritually interpreted, we see King Ahasuerus, a symbol of mortal man, again being immersed in material beliefs and forgetting his spiritual ideal (he had not asked for Esther for thirty days). This law that no one should come into the inner court to the king, except at his request, is symbolic of the sense we have as mortals that we must always wait for a man to desire and turn to the spiritual ideal, and that we must never thrust Truth uninvited on anyone. As a general rule this certainly holds good, but there are often occasions when, as Jesus said of his disciples whom the Pharisees rebuked for speaking, "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

True manhood, symbolized here by Mordecai, has the wisdom to see when it is imperative to take a stand, and that nothing is gained by not doing so. It knows that the spiritual idea will go on anyway—it cannot be destroyed in reality—but every individual must fulfil his God-appointed mission in order for the divine plan to manifest itself more quickly and easily and with less suffering for mankind as its accompaniment. No one understood this better than Jesus, and before the greatest stand man ever made for the allness and power of the spiritual, he was able to pray, "Not my will, but thine, be done."

Esther represents some measure of this same moral and spiritual courage of true manhood when she decided to go forward, saying, "If I perish, I perish." To fulfil the impulse of this courage, however, needs consecrated thought, prayer, and true purity. This is symbolized here by the fasting. If any man takes a stand for the spiritual, he cannot do this lightly, emotionally, nor fanatically, and hope to go through successfully with the demands and ensuing results of his stand. To fulfil such a stand he must first "fast" from material concepts, from personal sense with all its ambitious motives, welcome the substance and allness of spiritual fact, and be vitally aware of the omnipotence and omnipresence of the divine plan.

With due preparation and in a spirit of unselfed love, Esther went into the inner court to King Ahasuerus. Immediately he saw her, she was accepted and the golden sceptre held out to her. He then asked what she requested of him, saying he would give Esther half his kingdom should she desire it.

From time to time mortal man, absorbed in material living, is suddenly made aware of the comfort and beauty of the spiritual idea of being. When this happens, men are frequently enthused

with a desire to help forward a spiritual movement through gifts or in some practical way, even as Ahasuerus, reminded again of the loveliness and comfort of the beautiful Esther, would have given her half his kingdom. Human generosity towards spiritual efforts is often helpful, but it is as nothing compared with a man's recognition of the true identity of the spiritual ideal, and his awakening and response to the great demands it makes on him.

The ordered awakening to Truth and exposure of evil

The Bible commentaries cannot understand why Esther did not immediately answer her husband's question as to what she wanted by revealing who she was and pleading for her kinsfolk. She did not do this. Instead she asked the king and Haman to come to a banquet that she had prepared. It would seem that her plan was to have the manhood and authority of Mordecai acknowledged by Ahasuerus and the wickedness of Haman uncovered to him before she pleaded for her people, for this was what took place.

It is the true compassion and insight of womanhood that realizes that one cannot force men to relinquish material concepts that they may have made their bosom companions (Ahasuerus and Haman here symbolize this close relationship). The fallacy and evil of these concepts must first be uncovered to them. Neither can men be expected to value true spiritual manhood until they see in practical terms its blessedness, strength, and protection (Mordecai was later exalted by the king after he had become aware of Mordecai's worthiness).

At the banquet that Esther held, the king again asked her, "What is thy petition?" Her answer,—a further banquet to which her husband and Haman were again to be invited. This playing for time seemed to have its results, for between this banquet and the next the evil of Haman reached its peak, whilst the worth of Mordecai was seen and acknowledged by King Ahasuerus.

Haman became so incensed against Mordecai and his refusal to acknowledge him that, at his wife's suggestion, he had gallows built for Mordecai. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," as Paul says, and if it could, it would destroy the spiritual idea at every opportunity. But this is impossible. The power of Spirit, infinite good, is basic and fundamental, and though the spiritual idea may appear insignificant to mortal sense, its Principle is

supreme and will always find some channel through which to express and establish itself in human experience.

And so the story goes that on the night of the first banquet King Ahasuerus could not sleep and asked for the book of daily acts to be read to him. Here he heard for the first time how Mordecai had foiled the plot to kill him. On learning that Mordecai had never been honoured for this deed, he asked Haman what should be done to honour one whom the king desired to honour. Haman, believing it to be himself whom the king had in mind, advised that such a one be given royal apparel, the king's horse to ride upon and the royal crown set on his head; arrayed thus, he should be paraded through the city. When Ahasuerus said that all this must be done for Mordecai, it was a bitter blow to Haman, and he saw his end in sight.

Interpreted spiritually, it is often the greatest blessing for mortal man to be restless and unable to dream away the hours. In these waking and sometimes disturbed periods he gradually becomes aware of truths that he had never realized before. He learns how the spiritual idea of true manhood has delivered him, and even though he may not completely see through the mesmerism of the carnal mind, he sees enough of the value and goodness of true manhood to exalt it and put it foremost in his thought. Thus the carnal mind's influence on man begins to be weakened.

Then came Esther's second banquet, at which the king once more asked her, "What is thy petition?" This time Esther spoke out boldly and pleaded for the life of herself and her people, saying that they were about to be destroyed. The king questioned as to who would dare to propose such an act, and Esther replied, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." Much angered, Ahasuerus went into the garden. On his return he found Haman pleading for his life with Esther. The king believed that Haman was forcing his queen, and the result was that Haman was hung on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

As spiritual symbolism, this story is beautifully ordered in presenting the systematic destruction of evil. The trenchant demands of Truth—true manhood—carried out by the patience and care of Love—true womanhood—first lead mortal man to be aware of the value and worth of the spiritual idea. Having seen this, he is aroused also, through Love, to take care of the spiritual ideal, and to discard and destroy anything that would harm it.

A contrast in motives and actions

Tracing the development of the warfare between Mordecai and Esther on the one hand, and Haman on the other, the contrast in motive and action is very marked. Mordecai cherished Esther,—true womanhood,—acting as a father and mother to her. He put her forward as queen, watched over her, preserved King Ahasuerus' life, took a bold stand against Haman; he also made a demand on Esther, the ward he loved, which called upon her to risk her life, but this demand was made for love of the spiritual idea. Esther, too, risked her life for the sake of Mordecai and her people. And what of Haman? He did nothing but exalt himself and determined to kill all that stood in the way of his overriding ambition. The carnal mind always inculcates the great stumbling-block of self,—self-interest, self-love, self-will, self-justification. These evil traits lead finally to self-destruction, leaving always Godlike qualities to reign supreme.

It is interesting to note that neither Mordecai nor Esther plotted the death of Haman nor of the king in order to save their people. They operated positively.

If in dealing with evil man uses the wisdom and intelligence of Truth and the patience and care of Love, evil will eventually betray itself to its own destruction, but mortal man will be awakened to the truth of his being, and will be saved and blessed.

Esther—III

True manhood and womanhood reign supreme

(Esther 8:1-10:3)

THE BOOK OF ESTHER emphasizes the need for both manhood and womanhood qualities in the living practice of spiritual idealism. To know the truth, as Jesus adjured, is a vital necessity and causes a man to be alert, awake and divinely intelligent, but equally important is to live this truth in love,—to be willing to give one's all to the spiritual by reason of love for God and one's fellow man. To be able to deal with the physical senses and their temptations, we need to be intelligently conscious of the facts of Truth, and then to let them work out in our lives through a living adherence to divine Life and Love. The power of this essential balance is the message of Esther.

Man's well-being entrusted to the spiritual

In our story Mordecai and Esther, representing this true manhood and womanhood, had uncovered to Ahasuerus (a type of mortal man) the wickedness of Haman (the evil of fleshly beliefs), and he had been annihilated. Now in Chapter 8 we read that King Ahasuerus gave "the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen." All that had been entrusted to Haman before was now in Esther's hands. Moreover, by this time Esther had evidently told her husband the whole truth about herself and her relationship to Mordecai, and when the latter came before the king he gave him Haman's ring of authority, and Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

This is a symbol of what inevitably takes place as men are aroused to the reality of spiritual values. They cease to trust their health, happiness, relationships, and substance,—their well-being,—to a material sense of existence, letting fleshly beliefs rule over them, but transfer the rule to spiritual sense. And the spiritual sense of true womanhood realizes that it cannot maintain man's well-being without manhood being in charge. In other words, inspiration must be governed by divine reasoning and scientific understanding lest it tend towards fanaticism or mere emotionalism and lose its certainty and infallibility. What main-

tains the purity, balance, and steadfastness of true womanhood is its forever unity with the qualities of intelligence, reason, and spiritually scientific understanding. May not this be the spiritual meaning of Paul's words that "The head of the woman is the man"? True intelligence governs inspiration. A prayer of Mary Baker Eddy's relating to the balanced operation of true manhood and womanhood qualities also declares, "My love is protected and defended by my understanding, by the strength of my scientific understanding which is omnipotence." When wisdom guides our love, or true intelligence our inspiration, it constitutes a power that can deal with all the subtle suggestions of a material sense of existence.

"By their fruits ye shall know them"

An important point to be noted here is that although Ahasuerus is now aware of the identity of Esther,—that she is a Jewess,—it does not change his love for her; rather is he still desirous of helping her and her guardian, Mordecai. This respect, love, and co-operation remain a constant factor when an ideal is truly loved and lived, as it was by Esther. When she was first put forward by Mordecai to be the wife of the king, her guardian charged her not to reveal her identity, as the Jewish people were captives and regarded as inferior and even as potential enemies in Persia. But now, having won her royal husband's love and respect, and faced with the extermination of her people, the time had come when it was safe, right, and essential for Esther to declare her nationality and take her stand.

It is deeds, not words, that speak the loudest. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." In human experience, there is often so much antagonism connected with religious "labels" of various kinds, that it has even been considered a delicate matter to question a man as to his religion. In fact, religion and politics are two subjects which society is warned to avoid in discussions, since they arouse such passionate feelings. When, however, a man lives a Christly idealism based on Truth and Love, and brings forth the "fruits of the Spirit," as Paul calls them,—fruits of "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,"—then such an idealism is respected and helped forward by all honest thought, regardless of previous antagonism to its name or unfounded prejudice against

its theories. "By their fruits ye shall know them," said Jesus. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

This point raises the whole issue of religious propaganda with its attempts to attract adherents to certain articles of faith. Today it is being increasingly realized by many religious bodies that the only effective witness to Truth is living the true life, what is being termed "the church in the world,"—so-called "believers" living their convictions in daily life in the factory, office, home or wherever they may be. Actions always speak louder than words and no man can escape facing up to this obvious truth. But there may come a time when instead of denying the Christ as Peter once did, one's actions must include revealing the identity of the channel through which one's idealism has come and taking a stand for it. And this, not because of fanaticism or personal conviction, but to help in breaking down religious prejudice and bitter antagonism, and awakening thought to realize the universal nature of Truth.

The persistence of womanhood

In the Book of Esther we now witness the persistence and importunity of womanhood, for though the wickedness of Haman had been uncovered and dealt with, and his whole estate put in the hands of Esther and Mordecai, the fateful decree to destroy all the Jews in Persia was still in force. So Esther once again went boldly before the king, and with tears entreated him to reverse this murderous edict. It is not enough that mortal man should be aroused to value the spiritual ideal. He has to do something about it, to throw his weight into the spiritual scale and thus prevent spiritual idealism from being temporarily thrust to one side. It is the unselfed qualities of womanhood which persist in such a cause and will not rest until the safe development of the spiritual idea is ensured. One recalls again how womanhood, typified by the midwives, Moses' mother and sister and Pharaoh's daughter, saved the infant Moses from being slaughtered and so preserved the continuity of the spiritual idea.

In this case Ahasuerus once again "held out the golden sceptre toward Esther" and listened to her plea. Then he gave to Esther and Mordecai the authority to write to the Jews whatever command they felt was necessary, and to seal it with the king's ring. Mortal man learns to trust spiritual sense for the true government of his kingdom.

Rejoicing in tribulation

The law of the Medes and Persians could never be reversed, and so what was required in such a case as this was to issue another law that would render the previous one null and void. So Mordecai wrote such an edict and sealed it with the king's ring. What Mordecai did in effect was to give to the Jews the right to defend themselves on the day of slaughter. They were empowered "to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them . . . and to take the spoil of them for a prey." Symbolically, does this not mean that though we may not be able to reverse at once the machinations of material sense, we have the right and authority of true manhood to stand for the spiritual ideal and to gain the victory over that which would destroy it?

The Scriptures are full of incidents where perils, trials and temptations were not offset but overcome. Daniel had to undergo the experience of being cast into a den of lions, but only to prove that bestial animal nature is powerless in the presence of Christ-like consciousness, and that all creation responds to the one Principle that lies behind it and which moves everything in harmonious relationship. The three Hebrew young men could not avoid the fiery furnace, but in going right through it and coming out with not a hair of their heads singed nor the smell of smoke upon their garments, they bore witness to man's intact identity as the son of God, no matter what the destructive elements of materialism attempt to do to him. The supreme example of this, of course, is Jesus' crucifixion. He did not avoid it, though he declared at one point that his Father could give him "more than twelve legions of angels" to do so. But it had to take place to present the greatest proof of all time that man's fundamental identity is not in a mortal body but is spiritual and indestructible. Hatred, envy, revenge, expressing themselves through murder,—be it crucifixion or any other means,—cannot destroy man's eternal identity, for its true substance lies in Spirit.

All these instances illustrate that fundamentally there is one universe,—spiritual, indestructible,—and so whether man is called upon to prove it positively or negatively, the fact of the spiritual nature of being will prove itself anyway. In most cases men seem to learn through trials and tribulations. However, when we see that any temptation to believe in the reality and

power of a material and personal sense of creation with its attendant sorrows and difficulties, can have only one result and that is to make us more aware of our eternal spiritual selfhood with its dominion and authority, we shall fear nothing. Realizing that every experience is an opportunity to prove that “Beloved, now are we the sons of God,” we shall truly be able to say with Paul, “I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake.” All that these trials can ever do is to force us back to the fundamental truth of our being and prove its intact, harmonious, and eternal nature.

It is consistent with Paul’s sense of rejoicing in tribulation that this story records that although the Jews knew they would have to fight for their lives, nevertheless they had “light, and gladness, and joy, and honour.”

Taking the initiative with evil

Chapter 9 of Esther records the slaying of the Jews’ enemies, including Haman’s ten sons. It seems that the Jewish remnant did not only defend themselves when they were attacked, but also took the initiative to slay the Persians. Regarded literally, the story is bloodthirsty, but these narratives were written primarily to symbolize spiritual facts. Here it illustrates that we should not wait until we are personally attacked by some error before being alert to deal with it. Rather should we handle it positively and take the initiative for good, even when we are not attacked. This is what Jesus did and what all spiritual reformers have done. They have not been content to battle with evil only when compelled to do so to save their own lives. They have taken on the warfare for the sake of their fellow man,—really for all mankind.

This chapter records how Mordecai, now “great in the king’s house,” was feared by all the rulers and officials in Persia. It is interesting that the situation had come to the point where Mordecai—“little man,” “taught of God”—put fear into all material beliefs. Again, it is this recurring theme of the Scriptures that that which appears humanly small, but is pure and spiritual, will ultimately become great and the supreme governing power. “Who hath despised the day of small things?” asked Zechariah. Man has only quietly to culture the spiritual facts of being, to cherish the true womanhood qualities of purity, unselfish affection, patience, and perseverance, and also to be alert to all that

would stand in the way of the universal development of the spiritual idea, in order to experience in his life the authority of the spiritual ideal. All material beliefs bow before this.

In the slaughter the ten sons of Haman were killed and, at Esther's request, hung upon gallows. Nothing that was the outcome of these evil, fleshly beliefs was allowed to remain to cause further difficulties. But we are told that in all this slaughter the Jews did not lay their hands upon the spoil, which they were permitted to take had they wanted to do so. It is as if this dealing with material beliefs should not be undertaken for what man can get out of it, but rather to prove the supremacy of Spirit.

The spiritual idea is always safe

The Book of Esther concludes with the establishment of the feast of Purim, which was held to celebrate the deliverance of the Jewish people from massacre by the Persians. It is a feast of rejoicing that sorrow has been turned into joy; gifts are sent one to another and to the poor. It was called "Purim" from the word "Pur," which means "lot," and is a reference to the lot cast by Haman as to a favourable day to carry out his plot against the Jews. This plot, involving chance, hatred, murder, against the spiritual idea, was turned aside through the active spiritual qualities of manhood and womanhood,—of alertness, intelligence, purity, affection, courage, steadfastness. There was no element of chance in Mordecai's inspired planning. He knew the destiny of Esther and how his people would be saved. To this day the Jews keep the feast of Purim annually, and at this feast the Book of Esther is read.

Surely every man needs to keep the feast of Purim in his own heart, for it involves reminding himself that the spiritual idea can never be destroyed, nor even temporarily overwhelmed when divine Truth, Life, and Love are acknowledged, understood, and lived.

Ending as this Book does with Mordecai now in authority, accepted by all and bringing peace in the land, it carries a great promise to all "little men" everywhere who allow themselves to be "taught of God" and who cherish the pure spiritual sense typified by Esther. This union in consciousness of true manhood and womanhood and all that they mean will assuredly reign supreme.

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