

order, complete security and protection. The holy city becomes again the joy of the whole earth and the centre of the world's salvation. Nay, not only does Mount Zion enjoy the special favour of heaven, but all the environs of the hill—the places round about it, and the people inhabiting the adjacent territories—share in the manifold blessings predicted.

But, while I understand this to be the primary meaning of the text, there can be no doubt that spiritual blessings are also implied. The entire prophecy speaks of a condition of things wherein God and His people would stand towards each other in an entirely different relationship from that which formerly existed. These temporal gifts are, in reality, the smallest part of the blessings promised. They are indicative of the richest outpourings of grace, and a proof that God would again return and dwell among His chosen people, restoring to them privileges and honours with which the glory and grandeur of a bygone dispensation could not for a moment compare. The pious Jew, I doubt not, regarded such prophecies of coming good in this higher sense. It was by such general statements, that he was led to recognize imperfectly at least, the character of Gospel times, and look forward to the advent of a greater than King David who should build another temple of fairer proportions than the first, and repair the desolations of Jerusalem.

Intended originally for the comfort of God's ancient people, the promise has a direct application to the Church of the present day. All the blessings promised Israel are ours. When the words of the text are verified there shall be but one fold and one shepherd. The unbelief of the scattered nation shall give place to unfeigned loyalty, and hearty receptions of the truths of Christianity. We do not yet see its entire fulfilment, but we live in an age when the beginning of the end can be clearly discerned. It is ours to pray and to labour, that the Christian Church may enjoy these showers of blessing, that the perched soil may be softened and made ready for abundant harvest.

From these words then we are taught, first, that the Church of the latter days is to be the recipient of special favours. "I will cause the shower to come down in his season, there shall be showers of blessing." I am not careful whether you include the literal as well as the spiritual meaning in its application to the Church of the present day. I believe that the time is coming when God's blessing shall rest to a much larger extent than at present upon the productions of the field, and when the husbandman shall reap far more abundant harvests than are at present secured under the most favourable conditions. Secondly, and taking the passage in its higher meaning, as indicating the outpourings of the Spirit, notice (a) the extent of the blessing, not drops, but showers of rain, not the slight and all but imperceptible rustling of the leaves, but the mighty wind that brings abundance of rain. In a word, it is a recurrence of Pentecostal times, when the presence of God in His Church shall be plainly recognized by mighty awakenings and ingatherings, not occurring only once in a century or after long periods of spiritual drouth, but accompanying and sealing the simple proclamation of the Gospel from year to year. Notice again (b) that these showers are to be seasonable. How much we long for timely rains to water the earth, and how much depends upon their coming! It is not good to have sunshine always. The plants and shrubs and flowers wither under continued scorching heat. There must be showers in spring and showers in summer to fill the ears of corn with sap and substance, that harvest-home may be a time of grateful joy. And just such seasonable showers of grace are needed in the Church of Christ. We may labour perseveringly with human souls, and the Gospel plough-share may turn up the fallow soil, and good seed may be plentifully sown, but all is in vain until

"God the plenteous shower bestows
And sends salvation down."

How frequently have we witnessed such emergencies in our different fields! There have been indications of a glorious work of grace, unwonted seriousness and solemnity have prevailed in the congregation, the truth has seemed to fall impressively upon both young and old, the little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, begins, as we fondly imagine, to cover the horizon, and we look for floods of mercy to fall upon the hearts of sinners, when lo! it passes by, and our hopes are disappointed. If the seasonable showers had but fallen, what rich clusters of fruit might have been gathered, and how many precious souls saved from death!

Now, in the period spoken of there shall be no such failures. The showers shall be copious and seasonable. There shall be no drawbacks in spiritual husbandry. The sower shall return bringing his sheaves with him.

Notice again (c) that the blessings thus conferred upon the Church of the latter days, shall mightily increase her efficiency in evangelizing the world. Individual believers shall become centres of blessing to all within the reach of their influence. We speak of the efforts and victories of the Church too frequently as if it were an agency quite distinct from the membership. We lose sight of personal obligations. Many who take credit for work accomplished deserve, in reality, nothing of the honour that belongs to it.

The more willing and zealous bear the burdens, while the mass rest satisfied, looking on and applauding results. Not more than one third of the moral power of the Church is practically developed, whilst the unemployed talents of the others act as a heavy drag upon her progress. It is not by such indifference and neutrality that Gospel victories are to be hastened. We may not all be equally gifted or occupy the same vantage ground. The stars and planets are not all of equal magnitude and brilliancy, but there is not a star that twinkles in the midnight sky but has its important mission to fulfil. To everything in nature a distinct part has been assigned, and to every intelligent being a separate work has been allotted.

Now in the period spoken of, every Gospel hearer shall become a positive blessing to his fellowmen. God's people shall be willing in the day of His power. The love of Christ will constrain and impel. The name of Christian will be a synonym for all that is noble and pure and elevating. The whole neighbourhood will feel the influence of holy lives. Men of the world will recognize the spirit and impress of the Master, as the coin bears the image of the sovereign. Not only so, but the Church in her collective capacity shall more than ever bless the world. Mount Zion shall not only be the recipient of special favours, but a source of unmingled good to all the places round about it. The visible body of Christ's followers shall be the most powerful agency in society. It shall be felt in every department of the State. It shall direct the councils of the nation. It shall mould public opinion on all important questions affecting man's highest welfare. It shall command universal reverence and respect, for to be associated with the Church in any capacity whatever will be regarded as the highest honour.

This whole subject is well fitted to gladden the hearts of God's servants who are seeking after a larger measure of personal holiness, and who are longing for the set time to favour Zion. Not in human organizations, although these are necessary, does the vitality of the Church consist, but in the Spirit of the living God. The pipes and reservoirs and waterworks of a city are valuable, but capacious reservoirs and the most comprehensive net-work of mains and hydrants will not alone give water. The clouds full and overflowing are essential to the effectiveness of the whole. The old log pumps, or the old oaken bucket will bring forth more water out of the farm-house well fed by a living spring than the most costly and complicated hydraulic apparatus, out of a lake whose springs are dried up. And so it is in religious efforts; unless showers of blessing come in their season, all human devices and appointments are in vain. "Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase."

Out in the harbour of Marseilles, says tradition, four galleons are standing with their prows turned eastward, and their sails idly flapping in the wind. Their decks are filled with crusaders eager to embark for the Holy Land. A week has elapsed, and still the vessels have not moved their anchorage. At length, impatient of delay, raising their helmets they all with one accord join in the hymn—"Veni Creator Spiritus." As they lowered their arms bearing the symbol of the cross, the sound of a rushing wind was heard, and that same evening, with sails set in the name of God, and fued with His breath, they were flying eastward on the open sea. And thus, when our spiritual life and energies are becalmed, we pray that gales from heaven may quicken the pulsations of our being.

"O Lord, we gather silently, and hush our breath
And look and wait—
A longing eager multitude

Within and round Thy gate.

O Lord, we wait the sound from heaven
Which shall revive our drooping love,
And make us strong and make us wise,
And fit us for the life above.

O Spirit, come with power divine,
And make these waiting people Thine.

Fathers and brethren, we meet again in General Assembly to review the work of another year—to sum up results, and to record our sense of God's goodness in the different departments of Christian labour in which we are engaged. I have not attempted an elaborate or learned discussion of debated points in theology, which more or less engage the attention of thoughtful men at the present day. Those we can safely leave in the hands of our professors to be dealt with in the class-room. Seldom, indeed, ought they to form the theme of ordinary pulpit discourse, and only in very exceptional circumstances is it needful to make them the subject of an Assembly sermon. No one questions the imperative necessity of a learned ministry, in an age when the faith of God's saints is attacked by an insidious rationalism that seeks to deify human reason at the expense of infinite wisdom. But beyond this we need in our pulpits "the tongue of fire," and the fire ever burning upon the altars of our homes. This, and this alone, can make our work permanent and progressive. There is some danger, when the resources of a church are equal to the outlay of resting satisfied with tangible results as satisfactory evidence of vital godliness in the membership at large. But is it always so? We gladly acknowledge the greatly increased liberality of our membership for the

spread of the Gospel at home and abroad. The silver and the gold for the beautifying and enrichment of the temple are not withheld. Nor dare we for a moment question the sincerity of the motives that makes magnificent gifts to the Church of Christ in these latter days. But is there not, in spite of all, good grounds for asking—are we, as ministers and office-bearers, growing in holiness? Is the religion of the age characterized by greater personal sanctity than formerly, or is the wide-spread and bustling activity that prevails due to other causes than the direct operations of God's spirit? In Christ's parable of the vine and the branches, He not only insists upon the union of the branches with the vine in order to increase fruit bearing, but also that the fruit should remain. "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Indwelling abiding piety produces ever-green Christians. They flourish like the palm tree, and grow like cedars in Lebanon. They bring forth fruit in old age. And so it is with churches. The secret of their abiding strength and vigour is in constant communication with the Most High. "There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God. God is in the midst of her: she shall not be moved. God shall help her, and that right early." As we find it said of the waters that Ezekiel saw in vision by the banks of the Chebar, intended, doubtless, to symbolize the onward majestic sweep of the Gospel—"Everything shall live, whithersoever the river cometh. On this side and on that shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit be consumed, because their waters issued out of the Sanctuary."

The past year has been marked by considerable commercial depression. Almost every class has felt the stringency. Mercantile institutions have been forced to limit their operations or suspend payment. Large business houses enjoying the confidence of the community have gone down; and men, esteemed millionaires, reduced to comparative want. Does all this mean nothing? Are there no lessons for Christian churches to learn? Are monetary convulsions and failures in harvests to be referred to accident and unforeseen calamities? Nay, verily, much of it is God's judgment upon unrighteous speculation and undue love of riches, which still withholds God's claims for the evangelizing of the world. By such visitations we are taught, that men are but stewards of God's bounties; that there is something nobler than to hoard up riches, and that penurious giving sooner or later brings a curse!

THE ELDERSHIP.

MR. EDITOR, Whatever faults and imperfections may attach to the eldership of our Church, the unscriptural nature of a "term service" is not the true and proper remedy. Even if it were shown that the rotary plan was much more ancient than "Query" asserts it to be, it would not at all commend itself to our acceptance. In the absence of any authority from either the supreme or subordinate standards of our faith and practice, any extract from "Wodrow's edition of Knox," is of no value whatever. In Scripture we find nothing to countenance the idea of an eldership elected for a year, or for any specific term of years.

In so far as tradition and usage are to be regarded, we ought to prefer the example and practice of the Scottish and Irish Churches to that of the Continental, or even the American. That the Scottish Church ever practised the rotary system has been emphatically denied on eminent authority. For an able and full discussion of the "Tenure of the Elder's Office," see an article in the *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review* for July, 1872, by Dr. McGill, of Princeton, in which the writer brands, as apocryphal, the authorities cited to prove the election of elders for a limited term. Dr. McGill also deplores the action of the American Church in making it optional with congregations to elect elders for a limited term, as a departure from Scriptural methods and the traditions of the past.

"Query" concludes by saying that it seems preposterous that ordained ministers should be removed, sometimes, indeed, too easily, from their charges; but the elder, once ordained in a congregation, can never be displaced, except by the action of the Presbytery, on a distinct matter of accusation. There is no validity, however, in the comparison thus instituted. A minister removed from his charge does not cease to be a minister. He is only transferred, or transfers himself to another field of labour. He can no more be removed from his office than can the elder, except by the action of Presbytery on a distinct matter of accusation. Might it not be urged with as much, or as little reason, that while the minister may sever the pastoral tie whenever he chooses to do so, no matter how detrimental to the interests of the congregation, the latter has no power to loose itself from the minister, no matter how inefficient he may prove himself.

There are two sides to this question of the eldership, from one of which but little has as yet been heard. To adopt a "term service" system would be to degrade, not to elevate or improve it. I am convinced that such an arrangement would not be acceptable, either to the elders or the membership of the Church in this country. The man who is not qualified for a life service in this work, is not fit to be an elder at all.