

tions this expectant feeling found expression in various ways, and was only illustrated by the wise men when at an unusual sign in the heavens they studied, they left their homes and travelled a long journey to find the king of whom they believed the star to be a sign, and that they believed him to be more than a mere earthly king, is shown by the fact that they worshipped him. After the Romans had conquered nearly the whole of the then known world, and collected in the pantheon the gods of the conquered nations, people lost their reverence for religion, and infidelity expressed itself as in Pilate's question: "What is truth?" Leaving the Gentile world to which also the Messiah was to "be a light," let us glance at the Jewish people with their rich inheritance of the knowledge of God, and the remarkable history of their nation as His people, and the still more wonderful sayings of their prophets, some of which are even now being fulfilled, we might expect to find purity of living and of worship, and a true understanding of the mission of the coming Messiah; but alas! religion had degenerated into a most formal ritualism, in which it was considered as great a sin to eat with unwashed hands as to commit murder and was so taught by their Rabbis. The religious preaching of the time consisted of hair-splitting distinctions in the explanation of Scripture texts, and was anything but practical. The Jews, looking upon themselves as the "chosen of God," considered all other people as less than nothing, even as "spittle" in God's sight; so of course it was very hard for them to submit to be ruled by a foreign nation, hence the many revolts among them and the difficulties the Romans had in governing them. But in A. D. 27, there occurred what we might call a sensation in Palestine. It was whispered from mouth to mouth that in the wilds of the Jordan there had appeared a prophet, a man, young, earnest and dressed like a prophet of old, who in

fearless language called upon the people to repent of their sins. Immense gatherings thronged to see and hear him, and from the haughty priest and self-righteous pharisee down to the lowest publican each felt rebuked for his own sins laid bare before him by the searching words of the prophet.

Well was John described by Jesus as no "reed shaken by the wind." Political motives and the controversial zeal of religious sects had no weight with him. In an age of false Messiahs and pretenders of all sorts, John the Baptist, with perfect control over whatever ambitions and aspirations he might have had, when asked the direct question as to whether he were the Messiah, answered with true Christian humility not only that he was not the Christ, but declared himself unworthy to unloose the shoes of Him who was to come after him. Faithfully did John fulfil his mission as "forerunner" of Christ, and as the "Elijah who must first come." Never did Elijah more fearlessly denounce the sins of Ahab and Jezebel than did John the Baptist rebuke the wickedness of Herod and Herodias, and Herodias pursued him with as vindictive a hatred as ever Jezebel pursued the man of God who reproved her sins and foretold her doom. But John did not fly from this Jezebel, who at last accomplished her desire and caused his death. But it is as the "forerunner" we are chiefly interested in John the Baptist. In practising the rite of baptism, typical of the cleansing of the soul by true repentance, John most emphatically declared: "I indeed baptise you with water, but One mightier than I cometh, He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire," which words illustrate the cleansing process of the Spirit of Christ when allowed to perform its work in the soul, consuming all the dross and everything that would render it unfit for communion with God. John was the connecting link between the old and the new dispensations, using as his baptismal rite the