

The Home Mission Journal.

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God are delivered. And the doubt is resolved in the same way. The larger view relieves the difficulty. This life does not represent the whole career of human souls. God writes a book of remembrance for those who fear His. They are to be His when He makes up His jewels. A time is to come when it will be easy to discriminate between the righteous and the wicked. "For behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace; and all the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and gambol as calves of the stall."

But the strongest arguments for the reality of the future life is found in this Biblical solution of the apparent injustice of the providential ordering of the present world. Even Paul did not scruple to say that "if in this life only we have hoped in Christ we are of all men most miserable." If death ends all it is exceedingly difficult to show that the world is subject to a moral order except in the sense that righteousness may ultimately triumph over wickedness, and those who are living at that time will enter into its rewards. The deep sense of personality native to the human soul involves a future life and a judgment in which right shall be enthroned and wrong overwhelmed.

But the message of the prophet did not terminate with a vision of judgment. He teaches that the righteous may even now be conscious of a divine love and fellowship. God knows His own; He sets His love upon them; He prizes them as a woman prizes her jewels, or a man his son. It is just at this point that the Old Testament makes a prodigious advance upon the best pagan teaching. Plato and Plutarch apprehended the argument for a future life from the imperfect manifestations of moral order in the present world, as clearly as we do. What they did not see was that the righteous may have now the consciousness of a divine sympathy and fellowship. In the thought of Malachi it was not simply a mechanical relation of cause and effect that would repair the wrongs of the earth. He saw the rule of a divine Person, whose heart was instinct with care and affection for His own.

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record

One death grapple in the darkness, twist old systems and the Word;

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne.

Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown

Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.

No one can ever become quite solitary, quite poor, quite miserable, who can truly say, "Lord, if only I have thee." That is just the time when God makes his consolation most gratifying and abundant, when we through distress of body and soul have turned from all temporal things to him, and have learned that royal, over-shadowing "only thee."—*Theodore Christlieb.*

The Bible as Literature and Much More.

ROBERT STUART MACARTHUR.

XV

(Continued from last issue.)

The Circle of the Earth.

In Isaiah xli:22, we read: "It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth. . . . that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." These are instructive words of the rapt prophet Isaiah. How came he to speak of the circle of the earth? Let us look for a moment at his meaning and at the connection in which his words stand. We that in most oriental countries it is common to have courts within the houses; and we know that in those countries it is not uncommon for streets to be sheltered from the sun during the hottest hours of the day. A *velum* (veil or awning) is stretched across on ropes from wall to wall. This is the fact which probably Isaiah had in mind in the language which he uses in the latter part of this verse. The firmament above is thought of as stretched out expanded over our heads, as a curtain or veil, forming a sort of tent. A similar expression occurs in Psalm civ:2. God is here referred to as stretching out the heavens like a curtain. We know that the houses of most Orientals are constructed with a court in the centre. Houses so constructed may still be seen in Spain and in the countries which formerly were Spain's colonies, and in other lands. This court, or open square, has in it fountains and flowers. The fountains splash, giving an air of coolness and beauty; and the flowers fill the space with a perfumed atmosphere. Any one who has visited some of the best hotels or homes in Spain, and who has enjoyed a "siesta" in one of these courts, will readily recall the sweet picture, and will at once see the harmony between these memories and the suggestions of the passage from Isaiah. In the artificial coolness of these courts the family sit, and when the weather is very hot or rainy, an awning is drawn over this court area. So Isaiah thought of the heavens as extended like a tent; and here, in this beautiful pavilion, God had His dwelling place.

But special attention is now called to the first part of the verse. The Hebrew literally means "the sitter" or "he that sitteth on the circle of the earth." Perhaps the thought goes back to the twenty-first verse, as if Isaiah had said, "Have ye not known Him who sitteth on the circle of the earth?" The phrase beautifully sets forth the majesty and glory of God. God is represented as a mighty sovereign making the earth His august throne. It is of importance, then, in our inquiry that we should get a definite conception of what is meant by the words "the circle of the earth." The word translated *circle* properly means circle, sphere or arch." In Proverbs viii:27, and Job xxii:14, it is translated with that meaning. Perhaps the phrase is here used in the sense of the Latin term *orbis terrarum*, referring to the earth as an extended plain surrounded by mighty waters. It is not claimed in this discussion that Isaiah definitely meant to express his belief that the earth was a sphere. Perhaps he had no exact knowledge of the earth's sphericity. Perhaps he held the opinion of the majority of the men of this time, that the earth was a great plain. More than once he speaks of "the ends of the earth," meaning the earth itself, conceived of as a vast plain having well-defined boundaries. Probably this was the prevailing opinion among the ancients. It is, however, here affirmed that Isaiah used language in harmony with the idea of the sphericity of the earth, and thus anticipated the discoveries of a much later day; he thus used language not only not opposed to these discoveries, but language exactly in harmony with these discoveries. He used terms in which clearly lies the germ of all these scientific discoveries and conclusions. Suppose Isaiah had employed language which contradicted these discoveries. How all the little infidels and the puny agnostics would exclaim in their derision of his ignorance! Why, then, do they not honestly lift their strident voices in

acknowledgment of the accuracy of his phraseology? Why are they not manly enough to give him credit for his anticipations of modern discoveries? How came he to use language so accordant with the most advanced ideas of our time on these subjects, when the cosmogony of uninspired peoples excite only prolonged and well-nigh uncontrollable laughter? Whence did this glowing, rapt, seraphic Hebrew prophet derive this remarkable wisdom? Who gave him such understanding? How came he not only to be free from error in his use of language, but to employ terms which suggest the sublime truth of later scientific discovery? These again stands God.

The merit of having first formed the general notion of the Copernican system seems to be due to Pythagoras, but Copernicus really has the credit of having again drawn the attention of philosophers to it after the lapse of centuries, and of having increased the probability of its truth by his experiments and arguments. But the full glory of having matured its sublime truth belongs to Kepler, Galileo, and others, and especially to the immortal Newton. His discoveries connected with the law of gravitation demonstrated the truth of the broader laws of the Copernican system. Certainly Isaiah knew nothing of Copernicus and his great discoveries. The clergy in the days of Copernicus, and astronomers generally, rejected his theories. How came Isaiah to be wiser than the clergyman and astronomers of comparatively recent centuries? Certainly Isaiah knew nothing of the laws of gravitation as they have been formulated by Sir Isaac Newton. Newton showed that the same force which causes a stone to fall extends to the moon and holds her in her orbit. He showed that the planets tend to fall toward the sun, the satellites toward the planets, and the moon toward the earth, and that all these tendencies are in harmony with the law by which an apple falls to the ground. He did not, indeed, discover gravitation, for it was known from the earliest days; but he applied and formulated the law in harmony with these tendencies. He finally enunciated the greatest law of nature ever discovered. "Every body in nature attracts every other body with a force directly as its mass, and inversely as the square of its distance." These are sublime discoveries of comparatively modern days. We fully recognize their utility and rejoice in their sublimity.

Apart from the beautiful harmony between Isaiah's words and the latest conclusions of modern science, there is majesty in his words in their relation to God. The inhabitants of the earth, numerous and mighty as they are, he represents as nothing compared with the great God. The Eternal One is so exalted, so glorious, and so divine that from his lofty throne He looks down upon the inhabitants of the world, busy, excited creatures as they often are, looks down upon them as if they were interminable bands of locusts spread over the vast plains of the mysterious and majestic East. These are truly sublime descriptions of the greatness of God, and striking conceptions of the insignificance of man. We may well ask in the presence of such words, in the language of the Psalmist, "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" But we remember, also, in the words of the same psalm, that God has "made him a little lower than the angels, and has crowned him with glory and honor." Let all atheism be dumb in the presence of the great God! This mighty Being is our Father, our Friend, our Redeemer. With bowed head and uplifted heart let us give Him the homage that is His due, as Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of this great globe, as in august majesty He "sitteth upon the circle of the earth."

The flowers are God's beautiful thoughts, the mountains his majestic thoughts; the stars his brilliant thoughts.

Christ gives us a new start in life by giving us a new life to start with.

The infinite Father encircles his children in his everlasting arms.