

and reap; and yet, "He that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life eternal." May many readers of PARISH AND HOME go and be glad toilers with the Master in His vineyard.

CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE PRESENCE OF THE UNEXPLAINABLE.

"Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." Matt. 11: 2-6.

One of the most pathetic pictures in the New Testament is that of John the Baptist, and one of the most mysterious incidents in the providence of God, is the interrupted ministry of this faithful servant and his tragic death in the castle of Machærus. As one chosen of God, he had a strange, a singular, a stern ministry. With his coat of camel's hair, a leathern girdle about his loins, his food locusts and wild honey, he comes suddenly into the history as the forerunner of the Lord. Then, in the midst of his ministry, at the height of his popularity, he is arrested and cast into prison, and this for no fault of his own. It is his very faithfulness that brings him there. He rebuked the sin of the lustful Herod. And now while he lingers and languishes in prison, and the days and the months are going by, and while the mighty acts of Jesus are drawing multitudes after Him, he sends this plaintive, pathetic message to the Saviour, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" And he receives back an answer which is not an answer, only something which deepens the mystery, the testimony of eye witnesses to the work which Christ was at that moment performing. And then in the end, unrescued, perhaps unrelieved of his doubts and fears, he is allowed to suffer martyrdom at the

hands of the cruel King. The sword of the iniquitous Herod claimed the head of John the Baptist to satisfy the revenge of the vile Herodias. His is, indeed, a pathetic picture, his interrupted ministry and tragic death a most mysterious incident in the providence of God.

This subject is opportune at this time. Of course, there must be mysteries in the providence of God. "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out." But our hearts at this time seem specially bowed down under the sense of them. Why did Jesus, at the height of His ministry, allow the work of His faithful servant thus to be interrupted? Why was he allowed to suffer so long in the prison without any help from Jesus? Why did he meet at last a martyr's death? There is no satisfying answer. All is mystery. Why at the present moment do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? Why are all the horrors of the past in the way of massacre and murder in missionary fields repeated in this enlightened age? Why do the streets of Chinese cities at this moment run with the blood of martyred saints? There is no satisfying answer. All is mystery.

Notice a few things about this: Christian faith in the presence of the unexplainable.

I. JOHN'S QUESTION.

There were three things that troubled John.

1. *Why the righteous suffer.* Why they suffer for their very righteousness. John was a righteous man. We think it indeed a pity that John did not hear or receive the testimony of Jesus about him. The messengers had left when it was given. (Matt. xi. 7-15.) We think it would have cheered him. Yes, he was a burning and a shining light, and it was his very righteousness, his faithfulness to truth that opened for him the prison house. He rebuked the sin of Herod, and it cost him the loss of his liberty, and ultimately the loss of his life. Why do the righteous suffer? We know not. But we know this: it has always been so. We behold the works and the ways of God. I

was so in the life of Job. It was so in the lives of Joseph, of David, of Daniel. It was so in the lives of the twelve apostles. It is the life promised to the Christian. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you," etc. They that will live godly lives must suffer persecution. And it is the life realized in the service of God. (2 Cor. iv. 8-11.) Why do the righteous suffer? We know not, and yet one answer may be given. It is because there can be no fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness, no communion between light and darkness, no concord between Christ and Belial, no compromise between the world and the Church, no harmony between the flesh and the Spirit.

2. *Why Christ did not intervene in John's own case.* It is indeed a great mystery to us why He did not. John was related to Jesus. He was the child of prophecy and thus connected with the incarnation. He was Elias, and thus connected with the ministry of Jesus. He had many claims upon Jesus—the claims of kinship, the claims of prophecy, the claims of ministry. But so far as we know, He never visited him once during his long imprisonment, never sent him an encouraging message. It seems indeed strange. But again we look about us in the world and we see it has always been so. The Lord's own seem at times to be the most neglected. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." Lazarus is sick and dying at Bethany. Yet the Saviour does not come. He suffers him to die. Peter is delivered from Herod's prison by the prayers of the saints, yet that same Herod is permitted by his sword to cut off the head of James. Why does not the Lord interpose on behalf of His own? We know not, and yet one answer may be given. There is something worse than suffering and that is sin. It is better that the Christian should endure suffering than that he should commit sin. Yea, better that he should die than that he should bring dishonour upon the name of the Lord.

3. *Why Christ did not put forth His power and reign.* We believe that John the Baptist shared with his Jewish brethren the hope of a national kingdom. Into that hope