

also He assured them that the promise of the Father should be fulfilled upon them not many days hence, and they should be endued with power from on high.⁵ The latter of these statements explains the former, and both together explain the moral and spiritual revolution that had taken place in Peter. Peter's *apologia* before the Sanhedrim was proof that the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost was a reality—not for him alone, but for his co-apostles as well, and for the whole Church of Jesus Christ.

In the third place, the *dictum* of Peter—"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye"—announced that a new era had dawned for the Church of God upon the earth. When Peter spoke these words, says Pressensé,⁶ "liberty of conscience was born into the the world never to be destroyed." Up till that moment liberty of conscience had been understood neither by Jew nor Gentile. Asa, king of Judah, and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, alike imagined the consciences of their subjects to be in their keeping. Both alike believed it to be among their kingly duties to prescribe a religion for those whom God had placed beneath their rule, and to enforce it by pains and penalties.⁷ Perhaps a plea in favour of the former may be drawn from the fact that in Judah Church and State were one by express appointment of Heaven, and that under a theocracy there is no clear standing room for liberty of conscience. But under Christianity the case is different. The dispensation of the Spirit is a dispensation of religious freedom. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty"—not liberty, as before God, to dispense with religion entirely, or to select any form of religion indifferently, as if all religions were alike good, but liberty, so far as one's fellows are concerned, to follow the dictates of conscience, rather than the commandments of men in determining what is that true religion which one ought to embrace, what is that supreme voice of God which one ought to obey.

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⁵ Luke xxiv. 49.

⁶ *Early Years of Christianity*, vol. i. p. 38.

⁷ 2 Chron. xv. 13; Dan. iii. 29.