

THE BEREAN CHRISTADELPHIAN ECCLESIAL NEWS

A monthly magazine devoted wholly to the Berean Christadelphian Ecclesial welfare. Defending the original, foundation principles upon which the Truth was uncovered from darkness, and upon which the Christadelphian movement was developed. Opposed to the dogmas of papal and protestant christendom. Upholding the Truth as Bereans since 1923.

Vol. VIII No. 12 (XCIII)

DECEMBER, 2005

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God Willing, The Berean Christadelphian Ecclesial News will be published monthly as an avenue of providing information of Ecclesial interest to the Brotherhood. Ecclesial news and correspondence, Fraternal Gathering notices, special activities and upbuilding exhortations are encouraged. This is an effort to upbuild and prepare us in heart and mind for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CHRIST IS COMING SOON AND WILL REIGN ON EARTH

Ecclesial News

Holladay, Tennessee. Breaking of Bread 9:00 am, Sunday School 10:00 am. Recording Bro. Warren Rankin, 699 White Tail Rd, Holladay, TN 38341

It has been quite some time since we last wrote. We have enjoyed the fellowship of many brethren and sisters in our part of the vineyard.

On May 8th 2004 Bro. Jim Rankin and Sis. Terri Davey were united in marriage in Northboro, MA. We pray they may walk as one towards the Kingdom will be strengthened by God's guidance and direction. Also, this resulted in an addition to our ecclesia.

We have had several visitors over the past year: Bro. Len & Sis. Pam Naglieri, Bro. John and Sis. Mary Phillips, Bro. Harry and Sis. Phyllis Phillips, Bro. Michael Phillips, Bro. Beryl & Sis. Becky Synder, Sis. Kay Stinchcomb, Bro. Freddie Higham, Bro. Ted Mingham, Bro. Steve and Sis. Elizabeth Male, Bro. Dan and Sis. Sandy Jackson, Sis. Annetta Jones, Sis. Brenda McChesney, Sis. Sharon Osborne; we have enjoyed the Sunday School scholars that have visited too. We thank Bro. Len for his words of exhortation and the words he spoke recently by Bro. Joshua Garvey. We do appreciate Bro. Joshua's continue encouragement to us all as he goes through this trial.

On July 16th we witnessed the baptism of James Snow. On Sunday we welcomed our new brother as he received the right hand of fellowship and partook of the emblems. He has been studying with us for almost a year and we are pleased to have our new Bro. Jim to help us along the road Zionward.

The October Gathering was held on the 1st & 2nd. The subject was "God's plan with this earth -6000 years". We were blessed with a great weekend and had about 165 people in attendance. The brethren did an excellent job on the talks and we thank them for their efforts. The spiritual food is necessary as well as the association one with another. It is good to get away from the worldly affairs and be in our own corner of the vineyard enjoying God's Word.

On October 8, 2005 Bro. Jim Snow and Sis. Donna Rankin were united in marriage at the Natchez Trace Recreation Lodge - Lexington, TN. Bro. Dan Jackson presided over the ceremony and gave the talk. We were blessed with many family and friends who were able to attend. We pray God will guide them in their new life together.

May God keep us in His loving care, and on behalf of the Holladay Ecclesia.

Bro. Warren Rankin

FRATERNAL GATHERINGS & ACTIVITIES

(To be held Yahweh Willing)

MTONDIA FRATERNAL GATHERING.....**Dec 9–11, 2005**

Bro. Fred Omoto, P .O. Box 1177, Kilifi, Kenya

HENGOED FRATERNAL GATHERING.....**Mar 17–20, 2006**

Bro. Stephen Male, 63 Ty Llwyd Parc, Quakers Yard, Treharris, South Wales, CF46 5LB, United Kingdom, Phone: 011 441 44381 3828

NORTH CAROLINA–VIRGINIA STUDY WEEKEND.....**May 27–28, 2006**

Bro. Dale Lee at dleecpa2@mindspring.com (Details to follow shortly)

LAMPASAS FRATERNAL GATHERING..... **Jun 9–11, 2006**

Bro. Curtis Hurst, Rt.1, Box 40, Mullin, TX 76864, USA. 1-325-985-3868

HYE FRATERNAL GATHERING..... **Jul 24–30, 2006**

Bro. Curtis Hurst, Rt.1, Box 40, Mullin, TX 76864, USA. 1-325-985-3868

Study Class Topic: 1Thessalonians; Daily Bible Readings; Discussion on Zech. 1-7

Books For Kenya

We have requests from the Kenya Ecclesias for works on the Truth—books, pamphlets and Sunday School material that you can send would be very helpful in this effort. They may be addressed to the ecclesial addresses in the Ecclesial Directory. Please send Sis. Kaye Yuen a note letting her know what is sent to which ecclesia for her records.

Fellowship With Him

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”—1 John 1:5

In our readings we begin today the first epistle of John. We are told very little about John, either in the Gospels or in Acts and the Epistles. Peter, Paul and James, the Lord's brother, stand out prominently, but not John.

And yet there is something very special about John. He was the disciple Jesus loved.

Truly Jesus loved them all, but John particularly. This tells us volumes about John. There was a very special and unique relationship between John and Jesus, and it must have been because of John's special character. It was not favoritism. We can rule that out as unthinkable.

The depth and closeness of love depends upon mental and spiritual affinity. The depth and fullness of love is limited only by the comprehensions and capacities of the participants. John was especially beloved because of a deeper unity with the mind of Christ.

It is notable, and there is a certain amount of comfort for us in the fact, that on two occasions where John is prominent in the Gospels, it is not in a good light. He, with James, wanted to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, and he, with James, wanted the two places of highest preeminence in Christ's Kingdom. He had to learn the way of wisdom--the

true nature of the spirit he was called unto.

Both times Jesus had to gently rebuke them. When he had first selected James and John, he called them Boanerges—”Sons of Thunder”—doubtless for the ardent power of their dedication and zeal. By Jesus' love, John's thunder was purified.

John was the first to believe, after the resurrection when he saw the empty tomb. Though not prominent in the history, John wrote the deepest Gospel, the deepest Epistle (this one) and the deepest prophecy (Revelation).

Though deep, and spiritual, and laying all emphasis on love as the essential motive and power of holiness, this epistle is eminently practical and plain-spoken. There is no haziness, such as the mind of the flesh delights and takes refuge in. What could be plainer or blunter than this?—

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar.” (2:4)

“Let no man deceive you: he that DOETH righteousness is righteous.” (3:7)

“He that committeth sin is of the devil.” (3:8)

The first five verses lay the eternal foundations in words we could meditate on forever without fully plumbing their depth, but the next five turn upon us and are plain, uncompromising and unsparing. They speak of sin, and liars, and self-deception.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness; and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.” (1:2)

Christ is the great reality—the key to everything—the visible, tangible, touchable manifestation to man of all God's everlasting purpose and goodness and holiness. He had to be perfect. He was the perfect God manifested. He was the perfect Word of Life—eternal life—made flesh. John says later—

“He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life” (5:12).

That is unmistakable and cannot be evaded. We must have the Son to have life. See how John emphasizes this specific, factual reality as the vital foundation:

We heard, we saw, we scrutinized, we handled—the Word of life.

Their message was not a hazy philosophy of indefinite goodness according to the mind and judgment of man. It was not groping, human philosophy. It was specific testimony to a specific person to be accepted,

specific truths to be believed, specific commands to be obeyed.

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” (1:3)

Fellowship with the apostles and with God and His Son, depends on learning and accepting and bringing ourselves into harmony with these things that John reveals and declares.

And what is fellowship? We must ever be on guard against letting technicalities take the place of realities. Fellowship is not an external agreement to associate, but communion, harmony, unity of mind and spirit.

We are in fellowship with God if—and only if—our entire lives and thoughts and desires and interests are centered on God—only if everything we do is done for and because of God; only if we think God's thoughts.

“And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” (1:4)

Joy is God's great purpose of love for man. Is our joy full? Is joy the thankful atmosphere in which we constantly live?—an all-sustaining, all irradiating, all-protective joy?

It will be, if we really believe what we say we believe—If we really have a meaningful faith, and not just a form without power. John wrote to invite us up out of the flesh into the realm of all-enveloping spiritual joy, and if we are willing to follow all the rules, and cast off the encumbrances that hinder, we can enter this joy.

The whole purpose, says John, of his writing, is that our joy may be full.

It is John that records that Jesus said the same thing, on the night that he was betrayed (John 15:11)—

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”

Joy is the great identification and secret of the Truth. If we have the Truth in a real and living way, we have joy—deep, overwhelming, unassailable joy. This is the key to whether our faith is real or just an empty form.

It is not a joy that ignores the sorrows and troubles and difficulties of this life. It is not even a joy that is in spite of these things. Rather it is a joy because of these things—an intense thankfulness FOR these things. Jesus said (Matt. 5:11)— “When men persecute you, rejoice: be exceeding glad.”

James said (1:2)—”My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into trials and afflictions.”

Paul said (Rom. 5:3)—”We glory in tribulations.”

And of the disciples it is recorded, when the authorities had beaten

them for preaching Christ, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for his Name. (Acts 5:40-41)

This is really having the Truth, having God, in a living and saving way!

Do we have it in this burning robust way, or do we just have a pale, cold, powerless form of godliness?

How can we joy in tribulations and rejoice in sorrow? Can it be reasonably explained, or is it just a striking form of words? It CAN be explained. It IS real. It is reasonable. In fact, it is the only reasonable, sensible, intelligent course at all. Jesus said:

“For great is your reward in heaven.” (Matt 5:7; Luke 6:23)

James continues by saying—”The trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

Paul continued by saying:

“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts...” (Rom 5:3-6)

Is this reasonable? Is this sensible? Is this the path we want to follow, and the goal we want to achieve?

Present pleasure does us no good. It is nice while it lasts, like candy to a baby, but it really is not healthy. It is a cheat and a deception—it builds nothing lasting. Paul says present pleasure is a living death, because it has no promise for the future. It is just a brief dance of folly on the deck while the boat is sinking under us.

Joy is oneness with the mind of God, being in mental and spiritual harmony with God, seeing everything as God sees it—seeing the meaning and the purpose and the love and the beauty in all the works of God, in EVERYTHING that happens to us and around us; seeing—not just blindly believing—but actually seeing, realizing, understanding, rejoicing that—

“All things work together for good to them that love God.” (Rom 8:28)

Would it be nice to be never unhappy, never disappointed, never fearful, never lonely, never worried—always joyful, always content with what we have and what our position is? This is what the Truth freely offers us.

This is what the Truth really is. Do we have it? Have we found it?

The Truth is not just a little tidy packet of doctrines, but a living, transforming spirit-power. Paul said he was troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, yet never in despair; in sorrow, yet always rejoicing; having nothing, yet possessing all things. He said he took PLEASURE in

weakness, hardship, contempt, persecution and distress; for when he was weak and poor naturally, then he was strong and rich spiritually. And he said—

“Be ye followers of me.”

This is the mind of Christ, the mind of God, the spiritual mind—which is life and peace. Other than this is the mind of the flesh, which is sorrow and death.

“These things,” says John, “we write unto you, that your joy may be full”—not just partially filled, but wholly FULL—complete, perfect, unassailable, unalloyed.

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” (I John 15)

The great, central message that John brings is that God is all Light, pure Light, perfect Light. There are two great definitions of God in this epistle—“God is light.”

And—“God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

—the two great, eternal, divine realities: LIGHT—Truth, Holiness, Purity, Righteousness; and LOVE—Goodness, Mercy, Compassion, Benevolence, Kindness.

Wherein does the significance of this message lie for us, that “God is Light”? The message is that if we seek Life and joy we MUST come to the Light. We must leave all things of darkness behind. Jesus said—

“Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19)

This is natural man—natural desires. We must desire light, and the light we must desire is the light of God's Word as applied to all our thoughts and feelings and actions.

By nature, we are evil. Our thoughts are evil and fleshly. The light of God's Word reveals this evil and tells us what God desires, and if we love God we shall be very anxious to search out and do everything He desires and give His Word the benefit of every doubt.

The natural way is to decide what we desire, and what our flesh desires, and then try to justify it. If we allow ourselves to be deceived by this tendency, we can always find self-justification, and God will let us be self-deceived; yea, help us to be self-deceived.

But if we sincerely want to learn, want to improve, want to change, want to please God rather than ourselves, then God will open our understanding.

Light is the great theme of the Scriptures throughout. The very first thing God said was—“Let there be light...And God saw the light that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.”

And in the last chapter of the Bible we are told of the redeemed—“God giveth them light.”

The Spirit through Solomon says—“The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” (Prov 4:18)

John said of Jesus—“That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” (John 1:9)

And Paul says—“God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor 4:6)

By nature, we are all darkness. It is our life's purpose and our life's work more and more to absorb and radiate the light, and cast out the darkness.

The Light is God's Word: every part of it, from beginning to end. ALL Scripture, we are told, is profitable that we may be made perfect. We must prayerfully and continually study it, ponder on it, agonize to understand every word, as if it were a precious map leading us to great treasure, as it truly is.

All the time we can spare should be given to this. It is the only way to gain the life that only the few will ever find.

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” (I John 1:6)

“Walking in darkness” is doing anything according to the mind of the flesh. The Word of God sets before us a way of Life—a way of thinking about everything, a way of directing our interests and desires, a way of conduct toward, and thought about others.

It is usually very different from the natural way. It requires learning, practice, and effort, and continual seeking of guidance and help. If we are not consciously examining all we do, and consciously trying to conform it to God's Word, then we're automatically and inevitably “walking in darkness.”

Fellowship with God is not just a technicality—not just a form—not just the accepting of certain beliefs or joining a certain group. It is a WAY OF LIFE—a thinking like God, a walking in harmony with His revealed will and commands.

John minces no words. The issue is too grave, and self-deception is too terribly easy. It is so easy to “say that we have fellowship with Him.” Millions in the world say this. Wherein are WE different?

And let us not compare ourselves with the worst of them, or even with the average of them. Let us honestly face what the BEST of them are doing (supposedly for God, as they think), and ask ourselves, “Wherein are

we so different that we expect life while the best of these will get but death?”

The primary difference must of course be the Truth itself. True belief, true doctrine, is important—vitaly important. It must be what God says and not what man says, for God is all Light, and man is all darkness.

But just having the Light is not enough. We must, says John, walk in it—all the way in, plunging into it joyfully and unhesitatingly, letting it fill us and surround us. Notice the expression in this verse—”We lie, and do not the Truth.”

The Truth is not just something we have. It is something we must “DO.”

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (John 1:7)

We here this morning are in what we call fellowship with one another. The validity and power of that fellowship depends upon each one of us sincerely determining and endeavoring to walk in God's Light in every aspect of our lives. Apart from that, it is meaningless, powerless and purposeless.

If we walk in light, John says, the blood of Christ “cleanseth us from all sin.” Two words here are deeply significant “cleanse” and “all.” Sin is a dirtiness, an uncleanness, a defilement. Sin is the natural motions and thoughts of the flesh—

“In me, (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.” (Rom 7:18)

Sin is catering to our own desires, seeking our own advantage and pleasure. Sin is wasting time that God has commanded us to devote to His service.

Sin is using God's goods for our own indulgence beyond the point of necessity or usefulness for His purpose. Sin is everything short of the perfect holiness of the character of Christ.

If we desire and seek God's light, the blood of Christ will cleanse us from all these fleshly things. Until it does, we are dirty and offensive in God's sight.

It is said of the true ecclesia of God, the true Bride of Christ, that Jesus sanctifies and cleanses it with the washing of the Word, that it might not have spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but should be holy and without blemish—a glorious Ecclesia, a pure Bride. “The blood of Jesus Christ ...cleanseth us from all sin.” (I John 1:7)

It is important that we realize this. The Truth—the Way of Life—is an all-or-nothing thing. Unless we are cleansed of ALL sin, we are lost. One

seemingly small sin at the beginning plunged the world into 6000 years of sorrow and death.

If we fail through neglect of prayer and study of the Word to discern our sins, if we cling willfully to anything we know to be sin, or even have reason to suspect might be sin, then we cannot be saved.

HOW does Christ's poured-out blood “cleanse us from all sin?” Do we think that God was just establishing a technicality in Christ's death? Do we think God was just proving a point, so He could overlook sin? Do we think that God just waves a magic wand and says, “Abracadabra, you are clean”?

Is THAT our idea of how “the blood of Christ cleanseth us from sin?” It is the idea of many who think cleansing from sin is some sort of a superficial ritual that has all been taken care of for us. But John says (I John 3:3-10)—

“Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself.”

“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not.”

“Let no man deceive you: he that DOETH righteousness is righteous.”

“Whosoever DOETH not righteousness is not of God.”

THIS is how God cleanses us from sins—in reality, not just in symbol. Where does Christ's work come in then? He laid the essential foundation of perfection on which we must build. He established the acceptable place of meeting—the Mercy-Seat—the Seat, or Place, of Mercy—the place and means of cleansing and forgiveness, where man could approach in safety unto God's terrible holiness and exalted purity.

Paul said God set him forth as a Mercy-Seat to manifest God's righteousness, that He (God) might be righteous and also the builder of righteousness within all who approach Him through Jesus. John says of Christ that to all who received him he gave power to become sons of God.

Shall we sit down and say that it is too much?—that it cannot be done? Or shall we thankfully and joyfully take up this power so graciously offered, and by it become the sons of God? Paul exhorted the Philippians—

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.”

Here in one phrase it seems like we ourselves must do it all, and in the very next it seems like it is all of God—not only the doing, but the very will or desire behind the doing.

Both are true, marvelously and inseparably true. It is all of us, AND all of God.

A very crude comparison is power steering. Tremendous power is there, waiting to do immediately all the work on our behalf as soon as we

turn our lives toward the right direction, but it will never turn itself but go straight down the old natural course of death to the end, if we do not try, but just say it cannot be done.

“The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.” That is what we are here to memorialize this morning, in infinite thankfulness and joy. It is clear why he had to die. We know sin had to be condemned, the body of sin had to be put to death—the devil, the diabolos, the motions of sin, had to be destroyed by the victory of perfect obedience right to the end—God's pure law vindicated, God's merciful way of reconciliation proclaimed in a foundation of justified holiness.

We know why he had to die. But why did he have to SUFFER? Why did it “please God to bruise him, [and]...put him to grief”? (Isa 53:10). What pleasure did this give God? What good is served, what point is proved, what law is established by inflicting apparently unnecessary suffering on a perfectly obedient, perfectly submissive Son?

Paul throws much light on this, and reveals a vital first principle of holiness when he says (Heb. 2:10)—

“It became Him—that is, it was fitting for Him (God)—for Whom are all things and by Whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

There is an answer to it all. The sufferings were to make him perfect.

Was Christ ever imperfect? He was imperfect in the sense that the seed is imperfect as compared to the ripened fruit. His character—always beautiful, always spotless—had to be developed and matured and strengthened and tested in the fierce furnace of affliction, that it might be meet for God's everlasting companionship.

And what was needed for his preparation for the eternal glory of divine sonship is needed for his brethren also. Therefore let us, like Paul, thank God for suffering, seeing in its every aspect and instance the all-wise hand of a loving Father shaping and beautifying us for a glorious destiny—

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment...There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear.” (1 John 4:17-18)

“And this is the love of God—that we keep his commandments.” (5:3)

Bro. G.V. Growcott

Bible Readings Notes - December

“Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.”

The following inspired words of the sweet Psalmist of Israel (19:6-7) contain all the encouragement necessary to engage in the practice of daily

Bible reading. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” The tables known as the Bible Companion provide a well-trying method of regular study, embracing the whole Scriptures within the space of a year. According to this plan, the readings for December are the books of Job, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Hebrews 6 to 13, the epistles of James, Peter, John, Jude, and the Revelation.

JOB

This book portrays the divine principles by which the sons and daughters of God are made perfect through suffering. Job was a righteous man, “perfect and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil” (chap. 1:1). The divine pronouncement concerning him is, “My servant Job, there is none like him in all the earth” (chap. 2:3). He had an adversary, styled “Satan,” who sought to do him harm, and who stands as a type of all that exhibit the mind of the flesh, and are antagonistic to the servants of God. This seems to be the inference contained in the Satan's answer to the question, “Whence comest thou?” “From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it” (chap. 2:2). For a time the adversary was permitted to have his way, and Job was put to the test. He was deprived of children, possessions, position, and health, but he maintained his integrity. “The LORD gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (chap. 1:21). Again, he said, “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (chap. 2:10). After seven days' silence, Job's three friends discussed with him the principles underlying his afflictions. In reading the contributions of each of the speakers, it is imperative to remember the divine comment upon them. To Eliphaz, God said, “My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends, for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right” (chap. 42:7). Elihu was dismissed without comment, but of Job, God declared, he had spoken of Him the thing that was right [Rephrased as this was not direct quote] (chap. 42:8). Having recovered from the first shock of his troubles, Job recognized that they were divinely contrived with a view to his eternal wellbeing. (See chaps. 9:1- 5, and 13:15) “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” Observe his belief in resurrection, and immortality (chaps. 14:14; 19:25). The friends adopted the attitude that Job's sufferings were a punishment for his sins. “Whoever perished being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off?” (chap. 4:7). They failed to realize that “whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth” (Heb. 12:6). Job recognized this fundamental truth. “When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (chap. 23:10). He freely acknowledged that wisdom dwells with God, whose ways, though inscrutable, are just and true (chap. 28). At

length God Himself spoke to Job. He declared His wisdom, power, greatness, and love, as witnessed by the wonders of creation (chaps. 38 and 39). The divine reasoning is that God is supreme and unerring in all His ways, both in the mighty works of the universe and in the lives of all His servants. Man must not challenge or question His almighty workings. Job was prepared to acknowledge this sublime fact. "I know that thou canst do everything" (chap. 42:2). His example of patience, fortitude, and resignation is commended in both Old and New Testaments (Ezekiel 14:14; James 5:11), and his experiences foreshadowed the sufferings of Jesus. The lesson of the book is summed up by the apostle, who wrote, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

JONAH

This book, though derided by many professing Christians and by sceptics, received the endorsement of Christ. (See Matt. 12:40.) Its incidents circle around a remarkable miracle, the necessity for which will be apparent upon a moment's reflection. Jonah was a Jew, and as such shared all the prejudices against Gentile nations. Yet he was sent with a divine message to Nineveh. The Ninevites would have been equally unwilling to receive his utterances unless they were accompanied by unimpeachable evidences of divine origin. Hence the necessity for the miracle. Jonah was commanded to testify against the wickedness of Nineveh, but he sought to escape the disagreeable task. He boarded a ship bound for Tarshish, in the endeavour to flee from "the presence of the LORD" (chap. 1:3). When the ship was endangered by a mighty tempest, the mariners attributed their peril to Jonah. They cast him overboard, but "the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah" (chap. 1:17). He was ultimately cast up on the land, and having been humbled though strengthened in faith by his experiences, he journeyed to Nineveh, and warned its inhabitants of impending judgments (chap. 3). The Ninevites repented, and God spared them. Many valuable lessons are taught in this book, chiefly the omniscience of God (see also Psalm 139), the depths of divine mercy, and the prefigurement in Jonah's experiences of the resurrection of Christ. The divine expostulations with the Ninevites also foreshadowed the calling of the Gentiles, thereby illustrating the words of the apostle that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

MICAH

Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, and prophesied in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. He foretold the coming of divine judgments upon both Israel and Judah (chap. 1:6 to 9). His words concerning Israel were fulfilled during his own lifetime, in the carrying away captive of the people by Shalmaneser and Sargon, kings of Assyria.

Judah enjoyed a certain respite, but ultimately suffered a similar captivity, as Micah declared they would (chap. 2:10). The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, A.D. 70, is clearly alluded to in chapter 3:12. "Zion, for your sake, shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps." Chapter 4 contains a glowing picture of Israel's future glory, and of the blessings to come upon all nations by the beneficent reign of Christ. The prophecy will receive its fulfillment when Jesus returns to the earth, to be "ruler in Israel" (chap. 5:2). The whole chapter describes the work of Christ when he "shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the LORD his God" (verse 4). Chapter 6 reveals the basis of acceptability to God. "What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (verse 8). The closing chapter again reverts to the awful punishment that should come upon Israel, but contains glorious promises of coming restoration. "The nations shall see and be confounded" (verse 16) when Israel are delivered after the type of the former "coming out of...Egypt" (verse 15). The keynote of the whole prophecy is contained in its last verse. "Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old" (verse 20).

NAHUM

Nahum's prophecies were intended as a means of comfort to the faithful remnant of Israel who had witnessed the invasion of the Northern kingdom by the Assyrians. Was Assyria to become yet more powerful, and overrun Judah as she had Israel? Nahum foretold the overthrow of Nineveh, because it had exalted itself against God and had oppressed His people. "The LORD revengeth, and is furious" (chap. 1:2). Chapters 2 and 3 describe the irrecoverable ruin of this proud city. History records the fulfilment of the prophecy in the successful attacks of the Babylonians and the Medes. Notice the prophet's references to devastation by fire (chaps. 2:13; 3:15). The unearthed fragments of Nineveh's palaces now exhibited in the British Museum bear ample evidences of the raging fires, and are a corroboration of the scriptural account. Nahum foretold that notwithstanding all the vicissitudes of God's people, Israel would be restored to divine favor. "O Judah, keep thy Day of solemn feasts, perform thy vows, for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off" (chap. 1:15). This prophecy will be fulfilled when all the nations typified by Assyria are subdued by Christ, and Israel are exalted in the earth.

HABAKKUK

The time of Habakkuk's prophecy is established by the reference in chapter 1:6. "I will raise up the Chaldeans," "in your days" (verse 5), thus indicating the period marked by the rise of the Babylonians as oppressors of Israel. The prophet declared that God's fury upon His people

for their iniquities would be poured out through the instrumentality of this cruel race from the east. He mused in himself as to the time of Israel's bitter down-treading (chap. 1:12 to 17). Chapter 2 contains the answer to his ponderings. Babylon in her turn would be punished and her downfall would surely come. Many allusions in the chapter indicate, however, that its wider application relates to the overthrow of all the kingdoms of men. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak" (chap. 2:3). The sequel of their overthrow is described, verse 14, "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." Chapter 3 describes the manifestations of divine power by which the kingdom of God will be established in the earth.

ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah's prophecy concerns God's severe judgments upon Judah for their transgressions (chap. 1), and upon Ammon, Moab, and Philistia, for their wickedness. It also contains gracious promises of ultimate deliverance for Israel, and for the whole world when "I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent" (chap. 3:9). These words will be fulfilled when "I will gather her that was driven out, and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame" (verse 19). The partial restoration of the Jews to their own land, now an accomplished fact, is the sure guarantee of the early fulfillment of the prophet's words.

HAGGAI

Haggai was contemporary with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple after the Babylonian captivity. The theme of his utterances was that the rebuilding foreshadowed a glorious restoration, when God would "shake the heavens, and the earth, and the dry land...and the desire of all nations shall come" (chap. 2:6-7). It is a reference to the coming of Christ as Israel's King, and the erection in the earth of a house of prayer for all nations. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts" (chap. 2:9). This glorious event will be the sequel to the overthrowing of the throne of kingdoms, and the destruction of the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen (verse 22). Such a prophecy can have no other application than to the work of Christ at his second coming.

ZECHARIAH

Zechariah's prophecy is, in the main, a series of visions descriptive of the work of Christ and his immortalized friends in establishing the Kingdom of God in the earth. The vision of the horses (chap. 1) concludes with the words, "The earth sitteth still, and is at rest" (verse 11). Chapter 2 contains a reference to the time when "the LORD shall inherit Judah, his portion in the holy land"; chapter 3 speaks of the coming of God's servant

"the BRANCH"; chapter 6 declares "he shall grow up out of his place, and shall build the temple of the LORD"; chapter 9 alludes to the coming of the king who shall "speak peace unto the heathen"; chapter 12 describes the restoration of Judah; chapter 14 foretells the conflict at Armageddon resulting in the destruction of the kingdoms of men, and the enthronement of the LORD as "king over all the earth" (verse 9).

MALACHI

Malachi, the last of the prophets in Old Testament times, lived in the days immediately following the work of Ezra and Nehemiah. He protested against the laxity which had crept in among the people who were formerly so enthusiastic in the Lord's work, and especially did he reprove the priests for their neglect and infidelity. He foretold the coming of Christ as the "messenger of the covenant," and described the work he would perform in purifying the earth of all its evil elements. The following points should be particularly noted: the universal character of the Kingdom of God (chap. 1:11); the second coming of Christ (chap. 3:2); the delightful future of the promised land (chap. 3:12); the keeping of books of remembrance (chap. 3:16); the rewards of righteous and wicked (chap. 4). The readings from the New Testament for the month are: Hebrews, chapters 6 to 13; the epistles of James, Peter, John, Jude, and the book of Revelation.

HEBREWS

This epistle was intended to teach Jewish converts the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant over Moses and the Old Covenant. Chapter 1 demonstrates Christ's superiority over the Angels, chapter 3 his higher authority than Moses, chapter 7 the greater dignity of Christ's Melchizedec priesthood than the Aaronic, chapter 8 shows how the New Covenant is "better" than the Old, chapter 9 the contrast between the sacrifice of Christ and the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic ritual. Many first principles are taught in this epistle; chiefly, the nature and character of Christ (7:26, 27), the purpose of his sacrifice (9:26), his second coming (9:28). Chapter 11 teaches the imperative need for faith in God and His promises (verse 6), the nature of those promises (verses 8-16), and the practical effect of faith in those who possess it (verses 33-40). Chapters 12 and 13 contain many exhortations for the guidance of faithful men and women, all of which are summed up in the statement, "here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (chap. 13:14).

JAMES

This epistle is largely devoted to exhortations for the observance of the followers of Christ. Notice how the apostle speaks of temptation, "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed" (chap. 1:14). There is no countenance here of the doctrine of an outside tempter in the form of an immortal, personal devil. Observe the reference to Abraham as an example of faith and works (chap. 2:22). Mark the

allusions to the root causes of war and all wickedness (chaps. 3:15; 4:1), and to the second coming of Christ as the only hope for mankind (5:7).

PETER, JOHN, JUDE

Attention is drawn to the following doctrines of Divine Truth taught by the apostles in the letters bearing their names: the inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:20); the Fatherhood of God (1 John 1:3); the Sonship of Christ (1 John 4:15); his participation in human nature (1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 4:3); his sinless life (1 Peter 2:22); his atoning work (1 John 3:8; 4:9); his resurrection (1 Peter 1:3); his second coming (2 Peter 3:4); his judgment seat (1 Peter 4:17; Jude 6); the reward of the righteous (1 John 2:25); the necessity for baptism (1 Peter 3:21); the mortality of man (1 Peter 1:24); the declension from the One Faith (2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4); the necessity for correct belief (2 John 10). These doctrines are comprehended in “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3) for which true believers should earnestly contend.

REVELATION

The understanding of this book is dependent upon a knowledge of “the things concerning the kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ.” It treats of the events leading up to and consequent upon the revelation (appearing, second coming) of Jesus Christ. Its scope is defined (chap. 1:1) as being “to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass,” i.e. from the days of John (A.D. 96) to the consummation of the Divine Purpose in the earth. These matters were revealed by sign, or symbols (chap. 1:3). The book consists of four main divisions, viz., an introduction, the opening of the seven seals, the blowing of seven trumpets, the pouring out of seven vials resulting in the completion of the purpose. Each division is prefaced by a vision of the Kingdom of God. The introduction contains seven letters of warning and encouragement. The first six seals deal with the conflict between paganism and Christianity from A.D. 98 to 324. The seventh seal comprises the period covered by the trumpets and vials. The first six trumpets relate to the inroads of the barbarians upon the Roman Empire, the uprising of Mohammedanism, and the growth of the Papacy. The seventh trumpet covers the period of the vials. These date from the days of the French Revolution to the establishment of the Kingdom of God. A simple exposition of this interesting and important book will be found in the work entitled *Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse*, by Robert Roberts.

Christ-Mass: Touch Not The Unclean Thing

“Learn not the way of the heathen ... for the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest ... they deck it with silver and gold” —Jeremiah 10:2-4.

THE teachings of Scripture are directed toward developing an intense desire for that which is better, more powerful, stronger, holier, closer to divine principle and standard; toward the arousing of godly and spiritual yearnings that find their satisfaction and peace only in a constant upward effort toward conformity with the Perfect Example: off with the Old Man, on with the New.

The glorious struggle of life must not be viewed as an unhappy, burdensome, stoical battle against what we really desire. The secret is rather a gradual, joyful education and training of the inclinations toward BETTER things; an opening up of our natural, dark, ignorant minds to divine Love and Light and Holiness —

“Yet show I unto you a MORE EXCELLENT WAY” (1 Cor. 12:31).

“Overcome evil WITH GOOD” (Romans 12:21).

God says to us, ‘Here is a BETTER, a more excellent Way.’ The life in the Truth is a GROWTH: a movement ever forward and upward; a progressive advancement toward greater light and fuller understanding. God desires us to want to get as close as possible to Him, and as far as possible away from the customs of the world: especially the superstitious and ‘religious’ customs. If we are not deeply moved with this desire, there is little hope for us attaining the Kingdom.

Baptism is only the first step of a long journey, a bare beginning: to STOP at that point is suicide. We can all surely call to mind passages which emphasize this essential divine principle of growth and development and transformation—

“Be ye TRANSFORMED by the RENEWING of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

“GROW in grace and... knowledge” (2 Peter 3:18).

“Put on the New Man which is renewed in KNOWLEDGE” (Col.3:10).

“GROW UP unto him in ALL things” (Eph.4:15).

“Every man that hath this Hope in him PURIFIETH himself (1 John 3:3).

And so the man of God, through constant application to the enlightening Word, is gradually molded from weakness and ignorance to greater and greater strength of purpose, character and spiritual perception. We dare not remain simple ‘babes.’

Let us approach this subject from this point of view: eager to learn, to ascertain the true FACTS, to consider the holy spiritual principles which bear upon those facts, to put away anything unclean or even doubtful—that we may in all things better pursue the good, acceptable, perfect will of our holy God.

MOST HOLIDAYS ARE PAGAN-CATHOLIC

ONE thing immediately strikes us forcibly, which perhaps we may have never noticed before. That is, that most of the present historical anniversaries that the world keeps are ghostly hangovers from the time when the Mother of Harlots held undisputed sway over 'times and seasons,' and the 'bodies and souls of men,' AND that many of them were borrowed by the Catholic Church from paganism.

Many, of course, are now only unfamiliar names to most of us: Candlemass, Epiphany, St. Stephen's, Michaelmass, All Saints, Whitsuntide, Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Plough Monday, Twelfth Night, and scores of others. But some still remain prominent, as grim relics of an age of gross and incredible superstition.

'SAINT' VALENTINE, for instance, was a romantically-minded bishop of the 3rd century, martyred (at least according to legend) for performing 'christian' marriages against the laws of the Emperor.

'SAINT' PATRICK converted Ireland to Catholicism, and immortalized the shamrock by using it to demonstrate the superstition of the triple unity of the 'Trinity.'

EASTER is named from a pagan Saxon goddess of spring. Many ancient heathen nations revered the egg as the symbol of the beginning of life: it is from Teuton mythology that rabbit-laid eggs appear among Easter superstitions. Dressing up in new clothes for Easter goes back to Constantine's time. The [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) says—

“The name Easter is a survival from the old Teutonic mythology. It is derived from Eostre or Ostara, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring ... There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers. The sanctity of special times was an idea absent from the minds of the first Christians.”

HALLOWE'EN: Of this, the [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) says—
“Hallowe'en long antedates Christianity. History shows that the main celebrations of Hallowe'en were purely Druidical [ancient Britain]. The Druids believed in the calling together of certain wicked souls on Hallowe'en by Saman, lord of death. Upon the Druidic ceremonies were grafted some of the characteristics of the Roman festival in honor of Pomona [pagan Italian goddess of fruits and gardens] held about Nov. 1, in which nuts and apples, representing the winter store of fruits, played an important part.”

And this became the Roman Catholic 'All Hallows,' or 'Festival of All Saints,' and was so passed on to a besotted world. The [Encyclopedia Americana](#) says—

“Hallowe'en is associated in the popular imagination with the prevalence of supernatural influences, and is clearly a RELIC OF PAGAN TIMES”

CHRIST-MASS, too, we find is fundamentally of 'religious' origin (if superstitious paganism can be called 'religion'), but it is FAR from exclusively, or even principally, 'Christian.' Most of its innumerable customs, traditions and superstitions are of pagan origin. But the mystery-working of the Catholic Church has greatly complicated them by the addition of priests and madonnas and holy waters, and signs of the cross.

We must recognize the whole corrupt Babylonian system as a total unit, all equally part of the same Apostasy. The better we perceive, the less we will desire to have any part in heathen customs. When, by study, we come to perceive fully, we shall be shocked and revolted at the idea of having anything to do with it. We shall find it repulsive. We shall want to get as far away from it as we possibly can. Anyone who GROWS in the Truth must inevitably come to this conviction. The tragedy is that many never grow.

WE FIND, ABOVE ALL THINGS, THAT 'CHRIST-MASS' HAS COME TO US IN ITS PRESENT FORM AS BASICALLY AND PRIMARILY A ROMAN CATHOLIC INSTITUTION. To this great system of iniquity it owes its consolidation, establishment, permanence and popularity.

THE TIME OF THE YEAR

For the period of the year in which it is held, it is indebted to pagan sources. This time of the year—following the harvest, and centering about the winter solstice (shortest day of year), when the days again began to lengthen—has almost universally been a period of festivity and religious significance in the northern hemisphere ages before the spread of Christianity.

Regarding the date, most commentators agree that from many points of view, no date could be more unlikely to be that of Christ's birth. There is no month in the year in which respectable ecclesiastical authorities have not confidently placed the birth of Jesus. The date is undeniably pagan: even Catholic authorities admit that. The [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) (1949, article 'Christmas') says—

“CHRISTMAS (the 'Mass of Christ') ... Clement of Alexandria (about 200 AD) mentions several speculations on the date of Christ's birth, and condemns them as superstitious ... The exact day and year of Christ's birth have never been satisfactorily settled. When the Fathers of the Church in AD 340 decided upon a date to celebrate the event, they wisely (!) chose the day of the Winter Solstice, which was firmly fixed in the minds of the people, and which was their MOST IMPORTANT FESTIVAL.”

The Encyclopedia Americana (1946, article 'Christmas') says the same—

“CHRISTMAS, the 'Mass of Christ'... In the 5th century the Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the Birth of Sol (the Sun)... Among the German and Celtic tribes, the Winter Solstice was considered an important point of the year, and they held their chief festival of Yule to commemorate the return of the burning-wheel (the sun).” Webster derives 'Yule' from Old Norse Jol, meaning 'Winter Feast.' Schaff-Herzog says: 'The Scandinavian Juul, and the Anglo-Saxon Geol, mean 'wheel,' and refer to the Winter Solstice.'

And Everyman's Encyclopedia says—

“CHRISTMAS (the Mass of Christ) ... It is certain that the time now fixed could not by any possibility have been the period of Jesus' birth. The choice of this season was probably due to the general recognition that the Winter Solstice was the turning point of the year.”

THE PAGAN FOUNDATIONS

It was during the period of the ascendancy of the Roman Empire that Christ-Mass originated. Consequently we find that pagan Roman customs played the major part in fixing its date and characteristics. Its general season, however, was later found to coincide with important religious superstitions of the north European barbarians (who also worshiped the Sun and marked the Solstice), and this too played a large part in its development.

Alfred Hottes, Christmas Fact and Fancy*—

“The roots of Christmas observance go deeply into the folklore of the Druids, Scandinavians, Egyptians and Romans.”

The Chambers Encyclopedia records—

“Many of the beliefs and usages of the Old Germans, and also of the Romans, relating to this period, passed over from heathenism to Christianity.”

R. J. Campbell, in The Story of Christmas*, declares—

“There are not a few popular observances associated with the Christmas season which have NOTHING TO DO with the Christian religion and the birth of Jesus. Most of these observances are older than Christianity, and some of them—it must be confessed—are NOT OF VERY ELEVATED ORIGIN.”

William Auld, in Christmas Traditions*, notes—

“There are the green garlands, the marvelous trees, the mystic fire and lights, and customs many ... still clustering about the great midwinter feast—all of which descend to us from the PAGAN CHILDHOOD OF THE RACE.”

T. G. Crippen, in Christmas and Christmas Lore*, confesses—

“The Feast of the Nativity rather incorporated than supplanted various heathen festivals. It was therefore only natural that RELICS OF HEATHEN PRACTICE should survive as traditional customs.”

The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* confirms this—

“MOST of the Christian customs [related to Christmas] now prevailing in Europe, or recorded from former times, are HEATHEN customs which have been absorbed or tolerated by the Church. The Christian feast has inherited these customs from two sources: Roman and Teutonic PAGANISM.”

And the Catholic Encyclopedia* (note the source) admits—

“There is NO DOUBT that the original Christian nuclei attracted PAGAN accretions.”

The Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia similarly says—

“There were non-Christian elements present in the origin of Christmas. The giving of presents was a Roman custom. The Yule-tree [modern 'Christmas Tree'] and the Yule-log are remnants of old Teutonic NATURE-WORSHIP.”

All these sources, be it noted, are friends of Christmas. They are not exposing its corrupt background: they are rather glorying in it. They regard its heathen-Catholic origin as a delightful and intriguing asset. We find exactly the same picture in standard, independent reference books. The Encyclopedia Britannica says—

“Many current customs date back to pre-Christian origins: among them are Christmas decorations. The Romans ornamented their temples and homes with green boughs and flowers for the Saturnalia [Dec. 17-23] ... The Druids gathered mistletoe and hung it in their homes; the Saxons used holly and ivy.”

And Everyman's Encyclopedia declares—

“The practice of decorating churches is pagan in its origin.”

And this is from the Encyclopedia Americana—

“The holly, the mistletoe, the Yule log and the wassail bowl are relics of pre-Christian times ... The Christmas tree has been traced back to the Romans.”

*All asterisked books were obtained from the Public Library.

ORIGINALLY BABYLONIAN

Alexander Hislop, in his monumental “Two Babylons,” goes even further back—

“The Christmas-tree, now so common among us, was equally common in pagan Rome and pagan Egypt ... The festivals of the Roman Church are innumerable, but five of the most important may be singled out for

elucidation, viz: CHRISTMAS, Lady-day, Easter, the Nativity of St. John, and the Feast of the Assumption. Each and all of these can be proved to be Babylonian.

“It is admitted by the most learned and candid writers of all parties that, within the Christian Church, no such festival as Christmas was ever heard of till the 3rd century, and that not till the 4th century was far advanced did it gain much observance ...

“This tendency on the part of Christians to meet Paganism half-way was very early developed. We find Tertullian, even in his day, about the year 230, bitterly lamenting the inconsistency of the disciples of Christ in this respect, and contrasting it with the strict fidelity of the pagans to their own superstitions. 'By us,' he says, 'the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and the Matronalia are now frequented, gifts are carried to and fro, and sports and banquets are celebrated with uproar. Oh, how much more faithful are the heathen to their religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the Christians.'

“Upright men (continues Hislop) strove to stem the tide, but in spite of all their efforts the Apostacy went on till the Church, with the exception of a small remnant, was submerged under pagan superstition ... THAT CHRISTMAS WAS ORIGINALLY A PAGAN FESTIVAL IS BEYOND ALL DOUBT.”

SATURNALIA: CLIMAX OF ROME'S YEAR

THIS period of the year was one of great festivity for the pagan Romans. First came the celebrated Saturnalia, beginning Dec. 17. This feast of the god Saturn, the Roman deity of seed and sowing, finds much mention in all commentaries on Christ-Mass. One says—

“The Roman Saturnalia was characterized by processions, singing, lighting candles, adorning houses with laurels and green trees, giving presents.”

Again from the Religious Encyclopedia—

“The Saturnalia provided the model for most of the merry customs of Christmas. The time was one of general mirth. All classes exchanged gifts, the commonest being candles and dolls. Christmas inherited the general merriment: games, giving of gifts, abundance of sweetmeats, and—as to the more ceremonious elements—the burning of candles.”

The Encyclopedia Britannica relates similarly—

“Christmas customs are an evolution from times that long antedated the Christian period: a descent from seasonal, pagan, religious, and national practices ... The god Saturn's great festival was the Saturnalia. Business, public and private, was at a standstill, schools closed, presents were exchanged, the traditional ones being candles and dolls.”

Likewise the Encyclopedia Americana—

“At the commencement of this festival, a great number of candles were lighted in the temple of Saturn ... no business was transacted, schools kept holiday, law courts were closed. Jests and freedom everywhere prevailed, and all ceased from their various occupations.”

Campbell, in The Story of Christmas*, further says—

“The Romans adopted from earlier folk-customs the rituals which appear in their Saturnalia, and which have been CARRIED OVER INTO THE OBSERVANCE OF MODERN CHRISTMAS. There was giving of presents, feasting, drinking, and decorating with evergreens.”

Auld says again, in his Christmas Traditions*—

“Much of the spirit of this old Roman festival of the Saturnalia passed into Christmas celebration. The early Puritans, witnessing the jolly antics of grotesque fools (the 'Lords of Merry Disport'), never had any doubt in the matter ... That transient [that is, shallow and passing] feeling which blossoms at Christmastime OWES AS MUCH TO THE KIND GOD SATURN as to the loving Son of Man ... This is the Christmas, which mixed with a LITTLE, sentimental Christianity, lies so pleasantly in the genial pages of Dickens.”

BUFFOONERY AND BLASPHEMY

A major feature of the pagan Saturnalia festival was the reversal of all order and dignities: a mock turning everything upsidedown. This was carried to great lengths at Christmastime in the Church of the Middle Ages. In England it was customary to appoint a 'Lord of Misrule' or 'Abbot of Unreason' who presided over the blasphemous foolery. The Encyclopedia Britannica says—

“Merrymaking came to have a share in Christmas observance, even while emphasis was on the religious phase ... A Lord of Misrule and his jester directed the revels, and kept them uproarious.”

The Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia adds this—

“In England an 'Abbot of Misrule' was chosen in every large household; in Scotland, an 'Abbot of Unreason.' During the term of the festival he was the master of the house.”

We discover, with shock and surprise that it was quite customary for even the clergy to let down all barriers of restraint within the Church itself at the Christmas season. Crippen relates (which seems almost unbelievable)—

“At Vespers [the evening prayers], at the end of the Magnificat [hymn of praise to God], the whole service was turned into burlesque. Dice were cast, and black puddings [blood sausage] were eaten, on the altar, ludicrous songs were sung, and old leather was burned as mock incense.

In some places an ass was led into the Church, in whose honor a mock hymn was chanted, with a bray for a refrain.”

The Encyclopedia Americana confirms this, saying—

“On St. Nicholas' Day, a 'Boy Bishop' was elected, who exercised a burlesque episcopal jurisdiction, and parodied ecclesiastical functions and ceremonies.”

Such is the height and stability and value of a religion grounded on sentiment and superstition. Auld adds—

“All through the Middle Ages the two rivers of RIOT and RELIGION flowed together.”

SIGALLARIA AND BRUMALIA

Following the Saturnalia in Rome was the Sigallaria, or Doll Festival, another obvious link with modern Christmas. Then on the great day, Dec. 25 itself, came the Brumalia (from bruma: Shortest day) — the religious observance of the sun-worshippers. This was known also as Natalis Solus Invicti: the 'Birth of the Unconquerable Sun'—the date when the days began again to lengthen. It is significant that the Catholic Encyclopedia itself says—

“The well-known solar feast of Natalis Invicti, celebrated on Dec. 25, has a strong claim for the responsibility of our Christmas date.”

On this point, the Encyclopedia America says—

“In the 5th century the Western Church ordered Christmas to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol.”

And Everyman's Encyclopedia declares—

“The observance which especially influenced the Christian Church was probably the Roman festival of the Winter Solstice, celebrated on Dec. 25.”

Then came the Kalends of January, and finally the Juvenalia (Children's Festival), both of which have contributed their share to the modern Christ-mass. With very odd logic, but typical of the thinking of the flesh, Crippen remarks—

“Surely it was well that all these should be COMBINED IN ONE GREAT CHRISTIAN FEAST, and their ancient significance transferred in the light of the Gospel. Many customs obtained a new lease of life.

“In Egypt, as in Rome, the new festival would coincide with the birthday of the Sun-God. And the northern barbarians would find it practically coincident with their own Yule. It seems to have been the festival of the god Thor.”

Again from Auld—

“After the barbarians were Christianized, all the customs and SUPERSTITIONS which had belonged from time immemorial to their

own Yuletide began to CLUSTER ABOUT CHRISTMAS. When the season calls up in the mind crackling fires on the hearth, lighted candles, rooms adorned with evergreens, bright berries and flowers, feast and frolic—these are the GENUINE PAGAN ELEMENTS.”

WHEN THE CATHOLICS INVENTED CHRISTMAS

Regarding the period when Catholicism originated Christmas, the Catholic Encyclopedia says it was NOT among the early festivals of the Church, because Ireneus and Tertullian, at the end of the 2nd century, omit it from their list of feasts. The first evidence of any observance of the birth of Christ (says this same authority) appears about 200 AD in Egypt. It was not earlier than 330 AD that Dec. 25 was chosen by any 'Pope,' and it was not universally accepted till long after that, for the position and authority of the 'Pope' was then still far from established. In the Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia, we are told—

“From the beginning of the 4th century, when the restless searchings of the nature and person of Christ drove men's minds into many singular errors, the Eastern Church began to feel the importance of emphasizing the actual birth of Christ by a separate festival ... The date once fixed, Christmas gradually became one of the three great annual festivals of the Church.”

And from the Abbott-Conant Dictionary of Religious Knowledge—

“Christmas seems to have first appeared in the Roman Church after the middle of the 4th century. At a somewhat later period it spread into Eastern Asia. It was not received with equal readiness by all the churches. Some denounced it as an innovation ... It was not till the 6th century that anything like unanimity prevailed as to the day to be observed.

“The manner in which this festival came to be observed in the Romish Church, and through it to the other churches, is as follows: In this season of the year, a series of heathen festivals occurred, the celebration of which was in many ways closely interwoven with the whole civil and social life of the Romans.

“These festivals had an import which easily admitted of being spiritualized, and transformed into a Christian sense. First came the Saturnalia, which represented the Golden Age, and abolished for a while the distinction of ranks.

“Then came the custom, peculiar to this season, of making presents, afterwards transferred to the Christmas festival.

“After the Saturnalia came the Festival of Infants [Juvenalia], at which the children were presented with images.

“Next came a festival still more analogous to Christmas, that of the shortest day [Brumalia], the Winter Solstice, the Birthday of the New Sun,

about to return once more toward the earth ... Hence the celebration of the Nativity of Christ was transferred to December 25.

“In the Romish Church, Christmas is a very high festival.”

The SOLSTICE means (Latin) 'sun standing still': the two points in the year (longest and shortest days) when the sun seems to stop and reverse its inclination (actually due to earth's 22½° inclination).

HOW THE EARLY CHRISTIANS FELT

Regarding the attitude of early Christians toward such things, Auld says—

“As for the first believers, they had NOT THE SLIGHTEST INTEREST IN ANYTHING OF THE KIND. Hope in the Lord's imminent return from heaven in great power and glory was the flame that fired their devotion.”

In the book, The Customs of Mankind*, we read—

“Christmas was originally a festival of the Winter Solstice. It was customary to hold great feasts in honor of the HEATHEN GODS. The early teachers of Christianity PROHIBITED THESE FESTIVALS as unsuited to the character of Christ. Yet the symbols and customs of the old festivals are adapted to the new, and so we find Christmas patterned with many customs of pagan origin.

“To the mind of the Puritans, Christmas smelled to heaven of idolatry ... The Puritans abolished Christmas as a hateful relic of Popery.”

Tertullian—who wrote (says Encyclopedia Britannica) 'in a period when a LAX SPIRIT OF CONFORMITY had seized the churches': about 200 AD—says regarding decorating with evergreens and ceremonial candles—

“Let those who have no Light, light their lamps, let them affix to their posts laurels. YOU [Christians] are the Light of the World, a tree ever green. If you have renounced temples, make not your own gate a temple [by heathen wreaths].

Crippen says—

“At the time of persecution, Christians were detected by NOT decorating their houses at the Saturnalia.”

Some conformed to the heathen customs to avoid suspicion, and to appear like their neighbors, so they would not be looked on as odd and different. This practice was strongly condemned by the early church. And Campbell relates—

“There can be no doubt that [some of] the early Christians also frequently shared in the frolics of their heathen neighbors; and the fathers of the Church had considerable difficulty in prevailing on their members to refrain from such unedifying pastimes.

“The early Christians discouraged the use of evergreen decorations in Christian homes and assemblies, because their display had long been associated with heathen festivals. Bishop Martin of Braga forbade the use of all greenery and 'other dangerous Kalend customs'.”

Crippen remarks—

“So long as heathenism was in full vigor, the ancient Christians were puritanically jealous of anything that might seem like coquetting with idolatry. But when heathenism was declining, there was a disposition to adopt its customs. What had been heathenish became rich with Christian (!) symbol.”

Note that last statement. Auld too betrays the same perverted outlook—

“The use of evergreens is one of the happy (!) contributions which PAGANISM made to the Christian festival. At first the Church frowned upon this intrusion of paganism into the sacred season. But altogether, the ancient Church was wisely tolerant (!) in her attitude to heathen IDEAS and customs ... hence the curious and interesting MIXTURES of IDEAS—pagan and Christian—which became charmingly (!) entwined.”

After unsuccessfully fighting the adoption of pagan customs, says Campbell—

“The clergy endeavored to transform the heathen revels into amusements which—if not really more spiritual in character—had at least the merit of recognizing the authority of the Church.”

The Encyclopedia Britannica confirms this—

“As Christianity spread among the peoples of pagan lands, many of the practices of the Winter Solstice were blended with those of Christianity, because of the liberal ruling of Pope Gregory I and the cooperation of the missionaries.”

That is, instead of teaching the converts to abandon their old superstitions, and to start a clean new life solely according to the Way of God, the Church found it more practical and profitable to give the old superstitions new names, and mix Christianity with paganism.

And such was the slow but deadly course by which what was originally the faithful and holy Ecclesia of Christ exchanged purity for pleasure, and the friendship and Way of God for the friendship and ways of the world.

REFORMATION . . . THEN DECLENSION

In times of reformation, and attempted return to Bible ways, there have been periodic revulsions against these heathen corruptions, but they have not endured. In 529 AD, the Emperor Justinian decreed that no one should work on the Catholic festival of Christmas. At the Reformation, 1000

years later, the revulsion against the Catholic superstitions was such that laws were made against not working on Christ-mass. Crippen says—

“The leaders of the Reformation in Scotland thought the Roman Church was too bad to be mended. In their view, it must be ended, and a new beginning made strictly on the model of the New Testament.

“Now certainly the New Testament MADE NO MENTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL FESTIVALS. So the new beginning included the sweeping of them all away. On Dec. 26, 1583, the Glasgow Kirk Session put five persons to public penance for keeping the 'superstitious day called YULE.’”

The early Puritan settlers of America were of the same mind. Christmas, they declared, 'smelt to heaven of idolatry,' and they abolished it as a 'relic of Popery' [and it certainly is]. In Massachusetts in 1659, a law was passed that—

“Whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas, either by forbearing of labor, feasting, or in any other way, shall be fined five shillings.”

In their earlier, sounder days, when they valued the Bible as the Word of God, and were trying to be guided by it, the Presbyterians and Baptists were similarly opposed to these superstitious observances, on the same grounds, but they have long since drifted back to the 'ways of the heathen.' In England in 1644, at a time of respect for the Word, and of revulsion against Catholicism, the observance of Christmas was forbidden by an act of Parliament.

SANTA CLAUS - CHRISTMAS TREE

THE name 'Santa Claus' is clearly recognizable as derived from the good Bishop 'Saint Nicholas,' patron saint of beggars and thieves. In the Middle Ages, thieves were known as 'clerks of St. Nicholas.' In Europe he travels about in all his bishop's regalia riding a white horse (which he inherited through amalgamation with Scandanavian mythology from the god Wodin, who was engaged in exactly the same activities at that period of the year). His descent down the chimney is traceable to similar habits of the Norse goddess Hertha. Auld writes about St. Nicholas—

“The names and attributes of the mysterious purveyors of gifts disclose a most CONFUSED MIXTURE OF PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN NOTIONS. All kinds of bugbears and bogies figure in the European Christmas. By their names they suggest a loose connection with St. Nicholas, but by their activities they betray unmistakable relationship with the weird beings of pagan mythology.”

We have seen how the Christmas tree is traced clearly to ancient paganism. Virgil, the Roman poet, speaks of decorating pine trees in honor

of Bacchus, the god of drinking and revelry. Hislop connects similar customs with Egyptian cults.

And—in a strange, latter day reversal—pagan Russia has borrowed back the pagan 'Christmas' tree. The Moscow News reports that Moscow alone has 10,000 of such trees. Colored pictures show these 'New Year' trees, with all their tinsel and bright baubles and lights, to be indistinguishable from 'Christmas' trees, except there are no 'Christian' symbols, and the crowning Star at the top is red. And Russia's genial 'Grandfather Frost' associated with these trees, with his jolly face, and bushy white beard, and suit of red: who can distinguish him from St. Nick? He is St. Nick, stripped of his adopted Catholicism, and returned to his pagan origin.

Mistletoe, of course, is well-known as inherited—and introduced into Christmas—from the Druid priesthood of ancient heathen Britain. For centuries the Church forbade its use because of the superstitions attached to it. It was so sacred a talisman that enemies meeting beneath it laid down their arms. (The world still has a relic of this heathen superstition.)

Miscellaneous Christmas superstitions are far too numerous to mention. Campbell, in summing up, comes surprising close to the truth—

“There is really NOTHING IN COMMON between the mystery of the Word made flesh for man's salvation, and the orgies of eating and drinking and horseplay associated with the paganism of pre-Christian times, and PERPETUATED AT THE CHRISTMAS SEASON in our own as well as earlier generations.

“There's goodwill in both, but one is CARNAL, and the other SPIRITUAL.”

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Brethren and sisters, how do we—called out to be holy sons and daughters of the Lord—stand in relation to these confused and corrupt Catholic-Pagan things of the world? Admittedly, it all appeals powerfully to the flesh. It is 'pretty,' it is exciting, it is the popular way of the crowd, it is pleasant to the senses. It is all tinsel, and hoopla, and music, and glistening stars, and twinkling lights. It has everything that attracts the shallow, juvenile, fleshly mind. The Christmas songs and Christmas stories are concocted and executed by consummate actors for the fullest emotional effect.

Doubtless the children of Israel, indulging in the 'pretty' Canaanite religious customs, said to themselves (or in self-excuse to others), 'There really isn't any harm. Of course I do not really mean it in a religious way. It really means nothing to me, and it is all so pretty and pleasant. I really serve the Lord, but I just like a little fun and relaxation. Why do we have to be so different?'

There is absolutely nothing scriptural about Christ-mass. Nothing like it, or leading to it, or justifying it, is ever mentioned in the Bible, or even in early 'Christian' records. We have seen that it is a 'religious,' blasphemous Catholic-Pagan abomination. Why should holy brethren and sisters of Christ ever want to have anything to do with such things of the Apostasy? Surely we desire holiness!

We cannot really say what part of this fleshly mixture—the Pagan part or the Catholic part—is the more objectionable to God, but either one alone should be enough to keep a child of God from having anything to do with it. In the Revelation, two eternally antagonistic classes appear—

BRANDED WITH THE MARK OF THE BEAST

“ALL NATIONS drunk with the wine of the wrath of her fornication ... By [her] sorceries were ALL NATIONS deceived” (Rev. 17:2; 18:3, 23).

SANCTIFIED WITH THE SEAL OF GOD

“Lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him 144,000. THESE are they which were NOT defiled with the (apostate) women... These were redeemed from among men, being the Firstfruits unto God,... for they are without fault before the throne of God”—Rev. 14:1-4.

To which class will we be found to belong? Let us bear the following verse in mind constantly. This is what we must be continually striving toward in all we do, with all our heart and strength, or we are not of the true People of God. Can we rise to it? We can—anyone can—if they will totally give themselves to love of God—

“God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love ... to the praise of the glory of His grace”—Eph. 1:4-6.

It's a very, very high calling: but there's no peace, joy or satisfaction in anything else. —Bro.G.V.Growcott, *The Berean Christadelphian*

(A similar article was published in December 1971. This article, as printed above, encompasses all of the information contained in the other with additions added.)

What Does That Mean?

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” (1Cor. 4:1)

Why did Paul style the stewardship of the gospel given to him and his companions as “stewards of the mysteries of God”?

A mystery is something that is hidden, however when it is revealed it makes perfect sense. The use of the word in the New Testament refers to a truth long hidden but eventually revealed to man by God at the appointed time. “How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made

known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” (Eph.3:3-5)

In the second volume of *Eureka Bro. Thomas* sums up the Mystery this way: “‘The sufferings of the Christ and the glory that should follow,’ are the more general and twofold divisions of the mystery; or in other words, ‘the things concerning the Kingdom of the Deity, and the Name of Jesus Christ.’” (pg.580)

The Catholic Church uses the word “mysteries” to get around the unexplainable. They have many mysteries, such as the “Mystery of the Eucharist” Eph 6:19 (the wafer and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ); or the “Mystery of the Trinity” (three gods are actually one god). There are many other such “mysteries” but, of course none of these are scriptural. When something is a “mystery” it does not mean it is an impossibility such as the two cited above.

Other churches use these verses to create their mystery religions. They believe that esoteric teachings were communicated to an elite few, who were enjoined never to divulge the secrets. Paul’s meaning of a mystery is the exact opposite of this. Paul uses the term to herald the publication of the long-hidden secrets of God to the entire world. “And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,” (Eph. 6:19) Chief among these is the fact that God is now welcoming Gentiles and affirming them as having equal standing with Jewish believers.

However, as Bro. Thomas goes on to elaborate on the mystery. He shows Daniel desiring to understand the 1260- and 1335-year periods “but” he says, “I understood not;” In Rev. 10:7 we are told, “But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.” The mystery of God is complete once these time periods run out and the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ are complete.

We like Daniel, desire to understand. Bro. Thomas says, “This would have been very gratifying to his curiosity and to ours.” This, however, was not to be revealed. It is up to us to be prepared whenever it may be. We can rest assured that there is a “set time” that is running out when “the mystery of God should be finished.” For now “we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1Cor. 13:12)

Are we ready for that day? It will soon be here!

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