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Time is on the Wing

The Word of God reminds us of the shortness of time and of the fact that we shall not live here always. We are in this world for a short time at the longest. How swiftly do our years pass away, yea, faster than a weaver's shuttle. Before we are aware of it we have lived out our years. As we draw near to the end of another year in time we ought to remind ourselves that we are posting fast to the eternal world — to the unseen world of spirits which is now hidden from our eyes but which will soon be our eternal abiding place.

It is in the light of the great eternity that we will see the shortness of our time here. It is true that many live out their lives in this world without any thought of the eternity to which they are going. This is surely the height of folly. Were we going on a journey from one place to another in this world how diligently we would make preparation for it. How sin has blinded us when we live without a thought of the eternal world! May the Lord be pleased to open our eyes that we may be brought to realise the awful solemnity of passing from time to eternity.

Because time is passing so rapidly, the time is very short that we have to prepare for an endless eternity. None can say that they have time enough to prepare for the eternal world when they see death approaching. We know not what a day or an hour will bring forth. We know not when the messenger of death may arrive on our doorstep to take us away from time to the eternal world. It will be in vain then to plead for an extension of our time here. The hour of our departure has come and we must go hence. We must leave all that we had in this world for we cannot take anything hence. Naked came we into the world and naked shall we return thither. So is the testimony of God's Word.

What need there is to value time aright. Multitudes undervalue the preciousness of time. It is the time of opportunity for a lost and ruined

soul to seek the Lord while He may be found. It is not by a careless search that one is to obtain a blessing but by an earnest and diligent seeking after God with his whole heart. "Ye shall seek Me and find Me," says the Lord in His own word, "when ye shall seek for me with all your heart." Diligently, earnestly, importunately must the needy soul seek the Saviour of sinners. Where there is a true seeking after God and after the salvation that is in Jesus Christ, the soul will not cease its seeking notwithstanding many discouragements. The world will put obstacles in the way and the devil will lay snares for the feet of the seeking soul. His own evil heart also will discourage him. Even professed believers will at times hinder instead of encouraging the seeking soul. Yet that soul cannot give up its seeking after God and will never cease to seek after God until it finds what it is seeking — God as its God — God as a reconciled God in Jesus Christ.

The Psalmist who had found the Lord had to say — how short a time I shall on earth remain. My days, he said, are as a handbreadth and again, mine age is in Thine eye as nothing. If that was true of the Psalmist, is it not true also of sinners yet out of Christ? Is it not time for such to seek the Lord until He will send down a blessing upon them? Let us apply to our own soul the truth of the shortness of our days. Let us note each succeeding day, yea, each succeeding hour of each day; yea each succeeding moment of each day with alarm if we be still out of Christ. Let us prize every moment of every day, realising how much hangs upon it.

The year is drawing to a close. Where is the end of the year to find us? Is it to find us a stranger to grace and to God? Is it to find us still outside the kingdom of God's dear Son? Can it be that after hearing the Word of God and having the Gospel preached to us that we are still in our sin, still without God and without hope in the world?

Oh, let the approaching end of the year by the blessing of God bestir us to seek the Lord while He may be found and to call upon Him while He is near. He is saying to us in His own Word: "Let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him and to our God for He will abundantly pardon."

Sermon

by Septimus Sears

"To die is gain." Philippians 1: 21

Can a man stand on a more solemn spot than when his life — his span

of life — is behind him, and a vast, unbounded eternity before him? In fact we may all be said to stand continually on the margin of an eternal world: for what, at the longest, is our life? It is “even a vapour, that appeareth for a short time and then vanisheth away.”

But there are times when individuals seem especially to be on the edge of that deep without a bottom — that ocean without a shore — a vast, inexpressible, incomprehensible eternity. Now to the apostle Paul, at the time he wrote this epistle, it seemed as if death — death in a fierce form — were levelling its darts at him. It seemed as if death had got his tremendous eye upon him; his hand upon his bow; and anxious to let fly an arrow at his heart. That lion (Nero) appeared to be grinding his teeth at him; and, growling and grumbling, was waiting for the opportunity to pounce upon him, and put an end to such an enemy to the kingdom of Satan (in whose kingdom Nero was so conspicuous a member) — whose life was the means of extending the kingdom of that blessed Redeemer to whom Satan is so much opposed.

Now, in circumstances like these, what a favoured man was the apostle. He could composedly look at life, and say, “For me to live is Christ; and if it is best for me to live, as it seems to me, I shall live.” He could look at death with tranquility and calmness — without one drop of anguish or fear — without one tremor — because his faith twined peacefully around death’s conqueror, and could say, “For me to die is gain.” What a blessed testimony!

Have you ever lain apparently upon eternity’s margin? I know what it is to lie seemingly on the brink of another world in the greatest mental misery — filled with the guilt of my sins, and with slavish fears; and I have known what it is to lie, not many months ago, apparently upon that solemn brink with the love of God sweetly shed abroad in my heart. A man with his eyes open can die peacefully with Christ; but he cannot die at peace without Him. If he can say “Thou art with me”, he can exclaim, “I will fear no evil.” Grasping a precious Christ by faith will alone rightly make death easy.

But to come to the words of our text:

- I. Let us speak of the circumstances mentioned: “to die”.
- II. We will show to whom it will be no gain to die.
- III. To whom it will be gain to die, and
- IV. What the Christian man will gain by dying.

Now this is a solemn subject. May our minds be solemn, and may the Holy Spirit deign His gracious help, and shower down His heavenly blessing.

I. The Circumstance: "to die".

1. I observe it is a certain circumstance. There have been two, and but two exceptions. "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." Elijah went in a fiery chariot with a transformed body to glory. And those who shall be alive and remain to the coming of Christ shall be changed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye". The day is coming when we shall each of us drop into eternity. The day is coming when trembling hands, when a sweating brow, an oppressed heart, and a struggling chest, will announce the grim monster's dart has reached our bosom, and that our feet must ford the cold waters of the Jordan. It is a certain circumstance to each of us. We must! We must! We must die!

2. It is a near circumstance. What is human life? It is compared to the sweep of the thread from the weaver's shuttle across the frame. It is a vapour; a nothing; a shadow that vanisheth away. Have you not from a boat watched upon the wide sea the approaching shadow of a flitting cloud between the earth and the sun? It's coming — it's come — it's gone. Such is life. In a very short time — at the very longest — we must come to the solemn hour of death. Death's key must soon unlock eternity to us.

3. It is a solemn circumstance. Can there be any thing more awfully solemn? When you think that death is a circumstance that not only tears the fond wife from the bosom of her husband; that it not only snatches the parent away from his helpless children: but that it is a moment when you enter into an unchanging state of existence; that the moment after death you will commence a wail that will never close, will drop into a bottomless hell; or you will begin an endless song of praise in the celestial regions — you will strike the keynote of an everlasting anthem; you will commence to scale a height the top of which you will never reach — and bask in the beams of a sun that never will set. Man — woman — a tremendous eternity is before you, where you must howl in ceaseless anguish, or sing in undying raptures the praises of the Lamb of God.

4. And then it is a circumstance that can never be repeated. I do not know any thing about death that has struck me more than that. To die unregenerate is to be unregenerate for ever. If you die unsprinkled with blood, you can never return to seek that precious gift. If you die unclothed in Jesus' righteousness, you can never then cast away your filthy rags and cry for the best robe. If you die without a work of grace in your heart you go where such a work can never be wrought. If you die wrong, you are wrong for the unchanging condition of weal or woe that death takes you to. Can there be any thing more important than this solemn circumstance?

II. To whom will it be no gain to die?

Let us not go outside the chapel, but from seat to seat; and may each one be communing with his own heart, as if solitary before God; because it may be out of the few who are here present, there may be some to whom it will be no gain to die. If this were your dying-bed instead of a pew in a chapel, it would be a solemn moment to you.

To whom will it be no gain to die?

1. To the worldling — the thoughtless, eager, money-scraping worldling will find it no gain to die. Jesus has drawn the picture of a worldling — a man who prospered in the world — who succeeded well in business. “What must I do to bestow all my goods? I will pull down my barns and build greater.” And, having done all to make his carnal heart happy, he threw himself as it were on a bed of down, and said, “Soul, take thine ease.”

As if an immortal soul breathed from God, that can only be happy at its source; as if the soul that God is the author of, and God must be the end of, could ever be satisfied or happy with such garbage as earth can give (though we would not speak slightly of the mercies of God’s providence). “Thou fool,” said God to the man, “this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” What thousands in England are running this race! are eagerly grasping and grasping to get a sufficiency, saying “I will soon retire, and then think about eternity. Let us make hay while the sun shines: get all we can, use all the tricks and arts of trade and make provision for an independent old age.” O worldling, O man, laying up treasure for yourselves, and not rich towards God, so living and so dying, it will be no gain for you to die.

2. It will be no gain for the pleasure seeker to die. O frivolous pleasure seeker, if one should have crept in here tonight — living in what the flesh delights in, living after the flesh. Hear what God says about you, “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.” Death would prove no gain to you, except you can reckon it gain to gain a burning fire — a worm that never dies; except it be gain to gain a place among those who will call in vain for mountains to crush them, and for the rocks to bury them; a place where there is nought but the unendurable frown of the God whose wrath is hell, and whose smile is heaven.

3. Again. It will be no gain to the Pharisee to die: he being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about establishing his own righteousness, has not submitted himself to the righteousness of God. This is weaving the spider’s web. “But their webs”, says God, “shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works.” It would be no gain for the man to die who is building on the sand. He may call

his sand Catholicism — Protestantism — Independency — Baptism — Penitence — Reformation: he may call it by whatever name he pleases. All is sand in the matter of acceptance with God but one piece of ground, and that is Calvary! He builds for hell, wherever he builds, and who does not build at the Cross. He builds too low who does not build on the righteousness of Him Who "ever liveth to make intercession for all who come unto God by Him."

4. It will be no gain to the notional professor to die — the man who with sound doctrines and a clear creed is graceless: the man who, though graceless, makes his boast, "I am no Arminian; I am no Pharisee; I believe in election; I believe in God's sovereignty; I believe that Jesus died for the church and none but the church; I would not be an Arminian." I am glad of that: but Balaam believed what you believe, and he is in hell. The devils believe what you believe, and they are under the wrath of the Most High.

"True religion is more than notion,
something must be known and felt."

5. It will be no gain for the fanatic to die. You must not believe a person necessarily right because he has a feeling religion. There is true and false feeling, there is false hope. There is the fear of the wicked, as well as God's fear. There is the desire of the sluggard as well as the desire of the righteous. There is the hope of the hypocrite, as well as "a good hope through grace". There is the joy of the man whose "excellency mounts up to the skies," and yet shall "perish for ever", as well as the joy of the true believer. There is the "raging confidence of a fool", as well as the blessed confidence of a gracious man, who can say with the apostle, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." This is a serious question that exercises the hearts of God's people often. Is my experience genuine? You can never make a child of God think he has never been miserable; he knows he has, or that he has never had desires after God, or that he has never joyed in believing: he knows he has. But then the serious query with him sometimes is. Have these been spiritual convictions and desires, and enjoyment? I believe the professor never comes where the Psalmist came, in that solemn Psalm we have just read, Psalm 19. He never says sincerely, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "O make me right; right for time to serve Thee; right for eternity to enjoy Thee."

III. To whom will it be gain to die?

O, that we may be the means of picking up a child of God here. I would

not build up slight walls and daub them with untempered mortar. He that knows the worth of his own soul knows the worth of the souls of others. None, however, can sympathise with a tempest-tossed vessel of mercy as he can who has passed through the storm and tempest. The Lord told his people to be kind to strangers, because they had been strangers in the land of Egypt. "You know the heart of a stranger." You know when the iron galls his flesh; you know where the chain pinches him, and the load crushes him. Hence sympathise with him, and I think the Lord's own servants are often led through deep exercises that they may be the more "able to comfort others with the comfort wherewith they themselves are comforted of God."

1. I may say, doctrinally, it will be gain for the chosen to die. When the Lamb stood on mount Zion, they that were with Him were "called chosen, and faithful". Some of you may be fighting against electing love. It will be in vain to kick against the brazen mountain of God's decrees. It will be in vain thus to rush upon the bosses of His buckler. "He is stronger than thou; and He giveth account of none of His matters." How much better to be the soul lying at the footstool of mercy, crying out to be assured that he is one of the chosen, than to be stumbling over the great decrees of God: kicking against the pricks.

There was a time when my heart loathed this doctrine; I speak it with shame, I repined and rebelled against it; and now I feel it is one of the most wondrous mercies that God should ever have seen fit, instead of letting all men be damned as they deserved — as he let fallen angels be damned — in goodness and grace to have chosen and ransomed millions from the fall, and appointed them a portion in the skies — unfading and enduring.

2. Again, to the redeemed it will be gain to die: for it is "the ransomed of the Lord" that "shall return and come to Zion," and He shall "see" in them "of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." There is a day coming when all for whom He suffered in Gethsemane — when all whose sins crushed His holy soul at Calvary, will be presented by Him — washed in blood, clothed in spotless righteousness, faultless, without blame before the Most High Jehovah.

3. It will be gain to the quickened soul to die. All whom the Lord quickens will die no more. "I am the Resurrection and the Life; whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." Those who believe in Christ have "passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation."

“And never shall they die again,
Who in this life believe.”

It is the first work of God's Spirit to put new life into the immortal soul that previously was “dead in trespasses and sins”. This important work of the Spirit of God takes place in a moment, and is His sole work. “To God the Lord belong the issues from death.” No creature had any hand in quickening us either naturally or spiritually. “It is the Spirit that quickeneth.” He that possesses this life manifests it by certain signs.

Life, I might say, has its sorrows. Not necessarily. Adam had life once, and no sorrow. But under certain circumstances it has its sorrows. An imprisoned corpse would be without sorrow: but let life enter that corpse, its imprisonment becomes a source of sorrow. If you have spiritual life, your greatest trouble will be sin.

“O thou hideous monster sin!”

There are several things in sin that the living soul finds to be its trouble; sin's presence is its trouble; sin's load is its trouble; sin's power is its trouble; sin's lustings are its trouble; sin's tyranny is its trouble; and when the living soul cries out, “Take away all iniquity,” — deliver me from my transgressions — he means something more than “deliver me from hell”. It is, “Deliver me from sin's guilt — sin's load — sin's filth — sin's power; and finally, from sin's inbeing.”

Life has also its wants. He that is alive must have food, clothing, friends, communion. Where there is life, there are wants; and in a living soul there are wants that lie exactly parallel with the supply that is in Christ Jesus. If you are really alive, you want exactly such a Christ as is revealed in the Bible; you want just such a salvation as was effected on Calvary: you want exactly such a fulness as is treasured up in Emmanuel; you want a Saviour with offices and characters like Jesus. If a living soul, you have wants, and if without Christ you could not be satisfied; but if you have Christ, you are happy; all is well. When God gives a Christian Christ, he has given him His treasure; He has given the bride the Bridegroom; the pilgrim his home; the mariner his harbour; the refugee the city of refuge; the hungry one bread: the famished one water of life: He has given him all his desires: all his most ardent wishes; the object of his affections; the ground of his trust; the centre of his hopes; the springs of his joys, and the source of his brightest anticipations. In giving him Christ, God gives him ALL. Many a living soul is unable to lay hold of Christ, but he has in him an aching space that nothing else can fill.

It will be gain for you to die if you truly can say.

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want.”

Then again. Life has its comforts. Living people, in nearly any circumstances, are seldom without some comfort; and spiritual life has its comforts.

What a comfort to the living man are the invitations of the gospel! What does not the longing soul see in those precious invitations! They seem to him just like sending an invitation to a feast which he prefers going to above all other feasts; an invitation from the Eternal Provider of the banquet of grace. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried. If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." Do you not understand what it is for those broad invitations to be necessary to meet your soul? "Any man." "Whosoever will." John Berridge said, that he liked the word "Whosoever" better than if it had been "John Berridge" for he might have thought there were other John Berridges in the world for whom it was intended. "Whosoever will." The soul can say, "Lord, Thou knowest I will. My heart has been made willing in the day of Thy power; willing to be saved by Thee, and willing to serve Thee."

"The dearest idol I have known

Whate'er that idol be,

Help me to tear it from Thy throne,

And worship only Thee."

I might mention how the different promises and declarations of the gospel are made a comfort; but, put all together, Christ, Christ, He is the sum of the Christian's comfort: He is the well whence he draws his gladness; He is the sun in whose beams he basks and gets comfort; he is the Friend in whose communion and fellowship he can get consolation; He is the Priest, the Counsellor, into whose hands he can commit his case, and get comfort; He is the King in whose power he can confide and get comfort. O, if you want to know what is the greatest misery of the Christian — it is sin — sin; the greatest comfort of the Christian, it is Christ. Christ to teach him; Christ to save him; Christ to influence him; Christ to govern him; Christ to lead him; Christ to bring him safe home, and Christ to be his everlasting song and ALL.

4. It will be gain to the refugee to die. We read in the Scriptures that they have ground for "strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." Shall I illustrate this by Noah's ark? Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that in some respects we are in a similar position to what the world was in the days of Noah. How did things stand with the world then? Noah had erected an ark, and preached while it was being erected, and when it was completed. He preached two things — destruction for all without the ark; salvation for all within it. Everybody

ridiculed and doubted him, but a certain few, his own little family, who believed the threat against the world and the promise to Noah. And what did they do? They fled the ark. And oh, when the heavens gathered blackness, and the sea tossed and foamed, and the fountains of the great deep were broken up — when the billows rolled over the shores, and the clouds began to shower down their tremendous contents — oh then, who were the gainers, who were the losers?

Those who could do without the ark, and could afford to laugh at the ark, and at Noah, who built a ship in-land on the dry ground: they were the losers. They were the gainers who rode in safety on the bosom of the watery deep, securely shut in the ark. And if you are convinced of the filthiness of sin; if you are made to feel the holiness of God; if you are convinced you must perish out of Christ; and are brought helpless and poor, and lost, to throw yourself with all your weight of sin and guilt and helplessness and woe beneath the shadow of the Saviour's cross, it will be gain for you to die.

To what shall I compare the church and the world? It is just as if that mighty cross — that bleeding scene were in the centre of the earth, and round the centre a circle were thrown, and inside it written, "Life — life — gain — gain." Inside the circle all who are brought to believe that outside the sacred boundary is death and loss, and inside is life and gain, and through mighty grace to flee to the shadow of that cross, shelter in atoning blood, and screen their hell-deserving heads beneath a Saviour's spotless righteousness. "Happy is the people who are in such a case; yea, happy is the people whose God is the Lord."

It will be gain for such to die.

5. It will be gain to the good trees to die, that bring forth fruit. I believe there are three things the people of God especially cry out for, and cannot be satisfied without: salvation, fruitfulness and glory. They want salvation to be the starting point, fruitfulness their race course, and glory their goal. And if they cannot get these three, they cannot be content. Salvation they learn can only be got from Christ; fruitfulness they learn can only be got by abiding in Christ. I believe, however, real fruitfulness which is grace is like the human eye: it can see anything but itself. If ever you see a person who thinks himself sufficiently humble, or sufficiently spiritual, you may doubt whether such a one ever really knew anything of right fruitfulness. "Not as though I had already attained," says the Apostle. There was an humble man praying for more humility; a tender man breathing for more tenderness; a living man panting for more life; a believing man seeking for more faith; a gracious man longing for more grace.

“I want nothing,” said one, when an earthly gift was offered him, “but more grace.” Do you know what “Give me Christ” means? And the getting hold of Christ as your salvation? Does your heart cry, “More grace — more grace”? Then it will be gain for you to die. Nobody ever cried out for more grace — none in this dark world ever wanted sin crushed in them — but the joint heirs with Christ.

“Crush, dear Babe, its power within us.” They only pant to live the Christian’s life, as well as to die the Christian’s death. Can you come in here? Do you know anything in any measure of what it is for sin to be your grief; and for salvation by grace through faith, and the sweet invitations and truths of the gospel, to be in any measure your soul’s comfort? Do you know what it is to pant to live a fruitful life in separateness and dependence on God?

IV. What will the Christian gain by dying?

Oh, dear people of God, whose deepest wounds may be traced to that offence “that brought death into our world, and all our woe” — whose sweetest balm has been fetched from yonder tree, where Emmanuel bled: dear people of God, whose souls and hearts cry out, “I would be holy”.

“I would be near Thy feet,
Or at Thy bleeding side:
Feel how Thy heart does beat,
And view the purple tide:
Trace all the wonders of Thy death,
And sing Thy love in every breath.”

For you — for you — it will be gain to die. Death’s arrows levelled at thy bosom, though bitter to thy flesh, shall but kill thee into life. Even death shall prove thy friend; for

“Now his office is to wait between the saints and sin;
A porter at the heavenly gate to let the pilgrims in.”

Were you a slave in fetters bound, it would no more grieve you to have your chains smashed by a sledge hammer than to have them broken by an instrument of gold. O Christian, the day is not far distant when it will be gain to you to say, “Adieu to earth.” It will be a gain to you to be separated even from what is dear to you on earth — a gain to you to hear the welcome voice, “Child, your Father calls you home.”

1. What will the Christian gain by dying? He will gain by a loss, so to speak. He will gain freedom from every load. “We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.” He will gain a liberation from the bondage of corruption, from the burden of the flesh, and enter into eternal joy and felicity: his manacles will drop off; the prison walls fall, when

the disembodied prisoner, the long caged-up bird of paradise shall soar away and commence to warble amidst the heavenly songsters of the Eden of glory.

2. He will gain a crown — the conqueror's — the victor's crown — the successful racer's laurel. He is running the race now — he is battling with the enemy now — soon that head of yours, that is sometimes weary with the din of war, will wear a fadeless crown; soon your great and glorious Leader, in the presence of angels and archangels, of ransomed spirits made perfect, in the presence of the Eternal, will put the laurel on your brow, and say (most wonderful thing for Him to say to you), "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." O, it will be gain for thee to die!

3. You will gain a throne. Now you are often sadly subjugated — then you'll rule, then you'll triumph, with your enemies trampled under your feet. "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." "He that overcometh shall sit with Me in My throne, even as I overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."

4. You will gain a home. No longer a weary, way-worn pilgrim, but a child at home. Your soul will find its centre then, which even now attracts it. Broken off from your former centre, Calvary has attracted you by its mighty magnetism, and toward that centre you tend. Death will place you in your destined orbit, and then, through revolving ages, you'll circle amid the glittering stars of heaven, the throne of the Eternal.

The wanderer will there find a home; the weary one a resting-place; the sea-worn mariner a haven; the hungry one an immortal banquet. All your most earnest wishes will there be more than fulfilled. You'll find

"All you desire or wish below,
in the bright world to which you go."

Christian, what a gain is death! "To die is gain."

I must utter a few closing remarks. First, examine yourselves whether it will be gain for you to die. Is sin hated? Is your own righteousness distrusted? Is Christ leaned upon? Is He your only refuge? Do you want to have more grace? If so, it will be gain for you to die.

Must I not say a solemn warning word to those still without? Can I leave without a word more to those still in a state of nature? I feel that especially laid upon me to "warn every man". I know you cannot help yourselves. You are dead; you cannot live by any effort of your own. And yet will I cry with the prophesy. "O ye dry bones; hear the word of the Lord." I will prophesy to the bones; but all will be in vain without the wind. Prophesy to the wind then, O Christians, join me while I cry, "Come

from four winds and breathe upon these slain that they may live." You poor graceless sinner, you will find, if grace prevent not, death, the ugly jailer, to introduce you to the dark prison of eternal and inexpressible horrors, while the dear partaker of Jesus' grace will find death the welcome messenger to conduct him to his Father's place, where through the long ages of a blissful eternity he'll accompany the chords of his golden harp with lofty hallelujahs to God and the Lamb.

Amen.

Letter

(This letter was written from Weston-Favel to two condemned malefactors, in Northampton gaol, namely James Smart and Joseph Browne, about the middle of July 1755).

My poor fellow-sinners,

I received a letter from you, and should have visited you; but my health is so much decayed, and my spirits are so exceedingly tender, that I could not well bear the sight of your confinement, your chains, and your miserable circumstances, as I can hardly bear the thought of your approaching execution, and your extreme danger of everlasting destruction. But because I cannot come in person, I have sent you the following lines, which I hope you will consider, and which I beseech the God of all grace to accompany with his blessing.

You have been already condemned at an earthly tribunal; you are also condemned by the law of God; for thus it is written, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.' Gal. 3: 10. If every violation of the divine law exposes you to a curse, what a multitude of curses are ready to fall upon your unhappy souls! — And remember, this is not the curse of a mortal man, but of the great, eternal, infinite God. If it was dismal to hear an earthly judge command you to be hanged by the neck till you are DEAD; how much more terrible to hear the almighty Judge denounce that unalterable sentence, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.' Matth. 25: 41. Had you committed but one sin, this would have been your deserved doom: 'The wages of sin' of every sin, 'is death' Rom. 6: 23. How much more of those manifold sins and multiplied transgressions, of which your consciences must accuse you! — You are soon to suffer the punishment of the gallows, and you are liable to the vengeance of the most high God; for thus saith the holy word, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and

unrighteousness of men.' Rom. 1: 28. If against all and every instance of ungodliness, then how much more against your crimes, which have been of the most abominable and horrid kind! — 'The wrath of God!' Tremendous word! who knoweth the weight and terror of this wrath? At his rebuke the rocks melt like wax, the earth is shaken out of its place, and the pillars of heaven tremble. How then can you endure the furiousness of his wrath, and the severity of his vengeance? and that, not for a day, a month, or a year, but through all the ages of eternity! Yet this is the doom of 'them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.' What can you do in this distressed condition? What indeed! if you had a thousand years to live, you could not atone for one offence. How then can you make satisfaction for millions of provocations, in the space of a few days? — Alas! you are lost, utterly lost, in yourselves irrecoverably lost. May the God of all power make you sensible of your undone state! sensible that you are upon the brink, the very brink of an amazing, an unfathomable downfall. Perhaps you may say, Is there no hope then? is the door of heaven shut, and without any possibility of being opened to us? must we sink into unquenchable burnings; and is there not so much as a twig for us to catch at? Yes, my poor fellow sinners, there is not only a twig, but a tree, even the tree of life, a sure support, which if the Lord enables you to lay hold, on you may yet, even yet, be saved. Oh! beg of his wonderful goodness to accompany what you are going to read, with his Holy Spirit.

Christ, the all-glorious Son of God pitied the deplorable cases of such sinners. He not only pitied, but resolved to succour and relieve them. For this purpose HE came into the world, and was made man. Nay more, he came into the place, and stood in the stead of sinners. — Because we had broke the commandments of the law, he fulfilled them in all their perfection. Because we deserved the punishment of the law, he sustained it in its utmost extremity. — He became poor, and had nowhere to lay his head, though heaven and earth were all his own. — He submitted to scorn and reproach, though all the angels of God are bidden to worship him. Nay he was condemned to death, the most shameful and tormenting death, far more shameful, and unspeakably more tormenting, than the death which you must shortly undergo. He suffered unknown pangs in his body, and inconceivable anguish in his soul, from the indignation of God. In a word, he suffered all that shame, all that torment, all that vengeance, which the unnumbered sins of the whole world deserved. Here then is your door of hope. — Sins are borne by Christ; and though there be much

iniquity, there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Rom. 8: 1. — Wrath is born by Christ, so that sinners, who deserve eternal vengeance, are reconciled to God, and saved from wrath through him. Rom. 5: 9, 10. — A righteousness is wrought by Christ, a perfect and everlasting righteousness, such as brings incomparably-greater honour to God's law, than all our transgressions bring dishonour. By all this, he has merited and obtained a full deliverance, and a complete redemption. — Are you not ready to cry out, — O blessed Saviour! O precious redemption! What a happiness, if we might be interested in this Saviour, and partake of this redemption! Millions of worlds for such a blessing! — You need not give millions of worlds, no, nor any individual thing. These blessings are given freely, without money, and without price, without any deserving qualifications in us. All that are justified, are justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. — But we are sinners, vile sinners; we have not only nothing good, but much and grievous guilt. — The Lord convince you of this more and more! Yet remember for whom Christ died, he 'died for the ungodly.' — What says St Paul? 'In due time Christ died for the ungodly.' Rom. 5: 6. — He died for the unjust. — What says St Peter? 'Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust.' 1 Peter 3: 18. — What says our Lord himself? 'The Son of man is come to save that which was lost.' — Are you not ungodly men; are you not unjust persons? are you not lost creatures? For such, even for such, the divine Jesus died. Wonderful love! adorable compassion! The Lord enable you to lay hold on this hope set before you! — Perhaps, you may say, — We are not only sinners, but the chief of sinners — O! that you were convinced of this! — To be the chief of sinners, makes you unpardonable before men; but this is no difficulty with Christ, and should be no hindrance of your coming to Christ. Christ's merit and righteousness are infinite. They are as able to satisfy for a debt of ten thousand talents, as for a debt of a single farthing. Hear what the scriptures saith upon this subject; 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' 1 Tim. 1: 15. He came not to save sinners only, but the very chief of sinners. And he is 'able to save them to the very uttermost.' — But our sins are heinous, they have been often repeated, and long continued in. — What says the apostle? 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.' Another apostle declares, 'By him,' by the divinely excellent Redeemer, 'all that believe are justified from all things;' from all accusations, be they ever so numerous; from all iniquities, be they ever so enormous. Nay, so wonderful efficacious is the power of his death, that, through his great

atonement, sins which are as crimson, are made white, white as snow. Isa. 1: 18. — But will Christ vouchsafe his great salvation to us? Hear his own words, 'Him that cometh to me' for pardon and salvation, 'I will in no wise cast out.' Be his guilt ever so great, this shall be no bar. I will not on any consideration reject or deny his suit. Only let him come as a poor undone creature, and he shall find me willing and mighty to save; nay, he invites you to come. These are his gracious words, 'Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden,' heavy laden with sin and misery, 'and I will give you rest.' Matth. 11: 28. I will deliver you from going down into the pit, I will deliver you from the vengeance of eternal fire. All your sin shall be upon me, and all my righteousness shall be upon you. — Go to a great man on earth, beg of him to use his interest in your behalf; he would scorn to take notice of you. But your dear, tender, compassionate, most condescending Saviour, invites you to come to him, and assures you he will not abhor nor cast you out. Go to your earthly judge, entreat him on your bended knees, to pardon you. He perhaps cannot, must not: the laws forbid him. But it is not so with Jesus Christ; he has made a full satisfaction for sin: he has made an infinite atonement for sin; and were your sins ten thousand thousand times greater than they are, before the power of his death they would all vanish away; by the washing of his blood, they would all be as though they had never been.

This then should be the one desire of your souls, your incessant prayer to God, that you may come to Christ, that you may believe in Christ, that you may be found in Christ: then you will not perish, though you deserve it, but have everlasting life, through his name; then you will have just the same foundation for your hope, as I must myself have when I shall depart this life. When I shall be summoned to the great tribunal what will be my plea, what my dependence? Nothing but Christ! Christ, would I say, has been wounded for my sins, therefore they will not be punished in me. Christ has fulfilled all righteousness in my stead, therefore I trust to be justified when I am judged. I am a poor unworthy sinner, but worthy is the Lamb that was slain, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, for whose sake I shall receive both pardoning mercy and everlasting glory. This is my only hope, and this is as free for you as it is for your friend and fellow sinner,

James Hervey.

P.S. What I have written, I shall beg of God to bless; and will attend you with my prayers, though I cannot visit you in person.

The Hope of a Dying Believer

On the writer's visiting an aged member of Brushgrove Congregation (New South Wales), then nearing the close of his earthly pilgrimage, the conversation turned on the preparation needed for eternity. He was a widower, and in his loneliness felt the frailty of his condition and a greater isolation from the world. He brightened up, however, in speaking of spiritual things. When able, he had been a regular attendant on the means of grace, along with his partner and her sisters (Skye ladies), whom, for many years, he was accustomed to drive some miles to the place of worship at Woodford Dale. Now, in comparison, he felt that for him the years had no pleasure in them. He longed the more, therefore, for private fellowship, and he always had the Bible ready when we entered. He himself dwelt much in his exercise on the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and he loved to speak of the Christian warfare. On the occasion referred to he was much affected. He evidently felt that his time was short; and whilst recognising the solemnity of death and eternity — reference to which would bring tears to his eyes — yet he had that hope within him by which he was manifestly enabled to stay himself on God as his trust. As we conversed together alone on the nature of that hope, he was led, in his own simple, unaffected way, briefly to recount the manner of his conversion, and the changed life which it had meant to him in subsequent years. This he did to the following effect:—

“I came from Bury St. Edmund's, in the county of Suffolk, England. My surroundings there would do me no good. The preaching in the Church of England was dead. It was not a sermon, therefore, that first impressed me. God cried to me in His providence. A neighbouring man, returning from market with his cart, suddenly fell dead. I had known the man well, and the question came to my mind — Had it been myself, where would I have gone? Seeing, as the Bible tells us, ‘God turns the wicked into hell, and all the nations that forget God,’ I became greatly concerned. The commandment came to me wherein it is said, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.’ But I felt that I did not love God at all. I tried to improve myself in every way I could, by a more careful and serious life. But all was in vain. The law of God condemned me as a transgressor. It stung me to the quick. It continued thus with me for some time. I was then in great darkness and misery, and cried to God for help. At last I was led to come to Jesus, and to look to the fountain opened in His blood for the cleansing away of my sin; and I rejoiced, believing in God. I now

thought that I was done with sin. But I soon found my mistake. The corruptions of my heart discovered themselves, and I began to think that I was still lost, and had never really come to Christ. This greatly exercised me, until I was driven to look away from myself to Christ for righteousness as well as pardon. I was made to see that I had no righteousness of my own — that it was not by works of righteousness of mine, but according to His mercy, that He saved me. And thus I was brought to look to Christ's righteousness as a perfect and spotless righteousness, provided for me in Him. THAT HAS BEEN MY HOPE SINCE." He spoke with great feeling. After a pause he referred to Christ as "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever," and added, "therefore He is a suitable Saviour for me, who am so changeable and inconsistent. In my times of darkness I am enabled to hope in His Word. It is a lamp to my feet." Thy word hath quickened me." (Psalm 119: 50).

The only book which he specially mentioned on this occasion as helpful to him was M'Cheyne's "Memoirs".

Such was the testimony of Mr Josiah Carter, spontaneously given when tottering on the border of the grave. His wife, Margaret Matheson, who had sat under the Rev. Roderick M'Leod of Snizort, in early life, had been a true helpmeet for him; and they were both loyal and devoted communicants in the Free Presbyterian Church on the Clarence River. For some time Mr Carter presided over Lower Southgate Mission Sabbath School in connection with the Congregation, and the simplicity and earnestness of his prayers at the opening and closing exercise were remarked upon at the time. He was latterly elected an elder, but age and failing health obviated against his acceptance of the office. He, however, took time prayerfully to consider his duty, and communicated his decision in a kindly note to his pastor. The above interview took place on 27th September, 1902: Mr Carter died soon after. After his burial in Grafton Cemetery it was found that, amongst many other bequests, he had left a small property (value about £100) for the benefit of Woodford Dale Church, where he had so often worshipped. A man of comparatively few words, the deceased spoke deliberately, with an earnest gaze on the party addressed. This added to the impressiveness of his dying testimony. We took it as illustrative of that lively oracle — "The righteous hath hope in his death." (Proverbs 14: 32). Clarence River readers will be interested in this remembrance of one who so long went in and out amongst them. May it appeal to surviving relatives and others yet unawakened!

W. S.

The Observance of Christmas

Year after year Presbyterian Scotland is gradually but surely adopting the customs and religious festival days of her more powerful neighbour in the South. Some of these customs may be innocent enough, but it is quite different with others, such as a loose view of the sanctity of the Lord's Day. Alongside this there is an extraordinary readiness on the part of Presbyterians to adopt such festival days as Christmas and Easter. These have a place in the Church calendar, and are more or less devoutly observed by many, but by the great bulk these days are set aside for pleasure and amusement. Presbyterian Scotland at the First and the Second Reformations set its face sternly against the observance of these so-called holy days.

In the First Book of Discipline the Scottish Reformers, under the first head of Doctrine, say:— "Seeing that Jesus Christ is He whom the Father has commanded only to be heard, and followed of His sheep, we urge it necessary that the Evangel be truly and openly preached in every Kirk and Assembly of this Realm; and that all doctrine repugnant to the same be utterly suppressed as damnable to man's salvation." They then state what they mean by preaching this Evangel and what they understand by the contrary doctrine, viz.:— "Whatsoever men, by laws, counsels, or constitutions, have imposed upon the consciences of men, without the expressed commandment of God's Word; such as the vows of chastity . . . keeping of holy days of certain saints commanded by man, such as be all those that the Papists have invented, as the Feasts (as they term them) of Apostles, Martyrs, Virgins, Christmas, Circumcision, Epiphany, Purification, and other fond feasts of Our Lady" (Knox's Works, II., 185-6). At their 17th session the famous Glasgow Assembly (1638) confirmed this view, and decreed that these Feasts "be utterly abolished, because they are neither commanded nor warranted by Scripture." In their Act reference is made to Assembly decisions on these Festivals (Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, p. 19). In 1566 (25th December) the General Assembly while giving its approval to the Second Helvetic Confession, disapproved of "days dedicated to Christ." In the letter sent to Beza it is not only said that such festivals as Christmas, Circumcision, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost, that they "at the present time obtain no place among us," but that they "dare not religiously celebrate any other feast day than what the divine oracles have prescribed." In the Directory for Public Worship, in the Appendix touching Days and Places for Public Worship, it is laid down as a rule:— "There is no day commanded in Scripture to be kept holy under the Gospel

but the Lord's Day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly called Holy-days, having no warrant in the Word of God, are not to be continued." The General Assembly in 1645 passed a stringent "Act for censuring the observers of Yule-day and other superstitious days, especially if they be scholars," giving as their reason "the manifold abuses, profanity and superstitions," committed on these days. So great was the opposition to the observance of Christmas in Scotland in the 18th century that when a law was passed in Queen Anne's time repealing a law which forbade the Court of Session a "Yule vacance", it raised quite a storm of indignation.

We believe our forefathers acted rightly in this matter. And those who are again introducing the observance of Christmas into Scotland have neither Scripture nor history on their side. One will search the New Testament in vain for a command to keep the birthday of the Lord Jesus Christ sacred. It was certainly a momentous day for the world, but His advent, wonderful though it was, would not have saved sinners. It is His death and resurrection that brought everlasting hope to sinners, and the Church of God has her holy day in the Christian Sabbath as commemorative of His resurrection from the dead. If God asked men to observe Christmas and Easter they would flout His command just as they are doing with the Sabbath, but because He has not asked them to do so they become a law unto themselves. The manner in which Christmas is observed in England, with its religious services, followed too often by revelry and the observance of customs handed down from pagan times, ought to make serious-minded Scottish Presbyterians ponder as to whether such a way of observing this Church festival commends itself to them as in accordance with the fitness of things.

Dr Maclean, Bishop of Caithness and Moray, an authority on the early Church festivals, says that Christmas was probably unknown until nearly AD 300. That admission by a Scottish Episcopalian prelate is of great significance. This opinion is confirmed by Professor Kirsopp Lake in his article in Hasting's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (III., 601). As to the two dates, 25th December and 6th January, on which Christmas was observed, Duchesne suggests that the former date was observed by the Western or Latin Church, while the latter was observed by the Eastern or Greek Church. Why was the 25th December chosen as the date for this festival? Sir William Ramsay has shown that the birth of the Redeemer could scarcely be on the 25th December, as it was not a time suitable for the shepherds to be out with their flocks in the fields. Apart from this the Gospels throw no light on the day or month of the Redeemer's birth.

Why, then, was the 25th December fixed on? Professor Kirsopp Lake quite candidly admits that it was owing to the Church wishing to distract the attention of Christians from the old heathen festivals that December 25th, the *dies natalis solis invicti* (birthday of the unconquerable sun) was fixed on. Our author, while making this admission, maintains that the commonly accepted view that Christmas was intended to replace the Roman "Saturnalia" is not tenable. This feast was celebrated on 17th-24th December. Some of the customs are thus described:— "Gambling with dice, at other times illegal, was now permitted and practised. All classes exchanged gifts, the commonest being wax tapers and clay dolls. These dolls were especially given to children." It must, therefore, be conceded that if the "Saturnalia" were not replaced by Christmas, that it certainly took over with its observance a great deal of the pagan tomfoolery that characterised the "Saturnalia". This accounts for many of the customs observed at Christmas. Many of the other customs observed in England are traceable to distinctly pagan Norse influences.

The observance of Christmas as a religious festival, then, has (1) no warrant from Scripture. (2) There is no warrant for the 25th December being the birthday of the Redeemer. (3) Its observance was not known until the 4th century. (4) It replaced a heathen festival and retains in many of its customs its connection with the day following the Roman "Saturnalia". Why Presbyterians should be so keen to observe such a day, therefore, can only be accounted for on the ground that men are always determined to add something in religious observances that God never asked for nor commanded.

F.P. Mag. December, 1927

Book Reviews

CHRIST'S DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT by G. Smeaton, Banner of Truth Trust. Price £9.95.

G. Smeaton was one of the venerable company of the godly and learned men that adorned the Free Church of Scotland in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The book may not exhibit the same close reasoning as is to be found in that of his compeer Hugh Martin; nor is there in it what answers to the profundity of the renowned John Owen when he deals with the same subject; but there is in it freshness of thought and felicity of expression with a close adhesion to the subject title. The style is facile, plain and devotional.

From the lips of Christ Himself, the author proves the nature of Christ's

sufferings to be wholly vicarious and such as could be endured only by Him who is both God and man. He exhibits the truth that full satisfaction was made by Christ to God when "He encountered all the elements of eternal death as far as they could fall on such a sufferer;" while the cry of dereliction is described as that "which brings us to the margin of the inscrutable (where it is) wiser to stand by and adore than grope our way to the meaning of this 'why?'" Our author illustrates how in all these sufferings the Son of God in our nature was assured of victory, as when He said 'Now is the Son of Man glorified' — 'grasping the crown as already at hand.'

The restriction of the Atonement, in its purposes and efficacy, to the elect, is asserted and its effects upon Satan, angels and men opened up. The relation of the subject to the 'free offer' of the gospel is so dealt with as must relieve the fears of those who shrink from the phrase for fear of dishonouring God and of going contrary to the Word. 'Any carping' says he 'at it is due to the exercise of human reasoning on themes the finite mind must rather accept than presume to explore. . . . A special atonement and invitations sincerely made on the ground of it to mankind indifferently are quite compatible. They will be found to meet at some point though their junction be beyond our present line of vision.'

As our Reformers said, 'an unapplied Christ is no Christ', so our author sets forth the need of application of the atonement which is by a faith that is 'a Spirit-given trust in the divine mercy and on a personal Saviour as opposed to man's native self-reliance.'

False theories of the Atonement are summarily dismissed — the Arminian view that Christ shall give eternal life to all who obey His Word and persevere to the end: the Amyraldist view, that the atonement is for all if they believe; that Christ died with the intention that He might be a sufficient Saviour for all and every one provided they believe; the view of Cameron, that the death of Christ on condition of faith belongs EQUALLY to all.

Further, the author brings forward some of the errors of Darbyism and describes Darbyism as the very antithesis of Reformation doctrine. He draws the necessary distinction between believing in Christ and believing that Christ died for oneself, observing that no one, in the first instance, is called upon to believe that Christ died for him.

A section of the book is compiled of notes of an academic nature, expanding and explaining references in the main part. Being thus placed it means that the book can be read through without the reader being encumbered with unfamiliar theological terminology. One of the notes refers

to the theology of Schleiermacher and is deserving of perusal as that 'New Theology' has permeated theology ever since. Its main emphasis is on the Incarnation and the life of God in Christ from whom sinners are to receive the life simply in virtue of it being in Christ. He shows how this is a by-passing of the need of an Atonement and hence a most serious and fundamental error.

On page 120 there is reference to the law concerning the sabbath, and while the author makes plain that Christ did not abrogate that law, the words used are calculated to give the reader the impression that the law of the sabbath as commanding one seventh of man's time to be given to God by way of worship, is not moral and unalterable.

There is much to commend the book to all classes of readers.

EPHESIANS by Charles Hodge. Banner of Truth. £7.95.

Readers of the Free Presbyterian Magazine broadly speaking, need no formal introductions to Charles Hodge of Princeton. His name is a household word among our ministers and students. His eminence, piety and learning are beyond suspicion, and in this latest reprinted edition of his commentary on Ephesians, they are put to their highest use in unfolding the treasures of this great Epistle. The burning of the costly but dangerous volumes, kindled in Ephesus by the flame of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, give additional interest and significance to the Epistle.

Scholarship without grace has blighted the church of God, but to erudition in the hands of piety, the church owes a debt of gratitude to God. Behind the production lies no small degree of loving and prayerful labour. The volume is for ministers and students, rather than for laymen. To peruse its contents with profit requires close prayerful study and concentration. To affirm this gives us some indication of the spiritual ability and stamina of the author. He leans heavily on Calvin, and moves with ease and fluency from Greek to Latin. His thorough familiarity with the original tongue and its idioms is most apparent, yet useful in grappling with the subject matter. First published in 1856, reprinted by the Banner of Truth in 1964, this most tastefully bound volume appears again in 1991.

While we call no man master, yet we highly recommend this Commentary for its manifold merits and heart-warming orthodoxy. Extensive knowledge of the 'fathers' eminent theological acumen, and linguistic ability all combine to make this work what it is; a most helpful and illuminating Commentary. Hodge's comments on Ephesians 5: 19 merit close study, but it must be stated categorically that the Psalms alone are divinely inspired.

F.M.

Notes and Comments

The Prime Minister and the Sabbath

According to Press reports the Prime Minister, along with his Cabinet, is to oppose the proposal put forward by the European Community in the form of a directive for a 48-hour maximum working week. This proposal if accepted is likely to lead to the Sabbath becoming an official EC rest day. The Government is strongly opposed to the Sabbath becoming an official rest day throughout the Community. It is lamentable to think that Britain of all the nations of Western Europe should be opposed to the Sabbath as a day of rest. Let those who love the Sabbath make their views known to the Prime Minister and express their abhorrence of the Government's stand in this matter.

The House of Lords and a Blasphemous Film

It is good to know that strong opposition was expressed in the House of Lords by a number of peers to the projected showing (on the BBC) of a film which is blasphemous in the extreme. Lord Hailsham said that it was outrageous that the BBC should show such disregard for people who had paid licence fees. Lord Orr-Ewing said that the film was offensive not only because it ridicules Jesus but also because it shows Him to be weak and cynical. Lord Tonyandy, former Speaker of the Commons, said that no one would tolerate abuse of the prophet Muhammad and why should we tolerate ridicule of our Lord.

Foul Language on TV

Much disquiet has been expressed recently on the number of swear words used on the TV. The Chairman of the new Broadcasting Standards Council, Lord Rees Mogg, a Roman Catholic and former Editor of *The Times* newspaper, said that swearing was still the most common reason for viewers' complaints. Lord Rees Mogg is to tell the broadcasting organisations to make sure bad language does not go out before the 9 p.m. family watershed. Surely such words ought to be forbidden altogether as violations of the divine law whether spoken before or after 9 p.m. It is good to know that a day will come when such language will not be tolerated on the media, either by those who are in charge of the programmes or by those who hear them.

Pupils to get lessons on AIDS

The Education Secretary has indicated that compulsory coverage of HIV

would be included in the science curriculum. Some time ago the teaching of Sex Education was introduced into the schools having in view promoting better moral conduct. It is obvious that the very opposite effect took place and the type of education given in this field only hastened the moral decline of the nation. No doubt the Government have the same thing in mind with regard to instruction of children in the dangers of AIDS. How empty a proposal this is in view of the Government's total failure to deal with the real problem which is that of unnatural lusts. It was the legalising of sodomy on a free vote in Parliament which has produced this plague. The proper course is for those who promoted that piece of legislation who are still alive (we know that the main instigator of it has long ago gone to his account), repent of their action and let the present Government overturn it and banish it from the Statute Book of our land for ever. At the time it was passed it was said that no civilised nation before that time ever had on its Statute Book such an abominable piece of legislation.

Moral Standards in Public Life

The resignation of a public servant, high in the Civil Service, after being found in a highly compromising situation, shows that a certain moral standard is required of those who occupy places of public trust. It is good that this is how it is, for if it was otherwise, there is no saying what the effect would be on the life of the nation. May it long continue so.

New Prayer Book

A blasphemous prayer book has been published which includes feminist language in its addresses to God. God is referred to as "she" and the Lord's Prayer begins: "Beloved, our Father and Mother, in whom is heaven," according to a Press Report. It is also said that in some Anglican churches prayers are being used which ascribe a feminine gender to God. While this blasphemy may satisfy radical feminists, it only goes to prove the madness and blasphemy that is in the natural heart of man. When men or women reject revealed truth there is no length to which they will not resort. The rise of so many sects and false religions in the world goes to prove this. May the Word of God so find a lodging place in our hearts so that we may never give place to those evil tenets.

Mission News

It has been agreed by the Zimbabwean Presbytery that Mr Neil Murray leave Mbuma Hospital, and take up residence in Bulawayo from which

centre he will take services in various needy congregations, and particularly spend more time at Binga, the remote area in the Zambezi Valley, where he and Mr David Ndlovu have preached and given out portions of Scripture, and at the same time distributed food and clothing to destitute people. Immigration officials have yet to give their consent to this arrangement.

Before Mr Murray left for his last furlough in Scotland one section of the community at Binga presented Mr Murray with a large adze, or axe, as a special mark of esteem and gratitude, and a tea service carved in wood with a particularly large sugar bowl indicative of the African love for sugar!

A visit was paid recently to an elderly member at Ingwenya who was in Third Standard at Ingwenya in 1933. She was noticeably good then at answering Bible questions. Mrs Pepheta is crippled by arthritis, and unable to attend church but she told her visitors that her own Bible was now in tatters and she would dearly love a new Ndebele Bible. There were numerous grandchildren around her and she said she would like to gather them around her daily to read to them from the Bible. On making immediate enquiries it was discovered that an Ndebele Bible could not be found in the Bible shops in Bulawayo. Zulu Bibles are available but the old people prefer Ndebele, their own dialect. The British and Foreign Bible Society who are the publishers of the Ndebele Bible are being approached. It is hoped that a new and modern version is not being envisaged.

It is interesting for the Staff at Ingwenya to have visits from former pupils who have achieved eminence in the Government or in other spheres. The Minister of Agriculture is to attend the prizegiving at the end of the year. He is the grandson of an esteemed former elder, John Dabengwa. It would be a great matter for rejoicing if these men and women were converted.

A new classroom is being built at Ingwenya to accommodate pupils who have completed Primary School but have not reached Secondary School standard. Rather than see them adrift at such an early stage they are taught the usual school subjects including Bible, of course, to give them an opportunity to catch up.

The Sabbath Class for little Primary children was 176 in number recently. Numbers will fluctuate, no doubt, but a nucleus will attend regularly we trust with the Lord's blessing.

The Rev. John MacLeod is expected in Zimbabwe for the month of December, if all is well. All are looking forward very much to his coming.

J.N.

Church Notes

Presbytery Meetings (D.V.)

Western: At Laide on 10th December at 6 p.m.

Northern: At Dingwall on 21st January 1992 at 2 p.m.

Australia and New Zealand: At Auckland on 24th January 1992 at 2.30 p.m.

Outer Isles: At Stornoway on 28th January 1992 at 12 noon.

Skye: At Portree on 4th February 1992 at 11 a.m.

Zimbabwe: At Bulawayo on 13th March 1992 at 2 p.m.

Canadian: At Inverness on 20th March 1992 at 9 p.m.

Day of Prayer

The Synod appointed Wednesday 11th December or Thursday 12th December (D.V.) to be observed as a Day of Humiliation and Prayer to confess our national and personal guilt and pray for the outpouring of the Divine Spirit as the only solution for the crises and problems of the age.

List of Communions

The list of Communions has been corrected for 1992. Would ministers kindly intimate to the Editor any further corrections necessary.

Death of Elder in Canada

We intimate with sadness the passing away of Mr Henry Scambler at the time of the Chesley Communion. He had come from Oakville where he lived to attend the Communion but took ill and passed away on 8th November. His removal is a great loss to the Cause in Canada. Before removing to Canada in 1972, Mr Scambler was an elder in the Edinburgh Congregation, where he was highly respected. A fuller notice will no doubt appear in due course.

Notice to Congregational Treasurers

The General Treasurer requests Congregational Treasurers to let him have the last payments for 1991 by 25th December 1991. All payments not banked by him by 27th December 1991 will be entered as payments applicable to 1992.

Acknowledgment of Donations

The General Treasurer, Mr Rod Campbell, 133 Woodlands Road, Glasgow, acknowledges with sincere thanks the following donations:—

Zimbabwe (Binga) Fund: Friends, Edinburgh £50; Mr and Mrs N. £30; Mr and Mrs B., Aberdeen £100; Mrs M. R., Dingwall £10; Mr D. M., Applecross £20; A Friend £20, all per N.M. Mr Neil Murray acknowledges with sincere thanks the following: Mr and Mrs M.N. Edin., £30; Friend, Skye £50; Mrs C. £20; Friends, Greenock, £100; Friends, Aberdeen £100; Mr and Mrs K.W. £150.

Eastern Europe Fund: Two Friends, Edinburgh £40; Anon., Edinburgh £30; A Friend, £200; A.C. £100, last two per N.M.R.

Dominions and Overseas Fund: Brisbane Congregation A\$300.

The treasurers of the following Congregations acknowledge with sincere thanks the following donations:-

Greenock: D.R.M. £30 for Congr. Fds.; J.C., Glasgow £20 where most needed; Anon., Glasgow £30 where most needed; Anon., £15 for Home Miss. and £15 for Eastern Europe Fund (both by envelopes in plate).

Inverness: Anon., £50; £10; £50; £50; £4 all for Sust. Fd.; Anon., £5; £10; £10; £30; £10; £10 all for Dominions and Overseas Fd., all per envelopes in plate.

Laide: A friend £100 to help you with the Word of God to Russia; M.R. £65; R.M.B., Aberdeen £20; L. McL., Raasay £50; Angusina, Strathburn £10; B.M., Tolsta £5, all for Bibles for Russia; J.C.M. and M.M. £30; Stornoway Friend, Mark 16: 15 £60; Anon., Mark 16: 15 £25; Anon., £20; Friends, Inverness £30 (use whatever way it may help best); J.A.C. £200; Lairg Friends £20; Dingwall Sabbath School £29.60; Anon., South Harris £50; Anon. 'D' £150; R.M., Ormascaig £10; Anon., S.C.J.L. £30, all for Eastern Europe; Friends, Wellington, N.Z. £32; Tabor, Pitlochry £50, both for Russia; Anon., Lochcarron £20 for Missionary Work in Russia; J. & I. £50 to help on your journey to Russia; Friends, Wick £60 for Bibles for Romania; Aultbea Friend for Church Funds £20; J.A.C. £10 for Tape Ministry, all per D.A.R.; Friend £40 for Eastern Europe Mission per C. Ross; Anon., per Manse, Sheildaig for Eastern Europe Fund £20; Anon., for Romania £50 (in Laide plate).

Portree: Anon., £50 wherever needed (Envelope in plate); J.M. £10; Tolsta Friend £10 both where most needed and both per F.M.; Anon., £40; Anon., £4 both for Church Bus (both by envelope in plate).

Raasay: C.F., Lochcarron £40 where most needed per Rev. J. R. Tallach; envelope in plate £10; envelope in plate £20, both for Car Fund.

Staffin: Envelope in plate £5 for Car Fund.