

ancestors of the Philistines is misplaced, as we see from Deut. ii. 23; Jer. xlvii. 4; Amos ix. 7, which informs us that the mother-land of the Philistines was Caphtor. Caphtor is written Kaptar in hieroglyphics at Kom Ombos, and since, in Ezek. xxv. 16 and Zeph. ii. 5, the Philistines seem to be identified with the Cherethites which the Septuagint translates 'Kretans,' it is generally believed to denote the island of Krete.

The Philistines, called Pulista on the Egyptian monuments, Pilstê and Palastu in Assyrian, first make their appearance in history in the reign of the Pharaoh Ramses III. (cir. B.C. 1200), when they formed part of the great confederacy of tribes from the Greek islands and the coasts of Asia Minor, who swept through Syria, and attacked Egypt by sea and land. Along with their kindred, the Zakkal, they occupied the coast of Palestine, which subsequently took its name from them. Though 'the leader of the hostile bands of the

Pulista' figures among the prisoners of Ramses III. at Medinet Habu, they succeeded in wresting Gaza from Egypt, and in establishing themselves there and in the neighbouring cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath, all of which had once been in Egyptian hands. The Egyptians were thus cut off from access to Canaan. It would seem, from Ex. xiii. 17, that the Philistine attack on the Egyptian possessions in the south-western corner of Palestine was already taking place at the time of the Israelitish Exodus. Professor Prašek connects with the Philistine conquest a statement of Justin that, in the year before the capture of Troy, the king of Ashkelon overcame the Sidonians, who fled southward to Tyre. Like the Zakkal and the Dânu or Danaans, the Pulista are represented on the Egyptian monuments as beardless, but with the European type of features, and wearing a curious cap, the upper part of which seems to be made of plaited felt.

Sermonettes on the Golden Texts.

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Luke xxiv. 51.

'And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.'

THESE words describe the last event in the most beautiful and wonderful of stories, the earthly life of Jesus Christ; or rather, they form the opening words of the still grander sequel to that story—our Lord's life in heaven. How often sequels are disappointing, and we wish the author had never written them; but this sequel is that which gives power, meaning, and grandeur to the first part of the story, which, without it, would be a riddle with no solution.

Now the text tells us of three things, each of which is worth our attention: the Blessing, the Parting, and the Ascension.

I. THE BLESSING.—When the late Archbishop Benson was leaving Ireland just before his sudden death at Hawarden, the clergyman in whose house he had been staying asked for his blessing, and the request was readily granted. Do you think he can

ever forget these holy words? Will they not ever seem to him as a voice from the gates of heaven? Neither knew that parting was to be the last on earth, else its pathos would have been much deeper, but this fuller meaning fills it now. And perhaps some of you recall the touching scene in Dr. Paton's life, when first, as a lad, he left home, and his white-haired father accompanied him till they reached a stile, and then blessed him, and stood watching his son till they could see each other no longer.

Now such an hour had come for Jesus and His disciples. He had prayed with them and for them oftentimes, but never until after His resurrection had He thus blessed them. The traitor was no longer of the company, therefore He could set upon them this seal of love.

Then on each He setteth
His own secret sign,—
They that have My Spirit,
These, saith He, are Mine.

We do not know what words He used. Whether it was the hallowed form of the temple service,

'The Lord bless thee, and keep thee,' we cannot tell, but the joy and helpfulness of it lay in their Lord's love. Is our deepest gladness this—to have Jesus bless us, to wait eagerly His word of peace, to know ourselves in the company of His loved children?

II. THE PARTING.—Our New Testament does not give any ground for the imagination of many Christian painters, who show us the disciples watching Christ's ascent and His reception at His Father's right hand. This vision is nowhere said to have been granted them. Matthew has no account of it, the verses at the end of Mark are probably not his, the last clause of this verse in Luke is omitted on the best authority, John is quite silent, and in Acts we are distinctly told, 'a cloud received Him out of their sight.' It was a genuine parting, a sorrowful separation. But Jesus parted from them thus because He loved them. He had never been able to get them to look beyond this hour. Once He had said sorrowfully, 'I go unto Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?' I have seen little children so sad because father or mother were leaving them, that they could not think why—or see how much joy and brightness the temporary parting might mean for them afterwards, when their parents returned with new and lovely gifts, which only the journey could obtain. So Christ for the moment fills their eyes with tears, that presently He may fill their hearts with thanksgiving.

III. THE ASCENSION.—Whether the last words of this text were written here by Luke or no, he did tell us about the reality of Christ's Ascension. In Acts i. 10, 11, he tells us how two men in white apparel came to the disciples as they gazed wistfully upward, and told them Jesus had been received into heaven and would return again. Yes, that was a story that only heavenly messengers could tell—our eyes cannot see heaven, though our hearts can respond to its messages. As angels heralded His earthly birth, angels had to tell of His heavenly glory. An old legend assures us that on that very spot whence Christ ascended, the 'flaming of His advent feet' will one day be first visible. It is but a fancy, but it enshrines a great truth—His work is one and unbroken. The Jesus we love to read about in Galilee and Judæa is the same Lord to whom we pray. All His tenderness, gentleness, love of little children is His now, with a power and might and strength to serve

and help, greater far, and for all may come to Him now, not for the few who then could gather round His knee. So the hymn we often sing is one of our best and brightest, because its message is so grand and helpful—

All His work is ended,
Joyfully we sing;
Jesus hath ascended!
Glory to our King!

Acts ii. 4.

'And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.'

THESE words bring before us the beginning of that grand story of foreign missions. If we are eager to read of thrilling adventures, noble heroes, and stirring deeds, let us make ourselves acquainted with the lives of the great missionaries of all times, and I am glad to know so many boys and girls love to read them. Well, you know how interesting it is to see the first form of any great invention,—the first steam-engine, the first bicycle, the first motor-car,—or to read about the childhood of some famous man. And even more interesting is it to see the beginning of some great movement that has changed the character of the world, and made new lives possible for every one. Such we have here, and I wish you to remember three things about it: the Source, the Means, and the Limits.

I. THE SOURCE.—'They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.' This is what we are told about all the great people in the Bible, and in the Church of Christ. Even Jesus Himself could only begin His life-work thus. He 'returned in the power of the Spirit unto Galilee,' we read (Luke iv. 14), and then preached His great sermon in the synagogue of the town where He had been brought up. God has to take possession of men before they can do His work. That they were to share in this great gift had been the promise of Jesus to His disciples, and now they are finding what it means. The source of the great work, then, is God Himself. And He must ever be the source of everything that is worthy. You remember how the writer of Genesis begins his story of the creation—'In the beginning, God.' Now, when we read that, we know that we must

read farther on, 'it was very good.' James tells us that from God, our Father, cometh down 'every good and every perfect gift,' so we can be certain this mission work must prosper when God starts it. I have heard of great enterprises which no one would join, until they knew who was to be leader, but once a great leader arose, no man would hold back, even though the post meant great peril, and might bring death. So let us seek God to lead, help, and strengthen us in all our work, then need we have no fear, for 'they must win who side with Him'!

II. THE MEANS.—'They began to speak with other tongues.' We cannot understand this wonderful thing that happened on the day of Pentecost. It was very strange, but it was not too great a thing for God to do, yet I do not think He did it merely to make men marvel and talk. It would have been just as easy for God to have enabled all these foreigners to understand the native language of the apostles, but this would not have served the same purpose. When any one living in a strange country wishes to come into close touch with the people, and make real friends of them, he finds one of the best ways to effect his purpose is to learn their language, so that he may speak as one of themselves. Nothing sounds so sweet to us as the accent of our childhood's speech. When God wished, therefore, the message of the good news in Christ Jesus to be carried all over the world, He knew it would reach men's hearts best in their own tongue, and this miracle at Jerusalem was to show us His purpose. We may say it is a slow way—hundreds of years have passed, and not every language has the gospel yet. It takes many years to learn some difficult languages; few foreigners ever speak another tongue perfectly. Might not God have found a quicker and a better way? A quicker, yes; but a better, no! To have Christ's word each in our own language is the most priceless gift. The means God chose to spread the gospel was the human speech of our fellow-men—that each who had felt its power might tell in his own way the glad story. Let us then do our utmost that all peoples of every tongue may hear it! One day many of us may go to preach it ourselves. And God will be our teacher—not by a miraculous gift, but by helping us—as He has helped so many—to

master the most difficult tongues in order to do His work.

III. THE LIMITS.—'As the Spirit gave them utterance.' They could not say anything, but what God helped them to say. And that is the limit of His messengers still. If they are faithful to Him, they can only speak what He has taught them. But does that mean their work will be feeble and with little result? Far from it! Some day you may learn that in algebra there is a sign which means that the limit of the series of numbers with which you are working is infinity, *i.e.* that though you may come very near it, you can never reach it. Now, the limit here set to the work of God's heralds is only infinity. Until they perfectly accomplish His purpose, there will be no end to them. He can and will teach His servants what is right to say and do, and enable them to overcome all the difficulties they have to encounter. The only limits on our side are lack of obedience and faith. Let us all pray that we may never set limits to God's working with us, and that we may be willing and ready to go on to the farthest bounds of His holy purpose for the world!

For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind,
And the Heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

Acts ii. 39.

'For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord God shall call unto Him.'

HERE is a verse that suggests to us what we have often seen in some quiet little wayside pool. We have amused ourselves by throwing a stone into the middle of it, and then watching the circles rippling outwards from the centre—first tiny little rings, gradually widening and growing, until they lost themselves upon the shore. In these words spoken by Peter we have three such circles enclosing one another, the smallest consisting of the Jews to whom he spoke, the next larger: one embracing their descendants, and the largest of all including the whole world—a circle that ripples, as it were, quite out of sight. Now let us see a little more closely what these circles mean.

I. TO YOU.—This was a personal promise.

made to those whom he was then addressing. The good things of which he spoke were theirs by right. A certain gift had been promised to them, and now they had only to claim it. The Jewish people had already received many gifts from God's hands. Their whole wonderful history was a long evidence of His goodness and love, and very specially had He declared Himself their God, and named them His people; but more lay behind. The promises of God were not exhausted. If they liked, they could claim far more than they had ever received. Think what a depth of meaning there was in these simple words for them, and we are glad to know that as many as three thousand of them believed the message, and put themselves in the way of inheriting the great promise.

II. TO YOUR CHILDREN.—Here is the second circle. There are many good things our fathers and mothers possess that they cannot be certain, notwithstanding all their love and care, we shall have also. Their wealth may be lost to them; we may not have their vigour of natural health; the son may have no share in his father's genius, or the daughter but very little of her mother's talent; there are certain titles and honours even which no parent can pass onward to his children. On the other hand, there are great inheritances of which we cannot be deprived—the good name of our father's house, the untarnished reputation of his honourable career, the purity of his life, the influence of our home training, the rich blessing of our fathers' and mothers' prayers. These best of legacies no earthly power can ever remove. And in the past the great ones in Jewish history had been assured that God's blessing would descend to their children. Abraham had been led out under the countless stars, and told his descendants should be numerous as they, and be the special wards of God. He was 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' And thus He reveals Himself still. In the direct line of His servants there is to be no disinheriting.

TO ALL THAT ARE AFAR OFF.—This was something new. The Jews had never been accustomed to think of the great gifts of God as being the rightful property of strangers. For declaring this truth, the men of Nazareth would fain have killed Jesus at the outset of His ministry—and the jealousy His continued message raised led Him to the Cross. But God's purposes must be effected. He seeks to bless all men everywhere, and 'calls'

them. A Jewish legend says that the voice from Sinai spoke a different thing to each man who heard it—that it gave to everyone an individual message. That is what God does still. He has His own word for every one of us.

Now, remember, this last circle embraces us—we are the descendants of those who were 'afar off' in Peter's day. What, then, is the promise, for it concerns us all to know? 'The gift of the Holy Ghost.' This is what we all may have—within our hearts dwelling, abiding, the Spirit of God. How good, how beautiful! Let us pray for it, let us seek to cherish it!

Gentle, awful, holy Guest,
Make Thy temple in each breast,—
There Thy presence be confessed,
Comforter Divine!

Acts iii. 16.

'And by faith in His name hath His name made this man strong, whom ye behold and know: yea, the faith which is through Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.'

IN the early missions of the Christian Church, Jesus gave His disciples power to do many things, which even His truest servants cannot accomplish in the same way now. Yet miracles of healing are done every day 'in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.' Our Christian doctors at home, and our medical missionaries abroad, all recognise the help of Jesus and of His Spirit in enabling them to effect the cures which so strongly commend the gospel to those who benefit by them. A poor lame man, that every person in Jerusalem knew as well as the citizens of Edinburgh did the blind man who used to read at the Mound, or the people of London would know a blind beggar who took his stand by the steps of St. Paul's, had been cured by the word of Peter and John, and everyone was filled with amazement. Now Peter proceeds to teach them some lessons on the subject when he finds them thus in a mood to listen, and the text gives us three of the most important of these, namely, the result of the miracle, the witnesses of it, and the means by which it had been effected.

I. THE RESULT.—The man had been made quite strong, he had now 'perfect soundness' of life and limb. Sometimes very strange and sudden

cures seem to be effected in our own day, by so-called 'faith-healing,' or at shrines like the famous 'Lourdes' in the south of France. People leave their crutches and walking-sticks behind them in proof of their recovery. But it seems that most of these are either cases of nervous disease, or that the seeming cure is the result of excitement, and the weakness returns again, no more to be banished in this way. But this man's cure was perfect and permanent. There is nothing so sad as that people who are sick should be buoyed up with the hope of one new treatment after another, and find themselves no better in the end. But when God undertakes a cure, it is always certain. Everybody is sick till His cure comes. There is no sin too great, no weakness of character so deep-seated, no wicked heart so perverse, that God cannot make it clean, strong, and good. He is the Great Physician, and His healing brings 'perfect soundness.'

II. THE WITNESSES.—Everybody had known the lame man. Now everyone saw him walking and leaping, so there could be no question about his cure. It was too well attested to admit of doubt. And there were too many eager to find fault with the apostles to permit any chance of fraud. Peter is very strong on this point: 'Ye behold and know him,' he says; and again, the cure has been wrought 'in the presence of you all.' It is a great matter that Christ's work can appeal to all manner of witnesses. I heard the other day of a noble servant of His who is carrying on work in the midst of enemies who watch his every action to see where they can find a fault, but they cannot—they are only able grudgingly to praise him. So was it with Jesus Himself. Pilate said, 'I find no fault in this man.' His enemies had to pay men to tell lies about Him, and they had not wit enough to agree in their story; that was the only kind of witness they could bring against Him. Jesus' work is not done in a corner—we are all witnesses of it. Are we also witnesses for Him?

Jesus bids us shine, first of all for Him;
Well He sees and knows it, if our light is dim;
He looks down from heaven, to see us shine—
You in your small corner, and I in mine.

III. THE MEANS.—All this great result had been accomplished by a seemingly trifling agency—the mention of a name. Ah, but names are often very powerful—sometimes the most power-

ful weapons men can wield. Have you never been in a great gathering where some one has mentioned the name of a certain person, and for two or three minutes the speaker has not been able to be heard, because the people have cheered so lustily at the mention of that name? Our very blood runs swifter in our veins to-day when we mention Bruce or Wallace, Drake or Nelson, Lincoln or John Brown of Harper's Ferry. The names are powerful to rouse the best that is in us. And so everyone of us has our own mighty names. You remember, perhaps, little Ailie and her aunt Bessie in Mr. Crockett's beautiful story, *The Play-actress*. There could not be more than one 'Aunt Bessie' in the world, and she could have no other name, while no one could ever do things as well as she—even the cleverest could only imitate her at a distance. Well is it for us all, children, if we have some hero or heroine like that—best of all if they are father and mother! But there is 'a name that is above every name.' The old and young sing—

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear.

And this is the name of which Peter speaks here. The lame man had faith in that name, trusted altogether the power of Him who bore it, and so he was healed. The name is nothing to us, you see, unless we know the person. I might give you lists of the great heroes of ancient Egypt, India, and China, and you would not be at all interested or excited, would only grow weary at the recital, but the moment I spoke of Arthur, of Alfred, of Harold, or of Richard the Lion-heart, you would be all eager to hear. So the name of Jesus is the most precious in the world to those who know and love Him, and can effect the mightiest results in their lives. Those lives alone are miserable in which the mention of that name kindles no response. May every one of us love Him with all our hearts, and seek to serve Him with all our strength!

Acts iv. 12.

'And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.'

OUR former text led us to think about the 'name' and its meaning. This one also speaks of the

name, but the form of the words here suggests a contrast which will repay our making clear to ourselves. They set over against one another

1. The World's Saviours.
2. God's Saviour.

I. THE WORLD'S SAVIOURS.—There are a great many 'names given among men,' which they assert to be saving names. I do not mean the gods of the heathen nations, though it is interesting to remember that the Greeks used this very name 'Saviour' as a title of one of their deities. But these 'names' do not have much practical influence over us, and even in the lands wherein they once held universal sway, their empire is tottering to its fall. But I am thinking about the 'names' that are given as saviours in our own country. One says, If we can only get a certain amount of *money* every year, we shall be all right. There will be no undue anxiety for us then, and everything we really want we can obtain. Another bids us seek for *social position*. The ranks of the poor and those who toil hard with little wage and less regard from their fellows must be miserable, but if we once reach a certain social level we shall win happiness. Another bids us seek our safety in *intellectual attainment or culture*. Money, he says, is sordid and low; he will speak of it, as an end in itself, in as strong terms as a Christian will, but he is just as positive that his plan of success is the right one. Once we have mastered one of the great fields of knowledge, we shall hold the secret of the world, and our souls will be satisfied. And so on I might go through the long list of fame, philanthropy, 'bubble reputations at the cannon's mouth,' and all the various forms in which men have striven to win happiness for themselves. But it is dreary work: they have always to confess failure; none of these, however good in themselves, can be 'saving names.' They are too numerous. One pins his faith

to one of them, while another declares for one of quite a different character. None of us would have time to try them all, and life is so short that we have not opportunity to make such long and risky experiments. They are not only too numerous, but too uncertain. None of their advocates will guarantee any one of them as suitable for everybody, so we might choose just the wrong one for us, and end worse than we began, without having any chance of retrieving our error. In this particular 'multitude of counsellors' there is *no* wisdom.

II. GOD'S SAVIOUR.—'In none other is there salvation.' Here is a note of certainty struck that challenges all contradiction. And here also is but one way, one name standing out in solitary splendour. This method is not to follow any one line of action, not to set before ourselves a certain more or less definite aim, which somehow we may accomplish. It is to be obedient to one Person—to put our faith in one great Leader. It is to love and serve Jesus Christ. There is no uncertainty to be encountered, as to whether this method may suit us—it suits every one. There is no question of its ultimate success: by this name, and by Him alone, 'we must be saved.' Don't let us imagine it is something that concerns only older people, or ourselves at some future time of our life: it concerns us all at every moment. Don't let us be persuaded it is something too difficult for us to understand, about which even learned men differ. Jesus has said that He belongs to the children. Let the children claim Him! We never find it difficult to say of people whether we love them or no, and whether it is a joy to us to please them, and to have messages from them. This is what Jesus wants—to have our love, our trust, our service, our attention, to have us eager to read, learn, and practise all He tells in His messages and teaches in His life.

The Expository Times Guild of Bible Study.

WITH the month of November the Guild of Bible Study entered upon its seventh session. The purpose of the Guild is to encourage the systematic study as distinguished from the mere reading of Scripture. Two portions are chosen, one from the Old Testament and one from the New; and those who undertake to study, with the aid of some

commentary, one or both of these portions of Scripture between November 1896 and September 1897 are enrolled as Members of the Guild. Names of those who are willing to make this effort are sent to the Editor at Kinneff, Bervie, N.B. There is no fee or other obligation.

As the study proceeds, Members may send short