

The Jerusalem Church

By J.W. McGarvey

From *McGarvey's Sermons Delivered in Louisville, Kentucky*
(June-September, 1893)

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul ; and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own ; but they had all things common." (Acts, iv, 32.)

In the beginning of our race God made one perfect man and one perfect woman. They were perfect physically, mentally and spiritually ; for God made them in his own image, and when they were made he looked upon them and said they were "very good." But in process of time our first parents fell from their high estate, and ever since then it has been the aim of every right minded man to struggle back to the innocence and purity of Eden. In like manner, when the fullness of time had come, God made a perfect church, or one as near perfect as could be made out of fallen human beings. The church also fell ; and ever since it has been the aim of all who have rightly understood the revelation which God has given us, to get back to the characteristics of the Jerusalem church.

The time has been when few among Protestants could be found to deny this ; but in recent years it has been called into serious question by men of repute the way from Oxford University to our western prairies. I think it well therefore to reinvestigate the grounds of the old opinion, and see whether we and our fathers have been mistaken. When we consider the fact that the Jerusalem church was under the direction, during the whole of its brief career, of inspired men, one or more of whom seems to have been continuously present in the administration of its affairs, this alone would seem to guarantee the absolute correctness of all its proceedings, at least in the estimation of all who continue to believe in the miraculous inspiration of the twelve apostles. But such are the present conceptions of inspiration held by many who still call themselves Christians, that with them this is no longer a guarantee against much that is now said to be unwise for the time that then was, and incongruous with the needs of our own generation. It may be admitted in advance of special examination, that the Jerusalem church did not pass through all the experiences which congregations have since encountered, and that therefore it had no possible opportunity to set us an example for such experiences ; and yet it may still be for us a perfect model to the extent of the experiences through which it was called to pass. Beyond this it would of course be idle to think of it as a model church. Let us inquire then, what its experiences were, and let us see whether it set us an example in them that is worthy of all imitation, and incapable of improvement.

THE MATERIAL OF WHICH THIS CHURCH WAS COMPOSED

It may be well to glance in the first place, at the material of which this church was composed when it first came into existence. The nucleus of one hundred and twenty members, we remember, had been called by our Lord in person from among the sheep that he called his own, who knew his voice, and

followed him as the true shepherd ; and when, on the great Pentecost, the gospel of a risen Christ was first proclaimed, among the many thousands of devout Jews who heard it three thousand were found to acknowledge their faith, to repent, and to be baptized forthwith. These three thousand were men of tender consciences and decision of character, who needed only to know their* duty in order to do it at once. There was no parleying, no hesitation ; but before the sun had gone down on the day that they first heard the gospel preached, they were baptized into Christ. They were the pick and flower of that whole generation of Jews, the ripest fruits of the good tree planted by Moses and nourished by the prophets of Israel. Having such material to begin with, we should expect to see the inspired apostles mould them into a model church ; and we are not surprised at the statement with which their history as a church begins, that they "continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers ;" and here, in these four items, we find them a model for all subsequent imitation. To continue steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, is still the highest attainment of a church of God, as respects its advance in knowledge of the things which pertain to life and godliness; and to continue steadfastly in the fellowship of the apostles, is to have continuous fellowship with God and Christ and all the saints in light. To be steadfast in the breaking of bread and in the prayers, all the prayers that are appointed or authorized, is almost a certain assurance of a life in other respects well pleasing in the sight of God.

Such a church is certain to experience a rapid growth in numbers ; for its high qualities will inevitably draw to it the true-hearted in the community about it. This church did grow with marvelous rapidity. It soon numbered five thousand men, besides women and children; and if the latter classes maintained anything like the ratio they do in modern times, the whole number must have been at least ten thousand. It was at this stage of its progress that the remark is made which I have taken for my text. The multitude of these ten thousand believers were of one heart and one soul. We talk much these days about Christian union. We can't talk too much about it. We are solicitous, as believers have not, been for ages past, for the fulfillment of our Saviour's prayer in behalf of the union of all that believe in him. Have we forgotten that this prayer was at one time fulfilled to the very letter ? Here, in this first church, was a mass of men, women and children, of whom the inspired writer says, that they were all of one heart and soul, so completely so, that not one of them counted anything which he possessed as his own. It was all ours not mine. Not one was allowed to lack anything needful, though it required the sale of houses and lands on the part of some to supply the wants of others. Was there anything short of perfection in that union? Is that church not in respect to unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, the model for us all ? Can we have any higher aspiration, than to struggle back toward the unity of the Jerusalem church ?

PERFECT MODEL OF CHRISTIAN UNITY AND GENEROSITY

Let me say, that we have here not only a perfect model of Christian union, but also the Lord's own method of working toward the universal unity of the people of God. God began by bringing into existence one church perfectly united in itself and in Him, and then went on to originate others that were called on to imitate this. Had they done so, there would have been universal unity as far as the faith in Christ extended. So now, if we would bring about unity once more, we must begin by having at least one perfectly united congregation. Do you know such a congregation ? Would you not travel many miles to see a church of even a few hundred members, of whom it could be truly said that they are all of

one heart and soul, and that not one of them says that anything he has is his own 9 But until we have some such churches as that, how can we possibly have Christian union? If we could to-day bring into union all the congregations in the United States without a material change of each within itself, we should not have the unity for which our Savior prayed. It would be a jumbling together of many incongruous elements.

Some of us are obviously looking in the wrong direction for a restoration of the unity which once existed. We must look backward to the church that was, and not forward to some imaginary church of the future, for the model of union, and the union must begin in the individual congregation. When you get one congregation united in the Lord, you have made the right start, the start which the Lord himself made. Then get another and another into the same condition, and you will have them united with one another as fast as they become united within themselves in the Lord. The man then, who is doing the most to-day for the final union of all God's people, is not the man who is making the most noise about it, and getting up the biggest conventions to consider the subject, but the man who is doing the most to establish the unity of the Spirit in the midst of some single congregation, and thus reproducing the model church of old. Why can not the church which I am now addressing be the one to first set an example in this direction? Here is your model. See that you work according to it.

But perfect as this union was, it was a union of imperfect human beings, still bearing marks of the fall; and there was constant danger of its disruption. The time came when its disruption was averted only by consummate wisdom, and a manifestation of generosity such as claims our unbounded admiration. While the vast majority of the members were Hebrews, that is, home born Jews, many of them were Hellenists, or Jews born abroad. Between these two classes, everywhere except in this model church, there was some alienation and jealousy; and finally, within the church itself there arose a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, that the widows of the former were neglected in the daily ministrations. What a fine opportunity for a general quarrel—for the Hebrews to say, "It is no such thing;" and for the Hellenists to retort, "We know it is." And as the apostles themselves had been the almoners, what an opportunity for some of them to fall back upon their dignity, and complain that their honesty or fairness had been called in question. Did anything of this kind occur? If it had we should not be able to hold up the Jerusalem church as a model. It would have been too much like our churches of the present day. You know what occurred—that the apostles called the whole multitude together—a vast assembly in Solomon's portico no doubt, and proposed that seven men full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom be selected and set apart to look after the daily distribution, so that the apostles might give all their time to the ministry of the word and prayer. We are told, that "the saying pleased the whole multitude."

Every one of them was glad to see a way of avoiding dissension, and healing the breach before it was formed. The people selected the men; and if you will look over the list of names, you will see that there is not a Hebrew name among them—no Joseph, no Judah, no Simeon, no Benjamin, no Isaac, no Abraham. All are Greek names, full-blooded. They are Phillip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas; and one of them, Nicolas, was not a Jew by blood at all, but a proselyte whose home had been in the Greek city of Antioch. What does this mean? It means, that the Hebrews, though greatly in the majority, selected all the men from the minority, from the very party in which had arisen the murmuring; and

thus, to the great surprise no doubt of that party, they smothered the murmuring under a deluge of generosity. brethren, what a model we have here! How easy it would be for every church, when murmuring from a minority is first heard, to drown it out at once and forever, if we only had the heart to imitate the model church. God help us to think of this hereafter.

I said at the outset that this church was made as near perfect as it could be with human materials. This implies that exceptions would be found in the case of individuals. So, in the course of time one of its greatest virtues became a source of temptation and sin to two weak members. One day, while Peter was presiding at some meeting, a brother named Ananias walked forward, and laid at his feet a bag of silver which contained, he said, the price of a piece of land which he and his wife had sold for the benefit of the poor. If the disciples at that age had been as demonstrative and irreverent in the Lord's house as are some of our modern assemblies, I think there would have been general and very hearty clapping of hands at this deed. What then was the consternation of the brethren, when they saw a frown on Peter's brow, and heard from him these blistering words: "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, did it not remain thine own? And after it was sold was it not in thy power? How is it that thou hast conceived this thing in thy heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." While they listen and gaze, Ananias falls to the floor, and the cry is raised, He is dead. Peter calls out some young men from the audience, and tells them to wrap his clothing around him, take him out, and bury him at once. He was buried before he was cold. By common consent, or more probably through an intimation from Peter, no one ran to tell his wife. The meeting went on for about three hours. And what a solemn meeting it must have been! The wife of the dead man at last walks in, and Peter calls her forward. "Sapphira, tell me whether ye sold the land for so much." "Yes, for so much." "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them who have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out." She also falls dead. The same young men take her up, carry her out, and bury her by the side of her husband. What awful work this was; and how quickly done! No tears, no prayers, no delay.

PERFECT MODEL OF DISCIPLINE

Nothing but solemnity and awe like that of the judgment day. And whose work was it? Not that of Peter; for he seems not to have known that Ananias was to fall dead; and although he knew that Sapphira would, he expressed no will of his own in the matter. It was the work of the great Head of the church, who thus exercised discipline in His church, so as to show those to whom it would afterward be entrusted, the promptness with which crying sins must be rebuked if the church would please Him. This is a divine intimation on the subject of discipline. Shall we learn the lesson, or shall we continue, as so many churches have long been doing, to keep the ungodly in the church, under the vain delusion that we are exercising forbearance and mercy which heaven will approve, or under the idle impression that we have a better hope of saving a wicked man in the church, than if we cast him out. I think that God knows more than we do about how to save wicked men; and He through His apostle has used these solemn words: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received from us," Perhaps some of you are ready to say: Such discipline as that would never do, for it would scare everybody away from the church, and you would never have any more additions. Well, it was intended

to scare somebody away from the church, and I suppose it did. I will venture, that if any of the liars or hypocrites in Jerusalem had any thought of joining the church soon, it kept them away. They would conclude that such a church was not a healthy place for men of their stripe. But if there were any yet outside the church who were in dead earnest about trying to get to heaven, and felt the need of good company on the way, it must have had a very different effect on them. They now knew that this church was a body in which liars and hypocrites could not be tolerated, and this is the very kind of a church which they intended to join if they ever joined any. It would seem at first glance, that the reputation of the church would suffer prodigiously when it became known that it had two such members as Ananias and Sapphira—that its enemies would wink their eyes, and say, Ah yes, this new fangled religion looked very fair at first; those people were wonderfully kind to the poor ; but see now what hypocrites and pretenders they are, doing all this in appearance only. How many others are there who have kept back part of the price when they pretended to be giving all ? Such would undoubtedly have been the result, if Ananias and Sapphira had been kept in the church, as they certainly would have been if the model of many modern churches had been followed. But the real result was far different. Did it drive everybody away from the church? I hope you have not forgotten what the text of Acts says on this point. We read, just as we might expect, that " Great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things ;" but we also read, that "believers were the more added to the church, multitudes both of men and women." So it will ever be. Let us lay aside then our compromises with sin, and boldly follow the model church in keeping a high wall and a deep ditch between the church and the world, while we open the gates to those who are in earnest when they start for heaven.

PERFECT MODEL IN EVANGELISM

We have thus far seen that the Jerusalem church is a model in the high qualities of unity, liberality, generosity, and strictness of discipline ; and when a church stands high in these, it can not well have a low rank in anything else that is good. Nevertheless, this church has been charged with some grievous faults, and to these we shall now pay attention. It has been said that it was an anti-missionary church; that it confined its evangelization to the city of Jerusalem, unmindful of the great outlying world, and that it became necessary for God to smite it with the 1)e3om of apparent destruction, and scatter its members to the four winds, in order to send it out on its world-wide mission of preaching the gospel to the whole creation. But let us see how this is. It is true that the apostles did remain in Jerusalem until the church was dispersed under the persecution that arose about Stephen, and not only so, but that they stood their ground, and would not be driven away when all their brethren had fled. But why was this? It was in obedience to the express command of the Lord. He had told them to begin at Jerusalem, and it was their duty to remain there until they received some intimation from Him, either oral or providential, that they should enter the next field of labor. They had received no such intimation. On the contrary, up to the very time that Stephen was stoned, every intimation of Providence was in favor of a further stay. How can a conscientious preacher determine when he ought to leave one place and go to another? He can judge only by the degree of success attending his labor where he is, compared with that which he may reasonably anticipate elsewhere. Suppose, for illustration, that a preacher were holding a series of meetings in this church, with crowded audiences, and scores of persons confessing Christ every day; what would you think if he were to suddenly close his meeting and go up among the

river hills, and commence one in some country schoolhouse ? You would say that he was throwing away his opportunities, and sacrificing the interest of many souls. Precisely thus would it have been with the apostles and the other laborers in Jerusalem, if they had left the city before they did. Up to that very day their success in winning souls had continued to be greater than they could hope for in any other city or country under the sun, greater indeed than they ever afterward achieved in the wide world. Read the statements in the first six chapters of Acts, and see that after Pentecost the accessions to the ranks of the believers steadily increased until the very day in which Stephen was arraigned. The very last statement of the text before the account of his persecution begins, is this : " The word of God increased ; and the number of disciples in Jerusalem multiplied exceedingly, - and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." It appeared as if the whole city would soon be brought to Christ if the work should only be pressed a little longer. Was this a time to leave Jerusalem, and go to Samaria, or to the dark regions of the heathen world ? Preposterous ! and preposterous is the thought of him, who, with more zeal than knowledge in regard to foreign missions, creeps up in his ignorance, and whines out a complaint that the church in Jerusalem is anti-missionary ! No, brethren, the real spirit of that church in regard to the evangelization of the world, was seen both in staying and in leaving. And when they did leave their homes, though they had lost their all because of their zeal for Christ, they went everywhere preaching the gospel. Never was there a church which burned with a more consuming zeal for the conversion of the world, or labored more wisely in that very direction even while they still remained within the Holy City. It is not ignorance of the facts, so much as want of reflection upon them, which has given rise to this charge.

Another serious charge against this church is based upon their failure for a time to evangelize the uncircumcised. They are charged with being so narrow in their charity, and so bigoted in their Jewish exclusiveness, as to think that salvation was for the Jews alone. Their blind conservatism, we are told, was so extreme, that although they had been commanded by the Lord to go into the whole world, and make disciples of all nations, they were doggedly determined to confine their ministrations to the seed of Abraham.

I wonder if they thus were narrow and mean. The man who says they were ought to be very sure of it before he makes the charge, lest he be found bringing a railing accusation against the Holy Spirit by whom these men were guided. Let us see what were the facts in the case.

We are to remember that through a period of thirteen hundred years the written word of God had forbidden that any uncircumcised man be admitted to the ordinances of religion, and loyalty to God demanded that until this restriction was expressly rescinded by Him who appointed it, his people must continue to maintain it. The same law, however, admitted to all the privileges of the Jewish religion, all Gentiles who would submit to circumcision. How natural then, that the Jewish disciples, until they were otherwise informed, should conclude that while men of all nations were to be baptized into Christ, their circumcision was to precede their baptism. They were not indifferent to the salvation of the Gentiles, as is evident from the fact that Nicolas, the proselyte of Antioch, had not only been baptized, but had been chosen as one of the deacons of this very church in Jerusalem. Yes, the very church which is charged with this narrowness, had selected a Gentile to a high office.

Again, when Peter had been informed by a direct revelation from heaven that Gentiles even without circumcision were proper subjects of baptism, and had baptized Cornelius and his friends, the Jerusalem brethren, not yet informed as to the ground of his action, called him to account for it ; but you will remember, that as soon as Peter recited to them the facts, they held their peace, and, instead of manifesting the reluctance which bigotry would have prompted, they "glorified God, saying. Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life." They were happy to learn that they were at liberty to bring the believing Gentile into their fellowship just as he was. The question was settled, and settled forever. It was never raised again by even the most ignorant and bigoted member of the Jerusalem church.

I am not forgetting that there arose in this church afterward a question whether the Gentiles who were brought into the church without circumcision, should not be circumcised afterward, as a condition of their final salvation. But who was it that raised this question? The text of Acts says (xv. 5), that they were "Pharisees who believed;" and Paul more particularly describes them by saying that they were "false brethren privily brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage" (Gal. ii. 4). This shows that false brethren might gain access to this church, and that false teaching might be announced in it ; but what was done by the church as a church ? The whole multitude was called together ; the truth on the subject was propounded by the apostles who were present; the false teaching was silenced ; and the whole church united in a formal written declaration of the truth and repudiation of the error. Here again this church presents itself as a model, in maintaining the truth, and nipping in the bud the expression of erroneous and injurious teaching. This teaching would have broken the unity of the church if it had been allowed to run its course.

But the Apostle Peter, we are reminded, also faltered once, under the pressure of Jewish exclusiveness. So he did on a single point, that of eating at the tables of the Gentile brethren. But this was only a temporary aberration of Peter, similar in nature, though not in degree of turpitude, to his temporary fall when he denied his Lord. Under Paul's rebuke he was restored to right action, and he afterward warmly endorsed the epistles of Paul in which this whole subject of the relations between Jews and Gentiles is fully set forth, including the very epistle in which Paul speaks of Peter's sin and the rebuke which Peter received (II Peter iii, 15, 16). This transaction shows, that while a very eminent member of the Jerusalem church was weak enough to give way for a time under the influence of some of the false brethren whom he had once assisted in silencing, he quickly recovered ; and this reminds us of a remark which I made in the beginning, that this first church was as near perfect as the human material out of which it was made would permit. It could not be more perfect than this.

In the last notice which the Scriptures give us of the Jerusalem church, this same subject of circumcision is brought forward, but the character of the church itself still stands without a shadow of reproach. James, the Lord's brother, and the appointed elders, are now at the head of its affairs, and Paul comes to the city at the time of a great festival. Unbelieving Jews, Paul's bitter enemies, had propagated the falsehood, that he had taught the Jews who were among the Gentiles not to circumcise their children, or to observe the Jewish customs; and danger of a riot was anticipated if they should see Paul about the temple. What was done to prevent such a calamity? James and the elders, reaffirming the decision

which the church had announced years ago, that none of these Jewish customs should be required of Gentiles (xxi. 25) ; advise Paul for the sake of showing by action that these reports were false, to unite with four brethren in the services connected with the Nazarite vow, a service which, with the knowledge then possessed by the brethren, was considered perfectly compatible with the Christian faith. It was done ; and although the device failed to conciliate Paul's enemies, it shows that to the very last the brethren in Jerusalem, and also Paul when he was with them, were studious to preserve the good will of all men, that they might gain some to Christ ; and that they employed every innocent device to win even their bitterest enemies to the Lord. In this the Jerusalem church proved itself to possess in an admirable degree the spirit of its adorable Head, and to be a model for all churches in circumstances analogous.

PERFECT MODEL OF STEADFASTNESS IN PERSECUTION

Finally, this church is a splendid model, throughout its brief history, of steadfastness in the faith under the severest trials. I say, its brief history, because, from its beginning until its final dispersion, it existed only about thirty -four years. It was founded A. D., 34, and it was dispersed by the opening of the war with the Romans, A D. 68. There were doubtless yet remaining to the last some members who had been baptized on the ever memorable Pentecost when it sprang into being. During this short period it passed through five persecutions. In the first Peter and John were the victims. They were standing in Solomon's portico in the presence of a vast concourse of people, when armed guards from the Sanhedrim pushed their way through the crowd, seized the two apostles, and dragged them like criminals to the guardhouse.

The next day, after an exciting trial, they were dismissed with strict injunction accompanied by direful threats, not to preach or teach any more in the name of Jesus. Did the brethren speak of arming their five thousand men, and, under the protection of God, bidding defiance to their foes ? Not a word of it. These thousands remained perfectly quiet, and the two, when they were released, went straight to where the others were, and told all that had happened to them. One said, Let us pray. They all dropped to then* knees, and this prayer went up to heaven: " Lord, thou that didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is ; who by the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David didst say:

Why did the Gentiles rage,
And the peoples imagine vain things?
The kings of the earth set themselves in array,
And the rulers were gathered together,
Against the Lord and against his Anointed:

for of a truth in this city against thy Holy Servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel foreordained to come to pass. And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest forth thy hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done in the name of thy Holy Servant Jesus." The place was shaken, to show that the prayer was heard. They arose from their knees, went up to the temple, and spoke the word of God with boldness. In all this there was no thought of violence, no threatening except by the

enemy ; but there was earnest prayer, and an indomitable determination to keep right on. Can we have a better model than this?

In the next persecution all of the apostles were arrested, and were confined for the night in the common prison used for thieves and cut-throats. They were tried again, as Peter and John had been, but they were not released until they had each been tied to the whipping post and received forty stripes less one on the naked back. And here comes the most incredible statement to me in the whole New Testament. It is the statement that when the apostles were thus publicly and shamefully whipped, they went away " rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus." What power restrained their passions, and what kept quiet the thousands of brave men, their brethren, hundreds of whom would rather have died than to see that sight ? Ah, this is the model church. These apostles and their adherents are unconsciously setting a model for coming generations, a model of Christian patience and fortitude in imitation of their Master. The next blow of the enemy was enough to try the faith of the strongest. Stephen is stoned by the chief priests and elders. Devout men with great lamentations take up his mangled body and bury it ; but before their lamentations have died on the air, armed men are moving through the streets arresting every believer who can be found, both men and women, and the prisons are being crowded with them. The word for flight is given, and every gate of Jerusalem is crowded for a time with fleeing disciples, until the whole Jerusalem church is scattered to the winds. No more preaching now. No more gatherings in Solomon's portico. Jerusalem has lost ten thousand of its people, and the enemies of the cross rejoice over the final destruction of the church. We shall hear no more now, they say as they greet one another, of the hated name of Jesus. But did the Jerusalem church die ? It had never been more alive than it was that day ; and not many years had passed, when it was back in its old place again, with its chief persecutor now its boldest preacher. O brethren, the church which God has placed before us as a model could not be killed by persecution.

The next persecution was planned and executed by a Herod. It was not aimed at the rank and file of the church, but at the apostles themselves. Herod seems to have said to the chief priests, you don't know how to kill off this abominable sect. You must strike it on the head. I will show how the thing can be done. So he seizes and coolly beheads the apostle James, the oldest, I suppose, of the twelve. The unbelievers applaud. He seizes Peter next, not now to scourge him and let him go, but to send him headless to the grave after his brother James. It was the Passover feast, and he must not be executed till the feast is over. I will keep him in prison, says Herod, till the close of the feast. But the priests and elders had tried that once with all the apostles, and I think some of them must have said, You can't keep those men in prison, Herod. We tried it once, and they got out without opening the door or disturbing the guards.

I will show you ; so Herod chained him to two soldiers, and placed him and them in the inner prison. He set two guards between the three and the outer door. This door was a heavy one of iron ; and another body of soldiers was stationed in front of it. No thief or murderer was ever more securely imprisoned. But on the appointed morning, though the soldiers were all found at their posts, and the iron door securely locked and bolted, the prisoner gone. The guards who stood in front were called up. " Why did you let that man pass out of the prison?" " No man, king, passed through the door last night. We watched all night without sleeping." The man who kept the key was called up. "Who unlocked that door

last night ?" " No one, king, had the key, and I was not there." The guards between the prisoner and the door: "Why did you let that man pass by you last night?" "No man, king, passed by us. We paced our beat all night, the light was burning, and no man passed by us." The men to whom he was chained; "How did that man loosen the chains which fastened him to your arms ?" " We can not tell, king. All we know is, that when we went to sleep he was there, and when we awoke he was gone." " We told you so," chimed in the chief priests. Now Herod knew just as well as he knew his own name, that here was a great miracle ; but he cruelly ordered every one of the sixteen innocent soldiers to be put to death. No wonder that soon afterward he was himself smitten by an angel, and followed his victims into eternity. I don't see how the angel kept his hands off from him at the time of the massacre. But what was this model church doing all the time that its leader was in prison ? It is a short story but it speaks volumes. " Prayer was made earnestly by the Church unto God for him." They were not praying for his escape, as appears from the fact that when he did escape they would not at first believe it. They had no hope of this. They expected him to go as James had gone; and they prayed, I think, that he might be enabled to die as Stephen had died, as James had doubtless died, without faltering as he had once faltered in the presence of the priests and elders. What a noble example for the persecuted of every later generation ! and what an ocean of noble blood that has since been shed in battle, would have been saved, if the believers had always followed their model!

Of the fifth and last persecution we know but little, and that little comes to us through the writings of an unbeliever. Its chief incident was the murder, under the order of the chief priest, of James the Lord's brother, as related by Josephus. The time was between the death of Festus and the arrival in Judea of his successor. We can be sure that others suffered as well as James ; and we may judge how the battle-scarred veterans of this model church endured the trial, by what we know of their conduct in the past. Finally, the time came for this church to close its career. It had set an example in everything that we know of it for the churches of all time to come ; it had fulfilled its mission on earth, and so, like thousands of churches in later times, it must pass away. The rebellious and unbelieving Jews had in the madness of despair provoked a war with the invincible power of Rome, and the armies which had conquered the world were defied by a handful of fanatics. As the Roman legions begin to surround the Holy City, the disciples, in obedience to the command of their Lord uttered before his death, made a hasty flight, and the church of Jerusalem was no more. All of its enemies had not been able to kill it, but it died, as it had lived, in obedience to its Lord. It died as the sun dies at set of day, when it sinks amid a bank of clouds, and fills all the heavens with glory. what a church was that ! God grant that the like of it may yet be seen again, and that multiplied thousands like it may spread over the whole earth, so that the Head of the church, when He returns to reckon with us all, may find the model church reproduced in every congregation of his people.