

Too True to be New

I

Some years ago, as a member of the M.I.S. and a former President of the Union, the writer was invited by a Yorkshire Society to speak at their Interim Conference. The then President, A.E.Owler, vetoed their invitation and said that Ernest Brady must not be allowed to be heard, having expressed doubt of the correctness of some aspects of Christadelphian teaching. Any Mutual member will appreciate that such action is absolutely contrary to the rules and spirit of the Society, but I mention it not from any feeling of resentment but simply as a background to what follows.

It is, perhaps naturally, the policy of most leaders to prevent their followers hearing anyone or anything which might disturb the peace, but it has not usually been in the real interests of any form of knowledge or progress for discussion and criticism to be stifled. As it was evident to me that many of the friends I met at this meeting had no conception of the deep and abiding issues which had, to our sorrow, broken a long and loving association, I determined on writing this explanation.

I had been led to my conclusions as a result of feeling that something must be seriously wrong with a community which was split into so many different and antagonistic divisions as Christadelphians. If they all had the truth, I asked myself, and if the true spirit of Christ animated any or all of them, how was it possible for there to be in the same town two or three, or as in Birmingham, as many as five different groups, each debarring members of the others from fellowship? It could be, of course, that the matters upon which they were divided were unimportant and that all were right on fundamentals. On the other hand, if all were right on matters of basic truth, why was not the love and tolerance which should characterise true Christians not equal to the task of agreeing on matters of secondary importance?

During a period of several years I had thought over these matters, visiting other meetings, talking with other brethren and reading widely anything which seemed to have a bearing on them, I made one important discovery; there was one fundamental question on which all were most certainly not agreed, and that was in regard to the nature of man and the sacrifice of Christ. Not only were there different and conflicting views between different fellowships, but also inside separate groups the most contradictory views are to be found. Furthermore, there was what seemed like a conspiracy of silence in many quarters. For example, the Editor of The Fraternal Visitor said the subject had caused so much strife that he would have nothing more to do with it. Yet undoubtedly, it is the crux of the gospel and in apostolic times it formed the chief topic in Christian preaching.

It was while my mind was in a state of indecision that I happened to be speaking at Derby and spending the day with the late J.T.Roberts. During the afternoon I was browsing through his bookcase and came across two volumes of a periodical called "The Lamp," produced by Edward Turney of Nottingham in 1873 to 1875. From these, which brother Roberts subsequently gave me, I learned the true facts of the controversy of 1873 concerning the nature of Christ, and I realised how a zealous but misguided and autocratic man, the late Robert Roberts, had driven out of the community a noble and gentle character, with a few thoughtful and intelligent followers like the elder William Ellis, and had riveted on to Christadelphianism for all time the abominable doctrines of sinful flesh and a condemned Christ.

A number of small groups and ecclesias upheld the truth, the majority being re-baptised on realising that, as Christadelphians, their understanding on vital matters had been deficient, and remnants of these have existed ever since, though gradually diminishing in the way it seems minority groups of true believers always tend to. One of the last, known as the Crabtree Road ecclesia, was amalgamated to the Suffolk Street fellowship early this century. Such is the way in which, by age,

infirmity and death, the brightness of truth is dimmed, those who follow allow the sharp edges to become blurred and finally the lights are smothered.

Nevertheless, throughout the history of “The Truth” there has constantly appeared here and there what is called “The Clean Flesh Heresy,” either the result of reading what others have written or from personal study of the Bible leading to a rejection of the false teaching in the Statement of Faith, so that in the Temperance Hall Section the process of withdrawal has become almost a matter of routine. Pamphlets on the subject have been widely circulated by F.J.Pearce of Newbridge and the Nazarene Fellowship and although some of these are unskillfully written and crudely printed the reasoning is sound and scriptural and the confusion and contradictions which they reveal in the works of Dr Thomas, Robert Roberts, C.C.Walker, J.J.Hadley, and other prominent Christadelphians is scarcely credible.

My former brothers and sisters have good reason to know how R.Roberts misused his power, for not many years latter, by a similar act of dictatorship, he again split the Community on the question of Inspiration, and batted upon the Suffolk Street section the false accusation of believing in a partially inspired Bible. The fact that nearly seventy years afterwards this lying charge is still levelled by malicious members of the T.H. and Berean sections should make them hesitate to accept upon hearsay the equally false charges made against Edward Turney by Robert Roberts in, e.g., “The Slain Lamb” and other similar literature.

II

The year 1873 was a turning point for Christadelphians. If brotherly love and the scriptural principle of reasoning together had prevailed, the community might have gone on unto perfection and become a true and united Church. Instead, a fallible and irascible man was allowed to assert his will and entangle his followers in some of the same gross errors and misapplications of Scripture which disgrace most of the sects of Christendom, namely, original sin and defiled nature.

Many Christadelphians feel bitterly insulted to be charged with sharing the apostate doctrines of Roman Catholics, but the facts are undeniable. We willingly admit that longstanding tradition, supported by a superficial reading of a few passages of Scripture and encouraged by too great readiness to blame their faults and failures upon our inherited nature, leads some people to conclude that human nature is full of inherent evil. But true believers are expected to exercise a God-given reason and discrimination, and not to read superficially or be led astray by tradition, while the very fact that it was a Pope, seeking excuse for his own evil courses, who first introduced into Christianity the theory that Adam’s sin is supposed to have defiled his nature and become transmitted to all his descendants, should make us examine it especially carefully.

It is quite illogical to conclude that because wickedness appears to be universal therefore there must be some kind of evil principle or bias towards sin inherent in man, and there are two simple arguments to the contrary, either of which is alone sufficient to prove it false.

The first is, that if we have such a bias, then God Who created us or caused us to inherit a nature with that disability would be really responsible for all the sin in the world.

The second is, that Jesus, with exactly the same nature and tendencies as ourselves, was without sin.

It is no answer to the first to say that Adam sinned and we merely inherit in our flesh the effects of his sin; there is no escape from the conclusion that if we are born into the world with some evil principle or bias in our nature which causes us to sin, or makes it inevitable that we do sin, then it would be impossible for God in justice either to hold us guilty or still less to punish us. While a Creator who in such circumstances says to us “Be ye therefore perfect as I am perfect,” would be a

very monster of deceit and injustice; if as Christadelphians assert, sin runs in the blood one could as fairly blame a child born blind for not being able to see as expect one with sin in his blood to be good.

Such, in the Christadelphian view, is the virulence of the evil in man, that it can only be overcome by Divine Grace entering and displacing or restraining the native evil tendency. If such were the case, then one would expect that outside of the true believers, whoever they may be, there would be neither goodness nor morality of any kind. Yet one must admit that there are and possibly always have been, people who do good rather than evil from choice; who, without any religious motive whatever take pleasure in being charitable and kind: indeed the apostle tells us so (Romans 2:14); there have even been those who have loved their fellow men better than their own lives. We need not fear to acknowledge the fact because we are told that we are all under sin and in bondage; rather we should ask ourselves if we have properly understood what such statements imply. They in fact relate to a federal constitution whereby, for the purposes of salvation and the deliverance of a vast multitude of people from their personal sins, the one first sin is regarded as hanging over all men and the legal situation resulting from its commission, involving all enlightened believers.

I shall produce the evidence on this point in due course.

Regarding the second point one would think it scarcely necessary to enlarge, were it not evident that there are people who can blind themselves to the most hopeless contradictions in order to avoid facing a disquieting fact. If it is true, and we know it is so, (i) that Jesus was the same human flesh and blood as we are. and (ii) that He was capable of experiencing the same temptations as we do, and (iii) that He did indeed suffer such temptations and overcame them all, then it follows that His life, His experience and His example prove beyond question that there is no evil or bias toward evil in human nature which it is impossible for any other man to overcome.

When this reasoning is put before a Christadelphian, as it has been “ad nauseum,” he generally explains that we are overlooking the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, and that on this account He was specially strengthened to enable Him to do what no other man could do. We were confidently informed by a young brother last summer that Jesus was a mixture of human flesh and divine Spirit and therefore although He had the human weaknesses of other men yet He had the divine strength necessary to resist them!

If such was truly the case, then Jesus was not really like us: He might have looked like a man but He could not be truly a member of our race, the Son of Man. While if it is said that He was the same as we are but was in some way specially helped or strengthened, then it is not true to say He was tempted in all points like as we are. A person may choose to believe that our Saviour was a hybrid mixture of human and divine, or that He was endowed by His Father with a power to resist temptation which no ordinary man can call upon, or He may believe that He was an ordinary man actuated and supported by Divine Power as a puppet is by strings, but if so He should honestly admit that he believes in a Christ unknown to the Bible and that his theory contradicts the very fundamentals of truth laid down in the Scriptures which record Jesus’ life and experience.

Those who are interested to plumb the depths to which Christadelphian exposition on these points can descend, might do worse than read “Redemption in Christ” by W.F.Barling; which the present writer and F.J.Pearce have dealt with in “My Life For The Sheep.”

III

It appears from history that within a century of the completion of the New Testament, the leaders of the apostate Church had gone astray on the question of human nature, laying the blame for their evil deeds upon the impulses of their nature instead of upon the weakness of their characters. They sought to prove from Scriptures and experience how Original Sin changed man to a sin defiled and dying creature and made human nature for ever obnoxious in the sight of God. This has been the

teaching of the Church ever since, and according to their Constitution and Statement of Faith it is precisely what Christadelphians are supposed to believe and teach today.

Briefly it is based almost wholly upon a grave misapplication of Paul's teaching in Romans, 7th chapter, but, as many people have realised, including Dr Thomas, Paul was not here speaking of himself as a man in Christ, torn between wanting to do right but unable to do so because of the overpowering sinfulness of his body.

He was describing the mental reactions of a Jew under the Law: knowing what was good but because he sought to justify himself by meticulous observance of ceremonies and works of the law, while harbouring in his heart envy, malice and hypocrisy, convicted of sin.

Apart from this much misused chapter and a few passages in Job, nothing in Scripture justifies a belief in an innate evil principle. How could God address such words to Israel as "Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse. A blessing if ye obey the Commandments of the Lord your God, and a curse if ye will not obey" (Deuteronomy 11:26) if they were so created that they were physically incapable of obedience? Surely the whole basis of God's dealings with man is that we are fully capable of choosing between good and evil, of obeying or disobeying, and if because of an inherent evil principle the dice is loaded against us it would be a cynical fraud to say "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil" (Deuteronomy 30:15).

It would be a mistake to suppose that only in recent times has there been objection to the belief that sin is a fixed principle of the flesh. In the 4th Century A.D. a bishop named Pelagius, said to be a Briton, rejected the Church's teaching, affirming that Adam's sin affected himself alone and declaring that it was impossible for sin to be transmitted or inherited.

This was the so-called Pelagian Heresy mentioned in the Prayer Book, which resulted in the Thirty-nine Articles, of which the 9th states "Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk) but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness and is of his own nature inclined to evil."

This is a false and God-dishonouring doctrine worse in its implications than Immortal Soulism or Supernatural Devilry. Yet see how Christadelphians in their Statement of Faith teach exactly the same thing. Clause III (1879) "A sentence carried into execution by the implantation of a physical law of decay, which works out dissolution and death, and while a man is yet alive, gives him, where it is left to its uncontrolled operation, a tendency in [he direction of sin. This is the law of sin in the members, spoken of by Paul... In Adam's sentence, all mankind are involved, in consequence of their being physically derived from his physically affected unclean being."

Unfortunately, Pelagius saw only sufficient light to enable him to reject the error; he failed, or was perhaps too early in Christian history to be able to replace it by the true explanation of how Adam's sin really affected his posterity and how the death of Christ is related to it. There is no doubt it was understood in apostolic times but it is designedly left to be deduced in their writings by reasoning from the historical facts. Paul speaks of "the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest by the Scriptures of the Prophets." It is made manifest to those who are prepared to put the facts together and accept the conclusions to which they lead, but it is nowhere stated categorically exactly why Jesus died. This is left to our reasoning

We are more fortunate today in having the benefit of the work of Pelagius and many like him since, and it is largely our own fault if we remain in the error and ignorance which has prevailed over the Christian world since his day.

It is not easy for English speaking students to get at the full facts of the Pelagian controversy as it was recorded very incompletely and in Latin and very little of it has been translated. It is evident however that at the time the Church never got so far as the discussion of how the supposed inherited defilement of sin affected Jesus. But the time eventually came when it was realised, quite logically, that if all human flesh was full of sin, then it must inevitably follow that the flesh of Jesus was full of sin. Plainly, however the Church argued, this was not so, for the Bible says He was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners.

This was a truly dreadful dilemma, and to escape it and enable Jesus to be spotless while all others are supposed to be defiled, the Church invented the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, so that a clean thing might be brought out of an unclean. Thus one error begets another.

Now, when 1,500 years later Christadelphianism comes into the picture, instead of getting down to bedrock truth, Dr. Thomas seems to have accepted the nearly universal belief that human nature is defiled and full of sin, without question.

When one's eyes have been opened it is truly astounding to re-read "Elpis Israel" and see how his enthusiastic conviction that human nature is flesh-full-of-sin carries him away and obscures the lack of evidence on which it is based.

We can acknowledge with gratitude the tremendous value of the work Dr. Thomas accomplished, but we should be foolish not to recognise once the fact is pointed out to us, that he failed to perceive and reject what is in fact the worst and most blighting error of the whole apostasy - the teaching that Adam's sin physically defiled the human race and made it impossible for them to obey God's Commandments. We who have benefited from his pioneer work in bringing so much of truth to light again should be the last to blame him for failure on this one point even though it is so vital, but it would be the worst mistake to allow a misguided sense of loyalty to a man, or a system, or a community, make us false to our reason and to Christ.

IV

The blame for the perpetuation of such an incredible error amongst Christadelphians lies with those who lacked the humility and teachableness to admit their mistake when the matter was reasoned out before them from the Scriptures. One does not need what R. Roberts termed "a prolonged spiritual education" in order to perceive that it is impossible to harmonise the belief that human nature is full of sin with the fact that although Jesus was also human nature, He did not sin and He was holy, harmless and undefiled from His birth to His death.

We have seen that the Church solved the problem by inventing the Immaculate Conception. Christadelphians faced and accepted the logical conclusion that if original sin is what they think, then the flesh of Christ must also have been full of sin. They found a different solution. They affirm that we must distinguish between Christ's nature and His character. The Scriptures which say He was holy and sinless they apply to His character and way of life, while insisting that His flesh and nature was essentially evil.

It must be a matter of opinion whether the path of escape chosen by the Church in its perplexity is not to be preferred to the blasphemous arguments which R. Roberts in his day and men like John Carter and W.F. Barling in ours are prepared to defend the assertion that sin ran in the blood which Jesus inherited from His mother Mary, the handmaid of the Lord.

One's mind inevitably goes back to the injunctions given to Israel in regard to the creatures which they brought to the priest as sin-offerings. "But whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer, for it shall not be accepted for you. Whosoever offereth a sacrifice, it shall be perfect to be

accepted” (Leviticus 22:20,21). “And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy 15:21).

Dr. Thomas says (Elpis Israel page 114),”Sin I say is a synonym for human nature. Hence the flesh is invariably regarded as unclean... sin could not have been condemned in the body of Jesus if it had not existed there... Sinful flesh being [he hereditary nature of the Lord Jesus, he was a fit and proper sacrifice for sin.”

It is impossible that this should be correct, for if Jesus was unclean His sacrifice was a violation of Divine Law. If sin in the flesh is not a blemish, words have no meaning. If sinful flesh had been the hereditary nature of Jesus then that He should have been made a sin offering would have been a breach of every principle of sacrifice.

If one asks how it comes about that Jesus, with a nature supposed to be full of evil, succeeded in living a life free from sin, we are told it was because He was the Son of God and was specially strengthened to overcome. Were this indeed the case, then the Scriptures which tell us He was made like unto His brethren, and that He was tempted in all points like as we are, are utterly false, the trials which He is supposed to have endured were a farce and his example a hollow mockery.

In this connection my mind goes back more than twenty years to a day when accompanied by a girl of 18 who is now my wife, I listened to a Christadelphian, A.E.Field, lecturing on Jesus’ temptations. My companion asked me how it was that Jesus, Who was made in all points like us was able to overcome whereas so the speaker said no other human being could have done so. I had to confess that the problem was beyond me and I suggested she ask the speaker herself. He instantly explained that as Jesus was God’s Son, therefore He inherited from His Father the necessary Divine Power to resist temptation which all other men lack. Looking back it seems strange that one recalls little more than a vague feeling of something wrong and illogical, and although young people naturally incline to trust the judgment of their elders, it is remarkable that even children can be green enough to be fobbed off with such nonsense. Thank God we have more sense now. The sad thing is that A.E.Field is a descendant of members of the Crabtree Road Ecclesia already mentioned, who once had the truth, and he will probably believe and preach the same falsehoods for the rest of his days. Of the remnant who drifted back into Christadelphian error his mother seems to have been the only one who had the spirit to refuse to submit to their terms and died a year or two ago in isolation.

If the purpose of Jesus being the Son of God was to give Him the strength which other men lack, to overcome the evil impulses of their nature, there is neither honour in His triumph nor shame in our failure. If this were the worst that could be said against Christadelphian teaching it is more than sufficient to condemn it. But as we shall show, the view of the death of Christ to which it leads is an infinitely worse matter, worse than any of the errors of Rome and one which, we believe, will bring shame, dishonour and rejection upon all who wittingly defend it.

When about ten years ago these facts began to be clear to me, I circulated a humble little leaflet explaining the position as I saw it and suggesting that something might be done to remedy it. One result was the action of the President of the Mutual Society already referred to. Another was that two managing brethren were deputed to interview me. One was the late H.W.Warre and the other was L.C.Jennings whose address at the M.I.S. Conference was the occasion of these thoughts.

We met on the appointed day and, in order to clear the ground, I asked them if they understood the issues I had raised. Brother Warre replied that he not only understood them but had himself held the same views for more than 30 years; but under the Constitution he was precluded from expressing them. Brother Jennings replied that he neither understood them nor did he wish to do so, being quite satisfied with what he had always believed.

In these circumstances little purpose was to be served by discussion and I simply stated that I could not feel that either attitude was quite right. It did not seem to me consistent for one who believed that Jesus was in every sense holy and whose sacrifice was solely on behalf of sinners to join

in fellowship with those whose professed basis was the belief that He was defiled, condemned by His nature and His death necessary for His own salvation. Nor could I feel it right to know the truth of these things and refrain from expressing them. Brother Warre has since passed beyond the range of human judgment and we may hope that his obvious sincerity and good intention will justify what appears to us to have been a mistaken policy. Neither could I feel that in this life we shall ever attain the point where we can afford neither to know nor to wish to know anything which has to do with the things concerning the Name of Jesus Christ. Brother Jennings is still with us and in view of these things I was particularly interested to hear that he was speaking on this vital subject in the Midland Institute. It is with regret we have to conclude from what we heard that his self-satisfaction is scarcely justified.

The upshot of the interview was that I received a letter telling me that my name had been removed from the ecclesial roll for “absence from the meeting.” It has been suggested that the intention behind this strangely dishonest piece of work may have been to spare my feelings, but I am bound to confess that if I am to be condemned I would rather be condemned for the heretic I am than for the backslider I am not. Subsequently I requested permission to explain to my ecclesia the true reason for my expulsion but this was politely refused, as was a similar request to the Preaching Union, of which I was a member. When I was a Christadelphian I was always convinced that what we believed was unassailable – there is a saying “Truth sees no lion in the path” - but it is evident that on this subject at any rate there is more confidence in suppression and “hush hush” than in earnestly contending for the Truth.

V

Since the events just related, whether there be any connection or not, the Suffolk Street Ecclesia have abandoned the Statement of Faith containing much of the old rubbish and have adopted a simplified one. As far as it goes this is a good thing, but it is not enough; the errors have been omitted but the truth has not been put in; the evil spirits have been swept out but good spirits have not been invited in; the last state of that house may be worse than the former.

This was painfully evident in the address given by L.C. Jennings on June 2nd to which I now turn. He referred to the sacrifices appointed under the Law of Moses and said, rightly of course, that their blood could not take away sin. He then spoke of the death of Jesus and explained that His sacrifice was acceptable to God because He was a willing and understanding victim, submitting Himself consciously to His Father’s will, whereas the animals were without intelligence and completely passive.

All this was true enough as far as it went but not specially profound; it is merely a statement of simple scriptural facts which everyone accepts. It throws not the least glimmer of light on the central and most interesting and important question which everyone wants answered - and that is WHY? Why could the death of Christ do what the death of animals could not do? Why in fact did God require sacrifice at all?

Obviously, for the reasons which the speaker gave - and others which he appears to know nothing of – Jesus’ sacrifice was acceptable to God, but, and this is the real point, being acceptable, how and why could it take away sin? This is the real question, which anyone who elects to speak upon the subject ought at least to attempt to answer. Why in the purpose of God is the forgiveness of sin associated with blood-shedding and sacrifice; why in other words was the death of Christ necessary for the salvation of sinners? We may speak for 20 minutes or for twenty years about the reasons for His sacrifice being acceptable, but if we have no conception of why it had to be, why Jesus chose to be a willing and submissive victim, or what God intends us to learn from it, we may as well save our breath.

Some years ago I wrote a pamphlet called "The Question Christadelphians Cannot Answer," in which I quoted from many writers to show the unanimity of opinion that we cannot understand, nor, some say, are we intended to do so, why Christ had to die. That effort gave much offence and John Carter labelled me "a renegade," but it had the beneficial effect of inducing some speakers and writers to concentrate on the question and try their hand at answering it. I leave it to the reader to judge the success which has attended their efforts but it would be a good test to ask oneself whether, in his own mind and in harmony with his general beliefs he has any clear idea of why Jesus died.

Perhaps I should have called my pamphlet "The Question Christians Cannot Answer," for it is equally true; I do not think there is or ever has been a sect able to put forward a clear explanation of the Atonement, for the reason that all alike go wrong from the very first step - in believing that natural death, or corruptibility, is the penalty of the sin in Eden. As I sat and listened to Brother L.C.Jennings in the Midland Institute and saw a hall full of people being fed with stones instead of bread I can only confess that I felt sick at heart and sad that I had been able to accomplish so little to enlighten them.

Here I would say that what measure of success has attended our efforts under the grace of God, has been almost confined to the Temperance Hall section, a result which I attribute to the fact that they lay greater emphasis upon the traditional doctrinal basis and do not scruple to give expression to any arguments to uphold their belief in filthy flesh. Thus their very efforts to defend their false doctrines are doing more today than we can do to awaken people to the horrid things they are supposed to believe. An example of this is the occasion when John Carter in opposing our contention that Jesus suffered what was justly due to sinners, wrote "Jesus did not suffer the penalty of sin; He merely suffered death." Surely the man who can apply the adverb "merely" to the Crucifixion has never thought out his position.

Many people have contented themselves with the thought that the Sacrifice of Christ is too deep for them and it is in vain for them to try to understand it. This is absolutely wrong; the complications arise because people will not put aside their misconceptions long enough to consider it impartially. Start correctly from the beginning and it is comparatively simple and certainly within the capacity of anyone of average intelligence to understand it clearly. I have said, and I repeat, given a reasonable familiarity with the Bible and a willingness to listen and learn, I will undertake, in one hour, to impart to anyone an understanding of the Sacrifice of Christ which will transform his outlook.

VI

I have already affirmed that the basic error which makes it, I do not say difficult, I say impossible to understand the meaning of the Cross, is the nearly universal belief that natural death was the penalty and direct result of the sin in Eden. The full reasons for rejecting this belief are inseparable from the explanation of the death of Christ and no one will appreciate their full force until they can bring themselves to consider the events of Eden and Gethsemane as parts of one enthralling problem. Nevertheless, there are a number of points which carry weight independently.

All will agree that natural death results from man being corruptible; and it follows that man was either corruptible when he was created or his nature was changed to make him corruptible when he sinned. Christadelphians are supposed to believe the latter, as defined in Clause III of their Creed (1879) already quoted "A sentence carried into effect by the implantation of a physical law of decay, etc." It is certain that there is no mention in Scripture of any such process of implantation, and if it took place it must mean that before he sinned man was of some superior nature. Yet there are only two natures known to the Bible, the natural, with the life in the blood, and the incorruptible, with the life in the spirit.

The actual fact is clearly that man was created exactly as he is now, scripturally "a living soul," and that means a living person of the same breath of life nature as all other orders of animal life. It is a remarkable thing that Christadelphians are at pains to emphasize this truth when they are refuting

the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, yet they never notice that the arguments they use for that purpose knock the bottom out of their belief that corruptibility and its consequence, natural death, is the penalty of sin.

In one of the last articles written by Dr Thomas, entitled “Our Terrestrial System before the Fall,” the following passage occurs; “Death and corruption then is the fundamental law of the six days; seasons of decay and death were institutions existing before the fall. Adam and Eve, and all the other animals born of the earth with themselves, would have died and gone to corruption, if there had been no transgression, provided that there had been no further interference with the physical system than Moses records in the history of the six days.”

Presumably Dr. Thomas did not realise how this conclusion conflicts with that given in “Elpis Israel” and defined in the Statement of Faith, but as they are directly contradictory it is impossible for both views to be correct and we are therefore faced with the obligation of deciding where the Truth lies.

It is our conviction that had he lived long enough Dr. Thomas would have seen the need to revise some of his earlier conclusions; and we believe that if he were alive today he would be where we are. Some of its readers might sit up and take notice if they found in the Intelligence of The Christadelphian “We regret to report that Dr John Thomas has accepted views contrary to the Statement of Faith in regard to the nature of man and therefore ceases to be in fellowship.”

If we are asked the question, “Why is the animal creation corruptible?” does anyone reply “Because Adam sinned”? Why does a mayfly live for a few days and yet an elephant for a hundred years? Why is the life of a flower but a matter of hours, whereas a tree has a life of centuries? Is it not because these are the natural life span of their creation? Does a child who dies within a few minutes of birth lose his life or suffer for Adam’s sin? Have the tribes of Africa and India, a thousand generations of ignorant and irresponsible savages, been perishing for Adam’s one act of disobedience?

It needs no more than a moment’s clear thinking to recognise that all living things, man included, are part of a natural order of creation which, within the limits of its organisation is very good. It is nevertheless a natural order, governed by the natural laws of reproduction, growth maturity and decay which are vital to its continuance. Suffering, disease and death are as normal to it as are health, life and good, and indeed, unless evil formed a part of the design it would have been impossible for there to have been any appreciation or understanding of what is good. Contrasted with the harmony which existed in Eden, the creation is cursed; contrasted with the perfection which will be in the Kingdom, the present world is subject to vanity. From the point of view of the creature in search of happiness the whole creation groaneth in pain, but, and mark this, it is an essential framework and environment for the development of character.

For these reasons then, with Dr Thomas at his best and the few writers who during the centuries have glimpsed light through the fog of misconception and tradition, we have rejected the belief that the laws governing all nature were set in operation by Adam eating the fruit of a particular tree. We have renounced the doctrine (that is why we have been called “Renunciationists”) that at the fall man was literally impregnated with “sin” as a physical principle of decay and that natural death was the result and punishment. We believe it is false to reason and to revelation, and dishonouring to God, to teach that the common death of all men, wicked and good, innocent and guilty, wise and foolish, is attributable to what Adam and Eve did in Eden. Nor do we believe that because of man’s supposed physical defilement it is impossible for him to live a good life. If there was any single commandment which is beyond the capacity of any single man to observe and obey, the thought might be worth examination, but there is none.

Where then, shall we look for the explanation of the Fall of Man? It was undoubtedly a matter of Law. A tremendous change occurred certainly, but it was a legal change, not a physical one. The

change was in Adam's relationship to God. From being an obedient Son, living in harmony with his Creator, by a simple act of disobedience he alienated himself. This changed relationship is typified by the expulsion from Eden and debarment from the Tree of Life. It is not necessary to suppose that this tree of Life had a miraculous power to confer immortality; it typifies the fact that so long as Adam was obedient and free in the garden he was in a "living" relationship, but having transgressed the law under which he was placed, he incurred the penalty attaching to that law, namely the sentence of death. He was therefore cut off from the tree of Life and expelled from Eden; he was in a legally dead condition and estranged from God.

It is this alienation or estrangement from God which Adam incurred both for himself and his descendants. Just as a man born under British law is by birth subject to the British Constitution, so men are born under the dominion of sin and subject to the laws governing sinners. But just as a child is not held to be responsible to the Laws of England before he has reached years of discretion, so men, even though born under sin, are not held amenable to the law of the sin and the death until they are enlightened. This is what is implied by such Scriptures as "But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." (Galatians 3:22).

In 5th Romans this truth is put in several different ways, "Death passed on all men." "Death reigned even over them that had not sinned." "Through the offence of one many be dead." "Judgment by one to condemnation." "By one man's offence death reigned." "By one man's disobedience many were constituted sinners." "Sin hath reigned unto death." To suppose that in these passages Paul is referring to natural death and to personal sins is to credit him with a very poor ability to express his meaning. Every one contains the idea of law and is only understandable from a legal point of view. In the following context, each one is paralleled by its reverse, the removal of the legal disability by faith in Christ's Sacrifice and consequently freedom from the power of sin and death as its wages. It is because the reign of sin is, for the present, a legal matter, that those who choose can be delivered from it by an act of Faith, in a similar way to which one who is say a naturally born Britisher can assume American status by becoming naturalised.

VII

Now, some people argue that if our contention is correct that man was already corruptible or capable of death, he could not have incurred death by his sin. There is no weight in this objection as anyone will realise who considers what a world of difference there is between being capable of dying and being actually put to death. The vast difference is very evident if we think of a criminal under sentence of death. He will die in any case in course of time in the natural order, but he does not worry about that; what he dreads is the execution of his sentence.

The penalty attached to the law in Eden was "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," and this implies a summary execution. In every instance where death was prescribed in the Law of Moses as the penalty of sin, it was a death by violence, stoning or smiting. Therefore if God had inflicted upon Adam the punishment he incurred Adam would have been put to death immediately. And if it had been so Adam would have perished, suffering the just penalty of his disobedience, and the human race would never have existed. Thus whatever was done to deliver Adam, it is to that that we and all men who have ever lived owe our very existence.

But the problem was, How could Adam be saved from the results of what he had done? How could justice be upheld and yet at the same time man delivered from the awful situation into which he had fallen? How could God show His abhorrence of sin without exacting the uttermost farthing from the sinner and blotting him out for ever? In effect the same problem arises for every one of us personally when we realise that we are sinners and unworthy to live, but it has been solved for us and our part is to accept and believe in what has been done. Adam is our federal head; he represents us all and his one sin involved him and us with him in the condemnation which our own failures would incur.

It was a problem utterly beyond the wit of man or angel and unless Supreme wisdom and mercy had intervened there could have been neither the present human race nor the great nation of immortals which is being selected from it. How the Almighty and All-wise God solved the problem is in fact the Gospel of Salvation. It was for ages a hidden mystery, concealed under types and allegories. It comprised those things which even the angels desired to look into. Its revelation, apart from what men like Abraham and the prophets were able to discern by the eye of faith, had to await the appearance on earth of the one Who was Himself the Key to the mystery, but even since then it has been hid from the wise and prudent because to them the Cross is foolishness.

Here I wish to quote a paragraph from the pen of Andrew Wilson, a Scot to whom we owe much; "The parents of our race, recent from the fall and conscience stricken by the Divine rebuke, were driven from their blissful seat and filled with dismay at the threatening of death; a threatening piercing through their guilty souls, but of the nature and effects of which they could form none but the vaguest ideas. But when directed by stern Authority to apply some instrument of death to the lamb which, with endearing innocence had sported around, they heard the agonising groan, beheld the appalling sight of streaming blood, the struggling agonies and life's last throes, they gazed upon the breathless body and were told, this is death; how stricken must they have been, with horror such as no description can ever paint. When further, they had to go through that other process of sacrifice; the putting off of their own devised covering and the putting on of the robes of skin, their hands reluctant, their hearts broken and all their souls crushed down by the piercing consciousness that these revolting things were the fruit of their sin," the writer continues, "let us then, in guilty silence, Behold the Lamb of God in dark Gethsemane and Calvary, that meek and purest Lamb that was slain for us."

We can now return to L.C.Jenning's address and make good his failure to supply a reason for the death of Christ. The truth is that Jesus actually and literally suffered the death incurred by Adam. He was not compelled to do so. It was not a case of God punishing His innocent Son instead of Adam. God was not here concerned with punishment but with saving, and at the same time transforming the minds and touching the hearts of all men in all ages who are witnesses of these soul-stirring events. It was that Jesus, knowing what was at stake, voluntarily took the place assigned to Him by God, when in His foreknowledge He initiated the Plan of Salvation.

When we picture Jesus at twelve years old in the Temple, "both hearing them and asking them questions," He was not, as some people suppose, imparting to the doctors knowledge which He had received supernaturally; He was himself commencing to learn, how His nation's history and economy proves mankind alienated from its Creator. He would learn of its deliverance from Egypt by bloodshedding at the Passover; of the laws of sacrifice and sin offering; of the law which stipulated that every first-born had to be redeemed for an equivalent price or put to death; He knew that every soul in Israel had to be ransomed by the literal payment of a piece of money; in the history of His great ancestor Abraham He would learn how Isaac was offered up and how God saved Isaac by the substitution of a ram; in the synagogue He was accustomed to hearing the words of Isaiah which speak so eloquently of One Who was led as a lamb to the slaughter and who bare the sin of many.

From all these facts and many more, Jesus would gradually come to a realisation that the human race was existing under a deferred sentence of death; that in the sight of God mankind was in bondage, having been sold into slavery by its federal head Adam. How or when He came to the realisation that He was the One Who alone could effect their deliverance we do not know; it may have come as a direct revelation to Him from God; the writer's opinion is that it would come rather by a gradual process of learning in the way suggested. He learned obedience by the things He suffered; He probably also learned why His obedience was so vital by the same process of experience, since all the facts necessary to enlighten Him were within His knowledge.

As He watched the Temple services and pondered their significance, Jesus would slowly realise that the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. He would quickly perceive that, as Paul says later, "The Law came in order that the offence might abound." That is to say, the law, with its

multitude of sins and sacrifices, illustrated and emphasized the first sin whereby Adam and all the race in him lost the right to life. From Eden onwards, the animals which were offered were only types or tokens; such offerings could not alter the legal situation resulting from the first transgression of law. When they were offered in faith and in accordance with law - i.e., perfect and unblemished - they were accepted, in the forbearance of God, for the time then present, and the individual sinner received forgiveness. But the sin in Eden, which brought in death as a sentence, the wages of sin, still hung over mankind as a sentence of condemnation, and this could only be met by the penalty being paid. The Jewish law strictly laid down the principle of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. A man by his sin had forfeited his life; only the surrender of a man's life could purchase deliverance from the claim of the law.

It was because Jesus knew this that, well knowing what was to happen to Him, He set His face like a flint and went steadfastly towards His death. He said as He went. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto to, but to minister, and to give his life as a ransom for many." He knew the provision of the Law, that if a man were sold into bondage to a stranger, "after that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him... according unto the years (the period of his bondage) shall he give him again the price of his redemption." The period of man's bondage was his whole life; the price of his redemption was the life paid by his brother. Jesus therefore paid with His own life the debt which Adam incurred and which was still outstanding.

V111

When John the Baptist said of Jesus "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" he did not speak of Him taking away the personal sins of individuals, or of providing a way by which all sins may be forgiven. These things can certainly follow from what Jesus did, but the vital fact which it is essential to understand and accept because it is the foundation stone of the Gospel, is that by His sacrifice He cleared away that which stood between man and his Creator, the sin of the world, the first sin which stands for all sin, and the condemnation it brought which represents the punishment due to all sinners, for He literally bore the penalty which it incurred but which He alone could pay without perishing.

Why was this? Why could Jesus suffer the penalty of sin without perishing whereas Adam or any other man who suffered death for sin would perish?

There are two factors involved. The first is that Jesus was sinless; therefore He was able to suffer death, pour out His natural life in the blood which flowed from His wounds, and then rise again in the life of the Spirit; for God could not suffer His Holy One to see corruption. But if Adam had borne his own penalty he would have perished eternally, for there was no ground, provision or occasion for him to rise. He had failed in his probation; he was a sinner, fit only for destruction and all hope gone. There is infinitely more in this simple thought alone than Christadelphians see in the whole purpose of the Atonement - that the Salvation which commenced with Adam secured the very existence of every human creature. Thus it is in a very real sense that Jesus is "The Saviour of all men (but) especially of them that believe." If the present life is worth having, and who will deny it, every human creature owes it to Jesus. A strange and yet obvious truth which has never been preached since apostolic times. And if the future life is worth hoping for it is not because we hope our sins will be forgiven at the judgment seat but because Jesus died that we might have it. "I am come that ye might have life and have it more abundantly."

But there is another and equally vital factor in the explanation of why Jesus was able to take upon Himself the burden of sinners, death, and yet not perish. Since all men are included in the Adamic federal head and therefore, as shown in 5th Romans, legally estranged from God, it was impossible for any man in that position, whatever his personal goodness may have been, even to escape it himself, much less to find the means to deliver anyone else.

To affirm, as Christadelphians do, that Jesus “was raised up in the condemned line of Abraham and David and by dying abrogated the law of condemnation for those who were under condemnation and therefore for Himself” is as absurd as to imagine that a bankrupt man in a debtor’s prison could by some means conjure up the wherewithal to pay not only his own debt but also with the same money purchase the release of all his fellow prisoners. Not only is the idea unsound in itself but it is foreign both to all the principles of sacrifice and redemption and to clear scriptural teaching.

There is never the least suggestion that Jesus was under any form of condemnation nor in any need personally of redemption. As we have seen, the only ground upon which even Christadelphians base the contention, a suppressed inherited sin-nature, is a complete fallacy. The truth is the very contrary; so far from being penniless, Jesus was rich (in His inheritance) but for our sakes (by giving His life) He became poor. So far from being in bondage or under condemnation, as a Son in His Father’s house He was free (Matthew 17:26).

The question then arises, if the condemnation which Adam incurred was a legal bondage or alienation which involves all his children, in the same sense in which Levi while yet unborn is said to have paid tithes in Abraham to Melchisedec, how was it possible for Jesus, who was also a man, to escape it?

The explanation is in the facts of His birth. It was to make the Redeemer of the race a near kinsman of the one to be ransomed but at the same time free from the bondage which held him that He was a new creation begotten by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary. It was this necessity and this alone, which required that Jesus should derive His life not from the condemned line, but anew from the source, direct from God.

If Jesus had been a son of Joseph He would have been no different physically or in nature from what He was, but His life would then have come to Him from Adam and would have been a condemned or forfeited life. Had that been the case, it would have been impossible for Him to offer Himself as a sacrifice however willing He might have been, or for such a sacrifice to have been accepted. It would have been the same as if a Jew had offered a pig or a dog instead of the prescribed lamb or other legally clean animal. This is actually what the Christadelphian view comes to, for if inherited sinful flesh and condemnation are not blemishes and do not render a creature imperfect then words have no meaning.

But we know that Jesus was not the son of Joseph. His life was newly created by the Holy Spirit for the sole and especial purpose of bringing into the world a man related to Adam, of the identical flesh and blood nature, but Whose life was not derived from the alienated Adamic source. It was on this account that the Angel was to say to Mary, “Therefore that Holy Thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

IX

We have seen that the doctrine of inherited sinful nature is completely false; not even the worst sinner is born with a defiled nature, therefore neither was Jesus; there is no need for the invention of either an Immaculate Conception, or for an unscriptural distinction between Jesus’ nature and His character. He was the same flesh as His mother, as His brothers and sisters and as all other humans. It was in the origin of His life that He differed, and this difference was not of physical quality, of goodness or badness, but a legal one, a difference, we may truly say, of ownership. Jesus belonged to God because He was given life direct by God and was not brought into existence by the will of the flesh as an extension of the life of Adam. This is why He was called “holy” from birth. This does not simply mean He was a good baby, for as an infant He could not manifest a holy character; it means He was set apart; He was holy because of His origin. This is what Jesus referred to when He spoke of Himself being “from above” while His hearers were “from below,” and when He said “He that

committeth sin is the servant of sin and abideth not in the house for ever, but the Son abideth ever” (John 8).

As Jesus grew up and developed character under trial, He retained the holiness in which He was born and therefore His right to the life He had received; unlike Adam He did not fail under probation and forfeit His life by disobedience. Therefore, when the time came, He had in His own possession the equivalent price to that which Adam lost, a life, His own life, that which could be offered, if He so willed, for the life of the world.

It is impossible for us to properly appreciate the love of God revealed to us by Christ in His sacrifice unless we can contemplate the possibility that He might have chosen not to give His life and still not have been guilty of any crime. This may seem a startling thought and indeed it is only perhaps possible to consider it hypothetically, but it must be evident that even to regard His death as the crowning act of obedience of His life is to take away its real true voluntary and sacrificial meaning. How far less is it possible to accept the Christadelphian view that it was in any sense whatever for His own salvation?

There came a point in His life when we believe He knew that He had overcome the world and could justly claim the recognition He had earned. “Now is the hour come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” What does this mean but that He was entitled, as of right, to enter into His Father’s house and assume His place at the right hand of God? What stood in the way? What was to prevent Him? Hear His own words, “But except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.”

In Gethsemane He prayed that He might not be called upon to drink the cup prepared for Him. This was what He willed and who would dare to affirm that such a desire was wrong; or that had His courage failed or His endurance proved unequal to the trial He would have been guilty of sin? Where is there a law which says a man must give his life for others? It is true Jesus said “This commandment have I received of my Father,” but this signifies a thing given into His charge, not a law or order to which obedience was a matter of obligation. “I lay it down of myself; I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again; no man taketh it from me.” This was the charge He had received from His Father. The only compulsion upon Him consisted in His own determination to fulfil His Father’s purpose, because He realised that upon His willingness to sacrifice Himself depended the eternal existence of a multitude whom no man could number.

The consideration which induced His obedience therefore was not anything He might have suffered had He failed, but the desire both to merit and to show His Father’s love to mankind and the rewarding prospect of seeing the fruits of His suffering in a great company of saved ones. “He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.”

X

From what has been advanced it will be apparent that, although there are considerable divergences of opinion on this question amongst Christadelphians because of the false belief in Physical sin-in-the-flesh which they all entertain, not one of them is able to give a clear and simple explanation of his doctrine. We see the one extreme in the vague and negative attitude represented by L.C.Jennings and the Suffolk Street fellowship; they are probably conscious of some inconsistency in their position but lacking either the ability to resolve it or the courage to renounce the theory of implanted sin which gives rise to it, they are content to confess a complete inability to understand or explain or preach the Cross of Christ in any real and convincing way. The other extreme is represented by John Carter and the Temperance Hall Section, who swallow sin-in-the-flesh on the Roman Catholic model, hook line and sinker, and do not scruple to follow that false line to the bitter and blasphemous end; teaching that the purpose of Christ’s death was the ritual destruction of a condemned and sin-defiled body designed to demonstrate God’s abhorrence of human flesh. Both

these extremes meet in crediting to the Virgin Birth the fact that Jesus did not sin; explaining that His divine origin endowed Him with the power to overcome sin, thus, shamefully robbing Him of all honour and falsifying His identity with us. Both agree in their perverse conclusion that Jesus's death was required of Him as a proof of His obedience and therefore as much for His own deliverance as ours.

In this case, however, unlike some, the truth does not flow sweetly in the valley between such ugly and distasteful extremes. It is only to be found by abandoning both the empty kettles of Laodicea and the sinful flesh-pots of a modern Egypt and searching in the quiet hillsides of Galilee for a loving Shepherd of the sheep, Who suffered, being tempted and having overcome all trials, laid down His life for those whom He came seeking and to save.

Experience suggests that many of the people who receive this pamphlet will not read it at all; while some will scan it hoping to satisfy himself that the writer has a bee in his bonnet. Of the few who spare the thirty minutes or so which it takes to read, the majority will recognize that the reasoning is sound and scriptural and the facts true, but they will see no reason for doing anything about it. The conviction that they have the truth is so embedded in the Christadelphian mind that even the demonstration and admission of palpable error rarely disturbs their equanimity. To such we can only say that they have a different conception from ours of the value of truth and the obligations of the calling of God. Having outlined the facts to the best of our ability and put them before you without cost we consider our duty done and that the issue must be left to the individual conscience. We judge no one but ourselves; facts may appear of more, or less, importance or clarity to different people and it is not in us to decide the degree of truth or error which may admit or debar a person from participation in the things of the Kingdom and the Name. It is our opinion, however, that the very simple and elementary faith, perhaps even mixed with considerable error and superstition, which might have sufficed in the Middle Ages, or even 20 years ago, or for a person of limited capacity, will not be excusable in people like us who have every opportunity and inducement to make spiritual progress. Ignorance and inability to reason is one thing; mental idleness and smug self-satisfaction is a different matter; we do not feel under any obligation to harangue the reader on such points.

The facts of the Atonement and their purpose speak for themselves and it was the intention of the Almighty that these should have such an influence upon the mind of the believer as to enable him to count all things else as of no value beside the full realisation of His love in Christ. It will be a sad thing for any of us to find that we have allowed other considerations to stand between us and the truth.

Ernest Brady.

*"Just are the ways of God
And justifiable to man."*

(Milton. Samaon Agonistes)