

Behold, the Bridegroom

Cometh

..... go ye out to meet Him!

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THE MAKE - BELIEVER

(REVISED EDITION)

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GEN. 49:14, 15.

*Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens
(between the borders; Hebrew):*

*And he saw that rest was good and the land that it was pleasant;
and bowed his shoulder to bear and became a servant unto tribute.*

In the blessing of Jacob, from which the words just read have been taken, some wondrous mysteries lie hidden. It addresses the external condition and temporal affairs of one of the twelve tribes. But when once we introduce the spade of the Spirit a little deeper and penetrate beneath the surface, we touch upon a golden bed of spiritual treasures and truths, that at first we have enough to do to only survey all the wealth and arrange it rightly before us. After we had dealt with the wondrous promise given to Judah, we had a premonition respecting the encampment over which we were standing and we heard as it were, a hollow sound under our feet. Today we meet again on the same ground to dig out by the aid of the Holy Spirit, silver and gold, where at first sight nothing but grass and stubble is apparent. If we consider Issachar according to the flesh, the fifth son of Jacob by Leah, we will better understand the exposition of our text: it prophesies concerning him that he should be an industrious husbandman. And his tribe a race of agriculturalists. But there is also a spiritual Issachar. Would to God that his tent were nowhere to be found in our congregation! This spiritual Issachar, of whom a most striking likeness is presented to us in our text, let us now examine more closely. We see in SECTION I where he is couching: SECTION II how he got there and SECTION III what troubles and dangers he is exposed to in his resting place.

SECTION I

Issachar is a strong ass. What a strange name! Not at all calculated to predispose us much in his favour. Judah is called “a lion’s whelp”: that sounds more pleasant. Naphtali is styled “a hind let loose”; Joseph “a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall”; Shulamite “a dove”; Israel “a rose”. All this gives a more lovely sound. But a “strong ass” – the very words are enough to take away all inclination to form an acquaintance with the person thus designated. A name always means what the individual is, but God changes names to identify function or calling. And yet who knows how many of us may be registered by this hateful name in God’s books? For what reason Issachar is thus designated we shall presently see, when his spiritual figure is unveiled. What we know is that he was the ninth son of Jacob and the fifth of Leah: The first born of Leah after the interval which occurred in the birth of her children (Genesis 30:17 compare with Genesis 29:35).

Where do we find Issachar? “Between the borders.” “ISSACHAR IS A STRONG ASS COUCHING DOWN BETWEEN THE BORDERS.” In these words the Patriarch has given but a poor recommendation of his son. Had it only been that he should wander between the borders, then we might nevertheless have been tempted to say: “Only wait a little and he will soon pass the border and fond the promised land” But no! he is “couching down”; that makes the matter so much worse.

To couch or lie between the borders must ever be in itself, a most unhappy position. How terribly does the Lord judge these people who thus flutter with their hearts between cold and warm! He will spue them out of His mouth these lukewarm ones. “I would thou wert cold or hot.” (Revelation 3:15). Either the one or the other: the middle state is hateful to Him. Elijah, the prototype of the ministry to come after him, asked Israel “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word” (I Kings 18:21). What a sentence does He pass on those who will swear neither to His colours nor to those of the world; and who do not indeed renounce Him, but yet do not declare themselves for him, but would rather maintain a neutral ground between the two parties - his friends and his foes or even his congregation. And like Balaam led Israel to the worship of Baal-Pe-or (Numbers 25:1-9), so are individuals and groups led to doctrines and dogmas of unscriptural foundations. He declare them at once his enemies, and will treat them as such. He says, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad” (Mathew 12:30). And if He were to visit His church today and see how thousands of those who desire to be looked upon as his messengers have, in the preachings, couched between the borders of His pure Gospel and those of a self devised philosophical self stimulation of the last days’ mysteries of the message, alienated from God; what would He say? I see the words upon his lips: “Oh, that you were either believers or unbelievers! But no. You are NEITHER the one nor the other.” Yes, total unbelief would be far preferable to this unhappy middle state, and this halting between two opinions.

Where, then, does Issachar – the spiritual Issachar - and his tribe now lie? and between what borders has he pitched his tent? Issachar does not belong to those who are “neither cold nor hot”, nor to those who are neither “for” nor “against” – neither Christian nor heathen. Issachar is “for”. In a certain sense he is even a believer, but only

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mentally following the last days message without regeneration, he seems to even have his resting place in the kingdom of God; and yet, his state is deplorable. He firmly establishes himself between Canaan and Egypt, between the state of a converted man, and that of an unconverted man. He cannot be classed amongst the men of this world; but yet, much less amongst the children of God. He cannot be ranked among the froward and perverse generation of this world; nor can he be counted among the chosen people "the royal priesthood." He has his portion between the borders of the kingdom of grace and those of the kingdom of Belial. In this state of unhappy neutrality, he will never sit at the same table with the citizens of the former; but with the citizens of the latter he will perish and be consumed.

But let us approach our Issachar a little nearer and see his outward and inward form fully developed. His outward appearance, his life and dealings have, indeed, a fair aspect and a good colour and inspire us with predisposition in his favour. Think ye to find him "in the counsel of the ungodly;" or "in the way of sinners, " or "in the seat of the scornful?" Oh no!. To look for him there would be doing him great wrong: from this Sodom he is long gone forth and altogether separated himself in fulfilment of Revelation 17 and 18. He no longer offers on the high places and in the groves, and the assemblages of those who "drink iniquity like water" are most abominable to him. You do not find him chambering and banqueting, nor on the theatre of recklessness and infamy, where - as if seized by carnal desire - the blind world reels to and fro rioting in ungovernable passion and where the giddy dance to the sound of the pipe which Satan blows for them. He has nothing in common with those who have for their motto: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die"; and mixes not with the swine that feed on husks.

Neither must you think to find him among the moral people, who indeed walk respectable and honourable, but choose to know nothing of a godly and devotional life, feeling a perfect sufficiency in their morality; who cast behind them the Word of God and His kingdom, the communion and prayer and atonement, as old worn out rags at which they turn the up the nose as at a toy for the childish and the weak. No, amongst the true worshippers of God, there you must look for Issachar; where the last days' message is preached, where the banner of the cross is held up on high; where, to the glory of the Father, Christ is acknowledged to be the Lord; where the WORD is suffered to dwell richly among the people and one exhorts another with hymns and spiritual songs and holy hands are lifted up to heaven; where men feed on the green pastures of the stored spiritual food of the eternal revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ and drink water from the living well of the sure mercies of David. There he is to be found. There Issachar has his tent and dwelling place. He lives amongst the holy ones and is not absent from their assemblies. But he doesn't realise what it means in Jude verse 11, "Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward and perished in the gainsaying of Core." But the worst of all comes on the following verses of Jude 12 to 16, that Issachar is a spot in the feast of love "feeding themselves without fear" (the Greek word 'feeding' is the same Greek word like in Ephesians 4:11 which means *pastoring*). Issachar is pastoring himself without fear, or this portion of Scripture can be applied to the ministry who are pastoring themselves without the direction of the Holy Spirit, leaving innocent souls to Issachar's road, with religious programs of the highest form of worship.

But how then is Issachar a hypocrite? By no means is Issachar a hypocrite. Hypocrites are from a different class. This Pharisaic corporation ... is not to be found between the borders; they are still altogether in the very heart of Egypt.

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But if Issachar holds to the true bride, with whom the world will have nothing to do; and this too without hypocrisy, what then does he yet lack? Everything which is really essential to a state of grace. He lives in the fellowship of the saints, but only outwardly, not in spirit and in truth. He is no member of that holy body of which Christ is the Head. He is externally linked to it, but not virtually incorporated into it. He is no branch of the great cedar tree. He indeed finds some pleasure in its shade; but is not so grafted in that he should partake of its fullness and bud and blossom from its sap. He is no branch of the "True Vine" – but tied to it in appearance, by some human and perishable tie, money, popularity, or other carnal endeavours; somewhat like the decorations that are fastened to the Christmas tree, for the heathen enjoyment of children with memories of Babylon, but not living in the Spirit of the "True Vine"; or he has merely accepted the message without the new birth experience.

We look to his mind and no longer find Egyptian darkness and "strong delusions". No, he is rich in the knowledge of salvation; knows perhaps the whole catechism of the last days' message in all its details, he know how to play the vocabulary of the last days' message and half the Bible by heart and a multitude of choice quotes and hymns too, believes every word of the last days' message to be true and his associations to the great prophet cannot be questioned, and enjoys many a history of the devout and regenerate.

But what is it all? – nothing but a self achieved and self wrought acquisition, earned wages, human handiwork. He has read himself into it, or it has been talked, preached, persuaded, or practised into him by others; convincing him to join the last days' message for an escape of "the wrath to come," he doesn't know that he is "a generation of vipers" (Luke 3:7-13). But the Holy Ghost has no share in his illumination. He is a prophet without a message, he has not been taught of the Lord. And therefore, all he has thus swallowed down, lies like a dead capital, bringing in no interest. The food has not been digested and therefore not converted into juice, blood and life; and his spikenard gives no scent. The message of the last days has only been understood in the letter. He is looking for another messenger, or he looks to be recognised by the innocent, so that he can merchandise them for his carnal investments, to satisfy his flesh and his human handiwork. Poor Issachar knows not that God does not send two messengers with the same message.

If we look to his walk, we could indeed bring no charge against him. Issachar stands blameless in his eyes or thinks the same before the eyes of men; lives peaceable, retired, domestic; is respectable, industrious, prudent; holds only with Christian friends and seemingly despises the pleasures of the world. But is this the walk which God means when He says, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be thou perfect?" (Genesis 17:1); and which Isaiah means when he calls out, "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord"? (Isaiah 2:5); and the Apostle, in these words; "Our conversation is in heaven"? – and also; "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit"? (Galatians 4:25). Is the life of Issachar the fruit of the Holy Ghost; a clear streamlet springing out of the ground of a new, regenerated heart? Oh! what would he be? He is partly the fruit of a good last days' message education and habit, or of good company; and partly of a self chosen spirituality; an artificial and acquired work which the Holy Spirit can never own, because He actually never had the smallest part in it.

Do we look at Issachar's devotional life? There too everything bears the best aspect. But those prayers which he offers daily, those hymns which he sings in the great congregation, or at home amongst his own, are they the incense first received from God

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and then given Him back again as his gift and kindled by the fire of the Holy Ghost and laid in the censer of a broken and a contrite heart, as is alone acceptable in the sight of God? They are again of his own manufacture, his flesh is strongly blessed by the "message of charismatic fleshly demonstrations", but it waters the wrong seed of carnal emotions which profiteth very little. Issachar prays because he will pray, not because he must pray; it is Issachar who prays, but not Christ, the Holy Spirit in him.

How deplorable is his couching between the borders! He is in the message without having been regenerated; he acknowledges the corruption of man, without ever having felt his own personal corruption; he is instructed in spiritual things, mysteries, revelations, church ages, seals, even the anointed ones of the end time, without being enlightened; he believes in Jesus, without feeling any real want of Him; he reckons himself among the saints, yet he is none of them; he knows to testify of the way of salvation and present his knowledge and acquaintance to the prophet with the gift of a promoter, but has never yet trodden it; he thinks that he lives and walks quite after the manner of a Christian and yet, with his heart, spirit and soul, he is nothing more nor less than a natural man, who has never yet felt any real inward change; who has not the least thing to show that the Spirit has wrought in him; but who has, by personal exertions, pressed and forced himself into the last days' message. It is not that the last Adam has been born in him, but that the first Adam has become religious; an improved sinner, if you please, using quotes of the last days message without the leading of the Holy Spirit as Satan did: "Make these stones into bread" - and there is the evil.

Such is Issachar's position. No longer in Egypt, but not in Canaan either. In a certain sense removed from the world, but still far from the kingdom of grace. Christian form and last days' message, evangelical cut, in thought, word and deed; but the life which is of God, the new heart, is wanting. "Issachar is Couching down between the borders".

SECTION II

But how did Issachar then, come to this place of rest? Our text gives a short and most striking answer – “HE SAW THAT REST WAS GOOD AND THE LAND THAT IT WAS PLEASANT.” Whatever Issachar is, he is not by the drawing of the Father (John 6:44), nor by the work of the Holy Ghost; he has become what his is by his own choice, prompted by his own spirit and impelled, not so much by God, as by his own natural heart. Was it the heavy burden of his own sins which drove him to the message? Or the smoke of Sinai? The thunders of Ebal? The panting after redemption? The gift of discernment without the giver? The anxious care for the health and salvation of his soul? Oh no! that cannot be affirmed. Far different desires and advantages induced him to become a Christian. “He saw that rest was good”.

What rest? The Sabbatic rest in Christ? The peace with God? The resting on the merits of the Mediator? Deliverance from the curse of the law and ease from its troublesome enactments? Oh no! it was quite another sort of rest which allured our Issachar and after which he lusted – “he saw the land that it was pleasant”. And what land? That of light which is above, to which Jesus is “the way” and “the door”? or that of grace, where we are nourished by His dew and His sunshine? Was it this that he lusted after? Was it after this home that he longed? No. we cannot boast that of Issachar either; it was really something else that actuated him.

But what actuated him? Well, sometimes it is one thing, sometimes another, that leads men into the helpless condition between the borders. One is perhaps charmed by the harmony and mutual love which he witnesses amongst the righteous of the land. He has perhaps had some painful experience of the treachery and deceitfulness of the world; how it keeps neither faith nor promise and is full of strife and hatred. He has sought friends, but found himself sadly deceived.

The perhaps, he cast his eye on the congregation of the faithful, the very few of the true bride and sees how they are of one heart and cleave to each another in love and sincerity and serve each other like brethren. That pleases him well; he sees “that it is pleasant”, and his resolution is fixed – he joins himself to the genuine godly believers of the last days message.

Another may naturally have a sensitive heart; be easily moved; love solemn scenes and the generous excitement they produce; and so be captivated by the lives of the children of God, by their sweet and sacred songs and prayers; he sees that land “that it is pleasant,” and thus, of his own impulses, his mind lays hold of the thought, “It is good ... to be here; here let us make ... tabernacles.”

Another, again. could have by nature a spirit of thought and inquiry; with this spirit he seizes on the Scriptures and the message, (which is the revelation of the Scriptures): here he finds food in abundance; here he can exercise his acuteness and his power of thought. With the most lively interest he devotes himself to reading and searching the message, he stimulates his mind with reason and philosophies with those who do so in the last days’ message by “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (Colossians 2:18) – and it is his greatest joy henceforth to

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live only amongst those to whom the Bible has become the family library – the book of life. He finds pleasure in the exchange of Christian views and opinions about the mysteries of the seven seals, looking for an eighth messenger to satisfy his carnal wants and in Biblical discourses and conversation; and he too, forms a voluntary league with God's elect children, without having received the seed of regeneration from the much admired book, into his heart.

Others again, with a natural sense for the sublime and beautiful, are possibly attracted by the inspired narrative, the delightful, picturesque description, the brilliant figures and striking parables, the lovely and moving scenes in which the Bible so pre-eminently abounds. He reads the holy volume and studies the last days' message with a glowing zeal, consults with other Issachar's who know the last days' prophet after the flesh, but certainly with none other, than that with which he reads the glittering productions and the worldly poet; but yet he dwells with the Christians for the sake of the aesthetic enjoyment; conversion is not so much as though of.

Another observes that in godly families there is infinitely more order and concord than in those of the children of this world; the peace that reigns there, the quiet, the love and the happy serenity of mind. Also, the blessing that knows no end and the prosperous state of all the affairs. Oh how pleased and charmed he is with all this – especially so when he looks at the great contrast which his own house forms to this. He sees the rest, this it is good. "I am," he says, "tired of the endless feuds and quarrels; in my house too there shall be a change; I will introduce the last days' message"; and he does introduce it. They, now read, sing, pray. Noise, debate and contention have ceased and behold! the house is now new borne indeed! The house, but not the heart. The body is there and the form, but the life and the spirit is wanting; the man is gone out of the world, but the world has not gone out of him. The coat is changed, but the wearer remains the same.

Behold my brethren, thus it is that one becomes the Issachar of the last days' message, couching between the borders. Men see that rest is good and the land that it is pleasant. It is not the desire after reconciliation, not the hunger and thirst after righteousness, prayer and the gracious outpourings of the Holy Spirit that drives them to the Gospel. No, it is the advantages which the children of God enjoy, even in this world, in which they desire to participate.

So they become pious by their own free choice – peaceful, prudent, and devotional, so far as it is possible by their own exertions. They take up Christianity in the revelation of the last days' message as one does a trade, an art, or a science and learn to appropriate to themselves everything that belongs to the Christian life. Only two things are wanting and in them everything that constitutes the real character of the children of God – the contrite heart, in which alone the Lord will dwell and the Spirit, of which it is said, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9).

O Issachar, unhappy Issachar, who couchest between the borders and thus seest that rest is good and the land that it is pleasant, thou shalt never inherit the land beyond Jordan, nor ever join in the celebration of the eternal Sabbath.

SECTION III

We have now seen Issachar's resting place and know also how he got there. Let us now cast an eye upon the spiritual troubles which his couching between the borders must necessarily bring with it and the dangers that threaten him on all sides. Our text fully describes his painful and oppressive condition: "HE BOWED HIS SHOULDER TO BEAR AND BECAME A SERVANT UNTO TRIBUTE"

He bowed his shoulder to bear. There rests, then, some burden on him beneath which he is groaning and this burden is ... what? His sins? Would to God that he could but feel this burden! Then he might soon be relieved. This burden is the last days' message into which by free choice he forced himself. The Saviour says indeed, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." But of this, Issachar has no experience. I am here reminded of the words of the prophet Isaiah (10:27), where it is said, "And it shall come to pass in that day," that is, in the days of the new covenant, "that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder and his yoke from off thy neck and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing." The yoke will slip off when the neck is anointed with oil and when we are anointed with the oil of grace and the Holy Spirit, then the yoke will glide off from our shoulders, then is God's law and service no longer an oppressive yoke and heavy burden, but easy and cheerful; a pleasure and a delight.

But Issachar is unanointed and therefore are his shoulders bowed down and sunk in order to bear. He is not one of those who, with an open and penitent heart, sensible of it's wants, go to the Lord Jesus for grace and strength. Issachar is his own convert to the last days' message and chooses now to become holy, leads others to join the message, becomes a minister (prophet) of the last days message and lives after the manner of the Christian, at his own expense and by his own exertions. He imitates others; wants to fly up like them who have the wings of an eagle and forgets that the wings are wanting and that the Word of the Lord makes the prophet, not the prophet makes the Word. He wants to sing as they and he would pray as they, but he lacks insight, delight and breath for it. He calls the ministry the Nicolaitanes without knowing what Nicolaitanes means, so he can cover his own corruption. In this unhappy state, he would fulfil the law of God, but has no agape motive for doing it; no love, no cheerfulness, no strength. He places himself under the law, wherein he labours and agonizes; he disquieteth himself in vain with his will worship, his self edifying, his own self dependent devices for holiness. His are pains without gains; work without wages.

Having thus "bowed his shoulder to bear" he is "become a servant unto tribute." This expression is mournfully appropriate. For his prayers morning and evening, before and after meals, his singing and devotional exercises, what are they but so many payments of tribute, which having to bring it daily and duly, he brings, not with the cheerful freedom of a child of God, but like a bond-slave, with constraint and weariness! As he has never felt his need for the outpouring of the Spirit of grace and supplications, so he has never desired nor waited for it. Hence his religious exercises are forced, his holy services are extorted from him by fear; all is mere human performance, because he lives not in the true union of spirit with Him who is the life of the soul. The services of those who are born again, are yielded from the heart and flow from it as freely as streams from the fountain; but he is the well without water; how should any stream flow from thence!

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Feeling bound at the return of set times and seasons, to pay his dues of prayer and religion, he brings his tribute money, casts it down at the Divine footstool and renders, as he thinks, unto God, the things which are God's. But the tribute money is stamped with a wrong impression; it bears the image and superscription of "the first man," who "is of the earth, earthy"; not of "the second Man," who is the "Lord from heaven"; consequently it can never be deposited in God's treasury. Such is he! Not a child in the family, but a poor, mean servant under tribute, who has nothing, yet is constrained to payment; and which is worse than all, pays in coin that is refused and thrown back at his feet as counterfeit. He is a burden bearer, labouring under the self – imposed drudgery of his own will worship and wearing out his days and strength under the fretting yoke of legal bondage, as ignorant of the cheerfulness and freedom of spiritual life as is any poor beast of burden.

And with what dangers is this poor soul beset? The very thought of them makes one tremble. Such a poor creature, in his blindness thinks he has already entered the Kingdom of heaven by accepting the last days' message; and yet, he belongs to those that are "without." Just as much as the most unenlightened of the children of this world. He has succeeded tolerably in conforming his outward life and vocabulary to that of the true children of God and thus is involved in the unhappy delusion, that he too is a child of God. Besides this, it often happens that he is also considered as such by the faithful, with whom he interacts and who acknowledge and treat him as such; and this only serves to strengthen him in his resting place "between the borders." Poor, pitiable man! He thinks he lives in Canaan and has his tent near Tophet and on the confines of "the valley of Slaughter." He dreams that he is in Jerusalem; but only in the carnal Jerusalem from where the true message was proclaimed. But, he has taken up his abode not far from the Dead Sea, near "Admah and Zeboim.", he received his revelation in a carnal process, but Christ was not revealed in him, he conferred with flesh and blood and went to Jerusalem to them that were in the message before him, he is in Damascus now but not on the way from Arabia (Galatians 1:15–18). The warning words of the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 5:16, "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh, yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.", have no effect upon him, but in the contrast he has Judastic claims that went fishing or hunting with the master or his servants the prophets and still be a called apostle by the master himself, like Judas. And when the Lord comes with fire and brimstone, He cannot spare Issachar, though his heart should break for pity. In this state between the borders, He must consume him and root him out together with the ungodly.

Oh! then, draw near to God, whosoever of you thinks himself in Jerusalem and let him sigh with David, "search me, O God and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalms 139:23,24). Know, that in the day of judgement, nothing will be acknowledged, except that which the Holy Ghost has wrought in us in the last days. All self righteousness and the work of man, will be burned like stubble. All self invented spirituality and services, all self made piety, justification, carnal message knowledge and sanctity, shall be accounted for nought and perish in the flames. Then the question will not be, "What have you learned in catechisations of the last days' message and sermons?"; but "What have you learned in the school of the Holy Ghost?" Not, "How much have you prayed and sung in the carnal Jerusalem?"; but, "Have you prayed and sung in Spirit and in truth, in the name of Jesus Christ?" Not, "Have you lived in communion with the faithful on earth in conventions of the last days message, influenced by the flesh and blood and

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persuasion of men?"; but, "Have you lived in communion with Him who is life everlasting, and have you been one with Him who is the Head?" – those will be the questions.

There are many unhappy Issachar's, "couching between the borders", who, for some reason or other, have made themselves pious, or who have suffered themselves to be made so by mere human instrumentality without the Spirit of God having the least share in their piety. May the Lord have mercy on them and open their eyes! Many there may be who walk about in self delusion, blinded by the Christian appearance they have succeeded in assuming. The cover is there. But where, under that cover, is the broken spirit, the contrite heart? The seed of regeneration? The new creature? The cordial thirsting after the atoning blood of Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Where all that is the work of the Spirit and which alone constitutes the Christian? It is wanting and the poor soul knows it not.

Oh that the merciful God may keep us from such awful delusions, whose sure end is eternal destruction! May He rouse us with a voice of thunder and the sound of the trumpet from the deadly slumber between the borders of Canaan and Egypt and enable us all to say in truth, with Job, "The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life" (Job 33:4).