

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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DIVINE OBJECTIVES

W.Dickson

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Seeking help from the Lord one would seek to bring before the brethren again the great need of apprehending the divine objectives at the present time. The scriptures read relate to the objectives of the Spirit, and what the Lord had in view in His service toward the assembly, and Paul's service in relation to Corinth and what his objective was, and the end that was reached in each case. Perhaps the Spirit will raise the challenge as to whether these ends have been reached in our various places.

This well-known passage in Genesis 24 covers a wide scope of the scriptures. It would cover that important section in John's gospel from chapters 14-16; it would cover the early chapters of the Acts up to chapter 8 and it would also cover Paul's service as he moved out to Philippi with a view to securing in the great area of the western world that which was distinctively in keeping with his ministry. But, historical as that may be, there is a currency about the passage which should appeal to us afresh. The background is interesting in that it bears very much on what we concluded with in our earlier meeting, that the test to Rebecca was not the world but the earth. She was in Laban's household, surrounded by ties and circumstances which were no doubt very desirable, but when Abraham's servant brought forth the tokens of his master's wealth and displayed them to her, the effect was that when the question was put to her she said "I will go"; in other words Laban's household had lost its power over her. There was the plea that she might be detained ten days, but the Spirit would, so to speak, alert us not to be in any way diverted by that plea. It was a suggestion to stay a little longer in, the environment which pleases naturally rather than to respond to the Spirit in His great movements as He would lead us toward the divine objective, and that is to give present comfort to the heart of Christ. To me the suggestion regarding the ten days was

even a greater test to Rebecca than the test as to whether she would ever leave at all. As one reflects on the service of the Spirit in recent times to bring us to the point of Rebecca's decision, sometimes there has been an assent to the fact that the truth is right but that circumstances govern its application: that is the ten days. There may be assenting to the truth that the expression of the assembly is workable in days of breakdown but that circumstances affect its application; also the suggestion that the economy of the local assembly is workable but circumstances hinder its full implementation. The Spirit of God would wait upon us for the resolute assertion that we will "go"; in other words, that we have come to the great necessity of giving a present answer to the heart of Christ. What comes out into prominence in the passage, beloved brethren, is the camels. Now these camels are a very important feature of this exercise. There is the Spirit objectively in type in Abraham's servant, but what I think has come before us in these meetings is the importance of the camels, the active power of the Spirit marking the saints so that there is an answer to what He would give us in His own leading and in His own service. The position of Isaac is also stressed in that he has returned from Beer-lahai-roi, dwelling in the south country. It is an allusion to the great character of this dispensation, that it is marked by the declaration of God, by the full light of God's thoughts. How thankful we should be for the fact that the declaration is complete! It shone in its unsurpassed greatness in the Lord's ministry, and as having Paul's ministry as to the place of Christ glorified we understand the meaning of the south country. Oh beloved brethren, it has been fine to be in the south country these days! Epaphras "has also manifested to us your love in the Spirit" (Col 1: 8): that is a feature of the south country, to bring the warmth of another land in amongst the brethren. The south country is that divine affections are flowing amongst the brethren in simplicity and humility - love in the Spirit. Love is the essence of Christianity. You may say to me, What about righteousness? Yes, righteousness is our leader, ever remains our leader, but love is the essence of Christianity and love is the life stream of assembly conditions amongst us. As Isaac came from the south country he

took account of the camels, that the camels were coming. How the Lord delights in the fact that the Spirit of God has a place amongst His own, not only the acknowledgment of the Spirit objectively but that there is power subjectively! There is a reliance entirely upon the power that the Spirit of God gives. What a lesson to learn, to see to every matter in the power of the Spirit!

"And Rebecca lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac and she sprang off the camel": is that a contradiction, Rebecca springing off the camel? What would that mean? It is a beautiful suggestion. We have been taught that the assembly is the greatest creature vessel, it has status the nearest to Deity. Rebecca's action would be that she recognises the greatness of Christ typically. Our brother in the opening prayer today asked that a spirit of reverence might mark us in regard to the Person of Christ. That would be suggested in Rebecca's action. Let not our knowledge of and intimacy with the terms of the truth ever weaken in our souls the distinctiveness and glory of the Lord Himself. "Hast not denied my name" (Rev 3: 8) involves that every glory of His commands our worship. So Rebecca sprang off the camel and she said "Who is the man that is walking in the fields to meet us?". As Isaac walked he meditated. What was Isaac meditating about? Would it be novel if we suggested that he was longing for the return of the servant so that there might be a full answer to his affections? Thus it would be with the Lord Jesus at the present time. In answer to Rebecca's question the servant said "That is my master!" He did not say to her, That is your future husband; he said "That is my master". Have we the power to enter into the intimacy of the relationships between divine Persons in the economy? Such is John chapter 17; that beautiful chapter breathes the spirit of the intimacy of the relations between the Father and Jesus. There is a holy communion between divine Persons, and in that communion would be the great matter of the assembly for Christ. And so "she took the veil, and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac led her into his mother Sarah's tent". Now that is the provisional position, not the eternal order of things; Eve relates more to that. Rebecca in Sarah's

tent is the provisional side of things, bearing on the position down here. And Isaac took her "and she became his wife, and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted after the death of his mother". How the Lord feels that His beloved people Israel are in the silence of death! But He finds comfort now in His Rebecca as He leads her into His mother Sarah's tent, the Spirit's service completed. Comfort for Christ is a very choice matter. I do not think that this refers exactly to the Lord's supper. I think that the comfort that Rebecca affords to the heart of Isaac refers in type to our provisional experiences and what we are in our localities from week to week as we fill out the assembly obligations in love to Christ. We would always take account of the service of the Spirit by giving Him the response in that environment.

In Ephesians 5 we have the service of Christ. It says "Husbands, love your own wives, even as the Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it". It has been pointed out that that is not a historical reference and does not relate exclusively to His going into death. It would cover His present sojourn on high, and it is like the type of the Hebrew servant: "I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go free", Exod 21: 5. Christ is on high and He is serving in view of a great result. Oh, how patient the Lord is! May we take on His spirit. And it says "in order that he might sanctify it". Now that word 'sanctify' has a reference to setting apart. Again it brings up this question of the earth that we spoke of. The Lord would sanctify the assembly, He would set it apart from earthly things, from earthly-mindedness; He would bring out the distinctiveness of the assembly.

'O how precious Thine assembly
Is, Lord Jesus, in Thy sight' (Hymn 359)

His assembly is not like ordinary fellowships. The assembly is not like the masonic fellowship, it is not like any of these fellowships that exist among men in colleges, in professional associations. The assembly is sanctified, it is set apart by Christ, and He is constantly serving it to maintain the distinctive character of it.

Then it says "purifying it by the washing of water by the word" - a reference to ministry. Now I would like to say a practical word, beloved brethren, if you will bear with me, because the Lord has laid it on my heart, and that is that I would encourage the brethren in regard to the reading of the printed ministry. With the great heritage that is in the ministry of the recovery which is on our bookshelves many of our brethren, particularly our younger brethren, feel that what time they have should be devoted to the absorption of that divine wealth. I would give a word of encouragement to the younger brethren in regard to the printed ministry because if you just get one impression out of a book, how valuable it is. An impression of Christ is a choice thing, it is a living thing. Oft-times as you flick the pages you say, I think I have read this before somewhere; and then you come across some fresh spiritual thought and it makes it worthwhile. Beloved young brethren, apply yourselves to maintain your link with the printed ministry; you can discern oft-times in it the Spirit's current speaking.

I have been pondering a little this question of authority that was raised this morning. I think - not that I feel too competent to help - that there may be a confusion of thought as to what is implied in the use of that word 'authority', just as I see sometimes a confusion of thought between 'law' and 'the law'. Mr Taylor spent some time in the 1920s clarifying the difference between 'law' and 'the law', and it is quite an interesting matter to pursue the difference between those two things. And there is a difference between authority in the arbitrary sense and authority in the moral sense. I have seen men who carried authority with them even though they never said a word. There was authority with them as they walked into the meeting and sat down amongst the brethren. When we speak about authority in ministry we think of it as carrying the moral weight of a person who has experience with God, conveying in accuracy the truth as in the Scriptures. It is that kind of authority that we speak of. Young brethren, you can carry authority; you can carry moral authority in your demeanour, in speech and in the evidence that you have been with God. That is authority. I feel, beloved brethren, that "purifying it

by the washing of water by the word" is inclusive of every service of ministry that the Lord is pleased to give, whether it be oral or printed, or whether it relates to what has already been given in the past. There is a constant action of purifying going on in order "that he might present the assembly to himself glorious, having no spot or wrinkle or any of such things". Is that not wonderful? When the rapture comes there will be a vessel fully pleasing to the heart of Christ as the result of His own precious service, a result which has been reached amongst those who are faithful to the truth at the present time.

Now as to Paul's service at Corinth, he said "For I am jealous as to you with a jealousy which is of God; for I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ". May I appeal to the responsible element in every place - is that your objective? Is that your objective in regard to New York, in regard to Plainfield or wherever you care to speak about? Is that your objective as a responsible person, to present your local company a chaste virgin to Christ? The fact that there has been serious failure in the recent past is no excuse for reducing the standard of what is acceptable to Christ. The breakdown is no excuse for lowering the standard of what is pleasing to the Lord. We have to labour and seek to present our localities chaste virgins to Christ, free from the world, free from the earth, free from all these influences that are so displeasing to Him, in perfect simplicity as to the Christ. Simplicity as to the Christ would mean that every glorious feature of that blessed Man is shining vividly before our hearts in our localities because there is a pure state of things. The responsible element would include sisters, and thus all are responsible to maintain the conditions of chastity and purity so that there is what is delightful to the heart of Christ. There are corrupting influences abroad; some dear brethren do not seem to be able to discern between what is displeasing to the Lord and what is pleasing to Him. We must all carry the responsibility of presenting our local assemblies as a chaste virgin to Christ. May we have these objectives before us, and pray - weep if need be - but carry them in a priestly way so that the

Lord might have something for His own heart; for His Name's sake.
Amen.

PLAINFIELD

(Three-day Meeting)

23 May 1981

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

W.Dickson

Luke 15: 25-32; 18: 9-14

When I turned to the fifteenth of Luke no doubt you thought I was going to speak about the prodigal son, but I want to speak about the elder brother, because I have an impression that there might be more elder brothers than prodigal sons. Nevertheless the gospel is for both. I think if we analysed our history we would find that more of the elder brother has marked us than the prodigal son. But the grace of God is wonderful. As the elder brother drew nigh to the house he heard the music and the dancing. Have you heard it? Have you heard the music and the dancing these three days? Has your ear listened to these heavenly notes? And have you longed to go in and see what these people are enjoying - these happy men, these happy women, these happy children? Walk along the streets and you do not see anything like this. People go about with worried

looks, burdens upon their shoulders, and their car locks down in case of violence. But how wonderful to hear the music and the dancing, to see the faces of men, women, boys and girls who have found Jesus as their own personal Saviour; and as putting their trust in Him their lives have been affected.

The elder brother inquired from one of these servants, What has happened? What glad news it should have been! "Thy brother is come, and thy father has killed the fatted calf because he has received him safe and well". Oh, beloved hearers, do you know that God has killed the fatted calf? Do you know that? God has choice, wonderful thoughts for you for blessing in Christ. This was something that the prodigal son never knew, never heard of, never thought of. The Father had in His heart wonderful thoughts, that in His beloved Son He would make a provision for man, so wonderful, so glorious, that as feeding upon Him you would find eternal satisfaction. That blessed Person Jesus went into death on the cross, there He died and shed His precious blood that there might be a righteous basis laid upon which everyone can come into the blessing of God's house. And "he became angry, and he would not go in". Have you heard the gospel so frequently that that has been your reaction, and you have said, I will not go back? Perhaps the word pricked your conscience, something stuck there that you do not want to be reminded about. But "his father went out and besought him". Think of the beseechings of God! How often God has come and besought in the preaching! How often our parents have spoken to us in the name of Jesus, beseeching us to come in and we would not go in! The elder brother said to his father "Behold, so many years I serve thee, and never have I transgressed a commandment of thine". Oh, the self-righteousness of men! How they pride themselves in their own integrity and righteousness - what they are in the eyes of men, and they think that gives them a standing in the presence of God. The elder brother said "Never have I transgressed a commandment of thine and to me thou hast never given a kid that I might make merry with my friends". Perhaps he had not many friends. A kid would not feed many, but the father had the fatted calf.

It speaks of Christ in all His perfection and His glory. The elder brother seems to reproach his father by speaking of "thy son". He does not say, When my brother came back. Men often reproach God. You meet people who have suffered a calamity in life and you try to console them, you speak to them about Jesus and about a Father's love, and some reply reproachfully about God and say, If He is the God that you say He is, why has this happened? Oh, beloved hearers, let me tell you of a God who gave His best, who gave the great treasure of His heart. He loved Jesus and He gave Him for poor guilty sinners in order that they may be blessed with His richest thoughts. Could you ever doubt the goodness of a God like that? He gave His best - a perfect, sinless, holy Saviour, who never grieved Him in any way, One who moved in perfect obedience into death itself in order to lay a basis on which the glad tidings in all its fulness can go out tonight. The father's answer is touching: "he said to him, Child, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine".

As I have been through the streets of New York and see that favoured race that God took up, this passage came back to me: "Child, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine". God will never forget His promise to His beloved Israel, and a day is coming when the Messiah they rejected and put on the cross will come again. "They shall look on me whom they pierced", Zech 12: 10. And oh, it will come back: "all that is mine is thine". There will not be a promise or a committal of God in covenant fashion to His beloved people but will be secured in glory in the blessed Person they crucified. At the present time the Gentiles who had no claim upon God at all have in the sovereignty of His mercy come into His house. "It was right to make merry and rejoice". How was it right? What did the father mean when he said it was right? What I think is meant anyway is that the work of Christ had given God a basis on which He can bless man. Could you ever question the right of God to bless? No matter how guilty you are as a sinner, could you ever question the right of God to bless when you think of the finished work of Jesus?

Verse 32 reads "this thy brother was dead and has come to life again, and was lost and has been found". There is a peculiar joy attached to being found. We have had a few fishing disasters in Scotland on the north coast. One fishing boat after another went down and then a third one became overdue and for a week households, wives and children were in distress until the news flashed across, Boat found, all saved. Was that not wonderful? All saved. Are all saved here? But I will tell you another incident. A submarine went down off the coast of Britain with one hundred and thirty three sailors in it; it sank right to the bottom. For fifteen days the divers worked at it, but from the inside the knocking became weaker and weaker until one day the divers could get no response, and over the wire came the word, No hope, all lost. Is anybody here lost? You young people, are you lost or saved? What will be the news in Plainfield tonight?

In the eighteenth chapter it speaks of two men going up to pray. I think one of them would be the elder brother. I think this Pharisee was the elder brother, the man who would not go in, but he still wanted to keep praying, he still wanted to go to church and pride himself in his self-righteousness. Oh beloved hearers, may God deliver you from spiritual pride. That was what marked this man, he was full of spiritual pride, he thought he did not need a Saviour, he thought he was too good, he thought the work of Christ was not for him. That is what he thought. And he prayed to God and said "I am not as the rest of men... I fast twice in the week". According to Leviticus he was only expected to fast once a week but in religious zeal he would fast twice a week. But "the tax-gatherer, standing afar off": who was he standing afar off from? Was it God? I do not think so. I think he was standing as far away as he could from the Pharisee. He was determined that no other voice was going to stop him from hearing the pardon of God in all its fulness coming to him. And he "would not lift up even his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast". Oh beloved hearers, have you ever smitten upon your breast? Have you ever realised that conversion is a heart matter, that it is something that enters into your heart? "With the heart is

believed to righteousness; and with the mouth confession made to salvation", Rom 10: 10. Dear young people, it is a real soul transaction when you come to Jesus. I feel there is a need of this today even amongst our younger brethren. You may say, They are breaking bread. They may be breaking bread, but have they known what it is to smite upon their breast? In other words, to know that naturally that heart of theirs would reject Christ. But the possibility is open to them to have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit (see Rom 5: 5), and that heart that was once so full of unjust thoughts about God can be now filled with the love of God. The publican spoke of himself as "the sinner". You will never get real blessing until you come to the absolute individuality of a transaction with Christ. Paul reached it; he said, I received mercy, because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief (see 1 Tim 1: 13). Think of that! Paul said in effect, God has been merciful to me, the sinner. This man went down to his house justified rather than the other. Are we all justified? Have we all a conscious link with the Man who is in the presence of God? He went down to his house justified. He knew that no matter what his history had been, no matter how many people he may have defrauded, the precious work of Christ had cleansed him. He was justified in the sight of God without a spot as if he had never committed a sin in his life.

Oh the glory of the gospel! How it negates the whole principle of works, negates everything of man! And he "went down to his house justified rather than that other". It is fine to go down to your house justified and able to say, God has been richly merciful to me, He has met me in His grace and given me a standing in that blessed Man in His presence; He has given me the gift of the Holy Spirit, the love of God shed abroad in my heart that I can go down to my house and show forth to them the features of Christ. You can pray for your brothers, you can pray for your sisters, you can pray for your parents; it is marvellous what prayer can do. One of the brightest martyrs in England was won by the prayer of a young man. Have you heard of Latimer who with Ridley in the sixteenth century, in England, was burned at the stake? Latimer was high in the

hierarchy of the English church, he was a teacher in the highest theological college. He had a pupil called Bilney and a bond of affection grew between the pupil and the teacher. But Bilney was converted and Latimer, even though he was a professor of theology, was not converted. So one day Bilney got down on his knees and said, Oh God, help me to win Hugh Latimer for Christ. Later the two of them were together and Bilney said, Latimer, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners", 1 Tim 1: 15. That led to the conversion of Latimer and God answered Bilney's prayer.

May we finish on what we started with: "For every one who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted". It is an unvarying divine principle that if you humble yourself God will exalt you. If you humble yourself at the feet of Jesus God will exalt you, He will give you a place in His house, He will adorn you with His greatest thoughts in sonship, He will bring you into an area of things unsurpassed for its blessedness. May we know it for His Name's sake. Amen.

PLAINFIELD

(Three-day Meeting)

24 May 1981

THE LORD AND "ME"

W.E.Ellis

Acts 9: 1-5, 17, 26, 27; Matthew 25: 40

Just a thought, dear brethren, which was in my mind in regard to the Lord's ways with His own and the thought of the 'Me'. Jesus says to Saul "why dost thou persecute me?". We are well acquainted with the history of Saul of Tarsus and how he was at this point the arch-enemy of the testimony, and the enemy is always busy against the saints, against the testimony, against the assembly; but the Lord is able to deal with every situation. As we were reminded in our hymn (No 436), He is a man of war. Here He is coming in as a Man of war, dealing with this situation. What a man Saul of Tarsus was! Who

could deal with such a man as he was when you think of the persecution and the way he was treating the disciples and seeking to get rid of the testimony? Nevertheless the Lord is able to come in and deal with such a man as he. So the Lord takes the matter up Himself. The Lord is able Himself to take up the matter and the persons involved. So He says to Saul of Tarsus "why dost thou persecute me?". The 'me' would relate to the saints at Damascus; it would relate to the assembly, the saints of the assembly. What a great thing it is that the Lord Jesus, such a glorious Person as He, takes account of the saints in this way as 'Me': "why persecutest thou me?". And Saul, as wrought upon by the Spirit, says "Who art thou, Lord?" and Jesus says "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest". So the Lord Himself deals with the man, a great leader. Who else could have sought to touch him? But the Lord is able to deal with him.

In the later verse in the passage Ananias entered into the house and, on the instructions of the Lord lays his hands upon Saul. He said "Saul, brother: the Lord has sent me". Here is one who had been an enemy of the assembly; now he is embraced and is called a brother. That is the first way, I think, in which the Lord would touch each one of us in order that we might be adjusted and brought properly into the assembly, that He would first of all have us to do with Himself and to say 'Lord' to Him. So Saul realises what it was to have such a One as Lord. But now Ananias comes to him and says to him "Saul, brother". Dear brethren, I feel that each one of us needs to have to do with the Lord in regard to any matter which might arise amongst us, and then the question would be as to whether we can be embraced as a brother, whether Ananias as under divine instruction can say "Saul, brother".

Well then, of course, there is the formal place, as we might say, in the assembly. How could such a one, who had been persecuting the saints, have a place in the assembly? Now we have somebody else brought into view, and that is Barnabas. Saul essayed to join the saints but they were afraid of him, but the Lord had been working. There was no need to be afraid of him, but it needed someone to commend him; so he is commended, commended to the

brethren. "Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and related to them how he had spoken to him". Well, dear brethren, that would be a great testimony, as to one having seen the Lord in the way, and then to know what it is to become a brother, a true brother, and then to have the commendation of one who can testify as to how one such has seen the Lord in the way and He has said these things to him.

I just read in Matthew's gospel because there you get the side of the kingdom; it is the judgment of the nations, as we know, those on the right and those on the left, and the King comes in and He credits certain ones on the right with, as He says, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was ill, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came to me" (vv 35, 36). They enquire when this had been and the King said "Verily, I say to you, Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me". That word 'Me' impresses me, the 'Me' in Acts 9 and the 'Me' here; the assembly, and also the individual side as related to it, in the kingdom setting here; but nothing is overlooked which one might do for the saints. The King says "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren". He embraces them, acknowledges them as His brethren. He says "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least", not one of the greatest, but one of the least "of these my brethren, ye have done it to me". So how the Lord takes account of what is done for the saints, whoever they may be, because they are precious to Him, He regards them as His brethren. There are those, on the other hand, of whom sorrowfully He has to say "Inasmuch as ye have not done it to one of these least, neither have ye done it to me". This brings in the practical side, which one feels one needs for oneself, the practical side, as to what we can do for the saints. I believe our sister, departed to be with Christ, who has been buried today, has been the object of much service by the saints and not one bit of service will be overlooked.

I just had this in mind, dear brethren, the thought of the 'Me', and how the Lord would thus take up every matter, take account of His saints as, first of all brethren, and then as having a place in the

assembly. How precious they are to Him! And all this has His own valuation and will have its own reward in the Lord's own time.

(Not revised by Mr.Ellis: with Christ 9 August 1983)

LONDON

26 July 1983

THE CHILDREN SEARCHED

The early verses of the 28th chapter of the book of Job describe how the mining and refining of metals and precious stones was carried out in the East in ancient times. It is very wonderful that God in His word should have given us a picture so many centuries ago of the way in which the Holy Spirit brings to light God's own work deep in the heart of the Christian. As the scripture says "his eye seeth every precious thing". The Creator placed all these rare and beautiful things hidden in the earth as He now works anew within the believer sovereignly, that is by His own will.

The vein for the silver suggests for us the host of those redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. We do not know them all but "The Lord knows those that are his" and He has bought them all at such a price. The gold represents God's own work in the believer, perfect in itself, yet needing to be identified by us as distinct from the

old nature. When we read that iron is taken out of the dust we can but ponder the endurance shown by the martyrs whose bodies were of dust as our own. By faith they became strong out of weakness. The first of the Christian martyrs, Stephen, was given strength in his own spirit by fixing his gaze on the Lord Jesus. As to the copper which was smelted this metal was much used in various ways in the Tabernacle which represented the gracious dwelling of God amongst His people.

There is always the need for divine light. The miner "putteth an end to the darkness". This suggests the revealing character of God's word in the Bible. His word also reaches down into the soul and thus "exploreth to the utmost limit". When the Lord Jesus was here He was, and still is, the living word of God. When Job said "... out of it cometh bread" we learn that our souls need food as the Divine searching proceeds. Jesus is also the living bread. The path of faith is one which no vulture's piercing eye can see; it is also one which even the strength of the "fierce lion" cannot tread. But how satisfying it is to know that God "seeth every precious thing" and "what is hidden he bringeth forth to light"! Are all who read this children of light?

J.C.Evershed