

# THOUGHTS ON THINGS ETERNAL

FIFTY-TWO STUDIES  
FOR  
THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

JOHN KELMAN D.D.



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Ephemera eternitatas





EPHEMERA ETERNITATIS

*THE FIFTY-TWO SERIES OF BOOKS FOR  
CHRISTIAN WORKERS.*

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# EPHEMERA ETERNITATIS

A BOOK OF SHORT STUDIES IN LIFE  
HERE AND HEREAFTER, ARRANGED FOR  
THE SUNDAYS OF THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

BY THE REV.

JOHN KELMAN, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "COURTS OF THE TEMPLE," "FAITH OF R. L. STEVENSON," ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

ST. PAUL'S HOUSE, WARWICK SQUARE

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TO MY WIFE



## PREFACE

THE title, *Ephemera Eternitatis*, has many disadvantages ; but it is the best expression of the idea of the book which I could find. An old author, speaking of the journey of life, has quaintly described Sundays as the inns where the traveller rests for a little while and collects his thoughts, both of the road he has travelled and of the destination whither it is leading him. Such is the intention of these studies. They are not sermons, but fragments or abstracts of sermons. They are fugitive glimpses of eternal things.

While in a general way it has been found convenient to arrange them in the time-honoured sequence of the Christian year, only a few of the more important festivals, celebrated either on Sundays or on adjacent weekdays, have been selected. I have included the discarded festival of All Souls ; for, although it has been abused by superstition, it may well be allowed to remind us of our human

brotherhood and of the claim of God upon all mankind. The first and last Sundays of the year are the only commemorative days which have been added to those of the Church Calendar.

Since the object of the book is practical rather than critical, questions of authorship and of literal or figurative interpretation have been rarely introduced. In so far as disputed doctrines are dealt with, my desire is to sound a reconciling rather than a contentious note. Far too much has been made of our differences in matters where all theories are necessarily incomplete. The statement of truths of eternity in the language of time must always leave great room for Christian charity towards those who state the same truths otherwise, and the restatement of ancient doctrines in modern terms implies no lack of reverence either for former thinkers or their thoughts. It does imply a profound and deepening conviction that the earlier and the later voices are but different expressions of the same things. The chief characteristic of the thought of to-day is that it finds its way to abstract truth through actual experience. In the history of the race and of the individual there is clear evidence of the way of God with men. It is in these phenomena of time that we see passing glimpses of eternity.

JOHN KELMAN.

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
ON THE OBSERVANCE OF DAYS ... ..	1
"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day."—REVELATION i. 10.	
CONCERNING GIFTS ... ..	8
The gifts of the Magi.—ST. MATTHEW ii. 11.	
THE CONSECRATION OF IMPERIALISM ... ..	14
"He leadeth them out."—ST. JOHN x. 3.	
LEADERSHIP, FALSE AND TRUE ... ..	21
"He leadeth them out."—ST. JOHN x. 3.	
THE MAKING OF AN APOSTLE ... ..	27
St. Paul the Apostle.—ACTS ix. 1-9.	
THOUGHT AND ACTION ... ..	34
St. Paul's retrospect.—ACTS xxvi. 19.	

	PAGE
LOYALTY TO VISION ... ..	39
St. Paul's retrospect.—ACTS xxvi. 19.	
CHRIST'S LESSONS IN PRAYER ... ..	44
"Lord, teach us to pray."—LUKE ii. 1.	
PREPARATION FOR THE BEST ... ..	49
"A people prepared for the Lord."—LUKE i. 17.	
THE PREPARATION OF WORDS ... ..	55
"Take with you words."—HOSEA xiv. 2.	
THE POWER OF WORDS ... ..	61
"Take with you words."—HOSEA xiv. 2.	
EAST AND WEST ... ..	67
"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us."—PSALM ciii. 12.	
CHRIST AMONG THE TRANSGRESSORS ... ..	75
"He was numbered with the transgressors."—ISAIAH liii. 12; LUKE xxii. 37.	

# CONTENTS

xi

	PAGE
THE VALUE OF A PAGEANT ... ..	84
The triumphal entry into Jerusalem.—LUKE xix. 28-48.	
THE RISING OF CHRIST ... ..	90
“They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.”—ST. JOHN xx. 13.	
A SONG OF THE MORNING ... ..	97
“And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds.”—2 SAMUEL xxiii. 4.	
THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY ... ..	104
“That ye may approve things that are excellent.”—PHILIPPIANS i. 10.	
STRENGTH AND JOY ... ..	113
“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”—NEHEMIAH viii. 10.	
THE ELUSIVENESS OF DESIRE ... ..	119
“The mirage shall become a pool.”—ISAIAH xxxv. 7.	
THE PHANTASMAGORIA OF LIFE ... ..	125
“The mirage shall become a pool.”—ISAIAH xxxv. 7.	

	PAGE
A NEW POINT OF VIEW ... ..	131
“While they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”—ACTS i. 9.	
THE DAYS OF THE SPIRIT ... ..	138
“It is expedient for you that I go away.”—ST. JOHN xvi. 7.	
THE SPIRITUAL DOCTRINE OF GOD ... ..	144
“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” —1 JOHN v. 7.	
THE SPIRIT AND THE INTELLECT ... ..	150
“He will guide you into all truth.”—ST. JOHN xvi. 13.	
THE SPIRIT AND THE CONSCIENCE ... ..	155
“He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”—ST. JOHN xvii. 8-11.	
THE UNKNOWN CHRIST ... ..	160
“There standeth one among you whom ye know not.”—ST. JOHN i. 26.	
THE UNKNOWN NEIGHBOUR ... ..	167
“There standeth one among you whom ye know not.”—ST. JOHN i. 26.	



# CONTENTS

xiii

	PAGE
THE UNKNOWN SELF     ...     ...     ...     ...     ...	174
"There standeth one among you whom ye know not."—St. JOHN i. 26.	
DUTY AND PLEASURE     ...     ...     ...     ...     ...	181
"Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel."—2 KINGS v. 12.	
OPINION AND KNOWLEDGE ...     ...     ...     ...     ...	189
"Behold I thought . . . behold now I know."—2 KINGS v. 11, 15.	
THE CHARACTER OF GEHAZI     ...     ...     ...     ...     ...	198
2 KINGS v. 15-27.	
GOD'S COMPROMISE WITH MAN     ...     ...     ...     ...     ...	207
"Two mules' burden of earth."—2 KINGS v. 17.	
MAN'S COMPROMISE WITH GOD     ...     ...     ...     ...     ...	214
"The house of Rimmon."—2 KINGS v. 18.	
THE OPEN-AIR TREATMENT OF SOULS     ...     ...     ...     ...     ...	223
"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills."—PSALM cxxi. 1.	

	PAGE
THREE VIEWS OF MAN'S DESTINY.—1. PESSIMISM ...	230
"I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book."—REVELATION v. 4.	
THREE VIEWS OF MAN'S DESTINY.—2. THE GOSPEL OF HEALTHY-MINDEDNESS ... ..	236
"Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda . . . hath prevailed to open the book."—REVELATION v. 5.	
THREE VIEWS OF MAN'S DESTINY.—3. LOVE AND SACRI- FICE ... ..	242
"A Lamb as it had been slain."—REVELATION v. 6.	
WELL-MEANING BLUNDERERS ... ..	248
"Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."— LUKE xiv. 15.	
"Blessed is the womb which bear Thee and the paps which Thou hast sucked."—LUKE xi. 27.	
INTERPRETATION BY THE LONG RESULT ... ..	254
"What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know here- after."—ST. JOHN xiii. 7.	
TRUST IN THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST ... ..	260
"What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know here- after."—ST. JOHN xiii. 7.	

# CONTENTS

xv

	PAGE
THE EXPLORATION OF THE HIDDEN LIFE ... ..	266
"Your life is hid with Christ in God."—COLOSSIANS iii. 3. "Continue in prayer."—COLOSSIANS iv. 2.	
WEARINESS OF RESPONSIBILITY ... ..	275
"Make me as one of thy hired servants."—LUKE xv. 19.	
THE HERITAGE OF FEAR ... ..	282
"Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy name."—PSALM lxi. 5.	
THE CLAIM OF GOD ... ..	288
"All souls are mine."—EZEKIEL xviii. 5.	
THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY ... ..	295
"Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them."—ST. MATTHEW xiv. 14.	
THE FURTHER SIDE OF VICTORY ... ..	301
"More than conquerors."—ROMANS viii. 37.	
THE TRANSFORMATION OF LANGUAGE INTO LIFE ... ..	306
"The word was made flesh."—ST. JOHN i. 14.	

	PAGE
THE REASONABLE VIEW OF SIN AND OF FORGIVENESS ...	313
"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."—ISAIAH i. 18.	
THE DIVINE LOVE INCARNATE ... ..	319
"The love of God which is in Christ Jesus."—ROMANS viii. 39.	
THE SECOND ADVENT ... ..	325
"Like unto men that wait for their lord."—LUKE xii. 36.	
THE GROUPS AROUND THE CRADLE ... ..	332
"The eyes of all wait upon Thee."—PSALM cxlv. 15.	
THE END OF THE YEAR ... ..	336
"It is finished."—JOHN xix. 30.	

## ON THE OBSERVANCE OF DAYS

(*The New Year*)

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.”—REVELATION I. 10.

THE wonderful book of the Revelation introduces us suddenly to a most picturesque and most pathetic situation. It is Sunday in Patmos, where John is an exile condemned to work in the mines. Sunday was a great day with those early Christians—the Lord’s Day, the Christian festival of the Resurrection. For that brilliant fact shone behind them but a little distance off, and once a week they laid aside all other thoughts, and lived over again in loving imagination the events that had changed the world for them.

Sunday was not a holiday in the mines, but the spirit of this redeemed man is free, and he has access to the spiritual world. While his feet and hands toil at their dreary tasks, he passes into an ecstatic state, suspending his connexion with this material world, and leading him into the other land, unseen of any eyes but his.

In this exalted state the boundaries both of time and space are thrown down, and he moves free in a larger world. He is back again in the morning light of the day of Christ's rising. Again he runs to the empty tomb with Peter; again the woman whom they have left solitary by that empty tomb comes and tells them what she has seen; and again amid the evening shadows he himself hears the words "Peace be unto you". Similarly he escapes from the narrow confines of the island, and shares the life of the infant Church scattered along the coast-lines of the Great Sea. He is their brother and companion, both in the tribulation and in the kingdom of Jesus Christ; with them both in darkness and in glory. He is with them, too, in that patience of the saints which both the tribulation and the kingdom has taught them—that wonderful patience of the early Church, which had learned to be patient with life, both in its present trial and its deferred hope.

Such was the spirit of the day for John—partly commemoration of the past, partly fellowship with the far distant, in the brotherhood of the patient Church. It was a day of mingled sorrow and exultation, in every sense a very special day.

We still keep certain days apart, and break the monotony of the year with their recurring calls to remember and to love. There is sometimes heard a grudge against making much of one day above

another, but surely that is but a frowsy way of thinking. Those who cherish it must be people whose commonplace life of detail has overwhelmed them and made them dull, till they feel at home only in routine, and are restless and ill at ease when life grows keener. The loss of the power to take holiday is one of the results of the over-pressure nowadays. But even for the work's own sake we need sometimes to stand off from work, especially in our religious life. The finest and most sensitive instincts tend to die away or to get crowded out, even amid religious services and duties. Indeed it even comes to this that we positively fear any special inspirations. A sloth creeps upon us, and rather than risk a spiritual awakening we willingly consent to weary ourselves with unremitting labours, or succumb to the fascination of the unimportant, and indulge ourselves in a succession of casual little activities. We deliberately prefer and choose Martha's part instead of Mary's, and fill life so full of bustling services that we have no time either to think or to aspire.

There are others who in a different spirit ask: "Why select one day above another? Are not all days equally days of the Lord? Rather let us raise the tone of every day till it reaches festival height." This looks indeed like religion, but it is not human nature. Those who are always at high pressure grow inevitably strained and unnatural. It

is quite true that every day is a day of the Lord, for every day is "full of things offering themselves for our wonder, and understanding, and love, and every person we meet is a traveller between life and death". So all the interests of life are religious; but we are human, and none of us is capable of bearing more than a certain strain. Such attempts overstrain life to a tension that is neither desirable nor wholesome.

In a word, the spirit is tidal, and "the soul wins its victories as the sea wins hers". The occasional and fluctuating element in life is not only justifiable but essential to healthy human nature. The tides of the spirit are known to us all—the great reactions, the swinging tides of feeling, interest, and energy. These are from above, coming down upon us, unlike the pedestrian guides of common sense and principle which direct us evenly on our way. This does not apply merely to the ebb and flow of sweet or tender feeling, though it includes that also. Rather one thinks of the occasional heightening of life all round, the intensification of its powers in moments when it "means intensely, and means good."

For the continuance of such exalted moods, there are no tabernacles allowed on the mountain-top. Life moves best in reactions, and the occasional element is necessary to its wholesomeness. Very particularly does this hold true of religious experi-



ence, and it warns us against a false conscience of spirituality. Self-analysis and frequent measurement of the spiritual temperature may easily become morbid. Do not strain your spirit nor force your moods, nor accuse yourself because of the ebb and flow. All that is included in the command and trust that we shall live our human lives.

Now this occasional quality of human nature is the explanation of the common delight in the observance of special days. Birthdays and other anniversaries, the return of friends from afar, the festivals commemorating national and religious events, are all of them times of spiritual rising tide. It is fitting to give them their opportunity, to set time apart, and to forbid encroaching duties.

We have here a principle which gives its true meaning to the observance of Sunday. Unfortunately the whole question has come to be associated either with laws and forcible restraints, or with the mere idea of rest, and the cessation of the daily routine. Both of these are negative conceptions of the day, relating to what we must not do on it. Really such restrictions exist not for their own sake, but in order to make room for the positive Sunday life. That life consists of much that is keenest and most worthy in human nature—the fellowship of friends, thoughts of the absent, memories of the dead, aspirations after better life, communion with God. For the sake of these things of the Spirit it

is worth while to resist the encroachment of week-day interests. And the resistance must be firm, for much is ever waiting to be completed, and overlapping fragments of workaday life will make it impossible without watchfulness to be in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.

There is another special day, hidden from us all in the future, when one would wish above most days to be in the Spirit—the day of one's death. When we think of all that death involves for believing men, we cannot but class it among the festivals of life. Its freedom from old bonds, its sudden new adventure, its chance for turning the experience of life to use, its light of vision and the beginning of eternal peace—surely it is a day of the Lord, and it must be a thing to be desired that on that day He will grant us a mood fit and becoming; that the busy interests of life may die down and leave us free to go out upon a full tide of the Spirit.

We are in serious danger of crowding out the Spirit from the days, and this is a New Year's Day plea for homes and hearts. Our days too often miss the rare excellence that somehow seems their rightful heritage. We feel that there is "something deep and satisfying, and really close at hand, into which we cannot enter nor dwell". But can we not find the secret of the days, and rescue the fragrance of their departing sweetness? Our

special days supply at least one answer, if we shall but keep them special and apart. Great experiences of the Spirit are generally defeated by trifles which absorb and depress us. These trifles come to us as duties, and the minute and manifold sense of obligation shuts out the larger vision in which alone we may find peace. Our duties come between us and the meaning of our lives. As year follows year and we grow older, we see more and more clearly how much of the higher possibilities of life we have missed and are missing, not only through blundering and sin, but by the attempt to deal conscientiously with an over-crowded life. To all who feel thus, the New Year's festival brings an unexpected message. Neglect your duties now and then. Let things take care of themselves, and do you live your life and follow the vision. The Lord claims certain days as His own. Sundays He expressly claims, but in their degree He claims also Christmas, New Year's Day, and others. It is not a day that comes with such anniversaries, but a Spirit : and the name of the day, if the Spirit be wanting, is a sarcasm. It is ours to be in this Spirit on the Lord's Day.

## CONCERNING GIFTS

(*Epiphany*)

The gifts of the Magi.—ST. MATTHEW II. 11.

THERE is no story in all the world more beautiful than this. There is the wistfulness of long wandering about these three strangers, star-guided across the desert. We think, as we read, of the Moslem pilgrims who to this day may be seen, shrouded figures upon camel-back in that same desert, guiding themselves towards Mecca by the selected star “at the left ear”. And these are but stray instances of man’s long search for the highest he can conceive.

But those ancient wanderers were generous, and travelled that they might give. And in this very simple story we find among other things a strangely applicable hint of the true spirit of generosity. Christmas was a time of gifts, and now, as we are returning from its festive season to plainer days, it is well that we should remember something of its lessons about giving. Those men “saw, and fell down, and gave”. They did not give without seeing, as so much modern charity gives. To put down

one's name in a list of subscribers, while one hardly knows what is the object of the charity, is a fashionable way of saving the trouble of investigation and of sympathy, but it is not worth the name of benevolence. Nor did they give without falling down. Many are willing to be generous who are yet too proud to bow down their spirit in worship. It is so much easier to give than to fall down in reverence and humility : but liberality will not be accepted in lieu of worship.

For Christmas is not only a time of open-heartedness between man and man. It brings with it also the desire to give to Christ—a desire which sometimes comes to us all, though we do not always understand it. Remembering God's unspeakable gift to us, and seeing the response of those "star-led wizards on the Eastern road," we cannot but say to ourselves :—

Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain,  
To welcome him to this his new abode.

And, if we may so far follow tradition, it is worth while to remember that these men, opening their bales of treasure, brought gifts each from his own land. The gold was from India, the frankincense from Persia, and the myrrh from Arabia. They did not say that these, the products of their own lands, were common and everyday things, and set about procuring statues from Greece or tin from Britain. They brought what they had. So,

for us all, the gift that Christ will value most will never be that which grows in somebody else's country. It will not be some better or nobler thing than what you have, but just that.

Of course, in the fullest sense of the words, this means that strange and precious gift—yourself. "Your own redeemed personality" is the one gift which Christ desires and will value. Nay, your own personality, very incompletely redeemed as yet. We are not what we might have been, we are not what we ought to be, we are not what we hope to be; but such as we are, we may give ourselves to Him, and the gift will not be rejected.

As to these three gifts of the story, Matthew Henry, with his pleasant common sense, finds in them simply a "seasonable relief to Joseph" in his poverty. Ancient commentators used to find more in them than that, seeing in the gold a tribute to a king, in the frankincense an offering to a God, and in the myrrh a burial gift to the dead; and precisely the same ideas are to be found in at least one old carol. Whether the beautiful story as it was originally told meant this or not, it is a venerable tradition, and it is certainly true for us.

1. *Gold*—the tribute to a king. There is in us all a response to royalty and a delight in it. The child who worships strength, and makes a heroic figure of any famous athlete or player of games, knows the meaning of this. For the grown

man it may stand for the secular life of work and politics, the life most richly endowed with intellectual power or social influence. It includes business capacity, professional excellence, expertness in art, literature, or science. All this region is the royal domain of man's secular interests, his knowledge and his power. The reason why many people drift away from faith is that they seek to reserve it for a special and exclusive compartment of their life, which they choose to call "religious". Had they brought in tribute to Christ the produce of their own region, the gold of the secular life, they would never have drifted at all. And such tribute, offered at this cradle, recalls to their blessed childhood lives which otherwise too surely grow out of it into unsimple ways. It is well to offer gold at Christ's cradle.

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,  
Gold I bring, to crown Him again,  
King for ever, ceasing never,  
Over us all to reign.

2. *Frankincense*—an offering to God. This was a fragrant resin exuded from the bark of a certain tree, which formed an ingredient of incense in the ancient East. Incense was offered as a sweet savour to the Deity, and it became the symbol of prayers and vows, of aspirations and all the sweetness of man's worship. This is the complement of the gold, and there are some who are peculiarly

rich in it, people who are born with a genius for religion. It is an element in the life of all children. The tender conscience and spiritual longings of childhood are not only normal but characteristic gifts of the early days. On through later years this faculty persists. Too often, indeed, the frankincense is laid away with the child's toys. There is no worship any more, and the wistful and reverent child grows into a prayerless man or woman. Yet there are some natures so richly endowed with this that to the end of life they cannot be satisfied with being strong and serviceable. They must also find God, and offer to Him a certain exquisiteness of service. They present their most beautiful and fragrant things, and about their lives there is ever a delicate aroma of worship. It is frankincense that grows in their country.

But it grows in every land, and even those whose secular instincts are strongest may return to their childhood as they offer their gift at this cradle. They may come back from the busy secular life with its striving to this peace; back from intellectual perplexities, till they are once more among a few simple things, longing after God, and hearing again the call to worship like bells long silent.

Frankincense to offer have I,  
Incense owns a Deity nigh.  
Prayer and praising, all men raising,  
Worship Him, God most high.



3. *Myrrh*—for burial spices. Myrrh, dropping in reddish-brown drops like tears, was prized for its sweet scent—a far-away Eastern kind of scent, that would sweeten the air of the stable while the little child lay there. But the chief use of myrrh was for very precious ointment with which they embalmed the dead. Long afterwards, when that scent rose from the gift of Mary, Jesus at once said it was for His burial. And this odour of burial-spice was about the cradle in the inn of Bethlehem.

There are some who know it well. They are acquainted with grief, with loneliness, with anxieties, and bereavements. They themselves have sorrowed much, and felt the sorrow, the pain, and the death around them in the world. Their hearts are full of a great compassion, and their loving eyes are tearful. Ah, it is myrrh that grows in their country, and that will be their fitting gift to Jesus. The dying and the ailing folk, the poor, and the sad, and the desolate, will know the odour of their gift. And all may bring this also, for all must grieve and weep at times. Only let them offer it at His cradle that so their hearts may be kept from hardness, with a tender simplicity in their sorrow.

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume  
Breathes a life of gathering gloom ;  
Sorrowing, sighing, blinding, dying,  
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

## THE CONSECRATION OF IMPERIALISM

“He leadeth them out.”—ST. JOHN X. 3.

It is of peculiar interest now and then to cast our eyes back to the origins of our modern institutions, and to observe the background of our advancing civilization. When we examine even the newest inventions we find many traces of the oldest occupations. We are all the children of primitive hunters, sailors, shepherds, or tillers of the ground ; and that remotest ancestry has an incalculable effect upon the development of humanity to its latest day. But of all the primitive occupations of mankind, there is none that has done so much to make and keep life gentle as that of the shepherd. True, the shepherd races have been wild and rude, and in some lands the word “shepherd” has been almost synonymous with “robber”. But the care of lambs, and the very fact of dwelling among the flower of the grass, have their effect. The shepherd life, like all other phases in the evolution of the race, tends upwards towards its ideal. Many a gentle element in our modern days had its rude beginnings in the sheep-folds, and the Good Shepherd

ideal of tender pity for all weakness and suffering was learned long ago in prehistoric fields.

Much of this the world owes to the Semites, in whom the pastoral instinct is deep as life itself. Every one knows how close are the relations which still exist between the Eastern shepherd and his wandering flock. On the hillsides of Judea, with the subtle music of the pipe quivering faintly in the twilight, one understands all the detail of the twenty-third Psalm and the tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. At Hebron a few years ago a traveller, noticing that the sheep-folds were mere c-shaped walls, asked a shepherd why they had no doors. He answered "I am the door"; meaning that at night he lay wrapped in his cloak in the open entrance. At once one understands in that saying what Christ meant when He used it. In the fold of faith He has placed himself between those that are His and all the world. No sheep can wander without passing Him, nor can any ravenous beast enter to devour but over His body. Outside are the trying things, the tempting things and dangers; within, all is peace and safety, and that sweet and gentle familiarity in which "He calleth his own sheep by name".

Yet the text presents another aspect of shepherd life. In the words "He leadeth them out" our faces are turned towards the future and the wider world. In Old Testament imagery nothing

is more suggestive than the frequency with which the pastoral and the military ideas are combined, as in that splendid picture of God leading the hosts of Israel "out of Egypt like a flock". So it ever must be. Faith, indeed, offers a safe fold to believers, but its shelter and quiet are not meant to last. In spite of the desire which has expressed itself in Roman Catholic monasticism, and in individual reactions in Protestantism toward the secluded life, the call is inexorable.

Far from the world, O Lord, I flee,  
From strife and tumult far ;  
From scenes where Satan wages still,  
His most successful war ;

—every one can understand the tired fighter's longing for rest, or the shrinking of a timid and sensitive spirit from a world with which it found itself incompetent to grapple. Yet, surely, the scene where Satan is waging his most successful war can hardly be the place to flee from! Where else should the Christian be? Such sentiments are well enough for an hour of weariness when relaxation and rest are needed, but they can never be a typical statement of the Christian life. It is vain for any healthy Christian to imagine that it can be right for him to spend his years in nursing his own soul, and such ideals of the devotional life are but a refined form of self-indulgence.

Forth from the casemate, on the plain  
 Where honour has the world to gain :  
 Pour forth and bravely do your part,  
 Oh knights of the unshielded heart !  
 Forth and for ever forward !—out  
 From prudent turret and redoubt.

For the words of Jesus are resolute though they are gentle. He is quite determined that his followers shall go out. Life in this world is not meant to be a sheep-fold for the faithful ; it is an affair of sterner meaning, with action in it and adventure.

This leads us into the public life of our times, with a call to understand and take a part in its movements. We must go out as thinkers, with fearless exploration of new fields of truth ; as workers, to take up the unfinished tasks of the world ; as soldiers to fight the long-standing evils, and to help the weak causes of the times ; as searchers who shall seek until they find the lost. Every such career means risk and adventure, a strain and stress of energy and an uncertain future. We are flung back for comfort, not upon the warmth and shelter of the fold, but upon the character of the shepherd. It is a more wholesome and a more bracing comfort.

The practical meaning of all this brings us at once to the thought of our national life and work. The idea of imperialism is in the air, and it is of first importance to attain to a right conception of the true spirit of empire. There is no need to touch

here upon the politics of imperialism. For British people empire is a fact, and travel is an instinct. Never since the days of the Elizabethan adventurers have we stayed at home. This is more or less true of every nation, but it is of course especially true of countries whose extensive seaboard has forced upon them the work and destiny of great maritime powers. We find ourselves heirs to large responsibilities which we dare not and cannot surrender. It is these responsibilities which force upon us the question, Who leadeth us out? If we are to go forth to the ends of the earth, whom or what shall our flag follow? Shall it be mammon, or the mere instinct of wandering and adventure, or the dream of glory, or Jesus Christ? President Roosevelt in a recent speech said: "I have the keenest sympathy with the spread of the English empire, and I have that sympathy because and so long as the spread of that rule means benefit to the people over whom it goes". It is ours to see to it that in the management of empire we prove ourselves worthy of such praise.

Our foreign mission enterprise is one way in which we have sought to meet these responsibilities. Let us link on the missionary with the imperial idea, for foreign missions are but the baptism of imperialism with the Holy Ghost. Their enterprise carries out in modern times the great dreams of old—Augustine's *City of God*, Dante's

*De Monarchia*, More's *Utopia*, Bacon's *New Atlantis*. These dreams shall be fulfilled when the kingdoms of the world are become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. In this light all narrower and poorer elements fall away from the missionary idea. It is no longer a pious and romantic sentiment, nor a matter of individual evangelism conducted in picturesque circumstances. It is a great department of statesmanship, whose end is the conquest of the world for the empire of Jesus Christ. At home, the already submerged masses of the community are sinking towards despair and revolution; abroad, vast lands are rising into what may well become a godless civilization, more dangerous to the world than their ancient barbarisms. Surely the Church of Christ is called at such a time, not merely to individual heroism, but to statesmanship of the highest order, with intelligent strategy and concerted action. Surely our Christian life to-day is to be regarded not as a sheep-fold but as a crusade.

But there is much British life abroad outside the mission fields. As we follow in imagination the sweep of sunrise across the world, and think of the British men whom it awakens in every land, we cannot but ask again, Who will lead them out? The lands into which they go lie open to the kingdom of God. By our missionary enterprise we can do much, but we can do more by the sons of the empire,

if their standards are high and their ideals Christian, in politics, education, industry, and commerce. Baptize these with the Spirit of Christ, and you shall soon leaven the world.

For the soldier and sailor far across the seas, the civil servant in India, the merchant in Singapore, the Chartered Company clerk in Africa, are missionaries, either of God or of the devil. They are giving its moral tone to the empire, and either blessing or cursing the world. And your offices where boys are learning business, your firesides from which your sons and daughters go forth—there you are fixing the principles and setting the tone which they will carry with them to far-off lands. Every business man among his clerks, every mother kneeling beside a British cradle, may be determining the fate of nations, and setting the time for the coming of God's kingdom in the ends of the earth. If your children shall go forth, as most assuredly they shall, it is for you to make sure of this, that Christ, and not the enemies of Christ, shall lead them out.



## LEADERSHIP, FALSE AND TRUE

“He leadeth them out.”—ST. JOHN X. 3.

ALL great ideas which relate to the national and public welfare of mankind, return, when accepted conscientiously, to the field of individual life, and appear there in simpler forms. Our first responsibility is not for our country but for ourselves. There are dangers lying in wait for us, and sacred places unvisited as yet, for all of which we require a leader. So the words apply to each one's daily exit upon the world. As your door closes behind you in the morning, and you go forth into a new day's moral and spiritual adventure, who leadeth you out ?

The need of guidance is obvious, and all the wise know and confess it. Experience has taught them that they are never intellectually competent until they are learning from a higher wisdom than their own, nor morally free until they are obeying orders. The attempt to go unguided ultimately leads to wavering faith, mistaken judgments, irresolute and tentative movement ; and sooner or later in most cases it leads to that discouragement and darkness in which men stand still, or turn to retrace their

steps. The case could not be better nor more beautifully described than it is in Dinah's sermon in *Adam Bede*: "As soon as we lay ourselves entirely at His feet we have light enough given us to guide our own steps; as the foot-soldier, who hears nothing of the counsels that determine the course of the great battle he is in, hears plainly enough the word of command which he must himself obey". There is a wistfulness that George Eliot would have confessed to be almost envious, in these words that come from her pen. Every great spirit longs for leading.

But the situation is complicated by the fact that there are other leaderships which offer themselves. First, there is circumstance. Many people go strolling on through life uncommitted to a course. We see them standing at the cross-roads, and their course seems to be determined almost by the direction of the wind, so open are they to casual influence. Any passing example, any pressure of the crowd, is enough to lead them forward, this way or that. Few things are sadder than the spectacle of this helpless flock with its chance shepherding and its lack of guiding principles. You ask them why they are doing this or that, and they answer that they had heard it commended, or that something they had read suggested it. It never occurs to them to inquire whether these were competent guides, in this age of such singularly irresponsible

guidance, when every novice is shouting out advice, and we so seldom know whether our oracular literary guides have found their own path or not. But our Christian faith offers a very different guidance. Those who follow it do so in freedom, with thoughtful and deliberate choice, constrained not by the accidental hearing of an unknown voice, but by love and trust. For their Guide, unseen but yet familiar, goes before them, and they know His voice and follow Him.

Others take their direction from fashion, and the custom of society. It seems a safe guide, and indeed the reason why so many choose it is because it saves them the risk of originality. Yet when we analyse it we find that in the majority of cases no one can tell who started the fashion. At some unknown time, some nonentity chanced to do something, and another nonentity copied him, and so the custom arose. In their day, nobody took these nonentities for authorities ; yet all men follow them now, simply because they are unknown. But the very note of Christianity is that it appears erratic to the outsider. It is original if it is anything. The Christian is a new creation, with new ways unlike those of others. "To act like men," has, from the days of the prophets, been a reproach to the people of God. The reason again is that they have a guide unseen by the eyes of the rest. Copying Christ, and following in His footsteps, they are

independent of the many paths in which others wander.

But there are also those who boast that they find their own way for themselves. Seeking no leading from above, and regardless alike of the opinion and the example of their fellows, they are a law unto themselves, obeying only their own will. This vaunted self-will is largely a delusion. Indeed there is generally less of will in it than in almost any other type of character. They are really dominated by the mood of the moment, and that mood runs back into the past. Not even can our own past, the habitual choices which largely determine our moods, account for it. Heredity has also to be remembered; and it is probable that those whose moods are most commanding owe most to heredity. Some obscure ancestor repeats his life in them: and all the time that they are priding themselves upon their independence, they are really following docile in the steps of the ancient dead, going after a spectral guide who emerges upon them from the grave. The Christian's leadership is different. He follows not the call of the dead in his blood, but the voice of the living in his soul. He is not held by the dead hand of heredity to the moral and spiritual ways of the past, but with sure footsteps he is moving away from the past into the future and the will of Christ.

“*Christus dux*” — and life under that aspect is

a great thing indeed. Its course is set by one decisive choice, its direction continued in imitation of His example and under the prompting of His spirit. He leads us out of childhood into youth, and that is adolescence; out of ignorance into knowledge, and that is education; out of the old home with its love and preparation, into the new home with its new love and fulfilment of tasks, and that is the man's career; out of familiar truth and thought into new intellectual adventure, and that is the inevitable progress of thought which no man needs to fear, so long as upon the title page of all his books he writes "He leadeth them out". At last he leadeth them out of this earthly life into the unknown and wonderful and blessed land beyond—and that is death, no more than the old leading through new fields.

We spoke before of the leadership of Christ as the true imperialism, but in actual experience there come times when we are constrained to ask, Is this empire or is it exile? For we find ourselves led out of old security into battle and danger, out of luxurious sheltered meadows into paths that are hard and dull, out of small complacent successes into new and strange defeats. The waste and risk of it all sometimes terrify the spirits of those who follow, and they cry out upon so bitter a leading.

It is well here to remember that in a great leader two things are requisite. *Clearness* is indispensable,

so far as directions go, and the detail must be absolutely plain. And, apart from ease or difficulty, there is not any reason here to murmur. The leading may be bitter, full of sacrifice and suffering at times, but at least we can understand our orders. It may be hard, but it certainly will not be doubtful to those who are absolutely willing to be led. And the second thing requisite in great leadership is *unintelligibility*. A French historian wisely says that no leader can well dispense with what he calls "an unsoundable depth". If we were consulted, if we always understood, faith would be superfluous; and, for some reason or other, it is absolutely manifest that here it is appointed to man to live by faith.

And, after all, there is nothing which really concerns us but our guide. The fact of Christ matters, and the rest is all included in it. And for ever more He justifies His claim to leadership, to our full-hearted trust and implicit following. There is a firmness in those quiet eyes of His that reassures us. This is one who knows the way, and is master of life and death. Happy indeed are those who trust that leading through all changes of apparent good and evil fortune, who anticipate the life of heaven by learning here upon the earth to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth".

## THE MAKING OF AN APOSTLE

*(The Conversion of St. Paul)*

St. Paul the Apostle.—ACTS IX. 1-9.

THIS is the story of one of those profoundly significant events in history, on which the whole complexion of future thought and the course of future progress turn. St. Paul is one of those Titanic figures of the past about whom everything was on the large scale, both for himself and for the world. Intellectually, his views of truth have become a fundamental statement of the creed of nineteen centuries; practically, he is the master empire-builder of the kingdom of God in the world. He laid hold upon the largest conceptions of his time—the Hebrew religion and the Roman Empire—and he transformed them into the Christian Church.

But it was not by the natural development of his genius that he did this. Up to a certain moment in his career, his powers were running to waste, spending themselves in the most futile ways. At that moment something occurred which revolutionized his whole life, an upheaval of the very foundations of the man. The word 'conversion' is sometimes so lightly used that many earnest people are

inclined to avoid it. It often means simply the memory of an emotion, which has left the man without a master, and without a task. But the greatness of this man's nature ensured the thoroughness of the change in him. Such a man's conversion is a tremendous affair.

It is worth our while in the first place to inquire into the events which led up to that change. For it is evident that it was sudden only in its climax, as we may gather even from the words "kicking against the pricks". This is borne out by the altogether excessive zeal of the voluntary inquisitor. When we think what humble folk these early Christians were—slaves, women who earned their livelihood by trade, odds and ends of the below-stairs life of the great Empire—and when we remember how he rushed from house to house after them, and how everything was at its harshest and most violent, we can see the unnaturalness of it all. No one likes this sort of work for its own sake, and this fiery crusade, self-imposed, is certainly suspicious.

Who lights the faggot?

Not the full faith; no, but the lurking doubt.

On the other hand, we know from himself that he had already been struck tame by the discovery of the sinfulness of coveting, and the inward nature of morality. Pharisaic Judaism could do



nothing to help him in that, but it was a first principle of Jesus' teaching. And there was much else in the new faith that must have strongly attracted him. The character of Jesus, and of His followers, was after all inexplicably beautiful, whatever one might think about their principles. Those women with the Madonna-like faces, those young men whose eyes were full of spiritual light—undoubtedly they had some secret of gladness and of serenity hidden from the ancient world. Thus he was already more or less consciously dissatisfied with Judaism and tempted towards Christianity.

Yet such a change meant too much for him to make it possible that he should lightly capitulate. On the one hand, it was unthinkable to his proud spirit that simple people like the Christians had been right, while he and all thinkers whom he respected had been wrong. And then, if by any chance it should be true, the ghastly alternative was that he and his friends had seen their own Messiah, and crucified Him. No wonder that he felt "the anguish of a constant misgiving". It was the clash of two consciences within him. It was impossible to go on for long with this hunting of such small and defenceless game without a pang; and yet a sorer pang threatened him if for a moment he admitted the possibility of his nation's crime, and the falsehood of her fixed convictions.

It was characteristic of the man to seek to settle

the conflict by a blind and furious dash for one side. But the journey gave him much enforced leisure when he was not in a mood that could bear to be still. Whatever route he chose, he could not escape daily memories of Jesus and His doings. He was no longer backed by public opinion, and the solitary ride only gave freer course to his uncertain thoughts. By the time he had drawn near to Damascus, he was evidently growing feverish. No eastern travels at high noon except upon compulsion. Then in the still hot air, while the merciless sun beat on him and his unwilling and sullen companions, the city burst upon his view. There are some places where nature's beauty shames the crimes of man: and as he thought upon his helpless victims among those homes and gardens, a fierce reaction was inevitable. And all this for an uncertainty! There are truths for which we would not only die, but even kill. But such truths must be certainties indeed.

There is no need for curious speculation as to what happened then. It was then that Paul met Jesus and felt the attack of light upon his heart and conscience, and heard certain plain questions that must find definite and immediate answer.

Yet it is to the questions that Paul asked that day that we turn with even deeper interest. The

first of them was, "Who art Thou, Lord?" He had felt before that all this persecution, this harrying of people at once so blameless and so inflexible, was far too cheap and easy a solution. Behind the new faith lay some mysterious power, that was good and not evil, associated with the name of Jesus. But though he had often before asked the question who Jesus was, yet it had been prejudice which asked it, while now it was conscience. He had been aggravated by the power of the dead Nazarene who thwarted him at every turn. Who was he, this haunting ghost, this troubler of his times? But now irritation has given place to shame, and conscience asks, Who art Thou, Lord? That change from prejudice to conscience was one point in which his question sets the type for such questions for ever.

Another is, that he asked it of Jesus himself. He had formerly asked it of the Rabbis of his day, and now he might have inquired of the Apostles. But he was done with the Rabbis now, and he expressly tells us that it was three years before he met the Apostles. It is this that explains his power. His truth was not a doctrine learned up by study; it was his direct experience, his first-hand knowledge of Jesus Christ. And here also he sets a lasting type. The ultimate source of authority in Christian faith can never be either the Church or the Bible. These themselves are but the guardian and the record of a revelation made by God to the spirit of

man. And a similarly direct revelation must give to each believer his fundamental spiritual convictions. Each must ask his great question for himself, and for himself find answer.

Paul's second question is practical, "What wouldst Thou have me to do?" As the former sets us beside the springs of his thought, so this reveals the sources of his activity. For such a man as Paul, conversion without commission would have been a sham and therefore an impossibility. But the great point to notice is that it was as a commission that he received his life-work, and in that light that he always regarded it. Before this event, he had set himself his tasks, and no one could deny the earnestness with which he performed them. Like many another strenuous man whose task is self-appointed, the main part of his life-work had come to be destructive. He was occupied rather in opposing other people than in doing service to the world. Such destructive energy is generally to be distrusted when it claims a divine inspiration. There is too much of untamed human nature in it; it is the natural work for the natural man. When a man receives a commission from Jesus Christ, it is to proclaim some positive gospel rather than to deny the gospel of another. And that change from self-will to the will of Christ broke this man's pride. The whole stress was shifted from Paul to Jesus, and he who had once

been so sure of himself, now treasured his dependence on his Master as the choicest thing in life. He had capitulated without reservation, and only sought now to receive His orders. For him to live was Christ.

## THOUGHT AND ACTION

St. Paul's retrospect.—ACTS xxvi. 19.

ST. PAUL is now looking back from near the end of his career to the day of his great change. From that day to this his life had been summed up in the two words, vision and obedience. The vision of Jesus had expanded into the theology and religion of his Epistles; the commission had already resulted in the establishment of Christianity along the main lines of the Roman Empire. And, because, not for Paul only but for all of us, loyalty to vision is the truest expression of the life we fain would lead, we shall think what that implies.

The first apparent view of any life is presented by its output of deeds. The Christian life is not that of visionaries, it is a life of action. The first thought of those who live it day by day is of something immediately to be done. It is this practical quality of the Christian life which keeps it both healthy and honourable. For the soul as for the nation, service is the highest honour. A right man's view of his profession can never be merely that it is a means of gain, but that it is a chance

for service ; and the same thing is true of even our most intimate and private actions.

Yet this cannot be all. Every one remembers Langland's immortal figure of Haukyn the active man, who has not time to clean his coat. Mephistopheles is Goethe's great incarnation of fierce and clever action wholly without contemplation. And these are but extreme forms of what is seen around us every day. Some busy ones have never seen any vision at all, and these come in time to swell the long pathetic line of the ranks of the dispirited. For labour without light cannot permanently inspire. It grows meaningless, and sinks at last to deep and sometimes cynical discouragement. Others have seen, but their spiritual light has died out. They are committed by that former vision to a course, and they have to see it through. Now they are but poor dumb plodders, cheerlessly continuing this blundering night work, in the attempt at duty which they cannot understand.

The mystery of this failure is very deep. The conception of life as action seems in every way so sound and healthy that we stand aghast when we see in such instances "a man's loss come to him from his gain". But the explanation is not difficult to find. St. Paul had no magic secret that kept labour sweet to him ; he had only vision and obedience. But he had them in that order—vision first, and obedience following from it. It is not

mere action that is the secret of a healthy life, but action performed in loyalty to something we have seen. All the effective activities of men around us are just processes for turning thought into action—one's own thought, or the thought of others. In every art and craft and enthusiasm the supreme secret of mastery is to know what you are doing. Architecture is simply thought which has expressed itself in stone, or else it is sheer abomination. True healing comes not from routine prescription, but finds its sources deep among the springs of the physician's heart and imagination and experience. Social reform is either the most useless diletantism, or it is the creation of a new earth upon the lines of a pattern already clearly seen. So it is with all good work. It may be of many various kinds and there may be very many different ways of doing it, but this is characteristic of them all, that a man is carrying out into deed what he has seen in his mind. Vision ever goes before action, and true action is loyalty to vision.

In a still wider application the same principle is true, for the inward thought invariably affects the outward life and expresses itself sooner or later there. Not that one necessarily carries out into deeds all one's cherished thoughts. Dr. Bain affirms the "possibility of leading a life of imagination wholly distinct from the life of action"; and Mr. Leckie says that "a course may be continually



pursued in imagination without leading to corresponding actions". This is undoubtedly true, but it is a thoroughly dangerous fact. On the one hand, it produces dreamers whose dreams are so far apart from their conduct as to rank them among the hypocrites. On the other hand, if the dreaming be bad, the danger is very great that in times of temptation the man will fall. For the most part, in temptation, little depends upon the will at the moment; we stand or fall according to our habitual thoughts, which either hold us back or predispose us then. And apart from that, there can be no doubt that there goes out from every life upon those around it, a constant and subtle influence which is determined almost wholly by the inner life of vision—the life of imagination and thought. Thoreau has wisely said: "If ever I *did* a man good . . . it was something exceptional and insignificant compared with the good or evil I am constantly doing by being what I am". A man's atmosphere and spirit are always more powerful influences than his deeds and words.

Thus it is not surprising that the matter on which Christianity lays most stress is vision. The thoughts and imaginations of the heart; a taste for fine and clean things, and an instinctive shrinking from their opposites; above all a clear conception of Jesus Christ and a definitely accepted relation between the soul and Him—these are the

Christian fundamentals. Christianity has vindicated the rights of the imagination on its own account, apart from its outward expression ; and insisted that a man may lose his honour and respectability there, without going farther afield. Christ amazed his contemporaries by the value He set upon the life of vision : He shifted the centre of attention from outward respectability to inward seeing and light.

Christianity finds men filling their minds with sordid thoughts or foul imaginations ; others, like the prophet's servant, it finds seeing only enemies—impossibilities, dangers, anxieties, discouragements, misunderstandings, difficulties. Both alike are blind, and to both alike Christ's Gospel comes as daylight. The wholesome world is all about us, plain and normal and quiet. The sun is in the heavens, and in his light we see light clearly. Looking unto Jesus and walking in His light, we are no longer distracted by the will-o'-the-wisps of earth-bound lusts, the swinging lanterns of the opinions of others, or the poor candle of our own mere sense of duty. Action becomes at once sure of itself and glad when it is illuminated by vision. There is all the difference in the world between doing that which we have seen in Jesus Christ, and blindly doing the best we can.

## LOYALTY TO VISION

St. Paul's retrospect.—Acts xxvi. 19.

ST. PAUL'S career as a Christian began in two supreme events—a vision and a commission. To the end he goes back to them, and traces their effect upon his future, telling and retelling the story of his conversion. Yet no reader of his writings can fail to see that vision blends and alternates with action throughout his course. The Epistles are constantly turning from marvellous lights of revelation to most practical directions for living. Thus from him we learn loyalty both to past and present light.

1. *Loyalty to past vision.* The management of thoughts and swift imaginations is proverbially difficult, and there is much disloyalty to the visions of the past. It is to be seen in literature, and it is to be seen in speech and life; and few things are sadder than to watch the degeneration of lives whose course moves from light to darkness. Some are distracted by the fascinating and various spectacle of the world: others are seduced by the temptations of gain and popular applause. It is

all too easy to live by a light lower than one's highest ; and the lights of life go out one by one as we descend.

We have all caught sight, at one time or other, of high ideals, and many of us can remember a time when we saw Christ in His beauty. "Loyalty to such vision is the chief source of strength and satisfaction in a man's life." The light of life is necessarily fluctuating. Apart from anything for which we are responsible, we are so constituted as to live in a constant change and flux both of moods and of intellectual and spiritual powers. Such changes depend on bodily health, surrounding circumstances, and countless other causes which we cannot wholly command. Accordingly it will often happen that we have to remember what we have once seen, and to carry out the resolutions which then we formed. These resolutions are no longer glowing in the light of recent vision. They are cold and dead sometimes, and we no longer feel their urgency. We may even be tempted to think that we exaggerated the worth and necessity of them, and to say to ourselves that the effort is not worth while. Of course all this is still more dangerous when our own backsliding has brought about the change of mood.

In such an hour idleness is fatal. If we cannot see to do the highest things, let us at least do something. "If the energy, the clearness, the

power of intuition, is flagging in us, if we cannot do our best work, still let us do what we can—for we can always do something . . . if not vivid and spiritual work, then the plain needful drudgery.” But besides that there is often the necessity for dogged perseverance in a course whose value we can no longer see. If it seem irrational, then we must leave reason alone and for the time being be merely obstinate.

. . . Tasks in hours of insight willed,  
Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.

Nay, they sometimes *must* be so fulfilled. It is part of loyalty to say to our tempted and wavering spirits that “Said word is thrall,” and to go on in the dark, faithful to the tasks we set ourselves in the light.

2. *Loyalty to present vision.*—The grim and cheerless course we have just described is not, however, the normal way of Christian living. There is a snare in trusting to the past too much, and striving to be faithful to brilliant spiritual experiences which are no longer any more than memories. The Christian ideal is loyalty to a vision constantly seen at the time of action. It may be necessary sometimes to fight to-day’s battle by the light of other days, but as a rule of life that is unsatisfactory and insufficient. It is good to remember God’s grace in the past, and to recall His promises for the future, but it is better to have some clear vision at the hour. As Constantine saw

the cross on the field of battle, so we should see our spiritual help and backing at the time of our practical need.

Nor is this so hopeless a matter as perhaps it seems. It is not a peculiar faculty preserved only by those whose natural powers of imagination are great, or whose genius for the spiritual is exceptional. Religion is for all sorts and conditions of men, and not for a favoured few; it is for every day of a man's life, and not for red-letter days only. The power of vision may be increased or lessened, like any other of our powers. Such dark loyalty as we have already described, when a man is obstinately faithful to an ideal which for the moment has ceased to attract him, will certainly lead towards a renewal of that vision. "Alacrity and readiness to discern spiritual things may be cultivated"; and he who puts forth his energy and lives to the full stretch of his spiritual powers, will find that "with every advance in spiritual growth come greater distinctness of vision, finer susceptibility to spiritual suggestions, an increased power of reading spiritual signs and indications, and a firmer hold on spiritual realities".

The conditions of such recovery and increase of vision are mainly three. *Purity* is of course essential, and if evil thoughts have blurred the vision, these must be got rid of. Not that any direct attack will expel them: often the very effort and

attention employed in combating them seem to increase their vividness. But the occupation of the mind with healthy interests will drive them out to make room for better company. And the vision is nearer to those who live keenly, with delight in the wholesome things that work and play offer them, than to those who stand aloof and seek for light by ascetic withdrawal. *Peace* also is essential. Sometimes, indeed, the vision flashes upon the battle-field, but that is an act of God for which we can make little arrangement. But when life is crowded with work and worry it is sometimes possible to "have courage to rest," and it is not only the pure heart that sees God, but also the quiet heart. And *patience* is often demanded if we would see—the patient attendance upon that which is fine and good. For a time Christ may seem uninteresting and His ideals dull. But in reality they are the very splendour of God, and the soul that seeks shall find. There are stars so distant that no eye can see them, yet the photographic telescope pointed steadily to that field of darkness where they hide, receives their infinitesimal shafts of light, and their images are seen upon the plate. So, though the night be dark, the soul that turns away from lower things and resolutely points toward Christ, will yet see the image of the King in His beauty, and behold a land that is very far off.

## CHRIST'S LESSONS IN PRAYER

“Lord, teach us to pray.”—LUKE II. 1.

THE disciples had all prayed many times, and yet they came to Jesus with this request. For they were not satisfied with their praying. Their hearts were full of longings for which they could not find utterance, and the silence in which they dwelt oppressed them. For answer, Jesus began by teaching them how *not* to pray. It may well be, that with such bad examples of devotion in their synagogues and streets, the very habits of devotion which they had formed were hampering them. The request itself may give a hint of this, as if prayer were an art which might be taught by rules. The Pharisees were past masters in the art of prayer, but, in Jesus' sense, they knew not how to pray at all. For prayer is not an art but a spirit, and when it has become an art it has ceased to be prayer.

The immediate answer of Jesus was the Lord's Prayer, and its first words gave them all they had asked. “Our Father”—when He had said that He had taught them to pray. For the whole secret of



prayer is the artless childlike spirit, with its simplicity, confidence, and love.

In the first petitions He guards prayer from that selfishness which is a peculiar danger of the devotional life. There is a kind of devotion which is so secretive as to give almost a suggestion of something illicit, and against that subtle error His prayer warns them. True, He told them to pray in secret behind closed doors. But having shut the door of their chamber they are to open the door of their heart to their fellow-men in remembrance and sympathy. "Hallowed be Thy name"—and with these words we feel ourselves at once in the great congregation of those that worship. A vast multitude, under the shelter of the eternal wings, is praying along with us, and we are one with them in the communion of the saints. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"—the words reveal the multitude of those that labour. They sound the call of the morning, and the hosts of workers go forth to their daily toil, as we, too, must go. Through the honest work of the world the kingdom of God is coming on the earth, and in heaven they are working too, at tasks more worthy. So in all this part of it, the prayer breathes the wholesome spirit of the common life of man. We are out among our fellows, taking part in the manifold worship and labour of the world.

The second part is occupied with the two ideas

of bread and sin. The daily bread tells of the whole needs of the bodily life. If a man wakes hungry, let him tell God the thought that has thus come first. Here is a day to be lived through and labour waiting to be done, and the man lifts his heart to God for the necessary support which will carry him through it. But the next thought is of yesterday. Bread was given them, and the strength it brought was used for sinning. The deep shame of that betrayal needs forgiveness; and the necessary consequence is plain, that the forgiven must forgive. But this day also must be lived out, and yesterday's failure has warned us of its danger. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"—was Jesus thinking then of His own first temptation, the temptation of bread, we wonder? It may well have been so, and there are few of us who will not at once understand His far-reaching sympathy with us in this dangerous life of ours, when we hear Him teach us to pray for bread without temptation.

The Lord's Prayer was not given as a ritual or formula of prayer to be superstitiously repeated. It was not even given as in any exhaustive sense a "model" prayer, for much is omitted from it which we shall often need to ask. It is rather fundamental than complete, setting for us on the one hand the broad and generous spirit of sympathy with our fellows and their life, without which devotion tends

to self-indulgence ; and on the other hand selecting the elementary needs of men, bread for the body and purity for the soul.

That was his immediate answer, but he gave them two other answers to their request. *His example* taught them to pray. As they followed Him they saw that He, who apparently needed least, yet prayed most of all men. Constantly He retired to pray upon the mountains, and all the skylines of Palestine were marked in their memory with spots where He had knelt in prayer. While they were toiling, and as they lay down to rest after a toilsome day, they would many a time remember that He was praying for them then. And that remembrance must have been at once a conscience and a safeguard. It was a conscience, for if he must pray, so surely far more must they ; and the thought of His prayerfulness would often drag them to their knees when the flesh was weak and the spirit weary. But it was also a safeguard. The Syrians speak of the lamps of hermits shining through the night from far seen hill-side caves, as "hands folded in prayer". So the remembrance of the Master, withdrawn but not forgetting them, must often have made the day feel safe, and taken its terror from the darkness. There could be no better defence than the prayers of Jesus.

But the greatest answer of all which Jesus gave to that request lay in the simple fact that He was

Himself. There are some of our friends whose very presence is an influence upon us towards holy things. In their company we feel our souls drawn nearer to God, and we desire to pray. In the well-known picture of Satan watching the sleep of Christ, there is something wistful in the expression and attitude of the enemy, as if even over the foulest heart the Saviour had cast His spell. And the disciples found that as they lived with Jesus they turned instinctively toward God. Every hour of His company taught them to pray. He brought them to their best, and wakened all their slumbering desires after God and holiness.

All these answers to the disciples' request remain. The Lord's Prayer is upon our lips, with its wide and generous spirit, and its petitions for fundamental needs. His own prayers are still for us also a conscience and a defence. But most of all, by being what He is, He lifts the heart of the world for ever towards its God. No one can face the thought of Jesus without aspiring towards better things. To remember Him is to seek after God.

## PREPARATION FOR THE BEST

(*First Sunday in Lent*)

“A people prepared for the Lord.”—LUKE I. 17.

WHEN we speak of preparing ourselves for the future, we commonly think of some coming evil. Life is, in our familiar and apposite metaphor, a campaign; and “it is usual in war for the guns and the sentinels always to face towards the enemy however far off he may be”. There is an instinctive sense of enemies in this mortal life of ours, and every day looks forward more or less anxiously to its to-morrow. Men have so generally acknowledged this state of matters that there are few vaunts which have a more honourable sound to our ears than the old Latin one *in utrumque paratus*. Yet the phrase is sad. Its readiness for either fate suggests alertness, but has a certain desolate suggestion also: it acknowledges the possibility of the better chance, but it somehow seems to expect the worse.

So it comes to pass that we are far more seldom ready for the better than for the worse event. Preparedness for the best things is rare, because we

do not realize that they need preparation, and concentrate our attention in steeling ourselves against possible adversity. By so doing we miss many of life's highest opportunities, and find our gain turn to loss. Many a man is prepared for misfortune but not for prosperity. Defeat would have found him brave and patient, victory makes him overbearing and selfish. Loss would have drawn out his nobler qualities of industry and determination; wealth corrupts him with selfishness and luxurious indulgence and display.

The same thing happens in religion. Many a Parsifal is able to combat and unhorse his enemy, and yet is stupefied and blunders irretrievably when he sees the vision of the Holy Grail. Many an adventurer like Jacob looks back ruefully upon an hour of far-reaching promise and spiritual opportunity, saying "Surely God was in this place and I knew it not". The world, in the beginning of the first century, was adjusting itself to Augustus as best it might; but when Christ came, the world knew Him not. We are often prepared to meet the devil: to meet our God we are not prepared.

In the Church Year the great events of the Christian story group themselves into a cluster from Palm Sunday to Whitsunday, breaking the routine of the daily life with the splendid memories of Christ's passion and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is fitting that before this season

the Church should have set apart a prior season of special preparation. It is true that the coming of the Lord is not confined to any set occasions, and that the only true preparation for it is the quiet, constant daily preparation. Thomas à Kempis wisely says: "He that prepareth not himself, except only when a festival draweth near, or when custom compelleth him thereunto, shall too often be unprepared". Yet it is wise to let the season remind us yearly of our holiest things, and undoubtedly those who by the exercise of recollection have prepared themselves, are most likely to see and recognize the Lord when they meet Him.

Tennyson's lines are singularly appropriate to such a season:—

How pure at heart and sound in head,  
With what divine affections bold  
Should be the man whose thought would hold  
An hour's communion with the dead.

No words could more exhaustively express their thought. But they are still more appropriate to a season of communion with the Living God, as He is revealed in the events which the Church will soon be commemorating.

First, there is the preparation of the purification of the heart. All meditation leads that way at once. There is much to be forgiven before we can hope to understand and triumph, and there is much also to be changed. It is only the pure in

heart who can by any means see God, and the evil habits of thought, imagination, and desire must be searched out and put away. What softness and self-indulgence, what malice and resentment, what harshness and cruelty still linger in us all! How unwilling we are to understand the mind of Christ; how selfish and greedy of pleasure, how determined in our demand for our own way. But here is a great opportunity and call to return back to the simplicity of little children, to cast ourselves at the outset before the Cross, and eagerly to consent to the cleansing fires of conscience and the love of Christ.

But there is also much to understand, and communion with God along the channels of the central beliefs of Christendom implies much reflection. The conventionalities of daily life have put our thoughts out of proportion and perspective. Its facile acquiescences have dulled our power of judging and distinguishing. Its false emphasis has subverted our sense of truth. Its unwholesome moods have poisoned our views of many things. Its fuss and crowding have distracted and confused us. Minds in such a condition are in no sense competent for the highest thoughts. It requires a season of aloofness, of as much silence and peace as life will allow, and of honest and laborious thinking and recollection of the scattered faculties, before we are fit to meet our God in communion.



There is nothing which the present generation needs so much as discipline of the mind for serious thinking. The dimness of faith, and the consequent feebleness of religious life, are to be cured mainly by studying afresh the thoughts of really great thinkers, and by persistently setting the attention and holding it set in the direction of the central truths.

But there is also necessary the boldness of divine affections. We all admit that the world is, one way or another, too much with us. Preparation, therefore, must include the practice of looking beyond the world, and carrying up our thoughts and feelings to God himself. But it requires daring to train our eyes on the Divine, and none but the courageous in heart will succeed in doing it. For the affections that are to find God in Christ must travel along the two lines of our worst and of our best.

Let us offer to Him our worst, and dare to face the worst that we may offer it, crying to Him from the depths. It is a sorry offering, of the wreckage of broken resolutions and desires that have been in the slime of earthliness, and love that has wandered and comes half-heartedly back to faithfulness to Him. This is, indeed, the only place where such an offering has any value set upon it. No other than God would accept such things, and it requires a courageous faith to bring them. Yet the courage

will be abundantly rewarded. There is no aspect of the glory of the Lord so brilliant as the glory of God the Saviour seen from the depths of shame. There is no beauty that can compare with the beauty of Christ seen through tears of penitence.

And no less courage is demanded for the offering of our best to God. In the discouragement of contrition we are apt to disbelieve in any loftiness or greatness that we may ever have seen in life. Yet life is good and great in spite of us and our failure, and we have not surrendered our heritage in its nobilities. However far we have come short of realizing it, the ideal self still floats before our aspirations, and calls us upward. Let us offer to God the manhood we would fain achieve, the intermittent but genuine longings after holy things, the attempts to do right and play the man in difficult circumstances.

In a word, let us face and fully recognize both our weakness and our strength, our worst and our best. Let us bring them both, a strange offering of contrasts, to His feet; that, in our communion with Him, His power and His love may go out upon them both, and recreate us after His image.

## THE PREPARATION OF WORDS

*(Second Sunday in Lent)*

“Take with you words.”—HOSEA XIV. 2.

THIS text at first sight appears startlingly defective as a guide to men who would approach their God. Micah speaks otherwise—“What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”. In the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah we have a still more elaborate demand for various services toward the unfortunate, as the only terms on which God will consent to man’s approach. But here we read, Take with you—words!

Our heart sinks as we read it. The world is all deaf and stupefied with speaking. “It is the word too much which wrecks the majority of human schemes.” We know too well the futility of language to express the deepest things. Words are so constantly misunderstood, and further words of explanation are so useless to remove the misunderstandings. Especially is this true of religion, where language has been one of the worst enemies of faith, cramping, falsifying, and embittering man’s

thoughts of God. Silence is not only "the fortress of the strong," it is often the best language of the devout. What would the Apostle James say to this, with his scathing sarcasm against those who gave words where deeds were required? Nay, what did the Master say concerning those who imagined they would be heard for their much speaking?

And yet what an emancipation is here! The nation was anxious in those days before the fall of Samaria. Distracted people were turning to idols, to the ritual of sacrifice, to the help of puppet-kings, to alliances with Assyria and with Egypt. The greedy gods of the heathen were demanding offerings of gold, and hideous deaths of children; and superstitious Israelites were thinking that Jehovah, too, must be appeased in some such costly fashion. Words!—by their very worthlessness they mark the sublime contrast between this God and all other gods. This is the proclamation of free grace, long before the coming of Jesus. Already the prophet's heart was crying, "Nothing in my hands I bring". The whole Gospel of Christ is here, and the marrow of Reformation theology. He who brings only words, if they be the right ones, has performed the great act of faith. "For the Lord," as Thomas à Kempis says, "bestoweth His blessings there where He findeth His vessels empty."

Men are to-day wondering what it is to be a Christian, and asking anxiously what it is that God really wants from them. *This* is all that He requires, and most people, thinking that some great thing is wanted, bring too much. He wants words, and to consent to that demand is the only way in which we can show a whole-hearted trust in His generous and fatherly love. There are words, which, if we could but find and speak them, would wholly satisfy the demand of God. Ah, those un-found, unspoken words of faith and penitence! the whole chance of our religious life lies in them. So the saying of the prophet stirs up our wistfulness and curiosity about that hidden language, and we reverse the familiar text and cry, "I would speak what God the Lord will hear".

In one aspect the command suggests something in the nature of a liturgy. Though the words may be our own, yet they are to be "taken with us". Words are all that are asked for, yet evidently they are to be choice words, the best that we can bring.

No one will dispute the value of the great liturgies, in which worship and aspiration have clothed themselves according to their nature in fitting language. The Psalter, the liturgies of the Eastern and Western Churches, of the Church of England, of John Knox, have guided, dignified, and made effective the worship of saints for two

thousand years. They admonish us as to carefulness in the expression of our devotions, for those liturgies are the living needs of men worthily expressed. The only way to defend ourselves against bad ways of expression is to cultivate good ones carefully. We are in danger of slovenliness and irreverence for want of thoughtful preparation.

Nor is it mere decency that is demanded. Our best thought, our most beautiful imagination, should have place in the ordered and chastened utterance. Above all, there is need for definiteness of ideas, and clearness in their expression. The words must not distract us, tempting us to linger on their beauty or to depreciate the value of speech by exaggeration, or to lose their meaning by multiplying them. A few words will usually suffice, but let us be sure that we know what they mean. We have all often uttered meaningless generalities like the request that God would "bless" us. Such prayers led to nothing, and that was not surprising. No little child asks his father to bless him. He knows what he wants, and he asks for that. So let us first take time to say to our own souls what we have to say to God, that our prayers may be intelligible speech, and not vain repetition.

Thus, while the first impression of the text is liturgical, the very fact that clearness is demanded leads us away from formality in ritual. The words desired cannot be a formula that excludes

other expression. Principal G. A. Smith, in a very striking passage, contrasts the prayer of Hosea xiv. with that of Hosea vi. The latter, for all its beauty, is a rejected prayer. It is too artistic, too consciously laboured, not sufficiently spontaneous. But this prayer rings true, and it is answered. It is not the composition of a poet, but the outpouring of a conscience and a heart.

That is the one great rule of guidance—say what you have to say. Do not exaggerate your experience, nor pose before your God, nor try to put yourself into a religious attitude. Speak what words are natural and true, and no others. Say that you are glad, and life is good and full of love; or say, “Thy ways seem cruel to me, and the pressure of Thy hand too hard”. Say “Oh Lord, I love Thee, yet I love Thee not”; “Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief”. Say, if you must, “Except I see in His hands the print of the nails, I will not believe”. It may be daring, it may be very foolish, but if it be the true thing, say what you have to say. For God knows how to deal with honest speech; and words truly spoken will take on their real meaning, which the speaker may not know, in His understanding.

Some of your words will be silenced, doubtless, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought. Others will be “punctuated and made sense of,” finding their true meaning. Others will

be accepted and answered as they stand. And new words will be given you. "Christ . . . had the power of not merely saying beautiful things Himself, but of making other people say beautiful things to Him." Every honest prayer teaches us to pray better and more wisely. For God, listening in compassion to the broken voices of men, not only tolerates the singing, but puts a new song in their mouth.



## THE POWER OF WORDS

(*Third Sunday in Lent*)

“Take with you words.”—HOSEA XIV. 2.

WORDS are often supposed to be futile things, and contrasted with deeds. It was Carlyle who identified the two, “Cast forth thy Act, thy Word, into the ever-living, ever-working universe”: and indeed if they be the genuine expressions of the truth, they are never futile, but always charged with vital energy. Dr. Denney has said regarding St. Paul’s exhortation, “comfort one another with these words” that here the Apostle is balancing the greatest sorrow of life against words, but then they are words of eternal life. Even the words which a man may speak are often of the highest value. So valuable are they that a man may set up his barrier of words between himself and such tremendous forces as the power of the grave and the terrors of conscience. Such words are not the alternative to character but the expression of character; nay, they are part of what forms character and fixes it.

Three things are manifest as to the power of words in our religious experience.

1. *What they imply—a view of intercourse with God.*—Hosea has idolatry in mind as he writes this chapter, and the superstitious ritual of Israel's temple-worship. The two had this in common that they were founded on a non-rational conception of worship. The worshipper had in neither case any clear idea of the meaning of the service he performed. Indeed it was characteristic of Semitic thought that such ideas were not necessary in the least. What was required was the performance of certain acts and the giving of certain offerings. Why these were required, who could tell? It was simply part of the accepted tradition that such things should be done; and, once performed, there was the end of the matter. Further questioning was undesirable, and perhaps even profane. The god who could prescribe and accept such worship was, so far as his intercourse with men went, essentially irrational. Either he was incapable of rational intercourse, a mere mass of prejudices backed by supernatural powers; or he was unwilling for it, holding himself apart from his creatures in a haughty superiority which demanded homage, but despised them too thoroughly to be further interested in their affairs.

But here was a new conception of God. He cared not for mysteries but for meanings. He

called them back from formalities to the simplicity and reality of speech. He wanted not to hear them repeating formulæ, but saying what they had to say. When men worship God, rational beings are in communion, and worship is the converse of mind with mind. This is a God who can be spoken with, and from whom men may count on an intelligent and patient hearing. With such a God simplicity and sincerity are easy, for we are sure of being understood. Therefore awe must not rob us of trust and of directness. For our worship we should indeed prepare ourselves by selecting our choicest thoughts; but we should bring to God also our worst and most deplorable, nay even our most casual and unimportant. For this is not a recitation, it is an intercourse.

2. *What words reveal—the truth about oneself.*—

It is for want of bringing our secret life to expression that we are so often self-deceived. All idol-worshippers and mere performers of a religious office, come back from their devotions with their illusions undispeled. Those who would leave their illusions behind them must take with them words. For it is our own words that we have to bring, the words that have first been “spoken in the inner man”.

Thus speech is an ordeal, and the command of the text implies self-examination. What words shall we take? What have we to bring? The

answer will reveal what words are natural to us, and so will be a test of our growth or declension in the life of the spirit. When we try to state to ourselves what we are and what we desire most, we shall find startling revelations. Many states of mind are tolerable only until they are plainly and definitely expressed. The expression will reveal the wealth or poverty of what we have to say, of what our hearts want to say, and so will reveal what has been happening in us. Some will find themselves utter strangers in the spiritual region ; others will move in it as men walking in their home fields. When you come to words, you will at least know where you are.

3. *What they effect—a transformation of character.*—For this act of worship has the power not only of revealing but of forming character. Words mark the point of change from the unpractical to the practical.

In our inner life much is necessarily vague, consisting of confused masses of feeling, embryonic forms of thoughts, broken ends of ideas hanging loose. Some of these must, of course, be left vague, for it will be impossible to find language to express them. Yet some are waiting for expression to render them immediately effective. To say a thing which we have hitherto only thought or half-thought, is to give it the force of a part of our

active life, to put it in a position to tell definitely upon conduct. Literary critics are familiar with the reaction of style upon thought, and no writer who wishes to produce results can afford to neglect his style. Similarly we should all regard as an important and momentous act the expression in language of our thoughts. If the words we find for that expression are exact—choice words, chosen not for their eloquence but for their clearness and accuracy—we may look for results in character and conduct. When the images of the imagination are focused, and our estimate of self, our sense of sin, and our feeling of need are clearly perceived, action is sure to follow. There is more in the idea of “making phrases like swords” than a fine figure of speech. In literal truth “Bright is the ring of words,” and a spirit that has found its true utterance will be irresistibly urged forward towards conduct. The prodigal in the story had spent many days and nights in general ideas of repentance, desire, and intention that came to nothing. At last he found the words “I will arise and go,” and the words brought immediate action—he arose and went.

Thus religious utterance is one of the great forces that lead to right action. It is in the dreamy brooding silence, when we know not what we do, that we idle and sin. When we begin to stir our

minds, to think clear-edged thoughts and pass definite judgments of right and wrong and to pronounce these judgments in speech, our will leaps forward at the sound of the word, and makes for righteousness.

## EAST AND WEST

*(Fourth Sunday in Lent)*

“As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.”—PSALM CIII. 12.

THIS Psalm is one of exceptional exaltation. It combines the ideas of greatness and splendour so as to give a sense of magnificence all through, and it blends with this an exquisite and delicate tenderness. It is natural that such a Psalm should have the question of sin in the heart of it. Until that question has been faced and answered, neither the magnificence nor the tenderness of God can be clear. Sin is the intrusion of sordidness upon life, the stain upon the royal garment of God. It is the harsh voice of ill-will and bitterness breaking through the sweet music of love in homes and hearts.

Every one who knows himself or who knows life at all has to reckon with the fact of sin. In quiet times, when all is sleeping, it may slumber; but whenever any part of human nature wakens to intense consciousness, it wakens. In the past it

lies, a dead weight of fact beyond our reach. For the future it is "only a question of time; either you will overcome sin or sin will overcome you". Pride may separate a man from sin, but his mood will change and he will sacrifice pride to indulgence. Time and forgetfulness may seem to leave it on the farther side of a great gulf fixed between it and our present life. But sin can overleap that distance, and in a moment be at our conscience and our heart across a lifetime of intervening years. One stroke of memory, one siren-note of temptation wakening long-forgotten echoes of old days, and the gulf is crossed, and all to reckon with again.

But when God enters amid the tumult of fear and hope, of desire and renunciation, all is changed. For the past He brings forgiveness, the mightiest proof of love. For the future, "God has seen the saint in the sinner," and what He has seen, the world will yet see. Then comes the supreme moment in a man's experience, the sudden flight of sin beyond the farthest horizon. "A Greek poet implies," says Lytton, "that the height of bliss is the sudden relief from pain; there is a nobler bliss still, the rapture of the conscience at the sudden release from a guilty thought."

We are not accustomed to so complete a dealing, and the Bible seems almost to exhaust language in expressing it. We are so accustomed to tinkering with sin, to half-repentances and compromise



and recurrence, that few of our moral battles are fought out to a finish and the field cleared from the outposts of the enemy. So the colours are glaring—"crimson and scarlet," "white as snow". God is seen "coming over the mountains of our transgressions," and casting them "into the depths of the sea". And in this passage East and West stand for a corresponding sense of extreme distance that is meant to tax the imagination. The imaginative power and stretch of the appeal are seen along two lines.

1. *Geographical*.—Geographically, East and West were the extreme points of known distance. It was in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere that history began and civilization spread. Accordingly the stretch of ancient geography was wider between East and West than between North and South, and the ancient maps of the world were oblong. As thought travelled Westward it saw the dim coasts and islands of the Mediterranean, and perhaps the mountain of Teneriffe in the farthest distance. As it travelled Eastward, it passed through the ring of neighbouring nations across the Jordan; saw the wandering encampments of desert tribes; then Mesopotamia, with Nineveh and Babylon guarding its rivers; then the mountains of Persia, and the dream-like lands of India and China beyond. At the utmost limits, mountain-pillars upheld the world, or the edge of its oval

disc fell sheer into the waters of the nether deep upon which it floated.

One can realize the wonder and relief of such a man as this writer, as his conscience follows his imagination across the whole enormous breadth of the world. There, where the mountains of the dawn or sunset hardly break the skyline with their faint and shadowy ranges—there, over the edges of the flat earth where all things end—there, and no nearer, are his sins. From such an one sin, and its wages of death, are indeed very far away.

Geographically, science seems to have changed all that. For a long time travel and exploration increased year by year the distance between East and West, flinging out the horizon line farther in each direction. Yet in doing so they actually brought them together by their discovery that the earth is round, so that a man fleeing across the world to escape his sin must at last run into its arms. And that is a curious kind of allegory of what our modern thought has done with the sense of sin. Apparently it has removed it. It has drawn away men's attention to other interests, and it has relaxed the ancient tension of conscience. Yet, in very truth, as men escape from sin under the guidance of scientific theory, they rush un-awares into the arms of their sins again.

Natural science has revealed the connexion between the physical and the moral natures. Its

doctrines of evolution and heredity tend to a view of sin as natural tendency, defective or excessive vitality, a hereditary taint of blood. While at first sight these explanations seem to put sin away from conscience, yet they bring it infinitely nearer too. Instead of being a casual or isolated product of mere independent acts of will, they pronounce it native, and part of the necessary system of things. With all its ghastly consequences to the sinner and to others about him, it has become fixed in the iron chain of cause and effect, and it seems idle to talk of repentance or of change where sin begets sin and doom leads on to further doom. Nay further, some of the bolder spirits, starting from the ancient aphorism that every vice is but the exaggeration of a virtue, tell us that all human passions and crimes are natural, though they are more or less in conflict with the demands of the social system under which for the present we happen to live. So, as in Thornycroft's famous "Medea" the snake folds the garments to the limbs, making the form of the woman more beautiful, decadent thought insists upon a human beauty in vice as an offset to the old-fashioned beauty of holiness. Sin has come home to the very heart and flesh of man, a thousand-fold nearer than ever. And the native love of sin welcomes the approach, till men justify their sins like old friends and are loyal to them as to their ancestry.

What has God to say to all this? Exactly the same old words, "As far as the east is from the west". Whatever truth or error may lie in these accounts of the origin of sin, our faith knows only one unchanging fact—the living God. Our conscience has to deal not with theory, but with one great will and love. Against Him, Him only, have we sinned. Here and now, whatever be the story of life behind us, whatever the ultimate scientific definition of sin, we have to meet the eyes of God as Christ reveals Him. By His command, by His forgiveness, by His redemption, He tears sin away from His children and holds it apart from them now as of old. When God has intervened, we repudiate our lower nature, and lay hold on our nobler manhood. Thus, in the Cross of Christ, we see still that great act of God, that is ever repeated when a penitent child turns to his Father. It is the act of *justification*. Sin has not been slurred over, nor forgotten, nor suffered merely to drift away. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he *removed* our transgressions from us.

2. *Racial*.—East and West are not mere points in the compass; they stand for peopled lands, and even in very ancient times their racial distinctions were recognized. Israel had already touched the outposts of Greece, and had heard of the young power of Rome—not indeed in any close contact, but yet closely enough to perceive the contrast

between Europe and Asia, between Aryan and Semite. Since then all history has borne witness to the depth of that cleavage.

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall  
meet,

Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat.

The two represent different types of humanity. The East is dreaming, the West running to and fro. The East values a thought for its beauty and its mystery, the West for its practical value. The East fears immortality, and longs for the death of desire, the West rebels against death and seeks for life more abundant. The East lies back in fatalism, the West stands erect in strength of human will. Both East and West have sinned, and know it, and honour those who live a life devoid of sin. But the standards of moral judgment differ, and the ethical tastes are far apart. The views of sex, of property, of the value of life, of the rights of the individual, of the character of God, are wide as the world asunder. An Eastern saint might be a Western criminal, and a Western hero an Eastern madman.

All this lends a richer significance to the text. We need to be separated from our sins not merely by distance but by a change of standard and desire. When God enters, and a man deals with Him regarding sin, racial differences of moral standard and constitutional taste disappear. Jesus Christ, standing on that Syrian soil which has been the

historic meeting ground of East and West, changes the views of both, and creates a higher patriotism strong as the lower and far more true. Then men of all races, learning the will of God and His love, take these for their native country, the homeland of their spirit, and sin becomes alien and foreign to them.

What is this but *sanctification*, in which sin is removed not merely by the forgiving act of God, but by the change of man's desire which is the work of His Spirit? No longer regarded as merely dangerous or foolish or wicked, it comes to be literally hateful—uncongenial and utterly alien to his desires and tastes.

Such is the twofold grace of God to man, discovered in the ancient days, but operative through all the changes of the centuries. "Look how wide also the East is from the West; so far hath He set our sins from us."

## CHRIST AMONG THE TRANSGRESSORS

*(Fifth Sunday in Lent)*

“He was numbered with the transgressors.”—ISAIAH LIII. 12;  
LUKE XXII. 37.

THIS quotation by Jesus in the upper room marks His sense of the change which the reversal of His own fortunes must work for the disciples. When their master was the popular prophet of Galilee, they had everywhere found themselves welcome and honoured guests. Now that He was hunted as a criminal, they would find themselves suspects, regarded as dangerous to society. Thus “numbered among the transgressors” gives us at the outset a wonderful glimpse into that great heart which, in the hour of its supreme self-sacrifice, yet had leisure to feel His own shame for their sakes.

To us, as we look back through so long a stretch of time to those days, the words are the statement of a most obvious fact. Whatever else may be true or untrue about Jesus, it is certainly true that he was numbered with the transgressors. In what biography of the same length shall we find so many

accusations? He was accused of Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, gluttony, blasphemy; rebellion against the Romans, desecration of the temple, subversion of the Jewish law. He was called a fraudulent agent of the devil, a friend of publicans and sinners, an enemy of his country and of the human race. Barabbas was accounted innocent in comparison with Him, and He was crucified between two thieves.

So it comes to pass that age after age, looking back, sees Jesus embedded in the sin of the world. The Jews have so far had their way, and have fixed upon Him "the climax of reproach". The believing world has seen in Him not merely the exhibition of God's love and pity for those stricken by sin, but His identification of Himself with the sin that had stricken them. "Christ was not merely made man, He was made *sin* for us."

We have, indeed, little understanding of that great and dark saying. It opens a vista into the nethermost mystery of iniquity, the fathomless tragedy and reserve of darkness. Yet, practically, we may understand it well. Where is Christ today? It is asked by unbelievers, puzzled with intellectual difficulties; by believers, who have lost their first love. Where is He? Why, among the transgressors. You have cried, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him," and have sought for Him among good resolutions, respectabilities, endeavours



after a Christian life. Certainly He is there, but it is not always easy to find Him there. There is one place where you are sure of finding Christ. Take conscience for your guide and go down among your sins. Seek for Him among the transgressors. That is near home for us; it is where we all live. We have looked for Him away from home, among dreams and ideals and so forth. We have been claiming our inheritance among the saints in light, yet living all the time among the transgressors in darkness. There, in the world that conscience knows, we may find Him.

But why? On a winter night, walking under a scudding cloudrack through which the full moon lit the white buildings of a northern city, I first heard that question. An old man was with me—a man of singular clearness of intellect, originality of imagination, and beauty of character. He told me how his life had been arrested and wholly changed by that great question, Why was Jesus Christ numbered with the transgressors? He had not rested till he found an answer, and here, in its three main propositions, was the answer he found.

1. *To Fulfil the Law of God.*—There is no possibility of avoiding the thought of law in this text. The word “transgressors” implies it, and is meaningless without it. Christ’s constant aim was to fulfil the law, and his repudiation of the dead letter only left the spiritual law more binding than before.

To-day we shrink from stating Christianity in the formally forensic terms which have sometimes expressed it. The abstract conceptions of justice set over against mercy seem unreal and incongruous. We fall back on the fatherhood of God, and think all our thoughts in the light of that. Indeed the transition from legal to fatherly thoughts of God is the characteristic note of modern theology. Yet in this transition there is no escape from law. The law of fatherhood shows sin not as an insult to God's authority but as a wound to His heart; and so our sins are brought rather into the light of His countenance than before His judgment bar. Law is thus, as it were, absorbed into the very nature and being of God. It is no longer regarded as an external thing, either constructed or submitted to by Him. The law of God is just God Himself, the Father.

How, then, will God deal with transgression? Obviously as a father he cannot leave it alone. No father dare neglect the sin of his child. Anything like easy good nature is impossible here, for it would be criminal. When a child has wounded his father's moral nature, forgiveness ages a man and draws his heart's blood from him. So, by the law of fatherhood, God must deal with the sin of man. It can never be a light thing.

It is by no breath,  
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death.

It was in this dreadful sense that Isaiah had already conceived the agony of God, and that bold conception had arisen from human experience. There were many sin-bearers in Israel, feeling the weight and horror of other men's transgression. There were men who knew what it was "to stoop, and take upon your heart as your business and burden, man's suffering and sin . . . to seek to lift the deadness of men, to take their guilt upon your heart, to attempt to rouse them to it, to attempt to deliver them from it". It is the story of all philanthropy. All purity, freedom, truth, good conscience, peace, have been bought with the blood of sin-bearing men who have loved their fellows even unto death. The law of fatherhood extends beyond that one relation, and renders vicarious sacrifices universal in the higher ranks of existence.

It is fatuous to ask whether this is a just law. It is far more than just, it is divine. And all the sin-bearers of the earth are but dim shadows of the crucified Christ, in whom we see the sin of the children smiting full upon the Father's heart. Calvary offers the supreme example of God's faithfulness to His fatherhood, and reveals how all transgression affects the Father.

2. *To Get in Among Them.*—The world was full of transgressors, and yet each one of them was lonelier than if there were only himself in it. The loneliness of sin is the sorest and most oppressive

of all forms of that strange but well-known phenomenon, the loneliness of the crowd. When conscience shuts the door upon a soul, the thronging faces of its fellows are but an unreal show. In the crowded street, in the busy market, in the companionship of the home, the sinful soul is still alone. Jesus knew that ghastly solitude in which the spirits of the transgressors dwelt isolated and cut off from their fellows. He knew how they needed Him, and He went to them. Free to go where He pleased, He habitually went straight to the outcasts, and finally to the cross between two malefactors, just that He might get among them.

But how awful an experience this was, other lives than His can but faintly indicate. A man who finds himself for the first time in prison knows it as he looks round upon his companions and realizes that he is now one of these. The terrible conscience of childhood knows it, when the first conscious battle against temptation is lost, and the child feels himself for the first time a member of that company of dark characters, the transgressors. He, not content with showing compassion from a distance toward the sinful, went where they were, descending into the hell of conscience. He looked up at life from the bottom of the pit where they lay, and each transgressor knew that he was understood. And that marvellous companionship endures. When conscience has been

making us feel bitterly that we are among the transgressors, He is at our side in that dismal company. He is with us in the accursed subtlety of temptation, in the shame of sin, in the sharp ache of conscience, in the fear of consequences, in the doom of the irrevocable past. Standing amid the wreckage of the years, in "the woeful loss and waste of the blessings of holiness," we are not alone, for He is there also.

3. *To Reduce their Number.*—As we read the *Inferno* of Dante, the feeling that grows more and more overwhelming is the sense of helplessness. He talks with the tortured spirits and hears what they have to tell, he scorns the meaner and weeps with the nobler of them, but he emerges from the nether world alone. He saves himself: others he cannot save, and they remain transgressors still.

But the crowd which Christ has entered is a diminishing crowd, its numbers lessening day by day. The Cross of Christ is "finishing transgression and making an end of sin". He shares with the transgressors their temptation, sin, shame, dread, repentance; one thing He does not share—their helplessness. Here, among those spirits in prison, is universal helplessness. They rebel against their evil ways, they are ashamed and disgusted with themselves, they long in vain after goodness, but they remain transgressors and they will transgress again. Christ stands among them, alone only in this, that

He is stronger than transgression. Even at the deepest point of his sin-bearing there was in him the tremendous certainty that he was bearing sin away. Among the helpless here is the mighty Helper, come among them not to sympathize only but to set free.

The prophet sounds his grandest note of victory when he says, "He has His portion with the great, He divides the spoil with the strong". Who, then, are the great and strong in this world? Assuredly its sin-bearers. Those are not the really great ones who have risen by the fall of others, or made a desolation and called it peace: but those who have gone deepest into the wrongs and the vices of the world, and cleansed it from their stain. The heroes are the liberators, who have set the world free, and taught it to hope. With them Christ divides the spoil. Nay, rather He is *the* liberator, and the best of the others but catch a few crumbs from His table. The victory of the Cross lies in the men and women whom it has set free from sin, the reduced numbers of the transgressors. Every one who is less a transgressor than before swells that victory here upon the earth; and in heaven it is made complete by those who, once transgressors, are now numbered with the saints in glory everlasting.

Here, then, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Good news! He has fulfilled the law, the human and

divine law of Fatherhood. Better news! He understands the worst, and stands side by side with the rest of us, entangled in the dark web of sin and conscience. Best news of all! He is a match for our sin, mighty to save. We may be free who have been bondmen; we may arrive who have sighed in vain for any moral progress. The life we long for lies open to our feet, for He was numbered with the transgressors.

## THE VALUE OF A PAGEANT

(*Palm Sunday*)

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem.—LUKE XIX. 28-48.

THIS story of a pageant breaks into the history of the passion with almost ludicrous incongruity. So much has this been felt, that otherwise trustworthy commentators have been tempted to allegorize the details of it, making the ass stand for the old theocracy and the foal for the young Church. But the Bible remains interesting and alive in spite of its interpreters. The foal is there simply as a beast to ride on: the ass is there, not because it stood for the old theocracy, but because it was the mother of the foal. In itself the whole story is, as it appears, trivial. It is a great truth expressed in a very little way.

There are two notes of that journey to Jerusalem—the kingdom of God and the imminent cross, Royalty and Death. Both of these were clearly present to the mind of Jesus, as the two parts of a deliberate and colossal scheme for the mastery of the world. This sense of mastery is everywhere



apparent. The tone of Jesus' speech is changed from request to command, from avoidance of enemies to open challenge; and every word and action indicates a complete mastery of the situation. But the striking thing is that He should have changed not only His tone, but His outward policy also. He had always been particularly averse to the spectacular, and on more than one occasion had refused and avoided pageants. Why does He now consent to one?

Assuredly it was not because of any change in His own view of such shows. It has been well remarked that "He stood apart from His popularity"; He never mistook it for greatness. And if a popular demonstration of this sort offended His sensibilities in the Galilean days, how much more must it have jarred upon Him now, when He was gathering together the forces of His spirit to face the supreme event. It was a concession to human nature as that was displayed around Him then.

Then, for the first time, such a concession was safe. His task had been to insist upon the kingdom, and yet to avoid all attempts to make Him King. For over two years He had managed the populace as a skilful rider manages a restive horse, now drawing, and now slackening rein. Thus He had kept a bloody revolution at arm's length. But now at last there was no danger of such a revolu-

tion. There was, indeed, no time for it, for His death was distant but a week, and He must have known it.

And there *was* a certain value in such a pageant, however distasteful it might be to Him. It was certain to impress the imagination of His disciples, who were simple enough to set much store by such exhibitions. It painted for them an impressive picture, which would afterwards illuminate their faith in the royalty of Jesus ; and in the same way it might conceivably impress outsiders, rendering them more ready for the subsequent call of the gospel, and inclining them to accept it.

So then we have this strange combination of the great with the small, the eternal with the fleeting. That blending consciousness of royalty and death is superb even from a literary and artistic point of view. From a spiritual point of view it is the most majestic conception that ever entered into the heart of man. This unearthly kingdom, winning its way through death to eternal and redeeming life, is infinitely removed from the vulgarities of popular applause, and the passing shows of festival. In it the Messiah is seen leading men, by the path of the Cross, to God and to their own true destiny. It is an hour when angels may well have felt a silence fall on them as they watched.

But that solemnity was crowded with nearer watchers, and it was characteristic of Jesus to

remember them and to gratify their poorer needs. Some were impressed by Him simply as a worker of wonders. Some were Galilean revolutionaries, proud of their countryman and vaunting his prowess against the gates of the half-paganized Jerusalem. The majority were doubtless peasants on a holiday, ready for any excitement, and full of the Oriental delight in processions and shouting. All that whimsical and motley crowd acknowledged His royalty, yet none of them took it seriously enough to follow it up to any purpose. They were light-hearted and uncomprehending children, and there was no great value in their acclamations. Yet it was Jesus' way to speak to men, and to let them speak, in their own language, and to accept homage according to that a man hath. This was a childish way, but it was royalty as they understood it. So far as it went it was well enough, though in truth it did not go far.

This surely speaks its word to an age like our own, in which so very many people are playing at being Christians. Royalty and death are still before the world, in the great and eternal tragedy of the Cross. But the crowd is ever spectacular in heart, and Christianity has much that may be borrowed for the colour and shouting of the passing show. Its fine thoughts may be used to break the monotony of colourless lives. So it is utilized in all manner of cheap appeals. A political allusion,

a much advertised religious picture or play, a popular preacher interesting the crowd for an hour—in these the multitude puts Jesus Christ for a moment in the centre of its tableau, the successor of a demagogue, the predecessor of an artiste.

There is not necessarily any harm in such a passing interest in Christ; it may conceivably do good. He still speaks to us all in our own language, and consents to the pageant. Only do not let any one who swells that crowd take himself too seriously, or imagine that his approval and applause are religion. This is only a side issue at the best. Royalty and death are in the heart of Christ, and we are called upon to reckon with that dread purpose of His, each of us for ourselves. The show will pass and be forgotten, but how do we stand in respect of mastery over self and the world and sin? What share have we in the royal victory of the Cross?

The King was in tears in that procession. As they swept round the corner of the road on Olivet, and the fortress-like mass of the city's buildings burst upon their view, He wept. Partly it was the city that moved Him, standing aloof in its cold, strong superiority. In the faces of the priests, sunning themselves by the temple walls that day and asking haughtily "Who is this?" He saw a great lie confronting His great truth. And He saw the inevitable end, when that truth would conquer,

and ruin and despair would end the lofty complacency. Partly, too, it was just the pageant itself that moved Him. The utter sarcasm of His mighty truth hailed with the shouting of little souls, filled His heart with an unrestrainable compassion for the multitude—the shallow multitude who were needing a saviour and yet were satisfied with a procession.

Those tears of the King were the real secret of His royalty. They were shed for love of men, and that love is the secret alike of the kingdom and the Cross. It is because He had the heart to weep over these things that He is the eternal King of men. Still and for ever it is the love of Christ that makes Him king. He is “the gentlest of the mighty”—mightiest of all because of His great compassion. He weeps over the scorers and the shouters still—over those whose cold and haughty superiority stands aloof, and over those whose shallow enthusiasm applauds Him for an hour. But those who are wise will pause and consider this extraordinary situation. And His kingdom will be built up to the end of time from the ranks alike of enemies and wayside followers to whom the tears of Jesus have revealed the royalty of the Cross.

## THE RISING OF CHRIST

(*Easter-Day*)

“They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.”—ST. JOHN XX. 13.

A GREAT many problems have risen round the stories of Christ's resurrection. Between the extremes of denying all material elements and seeing in the dogma merely a spiritual truth, and of accepting all the details of the varying narratives and attempting a reconstruction which will reconcile them all, there are many possible dogmatic positions. Fortunately it is not necessary to wait for the truth and inspiration of the Easter message until we have settled such matters. Questions of physiology about the body have really little to do with it, and discussions about the angels nothing at all. Two things only concern us. First, the great assurance that Jesus who was dead is alive again for evermore; and second, the fact that that assurance comes to the world in connexion with some of the most tenderly human stories ever told. With regard to the assurance itself, it was that which seized upon Dr. Dale in so remarkable a manner

while he was writing an Easter sermon—"Christ is alive," he said, and kept repeating it in a kind of ecstasy whose record is one of the most interesting passages in his biography. Bishop Andrewes points us in the same direction when he says: "Our Lord makes mention of *ascending* twice, of *rising* not at all. And it is to teach us that resurrection is nothing, nor is any account to be made of it, if ascension go not with it." As to the human associations of that great assurance, none of them all touches so deep a pathos or sends on so typical an experience to the future as this woman's cry. "They"—and in the very vagueness there is a bitter sound, as if she were feeling men and things in general arrayed against her—"they have taken away my Lord". And all the time He was risen, and waiting to show Himself to her. Only, when He did show Himself, it was not as she had thought to see Him. She was expecting a dead body wrapped with sweet spices in fine linen. She found a living friend, who called her by her name.

Resurrection is the method of the kingdom of God. Not by steady and unbroken progress does it advance, but by death and rising again in new form from the dead. So it has been in the history of the Church. Again and again the familiar forms in which faith had apprehended Him die and are lost to sight, only to be superseded by some new aspect of Him, at first unfamiliar and distrusted, at

last recognized as Christ risen again. So it has been also in the faith of individuals. Having known Him in some particular fashion, we try to retain the vision just as it was. Like Haliburton, like Peter before him, we "spake ravingly of tabernacles". But God is inexorable, and we have to learn for ourselves "what this rising from the dead should mean".

1. *History*.—The Church began in a primitive simplicity which was content to tell the story of the Gospels. And, told by hearts hot with love to Jesus, that story conquered the world. But as the faith spread through the Roman Empire, and came in contact with the Greek thought of the day, lawless thinking and loose organization demanded new forms both of creed and of ecclesiasticism, and the ancient Catholic Church arose. Doubtless there were many simple souls who felt themselves lost and bewildered among all those new institutions, and whose cry was: "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him". Yet He was not taken away, but risen, in a new form suited to the new situation.

But that form, too, became obsolete. The ritual, like burial spices, seemed to hide Him in its formalities of worship, and love died away. Then came the reformation, sweeping away much of what had once revealed the Lord to the world, and substituting great intelligible truths which woke the in-



telleet as well as the devotion of the world. But there were tender and reverent spirits to whom the old way had meant much, and who like Luther's wife felt the chill of the new, and the old cry was heard again. But Christ was risen, a great Sun of Righteousness that gladdened all the Western lands and brought healing in His wings.

Yet again that living truth hardened into dead dogma, and this time there was not even the sweetness of the burial spices, but only dust and ashes. So there arose, first the successive evangelistic revivals and then the broader and more human presentation, which has taken for its central thought the fatherly rather than the judicial aspect of God. Again there were grave and loyal spirits who felt the new developments dangerous, and who had to learn that Christ was not taken away by the changes they had witnessed, but only risen once more, to live and speak in new times.

All these illustrate the same truth of the method of resurrection. Phase after phase of Christian faith rises, lives, and grows obsolete: and always there are some who cry that the Christ of the fathers has been taken away. But really it is only a phase that has been taken. That phase is dead. It has served its time and has now become ineffective, no longer influencing conduct, stirring the heart, or convincing the intellect. Those historic disappearances of Christ warn us against the attempt

to go back and find Him in any more primitive form of faith. They teach us to treat forms of faith new to us respectfully, as if in them indeed we may find the risen body of the Lord. Love at the first found this truth, and so discovered the risen One ; and in times of doubt and change love must rediscover Christ.

Nor is the comfort of the text only for the disheartened believer. The victory of science has for many of its own votaries a disconcerting aspect. Like Arctic discovery, men press forward through untold dangers and with unquenchable enthusiasm, only to reach some point of measureless dreariness. Science has taken away from them their Lord. It is not so. The facts remain, deep facts of human need and sin and sorrow. The emphasis of these has indeed been changed by modern thought, from the individual to the social, from the dogmatic to the spiritual, from abstract metaphysic to concrete experience. The claim of the new phases is as sound as that of the old was. "There is no real resting-place," says the late Dr. Jowett, "but in the entire faith that all true knowledge is a revelation of the will of God." In the new forms Christ is not taken away, but risen that He may reveal the Father to a new generation.

2. *Individual Experience.*—Here, too, Christ often disappears, and those who have lost Him come to old means of grace—doctrines, sacraments, devotions

—and find them but cold and empty ceremonies. Doctrinal causes may explain the change. From some, creeds have taken away their Lord, and from others the passing of creeds has done this. From some the rush of life and the hurry of business have taken Him, from others the sorrows and discouragements of the years have done it. They used to be very sure of Him, but life has become too difficult or too bitter,

When tears are spent, and thou art left alone  
With ghosts of blessings gone.

They know not where He is laid.

Others have lost Him through ease and luxury and self-indulgence. You used to be poorer, and Christ was more to you then. But those worldly advantages which you strove so hard to gain, have ill repaid you. They have taken away your Lord, and with Him have gone peace, and the vitality and freedom and gladness which once you knew. In such cases it is not really Christ who has been taken away. The Lord is there, but tears are in His eyes. For the world has taken away your heart from Him, and who knows where it has laid it?

In any case, in one way or another, the world has been too much for you. Yet none of all these things have taken away your Lord. He is risen, and He waits to meet you, when you wander bewildered, disheartened, or ashamed. His appearance will

not indeed be exactly what it was before. The search for truth, the cruelty of suffering, and the shame of apostacy—each works in the soul changes which require some new aspect of the Christ. But the wonderful thing about Christ is that He is sufficient for life in all its aspects; and that whatever be your experience, and however impossible it be now to regain the exact aspect of faith which once was yours, there is in Him all that man can ever need. He stands not where you were but beside you where you are, and if you will but turn and look you will find that He is risen and not taken away.

## A SONG OF THE MORNING

“And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds.”—2 SAMUEL XXIII. 4.

THESE were the last words of David, and they tell us his ideal of what a King should be. But the passage is deeply religious, and its import is far more than a conception of royalty. It is a conception of human life with the morning light of God shining upon it. Behind it there were the memories of certain mornings, great in the national history. There was that day when “the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared,” and Israel was free. Farther back in the past there was that other morning when the sun rose on Jacob as he passed over Penueel after his night of wrestling. It was from such passages that pious Israelites drew their thoughts of God, and worshipped with “glorious morning face”.

As Israel looked back upon such mornings, so she looked forward to others not less bright. Weeping might endure for a night, joy would come in the morning. The Lord would help her “when morning dawneth”. Her light would break forth

as the morning, and her righteous ones would triumph then. It is true that some of her doleful spirits have nothing more grateful to say than "Would God it were evening," and there are some to whom the morning is "even as the shadow of death". But that is only their sorrow or their weakness, or the irritation of the pessimist who is aggrieved by any call to rejoice. Israel's usual view of the morning is fresh and healthy. It is a call to labour and to wholesome thoughts. "In the morning sow thy seed," "Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening." With the sunrise has come safety; the wild beasts are gone to their dens; the highways of travel and of labour are clear, and the world is open for man. Everything is alive and cool and growing. The ground is fresh with dew, and the young grass is springing. Man, too, wakeneth morning by morning fresh and keen.

This morning light is on our Christian faith. We are for ever ageing before our time. As the shadows fall upon our work, we begin to feel that we have had our day. Yet when we look for sunset and the dark, it is a new sunrise that is coming:—

And not by eastern windows only,  
When daylight comes, comes in the light:  
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,  
But westward, look, the land is bright.

The note of paganism is the evening light through

which it looks back to a golden age far in the past. The worship of Buddha seems to dwell in "a land where it is always afternoon". Christianity is essentially the religion of the morning.

This involves many things, but above all others it is the guarantee of health as opposed to sentimentality of all kinds. Religion, even the Christian religion, has been regarded otherwise. It has been draped in close curtains of spurious mystery, stifled with ceremonial, made to appeal solely to the senses and emotions, until it had become hopelessly morbid and decadent. To be bright and keen, to be natural, to be heartily and simply human, has been regarded as a lapse into irreligious secularity. There has been indeed at times such a proud exultation in the mere world and its godless life, that faith has been driven for shelter to the darkness of midnight assemblies. But though Lucifer, son of the morning, is fallen, morning has another Son greater and more abiding. Jesus Christ is the bright and morning star. Ours is not the faith of those who hear only the voices of the night. Its believers are men who are singing in morning light, and that light—sane, clear, and cool—falls on all things earthly, and reveals them as they are.

The Christian view of *history* illustrates this. There is a dreary scientific doctrine that the world is growing aged and decrepit. It has had its day,

but now its powers are dying out, and it "goes dispiritedly, glad to finish". Nor have there been wanting some Christian believers to endorse the gloomy impression. Such Christianity despairs of life in the present, stands marking time till the Judgment Day or the Second Coming, as if that were all there is to do. But those who have drunk more deeply of the spirit of our faith, discover daily that old things are passing away and all things becoming new. We are standing not at the end but at the beginning of things. We go forth into the world daily remembering that it is morning. We ourselves may grow old without a pang, for "the best is yet to be," and our children shall see still better days than ours. The times may be precarious and their problems difficult to master, but the night is past and the day is before us.

Equally true is this assurance of our *individual* experience. The Christian feels the stirring of a new creation in his soul. The coming of the new life of God is not merely an event; it is a process, and we are daily being created. As yet we are but in the making. If this condition—this sinfulness and blindness and wavering faith and changeful desire—were the finished product of manhood, it would indeed be profoundly discouraging. But it doth not yet appear what we shall be, though we know that we shall be like Him. Every one who, in books or in real life, has had much intercourse



with aged saints, has learned that the Christian need never grow old at all. It was this that so arrests the wondering eyes of the Roman in "Marius the Epicurean," and gives to that great book much of its rare charm and clean fragrance. If you know Jesus Christ, you may trust life, and go forward brightly to its latest day. Your master has the secret of perpetual youth.

For further detail, let us set the Christian graces in this morning light :—

1. *Faith*.—There was a period in the nineteenth century when faith was seen by many of the noblest eyes, in an evening light. Watchers of twilight, or of darkness, the cry echoed from poets to prose writers, "Watchman, what of the night?" And the answers that came back were such as this—

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,  
And gather dust and chaff, and call  
To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope.

But the twentieth century is seeing things disentangled, and distinguishing between essential and merely casual beliefs. The morning light is clear and plain, and certain truths are visible in it. Faith is no longer groping and faintly trusting, bewildered among a vast system of beliefs. Its certainties are fewer, but they are absolutely certain. The faith of to-day is not dream but vision.

Such also is its vision of good, with clearer if less conventional light falling on moral questions. "Morning's at seven," as Pippa sang. The shutters are open, and instead of the many-coloured lanterns of tempting sophistry, moralists are seeing by daylight things as they are. Such is the vision of Christ. We do not demand of men that they shall hold so complete a set of definitions. But the progress of research has made Him stand out in clear light among the indisputable and eternal facts, and that is better than any completeness of theory or brilliancy of imagination that may turn out to be a pageantry of dreams.

2. *Hope*.—There is a hope in evening light ; that hope deferred that maketh the heart sick. Such hope may be a genuine Christian grace. The faintest light set in the future by some promise of God is precious ; and beyond all, there is the "one far-off, divine event to which the whole creation moves". Yet for us there is a nearer hope. In the morning, hope is immediate, and it concerns the facts of a day that has already dawned. Christ has not only pointed us towards a distant eternity, that may explain and compensate for a hopeless present. He has not only assured us that things will come right in the end. He has made us feel that to-day life is worth while.

3. *Lore*, in evening light, means rest, and the sweetness of fireside converse. In morning light,

love means labour. As the doors close behind them, the workmen do not love their homes less, but more, because they are going forth from them to labour. So love to God in morning light is a call to service. Do not stay brooding in close-curtained thought, searching your soul for love to God:—

I love and love not: Lord, it breaks my heart  
To love and not to love.

The day has dawned, the workmen of the world are abroad. Go forth and join them, and express your love in labour for God's sake.

Let us set our religion thus in the fresh and wholesome light of morning, while the call of life is in our ears. The evening will come soon enough, and with it rest and pensive sweetness and softness of feeling. Meanwhile the sun is risen; let us arise and live.

## THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

“That ye may approve things that are excellent.”—PHIL. I. 10.

IN this very remarkable prayer, St. Paul is guided by a conception of Christianity as it really is, and he is expressing successive aspects of the world into which it introduces men. The text describes one such aspect, and an extremely important one, viz. the approvals of a life, its unforced choices, instinctive preferences, and habitual consents.

Such choices meet us as the constant necessity of daily life. Frequently we would rather avoid the responsibility of them, but we cannot. Our environment is infinitely various, with its multitude of possible books, friends, plans, attitudes of mind, thoughts and actions. Among these there are great currents of fashion and of influence flowing strongly in different directions, so that we not only choose this or that in detail, but must commit ourselves to habits and to parties which will bear us on, the saving or destroying influences of our career.

Further, many of the problems of choice are extremely delicate. We have to face not only the

crude question of right or wrong, but a set of standards as much finer than these as a microscopic scale is finer than a yard stick. "We have not to distinguish the obviously good from bad, but among good things, good from best." This is the finesse of the game of life, in which lies the secret of all true culture. There are a thousand little points of manner, speech, thought, and action, in which both of two possible courses are justifiable, but one is the finer course, and belongs to the things which are excellent. This prayer is for a type of character founded upon the habitual choice of such things.

Obviously this first of all requires *appreciation*—to know what one desires and to desire rightly. If it be important to learn how to say No, it is still more important to learn how to say Yes, and to say it emphatically. For, even in so unsatisfactory a world as this, there are some things which are excellent—things that are "true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report". There is a certain number of such things round about us all. Some people are turning over large heaps of them, to find the unpleasant things below, but that does not alter the fact. If your world of thought and choice is ugly and second-rate, that is neither God's fault nor the world's. It is your own fault, who have approved these things for emphasis. The world is strewn with the good gifts of God. "Here is God's plenty,"

as Dryden says of Chaucer : and the opulence of the world is the heartening message of many others who have found "power each side, perfection every turn". It is a great and wise thing to look around us with chaste desire and loving eye, and to see and appreciate the choicest excellence.

Yet appreciation must be balanced with *criticism*, for in a world like this there is a very manifest limit to approval, and criticism, no less than appreciation, is a distinctively Christian duty. Marius the Epicurean recognized in his Christian friend "some inward standard of distinction, selection, refusal, amid the various elements of the fervid and corrupt life" around them. Even in literature, as Pater elsewhere insists, the choicest work depends upon the art of cutting off surplusage ; and all finest things, like the diamond, gain their beauty by sacrifice of precious dust. "Excellence is not common and abundant," says Matthew Arnold, "whoever talks of excellence as common and abundant is on the way to lose all right standard of excellence."

The necessity of criticism is true even to the length of a positive duty of hatred. Fra Angelico is famous as the man who could not paint a devil, and no one can withhold the tribute of reverence for so pure a spirit. Yet if there are devils there, such a view of life as his can never be a true picture of the world. Browning's great words are eternally true :—

Dante, who loved well because he hated,  
Hated wickedness that hinders loving.

All strong souls know what that means. It is the secret of moral and spiritual robustness, and it is a principle which Jesus Christ illustrated in Himself and taught to His disciples.

Yet, while this is true, it tells in favour of appreciation rather than against it. Our part is not to select the evil elements for emphasis, nor is it to simply accept the world in its breadth, going in good-naturedly with everything. In knowledge, it is not our part to be mere "pickers up of learning's crumbs," who accumulate miscellaneous facts. We must specialize if we are to have a message. In character and affections, the ideal is not that of mere enthusiastic persons, who are friends of all the world, with a vulgar heat of indiscriminate praise. A more austere way of dealing with life is expected of us. Christianity is not all kindness and fervour. It is severely discriminating judgment also, and thought founded on knowledge. There is no real fear that knowledge will cool love : love is cooled rather by ignorance and carelessness.

Thus Christian character also involves *selection*, not only of obvious right in contrast with wrong, but of the finest kind of right and that which is fittest for the special occasion. To reject open immorality and to accept all the rest without discrimination, is respectability, the religion of the Pharisees. But

every respectable Pharisee proves the truth of the saying that "the good is the enemy of the best". There is a scale of fineness among things respectable, and Christ insists that we shall not be content with a second-best, though it be good. In this way He has produced a special type of man, more delicately sensitive in choices than the rest. Such men, whose spirit habitually dwells among the highest things, show a rare spiritual culture, an exclusiveness, an aristocracy of spirit, which partly explains Christ's insistence on the narrow way and the straight gate, and the few that find it.

There are certain great difficulties in the way of those who would seek for this excellence. In lower regions of thought and conduct, the law judges for us, but here the responsibility falls back upon ourselves. And at once we have to meet with those *fashions* in moral and spiritual things whose standards for the time being set the type and frame the unwritten laws which govern the mass of society. In Cromwell's time strength was the ideal of England, in Dryden's time good nature. Now it is the courtier, now the nun, who seems most perfectly to embody human excellence. Such fashions make a very subtle appeal to the shame and vanity of many, who have not the courage to be counted peculiar. To others the temptation is to be in opposition, the revolt changing with the fashion as subserviently as the compliance changes.



Thus the chief demand is for moral and spiritual originality; to have a mind of one's own, and a conscience of one's own, which will enable one to discover and choose excellence for oneself.

A deeper difficulty in the way of seekers after excellence, is the fact that even the best of them are to so lamentable an extent the "familiar friends of sin," that it has become interesting and attractive to them, while goodness has come to seem insipid. This is partly the fault of the good. It makes one angry at times to see how deadly dull good people may become: we feel that they have no right to be so uninteresting as they sometimes are. In still greater part this aversion from excellence is our own fault, and is the result of deliberate or thoughtless pandering to our lower nature. It is so easy to get into the way of counting upon badness for interest, and imitating our cheapest literature by presenting the lower side of life in lights that quicken curiosity rather than revulsion. Thus we have perverted our standards of interest, and allowed our tastes to become corrupt, until we instinctively prefer the lower to the higher. This holds along the whole line of moral and spiritual choices, and it has degraded men's attitude toward Jesus Christ Himself. Men turn from Him, not so much because they are afraid of the fascination of a beauty so rare, but because they have actually looked upon Him and felt no fascination.

In the face of such obstacles we turn anxiously to inquire as to the secret of that right instinct which will recognize excellence and choose it. The discouraging element in all this is that to so large an extent the reasons that lie behind our choice seem to be so largely out of our own power. "Taste is morality," says Ruskin; and certainly that is true of the high moral and spiritual region. Sin, and all preference of lower to higher courses, are emphatically in bad taste. But then, taste is not a matter of prescribed rules, which can be enforced or made convincing to a mind that does not spontaneously admit its canons. Just as those who know good art from bad are quite sure of their judgment, but cannot tell why they so judge, nor communicate their judgment to others who prefer the poorer art; so this moral and spiritual taste is a kind of high fastidiousness, a new sense, a delicate and often incommunicable faculty of discernment. Doubtless, like the taste for good art, it arises from obscure sources in ancestry, natural sensibility, and education. Thus it appears to be a hopeless quest except for the select few who possess it; as unattainable as the shape of features or the colour of eyes. King Arthur pronounced the quest of the Grail too high for many of his knights, and plainly told them that they were neither Galahads nor Parsifals. So, for many of us, the most excellent things seem too fine. Our

want of spiritual finger-tips and delicacy of instinct, seems to debar us from the quest.

Yet that is not so true as it seems. Instincts may be acquired and tastes rectified within a lifetime. These are the last result of certain ways of dealing with life which are open to all. Those who live worthily among plain and ordinary issues, who train their minds to think accurately and dispassionately, who keep their eyes open and gain experience of the world, come in the end to a spontaneous and immediate discernment of the lower and the higher ways.

Still more surely is instinct affected by the moral discipline of life. He who faithfully and always chooses the course which seems to him right, gains in moral perception, and passes on from cruder to finer discernment. The instinct for the things that are excellent is the last product of a life that has been moulded consistently by right choices in cases of obvious right and wrong.

But above all there is the power of love, which Paul here has included in his prayer for the Philippians. Love may at first sight seem a doubtful guide. Is it not passionate, blind, and rash? Yet love is after all the only power in all the world that is delicate enough to create the instinct for excellence. That was Jesus Christ's secret long before it was Paul's. He set love free upon the earth, and the effects of that new love

which was flooding human life were wonderful indeed to the world, and not less surprising to those into whose hearts it had entered. For, in the secret alchemy of God, they found that in their souls love was transmuted into knowledge. Loving much, and knowing themselves greatly loved, they arrived at an accurate and direct sense of the distinction between what was finer and what was poorer. It is not too much to say that all the more delicate judgments of the world have arisen out of Christian love, which leads all who are faithful to it towards the approval of the things that are excellent.

## STRENGTH AND JOY

“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”—NEHEMIAH VIII. 10.

It was in the days of the return from Babylon that the two leaders, Nehemiah the soldier and Ezra the scholar, came upon the page of history. The student had been waiting for a chance to read the law, but the time was not yet come. Nehemiah had his rougher part to play first, and the wondrous days of “sword and trowel” followed. Now, that work done, the modest patriot yielded at once to the student, and the law was read to the people. But the faces of the multitude grew graver. An occasional sob was heard as law solemnly followed law, and they began to realize the conditions on which they might dwell within the new-built walls. Finally, there broke forth the great cry of a nation in tears.

This was disappointing enough to the two heroes. To them the law was familiar, and all their work had been done on those high ideals. But the crowd was ignorant, and in the reaction after their exciting labours they were ready for any discouragement. But the leaders knew how much remained to be

done, and that strength was needed now more than ever. Yet there was only one way of strength. There could be no escape from the laws which had discouraged them. *Through* the law the people must pass on to the heart of God, and there find joy. The people were learning God's laws with consternation; the leaders knew His character and heart. And they knew that He who had given the sombre law, was joyous for evermore. At the heart of things, in the depths of the universe, there was unfailing gladness.

There are obvious lessons here. Religion, viewed from a distance, is ever sombre and gloomy. Faced, accepted, attempted, it reveals daily delights. Many a man stands shuddering at religion, who if he would but boldly face it, would lose all his fears and weakness. For true strength and true joy are essentially moral. It is through law, and not without law, that any trustworthy gladness must come. Character is the granite rock of life.

All this depends ultimately on the character of God. There could be no possible joy for man in the worship of Moloch. But here man reaches the enthusiasm of a divine gladness. He has discovered the secret of the Lord, and is filled with the "inward glee" of those who have penetrated behind the sorrow, the severity, and the sin of the world, and found its God rejoicing.

But the special lesson of the text is that of the

connexion between strength and joy. Life demands of us all that we be strong, and our hearts respond in a great longing. To be able to fight and to labour and to wait, to be competent for our tasks—what heart does not answer to the delight in strength? Those whose strength is failing and who feel at once their call to labour and their weakness to achieve it, have ever longed most passionately for strength. They think enviously and yet with a kind of glory of the strength of others: they take the strongest for their heroes and imitate them as best they can. But there are many sorts of strength, and some of them are of little worth.

There is natural robustness, mere weight of muscle, unimpaired health, and unbroken success. This had been the kind of strength which the Israelites had exercised in their building. The sheer force of the work had carried them on in the excitement of the hour, and it had been enough for that labour. But now they collapsed when they realized life's finer tasks and more exacting demands. Such blind strength is coarse-grained, often feelingless and inconsiderate, never delicate enough for more than the rougher tasks.

Again there is the passionate strength of sorrow. Every one knows the amazing feats which desperate men may perform; and, when the first outburst of such emotion has passed, it is still possible to be strong in a dogged, hopeless fashion, resolute

without enthusiasm. Such strength might easily have been sought for by these Israelites, now that their old strength was broken. These laws were impossible, and there was no use trying to please their God. Yet, in a kind of Puritanic despair they might have gone bravely on to their doom, as many a hopeless spirit has done since then.

It was to men standing among such alternatives that the words were spoken. The Law-giver was also the Rejoicer, and He would have men to rejoice in His joy and so be strong. The very fact of being glad would restore heartiness to them and exhilarate their flagging spirits. But that is a poor rendering of the text. If they are to hear the laws of their God and still be glad, it must be because underneath the stern mask of commandment there is a smile on the Law-giver's face. They are to rejoice with their God while they obey His laws.

Such strength is intelligent and not blind. If we have seen the Creator rejoicing in His works, there is something to be glad about. Behind the joy lies not merely muscle or emotion, but reason and right thought. As the walls of Troy were supposed to have risen to the music of their builders' singing, as all works of art have been defined as the expression of their maker's joy; so men who take their tasks from God, sharing His joy of creation, rejoice in them and do them well.

Such strength is also unselfish. God is blessed



because He is for ever blessing. The very meaning of the Cross of Christ is that God's unselfishness is for ever overcoming the sorrow of the world. It is this generous joy, rejoicing in doing good to others, which alone gives real strength to character. In a world like this, where there is so much misery, it must sometimes occur to every happy spirit to ask whether any man has a right to enjoy himself. He has such a right only on condition that his is the generous joy of the Lord. "We may dare to be very happy while doing our utmost to help a brother."

Further, this is peaceful strength. With God there is no spasmodic effort. The heavens are calm above earth's strained and anxious life. The strongest forces are ever quiet, and all fuss and restless violence of effort are signs of weakness. In God, by faith we do enter into His rest, and are "strong in grave peace". God's peace within a soul makes room for joy, and to be glad thus quietly is to be strong.

Lastly, this strength is victorious; it is strength which has been reached through weakness. God, as we have seen Him in Jesus Christ, has conquered sorrow and death, and revealed a joy achieved through pain, and a strength made perfect in weakness. It is such strength that is found in the joy of the Lord, for all our joy also has in its heart some conquered sorrow. We can rejoice only by over-

coming, and the strength we reach thus is the strength of victorious men.

Such is this glad strength which is to be found for men in God. If it be available, it must be our duty to possess it. The world has already too many of the weak and sad in it, and has certainly no need of more. This is a plain word to all the neurotic, and to that very much over-indulged member of society, the weak brother. If in any measure you have it in your choice, then it is a great and urgent duty to be glad and to be strong. To swell voluntarily the ranks of the inefficient, to add another burden to the immense load which the heart of the world already bears, is an unmanly and a shameful thing. To all men and women who are tempted to trade on their weakness, to be exacting, to expect and demand special terms and allowances, the great words are spoken. You have no right to your weakness and your gloom; arise and sing ye that dwell in the dust; play the man and rejoice. Your God rejoices, Christ is risen, and the hosts of heaven are singing a new song. There is gladness at the heart of things. It is for you to believe it and to win the victory of faith. For those who do believe it, and rejoice in God, out of weakness are indeed made strong.

## THE ELUSIVENESS OF DESIRE

“The mirage shall become a pool.”—ISAIAH XXXV. 7.

THE most fantastic and surely the most cruel of all natural phenomena is the mirage of the desert. The sands of Africa, and the clay and stones of the Syrian desert, spread their vast expanse of tawny or leaden colour to the sun, and the hapless traveller whose store of water has failed him, at last abandons the vain hope of an oasis. Suddenly in front of him there is the sparkle of sun on lapping waves. It is a lake with palm-trees, or an inland sea, with wooded islands and their reflections clear in the waters as the ripples die down to calm. With tongue cracked and bloodshot eyes he staggers on towards that magic that is fairer and more delicate than any real scenery. It recedes before his advance, and as the fever rises he strips off his clothing piece by piece. Afterwards they find him, naked and dead, on the hot ground where the waters had shone before his eyes.

In Hebrew literature there is much reference to the desert. The usual effect of it upon Israel's thought was to teach her to appreciate her oasis-

land of Syria. It has often been remarked that she exaggerated the beauty and fertility of her land, but it has to be remembered that those trees and watersprings and mountains are seen and described by men whose instinctive sense of the surrounding desert heightened their charms by contrast. This, however, is a bolder stroke. The writer here is thinking not of escape from the desert but attack upon it. Ezekiel's waters from beneath the altar are to reclaim the desert of the Dead Sea. But this goes farther still, facing those lies and delusions which are the most exquisitely torturing devices of the desert's cruel heart, and forcing the mirage itself back to truth.

We need not pause upon the historical interpretation of the metaphor for Israel, for the promise is of application wide as human life. It is not the kingdom of God coming upon life when it appears grey and worthless, to give zest and the promise of good, that is here depicted. It is life appearing good and full of zest that calls forth desire, and then failing us. It is the disillusion and treachery, the false promises of happiness and satisfaction leading only to disappointed hopes. We need not pose as superior persons who are above such things. "We live by admiration"; we need desire and the satisfaction of desire, and we cannot be our best without it.

Well, there is no one of ripe years who is not

quite well accustomed to see the waters of his desire turn to mirage. Some one has said that most of the pools at which we slake our thirst are turgid. But that is not the worst. The worst is that when we come to the pools they are not there. This is so common in experience that the repetition of it sounds commonplace. Mirage is not a metaphor of high tragedy, it is an everyday fact. We live by admiration, but either we fail to reach what we have admired, or reaching it find it no longer admirable. Either "suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished," or "achievement lacks a gracious somewhat".

It is but natural that this disillusion should have called forth voices in the wilderness. Job will ever have his comforters, more or less wise and relevant. There are realists who accept the situation, and appear to find comfort in literature and speech about the vanity of human wishes. Some of them are ever laboriously reminding us of the mirage of life, and damping the ardour of young enthusiasts with their cynicism—"Ah, my young friends, but wait till you are as old as we are!" Nobler voices too, there are, crying in the night of man's discomfiture—voices from brave, dark hearts that shout courage amidst the disillusion.

As one by one thy hopes depart,  
Be resolute and calm,

or—"We are not meant to succeed ; failure is the

fate allotted . . . but God forbid it should be man that grumbles". But such comfort is not enough. We *do* complain ; and, if we are being cheated by the false appearances of things, we are in no mood to accept the situation complacently. Then, while we stand angrily facing the trick and sham of life, with the mocking laughter of the universe in our ears, God's great voice is heard, "The mirage shall become a pool". Here is a new thing—the attack upon the facts themselves by the only one who has power to change them. It is like God's great way. He is too wise and true to deny the obvious fact. The poor world has been so often cheated that it will never trust any light-hearted comforters. But this voice acknowledges the fact that "the world passeth away". "What is your life? it is even a mirage," it says. But then it adds, "The mirage shall become a pool". It faces the worst, and then raises the shout of redemption. Disillusion is true, but it is not the last word there is to say. The dream and the desire of life have proved false for a time, but they shall yet turn out true. In them we have touched reality, and God can yet confirm it.

The promise of life was pools of water, satisfying its desires for health and beauty, for coolness and rest. Christ is often misunderstood, as if he were laying new spiritual burdens on the poor children of desire. Really he offers rest. He offers not another thirst for an ideal still more unattainable,

but living water which will slake the soul's thirst. He offers not another added energy to the spirit already tired, but the coolness of quiet waters and the shade of the trees of God. He offers not a morbid holiness but a healthful and natural life.

The disillusioned and disappointed will naturally distrust such offers as these. For them the green-sward is faded, and the colour and radiance are gone out of life's vision, leaving but the harsh monotony of the desert. Desire, whether granted or refused, has cheated them, until they have finally made up their mind to deaden down its fires: they do not intend to be betrayed again. But Christ insists upon reopening the question. What you saw and desired was real good, though the form in which you sought it may not have been the best for you. But the keen and poignant sense of life which seemed to vanish has not really disappeared. All that you wanted to make life perfect, God still has in store for you. At His right hand there are pleasures for ever more.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall exist;

Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power  
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist,  
When eternity confirms the conception of an hour.

And if the question still be asked, when these things shall be, the answer probably expected is, that this life is not all, but only the beginning. Here we are disciplined by desires, there we shall

be satisfied with fulfilments. It is a legitimate and worthy answer. One of the most powerful arguments for immortality is just this twofold fact, that in our desires we catch passing glimpses of convincing and evident good, and that in many cases these are all which is allowed us. To doubt that these are waiting for fulfilment in some life complementary to this, is to pronounce all experience meaningless. But besides that, when the love and power of Christ enter into life here, they change the whole aspect of it. So vital and keen a thing is faith, that those who believe find not desire only but fulfilment of desire, and that increasing with the years. We shall all find some things which we have desired as pools of water turn out to be mirage. Those are wise and happy who resist the temptation to rebel, and who trust this great word of God's reassurance, The mirage shall become a pool.



## THE PHANTASMAGORIA OF LIFE

“The mirage shall become a pool.”—ISAIAH XXXV. 7.

APART from the treachery of the mirage which offers illusive waters to thirsty lips, there is also its confusion of the real and the unreal worlds. East of Damascus it may be seen for hours together, changing the grey vacancy of the horizon into an unceasing restless kaleidoscopic spectacle of swiftly changing form and colour. All sorts of familiar scenes suggest themselves to the imagination as picture succeeds picture. But the general effect is so powerful as to defy even the sanest mind to retain its sense of reality.

This aspect of the mirage suggests a nobler interpretation of the text than that of desire. We have, after all, a deeper quarrel with life than its false promises of satisfaction and happiness. We demand a stable and abiding sense of a real world in which we are dealing with realities. In the midst of many interests and pursuits there come moments when the whole sense of life fails us and seems to evaporate. Shakespeare knew the feeling well, and has told us in words whose familiarity proves how

true has been their appeal, of life as "a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing," and ourselves as "such stuff as dreams are made of". Sometimes this comes as a general reaction from our habitual trust in the soundness of our ordinary views. Sometimes it is a sharp and sudden experience, when some event, long looked forward to, seems unreal when it comes, and in spite of all persuasions to the contrary we find ourselves among cloud-work, each man walking in a vain show.

The great idealists have sought to safeguard man's belief in the reality of his spiritual experience by the most daring philosophies ; asserting, in face of all such faintings of the spirit as we have mentioned, that the ideas dwell in heaven, and that thought is the only reality. Christian optimists, like Kingsley and George Macdonald, have dogmatized on the courageous principle that such convictions are so beautiful that they *must* be true. We are grateful for all such voices, yet times of doubt recur. Are we indeed children of eternity, lying on our backs in the cave as Plato says, and seeing but the reflection of things on the roof, yet knowing that the realities are sure? or are we but ants tumbling on the huge ant-heap, taking ourselves with an absurd seriousness, and dreaming great things? Do our sins and virtues, our struggles and resistances, our joys and sorrows really matter? or are these all but the cloud-work of the desert? The

voice of God assures us that the mirage shall become a pool, real enough to live for or to die for. That is what Jesus Christ has done for the world.

Let us look at one or two details.

1. *Our work* often induces a sense of unreality. Weary toilers, whether successful or unsuccessful, feel the vanity even of finished works, and still more the vanity of unfinished works. Many a man has built his tower, done what he set out to do, and the tower falls and his labour is lost ; or worse still, his tower stands only to shame him with its imperfection, for it is not the thing he had designed. The better the workman, the more unsatisfied he is with his finished works. And then how much has to be left unfinished. The man's designs are greater than the length of his life. "Ambition had set its hold on him. He wanted to do more than there was time for. Like many of us he began by thinking that life was longer than it is."

Well, finished or unfinished, satisfactory or unsatisfactory, here is God's verdict upon man's honest labour. He approves the purpose of a life, and His approval establishes the work of our hands upon us. He understands what you meant to do, and knows the pattern showed you in secret, after which you have been striving. *That*, in God's sight, is reality. It is work, and has eternal value. No faithful toil can ever really be futile. This assurance brings a man in among the abiding things, for it tells him

that he has built an house not made with hands that is eternal.

2. *Character* is often a most tantalizing and lamentable mirage. We see our goal, apparently possible and within our reach, and across the desert we pant after it. But which of us has attained, or is anything resembling the man he fain would be? The flitting and evanescent image of our noblest manhood often dims and vanishes. Old temptations recurring out of due season draw us down from high hopes to low levels of actual conduct. Honesty, justice, purity, even when we have reached them in some degree, are a compromise rather than a victory. Our high efforts end ignominiously in the mere keeping up of appearances. At times a subtle doubt invades, and we find ourselves persisting, without knowing why we do so, in a moral struggle of whose worth we are by no means certain.

Again God's word is that that mirage also shall become a pool. One day we shall be sure with an indisputable certainty of the worth of the struggle, and of the glory of moral victory. What good hope are you now clinging to in your disgusted and disillusioned heart? He will "take the distorted thing in His hands and make something gallant of it". God draws out the best that is in a man and confirms it upon him. Even here this may be felt and seen; and, beyond, we shall find that we have been fighting better than we knew.

3. *Faith*, once taken to be the surest of realities, is now discredited in many minds. It seems a fantastic dreamland, which wakening intellect has discovered to be wild and impossible. Old forms and securities of faith have proved illusory. "Olympus and Sinai are deserts." The great mirage of Christianity itself is over. Jesus Christ remains but as the memory of a dream, a fair form in art, a hope from which the light has faded, a star vanished in the night.

This mirage also shall become a pool of living waters. In some form or other, Christian faith is going to prove true. Where the waters that once promised refreshment have vanished, and where now there are only deserts of intellectual routine, streams of vital truth will flow once more, never again to fail. Looking back when the change is completed, you will not count it a change from reality to unreality, but from an imperfect vision to the very truth of God and of life. There is a faith for you which will never need to be abandoned, a sure and eternal truth on the strength of which you may live and die.

4. Each of these is but a detail in the great mirage of *life* itself. The world, with the brilliance of its spectacle and the heave and fall of its surge—we have found it out to be but cloud, and still we gaze. Real or not, its wonder and its beauty fascinate us and hold our eyes. And heaven, as

you once imagined it, that last and most delicate mirage of all—you used to be thrilled with its splendour; now you turn from its gaudy and inadequate cloudland. You have found out the earth and the heavens.

Yes, but beneath such shows of things there are realities—the new earth and the new heaven—an earth where life is real, a heaven where the real life of earth is made eternal. For Jesus Christ is Lord of Realities, and He is Master of earth and heaven, who “maketh all things new”. He knows how we all dream, and how futile the dream appears on our awakening. But through it all there remain for all of us the facts of faith and love and service. These things are no dream, though on them also for a moment we may lose our hold. Yet for the faithful these will prove so real that they will give reality to all the rest that tends so readily to fade. And at last comes death. “After the fever of life, after wearinesses and sicknesses, fightings and despondings, languor and fretfulness, struggling and succeeding; after all the changes and chances of this troubled unhealthy state, at last comes death, at length the great white throne, at length the beatific vision.”

## A NEW POINT OF VIEW

### *(The Ascension-Day)*

“While they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”—Acts i. 9.

THE story of the life of Jesus falls into three parts, (1) a man on earth like other men, (2) still on the earth, but now unearthly and occasional, (3) free from the earth and identified with the life of God. The Ascension narrative marks the change from the second to the third of these, cutting off His earthly from His heavenly life. The stories of the days after the Resurrection tell of an experience which was indeed comforting but yet perplexing. Men were sure that Jesus still lived, but they needed a further assurance which would give stability and the sense of permanence to faith. They had been living, both before and after His death, in the constant expectation of surprises. But now no surprise could happen any more. Peace had come, such as can come only when the Best is also the Highest, when the Son of God is at God's right hand.

We need not trouble ourselves about curious questions of detail. Scientific speculations regarding matter and spirit are irrelevant here: critical questions and the laborious attempt to piece together the various accounts into one consistent narrative are equally out of place. There is indeed in the Gospels a manifest reserve, and even a carelessness as to consistency of detail, which send us back upon the heart of the story. The eye cannot follow Him on that day when a cloud receives Him out of our sight. But certain things remain, truths about God and our human life, for which the story stands. Four of these are:—

1. *Earth's view of Heaven.*—(“Gazing up into Heaven.”) Heaven has ever seemed a place inaccessible to earth. The truth is, when we speak frankly, that spirituality is beyond us. The natural man has indeed glimpses of the spiritual world, but he is incapable of sustained or satisfying vision of it. It is not even congenial to him. We love the earth and understand it well, but heaven we neither understand nor love. It is difficult to believe in, still more difficult to realize, and absolutely impossible to live for, leaving all for its sake.

Part of the reason for this is the want of the personal element. Spirituality without that is always tenuous and bleak. When a good man enters heaven, its aspect is to some extent changed for his friends. He is there, and the way by which



he went seems open. Very different are the sorts of entrance. Some, like storm-beaten vessels, hardly struggle into port. Some, in perfect trim, finish their voyage gaily, the white sails taking the evening light. Some chosen spirits make us feel that for them the heavens are impatient; and these, with their pale, eager faces of the dying, show us far glimpses through the open gates.

But above all the dying, Jesus Christ did this for us when He went to His own place. As the Resurrection silences for ever all talk of a "lonely Syrian grave," so the Ascension keeps us from losing Him among the sombre mysteries of death. His future is no "grand perhaps". He had been as a man journeying into a far country, and now He has been welcomed home after that long wandering. It was His design to make heaven clear and homely to the eyes of earth; and the disciples now, looking upward, see Jesus Christ there and know it for their homeland. He has absorbed into Himself our whole thought of heaven: to die is to go to be with Christ. It is confessedly difficult to believe in spiritual things, here or hereafter. But it is not difficult to believe in Jesus Christ. It is easy to believe in Him, and He is there. Into that strange land He is thus the way, and since He entered it earth's view of heaven has been different.

2. *Heaven's view of Earth.*—"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Earth's view of earth is always local. We see the part around our feet, but from the rest we are hedged in by all manner of barriers. But the Ascension of Jesus has taught us the heavenly point of view for earth, at which all local barriers are lost sight of.

There is a very intimate and emphatic connexion between the Ascension and this wide outlook and command. In Greek and Hebrew thought alike, heaven was the privileged home of a select minority of distinguished persons, while the rest passed to a land of shadows, and the exceptional exaltation of the few made the general doom only the more apparent. But it was otherwise with Jesus. He came forth at first as a local Galilean prophet ; at the last He appears in His disciples' preaching as the Lord of the world, the King of nations. But this expansion is directly connected with the narrative of the Ascension. Lifted up from the earth, He draws all men unto Himself. He breaks up and ends all possibility of national or local religions. He is detached from one land that He may claim all lands and come into the sight of all. Those who in spirit are ascended with Christ, not only see heaven but "overlook the world". Thousands of men and women, brethren in far lands, came into sight that day. The divisions of nationality, race, and class, and the barriers of aversion, prejudice and ignorance, all were lost sight of. This is the

characteristic note of the Ascension. We must ascend with Christ and get above the world to see it thus.

And having seen we must go forth into the newly discovered breadth of the world. All that is needed for conviction of the worth of foreign missions, and all other enterprises for the help of man by man, is that we ascend with Christ. Those who have understood the meaning of His Ascension, and seen the world from the heavenly point of view, can no longer stay at home. Provincialism is a low thing, possible only to the earthly. By His Ascension He taught men the cosmopolitanism of heaven's view of earth.

3. *The Power of the Unseen.*—(“All power is given unto Me,” etc.) One would think that power, in the sense of influence, must be measured by visibility. What we see most clearly we feel most powerfully. Yet even in the material world there is abundant evidence that the greatest powers surrounding us are the invisible forces of nature. And the access of spiritual power that came upon Christians after Jesus was no longer visible to their eyes, is one of the most remarkable facts in history.

When we remember the helplessness of the company of disciples huddled together after the Crucifixion, we might expect a paralysis of vital energy in the Church now that its Lord had finally vanished from the earth. Left alone, with their gigantic

task among the nations, a feeble band pitted against the possibilities and impossibilities of the situation, surely the Church must feel its human weakness to the point of despair.

But instead of this we find them returning to Jerusalem "with great joy," competent men who were adequate to their task. Evidently their faith had become a force now, and that force was a sense of the power of Christ. Men who face great tasks are usually keenly alive to the sense of Fate. But for them henceforth Fate was but the will of Christ, and to be with Him in will was to be stronger than life or death.

For us and for all men Christ's secret of power is not visibility but exaltation. He is not seen but He is ascended. Lack of spiritual power is the result of unworthy and inadequate thoughts of Christ. Let us exalt Him in our hearts, for the more He is exalted, the greater is the might and effectiveness of faith.

4. *The Presence of the Absent.*—("Lo, I am with you always.") The parting of Jesus from His friends really united them to Him. The earthly life had set limits of all kinds upon Him. He was here and not there, cut off from His friends by absence of the body. Now, He was free in the spiritual land. He was with them always, not occasionally as before.

And this meant for them the setting free of love,

as only the Ascension could set it free. They needed access to Him, for their love longed for His fellowship, and their attempts at service often needed comfort. With His Ascension there came upon the world a new sense of the love it longed for made accessible. Love was the essential element in the whole story of Christ. Mohammed died, and the fantastic legend honoured him with a coffin hanging in the air. That was high, but not ascended far above the earth. It was all that could be looked for, for the faith of Mohammed set power free but not love. But Christ's Ascension set love in the heights for ever; and from the heights that love for ever streams down upon mankind. The presence of the absent is precious chiefly for this, that neither height nor depth can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## THE DAYS OF THE SPIRIT

(*Whit-Sunday*)

“It is expedient for you that I go away.”—ST. JOHN XVI. 7.

THE doctrine of the Holy Spirit is distinctive of Christianity, and essential to it. Yet it is so delicate that its beauty and its wonder are easily spoiled by rough handling. It is difficult to deal rightly with it, and it is dangerous if abused. On the one hand, hasty believers, impatient of its subtlety, have materialized it, conceiving of the personality of the Holy Ghost in a crude and over-familiar fashion. All mystery has vanished from the doctrine for them, and it no longer answers to those inexpressible hints and suggestions—

those first affections,  
Those shadowy recollections. . . .  
Fallings from us, vanishings ;  
Blank misgivings of a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realized

—which it is its very office to interpret. On the other hand, there is the revulsion from all this on the part of those who, with an equal failure to

appreciate the reticent and secret play of the spiritual in life, have felt the crude statements of the others to be obvious unrealities. Such have left this doctrine severely alone, and have stated Christianity in so wholly unspiritual a way that one cannot but wonder if they have so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit. The result in either case is as unnecessary as it is costly. This whole region is withdrawn indeed and occult, yet it is a region of obvious facts of experience.

It is in connexion with these facts that we must view the necessity for Christ's departure. Life, indeed, seemed easy while they had His bodily presence, but it could never be complete. We have deep needs, spiritual demands so fine and intricate, that even Christ Himself in the flesh could not satisfy them, but must rather stand between men and their satisfaction. Let us see how this was so.

Jesus appeared in the midst of a society as unspiritual as could well be imagined. The avowed political materialism of the Sadducees, and the unconscious but even grosser legalistic materialism of Pharisaism, had set the fashion of the nation's thinking, and kept it earth-bound. Across that world Jesus flashed a great spiritual light. It was like a lightning-flash illuminating some mean street, and revealing unheard-of colours and forms in its deadly regularity. Like the force of electricity, this

spiritual force which Jesus revealed had been there before, but undiscovered and unutilized. He made men aware of a new world, in which He Himself was living, and in which they ought to live. It was a world of spiritual agencies and forces, potent and available for men. The plain men who followed Him uncomprehending, felt all this without clearly knowing what it was they felt. In Him they saw human life heightened, with keener possibilities and more high-strung intensity of purpose. He was living at a higher pressure and with a finer delicacy than they had known in any other life.

And yet, for their sakes, He must leave them. They looked on in wonder at this new kind of life, but they could not live it themselves. The very fascination of Jesus kept them from it. He was, in a way, a personality too commanding, and His way of life was too wonderful. While He was with them it became their habit not to face problems, but to go and tell Jesus. He bore all their burdens and undertook their responsibilities. As yet they were not trying to learn the finesse of the game of life, but leaving all that to Him. So absorbing was His presence that they could not see past Him. It was ever, "Thou knowest that I love Thee," or "My Lord and my God," and the full hearts were at rest and asked no more.

Thus even the holiest influences may deaden spiritual activity. St. Paul himself finds it necessary



to detach himself, and though he had known Christ after the flesh, henceforth to know Him so no more. So for those disciples it was worth while to lose Jesus, if they might find for themselves the way into that spiritual world in which they had seen Him moving. For He did not come to be adored by men who could never reach His secret. It was His will that those who had been given Him should be with Him where He was.

So He left them, and the days of the Spirit began. Once He was gone, they were in a position to review the past and understand its meaning. We all know how death speaks to us of our beloved, and how strangely impressive is the power of that which is no more. So now they could see His life, with its wonderful spirituality, in perspective and as a whole.

But when they turned from the memory of His life to the need of taking up their own, they found that He had wrought a change of which they had not been aware. The still pool had been troubled by the angel. Life was trembling with a spiritual quiver and had taken on a more delicate significance. They were no longer occupied with deeds and spoken words, but with thoughts, desires, and imaginations. No longer did they wait for commandments; they hearkened for suggestions, whispers of a spiritual voice that might be heard within, telling them His mind. To these they listened and tried to follow

them, till the instinctive voices grew clearer and more constant, and the Spirit was in command of their lives. Nor was this ministry of the Spirit an isolated thing, confined to the lives of a few chosen individuals. Great tides of it were flowing, which affected masses of men and even nations. The age of the Spirit had come, and the world felt the thrill of a life which was a new thing in the experience of men.

We can imagine something of this changed aspect of the world. In early childhood, in times of physical weakness, in rare and precious hours of silence, we all have been aware of a more delicate but elusive world—a kind of fairy-land hardly to be expressed. But words multiplied, concealing thought; health grew robuster and life more crowded. The veil of flesh fell heavily and the vision was lost and would not return. There must have been for those disciples something like a re-entering of such regions of delicate impressions. No longer did they dream of thrones in a restored kingdom, no longer did they expect the next miracle or revel in great hauls of fish or superabundance of bread. He had thrust them forth into the difficult and wonderful region of the spiritual life. They had to take up its responsibilities and make what they could of it. They had to venture out upon its tides of spirit, and count upon its mysterious powers for persuading men.

And they were able to do this in virtue of a most strange return to childhood, a change of spirit which had given them back the freshness of their simplest years. Children once again, as Jesus had said they must become, they had entered and were dwelling in a kingdom that was not of earth.

If this be Christianity as it actually was in the beginning, that fact entirely precludes all mere materialism either of faith or of unbelief. There is more in Christianity than eye hath seen or ear heard; more than theologians have defined or rationalists denied. There is in human nature a craving for contact with the spirit world deep as life itself. The Greek oracles, the Alexandrian gnosticism, and the many varieties of spiritualistic endeavour after the occult in modern times, all bear witness to that fact. It is easy to dismiss this or that development with the word "grotesque". But the Christian answer to these cravings is not ridicule nor denial. It is fulfilment, for the days of the Christian faith are indeed the Days of the Spirit. And this is the record of a historic change for which Christ is responsible. He went away and the Spirit came.

## THE SPIRITUAL DOCTRINE OF GOD

(*Trinity-Sunday*)

“FOR there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”  
—1 JOHN v. 7.

ONE of the most significant and valuable changes in the habits of theological thinking is the change from the deductive and metaphysical to the inductive and psychological method. In simpler language, it was formerly the rule to establish a doctrine apart from our human experience, and then to adapt life and thought to the doctrine; it is now the rule to take our human experience with us when we are trying to understand or state all doctrines.

In no case is this latter method more advantageous, and indeed necessary, than in regard to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. If we try to build it up out of proof-texts from Scripture, and abstract reasoning and speculation, we shall succeed only in bewildering ourselves. The abstract doctrine of the Trinity is scholastic, mechanical, and fictitious. The popularized form of such a conception will be

either some form of tritheism, or it will be a mere paradox with no meaning at all.

But it was not in this abstract fashion that the doctrine originally came. It did not arise from our text, for that text was absent from the original documents and did not appear till the fifth century. The doctrine, as Clarke says, "Sprang up in experience, not in speculation". It was because men found the one God manifesting Himself to them in three ways that they tried to conceive and state their thoughts of Him accordingly. The abstract formulations and controversies were drawn partly from Scripture; partly from the need of combating heresies which stated the being of God in terms which were not true to the Christian experience; and partly from the Greek spirit which sought to rationalize and harmonize all human knowledge. But none of these was the source of the doctrine, which arose out of the deepest hours of communion between the souls of believers and God.

On the one hand, by the very constitution of our minds we perceive the demand for unity in God. Apart from this there can be no universe, no rational life at all. And yet our social instincts, nay, the very constitution of human nature, reveal variety in unity. Thus, on the one hand, our thought of God could never rest in polytheism; on the other hand pure unitarianism has not satisfied the

demand of religious experience. The former ends in atheism, for it has never remained credible under the test of thought ; the latter tends to a coldness of religious spirit which has never met the need of the generality of men, for it is incapable of adequately revealing God's love.

We do not indeed profess to reconcile the unity and the variety with anything like a clear or complete understanding. The mystery remains in which the Divine must ever dwell. Yet trinitarian doctrine is helpful, for it saves us from being "lost in the vague recesses of the infinite," or from being driven to assert that "God is too awful to be worshipped". It keeps our manifold nature and experience at every point in touch with God.

When, then, we ask not what God is in Himself, but what He is to us, the answer of experience is, that we know Him as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit. It is interesting to remember that this is the order in which the revelation has been historically made. The earliest phase of it was that of the patriarchial times. Then, in the nomad society, fatherhood was the dominant idea. It governed law, custom, and all the affairs and relations of life. So men, looking up towards the Divine through their own experience, naturally found Him as the Father—the highest expression of their ruling and guiding conception. Later, when national history grew tragic with sin and punishment, de-

feat and exile shattering the nation's complacent life, and conscience embittering the misery of their hearts, there came a second phase. The suffering Servant, the stricken and afflicted One bearing on His own heart the sins of many, and by His stripes healing them, revealed the Son. When Jesus had been crucified, His disciples saw in Calvary the complete revelation of all that towards which the prophets had been groping. Here was another view of God, and the life of the world demanded it and was satisfied by it. Yet these were not all. From the first there had been a sense of the Divine inspiring and guiding the ordinary life of man, quickening his interests and working through him in his enthusiasms. In the days of the Apostles this inspiring and quickening became so distinct and so powerful a phenomenon, that they could explain it no otherwise than by a third view of God as Holy Spirit. Thus in historic order, God revealed Himself to man threefold.

In the experience of the individual the same thing is true, and though no religious experience is coerced into following any unbroken order of sequence, yet in general the order is the same. The little child, whose environment is the Christian home, naturally first views the world under the dominating idea of fatherhood. His parents are to him inevitably the first revelation of the Divine, and he knows the Father. Later, when life has

led him to its battle-fields of joy and sorrow, of sin and righteousness, he needs more in God than he needed in the innocence of childhood. Then it is that his whole nature craves for and responds to the revelation of God which is given in Jesus Christ. Farther on in the journey, when the passionate days of youth are over, the meaning of life's work and thought discloses itself. The continued labour and interest of the years require an interpretation which will keep the man strong and keen. So he finds God revealed as the Holy Spirit.

Heine, in a memorable passage, has elaborated this conception, and with that we may leave the subject. We must leave it in mystery; but through the mystery the great thought of the Holy Trinity shines, sufficient for the needs of life, though still eluding the efforts of the strongest intellect. We cannot master these conceptions and force them into a unity of thought. We shall be wise if we let them master us, and guide us into a life of worship and obedience.

"Ah, my child," says Heine, "while I was yet a little boy, while I yet sat upon my mother's knee, I believed in God the Father, who rules up there in heaven, good and great; who created the beautiful earth, and the beautiful men and women thereon; who ordained for sun, moon, and stars their courses.



“ When I got bigger, my child, I comprehended yet a great deal more than this, and comprehended, and grew intelligent ; and I believe on the Son also, on the beloved Son, who loved us and revealed love to us ; and for His reward, as always happens, was crucified by the people.

“ Now, when I am grown up, have read much, have travelled much, my heart swells within me, and with my whole heart I believe on the Holy Ghost. The greatest miracles were of His working, and still greater miracles doth He even now work ; He burst in sunder the oppressor’s stronghold, and He burst in sunder the bondsman’s yoke. He heals old death-wounds, and renews the old right ; all mankind are one race of noble equals before Him. He chases away the evening clouds and the dark cobwebs of the brain, which have spoilt love and joy for us, which day and night have lowered on us.”

## THE SPIRIT AND THE INTELLECT

“He will guide you into all truth.”—ST. JOHN XVI. 13.

WE have yet to consider the significance for the intellect of the change from the days of Christ's flesh to the days of the Spirit. We have already seen how the days of the Spirit led men to interpret their spiritual experience in terms of the great doctrine of the Trinity. But that is only one instance of the general guidance into truth which is here promised.

This promise demands close reflection, for the superficial understanding of it is dangerous. There is in some quarters a tendency towards the idea that this is some miraculous method of gaining knowledge apart from the ordinary ways in which knowledge is acquired—an idea which has led to disastrous results both of intellectual indolence and spiritual arrogance. Under its supposed sanction, some whose duty it was to be students following the ordinary painstaking methods of study and research, have imagined themselves capable of pronouncing opinions upon matters which they had not studied, mistaking the crude and mistaken ideas of their

undisciplined minds for revelations. Even practical business men have neglected the ordinary rules and methods of business, to follow an independent guidance which has led to disastrous consequences. Such attempts to leap for the top of the ladder are really the result not of spiritual illumination but of intellectual indolence. There are no short cuts to knowledge, and this is as true of religious knowledge as it is of scientific, or any other department of the search for truth. Moreover, those who in this way seek for knowledge by indolent magic instead of by honest work, cut off from the humbling discipline of the search, are apt to grow vain of their supposed wisdom, and arrogantly assume a spiritual superiority to others who are content to follow the more patient and honest way. It is as dishonest to seek interest upon fictitious capital in spiritual things as it is in the stock exchange, and such spiritual arrogance is akin to the pride of the *nouveau riche* speculator.

It is not new facts of knowledge, gained without expenditure of study, that are here promised, but something far nobler and more valuable. The days of the Spirit are days in which all a man's powers of thought and imagination are quickened from within. So real is this vital agency which Christ promised, that its effects may be seen in even secular regions. The Old Testament is full of the record of men upon whom the Spirit of the Lord

came mightily, producing the best results in music, in building, in decoration, and along the whole line of secular activities. The range of the Spirit's operation is as wide as the interests and concerns of human life. The student will be a better student, the business man more capable, if they live in the Spirit. Even in those secular ways, no one is so trying as the mere matter-of-fact person, and no one reaches truth less than he. The man to whom a flower is merely a botanical specimen, to be dissected and classified, will never be a botanist of the highest order, for he has not the Spirit. The artist whose painting is but the following out of mechanical rules of drawing and of colour, will ever be but second rate; while those who gain the supreme places in art are ever the first to confess that their pictures leapt to expression in some moment of inspiration which they themselves did not understand. Such moments are revelations of the Holy Spirit, and that is why high art calls forth our reverence.

But those heightened powers of the spiritual life show themselves most of all in regard to Jesus Christ. It needs spiritual insight to understand Him, and it was spiritual insight alone which distinguished the disciples from the Pharisees. To some men still His words sound commonplace, and His story is unimpressive. Others find wayside sayings of His take on new meaning as life leads them forward into new situations. As they read

His words, floods of light stream upon the problems of life and upon the being and character of God. He Himself grows more wonderful to them, and His power and love master their passions and command their souls. They know Him not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

There is yet a further promise—"He will show you things to come". This does not mean the very poor and doubtful gift of foretelling, which would again reduce Christianity to magic and detach it from normal human experience. It is but an expansion of the former promise, which is not merely that we shall *know*, but that we shall be *guided into* truth. For truth is a living thing, not fixed and stationary but growing. Truth has a future as well as a present, and it develops from age to age. The growth of the Christian creed is proof of this. It did not come to the world full-formed, like the goddess from the waves of Cyprus. It expanded from form to form, each new dogmatic advance revealing new stretches of thought, and leading thinkers to understand the former doctrines more fully and to re-state them more accurately. The oldest truth can only be rightly seen in the light of the newest revelation. As time leads men into new fields of inquiry, and science discovers new methods of research, these new methods, applied to the old doctrines, bring them out into richer and more wonderful light.

And as the general progress of civilization lays emphasis upon new human conditions and needs, a like change of emphasis appears in our thoughts of God and of His ways with men. Thus it need not surprise us that the point of view in theology has changed and is changing. It is but the fulfilment of the promise of Christ that the Spirit, in guiding men into all truth, would show them things to come.

Further, there is a counterpart in the experience of each individual to the general development of truth in the history of thought. Within the compass of each separate life, the truth ought to expand. At first we see it as it bears on our experience and knowledge up to that time. But as experience grows wider, we see it in new bearings and relations, and gradually realize what it must involve when more completely understood and more widely applied. This, however, is true only of the spiritual man. The world of the Spirit is a world not of inert convictions but of intense vitality and movement, where every belief is a living thing, expanding and growing richer continually under the guidance of the Spirit.

## THE SPIRIT AND THE CONSCIENCE

“He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”—ST. JOHN XVII. 8-11.

IN these words we have a more detailed description of the days of the Spirit—a closer view of what that remarkable change from material to spiritual life involves for the conscience, as we have already seen its value for the intellect.

Its significance for the conscience is implied in the promise that the Spirit will “convict” the world. The word does not denote the convincing of the intellect, but rather the striking home upon the moral sense, the strengthening and refining of all the moral faculties and powers. In its light the three great ethical facts of sin, righteousness, and judgment, take on a new meaning.

1. *Sin*.—There is nothing more liable to be inadequately conceived than sin. We think of it in general as a way of behaviour which is contrary to public rights or to private interests or tastes, and the outwardness of our view leads to shallowness. Yet there are times when no known wrong has been done, and when conscience nevertheless “trembles

like a guilty thing surprised". Such obstinate misgivings cannot be suppressed without doing violence to our moral nature, nor can they be made to vanish by any scientific attempts to explain them away. They prepare us for the finer sensibility of conscience, the more exacting tests and the higher standards of the days of the Spirit, and they enable us to understand these strange words "sin, because they believe not on me".

It is a common fallacy to consider the regions of belief and morals separate, in "water-tight compartments". It is, indeed, important to guard the neutrality of intellect against the unjust suspicions and accusations which have sometimes been entertained. It must be emphatically maintained that in many cases a man's belief or unbelief cannot be traced to his moral soundness or default. Yet that is but half the truth. Behind our present condition of belief or unbelief lies the history of an infinite number of small choices of right or wrong. Those habitual and insignificant-looking choices induce the moods which overshadow the life, and fix the general attitude of the soul. When a man's mind is habitually turned away from Christ, unimpressed by Him or even actively repelled, that fact may indeed be discussed as a purely intellectual phenomenon. But it is more than that. The Spirit discovers in it a whole world of sin, manifest in previous habits of choice with which it has apparently no connexion.



2. *Righteousness*—our thought of which is also inadequate, for want of vital interest. We may not indeed be willing to confess to the cynical view that righteousness is actually a cross; but we must confess that we have to try hard to be good, and that we have sometimes found it a dull business, which we have had to strengthen by reminding ourselves that after all it pays.

The spiritual view of righteousness is that it “goes to the Father”. Christ had been for the disciples the complete embodiment of righteousness, and this is His greatest saying about it. He tells them that men will receive a new conviction of it altogether when He goes to the Father. It was by thus bringing righteousness into connexion with the Father that he transformed it. One expects to see the angels ascending and descending between heaven and earth upon the Son of man. And here is this great angel of righteousness, seen now in its heavenly aspect.

It is when we realize that righteousness goes to the Father that we find it has become convincing. In ordinary views of it, we see it going to the law, to a man’s good name, to success in life; but when that is all, we can still hold it in suspense. But now it has become indisputable, because it consists no longer in obeying a law but in doing the will of one who loves us. There is no disputing that claim. It enlists not merely the delight of all healthy

minds in cleanness, but the surrender of the will to love. And because it is God's will to which we surrender, there is revealed also the godlikeness of goodness. The tenderness of God's compassion, the strength and gentleness of the Father's heart, all help us to realize the fascination of righteousness. It is seen to be real, dependent on no questions of ethical casuistry, but real as the love which requires it. It is human, for the character of God is manifestly the heritage of His sons. It is attainable, and we, too, must arise and go to the Father, whither our righteousness has already gone. In this high light we see as it were our aspirations and ideals finding their way to the Father, and ourselves following them in growing obedience. All this changed aspect of the moral world comes to us when our righteousness no longer stays on earth but goes to the Father.

3. *Judgment*—and the reference is not so much to a future Judgment Day as to our moral judgments in the present life. Before the days of the Spirit, these judgments are inaccurate because they are confused by the cross-lights of the world. Conscience gives one set of judgments, but the estimates of the world are different, and we are tempted to accept these as the more tolerant and comfortable. Of course there are certain glaring matters which are so obvious that all are perforce agreed about them. But there are innumerable questions whose

answer is by no means clear, where right or wrong must be settled by finer instincts. Apart from the Spirit, it must be confessed that while both conscience and the world are plausible, yet on the whole the world's less stringent fashion of judging may often seem to be the more reasonable of the two.

But in the days of the Spirit, the prince of this world is judged. It is not merely that in this or that particular we are led to choose the verdict of conscience against the world. But a comprehensive judgment is passed against the worth of the world's judgment. It has seemed authoritative, and it has required courage to question it. Many a time it has been imperious enough to silence the quieter voice of conscience. But now those who have caught sight of the spiritual world are set free from their bondage to this world's opinion. All things have fallen into proportion, and they see the relative values of the judgments. The apparent lordliness of this world is seen to be a mere delusion and a sham. No good can come of trusting the verdict of this world which passeth away against the verdict of the Spirit which abideth for ever. In Christian's invective against Apollyon, before the fight in the valley, we have a classical example of the judgment of the prince of this world. And we feel how the true royalty is transferred from the swaggering spirit of this world to the quiet might of those assurances which are the work of the Spirit.

## THE UNKNOWN CHRIST

(*St. John the Baptist*)

“There standeth one among you whom ye know not.”—

ST. JOHN I. 26.

FROM every point of view this scene is peculiarly interesting and graphic. The valley of Jordan, with its successive shelf-like ledges of plateau that mark the various levels of the flood, and its pride of bushy trees and lush water-side grass that crawls winding like a green snake along the colourless barrenness of the wide valley, is itself a unique piece of natural scenery. The crowds that then filled it, drawn from every rank and from every district of Palestine, lent their added human interest. Not often, even in that land of crowded open-air spectacles, could such a cosmopolitan and representative multitude be seen. The man at the river-side was still more unique—a man who from childhood had lived apart, taking his views of men and things direct, and not through any of the ordinary channels of knowledge. His mind was like his shaggy garment and his food—unusual, simple, and primitive. His thoughts passed through

no medium of public opinion that would tone them down to words conventionally correct. They went forth from him as they came to him, immediate and unsoftened by any thought of politeness or propriety. To complete the strangeness of the scene, we have him confronted by those who represented the extreme opposite of such simplicity, priests and Levites sent by the Jews from Jerusalem. These were men who had entirely lost their identity, merging themselves in the conventions of a ludicrously overdone religious system. Slaves of ritual and formulae, their minds had neither power of vision nor of judgment. Outside the routine of words, they were lost at once. It was the confronting of a child of nature with men of the schools.

They were out after names, and they had come to the very home of realities. Jerusalem was uneasy because it could not get a name for John. All nameless things, all that was original, unconventional, unusual, made Jerusalem uneasy. The strain of political crisis set men's nerves on edge, and brought to an acute point those instincts of the pedagogue which feared and hated the undefined. So they came with their question, "Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. Art thou the Christ, or Elias, or that prophet, and if thou art none of these, then who?" It was such questioning that drew from Jesus the ironical sayings as to what they went out for to see—

Was it a reed shaken with the wind, or a man clothed in soft clothing? As a matter of fact, the one list of categories was as accurate as the other for John the Baptist. He fitted no niche in their gallery, no shelf in their museum. All that they wanted from him was an answer, that they might put the right name on him and dismiss him from their minds.

But that was not at all what John wanted. It mattered nothing to him what men called him, but it mattered everything what they did with his message. So he answers, "I am a voice crying," "I baptize with water". It was as if he had said, "This is the wilderness, and I refuse to come back from it to the schools. This is the place of realities, not of fictions. I am just what you hear and see. Let your minds play directly upon these obvious facts. Take me for what I am, and do justice to the facts as you find them."

It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of that reply, with its demand to let his "work speak for itself without the prejudice of a name". There are always such men of theory who look upon all departments of the world as a museum for them to catalogue. Their whole interest in any phenomenon is to get it properly designated, labelled, and pigeon-holed. One of Robert Browning's characteristic phrases is "knows and names," but these men name without really knowing, and the name

becomes the enemy of knowledge. Classification is a valuable help to knowledge, but it is often used as a substitute for knowledge. Then it becomes a mere thought-saving apparatus, a device for stifling thought. For life is greater than many pigeon-holes, and a soul than definitions. The first secret of true knowledge is to take men and things as they are, without a theory, and to let them reveal themselves. There is less need either for names or theories than for an open and loving eye in the search for truth. Everything, even the meanest and most common, has hidden depths of significance, which are best explored while it remains uncatalogued.

Yet John is not content with this keen-edged truth. His thoughts and imagination were full of one face he had seen in that sea of faces, and he goes on to say, "There standeth one among you whom ye know not—one who will baffle your classifying even more completely than I—one whom it will do you little good to catalogue, but to know whom is eternal life." And as they looked round in curiosity it may well be that the eyes of some of them fell upon the Carpenter of Nazareth, classed Him at once as a village tradesman, and continued their search.

The story of Jesus Christ is a familiar story, how He was born, lived, taught, died, was buried, and rose from the dead. Some believe it, and some

sigh, saying that it is a great mystery. Doubts invade their faith. Questions of pre-existence, virgin-birth, miracles, or resurrection hinder them from pronouncing upon it, though they know it all so well. But both believers and unbelievers alike often mistake knowing for defining, and so repeat the old error of the priests and Levites. The mere achievement of forming a theory and finding a name for Him will bring a man no nearer heaven than the arranging of specimens in a case. Christ is neither imprisoned in history nor in heaven, neither in the Bible nor in the Church. Faith in Christ is not the passing of an examination in theological terms and doctrines: it is a magnificent realization of the eternal love as it is in Him who interprets life and reveals the Father. Christ is one that standeth *among you*—the Eternal Contemporary who has never left mankind. The questions about Him can wait and find answer tomorrow; but our souls may find themselves and their God through Him to-day.

Many speak of Him, and put this name or that upon Him, who do not know Him at all. But here and there a soul discovers Him and is amazed. He is so much more human than all that has been said about Him—so much more human and so much more divine. That tremendous personality is at work in our own lives and in the lives of all about us—at work, and working for the same ends as of



old. The marriage-feast of Cana is not ended. In a thousand homes He is turning the water of life and love and work into wine to-day. The temptations on the mountain are still in progress, and the Son of Man, in a thousand struggling souls, is winning His victory over self-indulgence and pride and the glory of the world which the devil offers. The woman taken in adultery is still hearing the incredible words: "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more". The Pharisee in the Temple is still being rejected in favour of the sin-smitten publican. The cross is still on Calvary, and men are learning there the love and sacrifice through which God wins the victory over the sin of the world.

These things are happening. They are the only true interpretation of human life as we find it within ourselves and in our fellow-men. Every stroke of conscience, every desire of better life, every generous impulse, every victory over temptation, every sudden glory when the spirit is set free and leaps to eternal love, every touch of compassion, when we feel the sin and sorrow of our fellow-man upon our own heart, and pitying him would fain save him—there is Christ Jesus, manifest to the eyes of those that will see. To understand these things we have to turn to Him. To do them justice we have to interpret them in terms of His life and words.

It is said that in the French Revolution the

maddened crowd was rushing through the corridors of the Tuileries, bent on the murder of the Queen. A young girl was in the front of that wild rush, and when they reached the locked door of the royal apartment she was driven against it with the full force of the mass of impetuous humanity behind her. The door gave way, and she was flung bleeding and unconscious forward upon the floor. When the girl came to herself the beautiful, compassionate face of Marie Antoinette was bending over her, the womanly arm of the Queen supporting her, while with her handkerchief she sought to stanch the bleeding of the wound. The girl's eyes opened, and filled with tears. Then breaking into a passion of weeping she cried : " Oh, I never dreamed she was like this ". So poor mortals, fleeing from their own salvation, think this and that of Christ, until the hour comes when they meet His eyes, bending over them in undreamed of tenderness to heal their wound. Ah, until that hour comes, there is none of us that has ever dreamed He was like that.

## THE UNKNOWN NEIGHBOUR

“There standeth one among you whom ye know not.”—

ST. JOHN I. 26.

THE vicious practice of mistaking classification for knowledge extends far beyond the Jews' misapprehension of John and Jesus. It vitiates our whole judgment of our fellows. As those priests and Levites looked around the crowd that had gathered beside the Jordan, they were doubtless busy classifying the people into groups according to the localities from which they came and the trades they followed. It never struck them that each one of these ordinary human beings had a significance of his own, deep as hell and high as heaven. The truest and the rarest kind of knowledge is that which knows familiar things or people. There is no mystery so wonderful as that which is to be found nearest home.

One hears sometimes the more or less cynical boast that such a man “knows men,” by which nothing better is intended than that the critic has some unkindly generalizations regarding human weaknesses and foibles, which he has chosen for his

guidance and protection. This is but an extreme form of the error which is here exposed. Divide society into groups, acquire a stock of ready-made judgments upon each of these groups *en masse*, and trouble yourself no more about your fellows. Rich and poor, sick and well, young and old, educated and ignorant, refined and vulgar, clever and stupid—chase the individual into his group, and your responsibility in judging him is ended : as if all labourers or shopkeepers or lords were identical with the others of their class. It is in this way, by reason of the barricades natural and artificial which we have thrown up around classes, that all those huge provincialisms arise which separate man from man. There is the national provincialism, which has its designation for all men of each nation, and keeps wars and suspicions and alienations still among us. There is the social provincialism, which takes for its unit such classes as employers and employed, and is responsible for labour warfare and class hatred. There is the Church provincialism, which asks only whether a man is a Roman Catholic, a Unitarian, or a member of this or that one of the innumerable sects of Protestantism, and having branded him with a name proceeds to praise or to condemn him. It is incredible until one comes to think of it how deep rooted is our habit of accepting such class-names as rigid and final standards of judgment, to be taken as settling

our estimate of our fellow-men and our attitude towards them.

The whole secret of social science, as of all professional efficiency, is to end this dangerous fallacy. It is said that a young lady, annoyed by the rudeness of some poorly dressed girls who were passing her, exclaimed: "Such creatures ought to be got rid of," and was answered by her friend, "Do you know that that is just what they are saying about you?" For indeed "one half of the world does not know how the other half lives," and all our harsh judgments are the result of ignorance. If we really knew them—how they live, how they weep and laugh—we would love them all. And the great secret is to be able to put ourselves in their places, to live their lives and think their thoughts as if we were they. If we could take our fellows out of their pigeon-holes and let them reveal themselves simply as they are, if we could look one another in the face as man to man, we would soon solve the social problem.

There is no end to the range of practical applications of this principle. To know men is to know their *hearts*, and not their manners. Those are but few who are masters of the difficult art of self-expression, and most men mean a better thing than they know how to say. It is to know their *temptations*, and not merely their sins. No judgments are so cheap as those we pass upon each other's trans-

gressions. The real standard for the guilt of a sin is the distance that had to be crossed to reach it. One, removed by circumstances or by taste so far from it that to commit it he would have to make a supreme and painful effort, can be no judge of another who has but to take one false step to fall into its abyss. It is one thing to commit a crime to which one has no inducement, and which is out of the whole region of one's desires. It is another thing to fall into it upon the hundredth temptation, when for long days one has kept off ninety and nine temptations that were tearing the flesh and throwing their glamour over the spirit, until at last the wearied will loses grasp of resolution, and the thing is done.

What's done we partly may compute,  
But know not what's resisted.

To know men is to know their *struggles and desires*, and not merely their achievements. They may be making poor work of it, and presenting to their critics a spectacle of almost unbroken failure and second-rate or third-rate result, and yet they may be worth far more than can be measured by results. God only knows the shame and discouragement in their hearts because of those failures that the world judges so lightly. He measures them not by what they have done or are yet doing, but by what they are longing for and trying. He "callesh things that are not as though they were,"

and sees and counts the secret effort and ideal, so long as men are honestly striving to realize it.

All instincts immature,  
All purposes unsure,  
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount . . .  
All I could never be,  
All men ignored in me,  
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

And indeed such hidden purposes and desires may one day surprise the world with their actual achievement. It is never safe to despise one of these little ones. They may be waiting for their hour, in which they will humiliate those who have discounted them. In all our knowledge of men it is wise to allow wide margins for slumbering powers, and to seek to discover such if we may.

To know men is to know their *worth*, and not merely their defects. In every life there is both good and evil, and we are all vexing and irritating each other in more or less unconscious ways. Yet, thank God, we are all helping on each other's lives also, and the general life of man is forwarded not by immaculate people, but by very faulty ones, who yet have the qualities of their defects. Those are wise who train their minds to appreciation rather than to censure, who can discount annoyances that they may discover genuine worth of character. One of the commonest kinds of tragedy in life is that of those who, while

their friends are with them, see only the disagreeable traits, and hear only the jarring discords. When the friends are gone they discover too late how great a gap they have been filling, and how many quiet services they have been rendering.

So far we have been finding how much it means when we say we know each other. It means that we have acquired that finest art of appreciating the unadvertised excellences, the silent courage of unvictorious struggles, the hidden beauties that lurk beneath the dust of the wayside or the dead leaves of the wood. All this means that we have learned the secret of the Lord who looketh not on the outward appearance but on the heart.

But there is a deeper secret yet—the secret of Jesus Christ. The usual standard by which men judge one another is the essentially selfish one of how much the man is worth to his critic. How much can I learn from him or receive from him? How much can he give me of “love, amusement, sympathy?” Judged by that standard we shall all find many apparently worthless people around us. But if we would reverse the standard, and ask what is their need of us instead of what is their value to us, we should find ourselves in a new world. Instead of seeking to exploit the wealth of the natures about us, we might explore their poverty in the hope of enriching it. That is the authentic note of Christ—the instinct of the saviour. And for the



saviour there can be no uninteresting people anywhere. For him, the most impoverished lives are indeed the most interesting; and the less there is to receive, the more chance there is for giving.

Those who would really know men, and taste the full wonder of the human world about them, must leave off complaining that no one understands them, or helps them, or cares for them. We are not here to be understood but to understand; not to receive but to give. Those are twice blessed who know and practise that great rule of life. For to them there can be no dull moment amid a world so full of need; and as they walk to and fro to understand and bless their fellows, they shall have the companionship of Jesus Christ.

## THE UNKNOWN SELF

“There standeth one among you whom ye know not.”—

ST. JOHN I. 26.

THE distinction between classification and knowledge tempts us to go one step farther, and surely every man in earnest about his deeper life will feel that this step (whether the priests and Levites took it or not) is not only justifiable but necessary. The mystery of human life reaches its depth, not in the lives of others, but in our own; and the one among us whom we know least of all is just ourself. “In one sense of the word it is of course necessary, as the Greek oracle said, to know oneself. That is the first achievement of knowledge. But to recognize that the soul of a man is unknowable, is the ultimate achievement of wisdom. The final mystery is oneself.” These words of Oliver Wendell Holmes are true and weighty. Yet there are recesses of that buried life of ours which we may explore. We may not know the deep mystery of our being, but we all may come to know ourselves far better than we do.

We think we know ourselves well, and there is  
(174)

not one of us but has catalogued himself more or less to his own satisfaction. Yet these judgments never quite satisfy us. Doubts invade the securest and most self-complacent at times, as to how we look from without, and we are curious "to see ourselves as others see us". J. B. Gough, himself the prince of mimics, used to say that he would go a hundred miles to see any one imitating him. And at times a deeper doubt invades our security. Not only would we correct by the judgments of others our estimate of our own worth and place among men, but we wonder what we *really* are, and would measure ourselves by greater and more eternal standards. "I go to find my soul."

When a man goes out on this adventure, conscience walks for guide by his bridle rein. Much of his piety turns out to be, like that of William Law's *Poenitens* on his death-bed, "imaginary piety". He sees how shallow and self-indulgent many of his virtues have been, and how many motives of mere prudence or of actual selfishness lay unseen behind fair deeds. He sees a multitude of sins where formerly none were visible at all. For those sins were guarded with excuses, and he regarded them in the light of their history. He knew how they began, what circumstances hemmed them in until they seemed inevitable, how subtly they blended with innocent and even noble aspirations. To him they are but habits and peculiarities,

or at the worst weaknesses or unfortunate necessities of the situation. To know yourself is to strip from your sins their coverings of excuse and palliation, and to know them for what they are. Such knowledge is never flattering. It leads a man among strange companions, until he cannot look upon a drunkard or a thief without the sinister conviction that they are remarkably like himself; for the same self-indulgence and the same covetousness and disregard of the rights of others, are actually in him though they have not come out into such broad expression. We are all worse than we think.

Yet that is not the only truth. If that lurid picture were man's true self, and that were the last word God had to say to life, then we might throw up the attempt altogether. But things are not so bad as that, and there need be no such word as despair for any man. *We are all better than we think.*

That is a bold word, and yet it is literally true, and true for every man. Discouraged people, downcast after many failures, are tempted to discount themselves and say that they are mere nobodies and it is no use for them to try. The late Dr. Joseph Parker, speaking on this subject, answered such a complaint with the shout that "God has not time to make nobodies". And in very truth we are all bigger than that; we all do count for something. "Trust thyself:" says Emerson, "every heart vibrates to that iron string". The

downcast ones hear such a word with amazement, having learned to distrust themselves by bitter experience.

They need to be reminded that our manhood is but in the making, and that we are all good for making men of. As the caterpillar is to the butterfly, such is our actual self to the self we may become. We have to learn to live and think on the platform of the ideal; to repudiate ourselves as we are and lay hold on a nobler manhood which is our true self. We have to say every day to ourselves, "Get thee behind me," and to keep our eyes steadily fixed on that which we would fain be. In the great words of Walt Whitman:—

You broken resolutions, you racking angers, you short-lived  
ennuis,

Ah, think not you shall finally triumph, my real self has yet to  
come forth.

It shall march forth over-mastering, till all lie beneath me,  
It shall stand up, the soldier of unquestioned victory.

Thus to know oneself is to know something at least of one's possibilities, and to believe that they are real possibilities and not fictions.

This holds true for every detail of character. Some will admit it in a general way, but will always make exceptions in regard to those points on which they feel themselves peculiarly weak. He who is *lazy*, either by disposition or by habit, looks on with wonder at the amount of work his neigh-

bour manages to get through ; for himself, he simply has no time for it. As a matter of fact he has exactly as much time as the other has, but he has no idea of the amount of diligence he is capable of, nor of how elastic time is, and how it yields to determination. The *weak* man envies the strong, and imagines that strength lies in nerve and muscle. As a matter of fact it lies mostly in making up one's mind and keeping it made up : and weakness in every case has an element in it of self-indulgence which is wholly in our power to check or to encourage. The besetting sin of another man is *lust*, and to him the innocence of the pure in heart seems inhuman and impossible. He does not know how purity is won, nor how it is maintained. The control of imagination and desire, the honour of the spirit, are things which any man may learn and keep unstained, if he will but be resolute and self-denying enough to do it. Another man is *gloomy*, and his hard lot has embittered him. Cheerful people provoke him, and he dismisses their example from his conscience on the ground that they are naturally light-hearted, and presumably shallow. The truth is that a bright spirit is the reward of self-discipline. The misanthrope has no idea how many smiles are at his command, nor how easily he might escape from gloom if he would think of others and forget himself. Another is *impulsive* but lacking in constancy. Quick tempers

flash in him, and undo his resolutions and beginnings. Yet he has never realized that it needs not to be so. He, too, can be patient and persevere. He always yields and changes before the end of his powers of endurance have come. He might have held on a little longer. Some of the most calm and evenly balanced men used to be irritable and uncertain, some of the most dogged used to be volatile. When we are tempted to say that things have gone over us, and to let go, it is well to remember this, and to refuse the tempter.

So far we have dealt with character in general, especially as it meets us in our weakest point. But there is also our strongest point—some line of special power and capacity which we are born to find and to work out. Every one has such a strong point, though not every one discovers what it is; and most men have a very strong point indeed, so much their own that if they find it it will amount at least to talent, and possibly even to genius. Let the poorest of spirits be but “anointed by the occasion,” let him fully find his life’s opportunity, and he will be suddenly transformed. Those who formerly discounted him will find to their astonishment that it is now no laughing matter to oppose him, for a man who has thus discovered his strength is ever “a stark man to his enemies”. This is a truth especially for those who have failed in this or that line. Such failure should be regarded

as a guide, not an eviction. It is a challenge and not a doom. Sometimes it may mean that you are called to make a new and more strenuous effort at the same ideal: sometimes it may point to some other venture. There is a line which offers you your chance of greatness and victory, whether it be the one along which your first attempt was made or some other. What you need is to believe in yourself. Whenever you are tempted to lament a natural defect, or the limitations of circumstances, or the shame of failure, say to your soul that you do not yet know yourself. You have not yet discovered your own powers of resistance, or of strength, or of tenderness. Go out again to find your soul, and go as a man going to claim an inheritance. For indeed, like Parsifal, you are "heir to this glories you ride forth to seek".

And there is more than that. On the Castle Rock in Edinburgh four bugles blow the last post over the darkening city every night. One 31st of March long ago, it is said that a bugler was murdered there. The legend tells that on every 31st of March the listeners in streets and homes hear the ghostly sound of a fifth bugler, calling as of old. So over our lives sound many bugles, calling us to courage and manhood. But beyond these, at times, the spirit hears a fifth bugle—the call of Christ Himself from the ramparts, "Because I live, ye shall live also".



## DUTY AND PLEASURE

“Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?”—2 KINGS v. 12.

FEW figures in the Old Testament impress us with a more living and human interest than that of Naaman the Syrian. He appears as one of the first gentlemen of Damascus, and Damascus was the Paris of the ancient East. It was famous as the chief centre of the Aramaean caravan traffic, and consequently the commercial capital of a vast region of land. It was famous also for its beauty, and was well named “the Pearl,” lying like a white star caught and glad to stay in the luxuriant wealth of green that everywhere surrounds it—an exquisite oasis rescued by the Abana from the edge of the tawny desert. From age to age it lies there, sphinx-like in its gaze across the desert, unheeding of the flight of time or the passing of the generations, sufficient to itself and absorbed wholly in its own wonderful life. Add to all this the fact that for the time being it was rejoicing in a victory over its Western rival Israel, and you have the very place where a man might be content with the earth, and, unlike Mohammed, wish for no other Paradise.

At the forefront of all this stands Naaman, wealthy, famous, victorious ; popular alike with his king and with his servants, beloved and happy in his home. Yet upon him has come the terrific doom of leprosy, running its iron wedge deep into the golden dream. Suddenly the spell is broken, and we seem to hear the sickening of the music, and to see the fountains dying and the sunshine fading out. From an enchantment life has become a delirium. Everything has lost its reality, and the phantom world about him is full of mockery.

Then he remembers a land famous for realities. It has no such splendour of palaces and fountains, no such gorgeous luxuriance of Nature, no such commercial greatness nor military glory. Yet they seem to be in touch with deeper facts there, and to have penetrated further into the heart of things. It is not a land to trouble with while all is well ; but now, what can a man do ?

So he sets off on the long journey. The swift chariot-drives through that glorious air would have been things to remember, were a man well enough to delight in them. The ravines of Hauran and its wide corn-fields bring him to the long Samaritan valleys, and to the palace of the king. But the king is pusillanimous, and the prophet haughty. He sees only a servant and receives directions to wash in their river. Then the leper is forgotten and the great official remembered. He has ex-

pected pomp and circumstance befitting his dignity, and his gorge rises at this inhospitable land and its unmannerly ways and its despised waters.

It was not the rivers that Naaman set in contrast, so much as the lands of which they were the symbols and indeed creators. Jordan, flinging its great arm round the whole East of Palestine, cuts it out from the desert. Abana, carefully distributed in many channels along its upper valley, is literally the one fact which makes Damascus possible. It is Syria as against Israel that Naaman praises. In fierce reaction the weary and disappointed man turns back to the streams that were his home and childhood. He remembers "those wonderful tropic nights, when the whole world lies in a silver dream, when the little wandering airs that touch your cheek like a caress are heavy with the scent of flowers, and your heart comes into your throat for the very beauty of life". His home and childhood—but the servant's words remind him that he has no home, no childhood any more. Abana and Pharpar are already flowing beside his grave.

In reality the rivers stood for types of a still wider and more eternal contrast than that between the lands. For the lands themselves were typical. The contrast is between the brilliant and alluring life of self-indulgence, and the life of duty and sacrifice and the solemn truths of religion. Put it at its worst, and set the witchery of the earth over

against the dullness of heaven ; the poignant beauty of life over against the chill of religion. There come times in every life when the choice wears just that aspect, and yet a man must choose. Which will you take as the key to your destiny, and treat as the reality for which the other must be sacrificed ?

Let us examine this rivalry for a little :—

1. *The Case for Damascus.* This has been completely stated in the beautiful words, “ Abana and Pharpar also rose in the hills of God”. Indeed all three rivers rise within a few miles of each other’s fountains, in the regions of Hermon and lower Antilibanus. Naaman may well have remembered this, and asked why the chance circumstance of a river’s flowing north or south should determine the healing power of its waters. In no respect was one river superior to the other. Jordan, where Naaman would cross it, was as clear and sweet as Abana ; and if Jordan never reached the sea, neither did the rivers of Damascus.

And as it was with the rivers, so also it was with the ways of life they typified. The springs of joy are ever near the fountain of tears. Gladness has no more necessary quarrel with conscience than sorrow has. The splendour of Damascus is ideally as divine a thing as the naked colourless land of Israel. In a word, it is all a question of temperaments and moods, and to some of these Abana is frankly more congenial than Jordan. The world is

very fair. The singers of its beauty are convincing—Shelley and Swinburne and Rossetti and the rest. Science and art, commerce and industry, work and pleasure—all these stand in their own right, pleading the brilliancy of life, its promise and its fulfilment of desire, as their own justification. These ideals are so intelligible, so presentable, so interesting, that, to confess the truth, when these are at their height, the religious alternative often appears utterly dreary. It lacks the *diablerie*, the subtle play and magic, of the world. The narrowness of the way of Christ, and the unreasonable bitterness of his cross, serve only as a foil to the delights of the rival way. Some attempt a compromise by some one of the many popular ways of blending Christianity with self-indulgent worldliness—ways which keep nearer the earth than Christ, and so retain something of earth's glamour. Some boldly confront the alternative and deliberately choose the world.

We all know what that challenge means—"Renounce the world". But is not the world good? Have not the secular and the sacred common springs in the heart of God? Surely, according to temperament, men may decide for themselves, and choose the way that each finds most congenial. "Both the Greek and the Hebrew spirit reach the infinite, the Greek spirit by beauty, the Hebrew spirit by sublimity."

2. *The Answer of Israel.* Much of all this pleading may be granted. We believe in life and we love it. We know quite well that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights. BUT—*he was a leper.* This is not a question of general excellence and legitimacy, but a question of power to cleanse leprosy. When it comes to that, Abana is as useless as it is fair, and Jordan has the power to bring a man's flesh back like the flesh of a little child.

There are facts in life which have to be dealt with, grim facts which every man must face sooner or later. There is the terror as well as the beauty of the world. How does Abana deal with the tragedy of disease, and misery, and sin? The worship of Rimmon takes for its emblem the pomegranate, and understands well the luscious powers of nature while they last. But summer dies, and then comes the weeping for Adonis. There is an incurable sadness in nature and in all forms of nature-worship. It seems good for the days of sunshine and of health; but when bodies grow sick and hearts are broken and consciences on fire with remorse, it is futile and can but weep.

Goethe describes the ancients as feeling themselves at once and without further wanderings at ease within the limits of this beautiful world. Märklin says: "I would with all my heart be a heathen, for here I find truth, nature, greatness".

The answer is "the deep suppressed melancholy" of the Greeks, the "subtle inextinguishable sadness" which every reader of their literature knows. Heine, who knew and loved the beauty of the world so well, came to his mattress-grave at last; and he tells how he stretched out his hands to the Venus he had worshipped. But she could not help him: her arms were broken.

We are not taking back any word of what was said for the charm of the earth. It is a genuine approach to God, but it is irrelevant and ineffective here. We are not "forcing a narrow judgment on an angry or a laughing world": it is leprosy that is forcing it. Men must face the facts, and what this fact needs is a river of healing waters that can make a man clean.

It all comes back to this one question—What is it that you want from God? Is it but a few fresh mornings and evenings tender with beauty? Or is it the healing of your soul's disease and wound?

One thing I of the Lord desire,  
For all my way hath miry been;  
Be it by water or by fire,  
Lord, make me clean.

For that you must come back to the waters of Israel, the "fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness". Jesus Christ is the master of realities, and there is no point of tragedy at which He fails and leaves men weeping. He is no enemy of the

sunshine or the sweetness of life, but He is the victor over its terror. And for us there can be only one loyalty. Either we must throw in our lot with that which will inevitably fail us, or with Him who saves to the uttermost.



## OPINION AND KNOWLEDGE

“Behold I thought . . . behold now I know.”—2 KINGS  
v. 11, 15.

It is the story of a man who went out to seek for a magician and who found a God, exchanging thoughts for knowledge.

*Naaman's thoughts* are enumerated in verse 11. He had rehearsed the scene and planned out all its detail. A lordly set of thoughts they were, and from Naaman's standpoint entirely satisfactory and convincing. The one suspicious element is the completeness of the programme. It would seem as if it were not God but Naaman who was arranging this cure.

Behind these thoughts of his lay many things. First, his military training. He has the confidence and swaggering arrogance of the popular general of an oriental king. He has the soldier's precision in thinking out schemes of all kinds. His system is exact, detailed, consistent, thorough—only, it is all wrong. “Nothing sits worse on a fighting man than too much knowledge,” it has been said, “except perhaps a lively imagination.” In dealing with the

great facts of life and death we have to put away our habit of command and our delight in arrangement, and to accept an order of things which has been fixed without our being consulted.

Then there was the palace life of Damascus. In those dreaming oasis cities of the East, men's minds are drunk with sun and blind with barbaric splendour. Life is half a pageant and half a game, in which the magic of the desert mingles and over which its spell is cast. All these elements are here, and about the story of the jingling cavalcade and the costly presents there is the scent of sandal-wood and incense. There was, indeed, another side to Naaman. The affection of the slave-girl, and the friendly talk of the orderlies, show a kindly and humane personality behind the mask of pomp and circumstance. But, like many others, he puts away that frank human nature when dealing with religion, and the figure we see is stiff with the brocade of ceremony.

Also, there is the religion of Baal Rimmon, the worship of Nature and the Sun. This worship had not then reached its ideal forms, that gave rise to the dreams of spiritual light and purity which fascinated decadent Rome in later centuries. It was but a kind of sorcery, the most advanced and daring phase of earthliness masquerading as a religion. It was a religion with all the worship eaten out of it by commerce and pride and superstition. It had

no spiritual side at all—no faith, no love, no obedience—but only a glorified commercialism and the spectacular pride of life, in which an elaborately theatrical healing was to be paid for in so much coin.

Into the midst of thoughts that rose out of these things falls the leprosy. The world which Naaman's thoughts have constructed about him appears fantastically unreal then, but he will keep up appearances hardily. Whatever chilling loneliness may have invaded his soul in quiet hours, yet to the general he still is the *grand seigneur*, indignant that a gentleman like him should have to conform to the rough manners of the land of Israel. In spite of the leprosy, God is not in all his thoughts. He simply desires to utilize a local divinity, and enslave him for a price paid.

It was a very natural way of thinking. It was what he had been accustomed to, and what every one else about him thought. He was constructing God out of his education and the popular opinions, as most men have always done. It was very natural, but it nearly cost him his healing. The price of thoughts is easy to ignore, but it must be paid. Countless men debar themselves from all life's highest gifts and chances simply because they are so set in their own opinions that they refuse to change them, or even to consider a new point of view. No class of men is more pathetic than that

of those who tenaciously and proudly cling to ideas of their own, and cannot find healing for their souls. May not the price of such men's thoughts be too high?

*Naaman's knowledge* comes to him with a rush of new thoughts, supplanting the old. These, the thoughts of a man restored from a loathsome death to fresh and clean vitality, we may well imagine. But better than them all was a new knowledge. Indeed the old thoughts were not knowledge. Religious and secular alike, they played on the surface of things. But there had come one commanding certainty—There is a God. It was not merely a new and brilliant thought among the others. It was a grand certainty founded upon experience. Health quivered through every nerve, and rushed through every vein of his body, and the healed man knew the touch of God. It was experience, the experience of healing, that brought him knowledge. The curse of leprosy had not done this. It had only added other thoughts, more bitter but not more true, than the former ones. But God's healing had done it, for that is the convincing thing that can turn thoughts into knowledge.

There are still some whose religion is a mere set of opinions, promiscuously gathered, and others who can say, "*I know* whom I have believed". And, as a rule, it is not misery but healing grace that has wrought this change. The blind man of Jerusalem knew not this or that of the opinions that men

tossed to and fro about Jesus. But one thing he knew, "that whereas I was blind now I see". That is no opinion, but absolute knowledge given by experience. A man knows that God who has pitied his misery and healed his disease.

Let us turn from Naaman to ourselves, and see the same contrast between opinion and knowledge which he found so long ago.

*Our thoughts* are a strange and valuable field for study. A man's opinions rise for the most part unconsciously in him, built up out of his education, his prejudices, his stray reading, his intercourse with other men, and his sense of the spirit of the age. Some, displeased with the confusion of opinion within them, construct a system, which will serve for a more or less elaborate and consistent theory of life. Some very brilliant constructions of this sort will come to every reader's mind : for this is a time in which many clever men have felt called upon to announce to us their newly constructed religious systems. We are startled by the novelty of every page, by the interest and the ingenuity of it all. These men are evidently world-builders, creators of a new universe which is no doubt in many points a vast improvement on this one. Only—it is not so. Theirs is not the universe we have to live in and deal with. We may leave them alone and return to the consideration of our own opinions.

There are several sources of error which falsify the opinions of the ordinary man. (1) We do not know all the facts, and the inadequate basis of fact stultifies the whole. Our opinions are but patchwork theories of things, pieced together as it were out of fragments which we have overheard. (2) Self-will intrudes upon our thinking, and we come to believe what we have determined shall be so. (3) Desire, with its thousand earth-born longings and regrets, forms a heated and delusive atmosphere about the mind, in which things are not as they seem. (4) Most of us are tempted by consistency, and enjoy system-building for its own sake apart from truth. But "nothing falsifies history more than logic," and when the facts do not tally with our systems of things as they ought to do, we are apt to cry in our folly, So much the worse for the facts.

So we build up and dwell in that cloud-castle of opinions which we call our thoughts. It lasts until some specially powerful fact, like this of leprosy, comes against it. Then all our calculations are upset. Thought falls back in ruins before the impact of something it cannot explain, and further thinking "can only serve to measure the helplessness of thought". There is a great verse in Psalm cxix. 113, wrongly translated in our version, upon whose real meaning and mood we are prone to fall back in such an hour—"I hate thoughts".

*Our knowledge* is a very different matter. There is, or may be, such a thing as our knowledge. There is much that can be actually and certainly known in religion, and our minds are capable of receiving and resting in it. In connexion with the faith we hold, there are many opinions which may or may not be true, but it is not all like that. There are men and women, not differing in appearance from their fellows, who yet carry with them, about these familiar streets and houses, the indisputable knowledge of some of the most profound and far-reaching secrets of the universe. This knowledge is given by experience, and is "subject to no dispute". It is futile to seek to discover the secrets of the furthest heavens with your field-glass of opinions ; but what if some great star were to swim into sight, and discover itself to you? So many have found it to be. While they were speculating among the doctrines, and discussing the high-sounding questions that it is fashionable to ask regarding God and man, God Himself came to them in their hour of need, and they knew His coming and were saved. Before that memorable experience a thousand preconceived opinions flee away, and from the pride of thought men come to the humility of knowledge.

This is no disparagement of reason, no attack on reasoning and speculation. It is rather a defence of it, for the danger lies not in thinking, but in

mismanaging the work of thinking. It is a dangerous game, this play of opinions, and it may cost a man very dear. Had Naaman adequately and dispassionately thought out the situation, he would have arrived at precisely the same knowledge which experience taught him. But few men ever do thus adequately deal with thought. Their opinions rise, as we have seen, from a wrong basis and upon wrong principles.

But let a man deal honestly with God and life, laying his soul quite open to whatever power and love there be for him in God. Then, as the mighty hands reach down for you, draw you up out of deep waters, set you on a rock of firm conviction gained not by speculation but by experience—then you will *know*. Your opinions about God matter little—your thoughts about religion, your arranged programme, your predetermined claim. Much of all that will have to be discarded, all of it will have to be revised, and thought will more frequently discover God by its failure than by its success. But bring your leprosy to God, and let us see Him heal it. Bring your shame and not your greatness; your bewilderment and not your fashionable opinions; your confessed folly and not your paraded cleverness. Then need will find Him where self-sufficiency must always fail. One touch of healing—a manhood cleansed and wholesome in



heart and imagination—sin forgiven, morbidness gone, freshness and freedom and power returned! Behold you thought this and that and the other clever and ingenious thing. Behold now you know that your Redeemer liveth.

## THE CHARACTER OF GEHAZI

2 KINGS v. 15-27.

IN the group of stories which make up the Scripture narrative of Elisha there is much that is perplexing both to the historical and to the moral sense. But whatever conclusion we arrive at as to the admixture of historic and legendary in the story, one thing is certain. Through the mist of years there looms out upon us a live man and a set of typical and eternal human truths. No one ever invented Elisha. He stands clear in his own right, as indisputable and strongly marked a character as ever walked the earth. It will be well for us to listen to the story as it is told, that we may discover those permanent revelations of human life and character in which it is so rich.

This is a tale of three men, seen against a background of sweet women and children. The three represent two extremes and Naaman between them, a wonderfully interesting and suggestive man. To-day we shall consider especially the character of Gehazi, the extreme and almost unrelieved type

of the wicked man. But first let us look for a little at the opposite extreme, which throws him into so strong a light of contrast.

*Elisha.*—There are, indeed, two sides to this extraordinary figure. His lifelong kindness to all sons of the prophets, and the stories of the poor women of Zarepta and of Shunem, reveal a great tenderness beneath his shaggy simplicity. Yet his usual aspect is that of unrelenting sternness. Some of the tales show the harshness of a pitiless cruelty, and about many of the rest there broods an uncanny sense of occult and unkindly power.

In this story he appears in a peculiarly distant and formal aspect. He heals, but without so much as looking at the sick man. He stands utterly apart, and repulses all attempts at familiarity. He refuses the gifts of the grateful Naaman, and has no word of guidance for him in his spiritual perplexities. The whole narrative is in the most violent contrast with the wealth and tenderness of sympathy for human suffering in which Isaiah abounds, and in still stronger contrast with the way of Him who “Himself took our sicknesses”. It is Jordan and not Elisha that takes His sickness away from Naaman. Nothing could be less sympathetic or less kindly than this cold, immaculate, and patronizing deed. With Naaman, at least, “never dares the man put off the prophet”. Austere, faultless, and aloof, he plays his impersonal part in the

destinies of nations and the lives of men, white and cold as snow, a bloodless statue of righteousness.

And all this time a man is going to perdition at his side. True, he is a very inferior man, the poorest of poor characters perhaps—yet a man, and going swiftly to ruin. Gehazi is shrewd and useful, a fellow of ready wit, who can upon occasions show remarkable practical sense. He cannot have been all bad and always bad. He is evidently a rather commonplace type of sinner, who could understand his master's power and rough strength, but not any finer or more spiritual qualities. He is self-important and more or less vain, and beneath these surface characteristics there is a strain of covetousness, developing into a besetting sin.

And ever, at his side, there was this uncompromising whiteness, this unbending and unintelligible goodness. He was one of those who would have needed nursing into decent character. He had not good taste enough to see how bad the things were that he did. No doubt every man is responsible for himself to his Maker, and yet something might have been made of such a man by a little human sympathy. He was so weak, beside one so strong, and in part at least his ruin was Elisha's fault. To watch a commonplace man degenerate into a criminal and then to curse him, is hardly the whole of any righteous man's duty. The voluble abuse of verse 26 is all very well. But as we see the poor

creature shrinking under its lashes in fear and astonishment, we cannot but ask whether that was all that could have been done. Purity is good, but it is not enough. Purity should be pitiful as well as pure. Otherwise its very whiteness may drive a man beside it to his doom. There is a righteousness that saves, and the righteousness that saves is that which is mingled with compassion.

*Gehazi.*—This is that figure of unrelieved black which contrasts with every decent character in the whole tale. We know little of him, and it is easy to say too much. Yet this seems clear, that his is the tragedy of a man ruined by familiarity with sacred things.

The story puts in the forefront the crime of covetousness. There is an immense quantity of silver, and ten holiday suits, presumably such silken garments as are still seen flashing their many coloured brilliance in the streets of Damascus. If the prophet has no use for such things, his vain servant has. The refusal is incredible; all the oracles of the nations expected gifts. The man's commercial instincts are in despair at such unheard of waste of chances. He loses his head altogether, and pleads the coming of two poor students as a sudden necessity for two of those incongruous robes of silk, and silver to the value of some £400 sterling.

It was of course the most transparent sort of lie,

explainable only by the veriest infatuation of greed. With more forcible reason than the oriental's love of buried treasure, he hurries his spoil off to a strong and secret hiding place known as the Tower on the Hill. Lie after lie comes to cover his fault in the swift chase of retribution, until the abject soul of him is like a hunted thing, fleeing before that terrible spirit that has outwitted his cunning as Prospero outwits Caliban in the play. Then come the dreadful words of doom that turn him to a living sarcasm, the white leprosy covering the black falsehood of the heart : and he crawls back to that Tower to look upon his silk and his silver, and to gaze desperately down the tainted line of his posterity.

The obvious immediate lesson is concerning covetousness. There is a limit to the honourable possibilities of making money, and when that limit is crossed, wealth is but leprosy that goes on through the inheriting generations, until a man's children's children may cry for clean poverty again, rather than this plague.

Such was his besetting sin. But a careful reading of his whole record will show that it lay in a character otherwise of little worth. His loquacious vanity is everywhere evident. His self-importance gives the impression of a proprietary right in his famous master. His hardness and want of compassion render him something of the bully in stories like that of the Shunammite. Such poor

vices exhibit a low strain of character, in the depths of which his dominant vice of greed flows on and gathers volume. At the moment of this incident, the tragedy of degeneration is complete. Granting that his nature has never been one of any sensitiveness or refinement, yet it is evident that it has reached a quite phenomenal bluntness now. Even as a mere matter of politics, when the diplomatic relations of Syria and Israel hung on a hair-trigger as they did then, such an action was sheer madness. For so shrewd a man, nothing but the blindness of a master passion could explain so manifest a blunder. Still more striking is the spiritual dullness of perception. He has the honour of the prophet of the living God in his hands, but that is swept by the board. He has just seen the most wonderful thing in all the world, the dawn of faith in a human soul; but the only impression which that has left with him is the fancied vision of himself clad in coloured silk. Neither the sneers of Damascus at Elisha, nor the effect on Naaman's new-born faith, are remembered. These Damascenes had seen and wondered at a nobler man than they had known, a man uninfluenced by all that men most prize. This had dragged him down, and stolen from them their one ideal. Damascus made no such fine pretences, yet it would hardly stoop to meanness such as this; and, after all, honour is better than spirituality!

Such is the "devastating power of an idolatry" to quench one by one the lights of the soul. The degenerate darkened spirit of the passion-driven is infinitely dangerous. He has no pity on the souls of men, no loyalty to their good name. And so we see this victim of his own evil nature, become the blow-fly settling on one of the finest stories in literature ; the ape in the sanctuary, who

Swings by his irreverent tail  
All over the most holy place.

How, then, has this tragedy come to pass ? For evidently the last barriers are down, and there is no restraint of reverence or awe, but only the easy stride of self-sufficiency, swinging along among the most tremendous mysteries, and a base passion let loose without restraint.

Every one knows the answer of the man on the street, then and now. " Oh," he would laugh, " the nearer the church the farther from grace." And in that answer there is a very terrible and searching truth. All contact with holy things is inevitably of the nature of a crisis: familiarity with them is dangerous and exacting. It is the old danger of touching the ark of God ; it is the danger which Meredith sees still when he sings :—

Enter these enchanted woods, ye who dare.

When the first touch of awe is on the man, let him take a thorough dealing with his soul, for if he surrender it not then to God he will surely mortgage



it to the devil. All the supreme experiences of life have this quality of crisis. At every point where a man feels himself brought face to face with any high trust or responsibility, with any deep sorrow or affection, above all when Jesus Christ confronts a man, and he has to say Yea or Nay to the great question of his life, there has come for him the awful hour of fate. Let him pass through such a moment slightly, and the sequel is sure. He will become accustomed to the most awful and exalted thoughts, and then he will despise them. His will be but the scene-shifter's view of the play, looking down on the backs of the actors, and seeing nothing to thrill his spirit. Doubtless prophets are but men, and there are many things in the best of them to criticize. Doubtless all supreme experiences, of responsibility or sorrow or love, have some earthly elements in them easy to disparage. But the God whom the prophets serve and represent, however faultily, is a consuming fire.

We are face to face with a very terrible fact here. All ministers especially, and all who engage in work about religion and its ordinances, must surely stand in awe of the dangers of familiarity. Yet this is a danger also for all who habitually hear or read or think of holy things, or handle them in the Sacraments. If faith be shallow and love half-hearted, if the wonder of this approach be not day by day renewed, and all rival passions that war against the

soul suppressed, then will come the sure vengeance of sacred things profaned, and familiarity will sink into contempt. But familiarity needs not thus to sink. If the soul's surrender be complete, the wonder will not only last but will increase, and each day of sacred service will break with the freshness of a new revelation. For the treasures of faith are inexhaustible, and the returns of God to the faithful are fresh as the dew of each new morning.

## GOD'S COMPROMISE WITH MAN

“Two mules' burden of earth.”—2 KINGS v. 17.

THE figure of Naaman is set in strong contrast with those of Elisha and Gehazi. These two are extreme types of austerity and sordidness. They move within the narrow lines of their limitations, uncompromising and therefore simple. Naaman stands apart, courtier and man of the world, in touch and sympathy with the breadth of human life. His is a pleasant figure, like his name which means Pleasantness. He is such a representative gentleman of Damascus as we meet in the pages of Tancred. Everything we read of him is attractive, and characteristic of “a good fellow and a dashing officer”. The frank manner, the generous heart that is not without its touch of hot temper, the ready gratitude and the warm friendships, make a wholly lovable and delightful sketch of the man.

It is for such men that questions of casuistry and compromise arise, making life at once difficult and fascinating. It was a comparatively easy matter for Elisha and Gehazi to go on their ways—the one “spendidly unhindered,” the other vulgarly un-

scrupulous. But Naaman is by far the most interesting of the trio. It is true that our ideas of him are more or less conjectural. We know few of the facts and circumstances of his life. We have to divest ourselves of many ideas and associations before we can get back to where he stood. Yet it is evident that there are always some whose contact with Jehovah sends them to the desert, and others whom it sends back into the world, and that Naaman is in the latter class. Just because he returns to the world, we see him moving on a wider and more perplexing field. He finds himself "on the dangerous edge of things," where he has to face practical questions of far greater subtlety than those which confront such men as the other two. Even in the space of the short narrative before us we find what may be called a double compromise between God and man. In the present study we shall consider the first of these compromises, in the next the second.

The request for two mules' burden of earth may be considered as God's compromise with man. It arose out of an idolatrous superstition. Among the Semites it was the universal custom to regard each god as attached to, and limited by, the land where he was worshipped. Consequently the very earth and stones of that land were sufficient to draw the god to the prayer of a worshipper; and they were necessary, for only on some part of his own

land could he act. Other earth was looked after by other gods. Thus, among those tribes, not only did the saints, but the gods themselves "take pleasure in her stones," and "her very dust to them was dear".

It is easy to denounce this, as Matthew Henry does in his antithetic way—"He had spoken lightly of the waters of Israel, and now he overvalues the earth of Israel". Yet the story does not say that the request was refused, and we gather that it was conceded. It was a heathen superstition, and yet like other heathen superstitions it expressed a deep and abiding human instinct behind the error. In later times a Jewish synagogue was raised by Jews in Persia, all of whose stones and earth had been brought from Jerusalem. Soil from the Holy Land was brought in the Middle Ages for the Campo Santos of Italy: and it is a very pathetic picture that is presented by those old-fashioned ships carrying earth across the seas for the covering of the beloved dead.

The whole question of relics, and of such aids to devotion as the skull or the crucifix, is raised by this ancient practice. Some of these aids may become dangerous. They are liable to abuse, and may have to be discarded. Men may transfer their worship from their God to the sacred earth, or even to the mules that carried it, and so reverence may become idolatry of a very primitive type.

Yet this question runs far deeper than any dispute as to form and ceremony between Roman Catholic and Protestant worshippers. All alike feel that the great trial to faith and the supreme difficulty of worship, lie in the intangibility of the object of faith and worship. God and His spiritual life are so withdrawn and so elusive, that at times they seem remote from our common life and inaccessible. The woman of Samaria spoke for humanity when she asked her question as to where man ought to worship. The answer of Jesus forbade neither the mountain nor Jerusalem, but only insisted that worship must not be in ignorance—we must know what we worship. For Himself, He used both the mountain and the temple for His worship; and we may take it that for each intelligent worshipper that way is legitimate and best which makes worship easiest and most satisfying for him.

There is no escape from this question. Those churches and sects which are farthest removed from ritual in the ordinary sense of the word, illustrate it in their own way quite as clearly as the churches against which they protest. Such sects usually begin in some critical hour, when the faith has come into bondage of some sort, and the mules are labouring and heavy laden with their burdens of earth. Then the spirit of freedom comes upon men, and in some great testimony they break away

and worship apart from the old associations. Afterwards circumstances may change, and the testimony may become obsolete or unimportant, yet the sect lives on. Associations gather round the places where men have spent their childhood, and learned to worship; where their fathers have made history, and created great loyalties. Such a place becomes veritable *terra santa*, holy ground, to the reverent spirit, and it needs a very powerful conviction of duty necessitated by the new developments, to bring men so accustomed to worship to change or break away.

But the problem runs still deeper into the individual life, and raises the whole question of the blending of human elements with divine in religion. Nothing which involves such strong emotions as those produced by religion can fail to waken responsive notes from the varied and sensitive strings of our human hearts. Our earthly life, with its tender loves, and its poignant regrets and longings, is very dear to us. Inevitably elements of human affection, and countless old memories and dear associations, mingle with even our most spiritual hours of worship. There has, indeed, been a lamentable and persistent attempt in all the Christian centuries to divorce the two, and to treat God's love and human love as rivals. Thomas à Kempis plainly tells us, "Thou oughtest to be so dead to such affections of beloved friends,

that (so far as thou art concerned) thou wouldst choose to be without all human sympathy". And many a bitter story of meaningless and uncalled-for sacrifice has saddened the records of religious life. But the whole attempt to untwist the threads of human and divine is a huge mistake. "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Worship, stripped of all earthly affections, is not for us. It is our part to take life as we find it, and worship God by what help we best can. Surely the reverent worshipper with his crucifix is better than the superior person who has got rid of all such superstitions only to stand dumb before the shrine, with all power of worship dead in him. Still more surely it is better for every man to see God in the light of beloved human eyes, than to stand alone in a desolated world, trying to flog up into vitality his purely spiritual emotions.

We judge from the story that this concession was made to the Syrian worshipper. And still and for ever God does consent to meet men where they are, and to accept such worship as they can best bring. It is good for all of us that it is so, for none of all our ways of worship are in the least degree adequate to express either our souls or Him. None of our doctrines, none of our forms or organizations, are more than faulty compromises at the best, and yet God consents to reveal Himself to man through these.



The Sacraments are a standing proof of this. Water and bread and wine are in all truth far enough from being adequate expressions of regeneration and atonement. Yet Christ reveals these greatest truths through their humble means. Nay, the Incarnation itself is the grand concession made by the spirit to the flesh, in which God chose to reveal His own infinite love and grace in such a form that men might understand these while they saw and heard and gazed upon and handled the dear body of Christ.

Let us take all the help we can from our human life and love. Let us accept any guidance, however humble, that leads us to the Father. It may indeed be expedient in special circumstances that even a man's worship should deny itself some help and suffer some loss of vividness, when an aid to it would be a public danger or a stumbling-block to others. But except in such circumstances, God will not grudge a worshipper any means of grace, so long as he worships not that, but Him.

## MAN'S COMPROMISE WITH GOD

“The house of Rimmon.”—2 KINGS v. 18.

THE House of Rimmon presents a different and a more complex situation than the two mules' burden of earth. The phrase has become the very synonym for religious compromise, and prejudices the case from the outset. To judge the matter justly, it is necessary to get as clear an idea as possible of what this worship actually was.

The city of Damascus contains to-day but few very ancient ruins. It is in the life of the streets rather than in the stones of temples that it is the oldest city in the world. Its great Mosque covers a site which has seen an amazing succession of changes in worship. It rises upon the lower walls and gateways of the Christian Church of Theodosius. That Church in its turn rose upon the ruins of a Roman temple, of which only one façade now stands, grey and weather-beaten amid the newer building. In all probability that Roman temple rose upon the site of the far more ancient worship of the local Baal, the Rimmon of this text.

It may well be that these successive archi-

teatures are typical of the easy changes of faith in a city whose heart has always been commercial rather than religious. It is probable that even in ancient times only the ignorant would take seriously the stories of the gods, while the educated and cultured would be sceptical. In any case we know that the religion of the Semites was a religion not of creed but of ritual, and that to an extent which our Western minds find it all but impossible to realize. Ceremonial performance was the one essential feature; its meaning was of literally no importance whatever. Worshippers made no attempt to speculate as to why they did this or that, or as to what facts lay behind the performance.

If, however, we insist on pushing the inquiry back, and asking what general ideas lay behind the rites, we shall find in the main two sets of such ideas:—

1. *The World and Nature.*—Rimmon was one of the many Baals, and Baal in general was the apotheosis of the fructifying powers of nature. In later times the cult was connected with that of Adonis, the story of the year, the summer triumph and the winter death of the sun. The Baals were lords of the wind and weather, the rain and sunshine, the air and clouds, the thunder and storm. Especially was Baal the sun god, source of the abundance of light and heat, that led the seeds to ripeness in the fertile earth. The name Rimmon,

signifying the pomegranate, has the suggestion of all this in its luscious fullness, and is peculiarly appropriate for the divinity that presided over the sweet and rich life of Damascus. So this "prince of the power of the air" stood for nature and the life of the earth. The cult was not so much a worship, as an appreciation of the world in all its fullness. God, to the Damascus worshipper, was "the view"—He was anything a man liked.

2. *Nationality and patriotism.*—Rimmon was the particular Baal of Damascus, and the ritual had a large element of politics in it. Worship was not a matter of private faith any more than it was a matter of spiritual communion. It was essentially a civic and national act. The gods were representative members of the nation, and their worship was official and political in its significance, involving before all else loyalty to the throne and customs of the land.

Taking these two sets of ideas together, we are better able to understand Naaman's position. Here, in the house of Rimmon, was the world in two aspects. (1) The green earth, the joy of life, its sensuous beauty and fullness. (2) The national loyalty, the public office and service of a courtier. So the question that faced him was, whether he would retire from the world into asceticism and private life, or whether he would remain in the world and serve Jehovah. He no longer worshipped

the world, for he had looked beyond it and seen the face of God. But he still appreciated its charm, and he still enjoyed its labours. He chose the latter course. As to the detail of ritual, we can imagine him saying to himself that a God so great in healing would be great also in understanding, so that the act of compromise was in one way an act of faith.

Thus the story leads us up to the general question of compromise. Obviously there are all sorts of compromises, good and bad ; and the more complex society becomes the more frequently such problems arise. Three tests may be given, by which the legitimacy of compromise may be judged :—

1. *Playing two games*—the compromise which involves self-deception. The change from one religion to another has often been marked by a lingering faith in the older gods continuing to exist alongside the new faith. It is thus that some scholars explain the mouse of Apollo, the owl of Minerva, and other such relics. The new and more splendid company of divinities had supplanted the old totem worship of mice and owls : but after all there might have been something in that lowly worship, and it would be as well not to neglect it altogether. But here we have a different case. There is no lingering belief or suspicion of belief in Rimmon. Probably there had been little intelligent or confident faith to begin with, and now there was

none at all. The new God had swept clean away all remnants of the obsolete Baal.

Such compromise as this double devotion is sometimes seen, and it is always absolutely wrong. Some professing Christians are not quite certain in their hearts that their Christian faith is true, and they never let go their hold on Mammon though they adopt the faith of Christ. There is an unexpressed caution about such people, which assures them that they will be making the best of things in any case. It is the danger of Pascal's argument that faith will pay best in the end whether it prove true or false, and in mean souls this becomes the incentive to a double life. But God will have no such divided allegiance. His worshippers must let go all their second strings, and swing themselves boldly out on the great venture of faith. Let it be the finding of God or the loss of all things—there is no room for compromise.

2. *Pretence*—the compromise which is intended to deceive others. Naaman had settled that by his two mules' burden of earth. It would be impossible to conceal such an act, nor would his frank nature wish to leave anyone in doubt as to his religious position. The attendance at the House of Rimmon would deceive no one. All Damascus knew what God Naaman worshipped.

Obviously no compromise is tolerable which is adopted with a view to deceive men. There is in-

deed a limit to the amount of consideration which must be given to possible misunderstandings. If the construction which every fool or weakling may put upon our conduct is to be taken into consideration at every turn, then the fool and the weak brother have become tyrants over the lives of better men than themselves, a tyranny which no self-respecting man will endure. With much of our lives, our neighbours have no business whatsoever, and it need give us little concern if interfering outsiders misconstrue our actions. It is certainly never worth a compromise with honesty to save our reputation. Either let men misjudge you as they please, if the end to be gained is worth that cost ; or if you value their good opinion, earn it honestly by denying yourself what they will misunderstand.

3. *Deliberate Sacrifice of Right to Wrong.*—Men's attempt to deceive God. When a sin, acknowledged to be such, is yet allowed on some specious plea of doing evil that good may come ; when pleasure is taken at the cost of what seems but a slight wound to conscience, or gain at the cost of a slight sacrifice of principle ; we have come upon very dangerous ground. Life is far too complex for our meddling with its moralities, and neither any pleasure nor any gain is worth the risk of nature's subtle and surprising vengeance. Nothing more surely brings on degeneration than such tampering

with ethics and living deliberately below one's best lights. Those who do so come to have the very hall-mark of the unsatisfied and the ineffective upon them, and are rejected both by God and Satan. No ! we are not the captain of this ship : let us steer by the course that has been set.

To return to the story, Naaman does not appear to have fallen under the condemnation of any such unworthy compromises as these. On the contrary, he appears as a very memorable gentleman, taking a man's risks and responsibilities in a very difficult situation ; trying to do right, and on the whole succeeding. No one can think of him without recalling Tom Brown's judgment, "I can't stand that fellow Naaman, after what he'd seen and felt, going back and bowing himself down in the House of Rimmon. . . . I wonder Elisha took the trouble to heal him." Who does not honour the boy and thank God for him ? And yet the matter is not so easy as that, and when Tom comes to face a man's difficulties he will find that the short cut is not always the true solution, but may sometimes be only a refusal to face all the facts. There are illegitimate compromises as we have seen, but there are also wise and good ones, which may save conscience from growing pedantic, and lives which might have accomplished something from being wasted over trifles not worthy of them. They may save men also from the inordinate vanity of those



who imagine that to shout "No compromise" is to secure a monopoly of honesty and courage.

For indeed life is by no means as easy as some energetic people imagine. Those whose lot it is to live in the world must sometimes find themselves in complicated and delicate situations in which every course seems open to objections. We all have our sets of rules for guidance, rules which are safe enough for little and ordinary things; but some new situation arises to which these rules are inadequate, and which seems to call for their revisal. Altogether, this is a supremely difficult world to live in, in which there is much that we all disapprove of, and more that we dislike.

It is largely a question of proportion in our judgment between great and small issues, and the snare of the unimportant may keep a man throughout a lifetime dabbling among trivialities. The great point is to begin, not among the trifling details of the fringe, but at the centre. Settle the main issues and live for these—to do the will of God, and to make the most of your life and powers. Plan your life on a sufficiently large scale, and with a clear sight of the commanding objects for which you are to live. As to the detail, it is best left to settle itself. On the dangerous edge of things, in the finesse of the game of life, there is much that will baffle the shrewdest mind and the most anxious conscience. Do not try to play that game of life

as if you were God, but take the man's way. Accept the risks, and be sure that you will often make mistakes in detail. Only let your eye be fixed steadily on the Master.

To those who will dare to take and abide by this way, strange guidance comes. They gain a knowledge, or rather a hardly-conscious instinct, as to how they ought to act. With practice and obedience this instinctive knowledge grows surer and more clear. They grow extraordinarily sagacious. They cannot give their reasons, but they do not make mistakes. Such sagacity cannot possibly be acquired by attention to detail. It is the result of a life habitually turned towards the thought of God, and the larger aims and purposes. In such lives is fulfilled the great promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye".

## THE OPEN-AIR TREATMENT OF SOULS

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.”—PSALM CXXI. 1.

MUCH has been heard of late of the healing qualities of the open air, and medical science has entered into a new alliance with nature. Discarding or at least laying smaller stress on the more complicated methods of the past, the secret of the new surgery is cleanness, that of the new medicine fresh air. The principle has been extended to Sociology, and in many directions reformers are seeking an escape from the overcrowded city life, and an open-air treatment for social evils and miseries.

Why should we not go one step farther, and institute an open-air treatment of souls? The conditions are closely parallel. Unnaturalness is the greatest evil in religious life, as it is in life social and physical. Almost all the dangers and enemies of the human race are bred in over-crowded, narrow and pestilential conditions of houses, society, or religious thought. Thus all the three fields are one. In this crusade, physician, social worker, and the Church join forces. They aim at the same ends

and follow the same methods. Together they are bringing forth the captives out of the prison-house, back to nature and God's fresh air.

Here we must avoid the mistakes frequently made by poets who have sought to personify nature and find in it a response to the varying moods of human life, and by theologians who have found in it an analogy of the ways of God. Nature is not like God. Her laws disclose no moral standards. When these are introduced she appears full not only of contradictions but of cruelties, and the God whose character we could induce from a consideration of the laws of nature would be as immoral as the pagan divinities. We need something nearer, more human and considerate, a God who can understand and suffer and love. Indeed we are so far from the poets who seek in nature an echo of their own inner life, as to feel that it is in offering us an escape from ourselves that nature is most helpful to man. There she lies, inscrutable, placid, expansive; now wrapped in mists and clouds, now sun-smitten or attacked by the furious onset of the thunderstorm. The craving for sympathy from her is morbid: we must find health in her unresponsiveness, her *healing want of sympathy* with morbid souls.

Nature is neither like man nor God. And when we feel the burden of our over-civilized life, and the cry of "Back to nature" rises, it is that we may

get among the elemental, simple things. The far-reaching primitive instincts call us to break away. We "babble o' green fields" and hear the call of forests and moorlands. The mighty hills shout to us, the river woos us to her heart. And these things are for an allegory of that wider call of nature, when we need above all things a touch of mother earth, that our spirits may find cleansing and peace, simplicity and expansiveness, relaxation and health.

1. The most obvious example of such wholesome return to nature is in connexion with temptation and sin. Much temptation is simply pent-up strength and vitality, seeking unwholesome outlet, or the sense of beauty grown morbid in close places, for the want of far horizons. The selfish pursuit of wealth confines men, decadent literature contaminates the air they breathe, and so lusts of all kinds, the diseases of the soul, are bred. Then the strong man lifts up his eyes to the hills, and finds fulfilment for his energy as a "climber of the rocks". The artist lifts up his eyes to them, and in their colours and their loftiness finds spiritual instead of sensuous suggestion. So the open air works its cure, and among the wind-swept, clean, cool hills the fever of passion ceases.

2. Just as the return to nature brings purity instead of passion, so it brings peace instead of worry and fretfulness. Our life grows strained and

anxious. Business men are watching the markets, scientists their instruments ; students are poring over their books, and earnest people are feverishly struggling to realize ideals. So there comes a weariness of mind, a discouragement and sense of futility, in which things begin to look altogether desperate. We crowd each other, too, and the air is over-breathed. We grow tired of the faces of our fellow-men, and familiar voices sound strident to our ears. In the entanglement of society, where each is struggling for himself, love is lost ; while even those who are living for others find the strain on the nerve grow tense, till it is like to cost much loss of temper.

It is well known that for physical eye-strain the cure is to focus the eyes on a distant object. Similarly for mental eye-strain such relief may come. For nature is not over-strung. There, on the mountains, men move with elastic step. The great sweeps of landscape and skyline have none of the fatiguing preciseness of our daily life. The moorlands are spacious, and "over all the hills is rest". Room and loneliness and air—a sane tolerance of circumstances and a wide charity for our fellow-men—these are the gifts of the open air and the hills.

3. No department of life needs the open air more, or is more responsive to its healing power, than *faith*. Our thoughts of God show the effects

of closeness, and our beliefs are apt to grow unnatural and strained. The Greeks of old felt this, building their temples on the mountain-tops as if to say (as Professor Butcher has beautifully expressed it) to their Egyptian predecessors, "I worship in the sunshine". Indeed as we read the history of ancient religions, this liberation is everywhere apparent. Dark idolatries are lurking in valleys and in caves; earthbound superstitions, the offspring of an unwholesome fear of the unknown, people the universe with terrors. Then suddenly we see white temples upon hills bathed in sunlight, and we know that it is the breeze of God that is blowing. And in the Hebrew religion, no one can forget that remarkable succession of the discoveries of God, moving like some great procession from Sinai to Carmel, Hattin, Hermon, Calvary, Olivet. Which things also are for an allegory.

(1) The gloom of morbid introspection has fallen upon faith. As formerly we found men crowded and obsessed by others, so here we find them haunted by themselves. In the cloistered life of self-examination men pore upon the evils and horrors of their own hearts. But if the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, surely that only shows the need of getting away from its evil neighbourhood among truer and purer thoughts. What is needed by those who incline to such brooding is the wholesome neglect of themselves,

their sins, their faith and love and consistency. Leave all these alone : remember God, and come out into the fresh mountain air of His love and goodness.

(2) Another tendency of morbid religion is to occupy itself with trifles and to imagine that they matter. Most men's religion is hampered by denominational or ecclesiastical principles or details of ritual. All church testimonies and traditions have this danger. Beginning often as liberators, they end by becoming an iron cage, cramping alike to the intellectual and the spiritual life. We suppose our God to be enlisted on one side of such questions as against the other, while really we are but measuring ourselves against our fellow men, and importing our ordinary rivalries and littlenesses into our religion. From such narrow rooms, unventilated and murky, where we occupy ourselves with misunderstandings of men instead of with worship of God, our text calls us forth, to worship under the broad heavens our common Father.

(3) Similarly the insistence upon dogmatic intricacies of definition, and the search for truth by formulae, have magnified trifles, lost perspective, and given an air of unreality to faith. Doctrines are good so long as we remember that the truth is greater than doctrines, and that God cannot be defined. Truth is not, after all, in a well, but on a mountain top. The great orthodoxy is the open air



of the healthy mind, the clear eye, the loving heart, and the firm will. "Heaven soon sets right all other matters."

Doubtless the open air is trying to people who are afraid of draughts, and such thoughts may seem dangerous. They were, however, the thoughts of Jesus Christ. He found men sitting in their close synagogues with their fears and customs and orthodoxies, and he led them out to the hills where the birds of the air and the lilies of the field told them of the Father whose sunshine and rain descended upon all. And so nature leads us beyond herself, and by returning to her we find our way to God. The ancient mystical interpretation of the title of the psalm, "A song of degrees," was "the steps by which God leads the righteous up to the other world". So nature sets up her ladder of Bethel, whenever any soul would rise and trust her guidance. Through the fresher air we have caught sight of the hills of the eternal land. The mountains of earth shall depart and the hills be removed, but God's kindness shall not depart. Nature is passing away, but the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

## THREE VIEWS OF MAN'S DESTINY

### 1. *Pessimism*

“I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book.”—REVELATION V. 4.

THIS is a mysterious passage in a mysterious book, but the fact that interpretation may easily become ridiculous should not debar us from the beauty and the power of one of the greatest and most picturesque of Scriptural poetic images. God is on His throne, but He is left undescribed, and we see only His hand holding a sealed book.

There have been many guesses as to what this book represents, some of them fantastic enough. In general it may be safely taken to be the book of human destiny, that long and secret scroll which is slowly unrolled in Scripture, history, politics, science, and every other phase of actual human life. The interpretation of the visions at the breaking of the seals is safe for no detail, but they afford glimpses of the general demands that time is sure to make on men and nations until all things end with the dawn of the heavenly life.

What concerns us especially is the group of three

figures which represent three of the main attitudes of man to destiny. There is the weeping man, the pessimist, who sees only the sadness of the mystery, and tends towards despair and cynicism. Then there is the elder of Judah with the lion of his tribe, the optimist whose one resource is that of energy. Finally there is the true key to destiny; the lamb as it had been slain, emblem of love and sacrifice. We may consider these in three successive studies.

The pessimist comes first, represented by the weeping man of the text. This man may stand for many thousands who have stood in bitterness before the unsolved riddle of human life. For himself, he cannot silence the questions that find no answer. Why has he been sent here? Whither does the purpose of his creation tend? What is his duty meanwhile, and what is his fate to be at last? For others, the questions are aggravated by the conditions under which most men live. There is the pain and misery and sin of the world; and much of these seems so unnecessary, so unfair, and so meaningless. The apparent waste—the heartless and unreasonable waste—of the wealth of human hearts and lives, force upon him the questions, What does God mean by making a world like this? and, What is He going to do with it?

These questions find no answer. No man is strong enough to break the seals and open the

book. No nation is strong enough. The national thought of Greece had tried it in the sublime attack of its philosophies; that of Rome in the imperial attack upon the world; while many an Asiatic people had already sought to wrest that secret from the mysterious hand that held it. Nay, the strong angel himself is helpless here. The mystery of this world's life is baffling not only to those who dwell in the world, but to whatever lofty intelligences look on from the spirit-world also. All these pathetic "efforts to understand things" fill the writer's mind with an overwhelming sense of futility. He can make nothing of it, and he abandons the attempt with tears.

There were other elements in this grief besides baffled curiosity. We all learn sooner or later that many things in this strange world are beyond our understanding, and we come to terms with the mystery of things with as good a grace as we can. But there are special elements here, which in some degree enter into the experience of all such seekers, and which give to pessimism its keenest point.

First of all, the dreamer had been promised a knowledge of the future, and in this refusal there was something like a claim dishonoured. And in us all there is the feeling that in some sense we have a right to know. We are not asking for complete explanations, but surely we may expect light enough to live by. We are here not of our own

choice, and we are willing to accept the situation and make the best of it. But, so tangled is the skein of life, it often happens that with the best intentions men make the most serious mistakes. We want some sure guidance, and above all we want some assurance that it is not all in vain, and that our destinies are not, as they sometimes seem to be, the sport of chance. We are willing to work cheerfully or to suffer patiently if we can only understand. But this looks like the demand for day labour while light is denied us, and it is no wonder though we weep.

Second, a discovery is here given of how much is required for such knowledge as we crave. "No man is *worthy* to open the book." The hindrance to understanding, the veil between our souls and truth is our own sin, and conscience further embitters the great unanswered question. The mystery of life often seems to press most sorely on the good, but it does not break their hearts. They find some meaning in things that consoles them and gives them rest. But the unworthy have no such consolation. It is they who weep most bitterly before the face of destiny, and rebel against the way in which the unintelligible world is made. When we are caught in the mills of God, the nether millstone on which any soul is ground is ever its own unworthiness.

The lessons of all this are plain. When we are

confronted with the blank and bitter mystery of things it is not well to brood sullenly on the sense of a dishonoured claim. The book is unreadable, and we have no real right to understand. Neither science nor religion professes to answer all our questions. Our theories give no full explanation, our visions are but glimpses at the best. "In mystery the soul abides," and to the end we are but "led blindfold through the glimmering camp of God". And, further, when we are tempted to despair and to rebel and to malign the world, it is well to ask ourselves, Am I *worthy* to open the book? What grossness, what pride, what folly enter even into our desire to understand? What use have we made of the light vouchsafed to us? For doubt is surprising only when the life is pure, and they who know most are those who are "holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience".

And after all is said, however natural it be, and by whatever reasons we may explain it, this is an unmanly attitude towards life. Granted that his claim seems dishonoured, granting that he is conscience-stricken as well, still the last word that a man has to say of life cannot be a fit of weeping. Pessimism is always and in all circumstances a poor and futile thing, and its answer to the riddle of the universe is a maudlin answer. However hard and cruel destiny may seem as we face it, at least let us face it standing on our feet. Weep for your

own relief if you must, but do not let others see or hear you. We surely cannot be justified in adding to the discouragement of the world by any policy of wailing.

And when the discouragers stand back, and the sound of their weeping ceases, we find that they have made room for Christ. What we have heard is all we are going to hear of man's unaided effort to understand things. The other two voices which we shall hear are voices of Christ. Jesus Christ, regarded in one point of view or in another, is the grand solution offered by our Christian faith. He does not, indeed, profess to explain the whole mystery. Many things remain unintelligible even to them that believe. Yet He has done more to solve the riddle of human life than "all the rangéd reasons of the world"; and because of that, the intellect of Christendom is able to rest in faith even in the midst of strange experiences and unanswered questions. Say what men will about Him, it is evident that for Him the book of destiny was an open book. He has told us what He could, and it has been enough. He has known and told the great secret, and interpreted our life to us.

## THREE VIEWS OF MAN'S DESTINY

### 2. *The Gospel of Healthy-mindedness*

“Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda . . . hath prevailed to open the book.”—REVELATION v. 5.

THE elder's view of the Messiah is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” and his boast is that Christ, in that capacity, has been able to unseal and open the book of human destiny. At least one of the older commentators has recognized in this elder the figure of the patriarch Jacob, and has referred the text back to the splendid words of Genesis XLIX. 9 —“Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?”

It would seem that from early times the lion had been a sort of insignia of Judah, a national emblem like the Scottish and the Persian lion. Dr. Dods has said in this connexion, “There is enough in the history of Judah himself, and in the subsequent history of the tribe, to justify the ascription to him of all lion-like qualities—a kingly fearlessness, confidence, power, and success; in action a rapidity



of movement, and a might that make Him irresistible, and in repose a majestic dignity of bearing". The same writer goes on to contrast the "rushing onset of the lion with the craft of the serpent, the predatory instinct of the wolf and the swiftness of the hind". This, especially in times of oppression and adversity, gives a very fair idea of the conception of Messiah cherished by the elders of Israel. To their passionate patriotism He was the mirror and emblem of national strength and triumph.

History has borne out the lordly boast. Judea has been not merely a personal but a national force in the arena of the world's destinies. All nations have taken their part in the grand sum total of history, but it is Judea that has led the way, both in the understanding and in the shaping of the destinies of the world. Disraeli has boasted that "the most popular poet in England is the sweet singer of Israel," and that "the divine image of the most illustrious of the Hebrews" has been again raised amid the homage of kneeling millions in the most civilized of the kingdoms of Europe. When we think of what Jesus Christ has meant already in human history, we are constrained to confess that that gallant little nation, perched on its high ridge of rock, has indeed unsealed the book. By the earliest Christian missions, by the Crusades, and by the unceasing play of Christianity upon the West, she gave its future to savage Europe. Later,

when the New World opened its gates to the Old, it was Puritan Christianity that gave its noblest qualities to the American race. To-day, when for Africa and Asia the seals are being opened in so swift and dramatic succession, the issues of the future again depend wholly on the Judean—it will be Christ or a godless civilization more ominous than their past heathenism.

But the Lion of the tribe of Judah may also be taken as the representative type of a clearly defined ideal of character. It is the oriflamme of the Gospel of healthy-mindedness, and the doctrine of the strenuous life. This lion-like attack on destiny is indeed a magnificent imagination. It tells of direct attack that scorns diplomatic cunning, of will and main force whose self-reliance waits neither for the backing of friends nor of circumstances. It tells us of a certain band of warriors against fate who by sheer force and rush of onset have carried destiny by storm. Shakespeare knew them—men who “taking arms against a sea of troubles” would “by opposing end them”. Victor Hugo took them for ideal types of character, and openly proclaimed his worship of strength. George Meredith cried to us to lay hold on God with our strength, and not with our weakness. Stanley and a host of other Western adventurers are of the band. Nansen uttered this elder's cry when he shouted, “Accidents shall not happen,” and drove for the North.

These are the men of *sturm und drang*, who master and enlist the great forces of the world. For the most part they are plain men, not assuming virtues of greater delicacy than they can understand. Always they are strong men, who are not wearied but braced by labour and endurance. They are simple men, unembarrassed by the subtle questionings which distract others. They cut through the knots which others strive in vain to disentangle, and their only refuge from discouragements and fears is the refuge of action. Men of this spirit may do superhuman things, taking the citadels of destiny by assault. Destiny goes down before Will, and the Weird itself (so runs the ancient Saxon song) will help "an undoomed man if he be brave". Not even the sense of sin and failure, nor the disheartening memory of the irrevocable past, is able wholly to daunt such spirits. There is in strong and courageous vitality, a strange power of healing and of purifying, which baffles the powers of darkness.

Jesus Christ rides at the head of that company of heroes. He is not the opponent, but the truest of all exponents of the Gospel of the healthy mind. He matched His strength against the religious hierarchy of Jerusalem, against the vast Empire of Rome, against the world, and He has won His battle all along the line. In the progress of the Christian conscience we see Him pitted against the slaveries, oppressions, injustices of two thousand years. In

the progress of Christian civilization we see Him combating the forces of sorrow, poverty, disease, and death. In the progress of religious thought we see Him conquering prejudice, hypocrisy, and errors of the mind and heart and will.

It is good to think thus of Christ and to realize His effectiveness among the actual forces of the world. There is a certain type of mind which, gazing too exclusively on His tears and on His wounds, thinks of Jesus with a sort of half-conscious pity, and associates the thought of Him with weakness and effeminacy. But this elder comes forth with his name of "the lion" and rescues Him from a thousand stained-glass windows where He has hung anæmic before the eyes of sentimental worshippers. Here is God's athlete, the real and eternal Herakles. Here is the lion, bounding into the arena of the world's struggle, terrible in His might, destroying that which He opposes. Here is the "strong Son of God," and He is at the head of all the daring.

There are Christians to-day who grow timid when they realize the strength of the secular forces of the world and the apparently irresistible power of evil in society. It would be well if such Christians would forget their conception of Christianity as a forlorn hope, and remember that those who are Christ's are in the sweep of the greatest of all the forces now operative on the earth. There are young men who, like Christoferus in the familiar legend,

love strength and will follow only the strongest. Here is their leader. Christ has had time to prove His strength, and to-day, after all those centuries, He stands forth unconquered and unaffrighted. Here is the hero of heroes, the eternal leader of the strongest and most resolute men. He calls not for weaklings to love Him, but for strong men to follow Him. And His call is a challenge to all the morbid and the idle and the soft and self-indulgent. You who are forgetting your manhood, in an age that calls for universal service and the redemption of men by men; you who are wailing over the evils of the times and reading melancholy books; you who are spending all your strength in other service while your noblest powers are rusting from disuse—rise up and play the man! And you whose spirit still is manly, and who fain would live strenuously and follow the strongest—the strongest is among you; rise and follow Christ.

## THREE VIEWS OF MAN'S DESTINY

### 3. *Love and Sacrifice*

“A Lamb as it had been slain.”—REVELATION v. 6.

THE lion of the elder is a true aspect of Christ, and yet there is a more excellent way. It is the way of the saint, the divine seer and evangelist, who comes to rest upon the vision of “the Lamb standing as it had been slain,” as the innermost secret of life and the true key of human destiny. For there is a limit to the power of will and courage, and sooner or later even the boldest attack teaches us by its imperfect success that we mortals must “approach destiny respectfully”.

So now we have the lamb substituted for the lion. And it is *ἀρνιον*—“the little lamb”—quoted from Isaiah LIII. 7, but purposely changed to the diminutive. This is the favourite thought of that tender and far-seeing spirit who took up the beautiful imagery of the twenty-third Psalm, and understood so well the meaning of the words “thy gentleness hath made me great,” when he told how the Baptist had spoken of Jesus as the Lamb of God.

A great principle is embodied here. There is a

Syrian mountain whose black basalt breaks the lofty table-land above the Sea of Galilee. At that mountain the Crusaders lost Palestine after one of the fiercest of their battles. On the same spot, according to tradition at least, Jesus won the world by his Sermon on the Mount. It is the merest commonplace, alike of science and of human nature, that the humblest approach gains the richest results. Nature resists man's violence, but yields inevitably in the end to his loving patience. In character, self-assertion and the endeavour to make an impression have accomplished much ; persecution, punishment, and coercion have done much ; but love has done far more than these. Love is the key to destiny. Force may succeed outwardly, and yet be but a magnificent failure. Love never fails : it does its appointed work.

It was this which was the life-long task and achievement of Jesus. In Him the world has seen love at once revealing and making destiny. For what was it in Him that led men to understand themselves and to change into better manhood? What was it that made that nobler life seem no longer an impossible ideal, but their own rightful heritage? It was not His courage nor His strength, not His absoluteness nor His denunciation. It was simply His love—that same love which cured the sickness of the land and burst open the tombs of its dead.

That aspect of the life of Christ gives us a great counsel to which we shall take heed if we be wise. When we have tried to force success by sheer daring and strenuousness and have failed, nothing is more natural than to become embittered. But this reminds us that we have not yet exhausted our resources. One power remains in reserve, the power of love. Those are wise who, in the dark hour of defeat, guard the springs of the heart and refuse to be embittered. Power and will are broken, but love remains still possible, and it is really the greatest power of all. But the secret that lies behind all hearts kept open and generous is deeper than the human effort to keep them so. "We love because He first loved us." When all things have gone against a man and he cannot repress the question whether life is worth its cost, let him remember the love of Christ and stay himself on that great fact. Soon such a one will no longer wonder; he will know.

But in that master-picture of Isaiah's which is here presented, there is a further meaning. It is not only the lamb, but the lamb slain that we see; not only love but sacrifice. The lamb has death-wounds on its body, as it stands in the first pathos of death, slain though not yet fallen. This is indeed the kind of love that conquers destiny. There are many kinds of love—placidly selfish love, good-humoured and easy-going affection, that knows



nothing of sacrifice. But this is by far too great a task for such love. The book of destiny remains for ever closed to selfishness.

So we come in sight of the ancient truth, old indeed as the world though but slowly apprehended, that man must sacrifice to destiny. To gain either the understanding or the mastery of fate you must give up yourself. It is a hard lesson, but it is the way in which the world is made, and we must all learn it. It is sacrifice, and sacrifice alone, that avails in the last resort to give either peace or victory. Life has no power to resist self-sacrifice. One's own unintelligible experience and threatening future, the fate of one's friends, the woe of the world—all these demand sacrifice for their explanation, and that is the last word life has to say to any man. And it is always possible for each of us to accept the strange condition. A man can always sacrifice himself, and until he has tried that expedient he has no right to disbelieve in life and rail against it. While we are insisting on our right to be happy and successful, we are still at cross purposes with the world. When we make up our mind to give up our claim, to suffer with the world and for it, all the perverse appearance of things changes, and the world proves reasonable and good. He who of his own free determination steps forward frankly to the cross and accepts it, has discovered a new meaning in human life.

Behind all such sacrifices, interpreting them and inspiring them, stands the great self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As we see Him moving on towards Calvary we tremble as we realize how the fate of the world turned on that cross. By accepting it He revealed the meaning of man's destiny, and He conquered it for man. The lamb slain prevailed to open the book. The revealing power of the Cross has showed how through suffering man is made perfect, and changed the mystery of pain to the hope of glory, the bitter cry to the shout of victory, and the victims of life to the sons of God. The conquering power of the cross has changed not only the aspect of things but the things themselves. Sin, borne and mastered there, is no longer a doom but a thing doomed. Sorrow and pain are no longer the curses of humanity, but the ministers of grace. Man is no longer a failure and an outcast, but one who stands above his fate, ransomed of the Lord.

These are the wonderful ways of Jesus Christ, the lion-like hero, and the lamb standing as it had been slain. He is accessible to men from whatever side they approach Him, satisfying the need of one for a hero, of another for sacrifice and love. And every one who comes to Him finds sooner or later more than he sought to find. There are some who come to Him for strength, full-blooded and confident and buoyant, seeking health and happy service. These find what they have sought, but

they also find love and sacrifice waiting for them ; and though at first they may wonder and shrink back, in the end they will know that life can only be made perfect through sufferings—His and theirs also. Others come to Him thinking only of sacrifice, bringing only their broken hearts and disappointed spirits and shamed consciences ; and these find to their amazement that Christ has for them also gifts of courage and strength and gladness. Either way this is true, that men who come to Him find always the key to destiny in His hands. He has opened the book, and for them no longer fate but Jesus Christ is lord and master of their lives.

## WELL-MEANING BLUNDERERS

“Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.”—

LUKE XIV. 15.

“Blessed is the womb which bear Thee and the paps which Thou hast sucked.”—LUKE XI. 27.

WE have here two instances in which well-meaning persons lost their heads when they heard Jesus speaking plain home-truths. They have their successors in every age, and stand for peculiarly characteristic types of the two commonest ways of turning aside the edge of conviction. The woman turns it aside by an emotion, the man by a pious remark.

1. *The Woman*.—Women were ever quicker than men to perceive the greatness of Jesus. In this instance we can see the woman's rising excitement as we read the story. The perversity and rudeness of His treacherous enemies must have stung the hearts of His friends. His reply to them, describing the miserable plight of the devil-haunted, and the wandering of demons in the wilderness, further heated her imagination, until perhaps she had grown almost hysterical, and needed the relief of speech.

It was the cry of one full of delight in His human power and more than human grace. The kind and womanly heart of her speaks out, it may be with the passion of the childless or the yearning of one whose children had shamed her. She blesses the unknown mother of Jesus, thinking how proud she herself would have been to have borne such a son. Her cry was the spontaneous utterance of the purest and most natural emotion.

Yet Jesus turned it aside with pointed words about the blessedness of those that hear the Word of God and keep it. His words were very gentle, yet they were relentless. He was carrying on His great work, intent upon the supreme moral and spiritual issues of men's lives. This inrush of emotion, distracting attention from the line of His teaching, was in the nature of an interruption; and He was not one who would allow the beauty or even the kindliness of an emotion to interfere with His higher mission.

The case is one which must repeat itself so long as human nature is what it is. Life is ever calling for a serious dealing with the facts, and there are always some whose answer is a flash of feeling and a dramatic exclamation. Christ calls for thought and action, for hearing and doing, and we are apt to offer Him this cheaper offering. Feeling has its own place in life, but that is not its place. It should accompany or follow the intellect and the will; and

the grand mistake which many make is to place it first, leaving will or intellect to follow as best they can its changeful guidance. No matter how good the feeling may be, it can never enter deeply enough into the meaning of Christ's demand. Indeed, the better it is the more dangerous it will be as a substitute for true response, for it will be but the more plausible, though quite as inadequate.

2. *The Man*.—Seated at the table as a guest, this unnamed man interrupts the discourse of Jesus with a somewhat similar remark. It does not look like an original saying, and may very likely have been a familiar quotation from some of the Rabbinical writings. Matthew Henry takes a kindly view of the incident: "Even those that are not of ability to carry on good discourse themselves ought to put in a word now and then, to countenance it and help it forward". It is an interpretation characteristic of that most courteous of divines, but it is quite impossible here. Jesus evidently regards the words as an intended interruption, and throws them aside in His very pointed parable of the feast and the excuses.

Quite consciously, in this case, the interjection was intended to parry the thrust of Jesus' words. His speech had been growing more and more direct and personal. It had become an exceedingly trying conversation for the listeners, as the guest proceeded to rebuke the hospitality of his host. To relieve

the strain this well-meaning man changes the subject from the present occasion into the wide and spacious future, from a particular instance to vague generalities about which there could be no dispute. His benignant sentiments and edifying remarks about the kingdom of God may well have won him a grateful glance from the uneasy Pharisee at the head of the table. Certainly the incident must have appealed strongly to any one of the guests who had a sense of humour. It is hardly possible for us to suppress a smile when we think how anxiously some very proper people must have wished the feast was over. Jesus was so explosive, so unexpected—what would He be saying next? So this nervous little creature comes to the assistance of his host and tries to save the situation. But Jesus is come not to save situations but to save souls. He has no use for edifying remarks which turn aside His direct thrust at the consciences of men. And this is a man who is afraid of the naked flame of truth, and who is trying to protect himself and his friends from Christ by what he took to be piety.

Unfortunately he has not been the last to make that attempt. We all know the type of man who, when the situation is becoming somewhat strained, exclaims, "Blessed" is somebody or other! "Don't let us talk about that, let us talk about something pleasant." This is the sort of man who might con-

ceivably be saved by an outburst of clean anger or even frank profanity—saved from nervous timidity and bloodless want of character. As it is, his motto is caution. Reduce Christianity to platitude, explain away or tone down unwelcome truth, until “the Bible as usual means nothing in particular; it is merely an obscure and figurative copy-book”. But now as then Christ despises language so guarded that it can never give offence, the expression of a complacently vegetable piety which drags the honourable word in the mire. Think of a man sitting at the feast of life—that feast which for the hearty and full-blooded is a feast of fat things and red wine—and pulling down all the poignancy and immediacy of the occasion by making edifying remarks!

So the two instances are really common examples of the practice of making excuses which Jesus so explicitly rebukes in the parable which follows. There the call of God is definite, “Come to My supper”; and the answer of men is, “Nay, but let us do something else, no matter what”. Here, we have two kindly but fatuous people who will not follow Christ’s lead but will take a safer line of their own. The great issues of life and death, of sin and judgment, are under consideration—let us talk of something else, and get back among ordinary subjects. As it happens, in the one case it is a religious emotion that is substituted for plain



dealing, in the other a religious platitude. But neither fervent emotions nor good thoughts will be accepted. Platitudes are so easy and emotions so interesting, but the facts are difficult and tragic. Life and death, sin and sorrow, must be fought with greater weapons. The call of Christ is to step out boldly and face the facts, prepared for thought and action.

## INTERPRETATION BY THE LONG RESULT

“ What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”—St. JOHN XIII. 7.

JESUS met with strange treatment from His friends. This is not the first time that we read of a feast without courtesy at which He sat. But there is a peculiar bitterness about this incident, in which we see the childish and sulky disciples doing their best to ruin an occasion to which He had been looking forward with a great desire. So He took, in those hands into which He knew that the Father had given all things, a towel and a jar of water ; and the shamed disciples felt the hands of the Master on their feet. Judas felt them without remonstrance ; but it was unbearable for Peter, and in his characteristic fashion he remonstrated. The answer of Jesus is the text.

So here we have one of those apparently casual sayings which are yet fraught with far-reaching significance. The incidental remarks of Jesus to-day become the discovery of the Church to-morrow, and the next day they are at once the despair and the inspiration of the noblest efforts of mankind.

“There is but one example,” says Lecky, “of a religion which is not necessarily subverted by civilization, and that example is Christianity. . . . There is, indeed, nothing more wonderful in the history of the human race than the way in which that ideal has traversed the lapse of years, acquiring a new strength and beauty with each advance of civilization, and infusing its beneficent influence into every sphere of thought and action.” Jesus used to speak of Himself as casting fire and sowing seed on the earth; two thousand years afterwards, we see the fire blazing and the seed multiplying its harvests. It was His habit to send out wayside words which were afterwards to give its leading principles to human life. He summed up in Himself the purpose of the ages, and sent out His pregnant words and deeds into the future. All later history has been the commentary on those words and deeds, and Christianity is better understood to-day than it was in the days of His flesh.

So this saying, and the incident which gave rise to it, appeared at the time not only *outré* and even unseemly, but also quite casual and insignificant. Their significance was waiting for future explanation, and they were passed on to the Church and the world for that disclosure. Looking back, we can see how that simple deed of kindly ministry became first the symbol of all service, and of all human love that purifies and ministers; until it

came to be a symbol of the whole person and work of Christ, revealing the meaning of the great mystery of His humiliation and of His supreme service of redemption through sacrifice.

It is this expansion which gives to this incident and the words their peculiar value. We are always being confronted by wayside mysteries, and a great part of every life's experience is unintelligible. Some of these mysteries are small, and only serve to tempt our curiosity; others are great and terrible enough to appal men's faith or shake their reason. We take life wrongly when we count the mystery in itself an injustice. There is no promise that we shall ever come to understand life at the time, nor have we any right to such immediate understanding. We are in the dark, as Peter was, and that is a "reason for being sparing and modest in our censures of God's providence". It is not probable that people who are confessedly in the dark shall be able usually to judge aright.

The first and most obvious message of the words is their assurance that Christ's disciples may safely trust the future. It is evident that in all things God counts upon the future and works for the long result. In His operation there is no indecent haste to finish. The deliberateness of creation, as the doctrine of evolution shows it moving from the fire and vapour and molten masses of the beginning to the fields of grain and the peopled lands, is an

immense gain over the hurried succession of six eventful days. The deliberateness of history is no less remarkable and reassuring, as we trace the slow progress of civilization and the gradual awakening of the social conscience. And the story of the life of Jesus affords abundant confirmation of this heartening message. His absolute trust in the future led to a deliberateness of action, even at critical moments, which often baffled the understanding of His disciples. He took His time, and refused to hurry. And when the end was at hand He entrusted himself and His cause without hesitation to the future after His death.

Christians have caught this trustful spirit toward the future. Hopeful speaks for Christendom when in Doubting Castle he says, "Who knows but that God, who made the world, may cause that Giant Despair may die, or that at some time or other he may forget to lock us in ; or that he may in a short time have another of his fits before us, and may lose the use of his limbs". These are wise words. When we are very young, every trouble seems final and without remedy. As life advances, we come to realize how infinite are the possibilities of any situation and how rich the years are in surprises, until the sense of finality is tempered by a never-failing last hope in the off-chance. The future is full of explanations, and already we have been often satisfied regarding matters which seemed to admit of no solution.

It has often been remarked that in G. F. Watt's pictures, the figure of Time is not the conventional old man, weary and sinking to decay, but a picture of unflinching youth and vigour. That is an essentially Christian view, and it is abundantly confirmed by history. Time is young and fresh, ever charged with new truth and incalculable vitality. Christian faith sends us on fearlessly through the days and years, trusting to time and taking our unanswered questions forward.

Still we say as we go,—  
 “ Strange to think by the way,  
 Whatever there is to know,  
 That shall we know one day ”.

Yet that assurance is not enough, for the fact is that life seldom fully explains itself. In order to cherish this trust we need some deeper conviction, some root of faith out of which this may spring. Without some such second trust the bravest optimism will often leave the aspect of the future ominous and dark. The text supplies this deeper ground of assurance in the great words *what I do*. In these words Christian faith sees Christ identifying Himself with the providence of God, and trusts to time because it is sure of Christ. We live, indeed, in the dark, but we believe through Christ that a divine plan is being wrought out through all experience. If God is in it—if He is indeed working out Christ's great ends of love—then all is well. If He

is not in it we may as well give up the game. It is either Christ or a bottomless pit of despair ; life is either " what I do," or it is the sport of devils.

Here, then, is a great saying concerning all that may happen to those that believe. We know of a better ally than the off-chance. God is at work upon our lives, and our experiences are His acts. It is enough for us that Christ speaks of them as " What I do ". Though we know not now any more than that, we may live out our lives without fear. Time and history form one long commentary on the acts of God and on the mystery of Jesus Christ. One day we shall look back and understand it all. Meantime we can wait for explanations, confident that if Christ is doing it, all is well.

## TRUST IN THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

“What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”—ST. JOHN XIII. 7.

IN the former study of these words we found the general principles that disciples of Christ may trust to time and face the future without misgiving, and that the reason for this confidence is in the words “What I do”. But this message is so surprising and so far-reaching that it will be worth our while to trace it out in some detail.

1. The commonest application of the text is to our *ordinary individual experience*, especially of sorrow. Many a sore heart has found comfort in the assurance that its pain is Christ's doing, mysterious for the present but waiting for an ultimate explanation. The very fact of handing on the explanation to the future is worthy of attention. There will always be much in life that has to be accepted unexplained—much that even our faith in Christ does not explain. He Himself felt this with His disciples. There were things He could not make them understand. He used to wish He could, and we feel the pain of suppression in such



sayings as “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now”. Often it would be no use trying to tell these things, for He could not make us in any sense understand. We are not yet fit to know, not big enough yet to look steadily upon the face of life and to glory in tribulations.

Yet one thing He has told us—“I do it”. And that is the last word that can be said to sorrow, for it shifts the burden from our understanding over to the character of Christ. In this He has made Himself ultimately responsible for all that happens to us. We dwell upon the hardness of circumstances, upon the world and the powers of darkness, upon our own mistakes or follies or sins. These may indeed be the occasions of much suffering; but beyond these, in every hour of sorrow, there still lies the will of God. This, after all is said, still is “What I do”.

It is equally legitimate for glad hearts to apply the words to their happiness. In very bright hours we are almost afraid to acknowledge our belief in life, and our happy sense of the world. Fears invade, and we ask whether future experience will honour our faith in life; to which Christianity replies that experience worketh not disillusion but hope. In spite of much sorrow, life is better than any of its first promises. The fugitive and sudden glories change to a settled peace and sense of well-being: The early momentary and passionate flashes of joy

grow to a constant steady exhilaration. The sense of a "haunting strangeness in beauty" ripens into the sweet familiarity and homeliness of love. Thus, for every wholesome nature, young pleasures undergo their change "into something rich and strange". Our faith in life was abundantly justified, and the half was never told at first. The years have led the happy spirit onward, exploring the pleasures that are at God's right hand. Our first delighted moments gave us no hint of the wealth of goodwill from which the Father was drawing, or the kindness of His love. What He is doing we know not at the time, but we understand more fully afterwards.

2. A still wider field opens before us in respect of *service*. The incident in the upper room seemed slight, but it was full of social significance. That day they thought he was only washing the feet of a few disciples. Time has shown that He was freeing slaves, building hospitals, founding charities, inaugurating social science, educating the social conscience of mankind.

The service of man is a matter that has been but slowly understood. At first, knowing not what he had done that day, the tendency was to mere imitation of the act, in voluntary humility, poverty, and ascetic discipline. But His words foretold not imitation but development, and told us in this sense also to trust the future, to which he had committed

his pregnant deed. This should set for us our attitude towards new and strange developments of the service of man by man. We cannot expect these to repeat endlessly the old forms of service, but should be prepared to welcome in new forms the ancient works of Christ.

Nothing is more striking than the direction in which the ideals of self-sacrifice have been moving. Beginning with the idea of self-denial for its own sake and for the discipline solely of the person who undertook it, it gradually passed out into more and more useful ideals which measured its value by the help it brought to others. When we claim development for the words of Jesus we mean that the Christian ideals of the service of man must have room to grow, to be original, to adapt themselves to the requirements of each successive age. Thus in each new doctrine of economics, in each new departure in social work, and in each new phase of civilization and philanthropy, men are simply coming to know long afterwards what Jesus did that day when He washed the feet of His disciples. And each new discovery of that sort is but a new declaration of Christ's astonishing reversal of the traditional conceptions of master and servant. The master has come to mean the man who can do the best service. He is the greatest among us who is the most sympathetic in understanding and the readiest in helping the need of his fellow-man.

3. The words are also applicable to the whole of what Christ was then doing for the *redemption* of man. His enemies were bringing the cross to Him, with very definite and clearly understood meanings of shame and cruelty attached to it. But He took the cross out of the hands of His enemies, made it His own, and attached to it a totally different set of meanings from that time onward. The church has known, as none of the twelve could possibly know that day, what it was that He did.

A similar development may be seen in the understanding of redemption by every one of the redeemed. When first Christ came to us to deal with our sins, to hear our confession and to handle our sordid lives, the heart cried out in wonder—Ah, Lord, Thou hast washed my feet! We thought we knew what He had done; we may even have framed a pretty complete theological expression of it; but in reality we did not know the richer fullness of meaning which time was to unfold. At first, our Christian faith had to be stated at its minimum—how little can I have of it, and yet legitimately claim to be a Christian? Afterwards, the soul wonders at the unexpected vistas of experience that open out before it as it advances further into the fullness of the Christian life. At first it knows only of the healing of the spirit's wound; at last it perceives with astonishment the glory of the Lord. At the first, it is but a hungry soul that has been fed; at the last it

stands in the light before the throne of God, singing the song of the redeemed.

Thus the Christian life is a very wonderful thing, a reticent and unfolding thing. It never discloses itself at the beginning, nor will any period of time suffice to reveal to any soul fully all the meaning of the service which Christ rendered to men. It will take a life-time, yes all the lives of Christendom, to explain what he did that day. What he did for us we know not yet, but we may know more and more of it if we are faithful and desirous.

## THE EXPLORATION OF THE HIDDEN LIFE

“Your life is hid with Christ in God.”—COLOSSIANS III. 3.

“Continue in prayer.”—COLOSSIANS IV. 2.

THESE words were addressed to the Colossians, a people peculiarly open to the attacks of incipient gnosticism. The Gnostics sought after hidden mysteries until all the world about them was uncanny—full of whispers, presences emerging out of the mist of dreams, wraiths of thought. Here Paul offers them something in Christianity that will appeal to such tastes. There is no need, he would say, to go past Christ for mysteries. He, and men's relations with Him, are the deepest mysteries of all.

The words were taken up by Christian theology in its doctrine of the “Mystical Union”. We died with Him, and the old life passed away, the life that had been mastered and bewitched by the world and directed by its instincts. In its stead a new life was born, higher and purer than the old, which we share with the risen Christ. But this is no longer a comprehensible or even a visible life. There is a secret element in spiritual communion of which the

world knows nothing. It is hidden with Christ, who is Himself hidden in God—a very mystical conception.

Christian experience confirms this though it does not explain it. Our faith and character are safe in that great hiding-place—safe from enemies of doubt or of temptation that would rob us of them. Like John Bunyan, we say with full security, “My Righteousness is on high”. From ourselves even is this secret hidden. No Christian professes to understand his own spiritual experience or to be able fully to rationalize it. It all ends ultimately in the mystery of the Divine. The great change from sin and the desire of sin to the grace that makes all things new is not a matter of our own doing, nor is it an effect of natural causes we can trace. Let anyone look back to the great event of his spiritual new birth; he will be very sure of God in it, but the rest will be lost in mystery.

This is indeed a theological doctrine, but it is no theological fiction. “The hiddenness of perfect things” is a broad fact of common knowledge. And, confessedly, the most deeply hidden of all things is the meaning of our own life. By many diverse methods—by hunger and pain and love, by all our blind gropings, by our restlessness of search, by “the infinite craving for an infinite filling”—we are lured on towards an ultimate goal. Our life is hid: we are out on the life-long search for it.

But often, in the world's most crowded streets,  
 But often, in the din of strife,  
 There rises an unspeakable desire  
 After the knowledge of our buried life.

Thus, by its own exquisite confession, is humanity disappointed in its search, until only the more strenuous seekers retain the faith that there is anything to find. But the Christian knows where that treasure lies. He is confident of finding himself at last. Day by day, with recurring surprise, he discovers some new aspect of that for which he seeks, or at least some trace of it. He knows—he is the one man on earth who does know—the secret of the buried life. His life is hid with Christ in God.

Under this light prayer takes on a new significance and interest. It is the search for hidden treasure. We all know how stimulating a *motif* this search has been in romance. Which of us has not seen the ingots shining in the light of fires of broken wreckage on a far-off shore? Such is the romance of prayer, in which we see the soul wandering in dim mysterious regions, seeking for the hidden treasure of its true life. There are various aspects of prayer. It may be regarded as ritual, a matter of ceremony artistically correct. It may be regarded as a problem in metaphysics, opening curious questions as to the uniformity of law. These are narrow conceptions compared with this.



The horizons of our thought and imagination sweep far out as we think of prayer as man's search for himself through the vast universe. This explorer—this huntsman of his own soul—speeds along the whole line of his activities, across the whole field of his interests, until, in some hour perhaps of difficulty and of strain, he finds the sudden revelation of the meaning of unintelligible experience, and of the presence of an unseen Friend. In the heart of Christ the man has discovered his own life. He may not be able to give reasons, but he understands and is quite sure. He can go back now, and endure and be glad. Or again, at times when all is in perplexity, the very exercise of prayer shows him what he would be at. Free from prejudices, delusions, and temptations, the mere act of turning to the Highest gives him the truest expression of himself, the fullest and most exalted utterance of experience. He has sought and found his hidden life. John Knox's great words are true: "We come to seeke our Lyfe and Perfection in Jesus Christ".

The truth of this is most obvious in regard to the highest reaches of life, the moral and the spiritual. A sensitive and living conscience, the rich and wonderful sense of forgiveness, moral strength and resoluteness for the future, and beyond all the promise of eternal life in God—these are life indeed, such as the world knows not. Yet to-day let us rather keep to the lower ranges. For these higher

ones are more commonly supposed to be accessible only by learning the secret of the Lord: the lower, men think they can explore apart from Him.

1. *Physical life*, in which "life" means "health". Much harm has been done by that anæmic presentation of the Christian life which gives the impression of something spectral and as far as possible disembodied. It is a great mistake to imagine that to be an invalid is in itself a Christian grace. Certainly Jesus held no such view. The effect of His life was on all hands to bring men back from sickness to a condition keenly alive to the earth and its work and charm. He rejoiced not in weakness and disease but in the coursing blood and the clean strength of the body. His gospel was emphatically the gospel of health.

Our bodily life is hid with Christ in God, and that is among the prizes which prayer finds and secures. Not only does the habit of prayer tend to restrain a man from hurtful excesses. He who prays learns to hold his physical life more precious and to regard it as a sacred trust, knowing its worth better than other men. It puzzles us to see the vast and anxious attention which some men, whose life is so poor and meaningless an affair, bestow upon their health. The discovery of an infinite significance and value for our earthly life is the only justification for such tender care.

As to the question of the effect of prayer upon

the condition of one's physical health, it is a difficult question, and anything that can be said about it must be rather in the nature of a practical hint than of a scientific explanation. Here, more than in most regions, it is necessary to avoid the extravagances of half-educated or rash speculation. Science is as truly God's gift and will as prayer is, and any prayer which sets itself up as a substitute for medical skill is mere presumption. Nor can prayer and medicine combined effect more than a certain limited amount. The last factor in the case is the will of God, and our times are in His hand.

Yet prayer may be a real means of finding a healthy life. So closely are body and mind connected, that the very moods which prayer induces will react in health upon the body. By prayer peace may come upon the spirit; and nature, hindered by tingling nerves and agitations, may get her chance. In prayer the thought and desire, set upon healthy conditions, may awaken the will and purpose, and the chances of health are vastly better for those who will to be well than for those who have lost heart and energy. For the rest, the abstract question of how prayer is answered is, and must always remain, obscure. Sir Oliver Lodge strikes the true note when he says that the fatalistic attitude is the unfilial one. We are but children in such matters, and the choice is between being "solemn little prigs," superior to faith; or simple

children who say to their father what they want. We shall never get beyond that to any higher thought, and if we insist on passing on from it, it must be to a lower one. This, at least, is true, that the life even of our flesh is hid with Christ in God, and that in prayer we are approaching its quickening springs.

2. *Emotional life*, in which "life" means harmony and peace. The first promise of Christianity is keen vitality, by which it at once distinguishes itself from all such religions as aim at the death of desire or the callousness of the steeled heart. But the vitality of the feelings is apt to produce a wild travesty of life rather than a controlled and steady flow of fitting emotions. The daily work and the daily battle are intended to move to the sound of appropriate music of moods and feelings. Too often that music rises to discordant shrieking, or sinks to the depression of a funeral march. At such times of random tempers or sullen distemper, we say "we are not ourselves," and we say truly. Again, prayer leads us out to find ourselves.

That hidden life which we go to find in Christ is not passionless. The moods are legitimate elements in experience, though they require harmony and control. When the strain is felt, before the mood expresses itself, go to find it as it is in Christ. There it will be safe for you to be true to it, and frankly let it find expression. So the depression

of drudgery will become the earnest enthusiasm of labour. Battle will change from a squabble to a crusade. Sullenness will change to sympathy that feels the sense of tears in mortal things. Exasperation will lose its blindness and yield instead a swift and brilliant vision of the mind of Christ regarding wrong.

3. *Social life*, in which "life" means love and service. Our social instincts tell us of a larger self which includes our relations to others. Social science is doing noble work in its efforts to understand and adjust these relations. But in the meantime generous and earnest men are often sorely perplexed. To suggest prayer as a substitute for sound economics is mere cant, which those who feel the pressure of present conditions will justifiably treat with scorn. Yet that which lies at the root of all these disputes is not details either of present injustice or of future amendment. It is the spirit of men's minds towards one another. In that lies our true social life.

That life of right social spirit is hid with Christ in God. It is found neither in debate nor in legislation. Prayer alone can find it. Those finer understandings in which class prejudices and dislikes vanish; the discovery of those common interests, rights and duties, joys and sorrows, which are the same to all men; that recognition of common worth, in which consists the real brotherhood of men—these

are the very spirit of Christ, and prayer is the means of their discovery.

So, through prayer, we pass on to that widest charity which is the true spirit of public life. Paul exhorts that "intercessions and givings of thanks be made for all men". Such intercession if it be intelligent and honest will open the intercessor's heart to the sorrows of his fellow-men. Such thanksgiving will be impossible except to those who are prepared to right their wrongs. That is the true hearty Christian spirit—intercessions and thanksgivings for all this crowded world of human life. It is not pity, far less scorn, but the true spirit of public life, the insight and good-will without which no man's manhood is complete. In prayer we go to find that life also, hid with Christ in God.

In a word, our true life in all its relations is hid with Christ in God. The solutions of critical problems, the answers to great questions, require more than painful thought. They require that we be our true selves to think and act truly among them. By prayer we go to seek and find our true selves in Him. In His will is our peace, in His favour our life, in His love our power of loving wisely so that we may rightly serve our generation.

## WEARINESS OF RESPONSIBILITY

“Make me as one of thy hired servants.”—LUKE XV. 19.

THE motive for these words has been variously understood. Some have accused the prodigal of lingering self-righteousness; as if he were demanding to work for his living, too proud to receive anything on charity. Others have taken them to be a promise of new obedience, in which he asked for a chance of showing how genuine was the change of heart. More usually they have been understood to be simply an expression of humiliation and of shame. He had forfeited his sonship, and entertained no idea of complete restoration. He could only hope now to be admitted as a servant into the house where he had once lived as a son.

No doubt this last is the view that is truest to the story. Certainly there is no ground for the suggestion of self-righteous pride or the desire for wages. But there is a further suggestion in the words, which takes us far in among the facts of human nature. The request was not the mere consent to a disagreeable position chosen because it was the lower place. It was a positive choice

of that position, as the one which he preferred to occupy.

He asked for hired service because he was sick of freedom. There had been a time when freedom was the only thing he wanted. The desire of it had led him away from his home to the far land. The routine of home, the tediousness of that dull person his elder brother, the restraint of a younger son living in his father's house,—these had become intolerable to his young blood. He heard the call of the sparkling world beyond the horizon of the homestead. There a man might live without restrictions and go as he pleased.

He went, a lad lighthearted and easily seduced. He found his freedom, and did what he liked. Soon all guidance of his affairs was gone, and he was whirled along in a rush of pleasures, the mere sport of circumstances and of lusts. Freedom is a noble thing, if it be accompanied by a clear mind and a powerful will that keeps its self-control. Freedom is a grand ideal to dream and boast and sing about. It is claimed as the native right and heritage of every man, and it seems little short of sacrilege even to qualify that claim. Yet it must be qualified if it is to be anything but a misleading and dangerous fallacy. It is true in the sense that until he has attained to liberty no man has reached his ideal manhood, or in any full measure come to his own. But it is not true that for all men, or for



many men at their present stage, full liberty is a right which it is just for them to claim, or which it would be safe to grant them. To be free to say what one likes and to do what one likes is not the great matter: but, as Matthew Arnold has reminded us, the great matter is that what one says and does when free shall be worthy and fitting. Meanwhile the very facts of education and of civilization are standing proofs that only by learning to obey can men attain to a condition in which freedom is safe in their hands. Premature freedom is both a dangerous and a costly gift.

So this prodigal had claimed his freedom before he was capable of managing it, and it had utterly wrecked his life. Now he is, as well he may be, afraid of it, afraid to trust himself.

Me this unchartered freedom tires;  
I feel the weight of chance-desires.

He genuinely and ardently longs for some one to control him, and it is this change of heart that redeems the incident. Otherwise the return, as a last resort when all else is impossible, bears the inevitable stamp of meanness. While the prodigal is still confident and cheerful about his prospects of living a better life in future, the case is hopeless. But the meanest return as a last resort when all else has failed, is redeemed from its meanness by that loss of self-confidence which is the test of true repentance.

Here, his confidence is broken indeed. His shame has led to a complete self-distrust. Mr. Huxley expressed the wish that he could be wound up each day like a watch, and so be sure of going rightly. Such a wish cannot indeed form a standard for any normal condition of life. A far more normal standard is Emerson's injunction, "Trust thyself," which we have already quoted. But here the words of the shamed adventurer are natural and right. They are the expression of that passionate longing for a master and a guide which comes when shame has brought distrust of self. The prodigal, desire for a better life, can find no hope of it but in a stronger will and a sounder judgment than his own to come between him and temptation. His heart cries out the cry of the humble:—

Shew me what I have to do ;  
Every hour my strength renew.

This then is the mood of the returning prodigal, who has his speech prepared for the meeting with his father. But that speech was never uttered. Our programmes of religious experience are never carried out literally. There is a better way than we in our shame had thought of, for God is always better than our thoughts, or even our desires. When father and son have met, there is no longer any word of hired servants. Fear, shame, distrust of self, the burden of responsibility, are all swallowed up in love. One sight of the father's face, the great

embrace of the beloved arm thrown around his rags, the tears that fall upon his neck—these settle all the problems which in cold blood we settle otherwise.

Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with  
 might ;  
 Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass'd in music out of  
 sight.

Self-distrust even has passed, for love has found a natural and happy solution. No hard responsibilities, to which our moral character is inadequate, are thrust upon us ; no unbearable lonely freedom is given us to manage rightly. The responsibilities of life in the father's house are different from those of the far country. For the father is there, and we have learned at last to love him, and that love has become a far more commanding law than hired service can ever know.

That is the beautiful old story, and there are multitudes who to-day understand it only too well. Their adventure in life has not been successful, and now a great longing has come upon them for rest from responsibilities which they have failed to meet.

Some come to this when sin has proved vain. They have tried self-will, and refused to follow the precepts by which others live. At last they have found out what incompetent fools they were, and how impossible a matter life becomes when it has revolted against its ancient laws. This is an in-

evitable element in true shame and penitence. Life has proved too much for them. Its very positions of honour and of trust condemn them, as they realize their failure, and they are overwhelmed by a hopeless sense of their own moral and spiritual inadequacy.

Others reach this state of mind rather from a sense of the sheer difficulty of the situation. Their constitution and their circumstances are not equal to the tasks they have to face. Life grows more and more perplexing, and its responsibilities more burdensome. They have come to this that they often cannot tell the right course from the wrong; and now they are too tired to face the situation and are utterly depressed by the sense of their own incapacity.

At such times the soul cries out for a master and a law. Give us our orders and we shall obey them. Let the command be definite, the direction unmistakable, and we shall not rebel. However hard the conditions may be, they cannot be so intolerable as the weary and futile attempt to choose and govern.

But God insists. He will give no external law written on tables of stone. He will write his laws only on our hearts. He will not call us servants even in answer to our prayers. He has called us friends and sons of his household, and he will not consent to any less honourable relation.

But then the love which Christ brings and reveals makes all the difference. That love is indeed the fulfilling of the law, as all those that are labouring and heavy laden may discover. They are not indeed permitted to lay down their burdens, but they find God bearing their burdens with them. Love changes the look and the feeling of all things. No responsibility is intolerable when in the Father we have found also the Master and the Guide. Under that lordship of love—full of allowances, rich in encouragement, tender with compassion—we can find heart to face anything that life sets before us.

## THE HERITAGE OF FEAR

(*All Saints*)

“Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy name.”

—PSALM LXI. 5.

THERE is a continuity in the history of religion which binds together the most widely diverse ages and types of thought. Each phase, with its peculiar emphasis, exists not only for the truth it can declare and the character it can produce at the time, but also for its contribution of permanent elements to the growing faith.

There is nothing so characteristic of primitive religious ideas as fear. “Terror is everywhere the beginning of religion,” and the process by which terror is exchanged for reasonable and loving communion is one of the most instructive studies in the world. Science has its part in this process, reducing steadily the region of the unknown, where man’s terrors mainly dwell. But religion is the supreme agent of enfranchisement, and while growing knowledge is steadily reducing fear, perfect love will ultimately cast it out. In the Old Testament we see this increasing emancipation. Fear of God is

the obvious background, but with increasing frequency and boldness the voice of prophecy cries to man "Fear not". The same process may be discerned in later times, with their transition from the gloomy and spectral night of mediaeval dogmas to the daylight of the reformation, and again from the harsher and more judicial forms of sixteenth-century doctrine to the kindly light of God's fatherhood which is the characteristic form of faith to-day.

But nothing which has entered into the faith and been a vital element in the Christianity of strong men of the past, has ever been in vain; nor have any such superseded elements ever been wholly discarded. They enter into the very essence of the faith and give to its future forms some of their richest and most valuable qualities. Fear is gone, in its crude and ancient sense, but the heritage of fear is among the most priceless parts of our inheritance from the past.

The inheritance of fear is manifold. It is worth our while to examine it in some detail:—

1. *Fear itself persisting.*—Fear, we said, is gone; but that can never be completely true. It is a dangerous world, whose territories are but half-explored as yet, and he must be but a foolish traveller who walks on light-heartedly with his eyes on the clouds. The consequences of wandering and of stumbling are manifest continually in the dooms of the lost and the fallen. Science has conquered

superstition, and civilization has cleared the road of life from many dangers that formerly beset it. Yet the result of this has only been to make men realize more fully the tremendous seriousness of the physical and social consequences of evil, and so to concentrate fear in the region of inward rather than in that of outward dangers. Here the most recent science is at one with the most ancient religion, and the Greek tragedies and Hebrew judgments are seen even more inexorably than of old working themselves out in our modern hospitals and laboratories. For the wise man, human life is still ringed round with dangers of which he is aware, and which he is wise enough to fear. And his religion will still bear the mark of this. Religion deals with things as they are, not with things as our desires or fancies paint them. There is no use in trying to adapt Christian faith to light-minded people, or to translate the thunders of Sinai or the voices from the Cross into the language of little souls. A religion that did not retain some elements of fear would *ipso facto* disprove itself.

2. Fear has a rich inheritance for the future, and when a people has ceased to fear it has little to hand on. Its children are born bankrupt of much that has made life most worth living to the past. Without the depths of repentance or the heights of reverence, such an age may call itself Augustan, but it is hastening towards the revolution. But the elements



of fear that enter into any generation's thoughts of God appear in the next generation for the most part in new forms. By the same strange alchemy of God, which changes the decay and death of this year into the fruitful harvests of next, the fears of the past are changed into the knowledge and character of the future.

*Knowledge* is part of the heritage of fear. The work of science is obviously this transmutation. The fears of to-day spur men on to acquire the knowledge of to-morrow, and most knowledge is thus literally the heritage of fear. But still more profoundly is this true of that knowledge of God which is the essential element in religion. The good-humoured little gods of modern Bohemia and modern Philistia are very pretty, but they are not real. If men know the true God at all to-day, that knowledge was found for them by former men who feared. If we know Him more humanly than the fathers, at least let us not forget that all that is greatest in our thoughts of Him came to us from them.

*Character*, too, is part of our heritage of fear. Character is a very complex thing. It cannot be created within one or even many generations. It is built up and enriched by countless elements which have entered into it in the past, which have been absorbed, and disappeared only to reappear in the richer and finer quality of the character of

future ideals. In a light age there is much talk about love and joy, but often these are slight, facile, and ineffective. The only joy and love that are trustworthy are those which spring from roots struck deep into the soil of the past, where they fed on sterner virtues. The element of fear out of which it grew gives to joy the qualities of repose, permanence, and gentleness: to love it gives a rich and passionate depth, a strength and patience which were impossible without it.

3. *Deliverance from Fear.*—Courage itself, and an unshaken and habitual fearlessness, are part of the heritage of fear. There is no sure or worthy deliverance from fear but through fear. By dealing reverently with the thought and conscience of the past, by full realization of the awfulness both of human nature and of God, fear may pass into joy and love that retain the notes of reverence and of steadfastness in our religion. It has been said that the land is blessed which has no history. In truth that land is more blessed that *has* a history, graved in the iron rock. But once fear has been transformed into reverent joy and steadfast love, we find ourselves delivered from all that manifold bondage and torment which beset the life that has dealt less thoroughly with the ancient terrors. In a word, the choice is offered us between one great fear and a thousand little ones; between the fear of God, and countless fears of evil, of to-morrow, of yesterday,

of our fellow-men, and of the mysterious region within the shadow of death.

Thus by fear we may escape from fear. "Live out the best that's in thee, and thou art done with fears"—it is a great and true saying. But that "best that's in thee" includes God in thee. Face Him and settle the issues of life with Him—then there is nothing left to fear. The great art of religion is that of centring all our fear in God. Fear is then lost in reverent love and trust, and the world around is swept clear of terrors. For such a man dreads nothing but the loss of the God he loves; he has now no longer any hesitation about "making the devil his enemy," nor bidding defiance to the trooping shadows of conscience and of mortality. For his faith no longer floats loosely on the surface of his dreams and his desires, but has reached bottom, and rests on the nether rock. Such is the final heritage of them that fear God's name.

## THE CLAIM OF GOD

### *All Souls*

"All souls are mine."—Ezekiel xxxiii. 4.

THE Bible is full of the demand for service to God, the demand for service resting on the fact of ownership. Two out of many such passages may be taken along with the text. In Isaiah xliii. 1, we have the words, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine," spoken by "the Lord that created thee . . . Him that formed thee." The grand ties of the servant of Jehovah, traced back through a wonderful history of redemption, ends thus in the thought of creation—and the *naming* of Jacob asserts that individual and particular client-relation which is so characteristic of Hebrew religion and so rich in meaning and suggestion". The other passage occurs in Acts xxvii. 28, when Paul, during the shipwreck, speaks of "God, whose I am, and whom I serve". At such a time as that, the question, *Whose am I?* is of first importance. In fair weather we are tempted to claim our souls and bodies for our own; but when the timbers are

starting, and the ship is driven before the tempest, we are fain to renounce the ownership of property we are so helpless to defend. If at such a time a man knows that he belongs to God, then the winds and waves matter little, and the impressionable sailor-men feel the power and shelter of one who knows whose he is.

Nowadays, when every one is proclaiming his "inalienable rights," and with loud voice asserting his claim on life, the other question, as to who has a claim to us, is often forgotten. Yet it is the more important, and even the more practical question of the two. Disciples of culture speak much of "fulfilling oneself" and "obeying one's nature," but they do not always realize that the very essence of such fulfilment and obedience is to find one's master. Genius has been often defined, but no definition is satisfactory that does not include a sense of mysterious ownership. The supreme touches of the artist, which change his picture suddenly from death to life, are in a real sense the coming of the Holy Ghost upon him. He is no longer his own man; he is for the moment "carried," possessed. So it is in music, in craftsmanship, in speech. It is not in any pride or self-sufficiency that a man can ever achieve the highest greatness. It is when "by stooping we climb to His feet". The man may not know what has happened when his work leaps thus towards the ideal of beauty or

truth, or perfection. Really it is the claim of God, who stoops over his workman and whispers to his soul, "Thou art mine".

There are, however, rival claimants for the souls of men, and each of these may, by the soul's consent, put forward a claim that life will honour. Not Judas only, but every man born, goes at last to his own place.

1. *The world*.—Life begins in an unworldly simplicity which accepts the situation without thought, But as childhood passes into youth, the world becomes more and more a shining and alluring fascination. The joy of life, the "green fire" of nature, press their demands. The intoxication of the "crowded hour of glorious life" proclaims and presses the imperative of earth. At first earth woos the soul surreptitiously, fawningly, whispering "Be thou mine". With hardly a flicker of definite consciousness or will, the soul answers "Yes, dear earth, I am thine". Until the man appears with his shameless creed of following his nature, subject to no other will.

Such a man has mortgaged his destiny. To be claimed by the world and to lose the faculty of escape from it is the ghastliest of all dooms. For the sweet voice that says "Thou art mine" changes its tone. It loses its softness and becomes terrifying, until at length its hoarse reiteration sounds the knell of the dying aspirations of the spirit. In his

*Easter Day*, Robert Browning has shown that appalling transition from delight through satiety to despair. Nothing could be more dreadful than the sickening return of the days, when the soul that has lost taste for all but earthly things, at last grows sick of them; when the swine before which we have thrown our pearls, turn again and rend us.

2. *Sin*.—There are in some lands, beautiful green spots that promise refreshment to the weary traveller, but he lingers on them to his death, for their beauty is poisoned. So he who grants the claim of the world finds that it leads directly to a further claim and a lower. You never meant to pledge yourself to more than pleasure, but you find yourself before you are aware committed to sin. Like the man in Victor Hugo's story, it was the cave you wanted, but the devil-fish wanted you. Sin, once committed, claims a man. He has sold himself, and he belongs to sin. This is no imaginary horror, it is happening around us every day. There are men everywhere who are surfeited with sin and yet committing it. They chose it lightly, and now they are filled with their own way. The sin they loved once they have long hated, but they do it still.

3. *Death*.—The surefooted shadow of death comes on at a measured interval after sin, and when sin has done with a man it leaves him to this next claimant. It is no theological fiction, but a patent

fact of life, that "the soul that sinneth it shall die". Sin is the sting of death, the paralysing sting, that leaves a man's heart and conscience and will flaccid, helpless, with no power to stand nor to resist. Sorrow, disappointment, and death come to all, but only to the unforgiven soul do they come with a claim. *Debemur morti*—we are due to death. There is no use of rebelling when with heads down they are marched off to that which claims them—their lord the worm.

That is life, not as religion makes it, but as it finds it. What then can religion do for so dire a situation? It sounds out a new claim, challenging all the rest. "To be the property of God is the essence of religion". So the form of this divine claimant strides in upon our ruined human life with His great voice, "All souls are Mine". The world hears it, that pleasure-house that has become a prison; and He breaks its gates of brass, and cuts its bars of iron in sunder. And the world, where once stood the prison-house, becomes the garden of the Lord. Sin and Death hear the foot-fall and the voice. They drop their victim and flee away, and remorse and temptation follow in their train. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life."

You who have sold your souls for naught until now the habits of your sins have bound you; you who are surfeited with earth, and to whom the



thought of things above this world has become a fainter and fainter dream ; you, whose bodies and souls have felt the growing tyranny of sin, and whose eyes have caught sight of Death, waiting visibly for your coming—listen to that great voice, “All souls are Mine—*your* soul is Mine.” The key of your soul hangs at God’s girdle. You belong inalienably to Him.

There is the solution of the whole ghastly mystery of life. However terribly those former claimants may have fastened their hold upon you, they have no right to you, for you are God’s. From the first, deep in the hearts of them, men have known that this was so. Even the classic heroes proclaimed themselves under the protection of a god. The faith of Israel set men free by publishing the claim of Jehovah. But not till Christ had come did that divine claim reach its full power and winsomeness. There was that about Him which seemed always to claim men for His own. It is only those who do not know Him that can criticize Him. When you know Him there is nothing for it but to be His. By His life and by His death, by His speech and by His deeds, by His infinite compassion and His mighty power to save, Christ claims us for His own.

To obey that claim is to reach a new thought of life’s responsibilities that will stand a man in good stead through evil days. “The lighthouse keeper on his rock sits in his solitude and watches his little

flame. Why does he not let it die away in the night as other lights in the distance die? Because it is not his light. He is its keeper, not its owner. The great power that watches that stormy coast has set him there, and he must be true." So does the man who knows Christ's claim upon him stand on the high vantage-ground of life. The tides of the world surge around him, the blasts of sin and the cold rain of death beat upon his tower. They would claim him for their own and quench his light of life. But the light shines on, for there is another who has said to his soul, "Thou art Mine".

## THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

“Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them.”—ST. MATTHEW XIV. 14.

NOTHING is of more importance than the love of humanity as a whole. Many thinkers of the last and the present centuries make this the central demand, and indeed the one essential principle, alike of morals and religion. Indeed this love of collective humanity has, by a strange irony of fate, become the chief rival of Christianity. The old individualism of our love one to another, and in its idealized form of our love to God or Christ, has been superseded by this wider and more general command of affection, “Write me as one who loved his fellow-men”.

No one denies the generosity and the beauty of such an ideal, nor do we in any degree underrate the value of it. Yet our heart sinks as we draw nearer, for we find that it is precisely the most impossible of all demands. The plain and brutal truth is, as Mr. Mallock has pointed out, that the great majority of our fellow-men are not in the least degree interesting to any of us. We do not know them, nor has our imagination any hold upon

them whatever. An accident involving death and suffering varies in its interest for us in inverse ratio to the distance of its scene from our familiar region. The same thing is true of distance in time. We are told to live for posterity, and in a general way we consent to legislate in view of far-reaching effects, and cherish public sentiments against the obvious propagation of disease and so forth. But how rare is any actual self-denial in view of the needs of far-distant generations. How few of us think of our successors beyond, say, the third generation, with imagination of the fact that they will have to face the same temptations, dangers, and necessities which we are facing, and that the results of our conduct will be of immense moment to their lives. In this diminishing intensity of compassion, we see love running to waste in collective humanity (and the leakage is not stopped by spelling Humanity with a capital letter), filtering away among the multitude until it disappears. Evidently what is wanted is a love of men that shall be backed by powers of imagination and sympathy which we must simply acknowledge that we do not possess.

But the Christ of Christian faith did possess such powers, and He has laid the conscience of them on the world. He had compassion on the multitude. Every life interested Him, distant as well as near. It is a curious question how far this comprehending imaginative sympathy extended, what limits His

human nature must have set to its scope. Yet in any case it is evident that here we have an altogether unheard-of stretch of sympathetic insight. It is indeed this fact that lies in the depths of any intelligent doctrine of substitution—an illimitable power of putting himself in the place of others so as to be in any true sense “the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”.

This compassion still lives on, and is as powerful to-day as at the first. Cicero confesses that, with the writings of Plato before him, he can feel the thrill of the hope of immortality; but when the book is closed, the ideals fade into thin ghosts again. But it is not so with Jesus. The most potent of all the forces of salvation at the present hour is the conviction held by great multitudes of men that Jesus still understands their perplexities, and bears upon His heart their burdens of sorrow and of sin. The only tolerable justification for the continued existence of the Christian Church is the persuasion that Jesus is now incarnate in it for the same ends of compassion and of healing. The function of the Church is compassion for the multitude—to seek out and to understand and to save the individual. To distinguish him from the mass, and look upon his sorrow and his sin; to discover and to pity the average man, to love him, and to find out that bright point in him which is not commonplace, and

to draw out the best that is in him. No service to society could be more economically valuable than that, and the Church may justly claim to have performed that service more than any other agency. It was Christ who taught the world the lovableness of the average man, and it is Christ who is slowly leavening society with the same conviction. No further question is needed to awaken compassion for the lowest of men than this, that he is "my churl for whom Christ died".

Surely here we have something absolutely divine. This universal care and tenderness inevitably send us back upon that God who created natural affection. Those eyes that thus search the world, that search history, and discover the souls of countless insignificant individuals, and bring them out into the light of love—surely such scrutiny is beyond the range of human vision. The longer we consider it, the more we think of the all-seeing eye of God. At first sight it may seem a far-fetched apologetic, but it will bear reflection. There is no question that an increasing compassion for the multitude, and an increasing conscience of their well-being has come upon man through Jesus Christ, and it would be difficult to find anything more expressly revealing the image of the Father. If there were to be a revelation at all, surely it must be something of this sort, so pre-eminently Godlike is Christ's compassion for the multitude.

Thus we find that the Gospel of Humanity and the Christian faith, so far from being rivals, are actually one and the same. Until Christ came, the love of humanity was no more than a theoretical and high-sounding subject for dialectic or for dream. It was He who changed it into an actual force in the world, and set its strong leaven working in the race. It had to work against innumerable prejudices and hatreds between individuals, classes, and nations. Still more serious was its opposition from the dead mass of selfish indifference which might well have seemed unconquerable. As a matter of fact it has not yet conquered more than small and isolated parts of the field. But it is at work. Man is already ashamed of his class hatreds and apologetic about his indifference, and everything which calls itself a Gospel of Humanity is at least sure of a sympathetic hearing.

But when any such Gospel disowns its origin, and poses as a new thing better than Christianity and about to supersede it, that Gospel is cutting itself off from its own sources of supply. Without the inspiration of Christ, it will soon cease to be of anything but an academic interest. For the simple fact is that we need Christ in order to love collective humanity and to discover the loveliness of its innumerable individuals. "It is because Christ lived that I believe in humanity," as Mrs. Lynn Linton told an earlier generation of humanitarians.

And indeed Christ is far easier to believe in. It requires the mysterious power of His personality, the force of His example, and the compulsion of His Spirit to enable men to have compassion on the multitude in any adequate or effective sense. We can love the world so as to save it, only so long as we are convinced by Jesus Christ that God so loved the world.



## THE FURTHER SIDE OF VICTORY

“More than conquerors.”—ROMANS VIII. 37.

No metaphor is more popular than that which represents life as a battle, nor is any exhortation more certain to stir our blood than the call to victory. Yet conquest is not the Christian ideal. It is a richer promise which Christ offers:--

And there the sunset skies unseal'd,  
Like lands he never knew,  
Beyond to-morrow's battle-field,  
Lay open out to view  
To ride into.

At first this seems overdrawn, but the more we think of it the more convincing it is. Even for its own sake, Christianity would need to have a higher promise than mere conquest. In many fields, victory is to be had otherwise. Every man who does his work is a conqueror, and the world is full of such men. For our sakes also, mere conquest is not enough. Ascetic Christianity may give a man the cheerless mastery over himself, which is yet very far from the gaining of the ideal life. And for the sake of others we must be more than conquerors.

All conquerors, in fact, are bound to be more than conquerors. Those who do not accept the stern condition will soon lose even that which they have gained. After conquest come higher responsibilities, for in the battle with evil either within our souls or around us, we must redeem that which we have overcome. It is not enough to make a desolation and call it peace. Life must cease to be our enemy and become our friend. So the true Christian conqueror is not merely a man with a brilliant deed behind him : he is one who has entered into a new and wonderful world, full of the rich fruits of victory.

Beyond conquest, the first fruit of it is *peace*. There is a noisy victory that is as restless almost as the battle was. But this conquest is a thing which ought to quiet the life, giving it a silent grandeur of repose. The rapture of release is natural at first, but it should soon pass into a settled confidence in which faith and character will grow and ripen.

*Gladness* also is offered to the Christian victor. Not only shall he be able to keep the enemies of the soul at bay, or with strong hand to suppress them. Freshness and vitality of spirit are with him also, both to enjoy his own life and to gladden others. The man who wrote this text was one who would undertake to rejoice in anything whatsoever. He rejoiced in hope and he rejoiced in

tribulation. He was, in the quaint, exhilarating phrase of an old commentator, "well, and merry, and going to heaven". We owe it to God, to ourselves, and to those around us that we shall not only be strong but rejoicing, men who "had faced life and were glad".

*Love* is a still richer spoil of victory. Conquest is apt to be loveless enough. Fighting tends to harden, and many a victor over life can only be said to tolerate the life he has mastered. He is master of himself, but the old illusions are gone. There is no heat of admiration, nor any kindness of judgment, but only a brave, austere, and cheerless spirit, withdrawn from his fellows and reverencing rather than loving God. But this is not the typical victory of faith. If the Christian has conquered, he has also loved. He has seen a love that overcame all things and subdued the world, and his own heart beats faster as he remembers that he too is "a man greatly beloved". So he has conquered in a heat of generous affection, and the wonder of that love remains, glorifying the life beyond the battle-field.

Such are the things that lie beyond mere conquest, and the secret of them all is Christ. Christianity has been well described as "a magnificent realization". There is a protagonist who fights in all our warfare, and our conquests are part of the great campaign. Every Christian knows the mean-

ing of the gods on their white horses who fought in the battle of Lake Regillus. Our victory is not a little narrow personal affair ; it is part of the mighty conquest in the war between heaven and hell on the battle-ground of earth. So much is this the case that our victories surprise no one so much as they surprise ourselves. "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory," for even after the hardest fighting the victory is a gift. So, through all the dust and smoke of battle, there is visible the form of the Son of God. Our fellowship with Him is so great and wonderful a thing that beside it any victory we may gain sinks into insignificance. We are far more than conquerors. We are men who have discovered the peace and joy and love of Christ.

There is always danger in very high ideals, and there may be some who shrink from such thoughts as these with a sense of wistfulness and discouragement. When we think of our fighting—how often we have been beaten, recreant, ashamed—our conscience protests that God knows it is difficult enough to conquer, and the weary spirit complains, "Why torment us with talk of something more? a plain, honest victory would be good enough for us!"

Ah, but this word "more than conquerors" does not presuppose a completed victory. Many a man feels acutely how far he is from anything like full

victory, and yet he has found peace and gladness and love. For Christ is generous with his soldiers, and His grace is wonderful beyond all reward. Long before we are conquerors, we are more than conquerors ; and that generosity of Christ, if a man will but understand and receive it, will nerve his heart and strengthen his fighting arm in the day of battle.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF LANGUAGE INTO LIFE

*(First Sunday in Advent)*

“The word was made flesh.”—ST. JOHN I. 14.

THE one supremely significant fact in the universe is, to quote Dr. Peabody's fine paraphrase, “the transformation of language into life”. We see this transformation in three different moments. There was the creation at the beginning, when great vitalizing words of God took form in created beings. Again there is the same transformation in all human work and morality to the end, when man is hearing words of God within him and is transforming them into deeds and finished products. But between these two there stands the stupendous fact of Christ, interpreting the first and inspiring the second.

1. *Creation*.—It is matter of general consent that the universe as we know it had a beginning. As thought travels backward into the great silence before that beginning, it must needs discover a moment when the eternal thought found expression, and the universe began. The word became

flesh. God spoke, and the thing spoken stood out as a created fact. "The universe is God's language." The unspoken word is all that might be; the spoken word is all that is. This is the meaning of those wonderful stories of Genesis, in which we see all things coming forth in their mighty evolution in answer to the words of God.

That is the Christian view of nature and the universe. It is not an eternally grinding machine, nor is it a dream-picture woven of mist. It is a real universe, in which God's language is transformed into life. The great words were spoken, and there are the mountains and the fields and the seas, and the ships upon the seas and the cities of men. It makes all the difference in the world whether as we stand in the midst of all these things we hear only a jangle of meaningless sounds, or whether we hear the word of the Lord. Listen to that word in the summer fields and sunshine, in the winter storms and the voice of the tossing seas. Listen, too, in the crowded streets, the throb of machinery and traffic, the bustle and the gentle speech of homes. In new thought and adventurous policy, in great loyalties to ancient institutions; in the voices of teachers in schools, of preachers in pulpits, of business-men in offices, of shopkeepers in shops; in the heart-beatings of the lonely and the sobs of the penitent—everywhere creation is the word become flesh.

2. *Jesus Christ*.—The word had been spoken in an unknown tongue. We heard it, and saw its incarnate forms, but we did not understand. Science was patiently deciphering it, retranslating it back from life to language ; endeavouring from the manifest facts of the universe to spell out the meaning of the Word of God. But science finds it difficult, and conscience and love find it far more difficult to understand. The divine Word has seemed to change and suffer in the process of becoming flesh. Its meaning is obscure, and it seems to have been mingled with much other speech that is not divine.

Many had tried to interpret it into human speech. Psalmists, prophets, philosophers had tried ; but their words died away, leaving fainter and fainter echoes in man's conscience. They had written their interpretation, but God's word can never find full expression in a book. Language must be transformed into life—and not, this time, the general life of the universe, but our human life—that we might understand. So “the word became flesh”. The meaning of life, the purpose of God in creation, became intelligible in Jesus Christ. His whole speech and conduct and being interpreted the world. When men saw Him they said, Life ought to be like that : God is like that.

Take three of the words of God, and let us see their transformation into life in Christ :—

(1) *Holiness*.—The word was familiar, for there



was abundance of ethical speculation and of conscience too. But holiness was dead and buried in formal rules of conduct, paralysed by man's universal failure, and hopelessly unattainable. But here was holiness splendidly alive, spontaneous, free, and natural. Here it was not merely attainable but actually attained. Jesus Christ—*that* was what God had meant by conscience, what conscience had tried to say; *that* was what ethical science had seen afar off, but never reached.

(2) *Love*—the most fascinating and yet the most elusive word of God. Men heard it in their own hearts and homes, but it was uncertain or sinister, and always precarious, being threatened both by life and death. That was human love, and the divine love was but a remote and dim whisper of possible goodwill, if things turned out to be as one sometimes almost dared to hope. But here was love at once stronger than death and simple as the laughter of a child. Men saw its patience, its responsiveness, its facility. They felt its tenderness, its understanding, its healing power. Here is God's heart, seen in the heart of a man. Here is what all true love actually means. The word Love had become flesh.

(3) *Death*—that last sad word. Every death before had been recognized as a Word of God, but how unfriendly and how harsh! Since Jesus died, men have known what God means by His great

word Death, for the death of Jesus has interpreted the whole of life. In the light of its love and sacrifice we look with new eyes upon sin, despair, forgiveness, restoration. And that death has re-interpreted death itself, giving to it surprisingly rich and blessed meaning. All the wonder of the eternal life—its rest, its renewal, its reward, its higher service—all these were included in the meaning of the word death, when in Christ language was translated into life. Truly man may say to the spectre, at the grave of Jesus,

Thou hast stolen a jewel, Death,  
Shall light thy dark up like a star.

All this, and far more than this, is included in the meaning of "the word became flesh". Flesh, the tempted and tempting thing, weak and suffering, subject to all contingencies and liable to all risks—flesh was used to express adequately and for ever the meaning of God's word of creation.

3. The third stage of this incarnation has yet to be considered. The text is a command that the word shall become flesh again in every Christian life. The translation of language into life is the great act of religion.

We are familiar with the idea of the incarnation being perpetuated in the Bible, the Church, and the Sacraments. But besides these, each life around us is a Word of God, a special purpose and design realized in flesh in its degree. This thought surely

gives new meaning to our intercourse with those who do business with us or live beside us. "There is but one temple in the world," says Novalis, "and that temple is the Body of Man. . . . We touch heaven when we lay our hands on a human body." Another has said: "The body of a child is as the body of the Lord; I am not worthy of either." How reverently, gently, purely should we treat one another if this indeed be so.

But most especially in ourselves must language be transformed into life. We all hear many words of God. The worship of the Church, its songs and prayers, its readings and thoughts, and the inward response to these in desire, aspiration, and resolve; these words are to become flesh in us when we return from our worship to our daily life. And also there are other words which our spirits hear from day to day. What has life been saying to you? What has your experience meant? What lessons has God been trying to make you understand? Some of it we cannot understand, and all that is required of us is that we shall walk among these unknown voices of life, erect and brave and self-respecting and gentle. But there is much that we understand quite well. It is the Word of God, spoken clearly and in familiar language by the voice of life.

But that word has yet to become flesh. There are countless words of God in the knowledge and

conviction of us all which are as yet no more than words. These are waiting for their incarnation in our character and influence, in our daily work and service of man and God. The works of our hands are God's word fulfilled in us. We who can work are born that certain great words we have heard in our secret souls may become flesh in deeds. Rise then and do the work that thy hands find to do. In this living fashion speak out what is in thee. So shalt thou also be a Word of God incarnate, an expression of His mind in living flesh.

## THE REASONABLE VIEW OF SIN AND OF FORGIVENESS

*(Second Sunday in Advent)*

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”—  
ISAIAH I. 18.

THIS passage brings the facts of sin and its removal into the light of reason. It is a point of view more familiar to the Greek than to the Hebrew thought, and when the Hebrew prophet describes God as reasoning with men concerning sin we may expect some startling truths.

1. *Views of Sin.* (1) *Unreasonable Views.*—The people had thought of sin as a light matter that could be easily compounded for with sacrifices and prayers—that was their great irrationality. It is repeated by clever modern people in many variants, each of them some device for getting rid of the old spectres of conscience which once terrified mankind. They have discovered that vice is but virtue run to seed, part of the evolution of character, an unpleasant necessity involved in human nature.

Above all, they insist that the whole subject is in bad taste, and that the proper course is to call it by some respectable name and say no more about it.

That view would be reasonable but for the facts of the case. But what means this indestructible conscience, this blood-red spectre that cannot be laid? That is fact, and there are those who would give all they have to persuade themselves that it is mere imagination. We are told to cultivate the power of living in the present. Laugh and forget; and "let the dead past bury its dead". Yes, if the sinful past *were* dead! but it is alive, and it will not stay underground.

(2) *The reasonable view*—"Scarlet and crimson". That is the fact of sin—glaring, blazing, unconcealable. Nay more, these are the colours of newly shed blood. The reference is to verse fifteen, where the people are accused of violence and murder. Like Lady Macbeth they have the stain of blood on their hand, and the 'damned spot' will not wash out.

Such language offends our ears. What have we to do with this? we are no murderers. Are we not? What of the slain innocence, the aspirations and pure hopes and desires that once were ours? What of the strength of will, the tenderness of conscience? What of the happiness of friends, their trust and love? Habits of evil have murdered our freedom; desires of evil have murdered our moral sanity and balance; temptations we have welcomed

have murdered the chances of to-morrow. We have stricken our own souls, wounding them to death.

But why go thus among the graves and let loose the spectres? The answer is plain; *we* are not doing this, it is reason that is doing it. "Scarlet and crimson" are the words of reason to eminently respectable people. Much is dead in you and me, and we are its murderers. That is the truth about sin; and, that being so, this is the only reasonable way to think of it. Come, then, and be reasonable. All the perfumes of Arabia—all the sweet theories of a tasteful generation that strews with flowers the grave of its murdered conscience—will not sweeten this little hand. Our sins are scarlet and crimson.

2. *Views of the issue.* (1) *Unreasonable.*—If this be the true view of sin, the true view of its issue would appear to be ghastly enough. It must be suffering, hopeless and unrelieved. The context shows the people of Israel battered by punishment, one mass of disease and pain. Yet all that had failed. "Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more." They had been punished in vain. The blows had been unexplained, for there was no knowing in them. As blow fell after blow, they simply took what was given, sullenness sinking to a fatal despair. Nothing could be more unintelligent or farther from reason than that. It was not the despair of the conscience-stricken but the despair of the brutish. Had conscience

stung them to desperation, had they been aware of the colour of their sins, there would have been reason in it: but this was wholly irrational, a dumb misery that unintelligently accepted the situation.

The counterpart of that despair is to be found in our modern pessimism. It professes to be reasonable. It founds upon philosophy and science. It knows the hereditary taint in the blood, the imprisoning environment and the tremendous odds against virtue. It knows also that man's sin is sure to find him out. It is not "done when 'tis done," but it is only beginning then. It will work out its course through vain remorse and tightening bonds of habit, and deepening gloom. The wages of sin is death—"wages," nay the prize, the best thing sin has to give. The only relief that pessimism has to offer is that this cannot go on indefinitely. The increasing horror of the rapids is so great that the swift plunge will come as a relief at last. This is widely held to be the rational view of the situation, and it would be so, but for one fact that it has left out.

2. *The Reasonable view of the Issue*—"They shall be white as snow . . . they shall be as wool". The words maintain the vivid sense of colour, and contrast with the gleaming blood, the snows of Hermon and the fleece of young lambs. They bring us back to the austere cleanness of nature which formerly



had seemed to judge the murderer by her cold and inexorable contrast.

This is very startling ; if we could believe it it would be very comforting ; but by what straining of language can it possibly be called reasonable ? It contradicts the whole record of history and goes in the teeth of science. It is altogether too good to be true in face of the facts. Why mock us further by speaking of reason here ?

Because of the omitted fact. Pain is no match for sin, but love is more than a match for it. The omitted fact is the fact of God. This is a record of His reasoning with man. He is neither compelling man's will nor condemning his transgression. He is appealing to his intelligence, urging him to take all the facts into consideration, and the fact of God above all other facts. If God be God, there must be some other issue, and the very fact that He is reasoning with men is full of the suggestion of hope. God has some way of dealing with sin which at the same time paints it in the most violent colours and yet entirely removes it. If God knows all and yet says this, then hope and not despair is rational, for the most reasonable thing in all the world must surely be to trust the character of God.

So the whole argument runs back at last to the love of God. He, who knows the depth of sin, knows also the height of His own forgiveness and the power of redemption. All the reason is on His

side, for if God indeed is offering to take sin away, the only reasonable course must be to accept the offer and let Him do it. This reasoning of love is indeed the greatest mystery in the universe. It does not explain the tremendous paradox of life, but it explains all we need to know. It leaves us on the one hand with the dread reality of sin, and on the other with the equal reality of pardon and deliverance. It faces all the facts of perverse will and the destruction that it leads to, but it brings in the greater fact of the irresistible power of love that masters all.

By Jesus Christ this tremendous challenge was accepted, and the facts set against one the other. The belief in redemption is entirely reasonable, for the thing has been done. The new fact of God's love has been tested, and the hosts of the redeemed are God's answer to man's greatest question. Sinful men, generation after generation, looked in despair at the scarlet and crimson of their sins; and behold they stand in white—white as snow and wool—before the throne. That is what Love can do and has done. God has proved His case.

## THE DIVINE LOVE INCARNATE

*(Third Sunday in Advent)*

“The love of God which is in Christ Jesus.”—ROMANS VIII. 39.

WHO is Jesus Christ? and what has He done for men? The answer of Christian faith is, He is God manifest in the flesh, who for us men and for our salvation lived on earth and died upon the cross and lives for evermore. Yet there are many to whom such formal definitions are valueless because they have not any sufficiently definite meaning in relation to our common experience of human life. Even those who are prepared to accept the formula, feel only too keenly how little they really understand it. “Christ Jesus,” says a thoughtful writer, “was in outward seeming like other men; His divinity is discerned only by spiritual grace.” That is true, and it is worth our while to inquire along what lines human nature is open to this spiritual grace, so that seeing Christ along them we may discern God in Him.

God, the Divine spirit at work in the world, can only be discerned by man along such channels as

are open to man, and the common description of the three main channels as power, thought, and love, will be a sufficiently clear and comprehensive one. From the first, the forces of nature were obvious and impressive, and man expressed his sense of these in primitive idol-worship. As civilization advanced, the ideas of order and intelligence were perceived more and more clearly, revealing wisdom as well as power in the Divine. Last and highest, as family affections grew deeper and more refined, love was recognized as an essential, and indeed paramount, quality of God.

He who undertakes to manifest God in the flesh, then, must work along these lines, combining and as it were epitomizing in himself the power, wisdom, and love of God. Apart from such a manifestation, God is discovered working out His ends slowly in the processes of nature and of human life. He is to be seen in the whole life of field and tree and beast and bird, and in all the lives of men, being in a sense incarnate in creation. But—so complex is creation—such manifestation must always be incomplete and inaccurate, and the great necessity must be for a manifestation of the life of God in a series of typical events within the limits of a single human life. It is this that Jesus claims to have done. He was that mysterious being who had power thus to sum up in Himself the entire process of God's life in man. He achieved in one short

lifetime the exhibition of the character and action of the eternal God.

As to the *power*, there can be no question that in Him history records a quite unique display. Whatever theory may be adopted in regard to the miracles, it is abundantly evident that here was One who laid mighty hands upon the individual lives with which He met, and that in His healing and helping energy men recognized the epitomizing of forces which would have otherwise been seen only in lengthy natural processes. Still more does His power reveal itself in that grasp of mental and social phenomena, which, through the agency of the early church, utterly changed existing society, set for the world new ideals, and set free within it new forces whose operation waited its time, but was irresistible when that time had come. And this is but the chief example of those immense supplies of *reserve* power which we are aware of in reading His life and words. One feels always that there are wide margins of possibility beyond the actual deeds recorded, and that His forces of character and influence are never put forth up to the edge of their field of exercise. He is, Himself, fully aware of this, and very frequently speaks of powers which He might have exercised, but restrained. Once, indeed, He exclaims, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth".

Similarly the *thought* of God is revealed alike in

His sayings and in His life. The wonder of the speech of Jesus is not its novelty, but rather a sense of familiarity and recognition which it awakens. It is as if we had known this before, though we had never been able to express it. Fragments of conviction, broken and imperfect intuitions and impressions about moral and spiritual things, spring into living knowledge when we have heard Him speak. It is as though the thought of God, which had been striving for utterance in the process of life, had extricated itself from manifold contradictions, and stood out clear and convincing, as final truth.

But most especially does the *love* of God manifest itself in Christ. It had been seen before Him, in all human love, in families and among friends. All love is of God, as we are told so emphatically in the first Epistle of John. But at best human love could give but a confused idea of divine love, and in some cases it must lead rather to doubt than to assurance. For love on earth is often divorced from wisdom and from power, and then its folly and its ineffectiveness lead rather to scepticism than to faith. If it is to reveal the divine love in any credible or consoling fashion, it must be brought back into relation with thought and power.

It needs thought and wisdom. It is often blind and uncomprehending, a mere passion not far removed from the senses, and utterly unfit for any confidence in so complex an engagement as human

life. Such unthinking and unwise love is one of the commonest of man's curses on the earth. In a world like this it is not enough to love ; we must love wisely. And instead of mere uncomprehending emotion, love needs a deep insight, a vast stretch of imagination, ingenuity, and conscience, to make it valuable or even safe.

Not less does human love require power. As Butler said of conscience, " Had it strength, as it has right ; had it power, as it has manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world". But as a matter of fact, love is constantly mastered on the earth. Selfishness, arbitrary circumstances, poverty, the lapse of time, all are seen to conquer it. Finally death comes, and love in passionate rebellion struggles in vain against that enemy. In view of these things there is many a life in which love, confessedly the most precious of human gifts, is yet also the weakest.

But the love of Jesus was illuminated by knowledge and fortified with power : it was strong as it was wise. He saw and understood those whom He loved. His insight penetrated to the depths of man's folly and sin, reconstructed his scattered ideals and insecure principles, interpreted him to himself, and so taught him to love discriminately. Similarly His love was strong enough to accomplish that which human love can only desire and long to do. His miracles are not recorded as mere

displays of power, but of love that was strong enough to cope with human sorrows. Faced by death itself, that love did not fail. It was stronger than death. Love was thus set free by Christ as an actual and effective force in the midst of human life with its needs and its perplexities. That wise and powerful love is among us yet. And in it and in its effects we see God, and understand not His love only, but also His wisdom and His power. And the more carefully we observe its contact with life at the acutest points of man's suffering, temptation, and wretchedness, the more clearly we see in Jesus the setting free of the eternal wisdom, power, and love upon the earth.



## THE SECOND ADVENT

*(Fourth Sunday in Advent.)*

“Like unto men that wait for their lord.”—LUKE XII. 36.

FEW doctrines have suffered more at the hands of their friends than that of the second coming of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures which relate to it have in them much of the spectacular, which is obviously there for the sake of vividness and not of literal prophecy. To understand the details a considerable knowledge of the history of symbolism would be needed, besides a wide acquaintance with Persian and the later Greek literature. Unfortunately the boldest dogmatists in this region are frequently those most inadequately equipped for the task, and the popular attempts at interpretation and forecast are to be wholly distrusted. Amid references to the clouds of heaven, the sound of a trumpet, and so on, we lose ourselves at once. Even the word “descend” presupposes a system of astronomy now held by no one. Equally impossible is it to reach any sound conclusions as to the time of a second advent. Those who are curious about prophetic signs and portents may find them in every age.

Such interpreters forget the largeness of history and the smallness of our knowledge and experience. They foster a morbid curiosity, whose effects upon the credulous are sometimes very mischievous. In the wise words of Godet, the Church "has nothing else to do, in virtue of her ignorance (from which she ought not to wish to escape) than to remain invariably on the watch".

The great fact which remains, when we have detached ourselves from entanglements of detail, is the fact of Christ in the future as well as in the past. Of that we must assure ourselves, for the question rises, Has Christianity a future with Christ in it? All great and fascinating ideals have a tendency to leave behind them the conviction that they will return. One has only to remember the legends of Arthur, Barbarossa, and Napoleon, to find examples. In a sense the legend is true. Many of man's designs are greater than the length of his life, and the demand for the continuance of anything which has once shown itself vividly effective and satisfying is part of our instinct of immortality. All the incompleteness, also, which men lamented in the work of those other heroes, is here also. The New Testament bears all the marks of an unfinished story.

But in the personality of Jesus Christ we find the element which distinguishes this from all other stories, and which guarantees a sequel with a lit-

eral certainty very different from the merely ideal truth of the other expectations. From such passages as the text—and there are many of them—we see the conviction of a return firmly seated in His own consciousness. His claim to be the Messiah, and His identification of Himself with the kingdom of God, necessarily include a doctrine of return. He began that kingdom and reign, and He obviously meant to complete it. Men who saw and understood its beginnings, recognized in them the very truth of life, the real meaning of history, towards which all the past had been feeling its way. They felt that this ideal state of things must and shall be completed, and they perceived that such completion would be impossible without Him.

Then His death became evident in the immediate future. He sought no escape, but deliberately accepted it. Beyond His death He perceived the unconquered evil forces of the world working out their dark miseries for mankind. Yet all this never for a moment shook His faith in the kingdom of God. Nay He linked on the thought of His death with the coming perfection of the kingdom, and saw, in death, not the thwarting of the kingdom, but a necessary incident in its coming. He felt in Himself the redeeming and renewing power that would yet recreate the world.

As to the form in which He expressed this, He was content to use familiar Old Testament figures

and symbols. For the detailed interpretation of these we have, as has been already said, no key. But the central meaning is perfectly clear. The kingdom of God is coming. Essentially, this is the promise that righteousness shall triumph on the earth, and become universal, full of judgment and at the same time full of gladness. But all this always centres in Himself, so that He is as essential to the future as to the past of the kingdom, and both are inseparably identified with His presence.

When our faith seeks to follow in His footsteps, and we repeat for ourselves the process of His thought, we find, to begin with, the conviction of the worth of righteousness supreme among our convictions. To see this once is to be unable ever to see life otherwise again. This kingdom of God is the very truth and meaning of life ; and our conviction of the worth and reality of righteousness compels us to believe in its ultimate victory. But then, for us, righteousness is wholly identified with Christ. Literally, "He is our righteousness," and when we think of righteousness we think of Him. Hence, when we think of it in the future, we cannot omit Him from the thought. Christ has made Himself absolutely indispensable to us, and absolutely certain also. The fact that meanwhile He is withdrawn from sight is a mere incident of no essential significance. Looking back and forward, we see righteousness and we see Jesus.

This sets for us the principle that in watching for His coming we shall find the real signs in the region of ideas and in the progress of history. Even now we see the kingdom of God gradually taking over the kingdoms of the world. Christ has slowly mastered the conscience of mankind, and every advance in public or private morality is a new triumph. Again, in individual lives, every conspicuous moment of experience is inseparable from a new revelation of Christ to the soul of the believer. If in any measure we are conquerors, it is "through Him that loved us". Thus, as every Christian heart knows, "Christ *has* come because He is here," and every new year "rings in the Christ that is to be". And, as we look forward to the future, all these lines of public progress and of private experience culminate in a point of time when Christ will be manifest again. In our present state we have always the sense of being "absent from the Lord," but everything around and within us tells us that the absence is only for a time. We are sure that we shall yet see Him face to face. For us individually, indeed, this climax may mean the vision that death will bring. But for the world it means more than that. Christ has appeared at the beginning of the kingdom, and Christendom looks forward to a time when the gradual victory will be completed, and the Son of Man will be manifest on the new earth He has remade.

Meanwhile the practical results of this great hope are evident. It inspires those who believe with an undying faith in the future. For them, Christ is in the future, and there is all the difference in the world between a religion which merely tells a story of the past and one which makes for a future day. We trust the future, and wait for it in faith and patience, because we see Christ there victoriously doing His will, and that vision wakens all that is bravest in us as we wait. Further, it puts a new meaning on the daily facts of life when we recognize Christ's coming in them. The climax is still to be waited for, but the coming is here and now, transforming all things for those who have eyes to see.

For the ultimate reunion, and for the daily coming of Christ alike, one fact only is certain. His coming is ever unexpected. The Christ we are waiting for is one whose habit it is to surprise the world. It is this constantly reiterated warning which discourages our curiosity as to details. By studying curious Scriptures you may think out a plan and fix a date, and that will be the hour when ye think. But it is in the hour when ye think not that Christ is to come. And the practical lesson is that we be so alert as to be always ready to recognize Christ in unexpected ways and at unexpected times. We expect Him in the clouds of heaven; he is coming along the streets of earth. We expect

Him in some great way ; He is coming in a thousand little ways. Only by alertness shall we overreach surprise ; by standing with the lights of faith and love and joy trimmed and burning, and the loins girt so that we are strong and unhampered for immediate service.

## THE GROUPS AROUND THE CRADLE

(*Christmas Day*)

“The eyes of all wait upon Thee.”—PSALM CXLV. 15.

THE one thing which is evident above all others in the artless Christmas stories of the New Testament, is their unconscious grouping round the cradle of significant and representative figures which, taken together, bring the world to gaze upon the wonder of Christ's coming. Like the symbolic groups round some statue they stand or kneel before Him, forming one prophetic picture of His manifold influence upon the world. In the beautiful words rendered familiar by the music of Gounod's "Nazar-eth," we have the local shepherds, the far-travelled kings, and the wind among the pine trees; excellently telling the same truth, and adding only that sense of nature also finding her interpreter in Him, which Milton expressed so nobly in his *Hymn on the Nativity*.

First there are *the parents*, linking Him in at once with Israel's royalty and peasantry. Joseph the carpenter brings Him among the working men and disappears, having rendered this service. The



working man shall receive from Jesus abundant repayment for that carpenter's care. *Mary* brings womanhood to the cradle, as Raphael and Rossetti have so exquisitely understood. Her pure soul has been astonished and grieved with centuries of worship. But one of the main reasons for her worship was that asceticism had taken the love of woman from the conscience of man, and it was by the compulsion of an eternal human need that she came back in this strange fashion. But, while the worship must pass, the gift she brought remains—purity and love are where Jesus is from the beginning.

The *Roman Emperor* is there, for it was the census that brought the babe to Bethlehem. Drawn, like so many thousands, by that Emperor's will along the roads of Palestine, they little thought how strong a link it was that then was forged. Rome shall reckon with that babe yet, and the greatness of her Empire shall pass over to His Church.

*The angels and the shepherds* are intentionally united in one group. Highest heaven and lowliest earth, separated by all the fears and superstitions of the past, are one at last in this welcome. The shepherd's pipe had sounded many a day and night among those pastures, and its only response had been the bleating of the sheep and echoes from the rocks, or the songs of rough voices. Yet it had sought wistfully—who can resist the wistfulness of

it?—for some other answer. Now the songs of the heavenly choir respond to it, and its wild music finds what it sought. For in Him the wistfulness of earth that yearns upward to the mystery of the stars finds at length an answer; and humble men discover unknown friends in heaven.

*Anna and Simeon* bring their hymns of welcome, and aged arms enfold Him in the temple. No Pharisees are there, nor Sadducees—none of the sophisticated lords of religion. But the worship of the world is there. In that temple, and in many another, where the piety of the world came to pray, empty arms had been stretched out towards the unseen God. But in Him worship was to find what it had sought, and to understand its own mysteries at last. Its God had hidden Himself, and the world of worshippers had been seeking for Him. Now that they found Him it was in the flesh of a little babe. And they understood that God is nearer than they had dared to hope. Men would look upon their children's faces, and touch them reverently, and God would be sought and found, not in the distant heaven, but here in the lives of men upon the earth.

The *Magi* come from far lands, guided by a star, with precious gifts in their hands. For this is to be no national hero merely, nor local revelation. He is for the world, and the Gentiles shall come to His light. And the wisdom of the world shall

come to Him also, and find the sciences open for their exploration. Guided by a star, they will travel through astrology to astronomy; through fantasy to knowledge. And while science flourishes in His days, more and more will it return to the cradle again, confessing that the highest knowledge is beyond its ken, and seeking that from Him.

Lastly, what is this evil face looking over the shoulders of the Magi? *Herod*, with his cunning eye, and his murderous heart, is there. Without that last figure the group were incomplete. It would tell of a world too fair and too harmonious. But the world we know has sin in it, and the undertone of the shepherd's pipe and the angels' song is a bitter cry that will not be comforted. The babe has drawn to His cradle not only the worship and the wisdom of the world, but its tragedies of sorrow and of sin. That touch completes the picture, casting among the shadows of the stable the deeper shadow of the cross.

Thus, around the manger of Bethlehem, all the world meets, bringing the manifold interests of humanity to Jesus Christ, that He may interpret and command them. The unseen world presses in also, for here heaven finds its Revealer Who shall indeed make it visible to the earth; and hell, astonished, drags its loathsomeness into the light in a vain attempt to match itself against its destroyer. Surely this is the night of all the days and nights, the birth in which all creation is new born.

## THE END OF THE YEAR

“It is finished.”—ST. JOHN XIX. 30.

THE closing year draws us to this text. There are two senses in which we use the word “finished,” and the death of Jesus illustrates them both.

1. *Finished, meaning come to an end.*—There was indeed much that came to an end when Jesus died, and there was much that had sore need to find its ending. In the words there is a sigh of infinite relief. His sufferings were over. In the deepening swoon of death, the pain of His wounds, and the excruciating weight and drag of the body on the hands, were already fading away. Behind these, the malice and enmity, the heart sore and broken with reproach, were behind him; soon, on the bosom of the Father, all these would be but a dream of the past. Behind that again, the growing sense of failure and disappointment as men rejected Him and all He had to offer them—that too was gone for ever. But behind all else, there were great shadows fleeing from the thrones from which they had oppressed mankind—sin and sorrow and death were finished too.

For us also the close of every year brings much

to mind that we would gladly be done with. Every year nails some part of humanity on its cross, but now the crucifixion of this year is finished. Each of us has his own share of things that never seem to come to an end. The long vexations and the unhealed wounds, the struggle and the sinning—how eternal they seem to be at times. So that at this season there are many hearts who feel like Childe Roland,

Yet acquiescingly

I did turn as he pointed : neither pride

Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,

So much as gladness that some end might be.

Well, at the poorest, there is at least always this to say, "It is finished"—you have gone through it and are done with it.

The year is dying in the night ;

Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

There is a great art in letting the past be past. Leave the cross of last year in that year, and do not take it over into next year. Perhaps a release awaits you, and happier days. Perhaps you shall have to go on with the same pain and battle. But do not take over the accumulated bitterness of the past; face only the burden of the day. And if anyone has taken his suffering selfishly, and himself become a cross to others, let that at least be finished and not again begun. One of the greatest things that Jesus Christ did for men was to finish things,

and let the past be past. He permits us to be done with certain things for ever, and He shows us how to do it. His cross has "finished transgression and made an end of sin," and what He has finished we may leave behind us.

And yet, though we may find some consolation thus in the very fact of ending, the feelings with which we greet the end are never wholly feelings of relief. There is a certain regret in our hearts as we part from even the saddest days. Part at least of the reason must be that with these days there must end so much priceless and irrecoverable opportunity, so many chances of courage, patience, and heroism. The end of all such earthly chances is coming soon, we know, to us all; and not a whole eternity of blessedness can give us back the lost opportunity of this difficult human life. On the boundless fields of God the soul will wonder at its want of patience. The longest, hardest life will seem so short a span, so possible a situation to have faced well. If the man most afflicted in the world knew that he had only one day more of it, how quickly that day would pass. Oh that we might catch the sense of haste before the rushing swiftness of the sunset hour reveals it.

2. *Finished, in the sense of completed.*—For we use the word in this sense also, indicating the accomplishment or perfecting of work. There is a difference between finishing a thing and merely getting

through with it ; and, as has been finely said, this is the difference between the artist and the artizan.

The life of Jesus seems like an incomplete life. We would fain have had that short space of three years extended. It seems in every sense fragmentary and broken off. Yet in this, as in so much else, further thought reverses the first impression. The last word of Jesus is, as Matthew Henry says, "A comprehensive word and a comfortable one".

The work of nature never seems finished : it is an untidy world. The rocks, the sea, the seasons of the year—how rough-edged they all are ! how lacking in what man calls finish ! In the tumble of nature all things are groaning and travailing in pain together, and nothing is ever exactly perfected. Yet through all this rough story of evolution, nature is making for some goal. Through lesser forms she reached forward till at last she found herself in man. Man in his turn is perfected in Jesus Christ, who Himself was made perfect through suffering, and found completion on the cross.

History tells the same story. The divine order in history is by no means so apparent as some light-hearted people think. This is the problem of all great historians ; and some of them, baffled by the confusing play of innumerable details, have denied that progress is to be seen in history. Yet the deepest meaning of history is man's attempt to find himself and to find his God ; and these, sought in vain

through unnumbered generations, were found at last in the Cross. All that the world had struggled and waited for was reached in that climax, in which love solved the problem of human life.

Thus on Calvary, not only was the life of Jesus perfected, but the whole struggle of nature and of history found that towards which it had reached forward. It was the triumph of weakness over brute force, of truth over error, of righteousness over sin, of love over hatred, of hope over fear, of gladness over gloom. This was the great redemption, of which Christ had said to his Father, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do," and the last words from the cross are a shout of victory as well as a sigh of relief.

For us, the hope of completing our human task is vain. And yet there may be more completeness in it than at this season we dare to hope. If we have been honest and faithful, we have certainly been building better than we knew. God is building His house not made with hands out of what seem to the human builders broken fragments, hopelessly incomplete, but these find completeness as parts of His large design. So let us close our year in hope. The whole enterprise of living is a mystery. It is our part not to be its architects but its masons and labourers, whose eyes are upon the Master-builder in faith and loyalty, and whose hands are doing with their might the work that is given them to do.











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