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any particular case is only to be determined by the context.

What, then, of authorship and date? In the case of SL, it must be after Jeremiah and Ezekiel, whose ideas on the subject of suffering were making the recasting of men's notions on this theme necessary. It is also later than Job. It is post-exilic. The *terminus ad quem* is possibly the Book of Malachi, if, as Duhm thinks, Mal 2⁵ is an echo of the SL. In that case the date must lie between 500 and 460. The SCN is dated by its relation to the Second and Third Isaiahs. It is dependent on the Cyrus-Servant Songs, and is in turn echoed in chapters such as 61. Thus it may be placed between 530 and 460. On psychological grounds, we might expect it to be the earlier of the two, for it is the application of what only comes to be a conscious principle in SL. Further, there are affinities between SCN and Second Isaiah, which are wanting between the latter and SL, though SL may well have SCN before him.

It would seem almost a pity that SL should have lost its individuality in this way, but it is difficult to see how otherwise it could have survived. It

would be natural that it should be included in the works of the Second Isaianic movement, with which it was indirectly connected. But, because of its greater affinity with SCN, it is probable that the fusion of the two songs into one took place before the insertion into the corpus. Before this could happen, however, there must have been a certain loss of spiritual insight. The SL must have come to be read legalistically; it meant nothing more than SCN. The redemption of men was now only the publication of the Torah. The emphasis had passed from the sufferings to the future glory of Israel. When this had taken place, it was ready to be inserted, after 52¹⁰, where it is written that 'YHWH hath made bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations.' This, too, may have been before the Third Isaiah, but the gap is short, although the gulf between the giants who wrote and the pygmies who compiled was widening, so that, outside of the elect few, there would not be many who could give to SL and SCN the meaning that was intended to be borne by them. Spiritual songs were finding mechanical executants.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Let in the Sun.¹

'I am the light of the world.'—Jn 9⁵.

Is yours the kind of Mummy that *will* keep all the blinds drawn down? Tell her from me that it's far far better to have the carpets a bit faded and the cushions' colours not quite bright and fresh than to have sickly bairnies. And they are sure nowadays that it's the sun that keeps us well, that we should always let in as much of it as ever we can; that it is in cold dark corners that, worse than bogles, the germs gather that give us colds and horrid illnesses, and keep us in bed, turning and tossing hot and uncomfy while the rest are having a grand time outside; and that the way to beat these wretched germs, and to keep well and sturdy, is—you know how you're always ready when your chum whistles—well, allow the sunshine in whenever

¹ By the Reverend A. J. Gossip, M.A., Aberdeen.

it comes keeking at the windows, for it'll bring health and strength and healing with it.

Christ knew that long ago, and told us all about it. Walk in the light, He said, keep in the sunshine, that is the way to have your bodies well and fit. And I am the Light of the world, He added. So that if you wish to have the real you, not your head and legs and tummies only, but the real you inside, hardy and well, you must keep close to Him. Leave Him, and you'll be in the dark, will trip and stumble and not see where to go or what to do; and, worse than that, the soul in you will catch all kinds of nasty illnesses. Measles was bad enough. How crumply the bed got! And how tired of it you were long before that doctor man would let you up and out of it! But sulks is worse; and temper is just horrid; and crossness makes one feel so wretched afterwards. If you have these diseases, keep you near to Christ. For it's the sun that heals and makes us fit. And He is the Light of the world.

Light, you know, is a strange thing. In a rough kind of a way it's like your hand, which, you see, is made up of the palm and the four fingers and a thumb. And light is made up of its different rays. You have seen some of them when the huge arch of the rainbow lay across the fields, could make out quite a lot of different colours, red and yellow and the rest of them. These were the rays that make the light. But there are more that we don't see ; and one of these is called the ultra-violet rays ; and it is these, the wise men say, that keep us well. Some of us who live in the country, or in clean little towns, don't know how well off we are. Always we have the broad sky above us and the country is close at hand. Just a short walk and you are there, out in the fields with all the houses left behind. And even in the streets the air is sweet and pure, and often sunny. But in the big cities, or some of them, it's all quite different. The houses are so packed together you can see only a narrow ribbon of grey sky ; and the trees look so tired and get so dirty and shabby and tashed, like children with no mummies to take care of them ; and it's often wet and rainy, and a thick black cloud of smoke lies up above you, and the sunshine can't get through, not very much of it at least. But, what is worst of all, they are beginning to find out that these kind ultra-violet rays that keep us well can't manage it at all, are nearly all held up and cannot reach the people jostling yonder in the streets. The red rays, and the blue rays, and the yellow ones can squeeze past now and then. But ultra-violet rays are stopped by smoke, and can't get through at all. And that is why, they think, that often children in the crowded cities are not quite so hardy as some others are, why they are often ill and white-faced and tired. The ultra-violet rays can't reach them. Isn't that a pity ? There are the wee folk just like you, needing them if they are to keep sturdy ; and there is the sun overhead shining and shining at its hardest, sending down ultra-violet rays as quickly as ever it can. 'Don't you worry, little ones,' it says ; 'I'm not forgetting, here is what will keep you right.' And yet, try how the sun will, its rays can't reach and help them. The stupid black smoke spoils it all. And isn't it a pity that, though Jesus longs to help us, often He too cannot reach us though He tries and tries because that horrid black smoke we call sin gets in between Him and us, and stops the ultra-violet rays of the Light of the world that

would keep our souls clean and straight and true and manly, if only they could reach us. But they can't.

And what is it that makes that thick smoke lying up above the cities ? Oh, just the fires ! That one in your grate, and this one in mine. They are only little things and they don't make much smoke when you look at them one by one. Yet all of them together, one fire here and one fire there, make that thick murkiness that keeps the kindly healing rays away. And so, you're not a bad wee lad, not you. You're a dear little soul, really. Only there are some things about you, quite small things, and they do make a dreadful difference. If only they weren't there ! And yet you stick to them, and lose so much. For years and years, the wise people have been telling us, 'If only you would do with less fires, would burn clean things and not dirty coal, you would have far more sunshine.' But we like coal fires, like the life in them, the crackle and the dancing flames and the pictures you can find in them. They are warm and comfy and homey. And so we keep on having them, and shutting out the healing rays. And it is such silly little things in you that come between you and Christ, yet you won't give them up. When you are in a hole, and to get out of it you are not quite straight ; when, because you want something, you are greedy and grabby about it ; when you lose your temper over a mere nothing, it is stupid things like these that make the smoke that stops the Light of the world from shining down on you, and keeping you hardy and fit and strong inside. How stupid we have been, now haven't we ?

But there is another thing. Perhaps there is almost no smoke where you live. No, but there is glass. 'And what's the matter with clean glass ?' you ask. This violet rays can't get through it either. That's what is the matter with it ! And so, when the sun shines warm and bright, they tell us that we ought to open the windows as wide as we can. No harm in windows, not a bit, we must have them. Yet open them, and let the ultra-violet rays come in to kill those nasty germs for us. And there are other things that are quite good, and that you have to do, and that you simply can't help doing, not bad at all, quite clean, quite right, fine things, and yet they can shut out the Light of the world from us. Isn't it true that, what with games, and lessons, and ploys, and one thing and another (and there are so many to pack into each

short day), you often forget all about Christ, never think of Him at all? I think He understands, and is happy that you should be so happy. But if we want to be fit, the real we, we must let the Light of the world shine in on us. So, open the windows, and let it in; however busy you are, make a place in that wee heart of yours for Jesus, our best Friend, and He will keep us well from grumps and selfishness and temper.

The Three White Baskets.¹

'I had three white baskets on my head.'—Gn 40¹⁶.

It was only a dream, but it gave a real fright to the dreamer. He dreamed he was walking along the street with three white baskets upon his head. Rather a jolly dream, don't you think? I know this, when I used to go to Covent Garden Market and see the clever porters there running about with twelve or even twenty baskets in one straight column, and all beautifully balanced on their heads, I used to wish I could do it. Once I had a try at home, and, well, I think I won't finish that story just now! The point at present is this, that every proper boy feels he would like to be able to balance that Eiffel Tower of baskets on his head, and if I had been able to do it only in a dream I should have been delighted, but this man woke up from his basket dream in a fright, and his face was as white as his baskets, for he said he had seen something in them! Empty baskets may be all very well, but his were full, and that may be quite another matter. I wouldn't like to have ONE basket on my head full of black beetles or frogs, would you? Well, this man had three baskets, and there were things in each of them that frightened him. What things were they? You see, this man was a baker, and he was used to making rolls and pies and tarts and buns, and when he liked he could make them so nicely that he was appointed to make them for the King. But he was sometimes very careless over his work, and one day the King grew so angry with the spoiled things he sent up to the table that he packed him straight off to prison, and it was in prison where he dreamed this dream. He looked into his dream baskets and there he saw the things that had so disgusted the King. Underdone buns, burnt tarts, and broken pies, and when he saw them all together he grew very frightened, and no wonder. How would you like to see all the horrid

things you ever did put together in a basket? All the fits of temper, all the fibs, all the broken promises? No, thank you! Next dream, please!

Well, when the young gaoler opened the cell door the next morning, this poor frightened baker told him all about his dream, and the young gaoler said, 'Yes, I see the meaning of it all. The three white baskets are three days. Every day comes to us as a white basket, and it gets filled with all the things we make, our good things and our bad things alike, and after what you have told me about your careless baking I should think you were frightened. I don't think there is much chance for you.' And he was right, for the King never forgave that careless baker.

There was once a very good man and a very brave man named George Fox, and just because the people did not understand his way of being good he was put into prison, and the grim old gaoler was very cruel to him, just because he knew that nobody would blame him for being cruel to this good man. But one night the gaoler had a fright, and when he woke up the next morning he was so trembling and panting that his wife grew frightened as well, and she said to him, 'Why, whatever is the matter with you?' And he said, 'Wife, I've had a dream, and it's frightened me! I dreamed I was called to God's Judgment Bar to give an account of all the cruel things I have done to George Fox!' There's a basketful for you! I expect it cured that grim old fellow. It seems to me the best thing we can do is to be very careful what we put into these white baskets, for what we do *is* put in them; and even after God has mercifully forgiven us, we shall still be sorry to think of the spoiled and broken things there. And, you know, if we take care not to spoil things in the baking, we shan't have to be sorry for them, shall we?

The Christian Year.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Nobleman of Capernaum.

'So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.'—Jn 4⁴⁶.

1. *The sifting of character.*—'Nothing more can be done.' How often have these words, spoken sadly and deliberately by the physician, baffled after long struggle, quenched the last faint sparks of anxious hope! They had doubtless been spoken in

¹ By the Reverend F. J. Gould, Watford.

the home of the nobleman at Capernaum. His son was now at the point of death. But there was one last chance. Report came that Jesus the Prophet was returning from Judæa. He was already well known at Capernaum, and returning pilgrims would bring tales of the signs and wonders of healing with which He had been arresting the notice of Jerusalem. Here was a new hope. The father would go to Him, and appeal for His help. No time was to be lost: he hurried out to meet the Prophet on His way. He besought Him—with what urgency we can so well imagine—that He would come down and heal his son. The answer of Jesus was strange and perplexing: ‘Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.’

It may be that Jesus felt deeply the contrast between the ready and eager heed paid to His acts and the indifference and denseness that refused the appeal of His words. How little there was in all the excitement of men about Him of any recognition that the Son of God was in their midst with His gift of a new life for the soul! It may be that Jesus wished to test the man himself, to see whether he had any personal faith, or only an anxiety to make use of Him as a last resource; to probe, in fact, the motives that had brought him there. This was often His way. He sifted men before He answered them. In this instance the test was not in vain. There was a note of simple confidence in the character of Jesus in the reply—so pathetically earnest in its very quietness—‘Sir, come down ere my child die.’

It is worthy of notice, too, that there was no sign or wonder given. ‘Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth.’ It was another and a more searching test. For it was no answer to the plea, ‘Come down.’ But his faith was once more equal to the test: it was strong enough to trust the mere word. ‘The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way.’ There must have been long hours of weary travelling and the anguish of anxiety, as the miles lengthened between him and the Healer who would not come with him. But we know the news that reached him on the road. ‘His servants met him, saying, that his son lived.’

It is surely hard for some of us to read in that story a parable of our own life—the earnest wish, brought to our Lord and laid at His feet in prayer; His answers, as it seems, of rebuke or hard testing; the long days and years of the travelling with un-

certainty and anxiety as the only companions—in short, the painful discipline of faith. But somewhere along that far-reaching stretch of the road of life, it may be on the other side of the river of death, the good news is waiting for us which will show that the mere word of Jesus was worth trusting.

2. *Disappointments in religion.*—The nobleman of Capernaum came to Jesus and asked in faith. How chilling, how perplexing Jesus’ reply—as it seemed, a mere rebuff! So it was in two other cases. The Syro-Phœnician woman came to Him in all the faith of a mother’s love, and He seemed to repel her with taunts. The rich young ruler, in all the ardour of desire to learn the teacher’s lesson, cast himself at His feet, and in words of love and respect—‘Good Master’—asked his question. And again the first answer was a rebuke; and the last answer the summons to a sacrifice too hard to make.

Well, it may have been just thus in our religious experience. We gave up our carelessness and offered our lives to God; and we have been troubled with perplexing doubts which never troubled us before. We told Him that our one desire was to be better men; and He seemed to answer us by letting us see as we had never seen before how bad we were. We offered ourselves to do some work for Him, and we found that we could not do it: it failed; we could do nothing with it. We offered Him our love, and we have had long spells of dryness, hardness, depression of spirit.

Now, sometimes the reason may be some ‘root of bitterness’ in ourselves, some sin not faced and dealt with, some habit still permitted, some sacrifice still grudged. But it is not always so. Sometimes—very often—these seeming rebuffs, these very real disappointments, are sent by God for our good. They are to test the inner motive of our faith, our prayers, our efforts. They are to show us whether in some subtle way we are not self-seeking—expecting our own happiness or satisfaction, rather than ‘God’s glory.’ So by these rebuffs and testing disappointments God warns us off false lines of religion. He pulls us up when He sees, as we cannot, that we are setting out on mistaken ways. He checks and disappoints until we have learned to say for ourselves, ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God.’ Thus only can we ‘enjoy him for ever.’

3. *The perplexities of prayer.*—We may be sure that if ever a prayer was sincere and from the heart it was that prayer of the nobleman, that Jesus

would come down and heal his son. Yet at first there was no answer at all. He repeated it in words of simple entreaty ; and then the answer was quite different from what he had asked. He asked Jesus to come ; he was told to go his way. ' Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way ; thy son liveth.'

There are few things in the religious life so disquieting as the perplexities of prayer. We make our prayer, earnestly, deliberately ; we are sure that what we ask is not plainly against God's will. Sometimes there seems to be no answer at all. We pray and pray, and the heavens seem to be as brass. Sometimes the answer, if it comes, is long deferred. Sometimes, if circumstances that occur be the answer, they are strangely different from what we asked or expected.

There is one thought that may help. We are to pray as men that expect an answer ; but we are not to pray for the sake of the answer. The essence of prayer, so to say, is the act, not the answer. It is the communion of the child with the Father. It is the placing of the life—its thoughts and wants and hopes—on the Divine will and leaving it there. If no answer seems to come, it is often just to test the reality of our trust in that will of God. When we think that the answer is the end of prayer, we set our mind on *that*, and disturb and distract our life in the impatient expectation of it. When we think that prayer is its own end, we leave the answer to Him ; and this trustfulness brings a great calm ; and this calm, this sense that all is in God's hands, is the real power that prayer gives to life. When we are perplexed, let these great words of St. John fall upon our ears with their calm strength : ' This is the boldness that we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us : and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him.'

4. *A rule of life.*—' The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way.' These words of the Evangelist—simple as the trust and obedience of the nobleman—are not less deep than simple ; for in truth, if we ponder them, we shall find them to reveal nothing less than the secret of a sane and happy Christian life. We have been thinking of some of the distresses and disappointments of religion. Well, here is a key put into our hands which can unlock the gate of escape from them. It is—to take Jesus at His word, and at

once to act as if it were true ; to believe the word that Jesus speaks unto us, and go our way.

We have the record of the words of Jesus. The progress of criticism has really strengthened the grounds for accepting the Gospels as authentic. But even suppose a man feels bound to admit that some of the words of Jesus have been, in the manner of Eastern writers, put into His mouth by His disciples in the later years of memory and reflection, yet he can hold to others which Jesus, and Jesus only, can have spoken. They are, in themselves, in the effect they have had on the world's history, the greatest words ever spoken in this planet. They have, in a unique degree, the characteristic of all the great words which have made epochs in the story of man's life—the mark of personality.

They are living words ; the freshness of eternal truth is ever in them ; they *find* men still, find them in their deepest need, in their truest instincts. The truest wisdom—a wisdom which is ever justified by its results—is to take one's stand by them, to hold them as true.

Yet this is just what Christians are often slow to do. They assent to them, but they do not trust them as true. Take the simplest instance. Jesus revealed the Supreme Being as ' Father.' That word alone, if taken really as true, is enough to transform life. Yet, when any event occurs to strain their faith in it, men lose it. They will not resolutely hold that the inevitable will of God, when it pains them, is the will of a Father.

The secret of success in the religious world is to take Jesus at His word. And then—to go our way. We have taken our stand : we know where we are about the problems of life ; we believe the word that Jesus has spoken to us. Then we are, with all simplicity and directness, to shape our daily steps accordingly. We are to take everything that comes—of opportunity, of trial, of sorrow, of happiness—as covered by that first and fundamental truth ; and to go our way in trust. This is the whole art of Christian living. Let us try to practise it.¹

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Our Peace.

' If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes.'—Lk 19⁴².

Jesus had come from the last of His preaching

¹ C. G. Lang, *The Miracles of Jesus*, 211.

tours to Jerusalem, in order to be present at the Passover. He had observed everywhere preparations for external religious observance, combined with few signs of religion of the heart and life. The sight of it all had come with an additional shock to His spirit, gladdened a little by the triumphal entry He had made with the cavalcade of Jews from the south-east and south, who had recently seen Him for the first time. The contrast between the honour given Him by His latest friends and the neglect of all that He stood for in the city, in which three years before He had preached, would touch Him with a poignant wounding. And yet before pronouncing upon the situation, He would take a lonely night to think over it all. Alone, in the fields by Bethany, under the brilliance of the white stars, He would review the whole problem before God. He had preached, He had lived, He had loved; and *that* Jerusalem, *that* Temple, which He had seen the day before, was the outcome!

The whole set of the circumstances and the tears that accompanied His words lend, to this saying of Christ, a specially deep value. The text is, of course, applicable to any community of men, or to any man, that is heedless of his highest interests. It is, therefore, applicable to any set of men, or any individual who may be indifferent to the claims of Christ and to the spiritual side of life generally. And in the saying we shall look at two points only; first, that it is of most vital importance to know wherein really consists our *peace*; and, second, that the time may come when we cannot know.

1. In the first place, then, there is such a thing as the right avenue of search for the secret of peace, and it is of the supremest importance to us to find it.

We shall all admit, no doubt, that we find in ourselves a continual restlessness. We know what it is to be looking forward continually to a something new and better, to surroundings that shall make for a permanent rest of spirit.

Such restlessness may be held to proceed from many causes—as, for instance, from a desire for a fuller exercise of active faculties—a desire to ‘realize ourselves’ in work and service; or from the ordinary position, in which all of us are settled more or less, of irksome and worrying circumstances, with which we are called upon ceaselessly to cope, to the detriment of the development of the higher sides of us; or from the difference that exists

between our ideal and our real, that is, from the non-performance of what we readily acknowledge to be best, owing to the weakness of our wills; or from the dim appreciation which we have, that our best falls very far short of the real best as it is in the mind of God. Whatever may be our diagnosis of our case, at least we feel that there is a city of rest somewhere, that we have not yet attained to it, and that we never shall have rest until we do attain to it.

Whereupon we proceed at least to imagine cures, and, as far as we can, to make use of them. Young men and young women say, ‘Keep on amusing me, and I shall have peace.’ Put in blunt English, the action of many proves that their opinion is, ‘Give me plenty of diversions and dinners and games and spectacles and trips and general gaieties—keep that up and I shall find rest. It is drudgery and sameness and compulsory toil that worry me. Fill up my life with pleasant change and my heart will be at peace.’ To others, that medicine seems a very quack remedy. According to them, it is turmoil that breeds restlessness. ‘Give us,’ say they, ‘peaceable surroundings and we shall be peaceable. Give us a home into which the sunlight and the singing of birds come in the morning; give us a garden wherein roses grow; take from us the dreary round of well-nigh hopeless work; give us, in its place, opportunity to serve, according to our faculties, such good works as may appeal to us; give us a cosy corner and a good book at night; take from us anxiety as to ways and means, and we shall be content. In peaceful homes, we shall possess our souls in peace.’

May God inspire legislators and economic thinkers and workers to devise plans whereby true ‘garden cities’ shall deck our land! At the same time, we all agree that not thus can the permanent rest of the soul be found.

And many another cure is proposed by men after their type. ‘Give me the life of thought,’ says one; ‘of art,’ says another; ‘of power and satisfied ambition,’ said a third, ‘therein is my rest.’ Sometimes a base voice comes, ‘Give me my lusts, and I shall rest.’

Is it not the plainest fact of common experience, that not along any of these lines does rest come to abide? The pleasures, that youth grasps at, are often ashes in the mouth to later years; the lusts that youth would gratify are the whips of the soul—usually even in this world, certainly in the world

to come. Ambition fails the moment ambition is gratified. Even the fine life of the mind itself does not satisfy ; for the thinker, just like other folk, has a heart and a soul.

When we are in earnest to find wherein our peace consists, we are forced along two avenues of discovery. One is the avenue of abstract thinking ; the other is the avenue of experience. By the former of these, the conclusion that we should come to is, that a man will only begin to attain rest when he has discovered his true end—that is, the purpose for which God created him—and is steadily moving towards it. By the latter, we find that there are certain moments in life when we seem to know the secrets of peace ; and, therefore, that we should seek to repeat the experiences of these moments.

Now God's word and experience agree precisely in teaching us wherein our true end consists. There are two experiences, which are intertwined, during which we seem to understand all the mysteries and be at peace. And these are the experiences of moral victory and of love. When a man has resisted, has fought and overcome, has, after struggle, made his sacrifice, for a moment at least the peace that floweth like a river is in his soul. In that experience there is a curious element of love—love, at least, of goodness, and also, in a mystic kind of sense, love of Christ. On the other hand, when a noble human affection is given and possessed in return, when a man can say that he is his friend's and his friend is his, then also he understands and is at rest. In that experience there is a curious element of moral conquest.

And what does all that amount to ? It amounts precisely to the first answer in the Shorter Catechism, one of the most inspired sentences ever penned. 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever.' To glorify God, what is that but to obey Him ? And what is obedience to God, but fulfilment of the moral law ? To enjoy Him, what is that but to give the heart to Perfect Love and to possess the empty heart's desire for ever ? Such is the rest that remaineth for the people of God !¹

2. The second point in our text is that the time may come when we cannot possess our peace, because we did not recognize where it lay.

So often there is obliviousness. 'If thou knewest . . . but thou didst not know,' must be

¹ J. R. P. Sclater, *The Enterprise of Life*, 65.

said in the case of many. 'If thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day' (the special opportunity made for thee), 'the things that belong unto thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes.'

Opportunity calls for awareness, capacity to see it. When Ishmael seemed to be dying of thirst there was a spring near, but the eyes of Hagar were blind with tears ; she never saw it till the Lord opened them. At the battle of Granson, Charles the Bold lost the Florentine diamond : the Swiss soldier who found it sold it for a few pence thinking it to be a piece of rock crystal. Another now supposed to be part of the same stone as that from which the Koh-i-Noor of the British crown comes, was for long used by a peasant as a flint for striking fire. These simple men were close to wealth and knew it not. Occasion was not taken by the hand. It is not always better in the highest things. There is unconsciousness of the Divine ; obliviousness to opportunity.

But missing and mistaking things are acts of omission that are penalized. It is because the incapacity to judge the import of the moment comes from fault. It is inattention that breeds incapacity. 'Now,' Christ said, 'are they hid from thine eyes.' Not by any other Divine decree than the decree which makes neglect to be punished by loss of power. The power to avail oneself of opportunities goes ; and the opportunities go.² It is too late to seek other avenues of peace. Desire for them is dead. Such men are chained to their own restlessness ; and from them breaks the most desolate cry which can be wrung from a human soul, 'If I had known, if I had known, the things that belong unto my peace.'

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

A Dying Civilization.

'And after the fire a still small voice.'—1 K 19¹².

The sublimity of this scene should impress us with its tremendous significance, but, as we watch the haggard solitary figure at the mouth of the cave, the shattered head of Horeb towering above him, and the desert stretching out dim and boundless and desolate before, and hear the rocks crash in tornado, and feel the earth quake in pent-up agony, and see the lightning wrap the world in flame, and shudder with awe as the tumult of nature changes to the sudden silence of the great waste places of

² J. T. Forbes, in *The Scottish Pulpit*, 86.

the earth, our imagination is so filled with the spectacle that we may forget to ask what it meant for that lone watcher.

Positive misunderstanding, moreover, is introduced by the translation of our text as 'a still small voice,' and especially by the accepted exposition of it both in preaching and poetry. The tumult in which God was not is taken to be the vehement methods of judgment, and in particular Elijah's violence with idolatry and the priests of Baal. The 'still small voice,' in which God was, is then a declaration of the gentle ways of God and a prophecy of Him who was full of grace and truth.

But even Christ's denunciation of an adulterous generation, who corrupted religion by hypocrisy, could be heart-shaking as earthquake and scathing as lightning; and no one ever announced more terrible judgments. Besides, if this voice rebuked violence and promised gentleness, why should it be followed by the announcement of just such a terrible upheaval in human society as had passed over nature? Why was Elijah to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu to be king over Israel, and Elisha to be prophet in his own room, that him who escaped from the sword of Hazael, Jehu should slay, and him who escaped from the sword of Jehu, Elisha should slay? Instead of gentleness and rebuke of the spirit of judgment, the doom is so appalling that Elijah himself, for all his sternness, sought delay when he took the first step of calling Elisha; and Elisha wept in the streets of Damascus when he took the second by appointing the kingdom to Hazael.

The seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal are the one hope in the distress. They become the holy remnant from which is to spring a new nation, and then the servant of the Lord who is to be a light to lighten the Gentiles as well as the glory of Israel. But even their presence, though it assures hope at the end of the day, cannot avert judgment or do more than delay the blotting-out of civilization. And it is this blotting-out which is predicted in the solemn stillness which follows the agony of nature.

The only doubtful word is that translated 'small.' Literally it means something beaten fine like dust, but it was also in common use for something thin like a veil. The rest is in no way doubtful. It is not a still voice, but a voice of silence. The silence itself speaks as when the heavens, which have no speech or language, declare the glory of God. The

best commentary is the passage in Job, where Eliphaz says that, in visions of the night, a mysterious presence passed before his face, and a voice of silence—not a voice following silence, but the voice of the silence itself—said, Can man be pure before God who charges even His angels with folly? Our text, therefore, means a voice of a silence which either wrapped the world like a veil or fell upon it like dust on one vast desolation. In either case it means the arresting, solemn, dread stillness of the great waste-places. It speaks in the same language of nature as the tornado, the earthquake, and the lightning. As they meant invasion, revolution, and moral disaster, this typifies the ruined world which shall remain when the work of which Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha are but the beginnings, has reached its calamitous close.

That the Lord was not in tempest, earthquake, or fire, does not mean that they were contrary to His mind or apart from His purpose, or even that He did not command them into action, but only that the prophet could not yet hear in them the deliverance he expected, the satisfaction of his longing for a purified religion and a regenerated society. That first spoke in the voice of the arresting silence which fell upon the lightning-riven masses of Horeb and the storm-driven sands of the far-stretching desert. This desolate stillness first uttered to his heart the hope that, as once the religion of Israel had been cleansed of idolatries and its society ordered on simple human relations in the wilderness, so it might be again.

In that voice of the silence of desolation can be heard the whole burden of Hebrew prophecy. Even Isaiah and Jeremiah, for all their far greater gifts of genius, are but followers and disciples of Elijah, and only the scope and splendour of their application obscures the extent to which they merely re-echo this message of the voices of the desert.

Elijah, listening in trembling awe to this pause of the utter, lone silence of the waste, learned the measure of value which gave birth to all the prophets' thoughts of God as ruling in righteousness the armies of Heaven as well as the inhabitants of Earth. From it they learned that no interests compare with the interests of the soul, that every loss is gain upon which the soul can feed, and that earthly kingdoms are less than nothing and vanity when God's Kingdom is at stake. Their sublime monotheism, with all its confidence in the wise omnipotent righteous sovereignty of the One God,

is just the application of this discovery. God has ceased to be an idol to secure individual prosperity or a national deity to guarantee His people's security, and has become the director of all destinies and the measure of all good, for whose ends man might with profit suffer and die and the world with advantage be reduced to ruin and desolation. Though this message never ceases to be tremendous and appalling, all true thoughts, not only of God's righteous sovereignty, but of His patient wise love, spring from it. And, if it grow only on soil ploughed deep with the agony of men and nations, it bears, as no other plant, the fruit of eternal hope. This we see in all the prophets from Amos to Jeremiah.

The work of Amos is so amazingly original, that it has been described as the most remarkable phenomenon in the history of the human spirit, yet the heart of his message is just what Elijah saw at Horeb: and his continual reference to fire seems to show that he was not ignorant of his dependence. God will send His fire upon Syria, which is still to Him the house of Hazeel, and upon Israel and Judah and all the nations round about. And fire means with Amos also the consuming power of the moral nature of things when ignored and defied. The present civilization is doomed, and nothing in it more certainly than its religion of much ritual and little righteousness. God despises its feasts, has no delight in its solemn assemblies, and pays no regard to its sacrifices, which were never offered in the wilderness.

In Hosea there is a still clearer conception that the goal is the wilderness. 'Behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the Valley of Troubling for a door of hope.' Anarchy is already doing its destructive work within and the invader is thundering at the gate. But the inevitable still lies in the moral and spiritual forces. A nation sunk in idolatry, licentiousness, intemperance, greed, pride, and injustice cannot abide.

A great agony of sympathy possesses the heart of the prophet. But comfort springs from the very depth of his woe, for the very agony in his own heart interprets the heart of God. 'In him the fatherless findeth mercy'; 'His heart is turned within him'; 'His compassions are kindled together,' He cannot finally give up His people.

The message of Isaiah is not essentially different,

Though the destruction of Judah is deferred, the present civilization is doomed in every nation.

Even more pointedly and exclusively this message of the wilderness was the prophetic burden of Jeremiah; while, through him, the method of the remnant was still clearly conceived as service and sacrifice.

Finally, under his influence, the remnant came to be later the Suffering Servant, whose work crowned the prophetic hope of the Old Testament and was the supreme preparation for Him who came from the bosom of the Father to declare Him and establish among men the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Old Testament has become in these days a real, an appallingly real book, and no part of it more concerns us than this central message of the silence of desolation.

When the great gift of civilization, so rich in its possibilities for higher thought and purer worship, for gracious sympathies and helpful, brotherly human relations, is misused for obscuring the vital demands of religion, for enriching the rich and impoverishing the poor, for competition in which strength serves only selfish desire, and for a measure of values by wealth and not by worth and wisdom and goodness, there is no hope but in its destruction and a return to the solemn stillness of the wilderness where men may hear, in the deeper voices of their own hearts, the call of the Divine Will of righteousness and love above them and of the sacred humanities around them. Civilization is a great good, but it may become the supreme obstacle to God's purpose with the spirit of man, and the supreme denial of His eternal Rule of Truth and Love.

Our first task is to save what we can of our present world by the call to sincere penitence and simple faith. But it may be that we shall not be heard till the striving and crying of a complex, worldly, prosperous age have fallen silent. Then our value for rebuilding our waste civilization to the true glory of God and the real good of man will depend on the measure we have been for signs and for wonders, in our unflinching faith that God does not fail and is not discouraged, and in our possession of the prophetic vision which sees through all the night of darkness and distress 'the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.' Then so high will the destiny of man appear and so glorious God's final kingdom of peace established in truth and righteousness, that

we shall know, how, throughout all the terrible journey towards it, 'in all our affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved us: in His love and in His pity He redeemed us: and He bare us and carried us all the days of old.'¹

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Sermon on the Mount.

'For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.'—
2 Co 3^d.

The question with which we are concerned is the applicability of the laws of Christ as set forth, for instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, to the practice of our everyday life.

What are we to make of the Sermon on the Mount? Was it meant to be obeyed? Can its precepts be practised? About the beauty and glory of the ideal it bodies forth there is no dispute. To use Bishop Gore's words, as a summary of moral duty the Sermon is complete—all others are fragmentary; the Sermon is pure—all others are mixed and partially corrupt; the Sermon is for free and grown men—all the others are for children and slaves; the Sermon is a word of authority—the rest are guess-work. About the unapproached and unapproachable grandeur of the moral ideal set forth in the Sermon all men are agreed—but the question is, is it practicable?

Now when it comes to the practicability of the Sermon wise men and good men differ widely. Sir Lewis Morris, the poet, feeling at once the beauty and impracticability of our Lord's demands, spoke of them as 'sweet, impossible precepts.' And in such a characterization of them the thoughts of many hearts stand revealed. The late Archbishop Magee, for instance (who had a trick of straight and uncompromising speech), bluntly declared that the Sermon was impracticable and that its precepts and councils were never meant to be literally obeyed.

On the other hand, here is a man like the late Count Leo Tolstoy declaring that the demands of the Sermon can and must be obeyed, and asserting that the failure of the Christian Church is due in large measure to this, that Christian people have not taken Christ seriously and have never addressed themselves honestly to the task of obeying His commandments.

Let me suggest one or two considerations that

¹ J. Oman, *The Paradox of the World*, 15.

may do something to mitigate the difficulties of the problem.

1. We start from the position that Christ *meant His words to be obeyed*. To imagine anything else is really to sacrifice Christ's character for earnestness and truth. When Christ uttered the precepts contained in the Sermon, He spoke in dead and solemn earnest. He Himself leaves us in no doubt as to the seriousness of His intentions—for He winds up the Sermon by that comparison of the man who builds his house upon the sand and the man who builds his house upon the rock. It is a kind of warning in advance against treating the Sermon as if it were a piece of pretty fancy and nothing more. The precepts propounded in it were meant to be obeyed. The only person who really builds his Christian life on a firm and solid foundation is the man who hears Christ's words and does them.

The fact is we entirely misinterpret the problem when we ask, 'Did Christ mean these precepts to be obeyed?' What we ought rather to ask is this, 'What exactly does Christ want us to obey?' We may take the obligatoriness of the commands for granted, it is only the interpretation of the commands we need trouble ourselves about.

2. Starting, then, from the position that Christ meant His precepts to be obeyed, our first business is to be perfectly clear as to what Christ meant. And to be clear as to what Christ meant, we must learn to distinguish between *the letter of the command* and *the essential spirit of it*; for even of Christ's words it is true—the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. Not that we are so to spiritualize these laws as to spiritualize them clean away. But that it is our first business to try patiently and conscientiously to discover the exact and abiding significance of these various precepts. For when we look at them quietly and seriously it becomes quite plain that we cannot take them at their surface value. We must make allowance, for instance, for Christ's methods of speech. The Eastern loved the parabolic and proverbial form of speech. Our Lord was almost typically Eastern in this respect. In this Sermon His preaching again and again is proverbial in form. The fact is, as Dr. Cox points out, our Lord was not in the habit of giving men maxims to which they were to give a literal obedience, but to promulgate principles which men were to apply under the guidance of His spirit. He did not come to give a second and more minute external law, but to create a disposition, a spirit, a

new attitude which in a sense should be a law unto itself. And perhaps, as Dr. Cox suggests, that was one reason why He put His precepts into such paradoxical form that men might never be able to degrade them into mere maxims or rules.

Let us illustrate by taking that staggering precept about 'turning the other cheek.' 'Whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' Now obviously our Lord did not mean that to be taken literally. He did not give a literal obedience to the precept Himself. When He was smitten on the face in the High Priest's hall, He did not turn the other cheek, He gently but firmly rebuked the smiter for his violence and injustice. And besides, a literal obedience to this precept would defeat the very object at which Christ was aiming. We must get at the 'spirit' of the command; and the spirit is this: that we must meet violence and rage not with rage and violence, but with meekness, friendliness, forgiveness. Or as Bishop Gore puts it, when nothing is concerned but our own pride and instinct for revenge, we had better take meekly some insult or wrong without seeking to defend ourselves. Retaliation and revenge are the practice of the world—forgiveness even until seventy times seven must be the practice of the Christian.

A literal obedience to the Sermon on the Mount is impossible. To interpret 'Resist not evil' in Tolstoy's sense would inevitably end in anarchy. To give a literal obedience to the commands, 'Swear not at all,' and 'If any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also,' would mean the destruction of law and order and of modern civilization as we know it. 'To turn the other cheek' and 'to give to every one that asks' would not banish revenge or poverty, but would probably intensify the one and aggravate the other. But then they were never meant to be literally obeyed. The fact that they land us in such obvious absurdities ought to have saved us from ever thinking they were meant to be literally obeyed. These precepts are not exact rules—they embody principles. It is the principle we must get at. A literal obedience would reduce our civilization to wreckage, but an honest attempt to apply the inner principles—kindness, truth, generosity, forgiveness, unworldliness—would convert our present imperfect civilization into the perfection and beauty of the Kingdom of God. 'The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.'

3. But right interpretation does not remove every difficulty. The real difficulties of the Sermon on the Mount come in the application of its principles to our social life. For these principles have their social aspect. The Laws here propounded are laws for a kingdom—the Kingdom of God. But that Kingdom is not yet here—it is only here in promise and in germ. It is only here in the persons of those who profess to be its subjects. The position is this: Christ's people find themselves members of an unchristian society. Can they, living in such an unchristian society, obey Christ's laws? That is the real difficulty. Of course if Christ's laws simply differed from the laws of society by demanding more, there would be little or no difficulty. Society demands abstention from wrongdoing; Christ demands active beneficence. But sometimes the law of Christ and the usages of society are in antagonism, and it seems to be impossible to obey the one without at the same time disobeying the other. And that is the real crux of the problem. It is the *social*, not the *individual*, application of the Sermon on the Mount that constitutes the real difficulty.

Take the matter of business. The question is often asked, 'Can a man be a Christian in business?' Some men when they ask that question mean, 'Can a man be honest, and square, and straightforward in business?' Of course he can. If he cannot, he had better quit. But there is a deeper sense in which the question can be asked, and when it would not be so easy to give an answer: 'Can business itself be run on Christian principles? What is the essential spirit of Christianity? The spirit of love. We are to bear one another's burdens. Life for the Christian is not a mastery, but a ministry. What is the essential spirit of business? The spirit of competition; business, as carried on to-day, is a terrific struggle for existence, in which the weak are driven to the wall and only the strong survive. The spirit of business and the spirit of Christianity seem to be in sharp antagonism with one another.

The heart of the problem is this: can a man fully obey the laws of Christ in the present condition of society? Can he be a complete Christian when the State is unchristian? We answer: we do not think he can. Society being what it is, and we being members of it, we cannot give Christ's laws a complete obedience. These are laws for the Kingdom of God—they are inapplicable to societies which are still 'kingdoms of the world.' Business

being what it is, I do not think those engaged in it can entirely fulfil the Christian law. What, then, is the duty of the Christian? Is he to leave business? No. He is to remain in business. He is to use every scrap of his influence to put business on a more Christian footing. He cannot do it entirely. And he cannot do it alone. If all Christian men were to try to run their businesses on the Christian principle of loving their neighbour, they would probably ruin themselves and bring chaos into all business relationships. Socialism may be more Christian than individualism—co-operation than competition—but an attempt suddenly and by a stroke to change the principles on which business is conducted would probably make our last state worse than our first. The change must come by the slow process of permeation. Let Christian men remain in business. Let them bring the Christian spirit and temper into it, and soon the leaven will leaven the whole lump and business can be conducted not only in a Christian spirit, but in full obedience to the Christian law.

This may seem an advocacy of compromise. It is scarcely that. It is a recognition that on the social side there are limits beyond which the law of Christ cannot be applied. But to its individual application there are no limits. So far as our personal and private obedience is concerned there is no limit beyond that which our own self-love imposes. Christ's law is hard, but there is nothing impossible about it. The laws of forgiveness, of charity, of beneficence—there is absolutely nothing to prevent us obeying them. And that will give us plenty to do. And if we personally obey these great laws of forgiveness and charity and love, we shall be paving the way for the possibility of a complete and absolute obedience.¹

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Threefold Cord.

'A threefold cord is not quickly broken.'—Ec 4¹².

It is sometimes good to ask ourselves what are the real roots or foundations of our personal religion, apart from what we receive as revealed truth? Put aside for a moment what we are taught by the Creeds, the Bible, and the Church, and ask ourselves what experiences in our lives have brought us consciously into relations with God, or with the eternal and spiritual world. The answer, if we

can find it, will give us the contents of our natural religion, our faith apart from revelation and authority. It will be our really natural religion—a very different thing from what used to be called natural religion in the eighteenth century. The natural religion of that period was a sound common-sense morality, and 'creed of all sensible men': but it was not, in any marked degree, either natural or religious. What *we* mean by natural religion is the testimony of the human consciousness to God, apart from any special revelation or traditional teaching.

What are the marks or tests which give some of our experiences a much higher value than others, so that we feel that there is something Divine about them? In the first place, they bring with them their own satisfaction. They are precious for their own sake; secondly, they have God and not our little selves for their centre; and thirdly, they bring us a peace and happiness which does not wholly perish when they are gone. Now, what are the experiences which have these qualities? It seems to me that they are of three kinds.

1. First of all, contact with moral *goodness* has this character. So far as we are brought close to goodness, and especially goodness in the form of disinterestedness, sympathy, love, we feel that we have reached the heart of life, that we are lifted out of ourselves, and that we are enjoying a happiness which, come what may, will make us richer for life. If we mentally compare human affection with the other good things of life, we shall recognize I think, that it has this absolute character which distinguishes it from most of them. It is an end in itself. It brings us, so far as it is really pure and disinterested, into the presence of God Himself. This is why the New Testament says that love is the fulfilling of the Law, and that God is Love. And it 'never faileth.' It is 'better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all,' because pure affection is never really lost; it ennobles us for life.

This is one strand in our threefold cord. To the religious mind it seems by far the most important. But we are not wholly emotional creatures; we have other faculties, which certainly were not intended to be used as Gibeonites—hewers of wood and drawers of water—to our affections and emotions.

2. There is the love of *truth*—this is the second strand in our threefold cord. By truth I mean right thinking—the correspondence of our minds with the nature of things, with facts as they are.

¹ J. D. Jones, *The Gospel of the Sovereignty*, 202.

I am sure that this, too, has the marks of belonging to the world of spirit. No matter in what field we are seeking the truth, we feel, when we have found it, that here is something which exists in its own right, which stands proudly aloof from our little personal scheme, and which we are permanently the better for having found. It follows that the work of the student, and the scientific investigator, is a branch of the larger priesthood, a direct service of God, who has revealed Himself to us as light, or enlightenment, as well as love.

3. The third strand in our threefold cord is the appreciation of *beauty*. This avenue to God was far more valued in Greek thought than it has generally been in Christianity. The Jews were not an artistic people. They have always neglected *form*, and have shown very little aptitude for painting, sculpture, and architecture. Only in lyrical sacred poetry, and in music, have they shown much appreciation of the beautiful.

At the same time, this absence of encouragement to art and the love of beautiful things in the Bible must not be exaggerated. What the Bible calls 'glory'—'the glory that shall be revealed in us'—the body of glory into which the body of our humiliation is to be transfigured—must certainly include the idea of beauty. The idea is not absent from the Jewish mind—it is only vague and formless. And surely this mysterious sense of beauty, which seems to serve very few practical *uses* in human life, in proportion to its strength and diffusion, must have been given us by God as a revelation of Himself. It has the three marks of spirituality. It claims to exist in its own right. The beauty of a landscape, or of a picture, is its own ample justification. It takes us out of ourselves, as pure affection, and pure seeking after truth, take us out of ourselves; and it is, or should be, in its own degree, a permanent enrichment of our life. So we may say with St. Augustine: 'All that is beautiful comes from the highest beauty, which is God.'

There is, then, a sacredness about these three experiences, which we should all feel. Pride and sensuality and selfishness—the world, the flesh, and the devil—are always trying to corrupt and spoil these experiences, in which God is offering us a direct revelation of Himself. It is selfishness that most often thwarts and spoils disinterested affection: it is pride which most prevents us from keeping our minds open and teachable for the reception of new truths; and it is sensuality which most often poisons our appreciation of the beautiful.

In Christianity these three natural avenues to God are gathered up and unified as they never had been before. Our Lord's whole life was full of the purest affection, of the most dauntless intellectual sincerity, and of simple love for all things bright and beautiful, green fields, mountains, lakes, and the one thing in Nature that is perhaps more beautiful than all these—little children.

In these days, when we are often told that some of the traditional props of our faith are no longer to be depended upon, it is a comfort to remember what a strong support this natural religion—this threefold cord—gives to the Christian life. Of course the distinction between natural and revealed religion is a false one: all true religion is natural, and all true religion is revealed. The Incarnation and Resurrection were as natural as the creation of the world by the Word of God; and these three natural avenues to God are just as much revelations of God as any miraculous occurrence recorded in the Bible.

Taken together, they are a very full revelation of God's nature, under the three aspects of Love or Goodness, Truth, and Beauty. We need not discuss their relative importance, for all are essential; but St. Paul, if we had asked him the question would doubtless have repeated, with a slight change, the last words of 1 Co 13: 'Now abideth Truth, Beauty, Goodness, these three; but the greatest of these is Goodness.'¹

¹ W. R. Inge, *All Saints' Sermons*, 211.

