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only enduring foundations of authority, are the only qualities men finally acknowledge on earth and in heaven.

The psalmist is saturated in the conceptions of the prophets. His opening closely resembles Is 3^{13}, his vision of Yahweh coming for judgment is the constant prophetic theme, the eschatological frame, both in language and in idea, comes from the same source. Again, the interesting points of contact with Daniel serve to suggest that the hymn springs from the same circle of thought which appears in that book. It must accordingly be late in the life of Israel. But, the later it is set, the more clearly does it militate against the conception of later Judaism as priest-ridden, sunk in legalism and deaf to the higher teaching of its prophets. To call it apocalyptic because of its strongly eschatological character is only to force one again to ask where the higher apocalyptic falls short of prophecy. For v.^{8}, with its touching prayer that the God of Israel may arise, not for Israel's sake, but for the world's help, strikes the authentic note of the nobler spirits in both movements. This wide and catholic spirit, this absence of all Jewish exclusiveness, this firm conviction of the eternal validity of Judaism, because it alone holds the ethical elements which befit a universal faith, are remarkably suggestive for a just understanding of one side of all later Jewish thought. To think of post-exilic Judaism as wholly legalistic in character is to rob it of the elements which made Christianity possible. And, after all, the problem of Hebrew religion is to discover how it gave rise to Rabbinism, and yet was the faith to which Jesus Christ, after the flesh, came.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Set down my Name, Sir.[1]

'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?'—Ps 24^{3}.

DID you ever hear of the island of Rapa? No? Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know much about it myself. And no shame either. For all that anybody knows about it is just this, that it is a queer little lonesome place away down in the southern seas, lying well out of the track of steamers, so that few people have ever seen it; and surrounded, so I am told, by cliffs so high and steep and unbroken, with the sea dashing against them in great clouds of spray, that no one, it is thought, has ever landed on it. There it has lain in the sunshine yonder for who can tell how many thousands and thousands and thousands of years, and no man yet has ever stood on it. Well, when we heard of that, what happened? Why, people said at once, 'No one ever been there? Well, then, I'm off; I'll be the first!' And they have fitted out a ship, and it has sailed, to do lots of things away down yonder in the sunny seas, but one of them is to find some way to get on to Rapa, and to see what it is like.

Isn't that a funny thing about us humans? If we are told a thing is hard, we want to do it; if we are shown some place where nobody has ever been, we itch to reach it; and the worse job it is to get there, why all the better fun. We were told about the Poles, hidden away hundreds and hundreds of miles from anywhere, lost yonder in the snow and the thick ice and the bitter cold. 'You can't reach them,' everybody said, 'it just can't be done.' But that made some people sit up at once. 'Can't?' they asked. 'Can't? You can do a heap of things if you really try.' 'Oh! but not this,' the others said; 'think of the dark, and the dangers, and the pitiless weather, and the ice breaking behind you and cutting you off.' But that didn't daunt them. Their faces lit up; they grew quite excited. 'Sounds all right,' they cried; 'seems just the thing that we've been looking for. We're off.' And they did go, time after time; until at last they managed, did win to the Poles; kept on trying, just because nobody had ever done it, wanted to be where nobody had ever been before.

So there are some folk who cannot see a mountain but they must find a way up to the top. It doesn't matter how steep, or how stony, or how high it is; they mean to get there, and they do, crawling about like flies, hanging from ropes, clambering up places that make some of us dizzy even to look at them. Up they mean to get, and up they go. So that

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

Everest is about the only hill they haven't managed (isn't it?)—Everest, that is so very high that it is difficult to breathe up yonder. The blood runs from your nose, and your chest seems bursting, and some men have died. And yet others keep on trying, look up at the snowy heights far, far above them, where nobody has ever stood, and keep saying, 'You are one up so far, old thing; but don't you fancy you are always going to beat us. Somehow and sometime we are going to get up there!' You see, just because a thing is hard to do, men want to do it; and where nobody has stood, we wish to be.

Well, I can tell you the hardest thing in all the world, the hill of all hills that is the steepest to climb, the deed of all deeds that is most difficult to do. And that ought to make you thrilly and excited; give you that feeling that you want to do it and get there. And yet does it? For the hardest thing in the world is—to be good ('Oh!' you say, and your voice is very dead); the hill most difficult to climb isn't Ben Nevis—it's simple; or Mont Blanc, or Everest; no, it is what the grown-ups call the Hill of Holiness, that great white peak far, far above us, where people aren't grumpy and cross and selfish any more. There's something really hard to do; somewhere that you have never been. Yet you're not excited when you hear of *that*; don't make up your mind you're going to reach it, as the men did about Rapa. Now, why? Ach! you say, it's dull and boring to be good. And, indeed, in books they often make the good boys very stodgy, and all the fun comes to the chaps who break bounds and run crooked. But that's rubbish, really. There's nothing so exciting in the world as trying to go straight, for there is so much to trip us up, so many tacklers we must dodge. It's like a hard game of 'rugger' against fellows far heavier than yourselves—a hard, rough game, with plenty of knocks. But how exciting it is just to keep them out, to pull them down on the line time on time, and how thrilling if you do break through and score! Or, it's like those places in the trenches at the war, where the parapet had been blown away, and clever German snipers watched for anybody passing, where you had to bend low and make a dash for it, with your heart in your mouth, for they might get you; yet, with a laugh in your mind, it was so thrilly.

So, every morning we get up, we know that we shall have to pass where snipers, splendid shots, are watching for us—temper (he has got you often), and selfishness (you've heard his bullets singing about your ears), and half a dozen more. It's splendidly exciting. And if you don't feel that, don't wish to have a share in it, what a muff you must be! Why, man, here is a thing so hard to do that people say it can't be done at all. And aren't you going to leap to your feet and cry, 'Hard? then I'll do it,' like the men who found the Poles at last, or the others who are off to land on Rapa somehow. 'Who,' says this Psalmist, 'who dare climb the hill of God?' It's steep, and it's dangerous, and look how far away its white heights lie! Have you the pluck to answer, 'Steep? that's good; and dangerous, that will be good fun; and far away, why, then I'm going to get there.' Good man! Well, up and off with you. Only, don't be rash and don't be silly! Be sure you take the Guide with you; see that you rope yourself to Him morning by morning, and that the rope is holding; and whenever you are in a tight place reach for His hand to steady you; and you and He will manage it; will climb higher and higher; sometimes you may slip and sometimes you may fall; yet higher and higher, up and up; and you will reach the top, at last.

Lend a Hand.[1]

'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it.'—Ec 9^{10}.

The Brownies, whose motto this is, are not wood folk, not elves or sprites, but girls under eleven who are one day to be Girl Guides. The Brownies are the feminine gender of Wolf Cubs. As the Cubs have a uniform and a motto, why should not the Brownies have them? For, whatever the boys may think, girls think they look quite as well in uniform and are quite as capable of living up to fine mottoes as boys.

They have both got fine mottoes—whether the boys' 'Do your best' or the girls' 'Lend a hand' is the finer would be as difficult to decide as to distinguish twins.

'Lend a hand' as a motto for girls under eleven, suggests that there is a place even for them in the world's service. It is their charter of recognition. That motto doesn't ignore them, or push them aside, as sometimes older brothers and sisters do. It doesn't tell them they are too young to take part in things, and make them feel they are not wanted. It encourages them to take part. Though unable

[1] By the Reverend F. C. Hoggarth, Morecambe.

to do what the older folk can do, there are niches of service that they can fill, that otherwise will go unfilled.

In his poem 'The Glory of the Garden,' Mr. Rudyard Kipling compares England to a garden. He claims that in the Garden there's a task for every one.

There's not a hand so weak and white, nor yet a heart so sick,
But it can find some needful job that's crying to be done.

True, it may be that

Some are hardly fit to trust with anything that grows,
But they can roll and trim the lawns and sift the sand and loam,
For the Glory of the Garden occupieth all who come.

It is a great idea. The poem, like the motto, is all against the spirit that folds its hands and sighs, 'There's nothing I can do.' It is ever truer to say, 'There is something that only I can do.'

The ways of lending a hand are many. A lovely story came through from Poland one or two winters ago. Winter there can be frightfully severe. In one small highland village, where an orphanage was situated, the snow became so deep that the peasants who delivered milk every day for the children at last refused to do so. 'The nurses were in despair, but a company of Girl Guides near by decided to lend a hand. They were schoolgirls, and their time was very limited, so they had to get up at five in the morning to take the milk to the orphanage before lessons began. They took it in turns, and for eight weeks kept the little orphan children supplied with fresh milk, though they had to go out into the darkness and cold and work hard to get through the snowdrifts.'

But not everybody is strong enough to fight their way through snowdrifts. Dean Inge of St. Paul's Cathedral, one of our great thinkers and teachers, lost his little girl a short time ago. For a year she just grew weaker and weaker. No fighting snowdrifts for her! Yet she was a Brownie, and if any little Brownie ever lived up to her motto she did. Though she was ill, somehow she helped. 'Folk never quarrelled when she was about.' It seemed as though, when she came, she brought sunshine with her and all dark moods and looks and tempers fled away.

She loved that line of Milton's poem that he wrote about his blindness: 'They also serve who only stand and wait.' She also was one who greatly served in that way.

The way in which boys and girls are lending a hand in the work of the Church is very fine. Thousands of them are doing their bit with zeal and devotion. Some causes would languish, indeed, were it not for the children. In connexion with what is known as The National Children's Home and Orphanage, in England, which cares for some thousands of children who through the death or neglect or cruelty or misfortune of their parents have no home, there has recently been formed a League of St. Christopher. It is a league of boys and girls ready to lend a hand to these other unfortunate children. Christopher, who in the Middle Ages built his hut near a river crossing and in time of flood and spate carried people, and especially children, across, is their patron saint. In their own way they are going to help as he helped—setting aside some part of their time, or their money, or their skill, in the service of those others who so badly need a helper.

It is a great spirit to have, this of being willing to lend a hand. The world's loveliest things come of it.

The Elizabeth Frys, the Frances Willards, the Mary Slessors, are all the outcome of that spirit. Besides, that is the spirit that has the secret of happiness. Our cup of joy is filled when we are serving others.

Those who stop, like the Good Samaritan, on the roads of life and lend a hand, have rewards unknown to those who hurriedly pass by on the other side.

The Christian Year.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

The Parable of the Pounds.

'And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.'—Lk 19^{11}.

So St. Luke, after his manner, defines the *occasion*, and therefore, at the moment, the *purpose* of the Parable of the Pounds. It was, as we should say, an Advent Parable. It spoke of our Lord's approaching departure and of the long waiting for His return.

'A certain nobleman went into a far country to

receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.' It was a figure familiar to the experience of those times. They would think of some one of high position in a distant province, going, as one of the Herods would have gone, to Rome, to receive from the Senate or the Emperor the kingdom of his own country as a dependency of the great city. The parable said to them: 'You are right, there is to be a kingdom established, and you see the destined King; but it is not to be in the way that you think at this moment. Now (so far as outward things go) He is not to show Himself in His power, but to be lost to your eyes. He is going a long way, beyond your following, going "to receive the kingdom" at His hands who can give it. But the "time and seasons the Father hath put in His own power."'

The parable held in another point. As in the case of most of those little kingdoms under the Roman Empire, the King was not the choice of the whole people, but of part. There was still a party that resisted the thought of His rule: 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' So far as human will could go, they would have their purpose. As Pilate told them, they would 'crucify their King.' All enemies should indeed be put under His feet, but not yet, not till His return.

It is an '*Advent* parable.' But it is also, and in virtue of that very fact, a parable of life. For all life on earth is life in a world of waiting for the revelation of God's perfect purpose.

Before the nobleman goes, he is represented as calling his servants together to give them his parting orders, to set them their tasks to do for him in his absence. What he says to them is not just what, as the story opened, we would have looked for. They might have expected to be warned of the unreconciled party, to be told how to watch against disloyal plots, how to fight his battles, how to win supporters for his cause. But all this is passed by. The enemies seem forgotten. He gives them no weapons, whether of offence or defence, but the means of peaceful occupation. 'He called his ten servants, and delivered unto them ten pounds, and said: Occupy (trade herewith) till I come.'

The parable says to us: 'If life is a time of waiting, of preparation for God's better service, the first and paramount duty in it, that in which others may even for the time be lost to view, is concerned with God's gifts to us, the duty of using them, using them to the utmost so that we may have more to put at His disposal than we seemed to start with when He comes to call for our service. The gifts are not defined: the lesson is meant to be as wide as life, gifts of capacity or of opportunity, gifts of the outer life or of the inner, gifts of heart or of head.

The period of the king's absence is passed over in the parable. How each spent his time, how he laid out his pound, by what processes it was to be multiplied, how one succeeded better than another, all this is assumed, is left to our imagination. There are means—that is all we are told—means accessible to all, of putting our gifts out at interest, or so putting them to the right uses, so exhausting their possibilities, as to make them grow under our hands. The parable takes us on to the moment when the work is done and ready to be judged. 'He commanded the servants to be called . . . that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.' There are three points that we notice in this picture of judgment.

1. The *opportunity* has been represented as in essence one and the same to all, one pound to each; but the success in using it, in developing the gifts, is very various. We are given specimens, three only out of the ten; but the suggestion is evidently of a perfect descending scale, every possible variety of effort and success. One has multiplied his gift by ten. He has for his lord's service at the end as much as all together had had when they started. It is a striking testimony, surely, to the power of self-development, self-adaptation to God's service, which is given to man. But though some have this pre-eminent power, or pre-eminent use of a power, there are many grades in the successful employment of God's gifts, and every use of them is recognized and rewarded in its measure. Only one servant is condemned: one in ten. It is the gentle judgment which we so often see in our Lord's parables, like the one of all the guests who was 'without a wedding garment.' His case is one which, when we look at it from outside, not in sight of our own heart and life, seems almost impossible, the making no use of what God gives, returning it as it was given, a faculty of good never exercised.

2. We notice the *nature of the rewards*. 'Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.' 'Well, thou good servant, because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.' It keeps the figure of the story. What the friends of the new dynasty would look for would be a share in power. But it also has its bearing in the applica-

tion. God's reward of service is the opportunity of higher, larger, harder service. It is so in this world. We believe without difficulty that it must be so when we pass from this world to another.

3. We notice the picture given us of the *frame of mind* of the unhappy servant who returned his lord's gifts unimproved, unused. 'I feared thee, because thou art an austere man.' 'I thought that thou lookedst for so much that I had not the heart to try to give thee anything.' The sin is traced to a false view of God, but it is a false view which comes from a deep fault in men's own nature. It is what the Epistle to the Hebrews calls the 'evil heart of unbelief, that turns from the living God.' It is the opposite of the 'honest and good heart' of the parable. It is the heart which, feeling no love, looks for no love, which judges the best and noblest by its own mean and cold and narrow self.

What are the lessons of the parable?

There is the lesson of patience. The 'kingdom' will not 'immediately appear.' Life, if it is to be so lived as to be worth living, is a working for a distant end, for an unseen eye.

There is the lesson of responsibility—not responsibility, in the first instance, for altering the order of the world, not even for fighting God's enemies, but for ourselves, our own tempers, our own powers, for using our own gifts, making the most of ourselves for His service.

There is the lesson of encouragement. In spite of stern thoughts and words of warning, that is, surely, the tone that rings all through the parable. The 'one pound' to each, the chance—in spite of any inequalities to our view, in God's eyes the equal chance—for each to do that which is looked for from him. The 'bank,' open to all, where money seems, as by a natural process, to grow; the grace that makes up for defects, that takes the will for the deed, that crowns every real effort with success; the kindly ordering that makes, to them who try, good ever easier, powers exercised ever stronger. The very nature of the slothful servant's folly—for it was not that of over-presumption, but of over-timidity. He had not hope enough, trust enough. He shut his eyes so as not to see how good his lord was, how easy to please, how ready to reward.

And then the reward. 'Well! thou good servant, thou hast been faithful in a very little!' How that sentence lifts and irradiates the dullest and simplest life! 'In a very little,' but even as the words are said the 'little' changes to 'much': 'have thou authority over ten cities.' It is a paradox. It passes our understanding. It awaits the revelation of the day when the King returns to take account. Yet in part it is realized already by those, at least, who look on. For the reward is power. 'The meek inherit the earth,' not power in the selfish sense, which degrades the idea to us, but a share in the sovereignty of God, the divine power given to goodness, to faithfulness, to self-sacrifice, the power to bless, to save, to guide, to make the good prevail.[1]

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

The Banishing of Fear.

'Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold a far stretching land.'—Is 33^{17} (R.V.).

These words exhibit, in an imaginative and emotional way, two great deliverances which religion brings to men: the one is from the disabling, depressing power of things present, and the other is from the anxious dread of things to come.

What filled the prophet's mind at this time was the rout of Sennacherib's army and the freeing of Jerusalem; but, like any poet laying hold of an historical subject, he does not bind himself to minute accuracy of detail. It is his subject not his master, it is the material on which he works; so without telling the story, he starts from it, and idealizes it into a bit of universal human experience.

The story had made so deep a mark on the mind of Israel that it is repeated three times over within the Old Testament, and it lies behind several of the noblest lyric pieces. On its human side it was an ugly record, for both king and people had betrayed an abject spirit. Hezekiah emptied the Temple treasure, and stripped its pillars and doors of gold to satisfy Sennacherib, and even so, he did not detain him. Without delaying the march of his main army, the conqueror detached a brigade or two to deal with Jerusalem, and the narratives are full of the insolent brutality with which the Assyrian generals showed their contempt for the king and people they had to deal with. But when the city lay helpless in their clutch, news arrived of an appalling outbreak of plague in the grand army; the camps were broken up, and the troops streamed off homewards, and Jerusalem was free. It was an amazing overturn, and the Hebrews were as men that dreamed.

1. *To-day's peace.*—One result of the experience

[1] E. C. Wickham, *Words of Light and Life*, 48.

appeared in some quarters in an increased sombreness of temper. The frightful strain of these months, and then the limitless horror of the enemy's doom, had created in many a feeling of inward disquiet, such as the Lisbon and the Messina earthquakes also awakened. Their savage preoccupation with the enemy narrowed their thoughts, and left them no room for joy, or hope, or life, or God. That is the way of human nature, when it is shut up with any fretting pain or engrossing care.

It would be a real redemption if we could find a way of escape from this; and escape is the one first achievement of faith. To our Lord Jesus Christ is due the praise of those 'who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares,' for this is His work as the Redeemer. Instead of mean affections, tending always towards oneself, He gives to His friends the larger heart, and the interest in big things, and that love which rejoices in the truth. 'Man's chief end,' it is said, 'is to enjoy God,' which necessarily implies in him emancipation from what is near, or he would not be able to do justice to the grander objects beyond. Any one who has watched the compass in a ship knows how it is adjusted so as to swing absolutely free from what is round about it, and steadfastly to point to what lies out of sight. That is our parallel and our pattern. If we are to have eyes for the things of God and the larger interests of our fellows, we also must seek for this gift of detachment. There must be a lifting of care, something to sweeten and allay the bitterness of nature and of circumstance; there must be the sense of a superintending Providence and of a Father's kindness. And these are offered us by Jesus Christ. What He bestows even now is nothing else than blessedness; it is the gift of a fuller life to men.

Watts wrote of James Smetham's painting that 'in colour, sentiment, and nobility of thought it was only to be classed with the very flower of modern art.' Yet he was an unsuccessful artist.

In his 'Letters' he writes: 'I think that I am a little sympathised with as a painter who has not got on somehow, whereas in my own secret heart I am looking on myself as one who *has* got on, and got to his goal; as one who, if he had chosen, could have had a competence, if not a fortune, by this time; but who has got something a thousand times better, more real, more inward, less in the power of others, less variable, more immutable, more eternal, and as one who can afford a sly wink to those who know him, which wink signifies that he is not so sure that he is not going to do something comfortable in an outward and artistic sense after all. But be this as it may, his feet are on a rock; his goings so far established, with a new song in his mouth and joy on his head—and 4s. 6d. this moment in his pocket, beside some postage stamps.' [1]

2. *To-morrow's fears.*—In the world there are two unhappy conditions: the one is marked by preoccupation with the worries and disappointments of to-day to the exclusion of its beauties and its consolations, and the other is marked by a lack of courage to look beyond to-day—whether that be good or barely tolerable—for fear of what the future may contain. Many outwardly prosperous people have a shadow always lying in the background of their thinking; behind all their tasks and enjoyments, there is a disconcerting sense of things they are afraid to face. What if health should fail, or business decline, or this security or that remove? 'I do not care for death a curse,' said Byron, 'it is the sting of death: I cannot bear pain.' And many, going deeper than he, conceal in the recesses of their hearts a lurking dread of what is after death. Conscience does not always sleep, and when it wakes, it hints at awful possibilities. Even if the ground about our dwelling is clear, and enemies and terrors are set at a distance; yet if in the background we see vaguely menacing figures, there can be no security of peace. Some of us have symptoms of disease they do not like to speak of, and some have inward disquiets and protests of conscience, and some through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage. But in almost every man the outlying regions of the mind are haunted places.

It is for such a mood that the prophet's words are intended: 'Your eyes shall see a land clear to the very edge.' Out to the limit of existence you can look and find nothing to affright you, no hint of a returning host, no threatening shadow. 'My God shall supply every need of yours,' said Paul, in whom this promise was fulfilled. 'The Lord is my shepherd,' said another, 'I shall not want; by paths which take me somewhere [righteous paths] he leads me, and though I walk through the valley of the dark shadow I still shall fear no evil, for thou art with me.' That man had made the promise of the far-stretching land his own, and looking to the utmost edge of life, he was convinced that there could be nothing to disturb.

[1] T. H. Davies, *Spiritual Voices in Modern Literature*, 148.

George MacDonald says truly: 'If we knew that God is good and fair and kind—heartily, I mean, not half-ways and with *ifs* and *buts*—there would be nothing left to be miserable about.' The lurking shadows of the mind can only be dispelled by the faith which leads to God the Father.

In his early 'Journals,' Charles Wesley one day notes: 'I laboured, waited and prayed to *feel* that He loved me and gave Himself for me. But when nature exhausted forced me to bed, I opened the Book upon—"For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness"; and after this comfortable assurance I slept in peace.' He will do it: that secures escape from myself and my own feelings and efforts, and lets me rest in the sufficiency of God.[1]

Christmas.

The People.

'And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.'—Lk 2^{8}.

'Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.'—Mt 2^{1}.

'And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.'—Lk 2^{25}.

There was a poor welcome for the Christ-child, but it is a mistake to say there was none. There were a few watchers for the dawn, and there were others who, though unexpectant, were ready to greet Him when the tidings of His birth came. Those who 'waited for the consolation of Israel' were on the watch-tower in the temple at Jerusalem; the star-gazers of Chaldea were scanning the skies for some token of hope; and the shepherds of Bethlehem, those sentinels of the night, startled by the great news in the midst of ordinary service, hastened to the babe in the manger.

It is noteworthy that the three groups who gathered round the infant Christ each represented a different class and a different type of mankind. To each group a differing token of the new Presence was granted.

The shepherds represent the toilers of earth, men who work with their hands and have most to do with the physical side of life. To them was given the sign most readily recognized—the angels' glory and the angels' song. It was a sign to eye and ear and mind, impossible to mistake.

[1] W. M. Macgregor, *Repentance unto Life*, 280.

The 'wise men' represent the students of the world, the observers and thinkers. To them was granted a sign which was discernible by the eye, but required interpretation by the mind.

Thirdly, the group of aged, pious people, the little circle within a circle, with the temple as their centre, represent the devout and discerning of spirit: for them there was no sign save an inward token, a spiritual assurance.

1. Romance has gathered round the figure of the Shepherd in the New Testament, especially because our Lord pictured Himself under this form as the great protective personality. It requires an effort to disrobe these watchers of the flock at Bethlehem of unreal glamour. But we miss something of truth unless we remember that this first Christmas night began just as hundreds of other nights had begun, and the shepherds were busy with their ordinary occupation. They were simple people, with few opportunities of knowledge. That night we may presume that while they kept guard they were talking about their sheep and their prospects at market, and their homes and children.

There is no sign that they were seekers after some new revelation of God.

That is one of the wonderful things about spiritual blessedness. Its offers invade men who are not seekers. Jesus Himself went out of His way to make that plain. When He taught the inestimable value of the heavenly treasure, He did an unusual thing. He duplicated the parable to make this plain. The merchant who gained the pearl of great price had been on the quest for years, but the discoverer of the hid treasure was not a professed treasure-seeker. He just happened on it. But they were people of the right stamp—humble, biddable, unsophisticated, ready to believe and ready to take trouble to test their belief.

There is something akin between the gospel and the worker. Jesus chose His comrades from among fishermen, men of toil; and it was shepherds who were the favoured ones of earth on the first Christmas Day. In the path of honest labour there is a place where God can speak to man. If the workers suffer themselves to be severed from Christ, they are going against nature. Jesus Christ and the worker are meant for each other. His first appeal was to them, and the angels sang their herald song to them. Oh, workers of England, know your Lord! He is your true friend.

2. The second group who hailed our Lord's

coming were the 'wise men of the East.' Who were they? Little we know of them, but this is clear: they were students who were also seekers. They were investigators, the scientific men of the time, pondering the old, watching for the new. They were also venturers, not only refusing the closed mind, but also willing to launch on a great quest. Imagination was their method as well as investigation.

It is also to be noticed that these student-venturers did not shut out the possibility of the advent of a great Personality who would succour the world. They studied the stars, but they were prepared to go to welcome a man who was a King. They were wistful, not proud.

Men say that the thinkers have deserted the Church. It has never been completely true. It is not true to-day. Pascal and Pasteur, Clerk Maxwell and Lord Kelvin, all died in the faith which is celebrated on Christmas Day. But the Church has often failed to welcome the 'wise men,' and has doubted their gifts. This is one of its heavy shames. It has been afraid of knowledge, faint-hearted about truth. The Church has the right to refuse to be stampeded. All that professes to be discovery is not truth. But the Church must unfailingly believe that all truth is one, as God is one. The open mind must be maintained on all questions concerning which there is no unmistakable revelation from God. There must be a welcome for the thinkers as well as for the toilers.

What is the Christian message to the thinkers to-day? Not that they think too much, but that the sphere of their thought is too limited. 'With all your seeking,' the Church cries, 'miss not the star that will lead you on the diviner quest, the guiding light which will give you the clue to life and lead you to the Lord of life.'

It was harder for the wise men to come than for the shepherds. They had a less obvious sign to descry, a longer journey to take, and a more difficult inquiry to make. But they brought more. The shepherds had to come empty-handed. The wise men brought their rare and costly gifts: 'gold, frankincense, and myrrh.' It is still the same. It is harder for the thinker to find the Christ, but when he comes he has more to bring.

3. There was a third group to greet the infant Jesus. It consisted of those aged, devout people, deeply religious and with a special quality in their faith. Simeon and Anna were the elect of the nation. God had whispered in their ear. They knew a great deliverer was at hand. Other Jews were excited at the thought of the possibility of a Messiah. They knew.

One ponders, then. They were the people with the unconquerable hope, though so old. Their expectation came wholly from the Unseen. Their whole life was devotion, prayer, and yet more prayer. Removed from earth's toils and struggles, half in heaven already, they had developed a rare spiritual sensitiveness, an unshakable religious certainty.

Therefore they were able to recognize the Expected One without a sign. A humble coming, an entirely normal human life, did not mislead them, though it might mislead their contemporaries.

Their successors are still among us. These are people with simple hearts, often unknown to fame, whose chief interest is God and God's ways with men. They have the forward look, for much intercourse with God creates expectancy. To them Christ is akin, and they bear witness to what Christ is to be to mankind. They keep open the doors whereby God can communicate with men, help us to believe in the Unseen, and give us spiritual courage. Wise, very wise they are, with the wisdom of the child's heart and the mature mind.

4. Where can Jesus Christ look for new welcomes to-day? He is ever seeking to enter the heart of man and to be born anew within each human soul. Not to one kind of experience or to one type of life does He offer Himself, but to all men.

The toiler may say: 'I have no time to investigate, and much is uncertain'; but our Lord suits His signs and tokens to our need. Where there is an honest and wistful heart, His message can come as certainly as the angel-message from the skies. But there is a journey of the spirit to be taken before certainty is possible. Will the toiler say: 'Let us go now even unto Bethlehem'?

The thinker may find Christ approach him in another way. He may say to himself: 'I cannot easily pray: I must ponder, study, investigate. I am staggered by this assertion that God became man. It is too great to be easily believed.' But is there no star to lead you, no manifestation in your mind to guide you on the way? What if it be true that 'God grew likest God in being born'? Are your eyes towards the sky?

The naturally Christian for whom prayer is no effort but a delight, they too can give the added

welcome on this Christmas Day. Not for your lips complaints and repinings, because of the blessed past; but the steady testimony: 'Christ still comes to men. Silently, surely, He enters in. We know.'[1]

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

Newness of Life.

'And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.'—Rev 21[5] (R.V.).

We cannot help seeing purpose at work in the world in which we live. The story of this planet, which science has unfolded, is the story of a process which seems to be moving towards an end. A vast scheme of evolution is presented, which is something more than a mere sequence of changes. The changes appear to be directed to a goal. And as the process develops it seems to gain in significance, it grows richer as time goes on. Originally this planet had no life upon it. It went through a long period of inorganic change, during which its crust was being gradually fitted for the reception of living organisms. Then life appeared, at first in very lowly fashion, but endowed with the capacity for advance. Through millions of years the development of life went on, until man came upon the scene; not as we know him now, but rude, uncivilized, and with the marks of his animal ancestry plain upon him. But there was that in man which distinguished him from the beasts. He possessed a capacity for moral and intellectual growth which no animal possesses, and in virtue of that capacity he has in the course of the ages become what he is to-day, a being with rich spiritual endowment, knowing God and striving after moral ideals. As we review this story of evolution we are compelled to see in it the unfolding of a spiritual purpose.

From this we conclude that there must be in the Creator powers adequate to produce what appears in His creation, that there is a Creative Mind and Will behind the process. When the doctrine of evolution was first propounded many people, including theologians who ought to have known better, were alarmed at it. The cry was raised that God was being banished from His universe, and His place taken by a blind tendency or force. But as the doctrine became better understood, it was seen that instead of banishing God, it revealed the marvel of His creative activity. We have learned that the account of creation in Genesis is not to be taken as a strictly historical and scientific statement of how the world was made, but as giving us 'a series of representative pictures—none, indeed, corresponding, in actual fact, to the reality, but all standing for, or representing it—of the various stages by which the earth was gradually formed, and peopled with its living inhabitants.

Is a thing any less the handiwork of God because it comes into being slowly and not suddenly? Is there not, on the contrary, a grandeur in the thought of a vast plan being gradually wrought out through enormous epochs of time, and more particularly in the thought of a Creative Will which is ceaselessly bringing the new out of the old? 'And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.' It is what God is always doing, in Nature, in history; yes, and in the human heart, if men will allow His Spirit to carry out there His creative and redemptive work. The doctrine of evolution has enormously enlarged and enriched our thought of God, and it has brought God close to us.

This thought of God as perpetually creating has, surely, great value for our religious life. It wakes our sense of wonder, and wonder helps to keep our religion fresh and vital. What must God be, who makes not only the glory of the stellar heavens, but the beauty of the rose or the intricate delicacy of the sea-shell? In T. E. Brown's Manx poem, 'The Doctor,' there is a charming description of the doctor on one of his dredging expeditions, told by the fisherman who accompanied him in the boat. Wild with excitement when the dredge-net was pulled up, the doctor sorted out the treasures it contained. We see him

coaxin' and teazin'
The fringes, and spreadin' them out on his sleeve,
But the delicate! you wouldn' believe;
And the soft and lovin', and a sort of a cooin'
Goin' at him all he was doin'.
And prayin', you'd think, and passin' the stringers
Of the long sea grass betwix' his fingers,
As if it wasn' wrack he had there,
But the holy bread, or a baby's hair.

Wonder and reverence are notes of the description of heaven in the Apocalypse. Wonder lifts the soul to a plane where God can speak with man.

The perfecting of personality is the end towards which God is guiding humanity. And He is

[1] R. C. Gillie, in *Advent and Christmas Sermons*, 149.

guiding it, not from a distance, but as a Spirit of Holy Love moving in and through human life in closest fellowship with men. 'Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?' writes St. Paul (1 Co 3^{16}). We must think of ourselves as capable of receiving God, as habitations where He may take up His abode; and we must think of God as seeking to enter into human personality to foster its development. It is a thought full both of warning and inspiration. Whatever keeps God out of my life is damaging my most intimate self and hindering my true growth. Whatever admits Him into my life is strengthening His hold upon me, and is thus directing my self along the path of true advance. Personality is something very sacred. It is, as Jesus taught, of great value in God's eyes. It is a reflection of the personal element in God. In creating a human person God created that which was most like Himself. Let us, then, think of God as continually trying to mould us into the pattern of the perfect personality, which the Christian believes has been shown to the world in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is a spiritual, not a mechanical, moulding. A man cannot be made moral by compulsion. God has given us our freedom, and we have to co-operate with Him in His creative task. But all the while His Spirit is striving with our spirits, seeking to persuade us to holiness, and self-sacrifice, and service of our fellow-men. God exercises a ceaseless pressure upon our lives.

Let us respond to the Divine pressure, and open our lives to God, and pray for cleansing and guidance. That is exactly what God wants us to do. For we cannot be our true selves unless we admit God into our lives. Just as in the mind of the painter, before he begins to paint, is the vision of the completed picture with all the meaning which he intends it to convey, so in the mind of God is the ideal pattern of every human life.

The life which yields itself to God and tries to link itself with His purposes grows in understanding, not only of God, but of its own nature and capacity. The road stretches out before it, marked with sign-posts, and at the far end shines the spiritual city 'having the glory of God.' What keeps God out from the life is sin; what brings Him into the life is the repentance which is sincere. 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.'[1]

[1] V. F. Storr, *The Living God*, 58.

Meditations in the Apocrypha.

By the Reverend Arthur F. Taylor, M.A., Canterbury.

Wisdom of Solomon i. 2.

'He is found of them that tempt him not, and is manifested unto them that disbelieve not on him.'

Because some men have not attained unto heavenly wisdom, it does not follow that heavenly wisdom is unattainable. There are men who have no aptitude for mathematics, or no head for philosophy, or no ear for music; but mathematics, philosophy, and music are glorious possibilities nevertheless. There are perhaps those who have no affinity for Divine wisdom, and they are apt to regard religiously minded people as humbugs and hypocrites. But there are those who *have* affinity, and by them wisdom is surely found. 'I love them that love me, and those that seek me . . . shall find me.'

And what is true of the wisdom of the Old Testament, is true also, I suppose, of Him who is the wisdom of God in the New Testament. This thought of the affinity of some souls for Jesus, their power to appreciate Him, is very characteristic of the Fourth Gospel, and perhaps this thought had been suggested to the author of that Gospel by his familiarity with this book of the Apocrypha—a new book in his day. The man who is repelled by Jesus, he tells us is, 'condemned already,' *i.e.* pronounces judgment upon himself. He testifies of himself that he has not been able to appreciate what was pure, beautiful, kindly, good, and revealing in Jesus. 'We needs must love the highest when we see it.' Must we? Then some people must be blind, that's all, unable to see with the eyes of the mind and of the heart. But the man in whom there is an affinity for the pure and beautiful and good cannot but be