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through her own mind and has written on the basis of her questionnaire a book packed with wisdom. There is a great deal of sound counsel for young teachers on the soundest lines, and chapters of a simple kind are devoted to the art of story-telling, to expression work, to memory work, to the devotional side, and, last of all, to some of the most serious difficulties of teachers. There is nothing stereotyped in these brief chapters, but a great deal

of practical help, put often in an original fashion. An unusually good book on its subject.

A revised edition of *Christian Fellowship in Thought and Prayer*, by Mr. Basil Mathews, M.A., and Mr. Harry Bisseker, M.A., has been issued by the Student Christian Movement (2s. net). It was first published by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton in 1919.

## In the Study.

### *Virginibus Quærisque.*

#### A Present for Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

“There is not a present to bring to the man of God. What have we?” The servant answered, “I have ninepence here for you to give the man of God.” “Good,” said Saul.—1 S 9<sup>7-10</sup>.

ARE you a sleepy head, so drowsy in the morning that they can't get you awake? Ah, well! for once there was no need for them to call and call, and come and shake you, and pull the bedclothes off at last. This morning you were awake long before the sun got up, lay there in the darkness so excited and thrilly, till at last you couldn't wait, had to creep down to the foot of the bed and feel your stocking. And, oh! how lovely and bulgy it was! And after that it was so hard to lie there waiting in the dark, thinking and thinking whatever that square, lumpy thing you had felt half-way down could be; and what that other little parcel that was so thin and pointed. And as soon as nurse came in and lit the light, you were up with a whoop and out, and at them all. No sleeping in on Christmas morning, is there?

What do you do in your house about Christmas? Oh, well, you say, it begins a long, long time before. For, you see, it takes so long to save up pennies. And it took such a heap of them to get that pot of tulips you wanted for Dad. And what with all your lessons you haven't much time for making things. And it's so difficult not to get caught. One day when you were working at her present, before you knew, Mother popped in, and you had just time to sit on it, and how the needle jagged

<sup>1</sup> By the Reverend A. J. Gossip, M.A., Aberdeen.

you! But she didn't see! And another day when you heard her coming you threw Nannie's into a drawer, and ran to the other side of the room. And when you looked back, there was a corner of it hanging out, quite plain. But somehow she never noticed it, and though in the end you had to ask her to wash it for you, she hadn't an idea it was for her; and was so surprised and pleased when she got it this morning.

And then, on Christmas Eve, you hang up your stocking, of course. But the big presents you get at breakfast-time. And what a heap of things there are on every plate! Oh! it's a lovely day.

So that's the way you do it, is it? It sounds very jolly. But here's a fine thing they do over in Ireland. On Christmas Eve the door is left unlocked, and the blinds are not drawn down, and a light is put to burn beside a window or two. Why? Well, you see, they want to give a present to Jesus. It would never do, they think, to forget Him. How ashamed you would be if there was nothing upon Mother's plate, not even one small parcel; if no one had remembered to get anything for her at all. And wouldn't it be horrid if we all forgot, if every one forgot to give a present to Jesus?

But what can we do? And what ever can we give Him? Well, these Irish people remember how the first Christmas, Joseph and Mary were out in the dark and cold, with no bed and no food, and no roof above them. And perhaps this Christmas some other poor folk may be homeless and cold and tired and hungry, and perhaps if we are kind to them, Jesus will take it as a little present to Himself. And so they set the candle in the window. And everybody knows it means if any one is cold

and homeless, here is a door open, and a bed and food and welcome for Christ's sake.

Now couldn't you do something like that? I don't know if Mother would let you set a candle in the window, or ask just anybody to come in. And yet, can't you, too, think out some wee present for Jesus like that? That boy whose people don't keep Christmas and who feels so out of it, couldn't you do something for him? That girl whose Mummie and Daddy are far away, and who has no Christmas parties, couldn't you ask her in and give her a good time? Isn't there some poor man or woman you could help? Jesus would take that as the nicest of all presents, better than almost anything you could do for Himself. Don't leave His plate quite empty!

Yes, and there's more than that. For this Christmas too, just like that first one long ago, He is left in the dark and cold, homeless and with nowhere to lay His head. You haven't a house to offer Him. No, but you have your heart. What do you say to setting up a lighted candle in its windows, yes, in every one of them. And perhaps Jesus, seeing them, will say, 'There is a door open for Me, and a warm welcome waiting Me, and a wee girl or wee lad who wants Me'; and He will come.

#### On Joining the Mustard Club.<sup>1</sup>

'Joined to all the living.'—Ec 9<sup>4</sup>.

'As a grain of mustard seed.'—Mt 17<sup>20</sup>.

I wonder if you have seen the big posters all over the country which stare at you in vivid colours, 'Join the Mustard Club'?

People wouldn't spend such a lot of money on posters unless they thought that their advice was most important. What does it mean? First of all, what is a club, and what does it mean to join one? The dictionary says, 'A club is an association of persons united by some common interest meeting periodically for co-operation.' That sounds very big, but in our own words it means, 'Joining with others to do something we want to do.'

Most boys want to join a club: a football club, for instance. You hear that some boys in your district are going to form one. You go to them, and you say, 'I want to be in it. Can I join?'

Then the bigger boys will look very wise and doubtful, and whilst they consult together you are

shaking in your shoes, but at last they say, 'Yes, you can join.' After dancing about you go home to tell your mother you have joined the club. She is pleased, and buys your clothes and your boots for you. Then your mother goes on to say that she hopes you are quite fit to join that club, that you are big enough and strong enough to play with the other boys, and that you are sporty enough to take the place they give you, and to work for the team and not for yourself. Not all boys are fit to join clubs. Some are not clubbable. They are like the boy who was batting, and the umpire gave him out. 'Have I to go out,' he said. 'Yes,' said the umpire. 'Then,' said the boy, 'I'll take my bat home.' You see, he was not clubbable. He had something to learn. What it means to join a club is this: 'To act with others for the good of all.'

What, then, does it mean to join the Mustard Club? I suppose the people who put out the posters want you to buy mustard. Mustard is a very useful thing. People use mustard to give relish to meat. Shakespeare makes one of his characters say: 'What say you to a piece of beef and mustard?' which shows that they have so used it in England for hundreds of years. A school-boy in a little essay once defined mustard as 'that which makes cold meat taste bad when you don't put any on.' Mustard is useful for other things. It warms. It gives a pleasant tingle to the body when you use it in the bath. A mustard plaster will burn a pain away. The people who advertise want you to buy it and use it. They call that joining the Mustard Club.

I don't mind whether you join that club or not. It is all a matter of taste, but there is a club it would be good to join. Join those people who make sure that life tastes good. Go in for those things that give relish and interest and joy to life.

One of them is *Pleasure*. We all ought to have some pleasure. Just as we have mustard with our meat, so we should have pleasure with our work and our daily life. We need a warning here. We need not seek for pleasure. We must not want *all* pleasure. Just as it wouldn't do to have a meal of mustard, so it won't do to seek a life of pleasure. There was a boy who made a very sad mistake. He saw on the table a pot of mustard, and he thought it was custard, so he put a dessert-spoonful in his mouth which made him shed some tears. A boy who is looking for pleasure all the time is like

<sup>1</sup> By the Reverend Cecil Nicholson, Darwin.

that. To want all pleasure is bad. Sooner or later it bites. If you will just be good and kind, and stick to your work, you will get, as you go along, enough pleasure to make life taste good.

Another thing is *Keeness*. Mustard is keen. That is why it gives relish, and if you want the best of life you will be keen about something good. One of our greatest schoolmasters said not long ago, 'There are two kinds of boys and two kinds of men : those who nip life, and those who grip life.' We shall all be happier and better if we grip life, and the way to grip life is to be as keen as mustard when we are after the best things. 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.'

Another thing is *Love*. Mustard is warm. It comforts, and so should we. We are in the world to live with one another and to love one another. To have a warm heart is even better than to have a clever head. The best joy in the world comes into our hearts when we learn to look on others with love. That is life's best taste of all.

Then remember that mustard is made from a very little seed. Our Lord Jesus Christ used to talk about it. He said His Kingdom was like a grain of mustard seed. It was a very little thing, but it had life in it, and it would grow, and it would do good. He wanted those who loved Him to be on the side of that little seed, not to be ashamed of it because it was small, but to love it and help it to grow. Yes ! and He wants you to do that, to stand up for the good when it is small and weak. He wants you to be heroes. He asks you to join the 'Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed,' and to be good and brave and faithful all the time for Him.

#### The Kookaburra.

'They did eat their meat with gladness and with singleness of heart.'—Ac 2<sup>46</sup>.

'God loveth a cheerful giver.'—2 Co 9<sup>7</sup>.

There is a bird in the Bush which all Australians love. Its name in the Zoological Garden is the 'Kookaburra,' but its name in the Bush is the 'Laughing Jackass.' He is not as large as a pigeon. His head is almost as big as his body ; and he has a great beak, which he opens wide when he laughs. You cannot be sulky when the Kookaburra laughs. Mothers often say to their girls and boys when they are cross, 'Why, there is the Jackass laughing at you,' and they look up and smile. What

is it that makes him so popular ? There are several things about him that we like.

He is a friendly fellow. He looks friendly with his great beak coming out of his big wise-looking head ; and he has such a kindly eye. When I am digging in my garden there are two of them which come and sit on the fence or low branch of a tree, and watch me while I work. There are people who say that they are only looking for the grubs which I may turn up with my spade—that it is only cupboard love, but I am sure there is more in it than that. I like them, and they like me. We are friends.

Another thing which makes the Laughing Jackass popular is the fact that he kills snakes. If he sees a snake in the grass he swoops down and picks it up, catching it by the back of the neck so that it cannot bite him, and carries it high into the air, then drops it ; and while it is still stunned with the fall, he picks it up again, and repeats the process until the snake is dead. Does he not deserve to be popular, when he does what he can to rid the Bush of these poisonous reptiles, which are the dread of the forest ?

But I think it is mostly his laugh, which makes people love him. He is such a cheerful fellow. Early in the morning you hear him in the Bush greeting the new day with a laugh, and at sunset saying 'Good-night' to all the inhabitants of the forest with a laugh ; and on a wet day, you hear his laugh in the Bush, and you say, 'It is going to clear,' and you soon find that he is a true prophet ; he can see the first trace of the sun breaking through the mist and the rain. And he does not keep the good news to himself, he tells it to the whole world.

No wonder he is a popular fellow. I think I have read somewhere that God wants us to be like this bird in these four ways.

He is friendly. And does not the Bible say that, 'He who would have a friend must show himself friendly' ?

He is death on Snakes—the mean, poisonous things which creep unseen in the grass and strike at you from their hiding-places. And does not God say that we are to crush the serpent's head, that is, we are to kill the mean and poisonous things which spoil the beautiful things of life ?

He is a bearer of good news. He tells you that the new day is coming, and that the clouds are breaking, and soon the sun will be shining. And does not Jesus say that we, His disciples, are to be

the bearers of good news? One of the last things which He said before He left the earth was, 'Go into all the world, and tell the glad news to every-body.'

And he laughs. He does everything with a laugh. He is a cheerful fellow. And does not the Bible say that 'God loves the cheerful giver.' And I am sure God loves the cheerful worker, the cheerful player, the cheerful friend, the cheerful teller of good news, and every other kind of cheerful person. Learn from the Kookaburra to do things with a laugh.

### The Christian Year.

#### THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

##### Rock of Ages.

'Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone.'—Is 28<sup>16</sup>.

The Foundation is Christ. What nobler, or more sufficient, or more incomparable foundation can we have?

1. Christ in His *redemption* is the Rock on which we rely. What ails you and me? Grief? Yes, but more than grief. Ignorance? Yes, but worse than ignorance. Strife? Yes, but that which feeds the flames of strife. It is sin which ails us. And men have sought the healing of sin in a multitude of ways, leaving no method untried which might bring the sense of pardon and peace. Augustine portrayed the weary search in the *Confessions*, and Bunyan in the *Grace Abounding*, and Pascal in the *Thoughts*. Thomas Bilney knew it, and George Fox, and John Wesley. We have known it, too, who are smaller than these princes of the chariot. By forgetfulness, or by formalism, or by self-centred effort, or by sacrifice and suffering, we strove to rid ourselves of sin. But it was useless; until we 'saw our Saviour plain,' and trusted none but Christ, and were healed by the medicine of His blood. And as the cure commenced in an act of simple faith, it is continued and completed by the habit of simple faith. We are redeemed from the power, as from the curse of sin, by looking away unto Jesus. The remembrance of Him, the cry to Him, and the appropriation of Him, in each of our hazards, make us more than conquerors. There is a town Bethel, Pastor von Bodelschwingh's Bethel, near Bielefeld in Westphalia—a marvellous town which the sick inhabit, and the

epileptics, and the men and women who have been defeated in the battle of life. It is a place to bring the tears to the eyes, and to fill the heart with psalms of praise. One house there is the Brocken-sammlung. It is a great depository of the worn-out things, the cracked and spoiled and frayed and fragmentary things, for which people have no more use. Tattered books, tin soldiers without arms or heads, dolls whose beauty is only a memory, trinkets twisted out of shape and corroded by rust, clothes which are relics of a far-off past—ten thousand boxes of them will arrive in a single year. And the epileptics and the unemployed, with friends to show them how, first disinfect them, and then stitch or press or paint or burnish or supplement them, till the crooked is straight, and the defective is whole, and the old is young, and the ugly is fair. The Brocken-sammlung epitomizes Bethel itself. And it is parable and miniature of Jesus Christ. He takes our rude souls and refines them, our broken souls and mends them. He ends our sin, our sickness, and our death.

Christ in His *rule* is the Rock on which all strong and abiding lives are built. Men have always been eager to learn how the art of living can best be carried out. In Greece, the Epicurean said that happiness was the standard; and the Stoic retorted, 'No, not happiness, but duty'—duty which preserves the stars from wrong. In Palestine, the Pharisee held that an external righteousness should be the governing force; and the Essene, in his limestone cave by the Dead Sea, held that meditation and a rigorous seclusion from the pollutions of the crowd were the aims which the soul must seek. So it has been in other lands and times—the mind probing into the question of where the highest good is to be found, and the will trying to translate this answer or that into the experience of every day. But only in Christ do men see the path running straight before them, which leads to holiness and fruitfulness here, to glory and God hereafter. Only in Him we live well and greatly. It is not merely that He is the Supreme Pattern. It is that He is the Indwelling Power. His Spirit imparts to us His own life, and a union so vital with a Keeper so Divine changes us into His likeness. 'When I say Christ is God, and my Christ is God,' wrote a great Christian of the seventeenth century, 'I have said all things, I can say no more.' That is profoundly true. We have found the ultimate and final word, when we designate Christ as God and our own.

2. If Christ is Foundation, God Himself lays the Foundation. And what assurance and what exultation this recollection should stir!

I travel far back in thought. Beyond the birth of constellations and worlds. Beyond the creation of man. God is in His eternal past. Foreseeing our fall and sin and misery—their freedom, their wilfulness, their evil—He nevertheless yielded up His Son to the mission, so heavy both for the Sender and for the Sent, of saving us. The mission would have crushed an archangel's strength, and would have exhausted the love burning in the seraph's heart of fire; but Christ is competent to discharge it. God entrusts it to Him; and, in that untracked and untrackable everlastingness, the Stone is laid.

Then I travel down the ages until I arrive at the *annus Domini*—the acceptable year of the Lord, when St. John and the others beheld His glory, glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father. The incarnation enrols Christ in our needy company. The obedience is His fulfilment for us of all righteousness. The crucifixion is His bearing of our condemnation. The resurrection is the guarantee that His work is accepted and crowned. The ascension is the prophecy of His opening to us the gates of the City of God. More than ever, the Stone is well and truly laid.

Forward yet I journey. The Day of Pentecost has come. The Spirit descends in tongues of flame. The New Testament Church receives its baptism of Power from on high. And wherever its envoys go, they preach Christ, urging men to cease building on sinking foundations of sand, and to plant faith and life on Him. Men believed then, and have been believing ever since. The *Gude and Godlie Ballate* speaks the truth even about the darkest times:

Lord God, Thy face and Word of grace  
Hes lang bene hid by craft of men,  
Till at the last the nycht is past,  
And we full weill their falsset ken:  
Yit God did feid His chosin indeid,  
As Noy, and Lot, and mony mo,  
And had respect to His elect,  
How ever the blind warld did go.

A great cloud of witnesses gathers about me, to bear testimony that the Stone is being laid more firmly still.

So we reach ourselves. Has God broken our pride, and taught us to boast, all the day long and all the year through, solely and victoriously in

Christ, the Teacher we confide in, the Redeemer we trust, the Ruler we obey? <sup>1</sup>

#### FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

##### The Comfort of a Man.

'A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.'—Is 32<sup>a</sup>.

When Isaiah says with such simplicity *a man*, he means any man, he means the ideal for every man. Having in v.<sup>1</sup> laid down the foundation for social life, he tells us in v.<sup>2</sup> what the shelter and fountain force of society are to be; not science or material wealth, but personal influence; the strength and freshness of the human personality. It is a call to every one, to every one who has received the gift of power and recognizes it. And the call is to use the power so as to become a shelter, so as to become the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Let us take examples. It would be best if we could take ordinary instances, the men and women of like passions, and of like circumstances, such as we are. For the power is given to every one to become the shadow of a great rock. The recognition of the gift may be wanting as well as the use of it. But whoever will may have it and use it. There is no doubt that it would be best if we could take ordinary instances, but it is not possible. Ordinary men and women are not sufficiently well known. There is not enough known about them. We must take outstanding examples.

1. Let us take *Samson* first. It is not easy to make use of the career of Samson for edification. But we know that he received power. It is distinctly stated that the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him. And he used it. He used it according to his understanding and according to his circumstances. His power was in his own right arm. Single-handed he sought to stem the tide of Philistine encroachment. The effort was inadequate, but it was not so utterly inadequate as it seems to us. For it was made in the youth of the nations, and nations, like men, make more of physical strength in their youth than afterwards. According to the gift that was given him, and in spite of certain disabilities, Samson did become to his own time and people the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

<sup>1</sup> A. Smellie, *Out of the Desert a Gift*, 21.

The land was very weary. These uncircumcized Philistines were a sore trial. Immigrants into the land of Palestine, which is now called after their name, they had come from afar—some say the island of Crete—and they had seized or built certain strong cities by the seacoast. They were able and ambitious. They desired to possess the whole land. They were not careful to use legitimate means of accomplishing it. Already it had begun to be a life-and-death struggle between Israel and the Philistines.

And what if the Philistines should win? Is there a promise that through *them* all the nations of the earth shall be blessed? Will Isaiah come from Ashdod? Will the Messiah be born in Askelon? There Samson stood, the shadow of a great rock in that weary, weary land, using the power that had been given him, and in the way he understood it had been given him to use.

2. Take *Samuel* next. Samson was an athlete: Samuel was a statesman. Samson used the hand: Samuel used the head. The war is still with the Philistines. But it has now become manifest that no single hand, however strong, can bring relief. Samuel's task is to gather the tribes of Israel together and make a nation of them.

It may be that when the tribes of Israel feel the throb of nationality they will demand a king. Will Samuel refuse to give them a king? Will he plead that they have no king but Jehovah? He may have to give them a king. For God's ways are not as our ways. Through the gift of a king, a King may come.

Moreover, the war is still with the Philistines. And the Philistines are now more formidable than they were in the days of Samson. It may be, not only that the tribes of Israel must be gathered into a nation, but also that the nation requires a leader. And when Saul presented himself—look at him, head and shoulders taller, and a king every inch of him, for it is still the world's youth and the physical has more than its value—when Saul appeared, Samuel anointed him king. Samuel doubted the wisdom of it. But we see now that in that self-effacing act Samuel had become to his people as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

3. Let *Isaiah* come third. If Samson used his power with the hand, and Samuel with the head, Isaiah reached the heart. But first his own heart must be reached. He must himself come into right relation with God before he can begin to do the

work which God has given him to do. Is this a new departure in God's leading? It is most momentous.

Samson had a personal feud with the Philistines, and that personal feud was the occasion (shall we say the opportunity?) for the exercise of the gift which God had given him, that the Philistines might be kept in check. Samuel was a patriot. The personal feud was swallowed up in the national quarrel. Now the first duty of the patriot is obedience. But obedience to whom? Obedience to the superior. One man has soldiers under him, and he says to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh. But he himself is also set under authority. And when it comes to the king at last, even he has his superior in Jehovah. Samuel had to teach Saul that to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

But there is a greater sphere than the patriot's. It is the sphere of the prophet. And there is a greater virtue than obedience. It is reverence. Isaiah learns first of all that the God of Israel is a holy God; and then he learns that the God of Israel is the God not of Israel only, but of the whole earth. He learns that the God of Israel is a holy God. Samson was not concerned with holiness in God, or with its immediate consequence, righteousness in man. A rude sense of justice he had, but little sense of obligation to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before his God. Even Samuel was more concerned with the welfare of the nation than with his own moral approach to God. Isaiah can do nothing until his lips have been touched with the live coal from off the altar. It is most momentous.

And as soon as he learns that God is a God of holiness, Isaiah learns also that He is the God of the whole earth. The same God who reaches to the heart stands in the centre of the Universe. And ludicrous as it will appear in moments of unbelief, he sees that his message is to the inhabitants of Sidon and to the men of Babylon, and he answers at once, 'Here am I, send me.'

4. The last is *Paul*. The athlete, the statesman, the prophet—beyond these there is a higher, the Christian. John the Baptist was a prophet—there hath not arisen a greater prophet than John the Baptist. Nevertheless, he that is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.

What is the Christian's secret? It is love. Samson did not understand it. He considered neither the Philistines nor the foxes when he sent the burning brands through the corn. Samuel did

not understand it. 'I remember what Amalek did to Israel'—and Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord. Isaiah did not understand it. But stay—Isaiah had at least a glimpse of it. Or if not Isaiah, then that other who said, 'Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.'

For if love is the secret of the Christian, the secret of love is self-sacrifice. 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels (and of prophets), and have not love, I am nothing. Love suffereth long and is kind.'

The shadow of a great rock? Samson will do in the days of youth; Samuel in manhood, when patriotism is the divinity; Isaiah as the years pass, and the patriot finds that there is a God of the Gentile as well as of the Jew. But there is no refuge for a whole wide world of weariness except in the love of Him who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.

#### CHRISTMAS DAY.

##### The Two Census Books.

'There went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled.'—Lk 2<sup>1</sup> (R.V.).

'They which are written in the Lamb's book of life.'—Rev 21<sup>27</sup>.

These two texts bring before our mind two census books. One of them stands at the very beginning of the gospel. We are introduced to it in the Christmas story which tells us of the birth of Jesus. Cæsar Augustus, Tiberius Cæsar, second in order of the Emperors of Rome, decided to make a census of the inhabitants of all his provinces. The people were to report themselves in their own native places—at any rate, so far as the Jews of Palestine were concerned. The purpose of the census was probably that the people might be registered, to be assessed for taxation. Joseph, being a native of Bethlehem, went for enrolment there, with Mary, his wife, and there, immediately after their arrival, Jesus was born. He must have been entered on the census. That was the first book in which the name of Jesus Christ was written—the Name that is now above every name.

The other census book stands at the end of the gospel. It is a book written in heaven. Jesus' name is inscribed on the outside of this book. He has many names that go to make up that Name above every name. He is Jesus, the Saviour; He

is Christ, the Anointed King; He is the Good Shepherd; He is the Light of the World; He is the Bright and Morning Star; and most wonderful of all, the Lamb of God. It is 'the Lamb's' book of life. As in Cæsar's book, the names of all who are alive are written there. It is His book of life.

1. The gospel *begins* with the name of Jesus Christ being written among the people living in the world. Strange and wonderful discoveries of old eastern documents—many of them much older than the time of Christ—have been made before this. Is it possible that some day there might be discovered the page of that book in which Joseph's and Mary's names and Jesus' are entered, that Cæsar might know how many subjects he had in Bethlehem? Probably it was not made of any parchment durable enough to survive long, and ages ago it was lost, or perished. But there it was, written among the facts of the world's history: Jesus, male child born to Mary, wife of Joseph, at Bethlehem. It reminds us that the gospel of Jesus Christ began in an event of history that could take its place among the world's records of fact. Every time we write a letter or enter a payment in a ledger, we testify that a change came for the world when Jesus was born. It was the greatest event in human history—the birth of Jesus. Have we ever tried to think how different our lives would have been if Jesus had not been born—if that event which could be written down as a fact in Cæsar's census book had not happened? We cannot think of it. We only know that there is hardly anything of all that we reckon most precious in our lives that we cannot trace back to that fact. It has made our homes what they have been in purity and tenderness; it has given us all that is strongest and sweetest in the influences that have been round our lives from babyhood. All our best thoughts of God, all our hopes of heaven have come from that. The cradle of Jesus has proved to be the cradle of the world's true hopes and joys.

And the other book is at the *end* of the gospel. 'They that are written in the Lamb's book of life.' What is the end of it all? If the wonderful things written in this New Testament are true, the end of it is that a people is to be gathered home to God; a people whose names can be written down as those who are alive. Alive, after what we call death is done with, looked back upon as one of the incidents of the past. And it is 'the Lamb's book of life.' The secret of life has been given them by Jesus, the Lamb of God. They are His people, their life is

owing to Him and owed to Him. What is a Christian? He is one who has come under the influence of that past fact that Jesus Christ came into the world: one whose life has been changed in many ways from misery to happiness, because Jesus Christ came into the world. We do not realize how dark the world is where Christ has not come to be known. The truth and benefits of Christianity have wrapped our lives round from the beginning. But all this, all the difference that it has made to us to have been born and brought up in a Christian land, that is all the work of the past upon us, something given to us from outside. And in the end we may be none the better for it. What is a Christian? There must be another answer that looks forward to the end. Shall we *live* then? Will our names be in the book of life?

2. Is this playing with the notion of these two census books in an unjustifiable way? There is no real parallel between them. The one was an actual book spoken of in a record of actual history; the other is only spoken of by a figure, in a book of visions and imagination. Think, then, about that difference between the two books. The one was an actual book—written with ink that you could see, on paper you could handle—that book of Tiberius Cæsar's. It was sent up by the registrar in Bethlehem to Cæsarea, or wherever the Palestine headquarters was, and then posted with other books to Antioch perhaps, the chief city of the province of Syria (to which Palestine belonged), and then perhaps to Rome, to be kept among the imperial archives. It was an actual thing; and being so it was temporary. How long do you suppose it was of the slightest interest to anybody? That census would be no use after a generation or so had passed. They would need to make another.

The other book is not an actual book—no, it is a book which is a spiritual fact, that could only be spoken of by a picture borrowed from material things. But which of the two books do you think really endures the longer—which of the two needs more to be reckoned with now, or in the ages to come? The spiritual fact is much more enduring than the material. The book that could only be spoken of in picture, is much more real than the other which was the tangible record of Cæsar's great dominions. 'The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.'

Cæsar's census book has perished; 'the Lamb's book of life' remains. It was an accident of time

and circumstance that decided whose names were written in that book of Cæsar's; just those who happened to be living on the earth, within the lands of the Roman Empire, when it was compiled. But it is no accident that decides whose names are written in that other unseen book. It is the book of eternal destiny. It is the book of human character, and neither time nor circumstance determines that.

All the entries of our life on earth will soon be forgotten in this world's reckoning. Every paper that bears our name, unless we are among the few famous ones of the earth, will soon be destroyed past all recovery. The things that are seen are temporal. But there *is* an entry that will not perish. Will our name be written there?

3. Think of one other thing of which these two census books remind us. Whose are they? The one belonged to Cæsar; the other belongs to Christ.

The name of Jesus was written in Cæsar's book—He was entered as one of Cæsar's subjects. Is Cæsar's name written in Christ's book—in 'the Lamb's book of life'? We do not know, but which thing matters most? Was it an honour for Jesus to be written down among the subjects of Tiberius? Or was it an honour for Tiberius, had he known it, to have Jesus' name there? There can be no doubt about our answer to that. Does it not make us feel, as we think of it, how shallow and trumpery the world's judgments are? For Cæsar seemed to be the great king, and Jesus—what did He seem then, and for so long as Tiberius lived? A despised member of a despised race; one whom even that race despised, and hated so that they got Cæsar's deputy to make away with Him. Yet He is on the throne, and it is before Him that Cæsar's claims come to be tested.

Would *we* rather be written down in Cæsar's book or in Christ's? Cæsar's books are still being compiled—the books of the powers of this world: census books, books of honour, books of privilege, books of fame. Would we rather be written down in them, or in 'the Lamb's book of life'? Would we rather be written a patriotic citizen of the British Empire or a faithful Christian? We may have to choose between them. Which counts more with us, to win the world's 'well done,' or Christ's? We may have to choose one and abandon the other.

Jesus Christ's is the only book of *life*. 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead'—those are awful words, but they must be spoken to us,

if we get the world's reward, but reject the following of Jesus. Jesus Christ's is the only book of life. The only real life comes through living in the power of *His life*, which is the power of love.

We are keeping Christmas again. And as it comes, with its wonderful message, so incredible to the world's judgment still—for all the easy professions of belief in it—the message that in that baby born in the Bethlehem stable, and in that carpenter of Nazareth, and in that nameless Galilean preacher, and in that man suffering as a common criminal upon the Cross, tricked and hunted to death by religious men with a crowd to help them with their fickle shouting, was the incarnate God, whose love, shown in all that life of sorrow and that death of shame, redeems the world—it comes with a great call to us, putting before us a new opportunity, to choose which way shall be ours: to go with Him by faith, or to go with the world.

Faith in Him is conquest—spiritual conquest. There is a greater war to win than any that is waged on earthly battlefields, the war against our unbelief: and we each have to fight it out on the battlefield of our hearts.<sup>1</sup>

#### FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

##### The Secret Guest.

'He entered into a house, and would have no man know it: and he could not be hid.'—*Mk 7<sup>24</sup>* (R.V.).

For the need of His own soul did Jesus desire retirement and even secrecy. It was the repair of silence and solitude that He sought, and for this cause He would have no man know where He abode. This is one of the places in the Gospels where we are reminded of what ministry was meaning for Jesus and what it was costing Him. But for this record, and some few incidental revelations elsewhere, it were easy to be misled into the notion that, until Gethsemane saw His agony and Calvary was near, what Jesus did for men was lightly accomplished. He moved among men with the joy of redemptive service radiant about Him, but with the burden of it greatly and nobly hidden. Nevertheless, that burden was there, and it was heavy.

1. But it is to be observed that our Lord's sense of the need for refuge and silence had particular cause at this time. 'From thence he arose.' 'There were gathered unto him the Pharisees, and

<sup>1</sup> H. C. Carter, in *Advent and Christmas Sermons*, 135.

certain of the scribes, which had come from Jerusalem.' It was a sinister and malicious deputation come with intent of mischief. With them Jesus came face to face with hostility and hypocrisy, and with malice which took religion for a cloak. Arose then at once sharp controversy in which Jesus spake His mind with plainness and severity. There was laid on Him the duty of remonstrance and rebuke, and He discharged it without flinching or fear.

Now there be few who follow Christ who escape occasion when some such duty is manifestly theirs. If a man of business meets and is challenged by that which is clearly base or unjust, if so be that he follow Christ, he must then speak as one who so follows, and there will be laid on him in that hour the difficult duty of remonstrance and rebuke.

But there is something written here to remind us that there is no atmosphere more perilous for a Christian than that of controversy, and no duty with more danger in it for the soul than that of rebuke. 'From thence he arose.' To the silence and to God after the controversy and the rebuking, and if He needed it, much more do we when in following Him there falls on us a like duty. Many a true and courageous stand for right in the face of evil has been robbed of value, and has even become the occasion of new mischief, by the after-bearing of the witnesses. Did you ever do such a thing without having to search your own soul lest censoriousness should have crept in, or your words aiming at truth, have missed charity, or your bearing betrayed that sense of self-superiority in which the meekness of the Lord was not discernible?

2. He had been that day made vividly conscious of the worst side of human nature. How it came about is hidden in the charity of the evangelist, and of the processes of His own mind we know nothing. But it is in this chapter, and immediately before we read of His hiding Himself, that there are set down certain shattering words of His about human nature. We seldom read these in public. It were wise of us to read them often in private, and steadily face up to what they mean and the truth of them. 'From within, out of the heart of man, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness; all these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.'

'What do you make of sin?' said a friend to

Ernest Renan. 'Sin,' he said musingly; 'I suppose I suppress it.' But not so Jesus.

There are many counsellors who are perplexing in their inadequacy. They will tell you to ignore sin. If you fall, get up again, and waste no time reflecting. There are varieties of 'new thought' which are trenchant in their attack upon the old dogmatic because of the stress it has laid on the reality of moral evil and the fact of sin. One may be ready and eager for new thought, but it must square with the facts of an old Adam. When it offers, in response to the cry of the tyrannized soul, glib assurances about the facility of righteousness, it becomes farcical to men and women who know what human nature is.

Now it is easy when we have to face the badness of human nature, whether we make the discovery within ourselves or it is thrust on us by others; when we are compelled to recognize all the possibilities and actualities of evil in man, it is easy to become cynics. 'The more I have to do with my fellow-men, the more I respect my dog,' said one in whom the experience of the dark side of human nature was on the way to produce the finished cynic. It is easy also to become an easy self-excuser on the ground that our worst is relatively good.

The more we are compelled to recognize of this side of human nature, the more we will need to take opportunity for silence and communion with our own soul and with God. Behold the way of Jesus! 'From thence he arose,' from the perception and exposure of human evil and wrong. 'He arose and entered into a house, and would have no man know it.' Did He feel the need to see human nature afresh in the light of God? Did He feel that He must retrieve His faith in man by renewal of His faith in God? He was no romantic sentimentalist. No one who ever lived knew as He knew and felt the sinister side of human nature. But no one ever believed more triumphantly in man than He. Was it not because in these quiet hours of recollection and prayer He was able to correct this vision, to look at man from the side of God, and in view of all the Divine potentialities still remaining by virtue of the unextinguishable kinship of man with God, of the might of Divine redemption, of the magnificence of Divine grace? How much more do we need this! To be quiet and alone with God is to get a new and immeasurably more hopeful view of ourselves and our fellows, and we never need God so much as when we have most to do with men,

unless it is when we most truly and deeply know ourselves.

3. We may pass now from the sequence which led to this retreat, to another suggestion. We are held by this desire of Jesus that no man should know where He abode. We suspect a purpose of blessing in it for the man whose house and home it was. It is excellent to think of Him as a guest; of what a blessing He was in the home at Bethany; of what a blessing He might have brought to the Pharisee's house if Simon, who was His host, had been of a more generous heart; of what a redemption came to the house of a publican when Jesus went to be guest to Zacchæus. There are also anonymous benefactors of Jesus of whom we wish we could know more. The goodman of the house, upon whose upper room furnished Jesus knew He could assuredly count, is one of the unknown and nameless friends of Jesus, over whom our imagination lingers. There is one of whom we know even less—the goodman of the house where Jesus lodged somewhere on the border of Tyre and Sidon. Only the devout imagination can recover him, for Jesus 'would have no man know' that He abode with this man of the marches.

It is still true that there are times when He abides with us and would have no man know it. There is a time for speech about Him, and we openly confess Him too tardily and reluctantly. There is a perpetual tendency for religion to lose the frankness of its utterance, and it is an unnatural thing and perilous. Nevertheless, there are times of rightful reticence.

I have seen a minister of Christ's gospel changed and his ministry transformed. Once it was superficial, flippant, ready for will-o'-the-wisps of easy speculation; it became deep, grave, and most steadfastly anchored to the great verities of the gospel. It was hard and steely, and it became tender and glowing. What lies between no man knows, save that a great sorrow opened the door of that minister's heart to the Lord, as sorrow does often open such doors for Him. But the Lord shut to that door, and who are we that we should seek to open it or pry into the ways of God with the soul of a man? We only know it by its sign, and of this we say: 'It is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes.'

4. Lastly, there is the frustrated secrecy. 'He would have no man know it; and he could not be hid.' It was because a little girl was in distress and

her mother in trouble that He could hide Himself no more. 'For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, came and fell at His feet.' The love of Christ cannot keep itself in a world of need. If Christ take up His abode with us, He cannot hide Himself to the end. It is to be known where He dwells, for the door of sympathy and succour is flung open at the approach of suffering and necessity. When once the feet of Christ have crossed the threshold of a human heart, all wounded feet may cross that threshold too.

Hereby we know if Christ be in us. He will discover Himself through us in sympathy and service. If He be our guest we shall no longer live unto ourselves. 'He could not be hid,' because there was a need outside too great for Him to withstand. There is, first, the love we receive. There is, second, the love we offer. My soul and my Saviour has its sequence in my neighbour and my service. The intimacy of my soul with its Saviour has its fruition in my responsiveness to all His love includes. First, a holy fellowship; then an availing and catholic charity. You never open your door so promptly in sympathy, or emerge so swiftly in service, as when for a season the door has been shut upon yourself and your Lord. No necessity is an intrusion, and no human need a stranger, when we know what it is to be much at home with Christ.<sup>1</sup>

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#### SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

##### An Attitude to Life.

'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.'—Mk 9<sup>24</sup>.

Face to face with life there are only three possible attitudes to take up, three communions of the spirit, so to call them, to one or other of which every thinking person must commit himself. Face to face with life in its deep and permanent conditions a man must either believe, or harden his heart, or give way. That is to say, ultimately there are Christians, and Stoics, and those who are merely passing the time. Leaving out of account these last, there are ultimately only two attitudes which those who reflect upon life can take up towards it. We may accept life or we may defy life. We may take life humbly, or, having decided that most things are vain, may train ourselves to despise its miserable details, and to take pride in the power

of our souls to bear without weakness the senseless accidents of fortune.

Any religious view of life, or any philosophical view which is held with such conviction as to give it the force of a religion, descends upon human hearts, and begins to become a force in history, always in a time of general collapse, when an old order of things is passing, and the aspect of the world for serious men is grave.

In the life of an ordinary human being, and in the general life of man, there are long stretches of regular and even experiences which provoke no deep questioning, times, it may be, when we are recovering from wounds, settling down after some upheaval, or so daunted by some well-remembered catastrophe that we go quietly; or times in which we are still enjoying the security which came, it may be, to our fathers in a great baptism of faith; and though that faith of theirs may not be held so acutely or honestly by us, still, we have not yet reached the stage when we abandon it, and our lives and policies have not yet embodied any open repudiation of their insight. We are living, as it were, in the long summer afternoon of a day of which they invoked and enjoyed the blessed dawn.

But a day comes when this peace is broken; for something happens—the loss of fortune, sickness, the hand of death—and suddenly life has raised certain questions for which we must find some honourable answer. Suddenly we find ourselves in a world which at least is not obviously a friendly world. It may be still a friendly world in its deeper intention; but this deeper friendliness is something towards which we are to work our way by the help of lights which for the most part are private. Meanwhile we stand in a shivered universe.

Krylov tells a story which, if we remember it, will recall these things to our mind some day when for one reason or another they have become urgent for ourselves. He tells of two farmers, whose fields had been devastated by the flooded river in their district. They pleaded to the god of the river to restrain the flood, but the flood persisted, and swept their crops away. Whereupon these two simple men went away to the great river, to the river which received the waters of the lesser rivers, and by receiving their waters seemed to justify their course. The two men went to the great river in order to plead with the god of the great river to restrain the violence of his subordinates. On and on they trod, not too sad

<sup>1</sup> T. Yates, *The Strategies of Grace*, 216.

because they had faith. But who shall say what happened in the depth of their souls when, approaching the great river, they saw, being borne on its proud wide bosom, their own ricks of grain! Krylov tells us that they stood still, looked at each other, shook their heads, and went home. What they did when they went home he does not tell us; but one or other of three things they were bound to do. One or other of three things they must have done; for there is no escape. They had either to believe in God with that deeper belief which becomes ours when we have to hold to it in spite of things. Perhaps they believed in God, and for the first time saw what belief in God may involve, what they should always have understood that belief in God might involve; that, as it involved for Jesus Christ Gethsemane and Calvary, so it might involve for us sinful men loss of goods or some heartbreak. They may have gone down upon their knees in a faith deeper than their natural despair. Or—and that shaking of their heads towards one another warns us of the possibility of this—they may from that hour have become desolate and embittered men, cursing life. Or, saddest of all, they may have gone home, and, instead of going in to comfort their wives and children, or to get comfort from them, they may have gone into the local tavern to drink vodka, and to drown their sorrows in forgetfulness.

But one or other of these three things they did; because, face to face with a deep challenge from the side of life, there is no escape for any of us from a decision.

'Let us eat, drink, and be merry; to-morrow we die.' That is the lowest voice. These words, of course, occur in Holy Scripture. Let us take the expression of the higher voice, though still far from the highest, not from Holy Scripture, for I confess I cannot find a verse of Scripture which without

pressure can be made to embody the very mood. Let me take this from a poet of our time:

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

That is fine. In the presence of such dignity and passion it little becomes us to argue with such a mood. We will only say that face to face with life it will not do. If Stoicism had sufficed for men there would have been no need, and no opening, for Christianity. And so there is the third attitude—for us, I trust, the only possible one; and since when all is said it is to our Holy Scriptures that we owe this final consolation and motive, from the Holy Scriptures we quote.

'Seeing that these things are all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? But according to his promise we look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye be found in peace, without spot, and blameless in his sight.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Hutton, *Discerning the Times*, 120.

## A New Idea in Religious Education.

BY THE REVEREND F. J. RAE, M.A., DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN  
ABERDEEN TRAINING CENTRE.

THE United States of America is prolific in the literature of religious education. There is no national system as regards this subject in that country, but this defect (as we see it) has made the religious teachers in the States only the

more anxious to perfect their presentation of religious truth to the young. They have many well-furnished seminaries with specialists who work on different aspects of the subject. And it is from America that the new idea referred to in the