

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

with principles of true religion: if the steward represents the Jewish Church (the Sanhedrin, perhaps, or the scribes and Pharisees); then the whole parable takes a different aspect, the cap fits and the 'moral' is clear. The Jewish Church had certainly failed. Like the steward, it had wasted the Lord's goods—frittering them away in little sillinesses, such as tithing mint, rue and cummin. It had brought the majestic Law of God into contempt. It had put the letter before the spirit. Its failure necessitated the sending of the 'beloved son' (Lk 20¹⁻¹⁶). It was, in fact, to be deposed. Not only had it failed in stewardship. It had demanded too much. It had imposed upon men 'burdens too hard to be borne'; burdens which in common justice needed remission. It had become aloof from the facts of everyday life. The parable, addressed as it is *πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς*, to the disciples or the Church of the future, indicates the very important truth, so frequently found in the Prophets and *par excellence* in our Lord's teaching, that true religion must rise above legalism. It warns against Rigorism on the one hand, and that frivolously lax casuistry which springs from it on the other. Furthermore, Dr. Kirk's four corollaries fall into place.

(a) 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon' will still remain a general truth, but its particular application can be seen in the false use of casuistry which aims at adapting Rigorism to an extremely lax position; which tries, in short, to make religion easy for all.

(b) 'The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light' is, as we have already seen, adumbration. But it has a special significance when we remember that 'ordinary people' often do arrive at moral intuitions surprisingly superior to those of ecclesiastical technique. In remitting the burdens of the tenants at his own cost the steward was doing rather a big thing—tardily perhaps and under strong compulsion—but

genuine and right. His conscience was a better guide here than further legalistic manipulation.

(c) 'If ye have been unfaithful,' etc.; or, as we have seen, 'If ye have proved untrustworthy in worldly affairs, who will entrust to you that which really matters?' is a warning which springs naturally from the interpretation we suggest. There may be some hint that even Rabbinic casuistry had been further debased in application. But in any case it is a warning to the disciples against falling into the same pitfall as had the Jewish Church (cf. Mk 8¹⁵); and it is possible to accept *ἡμέτερον*, 'your and my religion.'

(d) 'I say to you: Make to yourselves friends from the midst of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it fails, they may receive you (now—and finally in the dwellings of the just).' That is to say, those friends you have made (from mammon) in business, at the works, at tennis, or what not, through being not too exclusive, will turn to you and receive your teaching and respect your opinion about the things that matter (eternal truth, reality); and so there will be a 'communion of saints' both here and hereafter.

In short, the Jewish Church had failed, Mammon fails; but just where they fail Christ succeeds.

This reopening of a much-debated question in an attempt to reinforce one of those interpretations that have been made before has respected Dr. Stier's warning. No attempt has been made to unravel the many complications of commentators. If Dr. Kirk's four interpretations have been, to some extent, modified or re-focussed, nevertheless a word of thanks is due to him for having provided the impetus at a psychological moment. Should there be any validity in the point here suggested, it would seem to reinforce the position (on p. 121) in his latest book.

Finally, would it not be better to speak of the parable as that of 'The Untrustworthy Steward' rather than as that of 'The Unjust or Unrighteous Steward'?

In the Study.

Virginitus Querisque.

The Thorn that Blossomed.

BY THE REVEREND STUART ROBERTSON, M.A.,
GLASGOW.

'Instead of the thorn.'—Is 55¹³.

AN old legend tells us that Joseph of Arimathea sailed on the seas to England long ago, bearing the

cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper. When he came to Glastonbury, he and his company rested, for they were tired, at the top of a long hill called 'Weary-all Hill.' There he struck his thorn staff into the ground, and it took root, and there sprang from it a white thorn tree, which every Christmas day miraculously burst into blossom.

Now there *was* a white thorn at Glastonbury for

many a day; and it *did* blossom with a second blossoming at Christmas-time; but whether it came from Joseph's staff, I don't know, and I don't propose to ask.

But there is truth in this old story, and it is a truth of Christmas Day. Long ago God's ancient people was just like a lopped and withered stick. Its branches had been stripped and cut away. Its pride was brought very low. Winter had come upon it and it seemed quite dead.

But a prophet dreamed that 'out of the lopped stump of Jesse' there should come a shoot, and a twig out of the battered root; and at long last the dream came true.

On Christmas Day at Bethlehem the shrivelled-up stump of the nation of David burst into bloom, and the blossom was Jesus Christ our Lord. It did not seem likely. It was as strange and wonderful as a thorn tree blossoming in mid-winter; but 'the winter of our discontent' was 'made glorious summer' by the sun of God's love. Though Mary belonged to the family of David, she was the wife of a humble carpenter of Nazareth; yet her Son was our Saviour. He was the beautiful and pure white bloom.

The story of the thorn at Glastonbury is just a poetical way of saying 'Christ was born at Bethlehem,' and poetry is just as true as history.

And it is also the story of what happens every year as Christmas comes round. Human nature is the thorn, and it is sometimes a very prickly thorn indeed. The battle of life batters it and makes it hard and nubby. The cold winds of the world shrivel up its leaves of kindness and break down its tender gentleness. It seems sometimes as if it were dead and hopeless, as if it could only bear thorns and things that wound and pierce and tear, wars and strifes and disputes.

Then comes Christmas and the old thorn bursts into blossom. It blooms in kindness and goodwill to men. People that all the rest of the year have passed each other unheeding, not knowing each other, not wanting to know each other, scrambling against each other in trains and buses, hustling against each other in business, now beam good nature on each other and wish each other 'A Merry Christmas'! People, that for the rest of the year are too dignified to carry parcels, are seen with great awkward armfuls and quite happy about it; and when they go into train or tram with them, people who at other times would scowl at them for cluttering up the carriage and crowding folk with their parcels, smile and grow kinder, wondering what is in them and thinking of the children whose happiness is done up so in brown

paper. Stiff bachelor uncles and severe maiden aunts, who at other times look as if they had forgotten that they had ever been children, seem suddenly to have remembered and thawed. They are seen unashamed and very interested buying dolls! They are seen absorbed and chuckling over clockwork toys. They even leave business to attend to these things, and late at night, before they have sent them away, I quite believe they play with them themselves!

Grave old folk pull crackers and wear paper caps. Quite old folk—people about thirty and forty years old!—even hang up their stockings! What a jolly time it is! What has happened to the world? Why, just this: the thorn tree has blossomed again on Christmas Day.

Once the same old prophet, that dreamed of the dead stump blossoming, looked out on a troubled world and saw men like beasts; greedy as lions, treacherous as wolves, poisonous as serpents; and he had another dream. He dreamed that some day all those brutishnesses of man's nature would be changed and 'a little child should lead them.'

That too is coming, slowly. Jesus is leading us slowly but surely out of the things that made for war and its savage struggles to a better way. Some day the thorny human heart will bear the wonderful blossom of peace on earth.

Girls and boys, I wish you a Happy Christmas in the name of the Lord Jesus who gave us Christmas. 'Instead of the thorn' of selfishness which makes our lives so prickly and unkind, may there blossom anew in your hearts the wonderful flower of love.

What do you Measure by?

BY THE REVEREND ERNEST G. LOOSLEY, B.D.,
ALTRINCHAM.

'Be ye . . . even as your Father is.'—Lk 6⁹.

Of course we must have *something* to measure by. There is no sense in saying that a thing is as big as a bit of wood, or as long as a piece of string; for a bit of wood may be of any size and a piece of string of any length. We must have a *standard*—something fixed and definite with which we can compare anything that we want to measure. In a certain wall at Greenwich Observatory a metal rod has been placed which is exactly a yard long, and which is so made that it does not become longer on a hot day or shorter on a cold day, as most metals do. If you want to be very exact, you can take anything you want to measure all the way to Greenwich, and compare it with that metal rod. But we do not often need to be so exact as that,

and for all ordinary purposes the tape measure or the foot rule that you can buy in any town will be accurate enough.

Long before men used the yard standard, they measured everything by themselves. This was the easiest and most natural way for them to describe the size of anything. We have just spoken of a foot rule. It has to be a large 'foot' to measure twelve inches, but of course that is how the foot measurement began—a thing was a foot long when it was about the length of a man's foot. We still measure the height of horses by 'hands,' the hand being four inches, that is, about the width of the palm of the hand. In the Old Testament you often read about 'cubits.' A cubit was the length of the forearm, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. The Hebrews also measured by 'finger-breadths' and 'spans'; and instead of repeating their 'table of measure' as you do—'twelve inches one foot, three feet one yard'—they had to learn something like this :

- 4 finger-breadths (digits) = 1 palm.
- 3 palms = 1 span.
- 2 spans = 1 cubit.

In various European countries cloth and other goods used to be measured by the 'ell,' which comes from the Latin *ulna*, meaning elbow or arm. An ell was usually the length of an arm, but sometimes it meant the full reach of the extended arms, and so it varied from twenty-seven to fifty-four inches. It was like 'foot' and 'hand' and the Hebrew 'cubit' in this respect, that it was based on a part of the human body.

You can easily see one disadvantage in taking parts of our bodies as standards to measure by. We are not all the same size. Even amongst grown-up people, some are very tall and some very short, and there are all sizes in between. The hands of some are so small that they cannot span an octave on the piano, while others have no difficulty in spanning a full octave and two notes of the next. Which is to be the agreed 'span'? That was the difficulty, and for a time people solved it by saying that the king should be the standard size, and that the 'ell' should be the length of the king's arm. But only for a time: for the next king might be several sizes larger or smaller.

Rather more than a hundred years ago, some Frenchmen saw how unsatisfactory the whole method was, and decided to start afresh on an altogether different basis. They said, 'We won't measure things by ourselves or by parts of our own bodies any longer. We will measure by the earth,

which is always the same, and then there will be no doubt about it.' So they took the measurement of the earth from the Equator to the North Pole, and divided it by ten million; and that fraction of the earth's measurement they called a 'metre.' It is a little more than our 'yard'—just over thirty-nine inches; and upon that one measure the whole system of their weights and measures is based. It is so much more satisfactory than any other system that scientists all over the world have adopted it; and probably many of you learn it at school in addition to our own.

Really it is not satisfactory to measure things by ourselves or by one another. When you hear a boy saying, 'Well, I'm as good as *he* is, anyway,' you feel that there is something wrong about his way of measuring himself, even if you cannot see at once what is the right way. To compare ourselves with other people, and feel satisfied if we are no worse than they are, and proud if we are a little bit better—that is taking an unsatisfactory standard, and one that will not help us to grow. Jesus gives us a much better one. It is as startling as the change made by the Frenchmen when they left the stupid little standard of a man's body, and jumped right to the circumference of the earth. 'Measure yourself by God,' says Jesus. If you want to know how big you are, compare yourself with God. If you want to measure your character, put it side by side with God's. If you want to know how good you ought to be, look at God. 'Be ye merciful, even as your father is merciful.' 'Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.' Don't be satisfied with forgiving your brother seven times: forgive him seventy times seven, as God forgives.

If you measure yourself by God, you will never be proud or 'stuck-up,' and that will be a good thing. But though you will always feel that you have nothing to be conceited about, actually you will grow bigger and better than if you measured yourself by others. For the higher the standard, the better the result is likely to be; and the best can only be attained by aiming at the highest.

The Christian Year.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

The Reign of Christ.

'For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.'—1 Co 15²⁵.

'Thy kingdom come.'—Lk 11^a.

What a marvellous foresight it was in Christ which anticipated the spirit and temper of a Church

that should say, 'My lord delayeth his coming!' It is a very long time since Christ came; and it seems to us likely enough that it will be still longer before He comes again. For most of us Advent hopes are blurred and dim. We have lost the eagerness of men who are looking for their Lord. It was natural and necessary that men who stood so near to the Son of Man in the flesh should find it impossible to face the future without the hope of seeing Him again on earth. But that is not for us. We must re-conceive and re-interpret Advent; and that Christ shall come again must mean to us something different from what it meant in the days of the Apostles.

Let us look at two of the certainties which Advent proclaims, the permanent and changeless message of which the shocks and shifting movements of thought can never rob us.

1. There is the fact of the final triumph, the ultimate supremacy of Jesus Christ. Look at St. Paul's great statement of this, the climax to which all the close-knit witness of his magnificent apology for the Resurrection leads. 'He must reign.' With unflinching confidence he rests his conclusion upon the immovable rock of the Easter message, 'Christ is risen.' The Resurrection was a revelation, a transvaluation of all values, as the philosopher would say. It was also a revelation—a revelation of immortality; but above all it was a revelation of Christ Himself, for He had entered into His glory, and since 'it was not possible that he should be holden of death,' the reign of sin was broken by the victory of love. So His supreme place in the Universe and His external Kingship over men stand revealed. There can be no repetition of Calvary. The end of the campaign can tarry but a little; 'He must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet.' Advent flows out of Easter, as summer flows from spring.

There is one question which no thoughtful man can decline to face. Nietzsche asked it, as he moulded before the startled eyes of the nineteenth century the monstrous portent of his Superman—'Who is to be the Master of the world?' What is the future of this strange world in which we live our lives, so full of inveterate contradictions and alternating hopes and fears? Whither are we tending? What is to be the end?

It is hard not to be overwhelmed by the forebodings which whisper that life is a meaningless and purposeless drama being played out to a bitter end. And yet, in spite of it all, the instinct of hope burns on within us, and we will not, cannot, let it die. Man's dignity lies in this, his defiance of

appearance. In some way or other in every life Pippa passes. The Pippa-song goes on singing, above the funeral dirges and the monodies of defeat and dereliction, because man seeks a Saviour, and in the sanctuary of his spirit there is a vacant throne made ready for his King. The King has come, and the King is coming! The secret of the eternally attractive power of the Christian message is that it speaks as nothing else does to that instinct of hope. To our heaving, dissatisfied age, with the world in ferment, to the restless and baffled individual heart, to the mind staggered with insoluble problems, it comes with its redemptive tidings, 'He must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet.' This is the first great certainty, and it brings with it both warning and hope. The fear of Advent—how little we know of it! Yet there needs no laboured proof to convince an awakened conscience of the folly of a life that refuses to yield to the claims of the coming King. That is the solemn warning, lest we be found fighting against God. But to the warning is added glorious hope. 'Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself.'

2. Let us pass on now to think of the light of Advent certainty which falls upon the present. What do we mean when we say, 'Thy kingdom come'?

The strength of the first Christians was their strong hold upon the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection on the one hand, and an ever-imminent Advent on the other. In the first-century manual, known as the *Didaché*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, there is a Eucharistic prayer to be used after reception in the Holy Communion, which runs thus: 'Remember, O Lord, thy church, to deliver her from all evil, and to perfect her in thy love, and gather her together from the four winds, her which is sanctified unto thy kingdom which thou didst prepare for her. . . . Let grace come and this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David! If any is holy, let him come; if any is not, let him repent. Maran atha—our Lord cometh! Amen.' Thus every Eucharist was shot through and through with the glory of the return of Jesus. 'Our father, which art in heaven, thy kingdom come.' Like the Church of the *Didaché*, the Church in the twentieth century may say this still, and with the same meaning. To Christian faith Jesus Christ is always imminent. But the

teaching of the Lord's Parables warns us that we must not unduly limit its reference to the one thought, however true, and the one reality, however imminent. For the Kingdom of which Christ speaks comes also slowly and gradually, like the growth of the seed from its earliest state when it is cast into the earth, till it becomes the waving mustard plant in which the birds of the air take shelter. We cannot think of the Kingdom without thinking ultimately of its completeness; we cannot pray for its growth without praying that it may become full-grown. And therefore the Advent of Christ in His Kingdom, of which the Parable of the Mustard Seed and others like it speak, is one which is always on the way to completion; it is the beginning of, and the drawing on towards, the end. But none the less here and now it is actually taking place; it is going on; it is moving forward.

Sure of the end and looking forward to Christ's final victory, where can we trace His coming into our midst to-day?

(1) For answer we will point first to two facts—really one and indivisible—the fact of the Church and the fact of individual Christian experience. Perhaps these things seem too commonplace to be of real value; we are so accustomed to acknowledge them that we miss their vital significance. But it is just this 'rejuvenescence of commonplace' which we need most of all in our vision of things, that we may see them truly.

Nineteen hundred years after His death Jesus Christ reigns to-day in millions of human lives. Consider that fact! Not only the phenomenon of a society reaching to the ends of the earth, which with all its defects and shortcomings is still the most potent spiritual and moral force that exists among men. That in itself is arresting and wonderful. But the supreme marvel about it is the experience of which that society is the collective expression. For every member of Christ's Church, far more even than he articulately knows, lives by Christ Himself, as Way, as Truth, as Life. The Christian experience of Christ is the most astonishing fact in the spiritual history of mankind.

(2) Look out, secondly, into this great modern world, and see how Christ is preparing a way that He may pass anew into its life. Is it not plain that He is coming into it by creating a void for Himself, that the sense of that void may prove to it that it has need of Him? He has been doing that on a great scale these last fifty years, and He is still doing it now.

There is a threefold cry resounding in the world to-day. First, a cry for the spiritual. As Rudolf

Eucken is never weary of telling us, with all its brilliant achievements in external and material things the world is hungry and thirsty still, and eager for a message that will feed the spirit. A cry, next, for the living God; for a God who neither is His own world, nor is imprisoned within it, helpless and unable to break through the barriers of laws which are the expression of His own will, a God who is mighty to save. A cry, last, for human brotherhood, uttered through all our industrial unrest, and only to be answered by man's elder brother Christ, and the family relationships which He came to reveal under the one God and Father of us all. And here in the midst of our stormy debates, our cynical and disappointed scepticism, our blind and broken quests, there stands One among us whom we know not, the living Christ with His ancient answer to every human cry, spoken for none more than for us twentieth-century men and women who so profoundly need it, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

It would be easy to add to all this the witness of the advent of the Kingdom in other ways, such as the new sense of obligation with which men are facing social problems, and more especially the changed attitude to Christianity in other lands whose opening doors are yielding entrance to the coming of the Son of Man. The world is not won for Christ; but never in the whole of its history has it stood so ready for Him, and offered so many avenues of approach to its King. Who that has eyes to see but can descry the coming of the Kingdom in the progress which the Church has made in the awakening East? We must not omit to follow now the great pathways of light which are breaking through into the distant places of the earth like the far-flung beams of the rising sun. Here is Advent certainty—the fact of a coming of the Kingdom—to confirm the patience and to inspire the hope of a Church which ever looks and hastens unto the end.¹

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Judgment.

'So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.'—Ro 14¹².

'I am responsible for my life.' 'I am moving rapidly onwards to a great moment of accounting for that stewardship, on which my eternal destiny hangs.' These are two tremendous doc-

¹ F. B. Macnutt, *Advent Certainties*, 3.

trines, which, in their simple forms, have taken profound hold of the religious mind. These have bit deep in men's consciousness; and even yet hold a more powerful sway over men's minds than at times we think.

But we do not phrase them precisely as we did. We see that qualifications of a very grave kind need to be introduced into the doctrine of responsibility; and we realize that the great matter of judgment to come is presented to us in Scripture in language of a 'littleness to suit man's faculty.' We realize that judgment is taking place continually, as our characters turn either to evil or to God.

The danger is that the great, underlying thoughts shall be weakened, with disastrous results to morality. These two thoughts are: *We are responsible*. How much or how little is of no concern. The point is that we are responsible. *We are responsible to God*. Whether the setting of the rendering of our accounts shall be that of a law court or not is of no account. The point is that we are responsible to the living God, who knows, and sees, and understands, and judges.

1. Let us be clear that these two positions are maintained by us, and that, whatever phrasing we give them, they do not lose their force. In the first place, we are responsible for our lives. In this matter we have to allow for the influence of heredity and for the influence of environment. Many a time we must agree with Christina Rossetti, when, to a judgment affixing blame, she puts a caveat:

Clearly his own fault. Yet I think
My fault in part, who did not pray
But lagged and would not lead the way,
God help us both to mend and pray.

But there are two ways of approaching the matter from the point of view of the individual in question. We can say that we are not free, but are a part of all the scoundrels we have met. Wherefore, then, should we struggle? We are not to blame. Thus we may let the fact of our being bound in the bundle of life be an excuse for doing nice things that are wrong. On the other hand, we may say we are curiously hampered by a long dead past; yet we are so far free. Our consciousness, our reason, the universal consciousness, which awards praise and blame to individuals for their action, tell us that we are free. We will therefore concentrate our minds on our freedom and not on our bonds. We will err on the side of exaggerating our responsibility rather than of minimizing it. We

will strive to fulfil rightly such responsibility for ourselves as God has given us.

We shall remember that the doctrine of the effect which we have on one another is to be regarded as an impetus to action, rather than a reason for handing over the reins to our appetites. Why? Because we, according to that teaching, are affecting the moral possibilities of those that come after us. Therefore, at any cost, we will stand up and live.

Let us remember also that the statement of our bonds may be overdone. Let it be granted that we are nervous, naturally indolent, and love excitement. Must we therefore be irritable, do no work, and come home drunk at nights? Why, we have forgotten our *will*. We can struggle against these things. That is what we are for. Ah! but our will is feeble. Then we have forgotten God's grace and His spirit. Remembering these, we shall not only watch and work and strive, but we shall also pray.

2. Briefly, in the second place, note that we are responsible *to God*. We must render an account to Him. This very awful matter of the rendering of a final account to the Most High is one on which we can have little to say, except that it is a fact. The Scriptures portray it to us, pictorially indeed, but with a dignity and a greatness that must still the most frivolous of readers.

It is to *God* that we have to give account. Men are not measured by an absolute standard. It is not with the law that we are compared. The law would reject the weak who had struggled up a little. God judges the world with equity. Let that be for comfort and for warning. It is the use made of endowment that will test us; not the absolute amount of service rendered. It is God—a *Mind*—with whom we have to do.

Further, in other passages of Scripture, it is Christ who is stated to be the Judge. That is to say, it is immortal Love before whom man comes. Let that be for comfort also; and for warning still more. Let a man shut his eyes and anticipate, as he can, that scene. Jesus, the True, the Gracious, with eyes that scorch and burn—before Him we come. There, in Him, is what human life may be and has been. Here are we; and His contrast judges us. His Love judges us. Ah! the shame:

I plead Thyself with Thee, I plead
Thee in our utter need;
Lord God of mercy and of men,
Show mercy on us then.

Meantime, claim simply His forgiveness—for it is given—and with Him leave the past. Then, ‘under the Great Task-Master’s eye,’ stand up and live as men who have to die, and, what is more, have to live for ever.¹

CHRISTMAS DAY.

The Spirit of Expectation.

‘This is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us.’—Is 25⁹.

1. The special note of the season of Advent is *expectation*. We are trained in the habit of looking forward that we may come to Christmas-time with the spirit of expectation in our hearts. For this spirit of expectation is like a golden thread, linking together the children of God of all times. It was the master-instinct of the prophets. They moved through the world of their day with something of the far-off look of men who have trained themselves to look forward. And gradually their vision came to concentrate on one thing—the promise of the coming of Christ. ‘We have waited for him.’ The Old Testament is the record of how men waited for the Incarnation, how they kept alive the spirit of expectation in the midst of discouragement and long delay. And so, when the promise was fulfilled, it was to men who had learned to wait that the truth was revealed, to shepherds who kept watch by night, to wise men who waited for His star, to Simeon and Anna who were looking for the consolation of Israel. But still the spirit of expectation lived on. Ask the early Christians what they are doing, and the reply is still the same: ‘We are waiting for him.’ And still the unconquerable spirit of expectation lives in human hearts. Still men wait and dream of a good to come.

For success, and love, and honour? And then? For wealth, perhaps, and fame? And then? Is it only death at the end? Or is the true answer the answer of our text—we are waiting for God, for the touch of the Divine hand, the light of the Divine face, the realization of the vision of God? Keep this spirit of expectation, and we keep the secret of courage and hope; lose it, and life is like a coloured window behind which the sunset has faded, leaving only the darkened framework of the picture that glowed with splendid colours a little while ago.

2. Christmas is a season of expectation. And then also it is a season of *confidence*. ‘He will

save us.’ How the idea of salvation runs through all the Christmas story. ‘Unto you is born a *Saviour*.’ ‘Mine eyes have seen thy salvation.’ ‘He will save us’—that is what Christmas comes to tell us again. Not—He will save the heathen, the outcast, the hopeless; but He will save *us*. It is a personal confession. For it implies that we are dissatisfied with our lives as they are; that we are willing that they should be lifted out of the bondage of convention, the slavery of selfishness and greed, the deception thoughtlessly practised, the slander carelessly spoken. We confess that we too have need of salvation. And we confess that the power of the incarnate Christ is adequate to our needs.

No one can mix much with his fellow-men without realizing that a new doubt is everywhere awaking in men’s minds. Is not Christianity an exhausted force? Is not its power over the world coming to an end? Here are vast social evils crying to heaven, and no salvation comes. Men live and work and die with no apparent consciousness of spiritual realities, and all our efforts break against the passive force of apathy.

Can we, in face of all this, still hold to our belief that He who was born on that first Christmas morning is the Saviour of the world? If He is a Saviour, where is His salvation? If He is a King, where is that kingdom for whose coming we have prayed? We must face questions like these, and they will lead us back to the cradle of Bethlehem. We believe that in the Incarnation lies still the hope of the world. Yes, and our hope too. For when the simple truths of religion have become complicated by human glosses, and have lost touch with reality, or have grown hard and intolerant, we need to bring them again to Bethlehem and lay them at the cradle of a little Child. For He is the Saviour of Christianity as well as the Saviour of the world. Of our religious ideas, as well as of our personal character, it is true that except we be converted and become as little children, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

3. And lastly, Christmas is a season of *realization*. ‘This is our God.’ The Jewish records told how the people had stood at the foot of a great mountain and seen its summit shaken with earthquake and encircled with flame; and as they watched they whispered: ‘This—splendid, terrifying, isolated—this is our God.’ But the hour came when awed faces of simple men looked down on the cradle of a little Child, and whispered: ‘This is our God’; no longer separated, encircled with majesty, but veiled in flesh, humbled to the

¹ J. R. P. Selater, *The Enterprise of Life*, 305.

fashion of men, entering human life through the avenue of birth. Is it strange that from that moment a revolution began in human thought of which no man can see the end ?

And now another Christmas comes to tell us how the lost romance of the world came back when Jesus was born at Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the King. For a creed that tells how God was found in a cradle and on a cross ought surely to train us in the habit of watching for God where we should least expect to find Him. 'This is our God'; we have marked His footsteps along the fields, we have heard His voice among the trees. But, most of all, we have learned to look for Him in the broken bread and the poured-out wine. For still the wonder of that first Christmas Day renews itself in simple hearts :

And they who do their souls no wrong,
But keep at eve the faith of morn,
Shall daily hear the angel-song,
'To-day the Prince of Peace is born !'

There can be no true peace till the spirit of distrust and greed and selfish ambition ceases to dominate the policy of nations. The only real guarantee for peace is in the resolute and watchful action of all Christian men. In this, too, 'He will save us,' if we wait for Him. For He will save us from the impulse that makes for war, He will give us strength to stand firm when the passions of men break loose in the clamour for blood; He will teach us that there are better battles to fight than the battles full of 'confused noise and garments rolled in blood.' *His* battle is against ignorance and vice, against the selfish heart and the grasping hand, against discord and hatred, and all the foul things that haunt the darkness. So we pray: 'Give peace in our time, O Lord,' not that we may rest in indolent ease, but that we may turn to the true task of the patriot—the battle against vice and drink and sweating and ignorance; the truceless battle that must not end till we can join the triumph song: 'This is our God; we have waited for him, and he *has saved us.*'¹

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

Running to a Finish.

'I count not myself to have apprehended.'—Ph 3¹⁸.

To the man who adopts this attitude everything in the way of achievement is possible. It is the forward look with high resolve. It is the will

¹ J. H. B. Masterman, *The Challenge of Christ*, 91.

keyed to conquest. Such a mood forecasts the years, overleaps all obstacles, and already holds the future in fee. It has no further use for the past than it has for last year's calendar. It is something to forget, and the sooner the better. Whatever the past has registered, either of failure or success, can be dismissed without loss; because to dwell on success will breed complacency, and to brood over failure will beget distrust, both of which are sworn foes to the onward march of both mind and morals.

To count oneself to have apprehended or achieved is at once to relax effort; and to relax effort is to lose ground. Hence the pressing towards the mark of which the Apostle speaks in the context. Pressure means resistance, and the gradient of the upward way is a perpetual challenge to our powers. Life must be geared for the climb. Paul had seen many a race lost through overconfidence on the part of the runner, and in this heavenly race he is resolved to relax no effort, but to strain every power to the utmost till his hand shall close on the coveted prize. Not the way that he has come, but the distance he has yet to go, fills his eye, absorbs his thought, and summons all his powers.

Paul knew, as few men get to know, the value of a great and heroic past. But he also knew that the whole of that value would be neutralized unless it was carried forward and made available for present and future use. Anything in a man's past that cannot thus be carried forward with advantage, and be made to serve his interests by making its contribution to the great ends of life, had best be forgotten. Hence he says, 'Forgetting the things that are behind.' Like the rest of us, Paul had a past which was sadly mixed; and he felt that, for the sake of present and all-round efficiency, it was best to turn his back completely upon it and face only the future. The past is out of hand.

He 'counted.' This is a familiar phrase of Paul's. He figured things out. His conduct was not a flash in the pan, ignited by the impact of some sudden impulse and then dying out in smoke. It was the calmly reasoned conviction of his mind after taking all things into account. Looking at things as they were, and comparing them with what they ought to have been, he concluded that he had not yet achieved, but had still a long way to go. What a rebuke to the self-complacency of those who are sitting down in contented mediocrity, is the mood of this divinely discontented soul! He is still in the struggle, amid all the heat

and dust and sweat of conflict, with an awful sense of interval between the actual end and the ideal, between himself and the goal toward which he speeds. Such a testimony from such a man should serve as a fine corrective to the self-satisfaction which is drugging so many of us into idle and effortless ways. To be satisfied is to cut the nerve of all lofty and sustained endeavour, and to slip back inevitably among the degenerates and inefficient. It is so everywhere—in business, in art, in science, in letters, in religion.

No business firm, no nation, no church can live on its past. Once we regard ourselves as having achieved, we put ourselves out of the running. We straightway become a negligible quantity and cease to count. But to hold our own and win through has its price. Here, too, Paul is our example. Here again he 'counted,' figuring the cost of Christianity, and what it would mean to break with all the traditions and associations of the past, and he calmly gives us the result. 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse that I may win Christ.'

Regarding the Christian race as the pursuit of the ideal righteousness both for ourselves and others, it must be remembered that, just as the Olympic contests had their rigorous rules, to depart from which was to be disqualified, so is it in the contest for the moral mastery. There are conditions stringently enjoined, for even a right end must not be sought by doubtful or illicit means. It is difficult, of course, at this distance of time, to ascertain all the rules and regulations which controlled the games of ancient times. But that some of them must have suggested to Paul certain great analogies which would occur to his readers, is all the clearer from the fact that they are not stated but simply implied. There is a phrase in the letter to the Hebrews, 'the race that is set before us,' which implies that the course is 'laid down,' marked out, that is, as to its direction and its

distance, together with all the conditions of preparation and pursuit. Every candidate in the Olympic games was obliged to prove that he had put in ten months' training before his nomination and to put in another month before the event. This corresponds with the 'laying aside of every weight,' which really means to get rid of all superfluous flesh. Then again, we read how runners, with soul triumphant over the body, strained onward, heedless of failing heart and limb—on to the goal; so that a victor was even known to drop dead as he received the crown. This answers to the word 'patience,' or 'staying power,' as it may be rendered. It is also clear from the accounts that have come down to us, that every candidate was required to run in his own name, or find himself disqualified. Here, at least, is one point of analogy in the matter of unlawful running which may very well have been present to the Apostle's mind. He that would enter for the Christian race must do so in a perfectly frank and open manner. He must declare himself; for to run this race secretly or anonymously will be to be counted out as unworthy at the finish. But nothing is commoner than to hear men say that they see so much profession without the practice that they prefer to practise without making profession. The fear of hypocrisy in one direction thus drives them to hypocrisy in another; for the man who is endeavouring to lead a godly life while pretending to be a man of the world is as truly a hypocrite as the man who is living a worldly life while posing as a man of God. Christ has laid down as an absolute condition of discipleship a perfectly frank avowal on the part of His followers of their having entered the lists in His name. 'He that confesses me before men, him will I confess before my father in heaven.'

Having then counted the cost, let us, like Paul, strip ourselves for the strife, counting no hardness too severe to endure, and no sacrifice too great to make, if we may but win through to the goal, and by running to a finish make sure of the coveted crown.¹

¹ H. Howard, *The Love that Lifts*, 31.