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In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

On Making the Best of it.

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

'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.'—Ps 119[71].

Do you know why a whin has got its thorns and prickles? No! you say snappily, and I don't want to know, the horrid thing! Other flowers are generous, they'll share with you, they'll give you all they have. But this old miser won't spare anything to any one if he can help it. Halvers! we say. Not likely, he replies, and hugs close all the flowers he has. And yet if a boy acted like that every one would think him mean and selfish. Give me a little bit, then, we say pleadingly, only a little—just one spray. But, no, he won't! And if you try to get it, he'll likely scratch your hands and tear your clothes—the cross old curmudgeon.

Ah! but you mustn't talk about the whin like that. For it's really one of the bravest of things. It has faced up to difficulties that would have beaten most of us. But it wouldn't give in, and stuck it out; and it has come through it all right nobly.

The whin was set to grow in dry places, where there wasn't much water, sometimes almost none at all. And leaves need water. So the whin used to give and give and give any there was to its leaves, until it had none left for itself, and so it died. And then, of course, the leaves died too, and it seemed that very soon there would be no whins left in all the world.

Well, that wasn't any use, was it? Mother is always doing things for you wee ones. But when she tires herself out, and has to take to bed, it's horrid; and you wish she hadn't done so much before. So here, if the whin died, the leaves died with it. But at last it found out a way to manage. Leaves need water, and we have almost none, it said. Well, then, we just can't have many leaves, that's all. We'll have prickles instead. For prickles, you see, don't need water. It won't be nearly so nice, said the whin. My cousin the broom, with its long green shoots, will look much prettier than I. And my friend the cherry tree, with all that lovely blossom, can have leaves as well. Ah, well, I can't, except a few! But it's no use grumbling, and we must make the best of things; so we'll just do without, and have thorns, mostly, instead.

It's like Mother. Sometimes she would love to stay in bed of a morning. It would be fine, she feels, to have a real long lie for once. But what would you do, about breakfast, and getting off to school? So up she gets. And she would like pretty things; but you need this and that, and they have to come first. And at night she's sleepy and would be so glad to get off to bed. But there's stockings to darn and that pair of breeks of yours will have to be patched or you'll fall through and out of them, and that won't do! So up she sits, while you are fast asleep. Just so the whin gave up most of its leaves. I must think of the flowers, it said, and not mind if I look rather plain beside the other plants about me. It made the best of things.

Now, what about you? You get a hard lesson, and do you pout and sulk and throw the book away, crying, 'I can't do it'? Or you want something, and you don't get it. And do you go moping and cross from room to room, 'I don't want this; I won't have that'? Or do you make the best of things, and try to have a good time even without that thing you wished so much? You get a kick at rugger, and you won't play. Oh, look here, that won't do, you know! We have a saying, 'Be a man.' I think we might say, 'Be a whin, and stand up to things, and make the best of them, even when you don't get all your own way.' A rhododendron is a coward and a sulk. When it can't get water its leaves all droop, and it's so sorry for itself, and it lets every one see how wretched it is. But a whin keeps cheery and brave. No water? Ah, well, no leaves for me, that's all, or only a few. But we'll manage. And, do you know, it's just because it's been brave that it's managed better than most plants. Beasts trample down those others, but they don't go far into a jaggy whin bush! Cows eat up many leafy things, but not much of a prickly whin! And so because it's made the best of things, it's let alone, and spreads, and grows and sows itself everywhere. And if you take the knocks of life in the right way, you, too, will be the better for them, will learn to stand on your own feet, will grow brave and unselfish and strong. It's a good thing, says the Psalmist, I have been knocked about a bit. It has taught me heaps of things I wouldn't be without. It's turned out well for me there was so little water, says the whin. I've grown prickles, and can hold my own now. Yes, though I didn't like it at the start at all, it has turned out really well. Stand

up to things, even to horrid, vexing, disappointing things, and they will make a man of you.

Walking or Sauntering.

By the Reverend Stuart Robertson, M.A., Glasgow.

'He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.'—Lk 9^{51}.

What a wonderful sight a crowded street in a great city is! One wonders what they are all doing, where they are all going, what they all are thinking about. That, of course, you cannot tell or guess; but it is easy to distinguish two sorts of people—those who have a purpose, and those who have not.

Those who have a purpose you can tell by their walk. They go straight forward, nothing turns them aside. They don't stop to look into shop-windows. You can tell them by their speed: they don't dawdle, they lose no time. You can tell them by their faces; they are 'set.' They are thinking about their business. Their minds are not empty, they are full of something.

So the New Testament tells us that Jesus 'set his face stedfastly to go to Jerusalem.' That means that we could see at a glance that Jesus was not just out for a stroll, not caring where He went. He was not just seeing the country, and ready to turn down any lane that looked inviting. There was purpose in His face and in His walk.

I have a friend whom every one likes and who was very popular among the company of visitors at a certain holiday place in the Highlands. A lady there said to his wife, 'What a pleasant smile your husband has for everybody.'

'Oh,' she replied, 'you should see him with his city face!'

One day in winter this lady said to her husband, 'Now I know what Mrs. —— means by her husband's city face. I met him in the city to-day and stopped him and spoke to him. Oh! I wish I hadn't. How serious and stern he was!'

'What on earth did you do that for?' said her husband. 'He was busy. He would be going to a meeting and thinking things over as he went. You shouldn't have stopped him.'

'I suppose you're right,' she said, 'I'll know better next time.'

So you can tell the busy people. Their faces are set, they walk in a business-like, purposeful fashion and you don't want to stop them.

But there are others. They drift along. They stop at shop-windows. They hesitate at corners. It's all one to them which street they go along, and chance will settle it for them. Plainly they have no aim. They don't walk; they just saunter.

Do you know the derivation of the word 'saunter'? There was once a time when it was a great mark of devotion to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In France the Holy Land was La Sainte Terre. People willingly helped the pilgrims on their way, and, of course, some crafty folk saw in this their chance of an easy life. They would ask food and drink at a house, and when asked where they were going, they answered, 'à la sainte terre,' and willingly good people gave them food and shelter for the sake of their holy purpose.

But they had no intention of going to the Holy Land; and people got to know it, and when they saw them coming, they said, 'Here come some more "sainte-terrers."' They were not Christian pilgrims; they were just 'sainte-terring.' And so, some say, the word 'saunter' was born.

It is just the same on the great highway of life. There are those who have a purpose and show it in their walk. There are also those who saunter. They have no aim. They just drift with every current of custom, or of company, or of opinion. They may go to church, if some one calls in and invites them. They may equally go a walk, if some one calls and asks them. They will sit still, if a friend drops in and suggests sitting still. They are saunterers, very agreeable, but making nothing of their lives. The king of saunterers was Charles II. He made sauntering popular, and he was one of the worst kings England ever had, and England paid dearly for her sauntering king.

In our great cities there are a multitude of temptations that beset saunterers. There are all sorts of pests who never think of speaking to men who are plainly bent on business, set on some purpose; but they mark the saunterers and spread their net for them.

To have a purpose in life is a splendid armour against many temptations to evil. Weeds seed best in the empty garden, and evil gets easy entry into the empty mind.

To have the highest purpose, to be about your Father's business, is the best armour of all. The busy servants of sin see at once from face and walk that here is a mind that is pre-occupied and there is no entry for anything else.

Our Lord 'stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.' We must set our faces steadfastly to go to the city of the Heavenly King. There is a hymn that says, 'Whither, pilgrims, are you going?' You have often sung it. Have you an answer to

its question? Are you going anywhere, or are you just sauntering through life?

There is an Irish song which has for its refrain:

I know where I'm going,
And I know who'll go wi' me.

This is a good song to sing, if you are set steadfastly on the pilgrimage to the Heavenly City, and have with you the Great Companion.

The Christian Year.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

The Endless Offering.

'A living sacrifice.'—Ro 12^1.

In studying the life of Christ there may be danger of confining the sacrificial element in it too much to special hours or to the final climax. Faber has a wise warning about this. 'It seems to us strange that our Lord's human life should be of any use to God, except as the instrument of our own redemption. The idea of worship is faint and feeble in our minds. Work, utility, success, palpable results—these are what we look for. Hence we neither habitually see how inexplicable on our principles our Lord's division of His life into thirty years of seclusion and three of active work really is, nor discern the Divine significance of it when it is pointed out to us. We thus do an injustice to His secret, created life of adoration before God.' While the Cross was, in the nature of the case, sacrificial above all that had gone before, His whole life was sacrifice, adoration, worship. It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord.

1. When we come to New Testament times we find that the Temple sacrifices have vanished into the limbo of things no longer needful. They vanished because Christian men had discovered the sacrificial significance of the Cross. 'Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.' 'Christ hath loved us and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.' Here is the sacrifice—priest and victim in one—for which the ages have been waiting, for which the heart of man has unconsciously been looking. Here is the reality of which all that went before is only a symbol and a prophecy. Here is a true sacrifice, perhaps in the full sense the only true sacrifice, not merely a dramatic event designed to have an effect upon men, but an offering laid at the feet of God, to cancel sin and to bring earth and heaven to a meeting-point at last. And so the instincts which had dumbly and brokenly expressed themselves in the earlier sacrifices were satisfied in the Cross, and the sacrificial system of the Temple was laid aside once and for all, as men lay aside a broken tool, an outworn garment. To say this is not to utter dogma or theory: it is to record a fact of history and experience.

2. When Madame Guyon was a child, there was in the large garden of the house in which she lived a chapel to the Holy Child Jesus. She records that in the morning she would often eat only half of her breakfast; she would steal out with the remainder, and lay it in a cavity she had discovered behind the image of the Child Christ, because she wanted to offer sacrifice to her Saviour. Soon, of course, her little store was discovered and the proceedings stopped. But even if she had gone on for a time offering her childish sacrifices she would soon have got beyond them as she grew in knowledge and in grace. She would have discovered that the reality of the Christian's sacrifice is not in anything external but in the heart and the will—its essence in the act and attitude of living, its fragrance in the loving dedication of all life's purposes and powers. So, when we pass from earlier ages and dispensations into the New Testament itself, we watch men coming from a childish and temporary conception of sacrifice to its ethical and reasonable heart. This had been anticipated—'the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise'—but it had not been generally accepted. And when Paul says, 'I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice,' there is a Christian consciousness ripe and ready to receive his words and to confess that this is a reasonable service. God's untold and innumerable mercies make it reasonable. His supreme sacrifice makes it reasonable, and its opposite unreasonable and ungrateful. So the sacrificial element rushes back again, but the external is gone: the ethical, the vital, alone remains.

It is instructive to take a concordance and trace this word 'sacrifice' through the New Testament and see how the central principle leaps to light in many and different ways. The sacrifice is a *living* sacrifice, but life is many-sided and so the sacrifice takes many different forms. Some of the applications of the idea turn themselves Godwards. St. Paul speaks in one place of 'the sacrifice of your *faith*.' Faith is the offering we lay before Him. Like a burnt-offering, it flames. Like incense, it floats. Like smoke, it soars. And God desires to have it at the hands of His children more eagerly

than any fabled deity of long ago desired the sweet savour of burned offerings. Or there is a verse in Hebrews about the sacrifice of *praise*: 'by him let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name.' This lifts the whole matter to a very pure and beautiful region. We recall the cumbrous apparatus of the Temple sacrifice—its reeking altars, its gutters running with blood, its ceaseless symbolism of pain and death. It sublimates the whole matter to learn that words and songs can take the place of such sacrifices and be themselves a sacrifice, because they can help men to carry out the essence of the sacrificial idea, the offering of themselves to God. Sometimes, again, the reference is manward rather than Godward. 'To do good and to share with others, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' There are early Christian documents which speak of the poor as God's altar, but the foundation of that idea was laid in the New Testament itself. The Emperor Titus used to say when a day passed without his doing a kind action, *Diem perdidi*, 'I have lost a day.'

Yet these partial applications of the idea of sacrifice are less than the central principle which includes and transcends them all, and which, when it is accepted by heart and conscience, works out any number of applications for itself. If a man be a *living* sacrifice, so different from the dead sacrifices of long ago, then he carries his own altar about with him: he can find an altar anywhere and everywhere, wherever his will can be yielded to God's will or his powers used for the service of man. If a man himself be a living sacrifice, then his offering is never ended and done with: each day, each hour renews it, for his offering is himself, and he worships not by the clock or by the calendar, but by the motive of his actions and by the intention of his will.

3. When man realizes this ideal in himself, he justifies his place as the crown and climax of the natural process, even if he only fulfils the natural intention by a supernatural grace. Is not this what Nature has been reaching after from the first? Are not her richest moments parables of sacrifice? That wise writer, W. W. Peyton, has a startling phrase in his *Memorabilia of Jesus*, about 'the sorrow of summer.' Is not summer the season of joy and fruit and light? What has summer to do with sorrow? But he explains himself. 'Its large office is to prepare food for the living, and food is essentially a sacrificial offering. The grass is mown down for cattle; the wheat-field is cut down for us; life is given up for the food of others. The cattle are fattened for the slaughter. The midge gives up its life to the swallow, the fry to the gull, the salmon to us. When the activity of plant life goes into flower, growth is arrested; the plant no longer lives for itself but for a new and future plant. Summer is a long sacrificial procession. The system of our world is essentially sacrificial. . . . The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain because the idea of sacrifice is at the base of it.' Then, having so traced the principle which lies at the foundation of the universe, and which puts a stern groundtone even into the music of Nature's merriest, most splendid days, the same writer brings out the principle at the top of the scale, on the human level, on the Christian level. 'We live first not for ourselves, but for God: we live first for others, not for ourselves. We only live for ourselves when we offer ourselves to God to be used up by Him. We only become lucid with life, know what it is to live, when we have lost the idea of mere happiness, and have hold of the idea of service.' Have not men been dimly feeling after that splendid idea, ever since sacrifice became a human institution or a Divine appointment? Did it not shine through many an ancient offering of blood and tears? Was it not the point of many a psalm and prophecy? Did it not shape itself in dreams of God's sacrificial servant who served mankind and won His kingdom only in proportion as His life was yielded up? Did it not help men to interpret the Cross, not as the accident of an hour, but as a part of the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God? Did it not and does it not inspire in earnest souls the thought that until their lives too are offered up they have somehow missed their destiny, they have failed of the perfect worship, of the ineffable and most sacred joy? [1]

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Woman at Cana.

'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.'—Jn 2^5.

What are we to learn from the Epiphany sign of changing water into wine at the marriage feast at Cana in Galilee?

There seem to be four main lessons:

(1) That the ordinary movements of the natural world constitute an affirmation of the Immanence of God. (2) That the identification of Jesus of Nazareth with the control of these movements was His credential for His declaration, 'Ye believe in

[1] J. M. E. Ross, *The Tree of Healing*, 247.

God, believe also in me.' (3) That the influence of woman is emphatically recognized by the Divine Lord as a motive for action. And (4) that human happiness and the fulfilment of the educative purpose of God for His human family lie in implicit obedience to the commands and promptings of the Originating Spirit seeking to realize Himself and manifest Himself through individual lives.

1. Jesus' action at Cana is as though He said: Consider this fruit of the vine. Whence comes it? From a grape which has slowly taken form and swelled and ripened. And whence comes the grape? From a blossom which has gradually expanded under the genial warmth of the sun, and which was fertilized by some busy insect automatically obeying the law of its life. And the blossom? From the vine tree which has shot up from seed or cutting by the wholly unexplained mystery of progressive growth. And the life in the vine tree, whence came that? The memory turns at once to Tennyson's 'Flower in the Crannied Wall.' But why stop there? Tennyson's poetic suggestion leaves you in agnosticism:

> Flower in the crannied wall,
> I pluck you out of the crannies,
> I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
> Little flower—but *if* I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is.

But why stop there? Why not know what God and man is? The scientific method demands an adequate cause for all. The philosophic method demands that there shall be at least as much in the primal cause as in the sum total of its effects. Behind that life in the vine there must be a greater life; and behind that an infinite life, a universal life; and a universal life that proves itself a thousand times over to be an intelligent life, and not a blind, fortuitous concourse of atoms; a life that understands how to combine the mysterious elements of which the world is composed.

In a single glass of water there are six cubic feet of oxygen, reduced to a liquid condition and held there by the continuous action of a force that can only be measured by hundreds of tons. There are other invisible elements around us, carbonic dioxide, nitrogen, hydrogen—elements which, if combined in wrong proportions, would produce disastrous explosions, but all so proportioned, so combined, so securely balanced, that out of them the water, the land, the rocks, the trees, the bodies of living men are formed. And from this splendid spectacle of universal order the laws of logic demand that we should infer the existence of an Originating and Immanent Intelligence of infinite wisdom and activity. Thus the human mind, following the clue of the miracle of Cana, thinks on and on till the actual fact that it thinks at all appears the greatest miracle of all. And recognized self-consciousness suggests an infinite self-consciousness, and the conclusion is reverently arrived at that the life of man is rooted in the life of God, and that God is a necessary deduction from the conclusions of physical science, that God is all, and all is God, and God is perfect, and God is responsible. That is the first root thought.

2. But the miracle at Cana goes further, and this is the second root thought.

Jesus, who was the chosen specimen of the race, having led the thoughts of men up 'the altar stairs of things created,' and brought them face to face with the universal immanent Mind, leads them on gently to Himself. He demonstrates His identity with the Infinite life by His command of the controlling influences of Nature, by His power of manipulating the secret processes of growth at His will, condensing into a moment of time the many months of gradual progress during which absorbed moisture in God's great laboratory normally becomes wine. 'Ye believe in God,' He said, 'believe also in me.' In that Divine utterance love and logic strive for the mastery. Ye believe in the Universal Soul, believe in the self-manifestation of the Universal Soul in Me. Believe that I represent on earth the personality, the love of the Infinite Spirit, and that 'him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out,' for he that comes to Me comes to God in Me. Cease to weary your thinking capacities by the attempt to realize personality in the Infinite Abstraction who fills all boundless space; come home to My heart, for My heart is the heart of God under a limitation; suffer Me to shape and guide every event in your life to the regeneration of your nature, and to interweave My life with your own.

> Come to Jesus as you are, weary and worn and sad,
> Find in Him a resting-place, and He will make you glad.

3. And the third proposition seems to be this: The miracle at Cana rebukes emphatically the superficial judgment constantly passed by a hide-bound conventionality upon the position and influence of woman. It is a significant commentary upon the action of those who would silence the persuasive tongue of woman when uplifted for

God and humanity, that the first miracle was performed by the Christ upon the suggestion of a woman, and the first and best Christian sermon ever preached was uttered by a woman's lips.

It is well to remember that, when the fiat went forth that the unthinkable Creative Spirit should bring Himself within reach of man by veiling His essential Majesty in the Incarnation, woman was chosen to be His sole tabernacle; woman was selected to be the first to gaze into the face of the wondrous Babe, to welcome Him into this world of sorrow, to guide the first tottering footsteps of the *via crucis* of His earthly life. And it is well also to remember that the pardonable eagerness of a woman availed to precipitate His first manifestation of the 'Divinity that stirred within him.' There is no rebuke in those words of calm dignity, inadequately rendered, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?' There is only a recognition that He feels His relation to the mother of His flesh to be less controlling than His relation to the Infinite Parent-Spirit. In the Greek the words are, 'Lady, what is there between me and thee?' It is as if He had said, 'On the earth-plane we are united, and by the closest, tenderest bond, but on the heavenly plane there is no Parent but God.' Nevertheless that He may illustrate for all time what woman's influence can be, ought to be, may be, as interceder, peacemaker, prompter to high and remedial action, though He openly declares that His hour was not yet come, He hastens His manifestations that He may accede to her request.

All who believe that the Incarnation was a manifestation of a universal immanence of God should be encouraged, by the honour shown to woman at the miracle in Cana, to throw their influence into the scale in the matter of the elevation, the protection, and the rescue of woman.

For example, (1) we can do more to protect the unfallen. Let us support by every means in our power, by money, by personal service, girls' clubs, institutes, reading-rooms, everything that can counteract the influence of low places of entertainment, and public-houses.

(2) All should ceaselessly aim at accelerating the work of improving the dwellings of the poorer classes, that the evils consequent upon overcrowding may be minimized.

(3) We can protest against, remedy wherever possible, the utterly inadequate remuneration for woman's labour, which is one of the most fruitful causes of prostitution. Where a woman does a man's work she should earn a man's wage.

(4) Then they who have charge of the young can take their courage in both hands and lift the veil of mistaken prudery which fears to unfold, cautiously, purely, reverently, to young minds the God-appointed sacred functions of natural life.

(5) And as a matter of ethics, let us strive to realize ourselves, and cease not to teach, that acts are, after all, thoughts in precipitation; that 'out of the heart proceed adulteries.' Opportunity and environment are, after all, only the aids to accomplishment; where the thoughts are brought into captivity to the indwelling Divine nature, where our teaching is firmly based on the Immanence of God, however strong may be the passions of the natural man, the heart will remain pure and see God.

4. Finally, it is the sermon preached by a woman, by the Blessed Mother of the Lord, which teaches the lesson, that the key to progress in life and the fulfilment of the purpose of God for man, lie in ready obedience to the unmistakable promptings of the Divine Mind within. We call it conscience, but it is God the Spirit speaking to us; and the message from the Blessed Virgin is in these words: 'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.'

It is a brief but compendious sermon. It knocks on the head that favourite self-deception when we 'compound for sins we are inclined to by damning those we have no mind to.' There is more force and power in that 'whatsoever' from the lips of the human being who knew the Lord Jesus more intimately than He has ever been known after the flesh by any other, than in the most eloquent discourses of the greatest theologians. Unhesitating, instantaneous obedience to the suggestion of the Divine Immanence seeking to realize Himself within us is the road to sanctification, the panacea for heart-restlessness, the safeguard against temptation, the secret of the miracle of conversion, the conversion of water into wine, natural into spiritual, human into Divine.[1]

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

The Descent to the Plain.

'When he was come down from the mountain.'—Mt 8[1].

When Jesus teaches it is from a mountain. It is not simply as a geographical accident, but in the sense that the teaching itself lifts its head in a finer, rarer atmosphere. There is no serious challenge of this. Its practicality may be questioned, but its elevation is not challenged. It has

[1] B. Wilberforce, *Inward Vision*, 36.

spacious horizons. It braces every moral and spiritual faculty. 'He went up into a mountain, and he opened his mouth and taught.'

The instruction ended, He comes down from the mountain. Of course He does. If any teacher would keep his right to teach, that is what he will have to do. He will have to confront squarely the realities of common life, and to bring his teaching to the test of the everyday needs of everyday people.

There are other teachers who have come down from their mountain—and it has been their undoing. On the hill of their teaching we felt them mighty; when they were come down we became aware of their littleness. On the heights of the ideal we thought them great; in the plain we saw that they were mean. No greater name is there in literature than that of Goethe, and few who have taught so loftily. His confession of high sentiments and his exposition of noble principles raise our expectation. It is he of whom Carlyle said: 'The sight of such a man was to me a gospel of gospels.' But one of Goethe's most admiring apologists has this to say of his hero: 'Not only Christianity but morality itself, as it is commonly understood, was not much favoured in his life.' But it is a poor thing to botanize on the graves which idealists have dug for themselves when they were come down from their mountain. It is enough to be reminded that there have been many masters on the hill who have handled things dismally on the levels of life.

The needs of the prosaic, the test of the valley, await the teaching on the hill. Thus we watch closely when this Preacher of the Sermon on the Mount comes down. It is there or nowhere we shall find everybody's Christ. Men have shut Him within ecclesiastical systems and made Him the Christ of the institutionalists; they have set Him within the corners of a philosophy and made Him the thinker's Christ; they have shut the cell door upon Him and themselves and made Him the devotee's Christ; they have soared with Him in their minds into the heavenlies of rapt contemplation and made Him the mystic's Christ. Doubtless to none has He wholly refused Himself. But there is somewhere the people's Christ, the Christ of Every-man. He is found on the plain where common people confront common needs, anxieties, temptations; where sin and pain, disease and hunger, buying and selling are.

1. *He Himself accepted the test.*—John the Baptist had hailed Him as the Christ and had expected Him to move on lofty altitudes of majesty, power, and authority to His dominion. Being disillusioned, John sent his pathetic query which revealed his misgiving: 'Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?' The reply of Jesus, in effect, was: 'You are looking to the wrong quarter for My justification.' The vindication of God's Messiah is not in power above men, but in His pity and help among them. 'Go and tell John to cast his eyes down from the high places of this old grandiose Messianic dream to the level of the common men's needs. Go and tell John, the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.' The great Forerunner had not realized that the Christ of God comes to His own in the closeness and adequacy of His saving contact with broken, needy lives.

Consider His acceptance of the test of the common level in this very story. It is a strange chapter which follows upon this laconic statement that He came down from the mountain. It would be an almost unbearable chapter if it were not so prefaced, and if He were not come down into it.

Out of the crowd, a leper; out of the city, a heart-wrung man; in a soldier's house, a dying servant; in the disciple's home, a suffering mother; 'and when even was come they brought unto him many possessed with devils.' What a world! It was the world of life which met Jesus, 'when he was come down from the mountain.'

2. *It is this test which has to be accepted by His friends and servants.* By one of them it was accepted with reluctant astonishment. It came to pass on a day that the Apostle Peter went up upon the housetop to pray, and through the gate of dreams the instructing Spirit of truth opened to him more than he had before known of the revolutionizing truth as it is in Jesus. He learned in a vision that the Christ who saves men transcends every national exclusiveness. His ideas of religious caste were broken up, and the ring-fence of race went to pieces as there came mightily upon his mind the universalism of redemption. When the vision passed he was left upon the housetop, wrestling with something new which he vaguely knew must alter everything. What will he make of it? How long will he stay there pondering it? The Spirit of truth had not finished with him. God has His way of making ideas into dynamics, and that swiftly. There is a knocking in the street, and the Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men seek thee.' An untimely intrusion? Not so. It is the arrival from the street, and through the man

in the street, of God's interpretation of the house-top vision.

3. *The mountain is needed to make the plain endurable.* The plain is needed to interpret the mountain. Our Lord Himself will teach us this. Look closely into any record of strenuous self-giving service of His, and you will find it preceded by some sojourn on the high places of communion with God alone, or in company with His chosen friends. From that finer air He came to serve.

In the life of the spirit we need the hill to make the plain endurable. We cannot afford the activities of Christian service cut off from its resources and reserves. Movement after movement in the Christian Church has perished thus. They have died of exhaustion. The values of sustained prayer and thought, of quiet and ordered common worship, of careful instruction, of renewed inspirations, are in the power they bring to serve without disheartenment and fainting.

The plain is needed to interpret the mountain. The everyday ministry of Jesus is the real exposition of the teaching of the hill. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' The illuminating commentary upon that is seen when He came down from the mountain, and, though He had not where to lay His head, He kept a serene, untroubled, and victorious soul. 'Blessed are the meek.' The exposition is in the magnanimity of Jesus when He was come down from the mountain. 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.' The interpretation thereof is on the plain, when He said, 'My meat is to do the will of my Father.' 'Blessed are the merciful.' The word on the hill stands in light when on the plain He whispers to a confused woman, 'Neither do I condemn thee.'

There is a saying which has been a familiar watchword in Church history: 'Doctrine the test of the stability of the Church.' That it has its needed truth to tell is witnessed by the perils and disasters into which every recurrent non-theological phase of the Church has fallen. Christianity is a revelation of truth and demands its intellectual rights. Nevertheless, in the long run, Christianity is God's way of making good people, and there is an older saying than that old maxim of the Church. He, who sent His message to the seven churches by His servant John, began each of them with this word, '*I know thy works.*' It would seem that He, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks which are the churches, makes His closest scrutiny and takes His final estimate of them when they are 'come down from the mountain.'[1]

[1] T. Yates, *The Strategies of Grace*, 202.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

The Nature of Religious Truth.

'I know that my redeemer liveth.'—Job 19[25].

Many of those texts of orthodox doctrine and sentiment which show up so strangely in that most outspoken and fearless of all the books of the Old Testament—the Book of Job—turn out to be mistranslations. In particular, the famous verses which follow this text in the nineteenth chapter, pointing to a sure and certain hope of all-glorious resurrection in which death and all the evils worse than death with which Job is wrestling are swallowed up in victory, are changed to words which express the bare conviction that somehow and at some time things will be right. The change may be to some minds unwelcome at first sight, but it is surely right. The agony of Job or of the author of this book was not of the kind to be cured by miraculous provisions of Christian dogma. The truth that would help him, as the truth which will help any of us, had to come out of himself and his own experience—had to be a present truth.

The one thing in this passage no commentator proposes to take away or diminish is the note of certainty and assurance which has somehow come to Job out of his darkest perplexity and suffering. Suddenly his feet have touched bottom; he is on a rock; he can say, 'I know.' 'I shall see God, whom I shall see to my own good, and my eyes shall see him, and not as one estranged.' It does not matter that the reasons for his assurance are not what the Authorized Version gives us; that there are indeed no *reasons* given in this declaration of assurance; that the book ends with a confusion of mystery and inexplicability. What he has found may seem to us a poor comfort, a very reduced gospel, but he has it firm: it is his own.

No one can read the end of the Book of Job without feeling that the man who wrote it had found an answer to his problem, though the speech put into the mouth of God is not so much the answer as an evidence of the fact that an answer has been found. Somehow Job has come out of that painful questioning into a stable place, where the world of Nature with all its wonders and mysteries has become, instead of a terrible agonizing hell, something whose mystery strengthens and sustains.

How did Job get his certainty?

The earlier chapters show him exposed to two temptations, which, in our searching after life and truth, remain temptations to us all—to be selfish, to get what relief we can from our own pains and let the rest of the world be as evil as it

likes, or to cheat, to be dishonest, to say that things are all right when we know that they are not, to adopt that kind of faith which consists in believing what we know to be untrue.

1. When Job first gives vent to his misery, he is told to curse God and die, to take the relief for which he is longing and leave the world to be evil. And if we are troubled with the thought of the misery of the world, we can no doubt get some relief by deliberately becoming deaf to it. If we shut our ears long enough, we cease to hear, and get relief at the cost of the death of all but the animal part of ourselves.

Job puts that temptation from him and, as a result of his doing so, his agony ceases to concern himself alone; his complaint now is not that he is suffering, but that innocence is suffering, and suffering not only in the person of Job, but all over the world, and the impersonal agony so overmasters all thought of self in him, that it would be a relief to feel that he has somehow deserved punishment; that he is not only suffering but evil as well, if only at this cost he is enabled to think that God is not evil.

2. And with the thought comes the opposite temptation—to cheat, to be false to the facts as he sees them; to sink his own known misfortunes in the thought of the righteous universe without; to submit and say that what he knows to be wrong is right. He feels that he could bear his own misery if he could rest in the thought of the goodness of God, in the thought that all must be for the best, and that his dissenting mind is presumptuously misleading him.

This second method of escape from the perplexities which life presents is the unselfish man's temptation, as the first is the selfish man's, and it is usually supported by a much greater body of authority. Many people will tell you that troubles and perplexities such as Job's mind was suffering only come from thinking and doubting, from rash presumptions in asking questions which cannot be answered, that the simple cure of such ills is to stop thinking and doubting, to submit to the authority of our elders and betters, who are obviously our betters because they are not and have never been troubled as we are being troubled. The method of escape which is offered to Job, and which he rejects, is one which many men accept, and its acceptance brings them relief and with relief a certain power of grappling with the ordinary demands of life.

But this relief is bought at a price. Job's friends begin harmlessly enough, but before they have gone very far they are driven to defend God by accusing Job's children and Job himself of crimes for which they have not a jot of evidence. The doctrine which maintains that all human suffering is due to human guilt easily and inevitably becomes the doctrine that the unfortunate are also bad.

Job puts these two temptations from him, even though he could only hold out at the cost of feeling utterly alone in the world. 'Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net.' Out of the very midst of the negation and despair that seem the price of refusing to yield to these temptations, in his unselfishness and truthfulness, there suddenly comes an assurance that he is not alone, and he can say, 'I know that my Vindicator liveth.' He has found something in himself which draws him out of himself, which gives him an ever-widening and deepening sympathy with and understanding of his fellow-men, and which culminates in the profound moral insight and tenderness of the great speech in the thirty-first chapter.

We should note that assurance and conviction are found without an intellectual answer being found. Religious conviction and certainty come from the will, are described as issuing out of resistance to temptation. But the will from which Job's certainty is described as issuing is a disciplined will. Job gets his assurance of God because he has refused to yield to his own immediate desires, because he has made his difficulty a moral and not a personal problem, and because he has submitted his mind to the facts as he sees them, and refused to mould the facts to his mind. Such an attitude is implied to some degree in all attainment of truth.

The common testimony of all great writers in religion is that the only means of coming to religious assurance and knowledge is to learn by discipline of the will to give up merely personal desires and be humble and accepting. 'I say, moreover, if the soul will know God,' says Eckhardt, 'it must be forgetful of itself and must lose itself; for so long as it regards and takes cognizance of itself, it regards not God nor has cognizance of him. If, for God's sake, it loses itself and forsakes all things, it finds itself again in God.'

Job's assurance that comes to him at first as an immediate conviction becomes strengthened and confirmed by later experience. The final warrant for his assurance is not simply that it issues from a rational and disciplined source, a mind which has universalized its problems and been faithful to facts, but that eventually it is found to render a wider and wider stretch of experience intelligible.

What gives an abiding and real certainty in our æsthetic judgments is that as we go back and back to some works of art they go on approving themselves and seem to unfold more and more of their meaning. The same holds true of religious experience. Immediate and individual as it is, there is a long way between the first experience of assurance and the state of mind expressed in, 'I know whom I have believed.' The first immediate conviction is to be tested by its applicability to life, by its coherence with the rest of what we learn, by its rendering reality intelligible as much as are those great intuitions which are the beginnings of great scientific discoveries.

Lastly, although religious assurance as described in the Book of Job is not got by intellectual arguments, faithfulness to intellectual standards when they are relevant heightens and enhances the quality of the religious experience, and unfaithfulness lowers and perverts it. This is a truth we are apt to forget, with fatal consequences.[1]

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

The Gates of the City.

'On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.'—Rev 21[13].

The entire description of the Holy City, in the Book of Revelation, is a parable—of course, it is more than that—but it is at least a parable of the fellowship with God declared by Jesus Christ and made possible to us in Him. It furnishes us with a picture of the fulness and completeness of that life of communion into which Christ our Lord has invited us, and which, being realized by us, is our sufficient enduement for life and service until that day when we shall see His face.

Every detail of the City's architecture and ordering, as seen by the seer in the island of Patmos, is full of significance to the people whose faces are turned thitherward. In the circumstance, for example, of its four-square dimension we have a picture of the perfectly symmetrical life in which length and breadth and height are all equal. And in the facts of its illumination, that they need no candle nor light of the sun, for the Lord giveth them light, and the Lamb is the light thereof; of its unhungering and unthirsting inhabitants, entirely satisfied with the favour and goodness of the Lord; of its river which gives constant fertility to the land through which it flows, we have alluring pictures of that fellowship into which we are invited by the gospel, and which, being realized, is adequate equipment for life and for duty until we are beyond the need of picture and parable for ever.

But the interest of the seer is aroused particularly by the Gates of the City. The City, to the seer's vision, is walled to prevent intrusion. But its walls are pierced by gates which express a friendly welcome to everybody. There are twelve gates, each bearing the name of a tribe—an encouraging fact when the moral history of some of the tribes is remembered! They are so set that each side of the City has an equal and adequate number, fronting thus the entire world.

This parable of the twelve gates, three on each of the four sides of the City, obviously means that the fellowship with God which all men need is free to all men; that the City of God is large enough to contain all God's children in all their variety; that there is no stereotyped nor uniform method of approaching Him; that as every man has turned to sin in his own way, so every man must return to God in his own way; that as there is a uniqueness about the sin of every man, so there is something gloriously unique about the salvation of every man! The twelve gates declare that God's grace is catholic, fronting with its free invitation every variety of temperament, condition, and interest.

But there is more than general considerations in the parable of the gates on the east, and north, and south, and west. For east, and north, and south, and west are not merely geographical terms. They are regions on life's moral map, places where the play of influence and circumstance is explanatory of men's attitude toward God and their action in response to the claim and challenge of His Word.

1. So, without straining the parable at all, let us suggest, first, a meaning of the three eastern gates. The east is the quarter in which the sun rises, in which the new day begins, in which the light is born. So the eastern gate may well stand for the entrance of those who seek Christ in youth. And not only in youth but because of youth; those who receive His Word with reverence and with respect; those who are thrilled, as youth is thrilled, with the idea of high adventure with which the gospel is instinct; those who have left the insurgence of that within them which perplexes and affrights them, and are impelled rather than compelled to Jesus Christ; those who bring unwearied energies to the service of the Name they have learned to

[1] A. D. Lindsay, *The Nature of Religious Truth*, 189.

love. The paths round about the eastern gate are smooth and flower-decked. There are no wrecked ideals, nor outraged vows, nor lashing remorse amongst those who come by the eastern gate; although there is often an urgent and sensitive conscience moving young men and women in the first flush of their self-conscious young manhood and womanhood to Jesus Christ.

> Just as I am, young, strong, and free,
> To be the best that I can be
> For truth and righteousness and Thee,
> Jesus, my Lord, I come.

2. Then there are the northern gates. The north is the quarter from which the winter gales blow over the Arctic seas. And they may well stand for the entrance of those who have been searched by experiences of adversity and sorrow and disappointment; whose hearts have been broken, whose lives have been crushed as between the upper and nether millstones, and are now empty and cheerless and chill; who know what it is to have bitter hours of conviction and shame and remorse about their own sin; through whose lives the chill blast of condemnation blows constantly. Thank God, there are three gates on the north for those who are actually driven to Jesus Christ, before the blast, for shelter. Mary Magdalene came in by the north gate; and the publican also who stood and smote upon his breast as the chill of the north blast swept his being, and said, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.'

The north gate, too, may also stand for the entrance of those whose temperament exposes them to the chilling, cold blasts of doubt and unbelief. Some people—and particularly some of the young people of the present day—can no more help asking questions than needing their food. Some of them are particularly exposed by their temperament to the devastating blasts of unbelief and doubt; to whom problems and philosophies are constantly offering challenge; upon whom the question, 'Is it rational? Is it reasonable?' forces itself; to whom the only gospel seems to be, 'Come, let us reason together.' Thomas came in by that gate, which stands open to assure us that all our mental strength—the product of our mental struggle, that all our powers of reason and enlightenment are invited by Jesus Christ into the City for His service.

3. Then there are the southern gates. The south is the quarter from which warm, genial brightness comes. The south gates, therefore, may well stand for the entrance of those who are drawn to Jesus Christ by the very ardours and passions of their emotional nature, so easily aroused, so readily inflammable; by the generous impulses which are for ever seeking expression in something or in some one on whom to lavish affection and tenderness; by their inner intimations of immortality which will not be silenced; by the ideals of life discerned in the clear light of the sun which awaken desire and inform purpose; by life's joyful experiences—of its beauty, its friendship, its love, its glad fullness. I think the southern gate stands for the entrance of those to whom such things are the most potent of all influences in life. And they may stand also for the entrance of those in whom the reaction of such a temperament to the ordinary changes of life produces a sense of incompleteness and need. For all such warm, quick, quivering, emotional natures are as capable of deep dejections as of uplifting exaltations. Paul went in by the southern gate. Thenceforward he found his restless quest for ever satisfied, and his emotions for ever fixed, by cheerful engagement in the City's service and in the fellowship of the City's Lord.

4. Last of all, there are the western gates. The west is the quarter in which the sun sets, in which the light dies. We look out at the setting sun and get a suggestion in its copper brilliance of that which lies beyond, and something more than a hint of the transiency of life. So the western gates may well stand for the entrance of those who are world-weary. It does not require a man to be very old to be world-weary, nor a woman to have gone through an up-and-down experience of any length to become utterly world-weary, utterly bored, utterly sick of things that do not profit and that can only be too dearly purchased. And their very weariness is just Christ's invitation to fellowship with Him in which is rest and energy and soul-satisfaction. And these western gates may stand, too, for the entrance of those whose life-work is nearly done, to whom earth's joys grow dim.

Those who come in by the western gates—perhaps they are visionary, but they comprise old and young alike. Nathanael came in, and John also, one old and the other young, at the western gates. And they came in—the old man with his dreams of the past, and the young man with his visions of the future, to find their thoughts utterly surpassed in the glory of fellowship with Jesus Christ.

John Bunyan scents the meaning of the parable of the gates when he says: 'Now, just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them; and behold, the City shone like the sun;

the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying, "Holy holy, holy, is the Lord." And after that they shut up the gates; which, when I had seen, I wished myself amongst them. . . . I wished myself amongst them.' [1]

[1] J. S. Holden, *The God-Lit Road*, 311.

Surprises in the Early Church in Rome.

By the Reverend Albert G. Mackinnon, D.D., Rome.

The title which first suggested itself was, 'The Most Interesting Church in History'; but it would have challenged criticism, perhaps aroused resentment. Many of my readers, no doubt, belong to famous congregations, which are doing great things in the world to-day, and which have a membership that would make the Church of St. Paul's time in Rome appear numerically insignificant, therefore I must discard the adjective 'most generous' or 'most influential'; but there is one word I shall not yield, and that is 'most surprising.' When I read with gratification the annual reports of our great city churches, and scan their long membership rolls and subscription lists, I say to myself: 'Well, that is just what I expected. They have done splendidly, but they had it in them. With such a pastor and people they could not do otherwise.'

When, however, I study the first Christian Church in Rome I get a series of shocks. Everything is so unexpected. This Church does not conform to the rules. It surprises you by its lack of conventionality at every turn. It is so different from the pattern of to-day that I am almost tempted to dub St. Paul a Nonconformist! Let us note some of those surprising features which may perhaps make us a little uncomfortable and lessen our pride in things which were our boast.

1. Its founder is unknown. We are accustomed to a big tablet in the vestibule commemorating the name of some great preacher, who had started the cause which had grown into a flourishing congregation, or perhaps that of some generous donor, whose money had laid the foundation-stone. I do not condemn such a custom. There is an inspiration in great names, and they are 'On Fame's eternal bead-roll worthy to be filed.' But this Church in Rome could put up no such tablet; for the person who originated it has not even handed down his name. It was not St. Paul. He certainly does not claim that honour. With regard to Corinth it was different. He asserted a parental claim over that Church; but with Rome, no. It was not St. Peter, for when he appeared in the city there was already a strong Church established. Who, then, were its originators?

We must search for them amongst the Jewish colony. From the days of Pompey, the Great, this foreign community had steadily increased in size. Julius Cæsar fostered it. On the very day in which he was murdered a great act of Jewish emancipation was passed by the Senate granting them a free administration of their own funds, and a complete jurisdiction over their own members. No wonder that for three days the Jews turned the Forum into a weeping-place and bewailed the Great Cæsar who had proved himself their friend. We read that in 4 B.C., eight thousand Roman Jews met a deputation from Palestine to Augustus. This may be an exaggeration; still, if we put their population at sixty thousand, it was not impossible; and Sejanus, who was their enemy in the time of Tiberius, enrolled four thousand in a foreign legion and sent them to Sardinia to put down the brigands. It was from this colony in the Capital that in A.D. 29, we read, there came to the Feast of Pentecost, 'Sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes.' That is as near as we can get to the founders of the Church. From that group of travellers some came back Christians.

'Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which have come to pass there in these days?' said the two disciples to Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Behind these words lies a suggestive fact. Jerusalem was full of talk about Calvary, and into that babble of tongues came those Jews from Rome. Their curiosity must have been aroused, their interest excited, and in one or two hearts the truth accepted. The meaning of the Cross was seen in its true light,