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Follow after love.' Having written this, St. Paul reflected that here was the place to interpolate his prose hymn in praise of Love. This is evidence for careful writing.

Nerves—headaches—stammering. Such is the complex which I imagine to have been St. Paul's 'thorn in the flesh.' If the stammering is thought

fanciful, I would at least plead for the nerves, and suggest that the extraordinary appeal of the Apostle to many is due in part to the closeness with which he approaches twentieth-century civilized man in this respect. Or the headaches may be omitted. 'The thorn in the flesh' may be metaphorical, like the buffeting inflicted by the messenger of Satan.

In the Study.

Virginitus Puerisque.

The Long Way Round is the Short Way Home.

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

'God led them not by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; . . . but God led the people about, by the way of the wilderness.'—*Ex 13¹⁷* (R.V.).

It is an Italian proverb which says, 'The long way round is the short way home,' and it is truer than most proverbs, very true for all the world, and for your life and mine.

We live in a world that is in a dreadful hurry to-day. We want to go faster and faster. People that get things done quickly are admired. The short cut to anything is felt to be the best road; the near way is the best way.

The papers are full of advertisements of quick methods; how to make hair grow quickly, how to learn the piano in a month without scales or exercises, how to get rich quickly, and so on. Quickness is everything, and we are as sure as Euclid was that 'the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.' But that is only true on paper and in geometry; it isn't true for life. It isn't true on the surface of the earth, for the surface of the earth is not flat, but curved. The shortest distance between Liverpool and New York is a straight line on a map, but it isn't a straight line on the sea: it's a bit of a 'great circle.' On the map it seems round about and long, but the sailor knows that on the ocean 'the long way round is the short way home.'

I remember once going as a boy to climb Ben Lawers with an old minister and his sons. My idea was to go straight at it. There was the summit and the shortest way must be the best. When he led us by a way which started circling away round the mountain I thought he was a foolish old man.

But when at last I was at the top and looked down at the road I would have chosen, I saw that he was right and I was wrong. My way would have been far harder and would have taken far longer; his way was easier and in the end quicker. It was the long way round, and it was the shortest way to the top.

I go back to the Bible and I find God doing just this thing. He was leading His people to a land of Promise. There was a 'near way,' 'the way of the Philistines,' and there was a long way, 'the way of the desert'; and it was the long way by which God led them. Why? Because He wanted them to be fit to enter the land of Promise. He was leading them not only from Egypt to Canaan, but from the feebleness of slaves to manhood and courage and self-confidence. It is easy to go quickly to Canaan, but it is not easy to get to the kingdom of character, and it cannot be done quickly. So because they needed the desert to make them into men fit to have a country of their own, 'God led them not by the way of the Philistines, though that was near, but he led them by the way of the wilderness.'

In the New Testament I find our Saviour tempted in the wilderness, and each temptation was the temptation of the near way, the short cut.

What was to be His way to His Kingdom in men's hearts? Bribe them with food, master them with force, dazzle them with miracles—these were the easiest ways, and Jesus would have none of them. He knew that no kingdom could stand long that was built that way, and so He chose the long, slow way of winning their hearts by love and their wills by persuasion and their minds by truth. It was the long way round. It took Him into the wilderness. It took Him to the Cross, but it was the only way. Once again the long way round was the short way home.

Girls and boys, don't let yourselves be cheated

by short cuts. In some things there are no short cuts.

At school in algebra and arithmetic the short cut is to turn up the answer without working it out. In Latin it is to get a crib instead of using your dictionary and your brain, or to get some one to do it for you. It saves time ; but it saves time at the cost of everything else you ought to spend time to get. For it is not the answer that is the great matter, but the discipline of doing the work. As well expect to get strong by somebody else doing your gymnastics. As well expect to get good from a dinner which somebody else has eaten for you. You are being led into the kingdom of knowledge, the mind's land of promise, and the long way of honest work is in the end the short way home.

It is the same in the world of life. Our Father is guiding us up the heights of character. He leads by the way that is best—though it seems round about. He is leading us to a land of Promise, and He leads us by ways where discipline and effort will make us fit to arrive at that land of Promise, strong upright souls, fit to enter in and possess the land. He leads us by desert places, stony with temptation and disappointments, and sore with sorrows, because these things have a service to our souls. Souls cannot be made in a hurry. Character cannot be created by a magic wand. We would like to choose our paths and we should choose a path—a 'near way'—without these things.

But we are not allowed to choose our path ; the only thing we can choose is our Companion. If we choose God for our Companion, it doesn't matter where He leads us, for we can say, as Jesus said, 'My Father is always with me.' Any road is long without a companion, and good roads are horrid with the wrong companion. With the right companion, the longest road is short ; and we may be sure of this—that the long round with God is the short way home.

About writing Letters.

BY THE REVEREND WILLIAM J. MAY, ILKESTON.

'The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand.'—Col 4¹⁸.

Once upon a time, nearly seven thousand years ago, before the days when Abram left Ur of the Chaldees to try to find a living God, there was a man named Annini, living at a place called Simta-Ha. He had a field, and one day he wrote a letter about it. He wrote it with an iron pencil on a slab of wet clay. When it was dry he put it in a clay envelope and sent it to his landlord. You

could not tear up the letter written on a brick nor could you burn it very well. So after it was finished with the landlord threw Annini's letter away, envelope and all, and the desert sand drifted up and buried it. It buried Annini and his field as well, but a little while ago some one dug the letter up, and now you may see it in a London museum ; the oldest letter in the world.

What kind of letters do you write ? Some people write wonderful letters, letters so full of news and little word pictures of other places and other people that, long after the people who wrote them and the people who received them are dead, other people delight to read them because they are so interesting. You have to be very clever to write such letters as these. Perhaps your letters are very short and not very clever :

'DEAR FATHER,—I hope you are all right. We had a topping game of footer on Saturday and beat the Lower House by two goals to one. My pocket-money is all gone.—Your loving son, DAVID.'³

And if anyone complains you declare that there was nothing else to write about last week. In the days when Moses went to school in Egypt, boys were writing letters home like that on pieces of papyrus.

Some day you will find more to write about, and I wonder what sort of letters you will write then. Every time you write a letter you tell people something about yourself. Your handwriting tells them something, and people can see whether you are careless or careful ; whether you are proud or modest, whether you are strong and determined or weak and wavering. In your letters there are all sorts of things written in invisible ink, written between the lines, and people read them and see what you are. You did not intend to write those things down, they wrote themselves. Sometimes books are written about people and called, for example, 'St. Paul as Revealed in his Letters.'

Paul's eyes were very bad and he could not see very well, and perhaps his fingers were stiff, too, with working at his tent-making, so that he usually got some one to be his secretary. Sometimes Timothy would do it for him, and sometimes Luke would write, and sometimes a friend named Tertius wrote at Paul's dictation. When the letter was finished Paul would take the pen and sign it. I think the writing must have been bad and Paul felt a bit ashamed because it was so poor, so he added at the end of one of his letters ; 'The greeting of me, Paul, with my own hand. Remember, I am in prison.' Another day his eyes were worse than usual, he could scarcely see, but he felt he

wanted to put down something himself, just as Baby does when Daddy is away. They came over to the window, and Paul took the reed pen from the other and began to write. Oh, but the letters were clumsy and sprawling. Paul nearly laughed at them. Then he wrote: 'See what big letters I make, when I write you in my own hand!'

In another place Paul says something still more interesting. He says to his friends, 'You are our letters; the letters everybody reads.' That sounds very curious. What does Paul mean? He means that, when other people in Rome and Ephesus and Corinth look at the people to whom Paul is writing, the people who call themselves Christians and say they love Jesus, they read in them the message Paul would like to write. I wonder if any one sees in you not just a message from Paul but a letter from Jesus. If Jesus wrote a letter what would He say? This, I think: 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you.'

Will you let Jesus write that upon your life and be His beautiful letter to the world?

The Christian Year.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Follow Me.

'Follow me.'—Mt 4¹⁹.

Nothing gives a greater sense of the power of our Lord than the transformation He wrought in the character of His first disciples. He passed by the rich, the educated, the leaders of religion, and deliberately called Galilean peasants and fishermen. Their minds were filled with national and religious prejudices. They regarded the Kingdom of God as a political institution, based on the subjugation of the Gentile nations. We find in them ambition, envy, worldliness, jealousy, boasting, cowardice. They were not worse than others, but their mental and moral state was not very high when Christ said to them, 'Follow me.' In the course of a few years an extraordinary change passed over these men. We have the writings of some of them, and these have been revered for their truth and wisdom by generations of the wisest and best men who have lived. Further, those uneducated men are among the great forces that have turned the world into a diviner course.

And it is the same spiritual transformation Christ works in all who follow Him in every age. The first sign of change in the Twelve was an outward and visible one: they obeyed Christ literally—

gave up their work, boats and nets, home and kindred, and became wanderers through the land with their Master. Now, is that sacrifice asked of us? It may be. But the root of the matter is this: that anything even in our outward life that hinders us from following Christ must be given up. If even things right in themselves had to be given up by those first disciples, much more must things that are not right. And as we look round the mere externals of our life, do we not find many things that hold us back from following Christ, or at least following Him fully—habits of physical ease and luxury, customs of the world and business which cannot stand His scrutiny, companionships and ties which hold us back from our own best ideals? And therefore when Christ calls us, as He called Peter and the rest, our first duty may be to make a change even in our outward life—to measure all by a new standard.

These outward things can be abandoned in a moment of time. Peter and John gave up their boats and homes at once. But did they follow Christ in spirit as quickly as in body? Far from it. Christ found it far easier to get them to forsake their homes than to abandon pride, ambition, greed, jealousy, intolerance, cowardice. For to follow Christ is much more than a change in the external life. It is a change in the very habits of the soul. It is the growth of Divine tempers and dispositions of the heart. And just this is the change which we see going on in the disciples by the mere process of following this strange Master of theirs. At the beginning their souls were full of ambition. And out of this worldly pride sprang those jealous quarrels for the highest places, the sound of which is heard all through the Gospels. At every turn the disciples misunderstood their Master's aims. It almost seems as if they were His followers in body alone. Yet look at these men a few years later—listen to their sermons, read their letters, watch the life they live. The old worldly idea of the Kingdom is gone: it is now a spiritual Kingdom of truth and love. It is no longer for Jews alone: its gates stand open to every nation. The old ambition for the chief places is dead: they are 'clothed in humility'; the cowardice which forsook Christ and fled is gone: they face governors and kings for His sake. The Cross, once a stumbling-block and foolishness, is now their glory.

Further, the *minds* of these men underwent an almost incredible development. When Christ found them their minds were filled with the current national ideas of God and man, the world, sin, righteousness. At first His thoughts on all these

were too great for them to receive with ease. But they followed Him, and in a few years we find these men moving familiarly in a world of marvellous ideas—ideas so great that the highest minds since have not fathomed their significance. They began with the belief that their Master was human in precisely the same sense as themselves—wiser, indeed, stronger, but still a mere man. But as they followed Him, they began to feel themselves in the presence of something far above them—something that forced on their minds the strange, inevitable conviction of Divinity. And with this conviction came a host of new and infinite thoughts: a Divine Incarnation—a God who bears the sins and sorrows of a world—an atonement of love—the unity of the human race in sin and salvation.

Or turn to another change, the *social* change, the new attitude in which He placed these men toward their fellows. When He called them they were imprisoned in the common national conception of the human race. The Kingdom of Heaven was theirs by right Divine; the Gentiles were only worthy to be their slaves. In this exclusive Heaven these ambitious fishers looked to receive the first places, and doubtless to raise their own kindred to the rank of their own dignities. But Christ lifted them out of this pit of selfishness and taught them that the Kingdom of their Master was the heritage which His grace made free to the uttermost parts of the earth. Nay—a much more difficult thing—He poured into them His own great and generous spirit, His own enthusiasm for humanity; until they were ready to face all privations, persecutions, and dangers, in order to carry this good news to every nation under heaven. The change is almost inconceivable—men who began by quarrelling for the highest places now ambitious only to be the servants of all, giving up home and country for the sake of strangers and foreigners, glorifying in the Cross, once their stone of stumbling and rock of offence!

This was the great and beautiful change which Christ was able to make in His first disciples. Often perplexed, they still continued in His temptations, they still strove to set their wills in tune with His, following loyally when they could not understand. And thus, hour by hour, the great miracle was wrought. 'Follow me' is the secret of it all.¹

Wilfred Grenfell says: If increasing experience gives increasing wisdom, as I try to write down what I think Christ asks of each individual to-day, it is to do the thing that pleases Him. To have courage to follow Him and leave intellectual faith

to be won by experience—of long, hard, and expensive experience—but to be won in the good fight, as every worth while acquisition of man must be. The humility of modern Science is a greater marvel than even its wonderful achievements. Humility, not infallibility, is the note that the man of to-day responds to. Life is not a tragedy, it is a field of honour. What the Christ's teaching leads me to do for Him is the gauge I shall be judged by. It is unquestionably the gauge by which men appraise any claim to the title Christian. What Christ seems to be asking me for every time is not comprehension but apprehension, not belief but courage. His religion is not the mean emotion that seeks to save itself, but that ennobling one which in willingly laying down life for others finds its own salvation.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Word of God.

'The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever.'—Ps 19⁹.

These are bold words to apply to fear of all things in the world. For among the affections of the human mind none has engendered, whether within or without religion, tempers more base; nor is there any emotion less firm or more quickly thrown off by growing men.

The rites and tempers of a religion have generally been unclean in direct proportion to the degree of terror for the deity which the religion inspired. Superstition is nothing but the dominance of an ignorant fear over reason and love; and superstition, as we know even within Christianity, has begotten every form of uncleanness and cruelty. On the other hand, it requires little observation or analysis to show that, while there is thus a fear which is false and perishable, there is another which is true, inevitable, salutary, and enduring. It would seem as if the writer of our psalm had such a distinction in his mind. Certainly he enjoyed the opportunity of observing it in view of the heathen religions by which his people were surrounded. These were rank with fear and with the unclean tempers that fear begets. In opposition to these the Psalmist boldly says: 'The fear of the Lord'—the God of Israel—'is clean, and enduring for ever.'

Now the Psalmist makes this claim for his religion in a psalm which sings the praise of the written forms in which that religion is enforced. The law of the Lord is perfect, the testimonies of the Lord are sure, the statutes of the Lord are right, the

¹ J. S. Carroll, *The Motherhood of God*, 191.

commandment of the Lord is pure, the judgments or ordinances of the Lord are true. All these are well-known names for the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and especially for the body of sacred Law which they contain. When among the five terms, each clearly significant of the Scriptures, the Psalmist introduces the abstract expression 'the fear of the Lord,' he must mean something much the same: the Revealed Word of God—but rather in its general character and influence than in its separate precepts and laws. He must mean the awe, the obedience, the discipline and inspiration of the Book whose praise is the burden of his song.

Let us consider the unique authority which is here claimed for the Bible. Do not let us condemn the Old Testament for practices and tempers which its prophets themselves condemn. Let us rather measure the Bible by the unity of ethical purpose which it manifests from first to last, by the completeness with which it leaves behind every trace of a defective morality, and by the uncompromising and invincible opposition which the spirit of it offers to every political and religious interest that insinuates itself as a substitute for the ethical service of God.

Take, for example, those tempers and practices of early Israel which some men feel as difficulties in the way of their faith in the Bible. Are we not rather to see in the gradual disappearance of these from the pages of Scripture the illustration of the omnipotence of God's Spirit, the fulfilment of His claim who said: 'Behold, I make all things new'? Or take those later rites and doctrines of religion, which in their proper proportion and at certain historical crises may have been legitimate and necessary, but of which His prophets demanded the abolition when they were obtruded as substitutes for character and ethical service. For instance, when, in a period of great national prosperity, ritual and sacrifice were elaborated, and the nation laid the emphasis of their trust upon these, the prophets condemned all ritual, and insisted that justice, purity, and love were the only laws which God had given to men. 'What doth the Lord require of thee; but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Here is morality to the uttermost. When the nation, founding upon this absolute demand for righteousness and upon the promise of rewards by which it was accompanied, constructed the dogma that righteousness was always followed by prosperity, and that, conversely, suffering must be the proof of guilt, God inspired men to show

that righteousness must be pursued for its own sake alone, apart from all rewards and in spite of adversity and pain. By Jeremiah and the author of the Book of Job, every literary acid—irony, satire, scepticism in its most bitter form—along with the more powerful solvents of the disappointments and adversities of life, are employed to eat out from the mind of Israel this dogma of the essential union of righteousness and prosperity; till we find left alone the faith that a good conscience is independent of every other aid; and that each experience of pain, of doubt, and of forsakenness which besets it is the means whereby it is brought to purer and more disinterested convictions of its duty and its strength. 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.'

All this is even more evident in the New Testament. Throughout there is no aspiration after either political or ecclesiastical empire. Our aim, says the Apostle, is to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Now as to the source of this morality, and the authority of it, we are left in no doubt. As our text says, it is the fear of the Lord: something personal in its source, authority, and means of enforcement. Nor is the fear mere submission before the unknown and inscrutable power of the Almighty. Still less is it obedience to any arbitrary decrees. It is much rather the reverence, the awe, and the impulse to imitation, which are stirred in a soul by the revelation of the character of God. The source and character of that morality being what they are, it follows that the means by which it is enforced throughout the Bible are not the instruments of mere force and wonder, but the declaration of the truth itself, the revelation of the Supreme Being in whose character and actions it is embodied, and the conviction that since it is His will and purpose, it cannot fail to be realized in the world.

But morality is more than education. We do not only grow from one ideal to another. We have to struggle. How vividly does the Bible represent this. From the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane; from the temptation before the tree of knowledge to the temptations in the wilderness: with Adam and Abraham, with Jacob and Joseph, with Saul and David, with Solomon and Ahab and Gehazi, with Peter and Judas, with Paul and Demas—with one and all we see the same. They stand between two worlds and are conscript to their eternal warfare. A great sceptic has said that if anything could prove the Book to be the Word of God it is this way it has of aiding conscience

in opening our eyes to the two possibilities which lie before us and in bidding us make our choice for eternity. Here is fear in the noblest sense of the word: fear that is clean and enduring for ever. And if the Bible thus be at one with conscience in revealing the two worlds between which we stand, how thoroughly is it at one with experience in revealing to us ourselves—us who have to make that eternal choice. With a penetration and a truthfulness, attempted by no other book, it uncovers the secrets of the human heart.

But the Bible goes further than these obvious elements of morality. It tells us that the effort, the agony, nay, the very shame and curse of man's moral warfare are shared and borne by God Himself. The Story of this Divine Passion, which means both our condemnation, who have made it necessary by our sins, and our salvation, if we feel the penitence which it inspires as nothing else can, is found in these pages and in these alone. Hence their Divine validity. Not their inerrancy; not that they answer to this or that theory of inspiration; but that independent of all theories they tell to men the one Passion, the one Victory in all the history of time which can never grow old, nor lose its indispensable force for the sinful hearts of God's children; 'clean and enduring for ever'; needing nothing, as love needs nothing, of external authority or argument, to prove itself to the heart that requires it.¹

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Lame walk.

'The lame walk.'—Mt 11⁸.

These words occur as part of the answer which our Lord sent back to John the Baptist. John was lying in prison. We can well believe that the brave man's heart was near to giving way. We conclude that so it was, from the question which he commissioned some of his disciples to put to Jesus. That question had to be a very direct one, one of those questions which admit of only the answer 'yes' or 'no.'

The Baptist had to learn that you cannot get an off-hand, ready answer to any of life's really great questions. The answer from God to the great inquiries is never an unmistakable 'yes' or 'no,' for that would destroy the soul, would interfere with our moral education. A 'yes' spoken once for all by God to life's ultimate questions would paralyse our souls with a too great confidence; and a 'no' would paralyse our souls with despair.

¹ G. A. Smith, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, 26.

God's answer is never an explicit 'yes' or 'no,' but only the secret pressure of His Spirit upon ours. The answer which Jesus sent back to the Baptist was of the same kind as God still sends back to all our questioning. 'Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?' 'Am I wrong in believing? Am I wrong in my estimate of Christ? And in that case, am I wrong everywhere?' And Christ's answer to him was, 'The lame walk.'

It was part of Christ's wonderful manner that He would not give Himself a name. It was His plan to be Himself, to become for man all that He could become, and leave it to those, who in every age have been drawn to Him by secret and indestructible affinities, to say what they have found Him to be.

Jesus, in using the words 'the lame walk,' is describing what in His view was and is the characteristic feature or result of His appearance and work in the world of mankind. Jesus Christ came into the world in order to break up the tyranny of all natural and moral consequences. He came in order so to deal with us that we one by one should have a new beginning. He came in order to plant Something or Someone at the very root of our being, who should make all the difference in the world.

It is perfectly true that the Christian religion assumes what in theology is called the doctrine of the Fall of Man. It assumes that in some profound way the race of mankind has gone wrong. For practical purposes it declares also there is something in each one of us which needs to be put right. This is no disparagement of man. It is a disparagement of everybody in particular, but it is not a disparagement of man, the child of God. On the contrary, the doctrine of the Fall is the doctrine of the essential dignity and erectness of man.

To take an illustration which at the same time will lead us to the very text. Suppose I am walking behind some one whom I know, and presently I overtake him. I say, 'I am glad to see you, and glad to see how briskly you can go along.' Whereupon he looks at me displeased, and says: 'Surely you cannot mean it. As a matter of fact I am going lame just now!' Why is the man displeased? It is because I said something which meant that I thought he could walk no faster than he was walking; and his displeasure is just the fine protest of a man against being judged by his mere appearance, as though he could be nothing more.

Let us keep hold of this idea of lameness as signifying, of course, that condition of moral

impotence, of weakness and stumbling, or of dullness and deadness to God which is our average and natural condition until Christ makes us different.

1. There are those who are *born lame*. We have become aware in our day as never before of how the generations are bound to one another, how the sins of the fathers may be visited upon the children. Though it is only of recent years that we have learned so much of the material processes of heredity, the thing itself has always formed part of the knowledge of the human race. The Bible knows the doctrine that because 'the fathers have eaten sour grapes, the children's teeth are set on edge.' But the Bible declares that what God is working for in this world is to overthrow that fatal sequence. God is working for a state of things, as Jeremiah says, when every one shall suffer for his own sin, and not for the sin of his fathers. And we believe that there is in Christ this very power to rescue every man from the dead hand of his ancestry. The great thinkers of Greece were engaged all the time with this very question—how was the evil which one generation had let loose in the world to be contradicted, transformed, brought to a standstill, and finally cast out? And it was given to them to see very deeply into that great inquiry. They saw, as in the *Antigone* of Sophocles, that if one of the fated line, even Antigone herself, were to allow that darkness to have all its way with her; if one were, in utter meekness and without one moment's revolt, to submit to the dark wave of evil consequence; that in her stricken soul the evil thing would die.

We verily believe that this has been done in Christ. Our fathers did well to protest that Christ had done something for the whole world of men, apart from what He could do for each of us, one by one. In dying as Christ died, there was impregnated into the world of mankind a new motive; there was let loose amongst the world-forces a new and blessed force—something which is now there, fighting against the tyranny of mere natural consequences; something which each hard-pressed soul of man can lay claim to as a power on his own behalf, and also as a reason for believing that He who is with him is more than all that is against him!

2. And there are those who are *lame as the result of an accident*. There are those who to-day are what they are, and not better than they are, because of a sin, or because of a sinful life. Every one who sincerely repents of his sin, who bemoans it, who puts it in spirit away from him, and puts himself humbly in Christ's hands to bear witness

to Him in the world—every such one is forgiven, is back in the love of God.

3. Then, again, there are those who are lame *because they are weary*. They are getting older. Some of the visions of youth have failed. And in the case of many there have been sorrows, disappointments from children, or disappointments from themselves, which have the effect of bringing them to a standstill. The peril of our condition at such a time is that we consent to the view that, because in some ways this life has failed us, all has failed. There is the danger, too, at this stage, that we lose something of our first natural heroism and that we fall into a mood desiring mere physical comfort, and estimating life by what it gives rather than by what it suggests and keeps in reserve. And Christ heals us of this lameness, in part, by arousing our minds to what is really happening within ourselves. He came to show us that this world is not to be seen by itself, but always in its relation to another world and to God's will; that the things which are seen are temporal, and the things which are not seen are eternal.

4. There is yet another class of lame people in this world. They have become impaled upon a proverb: there are none so lame as those who will not walk. That is to say, there are those who are lame *because they are lazy*. How does Christ deal with these? These must present to Him the hardest case. For their malady is in the region of will; and even God cannot, certainly He will not, compel the will. And yet surely there is that in Christ which should shame us into protests against ourselves, when we consider that however we may sink back upon ourselves and humour ourselves in this world, there was One who heard in life a very different call.

Suppose we are standing on the bank of a river, when suddenly a child falls in and sinks. And we stand there doing nothing. But one of us steps out and plunges into the water to save the child. Suppose he saves the child. Do we not applaud his deed? Does not the most sluggish and worldly heart rise up to acknowledge an act like that which clothes our human nature with glory? And our applause, if it is genuine, is not mere applause. It is not mere admiration. It is the confession by every one of us who saw him do the deed that it was our deed; that in the deed he was our representative and substitute—not to spare us doing the like if the need should ever arise, but to create within hearts from which such an instinct is absent, and to augment in hearts where it already dwells, the instinct, in the presence of an occasion in which

the very reality of the world of the spirit is at stake, to fling away our dearest thing, even life itself.¹

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Proceeding on the Positives.

'I believe; help thou mine unbelief.'—Mk 9²⁴.

'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed.'—Mt 17²⁰.

Each of these utterances is contemplating faith in its smallness. In the first, its meagreness evokes an almost despairing cry. In the second, it evokes a confident prophecy. Yet the first has in it all the promise of the second. It is a prayer on its way to become a fulfilled prophecy. If any man say, 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief,' it makes all the difference possible whether his emphasis is on the first clause or the last.

The thing this man of the story put first was that he did believe. It was not much faith, but it *was* faith, and on it he ventured himself, though it was with a cry. Faith so small was his that, aware of it at one moment, he was unsure of it the next, yet since he knew it was there he put it first. Our unbelief, or our not-belief, may be of vastly greater magnitude than our belief, yet is our belief, be it ever so small and intermittent to our consciousness, of vastly greater significance.

There was a man whose eyes Jesus had opened, and who was fiercely cross-examined on the thing that happened to him. He was unable to give an entirely intelligible account of it. He could explain nothing, and he knew nothing even of the person who had healed him. But his mind worked positively before it worked interrogatively. It fastened on what he knew and refused to be drawn off. 'One thing I know.' It is well enough for us to get our doubts into the light and survey them with fearless eyes and a judging mind, but we can never do this wisely if we are at the same time ignoring our convictions. There is a negative perversity in most of us by which we are commonly more impressed by what we do not possess than by what we do, and are more persistent in brooding over the blessings we lack than we are in utilizing with thankfulness what we have. When Horace Bushnell was a college student, he completely lost his belief in God—not only in the God of the Christian revelation, but of even a vague theism. It was a time of profound mental distress for him, but he had to face what seemed a final fact. He surveyed what remained to him, and all that he

could find surviving in himself out of his former convictions was an unshaken belief in 'the abstract principle of right.' He made up his mind to hold hard to this. He had no other god, and he tells that he actually knelt down and said his prayers to an abstract principle. He besought the Idea of Right to keep him true to Itself. He says it was a dreary prayer. But it was a true prayer, and it was the best he could do. Years afterwards he told this experience to his students, and went on to tell them, with a voice broken by emotion, how the God he had lost came back to him in his act of faith and commitment to the best that had remained to him in the hour of eclipse.

From the man who contemplated the smallness of faith through eyes clouded with misgiving, we turn to Jesus, who also, regarding faith at its smallest measure, saw in it an immense promise and potency. The saying is an example of our Lord's use of daring hyperbole. The least of all seeds grows into a tree so great that the birds build in its branches—a quite incredible thing for a mustard seed to do, but this is not a lesson in botany, but a symbol of the Kingdom, and the marvellousness of its huge growth out of so little is the very point of it. Between the seed and the tree there is absolute continuity, and one has become the other by the law of its own life.

Faith may be a little thing, meagre and embryonic, but if it be alive at all, it cannot stay where it is. It has more significance and potency in it than a whole mountain of negation. The smallest vital belief compels men to add to it everything that is kindred and cognate to its own quality. It is our Lord's appreciation of faith as an energy, of faith as an activity of the soul, which accounts for and justifies His forceful metaphor. 'Faith is the response of the organism which we name the soul to that environment which we call God.' It is more than a spirit of simple receptiveness. It is the primary motion of the human spirit when brought into contact with Divine truth and goodness. It was not the least contribution of St. Paul that, as Dean Inge has pointed out, he made a fight 'for the new content of the word Faith as a Christian virtue,' and the fight was for its new *active* meaning as a decisive act of moral trust, and for it as an energy, bound up as it is with other Christian virtues, and especially with Love. It is an energy which insists on 'possessing its possessions.' In the strength of one achievement it moves on to face the next challenge.

(1) There is a man of strong individuality and force of mind who feels that a whole mountain

¹ J. A. Hutton, in *If I had only One Sermon to Preach*, 239.

would have to be moved and cast into the deep before he could be brought to believe in God at all. He says this thing out of his own habit of thinking for himself, standing upon his own feet, living his own life. He has faith in himself. He believes in intelligence, in will and freedom, and these are the things that make personality. Let him hold to that. He will have to go further. Believing this, he must believe more. Is it possible that the Source of all things has given us something loftier than is in the Source? 'There are many errors,' says Sir Oliver Lodge, 'but there is one truth in anthropomorphism, whatever worthy attribute belongs to man, be it personality or any other, its existence in the universe is thereby admitted; we can deny it no more.'

(2) There is another man who toward God presents a mind of blank negation. But he is greatly alive to the wonder of the world; he seeks and finds deep satisfaction in the majesty, beauty, and wonder of Nature's processes and results. But this man may not stand where he is. These emotions are the answer of personality to the touch and charm of some external cause, and he owns them real and enriching. This is a faith.

Campanella, the monk of Calabria, near three centuries ago, uttered in rhyme the real challenge to this potential believer:

Deem you that only you have thought and sense,
While heaven and all its wonders, sun and earth,
Scorned in your dulness, lack intelligence?
Fool! What produced you? These things gave
you birth;
So have they mind and God.

(3) There is another man, whose halt in faith is at a wholly different point. It is at Christ, as the final revelation of God and as in unique relation to both man and God, that he has stumbled. But if the meaning of Christ, in that full range which the Christian creed and devotion express, is to him still impossible, is all his mind a negation concerning Christ? There are some things about Christ he is able to assent to gladly. Let him hold to these. Christ lived a life of perfect goodness; believe then in that goodness. He lived and died in perfect love; believe then in that love. Let him stand to these things.

(4) There is yet another man, whose faith is only a smoulder amid a conscious moral confusion. Yet the doctrines and facts, if they be facts, of pardon, reconciliation, atonement, redemption, are beyond him. Let him face up to his own self-accusations and inquire the meaning and implica-

tions of these. He has a belief, or these would not rise disturbingly within him. He believes in the moral imperative. Let him explore the significance of it. He will go further. It is a real beginning when our moral helplessness is faced fairly. Redemption is not to be treated as an intellectual puzzle. It was not a problem, but a Person, who gave Himself for us on the Cross. The sense of sin and the experience of redemption are two things which God hath joined together and none can put asunder.

By its insistent self-enlargement let us test our faith. If it is a faith which will not let us grow, or that limits and narrows us, we must get rid of it. A vital faith has no finality because its object has no limit. Jesus never said, 'There is no more to believe.' He said, 'I will send you another Paraclete. He will guide you into all truth.'¹

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

God's Difficulties.

'For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee.'—Ro 9¹⁷.

There is nothing in the story of the Old Testament to suggest that any one was responsible for the experience of Israel in Egypt save God only. 'Fear not to go down into Egypt' are the words which Jacob recognizes as an intimation of the Divine Will. The famine was sore in the land. And in Egypt there was corn, gathered by the wise providence of his own brilliant son.

In those rough times the treachery of Judah and his brothers, wicked though it might be, was not altogether without excuse. Genius is often insufferable in its early stages, and virtue is not always recommended by precocity. Joseph would not have been exactly loved if his lot had been cast in one of the public schools of modern England. But, whatever punishment their cruelty and deceit may have deserved, it was under Joseph's protection that the patriarchal family was at last comfortably settled in the Land of Goshen. What is prominent in the Book of Genesis is the Divine ordering of events, and this is recognized by Joseph himself. 'God sent me before you,' are the words which he addresses to his conscience-stricken brethren, 'to preserve life.' And the 105th Psalm ascribes the whole story of the descent into Egypt, not to the consequences of sin, but to the working of Divine Providence.

What, then, does Egypt stand for in the accom-

¹ T. Yates, *The Strategies of Grace*, 58.

plishment of God's designs? Through no fault of their own, through no unfaithfulness to the mind and will of the heavenly Father concerning them, this race with its promise of a great future, its hope of a high destiny, is subjected to the grinding tyranny of a remorseless civilization. Into their soul the iron entered, but no prince of the people let them go free. Why, if the God of Israel be He who rules all things, did He not attain His end by a road less rough, a way less painful for the feet of His saints, than one which, like the old paths of the slave-raider in Central Africa, was strewn with dead bodies and bleaching bones?

Beware of suburban views of God! The last thing that we ought to think of revelation is that it will make the experience of life easy. People who argue that it should be of all men the most unpractical. There is a grave danger lest we should be blind to the lessons of history. The welfare of a nation is not necessarily bound up with the mitigation of immediate suffering. In times of stress and difficulty we may learn a great deal from what the Bible has to tell us about the sorrows of Israel in Egypt. What in the history of God's people is the meaning of Pharaoh? St. Paul, slightly paraphrasing the text of the Old Testament, gives the answer. The words he cites were addressed to Rameses II., the Pharaoh of the Exodus, whose cruel, hard, supercilious features look down upon us to-day from the walls of the British Museum. 'For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might shew thee my power.' But how can this be? If you can only crush a serpent's head by allowing it to bruise your heel, surely this is something less than omnipotence.

Most of the difficulties that beset men's minds with regard to God arise out of constructing Him in their own image before they will consent to seek Him in His actual working. The provincial free-thinker constructs an enlarged portrait of himself, and has then no difficulty in proving that such a personality does not exist. When the day comes that we shall know as we are known, shall we not be amazed at our own views of God, at what seemed to us to be the meaning of omnipotence, at what we thought were the necessities of a boundless love? We ought to bring the same frame of mind to the study of the ways of God as that in which we approach all other branches of knowledge. When we are engaged in the pursuit of positive science, it is not the essential nature of the facts that we examine. What they are in themselves is a mystery that eludes our method of inquiry. What we do wish to learn is the best means of acting upon

them. In other words, it is the destiny and not the origin of the universe which is the proper subject of human investigation. If God be Life—conscious, purposeful, personal Life—how do I know what obstacles He may not have had to encounter in the earlier stages of His creative activity? How do I know that self-realization in matter may not have encompassed Him with limitations not altogether unlike those which, as experience shows, have been imposed upon ourselves? How do I know that a universe could have been summoned into existence in which conflict with evil was not the essential condition of the establishment of the Kingdom of God?

Of the answer to these questions we know nothing. For all minds alike clouds and darkness surround the origin of things. It is not in the annihilation of difficulty, but in the bending of difficulty to the accomplishment of His victorious Will do we see the salvation of God.

The Bible is the record of God's victorious working amid the actual conditions of the world's development. The universe is God's great opportunity, as it is ours. Ask those emancipated Israelites whether they would be without one hour of that harsh captivity. Ask Miriam and her jubilant dancers whether they do not understand the place of Pharaoh in the purposes of God. Amid the clash of the timbrels the answer comes: 'Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.'

We can understand God's triumph in history, because it is a human victory. 'In all their affliction he was afflicted,' cried the great prophet of the Exile, 'and the angel of His presence saved them.' It is when, sharing our risks and bearing our sorrows, He becomes our Redeemer, that we become aware of the mighty fact that God is our Father. What is the spiritual significance of the Temptation of Jesus Christ but this? It clinches and brings to a supreme issue what has been suggested all down the pages of revelation. Our God is a human God. When Jesus is tempted to make stones bread, or perhaps to doubt His own prerogative of Deity, we miss the whole force of the evil suggestion if we set in sharp contrast the Godhead and the Manhood of the Saviour. We think of God as one to whom it would be quite natural to make stones bread, and we think of the kingdoms of this world as belonging to the Almighty without any effort on His part to win them. But surely there is something extraordinarily mechanical and unreal about the taking of the Manhood unto God,

if it is only thus that we can represent it to ourselves. To separate the Godhead of Christ from His Manhood is a task as impossible as it is unnecessary. The earthly story which culminated in the Cross is the last and fullest exposition of the Humanity of God. If we are made in God's image, then God is like us. Our conception of His power must never make us think of Him as some superior genie, who builds enchanted palaces. God has His difficulties. That is how He is ever represented in the Bible, and no consideration of the mystery that surrounds His existence should rob us of the wondrous picture of a personal, living God. If 'men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things,' can we not understand how this process may correspond to something in the very heart of God? It is of the very essence of personal life to be lifted on the waves of difficulty to the accomplishment of its purposes. Difficulty is the means of salvation. For us as we encounter the storms of life, what gives us courage—a man's courage—with which to grapple the tempest is the Presence in the boat.

The difficulties of God are consummated on

Calvary. Men have always found the Cross a cause of offence. That God should die, that the last great obstacle to the development of their own lives should reappear in the history of God, seems to them scandalous indeed. They imagine that somehow we should be able to accept the declaration that God is love, that He forgives iniquity and sin, though the declaration had no relation whatever to the fact of Golgotha. Tell us the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and we want nothing further than that touching story to make us arise and go to our Father.

But we cannot separate the story from Him who told it. Love has not proved itself to the uttermost till it has broken every barrier down. In the world as we know it love must encounter dangers, it must wrestle with death, if it is to reach the fulness of its glorious perfection. O Cross, O Tree of suffering and of glory, this is the word which the Lord hath spoken of thee: 'For this very purpose did I raise them up, that I might shew in thee the power of my prevailing love.'¹

¹ J. G. Simpson, *Great Ideas of Religion*, 103.

Recent Foreign Theology.

Christianity in China.

IN the earlier volumes of his *History of Evangelical Missions* Dr. Richter has dealt respectively with India, Islam, and Africa. With the publication of vol. iv. on 'China,'¹ his great task is completed. He has laid all Protestant churches under great obligation alike by his extensive researches spread over many years, and by his careful sifting and skilful arranging of the immense mass of material. In spite of the difficulty of writing about China in these days of kaleidoscopic changes, the time is held to be opportune for the publication of this volume, inasmuch as the Shanghai Conference (1922) marks the beginning of a new era in the history of Chinese missions. It is estimated that there are three-quarters of a million of Protestant Christians in China, and that, out of eight, one is a member or adherent of some continental church, three are attached to British, and four to American churches.

¹ *Allgemeine Evangelische Missionsgeschichte*, Band iv. 'Das Werden der christlichen Kirche in China.' Von Professor D. Julius Richter (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann; Seiten xvi, 584. M.25).

A chapter is devoted to Jesuit missions (1583-1773), and another to the beginnings of Evangelical missions (1807-1840), full justice being done to the 'distinguished personality' and literary activity of Robert Morrison. The work in the five Treaty ports (1840-1860) is sympathetically described, and there are dissertations on the Opium War, the Taiping Rebellion, etc. Subsequent history is divided under the following headings: from the Peace of Peking to the Boxer Rebellion, from the Boxer Rebellion to the Revolution, and the Republican Era. There are chapters on Medical Missions, Work amongst Women, Bible Translations, and Persecutions. Deep regret is expressed at the withdrawal of the China Inland Mission (1926) from the National Christian Council. A noteworthy feature of this work, greatly increasing its value, is that 200 pages are given to detailed histories of the missions classified geographically. For example, under such headings as Canton and the Hinterland, Shantung, Hunan, etc., a summary is given of the work of the various societies in each place and of their present condition.

Dr. Richter's encyclopædic history will be a standard work of reference for all the churches.