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Oates still inspires us, but the brave soul which thus expressed itself in death is gone for ever. It may be so, but it is not wildly irrational to doubt it. In science, in art, in ethics, the mind is busy with values that are felt to be eternal, and the mind that thus traffics with eternity is not lightly to be dismissed as the child of time.

Modern science cannot carry us very far in the discussion of this tremendous theme, but its evidence

is certainly not uniformly on the side of the denial of immortality. But, as Mr. Robertson rightly observed, the problem of immortality is part of the larger problem of Theism, and Theists would do well to take to heart two sentences from Benjamin Jowett. 'Some persons will say no more than that they trust in God and that they leave all to Him. It is a great part of true religion not to pretend to know more than we do.'

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Who is Out of Tune?

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

'Their ears are dull of hearing.'—Mt 13¹⁵.

IN an old book by an old man who loved old things and wrote about them in Old England three hundred years ago, there is this story :

'Dr. Tye was a peevish and humoursome (touchy) man, especially in his latter days, and sometimes playing on ye organ in ye chapel of Queen Elizabeth, which contained much music but little delight to the ear, she would send ye verger to him to tell him he played out of tune ; whereupon he sent word yt *her eares were out of tune.*'

Who was Christopher Tye? He was choir-master of Ely Cathedral, and afterwards vicar of a country parish in the days of Queen Elizabeth. We are told that 'he was a doctor of music, not skilful at preaching.'

Well, one can't be skilful at everything, and perhaps he did a better thing when he composed his music than when he wrote his not very 'skilful' sermons : for very few sermons live for four hundred years, but we have been singing the tunes of Christopher Tye for four centuries, and the Christian Church will go on singing them for many a day yet. He wrote the tune called 'Southwark.' Look it up, and next time you sing it, think of the plucky old gentleman who dared to tell the truth to Queen Elizabeth.

It was very bold of him to tell her so bluntly that 'her eares were out of tune,' and he ran a good risk of having his own 'eares' boxed by that very masterful lady ; but it was good advice, all the same, both for her and for us.

We often think people and things are out of

tune and all wrong, when it is our own ears, or our own tempers, or our own souls, that are out of tune.

Take music itself. We are accustomed to certain sorts of music and certain sorts of tunes, and when anything new is given to us, we are too ready to say, 'It isn't music. There's no tune in it.' We may be right, but it is worth while thinking whether perhaps we are wrong. Maybe our ears are not in tune and we are missing something by not trying to tune them to the new music. People have said such things about the greatest music, and have lived to find out that they were wrong. In Paris at first they hissed the great music of Tannhäuser ! Now we wonder how any one could have been so foolish. Yet we do the same thing.

One who writes about music, a 'musical critic,' told recently how he heard the music of a Russian composer, and went away saying, 'That is not music.' Then he began to wonder if the fault was not in his own ears. So he had all the music of Scriabine—that was the composer—played over and over to him for a fortnight, and then after a while for another fortnight, and at the end he said, 'This man is a great composer. This is great music.' He had got his ears in tune.

It matters a great deal when we miss what is good in music because our ears are out of tune ; but it matters a very great deal more when we miss what is good in people because *our temper is out of tune.*

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens shows us Mrs. Gummidge. She was always miserable and made everybody else miserable. She lived with the kindest of folk, but she said, 'I'm a lone, lorn cretur and things is contrairy with me.' One day she made the great discovery that the 'contrairiness' was not in 'things,' but in herself : her ears were out of tune. Then she became, according to

Mr. Peggotty, 'the willingest, the trest, the honestest helping woman that ever drewed the breath of life.'

There are many Mrs. Gummidges in this world. There are people who come to church and say that the people are stiff and cold. 'Nobody speaks to them.' They might think whether it isn't their own fault. To find friends one must be friendly. One's temper and manner must be tuned to friendship.

It matters most of all when *one's soul is out of tune with God*: when His commandments, His worship, His word have no attraction for us. To say, 'I don't like going to church,' doesn't end the matter. Are God's words wrong, or are your ears at fault? What about trying, taking pains to tune the ears of your soul, so that when His word is read you will say, 'That is great music.' That is what a man did long ago, who wrote in a psalm, 'Thy statutes are my songs as I wander through the world.' If the commandments that set him singing set you sighing, there is something wrong with you.

It takes patience and it takes pains, but it is worth while. How foolish it would be to have a splendid piano and not have it tuned regularly! It goes flat. It gives pain and not pleasure. It spoils the finest music.

And you have a soul meant to catch and give out the music of God's love and God's laws, its keys meant to answer truly to His touch, its chords to vibrate to His voice. How often must He be disappointed, for some notes are stiff, and some are dumb, and some are false because it hasn't been kept in tune.

When God calls us to worship, He is saying, 'Come My children, let Me tune your soul, your mind, to My truth, your will to My commandments, your heart to My love, so that no longer will you grumble and complain that things are out of tune with you, but all your life will be "one grand, sweet song."'

A Rule of Life.

BY THE REVEREND R. STRONG, M.A., B.LITT.,
LEEDS.

'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.'—Ps 37⁴.

Very often this year you will be hearing of John Bunyan, and, it may be, you will read again his thrilling story of Christian's adventure. Have you ever seen Bunyan's Rules of Life? There are six of them, and all are valuable, but the one I

have now in mind reads like this: 'Make provision beforehand that when things present themselves thou mayest come up to a good performance.' That is Rule 4, and I think it is worth memorizing.

Of course, that is really what every bit of life means—getting ready for some new kind of service. At school you are trying to gain fitness of body and alertness of mind, because although nobody knows what sort of duties are awaiting you in the future, everybody knows that these are two of the big assets which will help you to do them in the best possible style. Duties may arise quickly, and sometimes when you are expecting them the least, but the preparation takes a long time, and indeed is never finished. Lord Roberts used to say that a soldier's life is ten per cent. fighting and ninety per cent. preparation, and as everybody is a soldier in some degree, it is worth while to make a good deal of the preparation, to see that it is on the right lines. The wise folk are those who have listened to wise guidance and have been prepared for the right things, those which are almost certain to happen. I expect you remember that funny story written by Lewis Carroll about The White Knight. This silly man prepared himself against all sorts of difficulties that didn't happen and were never likely to happen, but he quite forgot to do the one thing that was expected of a Knight—he never learned to ride. He carried mouse-traps because he thought he might need them; he protected the horse's ankles against possible sharks, but he had never mastered the great art of staying on the horse's back instead of tumbling off. We may laugh at him, as Lewis Carroll meant that we should, but no doubt he had seen a fair number of White Knights, and I have no doubt you will before you have finished your time. Make up your mind not to be one. In that story the Great Teacher once told about a chance of service coming to three men at the same time, one man found his chance of doing a fine bit of work, not only because he had the heart to do it, but also because he knew what to do and was able to do it at once as the occasion demanded. I expect that Good Samaritan had prepared himself long before to render this sort of service, or he would never have been so efficient in dealing with those wounds as he was. I remember how Sir James Cantlie in his ambulance lectures used to say that everybody who wanted to be any good at rendering First Aid in times of accidents should read regularly the story of the Good Samaritan, and decide to fit themselves by every way they knew, so that in times of special need they would know what to do and be able to do it at once. When

real difficulties arise we may have to make up our minds very quickly, and the mind that is kept in training all the time will be able to do this with success. John Bunyan's phrase about things 'presenting themselves' is one that we know is true. It is quite as true in your sports as it will be found later on, in things that are not sports at all. The man you want in your team, and let us hope the man you want to be, is that first-rate player whose mind is all alive with interest in the game, and with passion for his side. He has kept in training, learned to know his place and his duty, so that in the great game, when the unexpected opening occurs, his brain tells his muscles at once what to do, the opportunity is grasped and not thrown away. Those who have not missed the chances of preparation are those who really enjoy life, and are always getting some new thrill out of it. They are keen on every new chance of the possible 'good performance.'

The great thing in our preparation for life is to hear our Captain saying, 'Learn of Me.' In your team you try to enter into your captain's mind so that you forget all about being Jones, or Smith, or Robinson, you all become one body working out a great purpose. It is always worth while to listen to the great workers, especially if they are willing to help us to understand their secrets. Well, one of the greatest workers in the world said about himself that he could stand up to anything because he had learned to trust the Strengthener. 'I can do all things,' he said, 'through Christ which strengtheneth me.' The good performance will never be that in which we have simply tried to please ourselves; it will be something both jollier and wiser than that—for we shall have tried and by His help succeeded—to do His will, which is the finest achievement that any of us can ever hope to realize. Our preparation to learn His mind can begin now.

The Christian Year.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Clairvoyance.

'It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.'—Ph 2¹³.

Many people feel that they have not a sufficiently vivid sense of the nearness and power of God. To them this is a matter of deep concern. They would gladly be conscious of the constraint upon their wills of some power other than their own. Their religious doubt does not arise from their lack of

conviction of the existence of God, but from their lack of consciousness that God has any direct action upon their heart and life. They look around upon others and say to themselves, 'In what way am I different from those who do not fear God, except that I fear Him?' They pray that their wills may be in tune with the Infinite, but are inwardly conscious of fluctuations of desire and waywardness of purpose. They set their hands sometimes to tasks which are dictated by the love of the right and would fain believe and hope that some inflowing Divine power would come to their aid. But they can discern the incoming of no fresh strength to hasten the flow of that mingled strength and weakness they have long recognized as their own. They would like to believe with St. Paul, 'It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.'

To such there are two simple things which may be said:

1. The first is that we should always look for God in the ordinary rather than in the extraordinary. Imaginative writers have often tried to picture primitive man looking out with fresh eyes upon the wonderful works of God, filled with a sense of awe concerning those things which to us seem to have become too familiar to attract our attention. Milton made use of this thought in *Paradise Lost*, but it is not a picture which seems true to the facts as we slowly discover them. The probability is that primitive man took the world for granted and had not his attention stimulated by those wonderful works of God which are infallible in their operation. At least this is so with primitive man as we find him to-day.

Professor Ernest Scott in *The Spirit in the New Testament* points out that men have always believed in spiritual aid, but in early days, even as the Bible reveals them to us, there was not much ethical content in their idea of God's operation upon men. They thought that God sometimes came upon man with exceeding strength. There are many passages in the Old Testament, such as 'The spirit of the Lord came upon Samson,' or 'The spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.' Literally it is rather, 'The spirit of the Lord leapt upon' such an one. The fact is that, when men did extraordinary things and were suddenly lifted above the level of their fellows, it was thought they had been possessed with a Divine spirit. Indeed not only in Bible times, but in many countries to this day, madness is considered a manifestation of spiritual power.

It is not until we come to the great prophets that we find them separating themselves from these

crude notions of God's action upon man, and teaching rather that God is the guardian of the world's order, and that true inspiration lies in the perception and interpretation of the infallible order of God. It is only slowly we have come to see that the really wonderful things are the things which are always happening, and unless we can find God in the ordinary, we are restricting our hope of finding Him to a very narrow segment of life.

So we must look for God in ordinary things. We must not lose sight of the thought of God's unobtrusiveness. We talk about feeling the nearness of God. What do we mean? He is the infinite God who is everywhere. Would we have His presence so enveloping that it smothered us? We talk about the silence of God. What do we mean? Would we hear the voice of the great God, Master of the flaming heavens and the far-flung stars? Would we hear a voice that might be commensurate with His greatness—and be deafened by it? We talk about wanting to see the power of God. Would we have so great a God put forth His strength as though He exerted it to persuade us, and be crushed by it? Nay. He is very courteous; He is exquisitely delicate in His dealings with men.

If religion only taught us to expect the irruption of God into the ordered processes of life it might well be a curse to us. It is better to see God in the sunrise than in the earthquake.

Heaven above is softer blue,
 Earth around a deeper green :
 Something lives in every hue
 Faithless eyes have never seen.
 Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
 Flowers with richer beauties shine,
 Since I know, as now I know,
 I am His, and He is mine.

2. The second thing is that, if we would seek God in the common things, we must not rest there. God is not the God of commonplaces, even though His commonplaces be as mysterious as the rising and the setting of the sun or the flaming of the stars. Let us seek through the common things for spiritual realities. God is a Spirit. Out of Spirit everything came, back to Spirit all will eventually go. Materialism has about given up the attempt to explain the universe by merely material things. Material things cannot account for the things of the mind and the spirit. Material things are the creation of the Spirit God. He uses them as His mirrors, through which he may make clear eternal truths.

There is a great piece of writing of Horace Bushnell's in which he tells the story of his own struggle with doubt. He asks himself this question : 'Is there no truth that I believe? Yes, there is a distinction of right and wrong that I have never doubted, and I see not how I can. . . . Have I taken the principle of right for my law? I have done right things, but have I ever thrown my life out on the principle to become all that it requires of me? No, I have not. Here, then, is something for me to do. Here will I begin. If there is a God, He is a right God. . . . If I have lost Him in wrong, perhaps I shall find Him in right.'

He goes on to tell us how he prayed to this God, so dimly felt and seen, asking for help that he might begin a right life, and then he says : 'As I have prayed I choose that life henceforth to be my unalterable, eternal endeavour. I rose from my knees; the whole sky was luminous about me. It was the morning of a new eternity. After this all doubt about God's reality was gone, for I had found Him. A Being so profoundly felt must inevitably be !'

We should not often doubt the reality of God if we were really seeking spiritual things. Along that line the quest is wondrously satisfying. A great many of our religious difficulties arise from the fact that our plans are so often overthrown, our wishes so often thwarted. Prosperity turns to adversity, and wrong seems to triumph over right. These are the ordinary problems of the religious mind, but if it is spiritual truth we are seeking after, if character is the great objective of our quest, these are the things that ought to happen. There surely is a place in the world for that inscrutable Providence which again and again overturns our plans, thwarts our purposes, and brings us nearer to the deep realities of life.

If we would look at life rightly, we should regard it as a spiritual thing. Whatever we take beyond the veil, it is obvious we can take nothing unless it is essentially spiritual. We cannot take our goods and chattels, we cannot take our material substance. If life has a Divine meaning at all, its ultimate meaning is a spiritual one. We are not really growing in the deepest sense unless we are becoming more and more superior to the material things, and more and more under the sway of the spiritual.

Let us go to the common things; kneel beside a common bush, look down upon a blade of grass, lift up our face in the sunlight and say, 'It is God!' The world is full of God. Then seek for the spiritual reality which indwells all these things and is their soul. Love the ordinary, but love God

in the ordinary, and we will not long and not seriously doubt that 'it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.'¹

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NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

A Very Disquieting Passage of Holy Scripture.

'The word of the Lord came again to me, saying, Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.'—Ezk 14¹²⁻¹⁴.

It is certainly the fact that if the Bible were to be written to-day, or even if it were to be collected to-day, it would not be written and it would not be collected as we have it. People simply would not bear its persistent gravity. They would eliminate the thunders of Sinai, the invective of Isaiah and of Jeremiah, and the terrible indictments of the universe which we have in Job and in some of the Psalms. We should say, as so many say, 'Why talk about these things? Have we not enough sorrows? Is life not a sad enough thing without being reminded of its sadness and its difficulty when we come here to worship God?'

And, once again, there is something in all that, if the prevailing impression left by an hour of worship is that life is difficult rather than that God is good.

Here, for example, is a chapter in Ezekiel, and the text chosen embodies the spirit of the entire chapter.

It is possible, says this uncomfortable prophet of God, for a nation to be living in the midst of what their forefathers would have supposed to be signs of God's wrath, hungry and angry and desolate, and yet for that nation to be so insensible that, if even Noah and Daniel and Job, who lived in different centuries, were all to come together and live in that one century and amongst that people, and were each of the three to put his experience at the disposal of that people, those three might do themselves good by dealing with the situation, but they would do nothing to relieve the situation itself; that, indeed, if those three had children of their own, they would have no control in such a time over even those children. Their sons and daughters

would go their way though their fathers were preaching in the streets.

That is all very serious, and it conflicts with a great deal which we have always believed, with a great deal also which we must go on continuing to believe, in spite of Ezekiel, if need be. But there we have the fairness of the Bible. It says anything can happen, the worst and the best; may happen temporarily, we mean; the Bible has no doubt at all as to what is ultimately going to happen. Everything that opposes itself to the Holy Will of God is going to be overturned. God is going to be supreme in a world upon which He has turned His eyes. But short of that, and on the way towards that, all sorts of things, according to the Bible, may happen; and this is one of the things: an age may become insensate, stupid, and incompetent towards the finer things. It may for the time being trample truth in the dust and crucify the Son of God afresh. A time may come in the life of a nation and in the history of the world, and the Bible prepares us for its recurring from time to time, when truth will not get a hearing, and when there is simply nothing left even to God but to allow certain things to mature and move on to their own predestined catastrophe, and out of that catastrophe, and in the midst of the very boulders caused by that earthquake, the grace of the true life may reappear, like flowers and ferns amongst vast ruins.

This is by no means the one thing that the Bible has to say. There is a moving passage in Scripture where Abraham is interceding with God for the Cities of the Plain, and God there promises Abraham that if he can produce ten good men the cities will be spared. *There* God promised in effect that, given ten good men, however bad their surroundings, the goodness in the men would master the badness in their surroundings.

This, of course, was the faith of our Blessed Lord. It was His own faith, and it is the faith which He lays upon us as our very task in life, that good is stronger than evil, that good has deeper roots and is the thing which will survive.

This gives us a new fresh way of conceiving our function as believers in our own particular age. If it is true, as Ezekiel declared it was true, that an age might sink into such a state of perverted knowledge and secularity and low ambitions that it had no power even to recognize the voice of God, so that a good man in it might fling himself against it in vain, except that he would save his own soul; if that is possible, we must see to it that here in the Church of Christ *we* maintain a serious and attentive

¹ F. W. Norwood, *The Gospel of the Larger World*, 190.

mood. *Our* ear must be at the receiver when God is speaking at the other end of the wire.

And more than that : we are here not to stand apart from the world and to let it sink, not to gather our robes about us and pick our steps daintily, avoiding rough contacts. We are here to be that element in secular society without which, as our Lord said, secular society, in pursuit of its own low aims, passes inevitably to corruption and decay.

In our Lord's own day there was a great religious community called the Essenes, who practised a beautiful but too-dainty type of holiness. Separated from the haunts of men, they lived in lonely places, clad in white robes, spending the day in prayers and praises, labouring to secure from the face of Nature only the bare necessities for life. There they were, in great numbers, living in the same small country as our Lord lived in for three years. The New Testament never once refers to them ! The New Testament's silence is the New Testament's way of condemning all such aloofness.

'Be not ye conformed to the world, but overcome the evil with the good.' It was face to face with this fatal tendency which man cannot but obey, rushing headlong upon disasters which in the long run are inevitable to a world in which the thought of God has come to be without effect ; it was face to face with this fatal tendency that our Lord gave us, who take the interpretation of life and the motive for life and the spirit for life from Him, our commission when He said, 'Ye are the salt of the earth,' adding, with a flash of scorn against those who still name the name of Christ, repudiating their calling, 'if the salt have lost his savour, it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be trodden under foot of men.'¹

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TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Inner Life of Private Prayer.

'Continue in prayer.'—Col 4².

We have been told that the great discovery of our time was the recovery of the corporate ideal ; to be a Christian was simply to be a Churchman ; that the Christian had no right to travel alone to the celestial city. We have been told that far too much has been thought about saving our own souls ; that the less we think about our own salvation the better, and so on. It seems as if three things were combined to discredit the inner life, the solitary devotion and meditation of the Christian. One

¹ J. A. Hutton, *The Victory over Victory*, 117.

was the corporate idea, *esprit de corps* in general. Another was the acute secularizing of the hopes of humanity leading to an actual evanescence of the hopes of immortality and the corresponding fear of eternal perdition. To this we may add the absorbing complexity of modern life making meditation and recollection difficult.

Now, if we read the Gospels and consider what the religion of our Blessed Lord Himself was, and what He tells us about the way in which we ought to live, we shall be struck by these facts, that the chief characteristics of His teaching were : First, the law of inwardness. Secondly, the need for renunciation. And thirdly, the law of love. Consider some of the key texts like that wonderful text—'Not that which entereth into the mouth defileth the man, but that which cometh out of the heart of man, that alone defiles a man's character.' And, of course, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' And consider the whole tenor of His own teaching, of His own practice. It is always private prayer that He lays stress upon. If there is any danger that preoccupation with our own inner life may make us selfish, then other exhortations come to the rescue. He that wishes to save his soul, as it is in the Greek, shall lose it.

The inner life of the Christian, that is, private prayer, is the most important side of the religious life. There is no fear of making people self-centred : rather, we must be our own centre ; the only mischief is when we become our own circumference as well. After all, our own characters are the little bit of garden which God has given us to till ; they are the little bit of battle-line which He has ordered us to defend. Our religion is and always has been and must be the background which alone gives value and meaning to all that happens in this world ; and so soon as we forget that we really cease to be in the truest sense Christian.

Now prayer has been defined—the definition is generally ascribed to St. Thomas Aquinas, but is as old as St. Basil—as the elevation of the mind to God, a much wider thing than petition. 'Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.' 'Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk ; for I lift up my soul unto thee.' It is admitted by almost all writers on the subject that prayer is the central act of religion. Here are a few sentences collected from Friedrich von Hügel's great work on *Prayer*, and from other sources :

'Prayer is in religion what thought is in philosophy. The religious sense prays as the thought organ thinks.'

'Take prayer out of the world, and you have severed the bond between man and God, and made the tongue of the child dumb to its father.'

'Where there is no prayer from the heart there is no religion.'

'Prayer is the only adequate form of faith.'

'Prayer is, properly speaking, the activity of religion.'

'Normal prayer is normal religion.'

And Professor Romanes, a well-known man of science, who for many years lost his faith, much to his own grief and misery, and afterwards recovered it; this is what he writes when he found he could no longer pray: 'forasmuch as I am far from being able to agree with those who affirm that the twilight doctrine of the new faith is a desirable substitute for the waning splendour of the old, I am not ashamed to confess that with this virtual negation of God the universe to me has lost its soul of loveliness; and although from henceforth the precept of "work while it is day" will doubtless but gain an intensified force from the terribly intensified meaning of the words that the "night cometh when no man can work," yet when at times I think, as think at times I must, of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as now I find it, at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is susceptible.'

Our Lord's precepts about prayer lead us to think that prayers ought to be short and frequent, and that they ought not to consist of what He calls vain repetition. Yet we find that He Himself used sometimes to spend the whole night in prayer. We hear that He went to the top of a mountain in order to get complete solitude, and also to have the inspiration of seeing the starry sky and the sunrise—and that He spent the whole night in prayer. Another time He rose up a great while before day and went into a solitary place and there prayed. We must allow for the great differences of temperament in that way. There are some people who are naturally endowed with a gift for devotion, and they are able to spend a long time in prayer and meditation which would be impossible for most of us. Those who have that gift may regard it as a gift from God; only let them not think that they are necessarily more accepted by God because they have that gift. There are many people who are not and never could be mystics, who go their way quietly, doing their duty, helping their fellow-men, who may be quite as acceptable in God's sight

as those who have what is sometimes considered the saintly temperament.

Perhaps the first thing we ought to aim at in prayer is the acquisition of self-knowledge—the old proverb, Know thyself. How many of us, as Matthew Arnold said of the English in general, never once possess our souls before we die, and how little we know of our own character! We see this indolence in other people, and we sometimes smile at their false estimates of themselves; but perhaps we ourselves seldom even turn our eyes on the undiscovered country within us; and when we really pray, it comes over us that we are campaigning without really knowing the ground; how we are to advance; what we are to contend against. We know certainly one or two prominent faults which perhaps in our youth made us very uneasy. But how often it happens that in middle life a man or woman takes himself or herself for better or worse, no longer strives seriously against those habits which have become second nature. In some ways middle life is the most dangerous period, it brings with it such great temptations to self-satisfaction, to acquiescence with our own characters as they are, which practically amounts very often to keeping a secret account open with the world, the flesh, and the devil, indulging them up to a certain point now that we feel fairly safe that they will not run away with us altogether. Are we irritable, or stingy, or lazy? Well, we were made so, and we have, we think, other good qualities to make up. But do not we also hear sometimes ghostly footfalls of unknown spiritual enemies? Are there no unexpected temptations, no sudden things that seem to pull us back without our expecting it. Sometimes it seems to me we are actually assailed by what we can only call temptations of the devil—temptations which seem to come to us not from the lower side of our own character but from outside.

Again, when we think of our past lives we recognize certain capacities for good and for evil—certain capacities for good which may not have been properly used. We recognize turning-points in our lives and merciful escapes when we were, perhaps, rather near the edge of the precipice. We recognize the effect on our characters of sudden changes, good and evil fortune, and changes in our circumstances such as come through the change of home, or profession, or of marriage; and the deadening effect of routine, of habit, must come very strongly over us. Even our attempts at self-knowledge often play us false. Self-analysis does not always lead to self-knowledge. Self-knowledge

is moral rather than intellectual. And sometimes we may help ourselves by finding out what others think of us. Or again, books of devotion and biographies many people find very helpful—tracing the career of some good and great man or woman, and contrasting them with ourselves. But the best help of all is to think about the life of Christ—the life of Christ as it is described in the Gospels. But remember also this—that Christ has not left the earth; He is not far from every one of us. He by His Holy Spirit, who is really only Himself in another form, calls all things to our remembrance whatever He said upon earth. We know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And the Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God.¹

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Second Watch.

‘Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching. . . . And if he shall come in the second watch . . . and find them so, blessed are those servants.’—Lk 12³⁷.

Twice over Jesus repeats the phrase, ‘Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching. . . . And if he shall come in the second watch and find them so, blessed are those servants.’ It is as though this spirit of persistent fidelity and self-denial were singled out as exceptionally rare. Jesus had just told the disciples, ‘Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.’ If their minds and hearts were really in their work, he continues, they would be setting their Lord’s interests above their own; even in the dead of night, when it was hardest to keep awake, with no outward stimulus, with little or nothing to remind them of their duty to Him, they would be showing their devotion by behaving as those who lived for more than could be seen, and who were thinking constantly and chiefly of what their Lord had a right to expect from them.

1. The primitive Christians were tempted by their belief in the near advent of Jesus, either to be excited and feverish, as if the crisis were imminent, or to grow presumptuous and careless, as if it were a remote contingency which justified them meanwhile in taking things easy. These words of Jesus are addressed to the latter danger. ‘The sense of security,’ George Eliot once wrote,

¹ W. R. Inge, in *The Christian World Pulpit*, cxliii. 205.

‘springs from habit rather than from conviction, and for this reason it often subsists after such a change in the conditions as might have been expected to suggest alarm. The lapse of time during which a given event has not happened, is, in this logic of habit, constantly alleged as a reason why the event should never happen, even when the lapse of time is precisely the added condition which makes the event imminent.’ For ourselves, though the form of this duty of watchfulness has altered, the spirit of it remains. The religious significance of that ardent belief in the second coming of Jesus which controlled the Early Church lay in the fact that it expressed vividly the entire dependence of the Christian situation upon the person and will of Jesus Christ.

We have no right to act or think as if we were independent, or as if we could afford to take our cue from natural impulses or our conventional environment. Then, as now, the plausible temptation was to estimate life by appearances. In every age people can forecast, as they think, what is likely to happen within certain limits; from observation and experience they consider themselves pretty good judges of how things will go, and in what way the moral processes of life will be worked out in their own case. To some extent this is reasonable enough. There are general lines of providence which only the dull and stupid can miss; the will of God is manifested repeatedly to the sagacity and insight of those who have eyes to see. But this kind of foresight may readily degenerate into moral presumption, and it does so whenever we slip into the habit of reasoning that life can be gauged beforehand with such accuracy as to relieve us at certain periods from the sense of entire dependence upon the will of God. Had we some calendar of providence, by means of which we could reckon beforehand when we would require to be on our guard, and when no demand would be made, it would weaken our sense of dependence upon the living God. But we live under a discipline of the indefinite. Who can fail to note on almost every other page of history and experience a warning against false security? It is the peril of the second watch, when we are apt to relax our vigilance because we expect nothing to happen and because it is particularly difficult to cherish any other kind of expectation.

2. Something does happen, in many cases. It may take the form of *temptation*, for example. The power of temptation depends largely on the condition in which it finds us. Any one who has been slackening the practice of prayer, or accustoming

himself to insidious habits of self-indulgence and inconsistency, is apt to fail at the critical moment, and his failure reaches back to previous laxity in his personal religion. Horace Walpole notes that during the American revolution the citizens of Boston raised a special army of sixteen thousand men, who were called 'minute-men,' because they were to be ready for active service at a moment's notice. The safety of our religious character is in being 'minute-men,' who cannot be surprised by any sudden onset of temptation.

It is the same with *opportunities*. They do not always announce themselves beforehand. They may surprise us during the second watch, and nothing is more easy than to miss them by being unknit and loose and careless. It is only by maintaining a temper of keenness and self-denial and prayer during this second watch that men and women can equip themselves for any opportunity that may arrive sooner or later.

The crisis always brings an inspiration of its own. Such moments stimulate the mental and the moral powers of any man who faces their demand. But only if he has already been careful to exercise that 'constant influence' of an alert, conscientious spirit upon the unromantic tasks of ordinary life. It is vain to count upon the 'sudden brightness,' as if that would invest any one in a given emergency. The heightening of the mind, the clarifying of the judgment, the reinforcement of the will, which frequently mark a man's experience at some crucial point, are simply the result and the reward of undeviating faithfulness during the common days beforehand.

3. Life has many phases which correspond to the second watch of the night, when it is particularly difficult to maintain personal religion, or at least when there is less help than usual in our environment against the inertia which threatens to overpower the spiritual sense. Personal religion never can afford to depend very much upon the aid of circumstances or the tone of contemporary life, but at times there is hardly anything to encourage it, or to whet the sense of our relation to the unseen Lord. Undisturbed prosperity, a period of moral reaction, or uncongenial surroundings, may deaden almost every incentive to the practice of the spiritual life, till the atmosphere becomes heavy and drowsy. Though it is always a temptation to take life into our own hands, there are special periods when the feeling of responsibility to God perceptibly wanes, and when we imagine it is not only possible but legitimate to shrink from hardship and to attend to our personal tasks and ambitions as if these

were of primary importance. Christ recalls us from such errors to that consciousness of a bond which stamps the Christian vocation. There is an old saying of Christ, which was current in the Early Church, to this effect: 'In whatsoever things I find you, by these will I judge you.' The Lord is repeatedly coming to men and judging them thus. Men and women are found by the opportunities of the moral life, and where they are found is their judgment. Their seriousness or their carelessness, their obedience or their self-will, their temper of devotion to the Lord's interests, or their self-indulgence, that is what stamps their quality. The significance of such critical moments lies not so much in themselves—they are often comparatively obscure or even trivial—as in us, in the condition where God finds us.

The attitude of the Christian is not explained by the environment which accounts for the ordinary life of men. It is not always helped by its surroundings. Its meaning lies in relationship to an unseen Lord and in something that has passed between the Lord and His servants. His word must stand against the world's. The second watch is a test of our devotion to Him and to His interests, just because it bids our nature acquiesce in our surroundings. To wait for the Lord, or upon the Lord, is not difficult amid the sounds and sights of the first watch. That is a comparatively easy period, when good impressions are made and devotion is as yet an impulse. But the impulse soon gets tested, and if it is no more than a fitful impulse which has stirred the feelings but never worked itself down into the will and enabled us to break if need be with accepted views and habits, it dies down in the course of the second watch, when the initial stimulus is gone and when life is thrown back upon the sheer power of believing, by means of reverence and self-denial, in the unseen Lord.

For those who may have to stand the second watch, the word is: Let us rally our sense of being trusted by God. The meaning of our life to-day as well as yesterday lies nowhere but in our relation to Another's will. Let us light the lamps of duty, self-control, prayer, and love, and keep them burning through the dark hours of the watch.

That which I chose, I choose;
 That which I willed, I will;
 That which I once refused, I still refuse.
 That which I chose and choose
 And will is Jesus' will.¹

¹ J. Moffatt, *The Second Things of Life*, 117.