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

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

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

occurs five times, and in all five it is used of priestly duties, including that of blessing in the name of Jehovah (10⁸ 17¹² 18^{5, 7} 21⁵), and the same usage is found in connexion with both priests and Levites in the later writings and in P (Ex 30²⁰, Nu 3³¹, etc. etc.). Another duty is brought out by the second word (שמר). When the ark was brought into the house of Abinadab the men of Kirjath-Jearim 'sanctified' his son to 'keep' it. In the same way 'such an image as that of Gideon or Micah (Jg 8^{26, 27} 17^{4, 5}) was well worth stealing,' and needed a priest as guardian over it. This verb is used in P of both priests and Levites (Nu 18^{5, 7} and 3. 4; cf. 2 K 25¹⁸, Ezk 44¹⁴⁻¹⁶). A third duty of the priests in Old Israel was to give oracular answers to those who came to inquire of God (Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, p. 130). So

Abiathar came down to David with an ephod in his hand, and David through him 'inquired of Jehovah' (1 S 23^{6, 9-13, 2, 4} 14^{3, 18} R.V.m. 22¹⁰ with 21⁶ 30⁷). [In 1 S 14³ 22¹⁸ the Heb. means 'carry' or 'bear,' not 'wear,' and the ephod is clearly a small image and not the 'linen ephod' of 2¹⁸, Ex 28⁶. In 22¹⁸ 'linen' is wanting in the LXX, and we should read 'ephod-bearing men.']

This giving of oracular answers developed into the giving of 'torah,' *i.e.* teachings and decisions on moot points of law and order (Dt 33¹⁰ etc.). And, when daily sacrifices were inaugurated in national sanctuaries, of necessity the priests themselves slaughtered sacrificially.

4. Wiener's fourth contention, *viz.* that statutory sacrifices could be sacrificed only at the central sanctuary, will be discussed in Art. VI.

In the Study.

Virginitus Puerisque.

Refusing the Easy Way out.

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

'Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance.'—
He 11³⁵.

THERE is one thing written very plainly across the pages of the Bible, and that is that God is our Deliverer. The Bible is a book of deliverances. Its histories tell us how God delivered Israel from Egypt, David from Saul, the Jews from captivity, Daniel from the lions, Peter and Paul and Silas from prison. Its Psalms are prayers for deliverance, and thanksgivings because God heard those who called on Him and delivered them from all their distresses. Its prophets preach the hope of a Deliverer who should come some day; and when Jesus came at last, He said He was come to 'preach deliverance to the captives.' His very name 'Jesus' means 'Deliverer.'

Yet in one place, when the writer is exulting in the long list of those whom God had delivered, he goes on to say, 'Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance.'

What does this mean? That they refused God's way of deliverance? No! It means that they refused a way of deliverance because it was not God's way. There was a way out, an easy way, but they refused to take the easy way out.

It means that it is a fine thing to trust God to deliver you in trouble, but it is a finer thing to go on trusting Him when He doesn't deliver you; and so the Bible puts high in the list of its heroes those who refused the easy way out.

What splendid pages of history these people have written! I see the disciples brought before the very man who had put Jesus to death and who had power to put them to death. He forbids the disciples to preach about Jesus. Peter answers that they 'must obey God rather than man,' and faces the consequences boldly. The easy way was just to be quiet, but they didn't take it. I see the early Christians. They were only asked to cast a pinch of incense on the altar of the Emperor: that was the easy way. The other way was the lions and the torture and death. Why not do the easy thing and confess Christ in their hearts? It meant peace and quietness. Some did it, but many others refused deliverance and were tortured. I see George Wishart and Patrick Hamilton in Scotland. They had the same choice: to hold their tongues and live unharmed, or to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and face burning and the stake. They refused the easy way out, and were martyred at St. Andrews. I think of Cranmer and Latimer and Ridley; to all there was an easy way of escape: to deny Christ, to hold their peace, to forget their conscience; but, instead, they chose to be loyal to Christ and to conscience.

They were burned, and shot, and hanged, on the hills of Scotland, and in the market-places of England, and it thrills us to read of their courage and faithfulness. We admire them for their choice.

Now the Captain of all who choose to be true to their God and their conscience, whatever the consequences may be, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He chose the hard way though it led straight to the Cross. Peter, because he loved Jesus and couldn't bear to think of Him suffering, urged Him to take the easy way out. Jesus called Peter 'Satan' for suggesting it, and 'set his face stedfastly to go to Jerusalem.' When He was tortured upon the Cross, the people said, 'He trusted in God that He would deliver Him. Let Him deliver Him. Let the Christ come down from the Cross.' And God didn't deliver Him; He died on that Cross.

Why didn't God deliver Jesus and all these others? I don't know. Only God knows. But I know that the world's history would have been a poorer thing if He had, and that it is richer because of their brave and heroic choice. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church: the sufferings of the Covenanters put iron into the soul of Scotland; and the Cross of Christ is the salvation of the world.

Is there ever anything like this in your lives? Aren't you often tempted to take the easy way out? the shabby, cowardly, dishonourable way, because it is the easy way?

At school you have done something wrong. You are asked straight, 'Did you do it?' The master will take your word. The easy way is to say 'No,' to tell a lie and escape. No one will ever know but yourself and God. The other way is to tell the truth and take the consequences; certainly some punishment, for you have deserved it. *Take the hard way always.*

For one thing the easy way isn't really easy. No one ever took it but came, sometimes very soon, to wish he hadn't. Peter took it when he denied Christ by the fire in the High Priest's courtyard; and in a little Peter was weeping bitterly. Cranmer took it when he recanted. He found safety, but he didn't find peace, and soon we see him holding the hand that signed his recantation in the fire till it shrivelled away. The pain of that was nothing to the pain of a shamed conscience.

Take the hard way always. It is a man's way. It may bring pain; but pain will pass and shame won't. No one may know but you and God when you play the coward, but that is just two too many.

It is better to be hurt in the body than ashamed in your own soul. It is manly to bear pain, but shame takes away your manhood.

It may seem a little thing that nobody sees, but it is a far bigger thing than you think. Every time a boy or girl refuses the easy way out and takes the hard way, whatever the consequences may be, something is added to the world's golden store of heroism and high faithfulness. They have written their names in the Roll of Honour of those who 'were tortured, not accepting deliverance,' that Roll at the head of which stands the glorious name of Jesus Christ.

Anticipatory Footwork.

BY THE REVEREND J. OPIE URMSON, SOUTH SHIELDS.

'Having shod your feet with preparation.'—Eph 6¹⁵.

There is no better advice for life than the motto which the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides carry on their banners, and which Paul here gives to the Christian soldier: 'Be Prepared.'

It is impossible to read St. Paul's Epistles without thinking, not only that he liked games, but that he knew how to excel in them. He would not have referred to them so often had he not been interested in them; and he would not have been so accurate had he been merely a spectator. When he is advising the Christian warrior about getting ready for the fray, before he mentions sword, shield, or helmet, he tells him to tighten his belt and look to his feet. That is very sound advice, for the feet are all-important. We play almost every game with our feet. Football, cricket, tennis, fencing, are all played with our feet. If you think otherwise, that is probably why you do not play well. Everything depends upon anticipatory footwork; upon the feet being shod with preparation.

Watch the expert goalkeeper. The opposing forward gathers the ball, and shoots it into one corner of the goal. Like a flash the goalkeeper is there awaiting it. How did he get there? Some instinct warned him; and half a second before it came he anticipated it, and he was prepared. You have seen the batsman drive the ball, and you have cheered excitedly. You feel sure that it will be a boundary. Then you notice a fielder who seems to spring from nowhere, and there is a counter cheer as he brings off a magnificent running catch. How did he do it? His feet were shod with preparation. He had anticipated the stroke. When two men are fencing, they seek to play each other as an angler plays a fish. They tempt each

other to make a mistake in footwork. When that comes they strike, and strike at once.

When I was a boy I was told to count ten before I spoke a hasty word. It was poor counsel. When the blood is hot there is no thought of counting. Paul knew that in temptation, as in games, there is no time for thinking. As my fencing master in the old army used to say, 'Until you can fence without thinking you cannot fence at all. The attack calls out the defence.' Just as the eye shields itself when harm threatens, so the trained conscience recoils when sin attacks.

Religion is a means not of getting us off punishment, but of teaching us how to avoid mistakes. One of the glories of Jesus was that, though His enemies were always seeking to trap Him, He was always prepared. People commonly forget this. They ask, 'What would Jesus have done had He been in the circumstances in which I am involved?' The answer is that He would not have been there. Once upon a time I had a friend staying with me who was a chess expert. Every night we played chess. Every game he won. One night, however, I thought I was doing better. But I soon realized that I was losing again. So I turned the board round and said, 'What would you do if you were in my place?' 'Well,' he said, 'you cannot win.' Then he explained how, about twelve moves earlier, I had fallen into a trap which he had set. I was defeated before I knew it. So also life is a number of actions all depending upon one another. To-day's thoughts become to-morrow's desires. Desires become actions, and actions grow into habits. If you would live a pure life you must learn to think only pure thoughts. Religion does not promise that anyone can come out of difficulty with flying colours. Everything depends upon preliminary footwork.

Anticipation, both in life and in games, depends upon trained judgment. You cannot learn the art either of cricket or of life from books. You can, of course, get many hints and helps in that way, but you must go out and practise. Do not think too much about the hard knocks that you receive. Do not get discouraged because you cannot do just what you try to do. Keep on trying, and always try your utmost. Do not grow careless, for during these fits of carelessness bad habits are formed. Learn from your failures, and do not get caught the same way a second time. Bit by bit the hardest tasks grow easier, and the judgment becomes more trustworthy. You remember Paul's words: 'Herein I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.'

Yet when you have taken care you sometimes fail. What then? Own up! Do not try to prove that you are not out. If you own up there is always another chance. That is what the gospel means. 'If we confess our sins he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' That is, God will give us another start with a clean sheet. But be ready; and ask God's guidance. 'He will keep the feet of his saints, for by strength shall no man prevail.'

The Christian Year.

THE EPIPHANY.

The Faith of God.

'Thy walls are continually before me.'—Is 49¹⁴.

These words admit us to the very heart of God. It is indeed when we consider deeply words of this kind that we perceive how Jesus Christ must have been in the Godhead from all eternity. 'God is love,' said St. John, after he had seen Christ on Calvary. 'Love is an agony'—*Caritas est passio*—an agony of yearning and defeat and faith, said Origen of Alexandria. But Isaiah had the first word and anticipated them all: 'Where men see only ruins,' said he, 'God sees the finished walls.'

The words were spoken to the captive Jews in Babylon at a momentous stage in their history. Cyrus, King of Elam, had come up against Babylon with a mighty army and had occupied the great city without opposition. And, doubtless for his own reasons, and thinking nothing at all of how in doing as he did he was furthering God's purposes, Cyrus issued a decree permitting the captives of every nation who had been detained in Babylon to return to their several countries.

Nothing, therefore, stood in the way of the Jews going back to their native land. And yet, when all things were ready, they hung back. There is nothing more disheartening to men who wish to think greatly of man than to consider the miserable number of captive Jews who showed any real passion for their ancient liberty and standing. As for the great mass of these captives, they simply did not want to hear anything more about the holy city and those great days of which their fathers had told them. 'I hate luxury,' said Goethe; 'it destroys the imagination.' Fifty years of life in Babylon had carried those people a long way from their old moorings.

Some of them found themselves unable to believe that it was now really possible for them to go back,

to believe that they were now really free. Some of them were afraid (at least so they professed) of the return journey, afraid of the desert with its wild beasts, with its roving bands of robbers, with its hunger and thirst. At least they gave that as their reason for staying where they were, although we may have our doubts.

If we go on living in a trifling way, never taking ourselves seriously or looking the whole of this life of ours in the face; if we go on day after day avoiding all contact with the ultimate meaning of things, whether that be to us meanwhile a voice or a silence; the real penalty for such a way of living is the consequence of it, and that is, that we get to like it, we become unfit for anything better or different. Perhaps, therefore, the most difficult spiritual condition for any of us to fall into is that condition which comes with years and years of elaborate trifling, of busy superficiality, when we have at length lost all taste and desire for anything serious and real, all sense of that severity in things, that terror even, which, in the case of most of us, ought for good reasons to be there until it has been dealt with and honourably composed.

There were still others of the captive Jews who, though the way was clear, did not at first set out. When the prophet appealed to them to return, they replied in effect: 'Return? Return to what? To dust and ashes? What's the use now? Jerusalem is a desolation, a heap of dust and ruins!' It was to these that the prophet flung back the words which really give us God Himself—'Thy walls are continually before me!'

There was something to be said for the view taken by these last. There is always a great deal to be said for the disheartening view of any holy enterprise: only we should not say it—unless, of course, to God in prayer. The thing that makes faith faith is that it has to stand up to a great deal of difficulty. Why, faith is just the protest of something glorious and unconquerable in the soul of man against the domination of what the world calls facts. Faith, too, has its facts which it asserts are as truly there as the facts which strike our mere sense. Faith takes its really unassailable stand upon the supreme fact—the fact of God! Now that is the whole point of this text: it is the whole point of the Book of Isaiah; it is the point of the whole Bible, and of Jesus Christ, and of the true Church of God in the world. There is an immense gulf between men—there are those who begin with God, and there are the others.

Those reluctant Jews who hung back from an enterprise of faith because of the difficulties by

the way, those people who said, 'Jerusalem is now in ruins,' were forgetting that the real situation is not what we see upon the surface, but what God sees, and what He in holy and prophetic moments reveals to us in measure. The real fact about any situation or about a human soul is—what lies within it for God, what it is worth to God. And this is the work of God—to make us believe, to make us see things and see ourselves and one another as He in His infinite hopefulness sees us all. Where we see ruins, He sees the walls.

What if God were to become discouraged over us, as well He might? What if He were to turn His back upon us and let us alone? Ah, well: He does not. Now that Christ is of us, He will not. He lives by faith—yes, by faith in the Son of God who gave Himself for us all. He sees something coming. He sees man, the prodigal son, coming back and home.

In the great charity of God we are not simply what we are in our mere performances. We are also what we are in our lonely protests—in our tears and agonies and cries. We are not merely what we are in our feelings about ourselves; still less are we altogether what we may have given the world cause to consider us. We are really what we are to those who love us. We are really what we are to that holy and loving God whose face man saw for one tremendous moment in the Christ of history. Let us, therefore, go on to believe, and let us act as though we did believe, that in that same great charity of God we may through Christ's eternal intercession even yet recover the lost provinces of our souls, may yet become, both now and through the ages, all that God saw in us as possible, all that He dreamed of us when He decreed us being, and set us our task in the world of spirits.

In conclusion let us say:

1. We are to imitate the faith of God. We, also, are to see 'the walls'—God's completed purposes—ever before us. Everybody sees the ruins. It needs no great qualification to see difficulties. It is the mark of God's calling to see 'the walls.' We have nothing to do with times and seasons or with events; we have only to do with duties.

2. We cannot see 'the walls': let it be enough that God sees them, that Christ saw them. For ourselves, the proof that the walls are coming is that He has given us the instinct to build.

3. This vision is ours when our hearts are pure. There is an old legend of the Middle Ages of a pilgrim who, as he passed through dark and silent

forests, saw before him a great cathedral, even heard the solemn and happy music of it. But as often as his own heart became confused with doubt or lost its beautiful balance through the disturbance of some private sin, the vision perished, the music ceased, leaving him in the pathless forest, surrounded by the ancient darkness and natural despair. So the pure in heart see God. But let us begin to build if we would be sure of 'the walls.' In every matter into which God comes, those who merely look on see nothing.

And, above everything, let us keep in touch with the Master; in communion with that great Soul of faith and hope and love; in communion with that atmosphere of miracle and triumph which caught into a kind of glory the first apostles. For what man once saw, he may still see. The power of that vision is still there, still somewhere, if we will only seek it with our undivided will, with our undistracted confidence.¹

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

A Pagan's Pathway to Faith.

'Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.'—Mt 8¹⁰.

This is a very touching and a very illuminating story. Often Christ had to awaken faith before He could heal. Here He found a great faith waiting for Him. It is worth noting that He commended this man's faith, and that for the one reason for which faith is valuable, that it created the atmosphere in which He could work.

1. The question that naturally interests us is how this man came to have this faith. He was a Roman soldier, a pagan, an alien, and, therefore, one who was not likely to see in a Jewish peasant a world-transforming power. It would be very difficult for him, with such traditions and training as his, to appreciate Jesus; but is it not rather a startling thing that those who in His own day seemed to appreciate Jesus best were those who stood outside the religious world of Palestine—the heathen, the outcast, the prodigal? There are signs of this even in our own day. It is very interesting, very searching, to realize that some of those outside the churches have a feeling about Jesus which reaches nearer to worship than that of some of the people within. Mr. H. G. Wells sums up his picture of Him by the confession that 'He is too great for our small hearts,' and Mr. Middleton-Murry in his *Life of Jesus* comes to this conclusion: 'Keep we our heads as high as we

can, they shall be bowed at the last.' But there is a kind of worship of Him which has the effect of putting Him on a pedestal from which He cannot reach us, and is really a way of escape from His demand. This man had no theological ideas about Jesus. His faith was natural and simple. How did he come to have it? There is no question more worth asking, for, unless the New Testament is a fairy-tale, this faith in Christ is the one thing the lack of which, for many people, is making the world a place of failure and strife and misery. How came this pagan to see in Christ a love which he could trust in perfect confidence?

The secret is to be found in the man's attitude to all those among whom he lived. He could see the good in all sorts of people—Jew and Gentile, rich and poor. He was a worshipper of heathen gods; yet he could see what was good in the Jews with their vastly different faith. He was a Roman; yet he could appreciate fine qualities in people of another race. He was an officer of the army of occupation in Palestine, and yet he had no feeling of superiority to a subject people. He was a man of rank; yet he had made a friend of his servant and felt for him so strong an affection that the man's sickness brought genuine pain. In short, this centurion had come to a real sense of the value of men as men.

Now, that is a very wonderful thing. It prompts us to ask ourselves how far we have found our way into this world of real human values, and are living in it. It is what Jesus meant by love, this moral valuation of personality. We have only to look below the surface to find how much our social and industrial trouble is due to the fact that our sense of human values has been, in one way or the other, obscured. There are many things that obscure it. A hundred years ago, children were set to work in mines and factories, because their human value was obscured by what was thought to be economic necessity. The real root of war is the fact that this human value is hidden for the moment by what is felt to be the duty of patriotism.

2. What has all this to do with the centurion's faith in Christ? If we think for a moment what faith is, we shall understand. Faith is our response to what we see in Jesus. It is an impulse of trust which is awakened by our vision of that in Him which meets our need. Faith cannot function at all, except through the vision of Jesus bursting into our hearts to quicken wonder and love. And many people cannot see Jesus in His reality because their minds are bound by prejudice of one kind or another. But this man had

¹ J. A. Hutton, *At Close Quarters*, 212.

a free and unprejudiced mind. He did not need, for instance, to get over the fact that Jesus was a Jew and a peasant. He had got over that kind of prejudice which, in some people, made it intolerable for them during the war to sing a hymn by a German author, though written perhaps some four hundred years ago; which in others makes it difficult to see in a man like Gandhi—just because they dislike his politics—one in some ways more nearly Christian than many of us. This centurion was free from all those mists that cloud the judgment and blind our eyes, and when he met with Christ he found in Him the incarnation of what he really valued—the goodness and love by which he had unconsciously striven to live.

But there was more. This man had realized in his own life the power of this attitude to others. What joy it had brought into his own life! What friendships it had given him with all sorts of people! And what difficult problems it had helped him to solve! And, as he stood before Jesus, it flashed upon him that here was One who was Master in that field of love; here was One who had at His disposal all its resources and wielded to the full the only power which could penetrate men's hearts and start the springs of new life there. It may be that he realized an even deeper thing—that here, in Christ, was the source of that spirit that had been moving in his own life and had made him what he was. In any case, his whole soul fell captive to the personality of Jesus. 'Speak the word only,' he said, 'and my servant shall be healed,' and through that faith the love of Christ was set free.

3. Now, what does this suggest to us? Does it not suggest this, for one thing, that the value we have for Jesus is bound up with the value we have for other people? To put it quite clearly, people who do not love others, whatever their rank or race, do not really love Christ in the true sense of the word. They are living in an artificial world. If they really examined themselves, they would discover that, beneath all false respect for people, what they really love is money, or rank, or whatever else ministers to their own pride.

What is more, we have no real faith in Christ, save as our faith is in that love of His which values every one, the prodigal and the saint, the rich and the poor, and we see in that love the only real power in the world. For true faith in Christ is the conviction that His love is power. And the only way in which He can save the world is through this same love, brought into action by our faith in it. Was not His whole effort in the world the

effort to persuade men and women to become one human family, and to see each other and deal with each other as we see and deal with our own brothers and sisters? The root idea of the Kingdom of God is a world become one family.

4. But the question is, how to reach this attitude. The first step is to revise our values of people. It is to determine to see the best in others, to believe in it, to trust it, and to make adventures of friendship. How often do we give others credit for the same ideals as are in ourselves—especially if they do not belong to our circle—and insist on meeting them on that basis? Before Ezekiel the prophet opened his mouth to tell the exiles in Babylon what he thought about them, he was bidden to go and sit where they sat. For ten days or so he lived with them, and when he began to speak, there was a tenderer note in his voice. The beginning of a new outlook is to see in other lives a value that is, at least, as great as that in our own. Most of all, it is to see in Christ a love which is not in ourselves, and to open our hearts to it, praying that He will deepen this love in us, which is the entering in of His own spirit.

It may be that all we are capable of, to begin with, is a confession and a longing, in which there is only a spark of hope.

I am unjust, but I can strive for justice.

My life's unkind, but I can vote for kindness.
I, the unlovely, say life should be lovely.

I that am blind, cry out against my blindness.

It may be that, like the centurion, the awakened love for other people, as we see them in their bitter need and helplessness, will throw us open to the love that can alone heal ourselves, and bring healing to the world. It is not seldom that he who has not felt the need of Christ for himself, has come to feel it through the aching need to help another. And, bit by bit, the faith in Him will grow through which miraculous things will begin to happen, and, for us and others, a new day will begin to dawn.¹

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Towering o'er the Wrecks of Time.

'Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.'—Gal 1st.

There is a sublime and suggestive passage in St. Paul where he defines the Christian redemption

¹ J. Reid, *In Touch with Christ*, 38.

in terms of deliverance from the tyranny of the evanescent. 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world.' It sounds almost as if the Apostle were wrestling with something which is very familiar to modern men under the title of the *Zeitgeist*, the time-spirit.

1. The dominion of the time-spirit is a real thing in any and every stage of human progress. Lord Morley has called it a great historical principle, that 'besides the prominent men of a generation there is something at work beneath, a moving current on whose flood they are borne.' And if the prominent find it hard to get out of the current of their own age and steer an independent course, the pull upon smaller souls is proportionately mightier. Yet if the emancipation of a human soul is to be complete, it must include deliverance from this tyranny: it may even have to consist chiefly in this. Evil takes different forms in different ages: men are poorly equipped for their conflict if they have learned to wrestle merely with dead heresies and forgotten sins. Matthew Arnold, who did so much to familiarize in this country the idea of the *Zeitgeist*, has an ironic passage in which he compares the *Times* newspaper of his day to 'a gigantic Sancho Panza,' 'following by an attraction he cannot resist that poor, mad, scorned, suffering, sublime enthusiast, the modern spirit; following it, indeed, with constant grumbling, expostulation, and opposition, with airs of protection, of compassionate superiority, with an incessant by-play of nods, shrugs, and winks addressed to the spectators; following it, in short, with all the incurable recalcitrancy of a lower nature, but still following it.'

If a great newspaper sometimes does this, much more is a humble individual likely to do it, perhaps grumbling at his age, criticising it, complaining against it, yet on the whole doing what it wants him to do. It is one of the perplexities of history that the grip of the age even upon the more enlightened individual has often been so strong. The tales of lust and blood which disfigure the lives even of some of the heroes of Old Testament story are best accounted for by the spirit of the age.

2. It goes without saying that much of the influence of the time-spirit is not only inevitable but beneficial. Good as well as evil has different developments in different ages, but He who is not the God of the dead but of the living would have His people alive to all His present leadings. One half of a man's duty towards his own age is to reverence it, understand it, and serve it. But the

other half is not to be enslaved or blinded by it. There could be no finer example than the character and work of the great apostle himself. He was a man of his own age, a Jew of the Jews, a citizen of the Roman Empire, a typical product of a particular race and religion at a certain time. Yet he would have made small mark upon history had there not been another side to him altogether—his fine independence of his age. He had this power from Christ. In the fellowship of Christ he found this liberty. In the words of Principal Forsyth, 'a positive, eternal creative gospel for the spiritual conscience is what we need—not a set of true beliefs to contend with false, but the holy, living God of historic grace to keep us from the idols of the religious mind and the passing age.'

3. It is easier, perhaps, to state this in general than to apply it to the circumstances of a special age such as our own—an age is difficult to sum up. R. H. Hutton points out that the usual course of the *Zeitgeist* is like that of Mephistopheles—zigzag. 'It breathes on us, and we can no longer see a course which was clear yesterday. It breathes again, and, like invisible ink held to the fire, the truth comes out again in all its brightness.'

Some observers of our age might tell us of its frivolity. Other observers, perhaps equally truthful, might tell our generation about its gloom, the cynicism and pessimism even of some of our young people who, running everywhere in quest of joy, have not found it. As true a diagnosis as any might define our age as being, in and beneath these things, an age of egotism—an egotism now feverish in its thirst for pleasure, now morbid in its wounded pride, yet ever thrusting and pushing, breaking all the commandments because heedless on the one hand of a neighbour's welfare as on the other of the Divine will. It is not a comfortable age to live in. There is written all over its restless life that men need deliverance from some of its most characteristic qualities. They need deliverance from themselves.

They are meant to find it. That is the very meaning of revelation. Revelation lay in this, the coming of the Eternal into the midst of time, revealing the timeless truth and love, and supplying a pattern which time could not antique and a motive which time could not exhaust. This is the meaning of Jesus Christ, 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,' and of His Cross, which, erected but for the business of a cruel day, is still 'towering o'er the wrecks of time,' the supreme sign of God, the supreme hope of the world. It is this that is needed to correct the frivolity of our

age and to teach it seriousness and sincerity. It is this that is no less needed to correct its glooms, and to bring into place of its cynicism and pessimism the peace and hope of redemption. It is this that alone can conquer the egotism of our time-spirit, and teach a thrusting and selfish world the law which is perfect liberty. So the Lord Christ reigns over every age, the Master of them all.¹

SEPTUAGESIMA.

The Epic of Redemption.

'And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.'—Gn 1³¹.

That is the first assertion of religious faith and it is the last. And it is, too, the everlasting changeless background on which the confused and shifting pageant of faith's agelong struggle is flung. The history of human faith is the history of the long warfare which this certainty has had to wage for its very existence. The certainty was there in the beginning, as it will be in the end. Religion cannot exist without it. And there is no surer proof that man is naturally religious than his obstinate certainty that, if the whole of things could be seen at once and as a whole, it would be recognized as very good.

Take any history of long-continued religious experience, and see how it bears witness to the truth of this fact. Take, for instance, the Bible. It begins with an act of faith in the goodness of the whole. It gathers up the agelong process of Divine creation, that process which is coterminous with the existence of things in time, into one single moment, regards it in a single flash as with the eye of God, and from that standpoint pronounces it without hesitation very good. The fundamental characteristic of every act of man's faith in God is just that impossible and yet for man indispensable attempt to see things as God sees them. It was probably that particular urgency and necessity of faith which Tertullian was trying to express when he uttered his famous *Credo quia impossibile*, 'I believe in the impossible just because it is impossible.'

But hardly has this act of faith been made, this certainty proclaimed, by the Jewish race, by Tertullian, or by any of the rest of us, before we are compelled to bring it down to the test of our actual experience. And there it meets with nothing but rebuke. Things are most obviously not very good. The more close, indeed, the hold of God,

the worse things as they are seem to us to be. That is the experience which the Bible records in the mythical story of the Fall.

It is only the account which a stern religious realism is forced to give of what man actually is and of what the world necessarily seems to him, being what he is, to be. Yet, in apparently hopeless disillusionment, he realizes a Divine assurance that he will one day crush the head of that evil which so ruthlessly pursues him, biting viciously at his flying heel. And on throughout the whole history the same certainty revives out of the darkest hours of apparent defeat and felt despair. In Abraham, in Moses, in Elijah, in Isaiah, in the long succession of the prophets, the terrible conflict of faith is renewed, and the certainty is always recovered out of the very experiences that seem to extinguish it utterly. And the long history of faith, which the Bible is, closes as it began with the proclamation of the great religious certainty as near to its final accomplishment.

So it is that the Bible is for the religious sense one book. It ends on the note with which it opened. That first chapter is but the attempt to express from the standpoint of eternity a process which is still going forward, which will continue so long as man endures. The rest of the book is the history of creation under the aspect of time, the history of that redemptive activity of God which is for us His real continuous creation of His world. It was all stated in a phrase by our Lord, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.'

Now what we want specially to emphasize, on Septuagesima Sunday, which is as it were the annual festival of God as Creator, is that redemption is the key to the religious idea of creation, that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the secret of all our knowledge of God whatsoever. This does not mean that if our Lord had not lived as a man upon earth, man would not have known God. Such a view would be an insane denial of fact. God not only was known, and known with a wonderful spiritual intimacy, by the great seers of Israel before our Lord's coming, but He is known to-day by multitudes who have never heard the name of Jesus.

But think of the vanity of any attempt to find God in the world apart from this illuminating power which the redemptive stress of the Divine Spirit can awake in the souls of men. The non-human world is now the supreme difficulty with which faith in God has to grapple. The order which we find there seems utterly careless of human life. It will cut off in their prime the lives that seem to us

¹ J. M. E. Ross, *The Tree of Healing*, 224.

of most promise and value. It will let the worthless linger on in untroubled uselessness to their fellows to the furthest term of our human span. It will torture the brave, the patient, the unselfish with lingering and malignant disease.

And yet because of all this is faith in God less sure? The Book of Job belongs to a past when the full measure of Nature's moral indifference was not suspected, and yet it witnesses to a faith which had conquered the worst that the apparent hostility of circumstance could accomplish. For faith issues from a purely human experience. Think of what that experience is. It is a profound and insatiable discontent with self. It is the discovery that this is not our spirit's home. And yet when our self-discontent is most profound, just then the great consolation arrives. A heavenly peace broods upon the troubled conflict, the soul knows its rest in the very fact of its onward struggle. That is the spiritual history of man. It is the history of man's discovery of God as the human redeemer, as the redeemer of man by man. It is the history of God's revelation of Himself to man as the Power which constitutes him, and constitutes him as at once the theatre and the conscious instrument of this conflict in which dwells the supreme peace, of this truceless dissatisfaction with himself at the heart of which resides the infinite satisfaction of a Presence higher than himself.

And out of this experience of the redemptive God there grows naturally, inevitably, the faith in the creative God, the faith that somehow the whole of things must serve the purpose of that redeeming will, the faith that the most inexplicable waywardness of Nature not only does not contradict that purpose, but must somehow, even though we may never see how, contribute to it, the faith that through all things that are there works a spirit of very goodness. It is a sheer act of faith, but it is an act of faith which the immediate experience of the redeeming God has always forced man to make and which only that experience enables him to make.¹

SEXAGESIMA

The Flying Roll and the Flying Angel.

'Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll.'—Zec 5¹.

'And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven.'—Rev 14⁶.

There is no far-fetched straining needed to bring these two sentences together. Though they lie

¹ A. L. Lilley, *Nature and Supernature*, 33.

apart, and in their utterance are divided by the space of many centuries, if we take the one with the other, beneath the glowing imagery in which they are expressed we shall find that they embrace in a striking unity the broad and deep truth of God's revelation as that is brought to bear upon the life and destiny of man. The flying roll: the flying angel: in the one you see the spirit of the Old Testament, in the other the spirit of the New. That is the reign of Nature, this is the reign of grace: there is the law, here is the gospel: there is the justice, here is the mercy of Almighty God.

1. 'Then I looked, and lifted up mine eyes, and behold a flying roll.' Is this merely the nightmare dream of a Hebrew prophet? Or, is it not rather a vision which carries us irresistibly beyond its immediate purpose to its eternal truth, which holds up before a man in a light terrific by its clearness that law which of all laws that rule human conduct is the most sweeping and indubitable; that law which tells us that behind every soul of man who has sinned there is a dark shadow deepening as the days pass by, which to the prophet's eyes appeared as a flying roll—a roll whose volume grows as it moves on, enclosing within its ever-increasing folds all the records of our past life.

Let us not forget, however, that this is a principle which may work for good as well as for ill. Most assuredly it is no one-sided law. Consider its influence on the positive side. Let a man do good. Let him obey the voice of God. Let him bow his will before the Eternal, and the very stars in their courses will fight for him; the majesty of heaven will follow in his train, and all the bright days he has lived, and all the moral victories he has won, will shed their light upon his path.

But let a man do evil. Let him spurn the voice of God. Let him set his will above the Eternal, and by all the force of God's universe he will be pursued and overwhelmed. Tell us not of the success of wicked men. Will we measure success by the idle standards of the world, will we weigh the soul which is immortal in the false balances of earth? God forbid. The good man alone is successful, the bad man eternally a failure.

Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are.

Everything we do or think or say, every form of our activity, has a certain moulding power over the soul, and thus in the lives of most men we find a certain consistency. What would be the condition of human life if it were otherwise, if our state at any one moment were entirely separated from all that

had gone before? How heavily weighted man would be in the struggle which his life is! At every fresh encounter he would have to give up the vantage ground so dearly won, and so begin the fight anew.

If we search through all the great literatures, the Bibles of the human race, we shall find that the most penetrating and universal thought which has impressed itself upon the mind of man is that ancient doctrine, ever new, of the Nemesis that follows still the guilty choice. 'Keeping watch over the universe and letting no offence go unpunished'—that doctrine which has ingrained itself in the common language of men—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, measure for measure—that truth which, whether it comes to us in the imagery of Eastern mythology, or in the burning words of Greek dramatist, or in the quivering accents of ancient prophecy, is the truth which underlay this vision, the flying roll which follows in the track of sin, the presence undefined which cannot be put by.

Our acts our angels are for good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.

2. Turn now from this dark vision. Let us listen to the voice of the New Testament as it also rings through the ages and finds a joyful echo in the soul of man:

'And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.'

From the lofty watch tower the angel can see the ravages which sin has made over the souls beneath. And as he bears his message to those souls the power and the grace of God are visible there. For wherever he is heard, wherever a soul in the loneliness of its sin bows itself before the offer of grace, the dark record is erased, and the guilty past effaced, and the flying roll cast off, and the soul which was literally dead in trespasses and sins is reconciled to God and breathes a purer and serener air. That terrible

chain which bound the soul to sin and death is snapped by the power of God in Christ.

Nay, more; even as the power of the flying roll was so subtle and so far-reaching that it threw its baneful influence over every soul of man, even so does the message of the flying angel, the grace of God, come to every soul. As there is no one who can utterly escape the dreadful curse of sin, so need there be no one to whom the grace shall be denied. It is, as we see, the characteristic of all God's truth that it is two-edged, and the very same law which leads from sin to deeper sin, leads also from holiness to higher holiness. Let a man but turn towards the light. Let him freely obey the Infinite Will. Let him look on the Cross. Let him bow before that supreme offering made by Supreme Love because the need of man was great. Looking on that spectacle we see into the very depths of God's heart; we see more, much more, than the terror of God's avenging justice, we see the infinity of His love. When with open face we behold that vision, then goes forth the soul to God. This is something more than an intellectual appreciation of the meaning of Christ's suffering and death. It is, so to speak, to make them spiritually tangible to our own souls. It is to realize that this love is our possession, and, realizing this, the soul goes forth to possess Christ and is emptied of self.

Surely there is no man to whom this assurance of a living Saviour should not bring joy. We live in a world of changes. We have a past behind us which is darkened by a record of sin. We have a future before us which is also dark and uncertain. The shadows of time gather fast. Amid the increasing round of daily duties, amid the hard commonplaces of the world's battle, we are hurried on and ever on. There is for us a joy in human friendship, but it is fleeting and fickle at the best. There is a noble pleasure in the sternness of daily toil, but the night cometh when no man can work. What shall be our stay in this shifting scene—who will take us by the hand and lead us through the darkness to the brighter day? There is only one stay on which to rest, and that is true religion; there is only one who can efface the guilty record of the past and give us new life, and that is Jesus Christ.¹

¹ A. W. Williamson, *The Glorious Gospel*, 140.