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## In the Study.

### Virginibus Puerisque.

#### The Puzzle of Jacob's Ladder.

BY THE REVEREND W. H. STUBBS, B.A.,  
CHORLTON-CUM-HARDY.

'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending.'—Jn 1<sup>51</sup>.

I HAVE been awfully puzzled about Jacob's ladder. When he fled from his home to go to Padan Aram, he did not take much baggage with him. He had no time to take his tent. So he had to sleep on the roadside. He threw his cloak around him, and placed a stone under his head for a pillow. I don't suppose he was very comfortable, so I am not surprised that he had a dream. The dream was a very queer one. He saw a ladder so tall that it reached to heaven. On this ladder there were angels ascending and descending.

Now, my trouble was this. How could the angels go up without first coming down? Jacob said that they were ascending and descending. I always thought that angels lived in heaven and that they sometimes came to earth. We do not see them, of course. But Jacob for once caught sight of them. But I could not understand how they could go up without first coming down.

Then I remembered that Jesus had something to say about angels going to and fro from heaven. I looked it up, and I found that Jesus said the same thing as Jacob. Here it is, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending.' That settled it. Jesus knows all there is to be known about angels. So there is nothing more to be said when Jesus says that they ascend and descend. They go up to heaven for some purpose, and then they come back. That means that they live on earth.

Now if I were talking to the grown-up people about angels I should have to explain a lot of things. They do not seem to be on speaking terms with the angels. They have not seen an angel for years and years, not since they were as young as you are. It is one of the best things I know, to be on speaking terms with the angels and to believe in them. Now angels are not all dressed in flowing robes and wings. Perhaps those are who live in heaven. But what about those who live on earth? I wonder where they live and what they are like? Somebody said that angels

are sent forth to minister. So if we can see people ministering they may be angels.

If you can find some one doing a noble deed, or comforting some one in distress, and making folk smile, they are angels on earth. Perhaps some angels, after all, are just ordinary human beings full of love and pity who work for kindness' sake and who go about, like Jesus Christ, doing good.

Perhaps the wings don't grow until they get to heaven, and they don't look like angels because they are disguised. But they must be angels, because they do the work of angels. Then while we are asleep, and when they are asleep, they go up the ladder which Jacob saw and enter heaven, where they learn about people who are in trouble. Then the next day they go to those people and comfort them.

When I was a boy, now I come to think of it, there was one living in my home. We called her 'Mother,' but that was only her earth name. I wonder what God calls her now that she is with Him for good? I know she was an angel, because she ministered to us. In her dreams I am sure she went to heaven, because she seemed to know everything we wanted. When we came down in the morning we found her busy working and getting things ready for us. She had been up early because there was so much to do. God must have told her a lot of things about Himself. She seemed to know all about Him when we asked her to tell us about God.

I was at the hospital last week and I think that I saw some angels there. No, they did not have wings, but their sleeves were tucked up, and they wore blue dresses and white aprons. There were a lot of people who were ill, and these nurses moved about, ministering. One of them was whistling. That is surely a strange thing for an angel to do. But they do it. Perhaps all of them can't sing, but they can whistle, and they do so at their work to keep their spirits up, I suppose, and to cheer the patients.

I think that I have met angels in church. You would not know them for angels unless you knew what to look for. They are the people who do things for others. Some of them do them very quietly and secretly. They blush when you discover them, and they make you promise not to tell that you have found them out.

I think that I have also found angels among Boy Scouts, angels with bare knees. And there are

the angels among the Girl Guides with strange hats and belts.

Sometimes your mother calls you an 'angel,' and your father, who is reading the paper and pretending not to be listening, smiles behind his paper. He thinks that you are not an angel because you have no wings. But he is not so clever as he thinks. Birds have wings, but they are not angels. You find that verse in the Bible about ministering spirits and show it to him. If you are always willing to do good to everybody who is in need, then you surely are an angel in disguise.

I wonder what is happening when you are asleep?

Perhaps you climb Jacob's ladder in your dreams and find out things about God and what He wants you to do. Then in the morning your mother finds you back in bed. But she does not know that you have been away to the 'Never-Never Land,' and that you have been mixing with the angels.

We want you to be angels on earth. You see there are plenty of angels in heaven, and where there are so many, there cannot be much for them to do. But we want angels on earth so very badly. There is so much for them to do, and there are so few of them to do it.

#### Rehearsals.

BY THE REVEREND S. GREER, M.A., AYR.

'His sling was in his hand.'—I S 17<sup>40</sup>.

It was with that sling David played as a boy, practising far shots, hitting—or missing—some distant mark, or playfully flicking with a little stone the broad back of some big motherly sheep that would look up with eyes of mild surprise. With it he had doubtless brought down many an eagle which was hovering near the fold where the lambs lay, and had often driven off sly Brer Fox prowling about the farmyard.

So he grew expert with that sling, and *he never knew what he was training for*. He never guessed he was preparing himself for a big emergency. He just cultivated the steady hand and the straight eye which were to stand him in such good stead that day he faced the Giant.

There are things we learn when we're young, and at the time we don't think very much about them. In our games we learn to keep our temper, and play fair. In our school-life we learn 'to stick it,' and to have due respect for other people's rights, and not to be a baby. In our home and church life we learn to be unselfish and thoughtful,

how to give and take, and the Love which keeps the heart always.

And these, if you think of it, are just the things we are going to need in the big battle which life is. We're practising now. And I never see a girl or boy growing up straight and honourable in everything, but I think of David the youth, practising with his sling. And I know that, like him, they'll make their mark, and win through with credit, when the game has turned to earnest.

In an Irish story a mother tells this to her boy in her own way. There is to be a Flower Show in the village, and the boy has got a geranium from a gardener, which he wishes to exhibit as his own growing. But his mother protests. It wouldn't be honest. 'But sure 'twas only a little village show,' some one remarks. 'No, no,' said the mother, 'the whole world is a big show, and this is the only place a little fellow has to rehearse in.'

Yes, that's it! This is the time, girls and boys, in which to rehearse with truth and honour. And remember, *it's only the things that come handy to you* (as David found) *that you can count on in an emergency*.

Somebody said to me lately that 'playing the game' is nearly the whole of Christianity. Well, it's a big bit of it. It means being just and unselfish, and perfectly straight, thinking more of your side than of yourself, with your eye ever on your Captain. Play the game! Never stoop to conquer! You may conquer by stooping, but somehow you may never get the stoop out of your character.

There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night—

Ten to make and the match to win—

A bumping pitch and a blinding light,

An hour to play and the last man in.

And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,

Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,

But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote—

'Play up! play up! and play the game!'

If we play well our part now when we're young, feeling on our shoulder the hand of our great Captain, we need have little fear when the big time of testing comes.

#### The Christian Year.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

#### Progressive Religion.

'And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.'—2 S 24<sup>1</sup>.

'And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.'—1 Ch 21<sup>1</sup>.

This is a dramatic discrepancy, which challenges inquiry, and moves in the student's mind many speculations. Action ascribed to Jehovah by one sacred author is ascribed to Satan by another! If these were contemporary documents, written by the representatives of different schools of religious thought, we might be at no loss to understand the difference. For much turns on the writer's point of view, and even under the appearance of actual contradiction, it is possible that substantial agreement may exist. But these are neither contemporary nor independent documents. Probably a period of at least four centuries elapsed between the compilation of the Books of Samuel and the compilation of the Books of Chronicles, and it is as certain as any conclusion of literary criticism can be, that the later Book was fashioned mainly from the earlier. The chronicler took the older record, and revised it so drastically that it became in his hands a new work, and finally entered the canon of Scripture as an independent history. His notions of religion were widely different from those of the earlier author. Between the two Books we may say broadly that the great prophetic movement had intervened. In that interval of four hundred years the religion of Israel had been transformed, and this contrast which our text presents indicates the completeness of the process.

1. We see in the Scripture the record of an advancing revelation, and this revelation must be read historically, in the connexions which occasioned and witnessed its successive phases. Truth in the Bible is a line of waxing light, not an equal and sustained illumination.

Next, the religious witness of Scripture is so far from being contained in single texts that single texts may even be gravely misleading. We have a striking example before us. Let a student strive to discover the truth about God in the statement that Jehovah prompted David to do a sinful action in order that He might bring him to disaster, and he will certainly fail to reach the conclusion which St. James has set forth in his Epistle: 'Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man.' The student who built his doctrine on the text in Chronicles would certainly be nearer the truth, for at least he would have perceived the impossibility of ascribing to the Author of all good, conduct which is plainly wrong; but even he would not have reached the fuller knowledge which can say with St. James that the

springs of evil are to be sought in the perverted will of the sinner: 'Each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.'

Further, we see that Scripture, as the record of a progressive revelation, must be read in its historic order. Here it is impossible not to regret the arrangement of our Bibles, which, though roughly corresponding with the facts, is yet in some respects gravely defective. At least, if the Books were ranged in the chronological order of their composition or compilation, it would be easier for the English reader to perceive the movement of religious thought which leads from the crude anthropomorphism of the early narratives in Genesis to the sublime spirituality of the Psalmists, and from the non-moral nationalism of the earliest historical Books to the pure theism of the Prophets.

2. Let us indicate a practical moral. If there cannot be for us men, living and learning under the conditions of history, any finality in truth, how careful we should be always to remember the limited authority and provisional character of our personal beliefs! How anxious should we be to preserve a teachable mind, which is all that can rightly be intended by the phrase 'an open mind'!

To say that our personal beliefs are provisional does not mean that they are uncertain or without coercive authority over us. Relatively to the past they are final. We can never rightly go back to a discarded phase of faith. The very mark of every change which is progress is that it shall validate all past advances, and lead on from the point already reached. Nothing already gained must be let slip, if we are to 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The truth, moreover, is gained in portions, which at first seem wholly irreconcilable with one another, and then are perceived to have a mutual relation. Finally, they are fused in a larger statement of faith. Even this violent contradiction between the two texts which are the subject of our present discourse is no exception. The older writer has a very crude conception of the Divine character, and a very mechanical notion of the Divine method. He has, however, the conviction that moral fault brings in its train disaster, and he seeks to find in the action of David some adequate explanation for the terrible pestilence which has befallen the nation. He shares with the ancients generally a religious horror of human arrogance as provoking Divine resentment. Accordingly, he pictures Jehovah, offended by national sin, using this crude device to bring penalty on the nation. He stirs

the pride of the King to take the measure of his power, and thus to challenge heaven to abash his insolence by a dramatic chastisement. It is obviously very crude, yet at the bottom we can perceive a sound idea, that sin must be punished, and that God will punish it. Time passes, and the Prophets preach a nobler version of the Divine character. The chronicler revolts against the crudity of the older writer. Evil must have an evil source; therefore the source of the vain-glorious motive which led King and nation to disaster cannot be in Jehovah. Satan stands out in plain opposition to Jehovah, the personification of the continuing rebellion against Jehovah's righteous law. Here, clearly, is a great advance on the earlier teaching; and the opposition between the two phases of truth appears to be extreme. A time will come when the devout Israelite will bring Jehovah back again into the process, and garner the fragment of truth which the early historian had so crudely uttered. Reflective wisdom will trace a process of Divine discipline in affliction, and the malignant activity of Satan will be dimly seen to be subject to the righteous will of the All-Holy. 'My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his reproof; for whom the Lord loveth he reproveth: even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.' The time would come when this profound antinomy should be awfully illustrated and illumined by One who, when the stroke of extreme temptation fell upon Him, cried to His Father 'that the cup might pass from him,' if so the Father's Will might be accomplished. Jesus Christ has taught us ever to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation.'

From this position it properly follows that we need not be distressed if we fail to get satisfaction in religious theories which once appeared to us to be entirely satisfactory. Of course it is possible that we may be falling back from a point once reached. That may well be the case if, along with our new doctrinal dissatisfaction, there has proceeded a lowering of the moral standard, so that we are no longer guarding the moral conditions of right thinking. The possibility of this retrogression must never be absent from our minds, and must always lead us first of all to honest searching of conscience, as well as to careful examination of doctrine. But surely it must needs be the case that in the affairs of the mind, as well as in those of the spirit, 'here we have no continuing city,' for we are moving forwards to a point beyond, from which wider ranges of vision will be possible.

But is it not true that as Christians we must needs look backwards for the complete expression of truth; that the very notion of an Incarnation of God in the historic Jesus implies that in some sense the course of progressive revelation found its term in the life and death of the Incarnate? We must answer by recalling the Lord's teaching about the Holy Spirit, and by pointing to the actual experience of the Christian Church. Two notes of the Master's discourses on the eve of His Passion are united in the Fourth Gospel. The note of plenary authority, of finality, of absolute truth mingles with the note of progressive teaching, of continuing advance, of gradual illumination. The Apostles are to bear a twofold character as they witness to the historic facts of Christ's historic career, and as they follow the guidance of the Spirit of Truth.

The passages which are combined in the text disclose a dramatic change of religious thought as having taken place among the Jews in a period of some four hundred years, about the same interval of time as that which parts the present day from the mediæval epoch. Just midway between the Middle Ages and the present time the last executions for heresy took place in England, when, in 1612, the Unitarians Legatt and Wightman were burned at the stake, not merely with the consent, but at the earnest insistence, of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Will any doubt that there is progress in the moral sphere when we contrast the sentiments which such a procedure would stir in our minds now, with the sentiments which were openly professed then by the best Christians of the time? Intolerance is with us still, and still passes under the old grand disguises. Yes, but though the disguises are the same, our right to use them is not. 'To whom much is given, from him shall much be required,' is the rule by which God will judge us. We must stand or fall with our own time, unless we are called to the high and sorrowful ministry of going before it in the onward march. Never can we rightly excuse our own moral failures by the precedents of the past. That were to step back to an earlier stage in the advancing movement of humanity, and seek to live on that lower level. Under the present leadings of the Spirit of Truth we must handle the heritage of experience in the spirit of liberty and in the power of faith, and transform it from a dead weight of imprisoning shackles to a kindly teacher, bringing to the interpretation of present difficulties the warnings of former failures and the encouragements of past success.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. H. Henson, *The Creed in the Pulpit*, 321.

## EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

**The Spiritual Basis of Service.**

'Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.'—Mt 10<sup>42</sup>.

1. This verse is a kind of poor man's charter. It is the guarantee of his right to a place in the service of Christ. He may not be able to do much, or to give much, but at least he can give a cup of cold water, and feel that his deed will count in the eyes of Jesus. It has become the authority for that human service to others in their physical need, which for some people is the sum total of Christian living. In the face of this word, and others like it, no one dare deny the value of social and philanthropic service.

In the age in which we live there is not the same need, as once there was, to insist on this. The emphasis on practical Christianity has returned with force. The cup of cold water has become a kind of popular religious cult.

But there is a danger in this emphasis. It is the danger lest social service should come to take the place of religion, and be divorced from the outlook and motive of religious faith. There are many motives of social service to-day, and not all of them of the highest. For some people, service to others, when we get to the root of it, is really a way of escape for themselves. We are living in an introspective age. Many people carry about with them continually a half-conscious underworld of unrest and conflict. A good deal of social service to which some people give themselves is a noble effort to find release from the conflict within.

Other people fall back upon such service as an escape from thought about the meaning of life, the enigmas of the universe in which we live. To them religion is full of perplexity. They find it so difficult to see their way amid conflicting creeds and to discover a real basis of belief, that they attempt to solve the problem by throwing over the whole effort, cutting the knot, with the reflection that, after all, Christianity means helping other people.

The result is that, for many, the service of men has become a substitute for religion. It is easy enough to argue for it; to make stage capital or literary points out of the contrast between the worshipper who neglects the appeal for human service and the man who scorns the Church, but is generous, kind, and sympathetic. Yet the real truth is that the two things cannot be separated without loss to

both. Without service, religion degenerates into unreality; and without religion, service becomes materialistic. It cannot help in any final way the man it seeks to serve, and in the end it fails of its own vital impulse and motive.

The point to notice in our text is the actual word of Jesus about the cup of cold water. He does not say that whosoever gives a cup of cold water to his fellows will have his reward. There is a phrase added which is significant; the deed must be done in the name of a disciple. That phrase is important, for this is what it suggests—it is not merely the giving of the cup of cold water which is the helpful thing; it is giving it in the name of a disciple—that is, as a writer remarks, 'in the name of something that is of cosmic importance.' In other words, it is giving the cup of cold water in a certain spirit, with a certain outlook and meaning—this, namely, that we and the man we are helping are brothers in a world where God is Father.

Perhaps we ask what difference this makes. Does it really matter what is in our minds about the man we are helping, so long as we help him? What does the motive matter?

2. But if we think this out, we will realize that it does make a difference. *It makes, in the first place, a real difference to him.* Who is this man to whom we give the cup of cold water? Is he only body, or is he also spirit? If he is spirit, how far can a mere cup of cold water, if it be that and nothing more, feed that spirit, and lift him from the dust where life has flung him? The moment we come to think of it, we realize that man's deepest need is within. 'The most sensual and the meanest always manifest,' says Mark Rutherford, 'an indisposition to be content with mere material satisfactions. It is the commentary on the text that man shall not live by bread alone. It is evidence of a compulsion, of which art is the highest manifestation, to escape.' In other words, men crave not only bread, but beauty; not only food, but friendship.

Our service to the need of others, like everything else we do, is symbolic. It carries some meaning; it speaks some message. It may be the symbol of brotherhood or of patronage; it may be the expression of a real sympathy or of a secret disdain. Our gifts must be sacramental of a real love, or they do not really touch the sore of human life. They must convey something of ourselves, of our own faith, or they miss the mark, and harden instead of lifting. They must aim at remaking the mind, while remaking the body. 'Love,' says Professor Hocking, 'in Christianity, as in Plato,

means the will to confer immortality ; and, apart from that, the legacy of charity imposed upon our present social order begins to appear as a wretched substitute for justice, and a mockery of all honest love.'

Not what we give, but what we share—  
For the gift without the giver is bare ;  
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three—  
Himself, his hungering neighbour, and Me.

3. But again, this motive makes all the difference in the inspiration of our social service. *It will make a difference to ourselves.* We may talk fine words about brotherhood, but can we carry on the practical service which brotherhood entails without the faith in the Fatherhood of God ? We may help our fellows out of a pity which is next door to despair, as men drowning on a raft in mid-ocean may be kind to one another for the brief hour they have to live ; but can we go on doing it, if that is our outlook about the world ? No, the only motive which can sustain our social service is the faith that man, in spite of his failure and low estate in the world's values, has a value in the sight of God—that he is a brother, because he is a child of the Father. The real root of social contempt is practical infidelity ; and a faithless outlook on life will work out that way sooner or later.

Still, there are—and we can thank God for it—large numbers to-day who, while not professing Christian faith, yet believe that only in Christian conduct can we find a way out of the miseries of modern civilization. They believe in fellowship both in industrial and international life. They hold that only in a Christian attitude to one another can men get rid of war—a fact which is expressed in the League of Nations. But what lies behind all that ? Can we go on believing in Christian ethics if we reject the theology on which it is based and neglect to keep the Christian faith alive, with all its meanings ? In point of fact, the late Lord Salisbury declared that, while he had never known what it was to doubt the truth of Christian doctrine, he had all his life found a difficulty in accepting the moral teaching of the Gospels. He added that, in fact, his acceptance of Christ's moral teaching was an act of faith due to the Divine authority upon which it rested.

Nature does not seem to care much for the individual, as Tennyson suggests. Nine millions of men died in the war, and Nature is already so making up the deficiency that we find it difficult to supply homes and food for the population. Christian service to the sick and the degraded is

really a kind of challenge to Nature, a defiance of the brute struggle for existence, a denial of the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. But we may well ask, as Lord Balfour does, 'whether it is possible for the ordinary man to maintain undimmed his unselfish ideals, if he thinks that Nature is against them—unless, indeed, he comes to believe that God is on their side.'

Surely these ideals and impulses of pity ; the longing for fellowship ; the dream of a warless world—all this is merely a fleck of foam on the tide, unless there is something in the universe which is behind them. The impulse to give a cup of cold water is not of our own making. It is something which we have seen in the light of faith, even though we have not thought it out. And only an outlook which is definitely based on faith will support it for long.

The point of all this is plain. If social service is to achieve its true end, it must discover this basis of faith and plant its feet upon it. We have to come back from the valley of human service to the mountain-top of worship and illumination, there to capture again that sense of meaning which alone can give worth to our service and power to our hearts. We have to recover, continually, our vision of the Kingdom of God, in which the humblest act can find its place. It comes to this, that the value of what we give and what we do depends, first of all, on what we are. The heart of all Christ's giving was that He gave Himself, and it was what He was in Himself that made the gift redeeming ; so that even His simplest acts shine to-day with a light that reveals the face of God. Paul is right when he makes the final redemption of the material universe depend upon redeemed personality. 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together, waiting for the unveiling of the sons of God.'<sup>1</sup>

#### NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

##### Finality in our Dealings with God.

'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.'—Ph 3<sup>12</sup>.

1. *The Divine Ideals which appeal for our Attainment.*—Each one of us is created within reach of a glorious destiny. We may be the sons and daughters of the Almighty in no fictitious sense ! Is it wonderful, therefore, that we should receive, from the shifting events of time and sense, the special training needed for the future which awaits us ? In the children of a large family there is a

<sup>1</sup> J. Reid, *In Touch with Christ*, 289.

vast diversity of character, and happy are those parents who can afford to give each child that education which is most suited to its development. So each unit of humanity is a distinct creation. God never repeats Himself. Each soul in Eph 2<sup>10</sup> is compared to a poem. No poet repeats himself. Each production bears trace of some new aspect of consummate art. There may be similarity, but there can be no identity. Each of us, therefore, enshrines a distinct ideal of God's mind, but we have to *work out* our own salvation with fear and trembling. We have to apprehend that for which we were apprehended by Christ Jesus. And we are placed in this world for a brief space that we may work out what God is working in, and approximate so far as possible to the Divine ideal.

2. *The Divine Ideal or Purpose can only be realized in Stages.*—'Not that I have already attained, or am already made perfect; but I press on.' We leave the things that are behind, and reach out towards those before. As there are rings in the centre of a tree, so that the woodsman can decipher the years of growth, so there are distinct stages in our progress towards the Divine ideal.

A friend discovered Thorwaldsen in tears, and on his asking the reason the illustrious sculptor replied: 'Look at that statue. I have reached my ideal, and fear that I have reached the high-water mark of my profession. When a man is satisfied, he ceases to grow.' How different this is to the cry of the Apostle!

We are all tempted to live in the past, to look up at the fading laurels we have won, as though they could not be equalled or surpassed, to confess that we shall never do anything so good as that, never reach so high, never paint so fair a picture, preach so good a sermon, have such a vision of God! That is fatal. We must forget! Forget the rapture of our first Communion, the earliest efforts of our soul, the trophies we won, the visions of truth, the mountain-top experience, and press onward, upward, with the eagle's flight to the sun!

3. *The Realization of the Soul's Ideals is only possible when there is Finality in our Dealings with God.*—The failure, in a vast number of lives, arises from our lack of understanding of the prime law of growth, truly envisaged by the Apostle when he speaks of 'leaving those things which are behind.' There are stages in the Christian's growth; rings, as we have said, in the tree; crease-marks on the grass; cairns left behind in the march. There must, in fact, be definite and final dealings with the past, with conscience, and with God.

Let us take three illustrations of finality in the

soul's progress. *First, the consciousness that, on our confession, sin is absolutely forgiven and put away.* I remember an interview with an elderly man in which he told me that every night before he slept he confessed all the sins of the past that he could recall, and sought forgiveness. Obviously such an ordeal was arduous, costly of sleep and rest, and altogether unnecessary, in face of the continual affirmations of Scripture. The statements on page after page are clear as crystal. 'As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions.' 'I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will no more remember thy sins.' 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us.' Nothing could be more explicit and definite.

There may come a definite moment when the soul faces its past, and in true penitence returns, prodigal-like, to the Father, with the frank confession of the past. As soon as the frank and full confession has been made, the whole black record is obliterated. Nothing of the past will ever be mentioned again. It is forgiven and forgotten from that hour; and it must be a grievous hurt to the Divine Spirit to be asked again and again to forgive.

*The same attitude should be adopted in regard to Divine guidance.* There are three steps which enable us to come to a definite conclusion as to our life-course, and the demands for decision and choice of route which arise from time to time. In the first place, a resolve or sense of duty begins to form in the secret depths of the soul. At this stage we are wise not to mention it to the closest friend. Ask that, if it be not of God, it may die away. But if it grows, expose it to the scrutiny of the Divine Spirit. Finally, there will be corroboration on the part of those whom at this stage we consult. When these three signs agree, we must dare to roll the entire responsibility on God's Providence, as Abraham did, when he left Haran and flung himself into the desert which intervened between the Euphrates and Damascus. 'He went out, not knowing whither he went.' But he never returned, and God vindicated him. Similarly men, as individuals or in groups, have stepped forth on unknown paths; but when faith takes a step of that nature, whatever be the difficulties and perils, there must be no looking back. The responsibility for all the future must be cast on God. He must and will provide.

*The same attitude should be adopted in the presence of a heavy sorrow, which ever lies on the heart and extorts sighs and tears.* It is natural to entreat

that the cup should be taken away, and that the long discipline should cease. It is natural to return day after day and night after night to that same spot in our Gethsemane. But there must come an end to this, if we would follow in the footsteps of our Lord. We must accept the discipline as the Divine will, whether it be imposed or permitted. We must believe that God has a definite purpose and reason in regard to it. We must come to the point of definitely accepting it as the Father's choice for us. We must tell Him of our willingness to suffer so long as He deems it to be necessary. We may ask for an angel to strengthen us, but we must allow our wrists to be bound with thongs.

The only experience in our mortal life in which we cannot always claim finality is in our intercession for others. 'God forbid,' said the patriot-prophet, 'that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.' But even in this case the soul may become assured that the prayer has been answered, and then the prayer is turned to praise, and the intercessor quietly waits to see the salvation of God. Intercession, like that recorded of our Lord in John 17, can never cease. 'He ever liveth to make intercession.'

Scripture abounds with instances of finality in dealing with God. Samuel's mother, having poured out her heart, was no more sad. The nobleman who came to Christ for his child, instead of waiting for further assurance, believed the word that Jesus spake, and went his way! Why should not we cast our burdens on the Lord, and leave them there, without fear as to the result, when once we have the inner conviction that God has accepted us? Never in this life shall we feel that we have apprehended all for which we have been apprehended. It is related of the great artist Herkomer that his aged father lived in his home and spent his days in modelling clay. At night he placed the day's work on the shelf with a sigh as he detected the effect of the pilfering years. But when he had retired to the early bed of age, his gifted son entered the workshop, took up one by one the objects over which his father lamented, touched them with inimitable skill, and the old man, as he took them up in the morning, dismissed the regrets of the previous night, and said delightedly, 'After all, I can do as well as ever.' So at the end of life, and often during life, when we confess that we have not apprehended, we shall discover that Christ's deft touch has perfected our poor handiwork.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> F. B. Meyer, in *If I had only One Sermon to Preach*, 161.

## TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

### The Trust of Life.

'He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.'—Mt 5<sup>45</sup>.

All the great principles of Christianity come home to the individual in definite personal demands, nor is this one of God's trust in man an exception.

The most obvious aspect of life, as one thinks of it in one's own case, is that of opportunity. Montaigne has immortalized the assurance that 'To-morrow's a new day.' What does that assurance mean? Simply the chance of doing something, well or ill. The wide fields of time lie before us, and the sun has risen to light our day. There, in the very freedom, and the clear space that lies open to us, is our first great proof of God's confidence. He is not forcing our will. He is not hemming us in with circumstances. He is not imprisoning us in our past failures. He has trusted us with the life of another day.

And the day comes laden with great gifts. We need not confine our thought here to the gifts it brings to the very wealthy, or the high in station, or those gifted with exceptional talent. The gifts that every day brings to ordinary people are enough to show God's trust. There is for all a body to keep in seamliness and health and purity. There is an imagination to keep untainted, a conscience to keep unstained, a brain to keep clear. There are the special powers and faculties in which we excel waiting for fresh exercise, and the living thoughts and purposes which returning consciousness wakens in our mind. There is our society, too, the place we fill in the world, and there are the friends in our home and the companions of our work or of our leisure. Surely it is a great trust, this of life, upon which has been thrust so many responsibilities. The delicate mechanism of the body and the more delicate mechanism of the mind and heart are all at our mercy. The subtle relations between our soul and the souls that surround us—whether we shall be true and considerate, or whether we shall wound them and deceive them—all that is left solely to our sense of honour.

Let us think of trust in special departments of experience.

1. *The trust of the day's work.*—It is true that, when we remember how insignificant is any force that a human being can exert in contrast with the mightier forces of the universe, and how little the world is affected by the deeds of even the greatest among men, we are tempted to think but

slightly of the importance of our labour. But the exacter eyes of God are over all His works, and in their sight there is no human action that is insignificant. However trivial the effect of our lives upon the sum total of things may seem to us, it is quite obvious that we are not here merely to feel the thrill of life and to pass on that meaningless thrill to our children. We are here that certain things may be done, things whose doing God requires.

To take our labour thus is to pass from being artisans and to become artists under the Master Worker; for the real distinction between these two has nothing to do with the *kind* of work, but with the spirit in which it is done and the thoughts that lie behind it.

2. *The trust of trial.*—There are two possible ways of looking upon trial. The first is that God is angry with the sufferer and is taking His revenge. It is a view old as the fears and the morbidness of man. The friends of Job are its champions in every generation. It seems so obvious to those who hold it, that few of them give any pains to think it out to its issues, or realize how small a God this of theirs must be. Those who seriously believe in God at all will have little difficulty in passing to the second way of looking upon trial, and if their faith is worthy of the name, it will be quite as obvious as the former. Once seen it can never again be doubted, though it may sometimes require a strong effort to realize and hold by it. When we hear that certain troops have been sent into the most dangerous and trying post on the battlefield, how do we judge of them? Is it that their general has wished to punish them, or is it not rather that he believed in them best of all? And is not such confidence an honour greater than all other praise? To look at life under that light is to be done with fears and doubts. And along with that we take the further assurance that God sends no man into any battle that he may fall. None of all His troops is ever sacrificed to the exigencies of the field.

3. *The trust of forgiveness.*—‘Go, and sin no more.’ Let us think of the time and circumstances in which these words were spoken, and the temptations of the life into which the forgiven were sent forth. Such trust was never seen on earth, surely, as that. There was no period of probation set, no long discipline prescribed. The forgiveness was given first, without guarantee, and the only safeguard that He who forgave retained was the sense of honour that would be awakened in loving and grateful hearts. There

are no half-measures in God’s grace. To this unheard-of length will His truth go, even for the most misguided of His children.

Thus, beyond the shame of forgiveness, and beyond the unutterable sweetness and the sense of safety and of tenderness experienced by those who have come home to their Father’s heart, there is one commanding thought that braces a man for the future and restores to him his sword and armour. Forgiveness means a second chance. To have sinned is to have been a failure, to have betrayed life’s trust. Had the soul’s story ended there, how unbearably hopeless it would have been! ‘To have been useless, and to have now no more chance of usefulness’—that would have been a bitter lot indeed, a punishment greater than the spirit of any strong man could bear. But forgiveness means to all such spirits that God still has use for them. It means that they are not—

Left in God’s contempt apart,  
With ghastly smooth life, dead in heart,  
Tame in earth’s paddock as her prize.

Instead of that the man is sent forth, with God’s assurance that he is no castaway, but an acknowledged son and soldier of the Lord. The world is before him, its boundless fields of victory and progress left open for his entrance. Much may be gone from life for ever of old innocence and former simplicity of character. But always more, far more, remains than what is gone. In a memorable passage in the story of *John Inglesant*, this gospel of second chances is well expressed: ‘If I am not mistaken in your case, God will win you, and He will win you by determined and uninterrupted acts of love. It may be that in some other place God would have found for you other work; you have failed in attaining to that place: serve Him where you are. If you fall still lower, or imagine that you fall lower, still serve Him in the lowest room of all. Wherever you may find yourself . . . still serve Him, and you will bid defiance to imaginations and powers of evil.’

How have we fulfilled our trust—the national trust of history, and the individual trust of the opportunities of our own lives? It is a solemn question, for it is certain that every high trust is dangerous as well as honourable. It raises up the faithful and it lowers the faithless. And life slips by so quietly, that it is the easiest of mistakes to be careless and blind to its highest meaning, growing accustomed to it as a common thing. As we turn to the actual facts, it may well be that a deep discouragement settles down upon our souls.

If history be indeed what we have said, why are our times not better than they are? Why is every national life still shamed with evils of long standing, and plagued with new forms of evil more subtle still? Why have not all these centuries of God's unbroken confidence made the spirit of our times loftier and more pure? And if we ask the question of our own souls, the shame becomes keener. How have we fulfilled our personal trusts wherewith the Master honoured us? For some, the very opportunities of life have been too much for them. The greatness of the possibilities has confused and paralysed them, and they have been unfaithful through the fear of their responsibilities. Others have never realized that they were upon their honour with God at all, imagining that every man lived unto himself alone. All have failed to meet the high demands that life must ever make upon those who are commissioned of the Lord for its daily service.

Let us together hear the great word of forgiveness and understand that the trust is renewed from the very fact that life lies before us open for new adventure.<sup>1</sup>

#### ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

##### The Service of the Eye and Ear.

'The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.'—Pr 20<sup>12</sup>.

There is no problem so difficult for us to understand as how He who made the eye and ear submitted Himself to their laws and gradually heard and saw, but it is by thinking of some such experience that we gain a true estimate of the important teaching He gives on both. At first all the impressions of sight and sound were the same, then He learnt to distinguish between them, to understand their meaning, to rejoice in the new life which they opened out to Him. And it is helpful to remember how much others gave Him in this earliest stage of life.

Perhaps no one who has reached middle life but deplores that he has made so little use of these extraordinary powers. We have failed in hearing and sight because we have been so preoccupied with self. With Him, it is needless to say, there was no such barrier. Recognizing His own relation to the world into which He had come, every sound, whether of falling water, or of the wind rustling in the trees, gave exquisite pleasure as being sounds which opened out communion with living things that were already friends. But the sights and

sounds of chief interest were those connected with the human family He came to save. The sight of a human face and the sound of a human voice moved Him as nothing else could, but never, we may believe, in quite the same way as they move us. He doubtless saw many beautiful faces and heard some cultivated and refined voices, but these were only symbols of what lay behind, and He was ever pressing in to see what the mask concealed, what the sound indicated.

Frequently it appeared as though He had paid no attention to what men had asked, so different was the reply from what was expected, but on thinking it over many a questioner found himself asking, 'How did He know I was really thinking of this when I asked that?' For example, Nicodemus finds his compliment brushed away and his eagerness to know what was the nature of the Kingdom this new Prophet was establishing, revealed.

So He taught us that sight and hearing were faculties that needed delicate care and training. They only supplied symbols of a mystery lying behind that which they symbolized. It is when we bear this in mind that we are able to estimate more truly His teaching as to direct the use of eye or ear.

It is at first a surprise to learn that He considered most people to be either partially or completely blind. There were blind guides and blind followers. And indeed the great prevailing sin was ignorance on this very question. If only men had known they were blind they 'would have had no sin.' And yet men saw things and appreciated what they saw. But they saw everything as single separated objects having no meaning but the obvious one that lay on the surface. And therefore they were blind, for sight was given to men to realize that they were walking in the Temple of God filled with wonderful treasures. And with this conception of sight He felt it comparatively useless to restore the outward blessing without some assurance that when given back it would be properly used. Faith seems to have been an indispensable condition for the restoration of the blind. Faith in Himself, for it was only when they entirely trusted Him and became His disciples that they were likely to be able to see what God intended them to see.

What, then, do we gather from Jesus' teaching about Love's use of the eye and ear? In the first place, we can never sufficiently admire the powers God has given us in these faculties. The contrast between what we have, small though it be, and blindness or deafness, is enough to raise a

<sup>1</sup> J. Kelman, *Honour towards God*, 45.

perpetual thanksgiving to God that we can see and hear.

But not only negatively but positively we may get a fresh impression of our blessings if we contemplate for a moment the happiness that lies within the exercise of these powers. Imagine the joy of being able to enter into the world of musical sound 'when the whole air of the concert hall is kept quivering with an inconceivable complexity of motions following one another as fast as fingers nimble with years of practice can move.' What is all this but for a time to be transported into a new world from which for the time are banished all the evil thoughts that would disturb the spiritual life!

But not only in the discovery of a new realm of thought but in particular and intimate knowledge of the treasures of the world which are laid open by the ear we realize our blessings. The hum of the bee, the note of the bird, the music of the human voice incite us to use our wits to learn what we can of creatures whose sounds have excited in us so much interest.

Gifts so remarkable demand the greatest care, and the knowledge and skill of great doctors is devoted to their preservation from harm and destruction. And dare we catechize ourselves as to how we use them? Both must necessarily be used for selfish purposes. The eye, for instance, is brought to the service of the hand. In our dressing, our eating and drinking, our business, the eye is being made to minister to the body, and it would be discouraging if we were to calculate for how large a part of the day it was serving self.

We start, therefore, with instruments already biased, and strongly biased, with selfish tendencies. The Bible speaks of 'high looks,' 'eyes that love vanity,' of 'itching ears' 'heavy' as though that were the natural condition out of which they were to be developed into spiritual instruments. And our Lord warns us that sin lies in the look and the hearing as well as in the act. We are constantly tempted to suppose that it matters not what we see so long as it is not followed by action, and men and women who would shudder at the idea of impurity in act see (apparently) no harm in impurity of thought. They will go to questionable plays, read questionable books, look at questionable pictures, imagining that sight produces no harm, but the bad thing that the eye has seen is retained long after we willed to blot it out of our sight. So, too, for the eye to rest over long on something denied to us is to encourage that spirit of discontent which is the bane of many an earnest life.

It is not without importance that our Lord taught that the sacrifice of the eye might be as necessary as that of the hand, that a habit of looking wrongly might become as dangerous as that of acting wrongly. That as under certain circumstances the body could only be saved by the abstinence from all intoxicants, so, too, the mind only by the total exclusion of all objects that have the power to excite evil thoughts.

It is plain then that both eye and ear need to be trained. A consecrated use is better than excision. And if we would secure this we must see that the attitude is right. It must be Godward first, manward second.

Let us consider the service of the ear. Given first to God, it hears much that others hear not at all. The disciples had no great intellectual advantages, they were simple working men with the practical ability that belongs to what we call the working class, and yet they heard what the wise and prudent failed to catch. The Teacher could congratulate them on the results of His work. 'Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear; for many prophets and righteous men desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.' And yet there were no secrets. But the many, including the wise and prudent, were so occupied in catching what could support their own prejudices and views that the chief lesson was lost.

'Take heed how ye hear' remains a caution never out of date to the disciple of love. It means an ear that loves to hear, that, knowing itself to be the instrument of Divine Love, tries to catch every word that is spoken whether from within or from without, that amidst the world's noise and discord it may always hear 'the gentle voice soft as the breath of even.'<sup>1</sup>

God's in matter everywhere,  
 Flower, bird, beast, and man and woman,  
 Earth and water, fire and air,  
 All divine is all that's human,  
 Only matter's dense opaqueness  
 Checks God's light from shining through it,  
 And our senses (such their weakness)  
 Cannot help our souls to view it,  
 Till Love lends the world translucence,  
 Then we see God clear in all things.  
 Love's the new sense, Love's the true sense  
 Whereby souls learn how to call things.

<sup>1</sup> G. H. S. Walpole, *Life's Chance*, 169 f.