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In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

'Two Mules' Burden of Earth.'

BY THE REVEREND ERNEST G. LOOSLEY, B.D.,
BURY ST. EDMUNDS.

'And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.'—2 K 5¹⁷.

EVERY boy knows something about geography, and can give quite a lot of information about imports and exports of various countries. Well, what do we import from Australia? 'Wool, wheat, apples.' Yes, that is right. But I was reading the other day about one of the strangest imports ever received into this country, and it came from Australia. It consisted of one hundred and fifty tons of soil, brought over to England in order to make a cricket pitch. I suppose the pitch in some parts of Australia is so hard that it almost breaks the heart of many English 'test' bowlers; and in order to enable them to practise on a wicket exactly like those they would have to play on in Australia, a rich lover of cricket imported these one hundred and fifty tons of soil to Broome Park, in Kent—where Lord Kitchener used to live. After this, we ought to stand a better chance of keeping the 'ashes.'

It must be a rare thing for soil to be exported from one country to another. But I remember reading of one other case, that happened many years ago. Let me describe it to you. A caravan party is trekking along one of the oldest roads in the world, the road that runs from Egypt through Palestine to Babylonia. They are going northwards towards Damascus, and from their appearance we get the impression that an important and wealthy man is making the journey, and taking with him all the provision that is needed for himself and his servants. Some of the luggage we can recognize at once—tents, food, water. But what is the load that these two mules are carrying, about which the driver seems to be so particular? Let us ask him.

'Your mules seem to have a heavy load: what have you in those sacks?'

'This is soil from the land of Israel,' he answers. 'My master is taking it home with him to Syria.'

'Soil! What for? Haven't you enough soil in Syria? Is the soil of the land of Israel so much better than that of Syria? What is your master

going to do with it? Is he trying to grow some of the plants of Israel?'

'You may well ask,' the driver replies; 'but it isn't for his garden that he wants this soil. He is going to build an altar upon it, and that is why I have to be so particular not to lose any of it. He has just been healed of a terrible disease by the God of the Israelites, and he is going to worship Him when he gets home. But, of course, Rimmon is our God in Syria, and my master Naaman could not build an altar to the God of Israel without some of the soil of Israel on which to build it. That is why these two mules are carrying their heavy load of earth.'

A strange old idea, wasn't it? Each god having his own land that belonged to him, so that he could only be worshipped within the borders of that land! And it wasn't only the poor old mule-driver who believed this, but his rich and well-educated master Naaman believed it too; and even the prophet of the God of Israel seems to have believed it, for he didn't try to teach Naaman any better.

You could teach him better than that *now*, couldn't you? Not long after Naaman's time, men arose in Israel who came to see that there was only one God, who belonged to every nation, and cared for every nation, and could be worshipped in every land throughout the world. That was once a new idea, though it is now so old. And when men came to realize that the one God, who made the whole world, was everywhere, and could be worshipped anywhere, they no longer needed to carry home with them 'two mules' burden of earth' in order to make a little home for a god outside his own country.

Nearest to Everything.

BY THE REVEREND JOHN MACBEATH, M.A., GLASGOW.

'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.'—Ps 122¹.

I was once staying in a large hotel in one of the great cities of America. I had taken lunch on the roof garden at a great height above the street, higher than our city monuments. Then I went to my bedroom to do some writing. I found the hotel notepaper and envelopes very interesting. On the top half of the sheet was an outline map of the centre of the city, and at the heart of it a miniature picture of the hotel, with the motto underneath, 'Nearest to Everything.'

The picture showed that the hotel was a very convenient residence for most things in the city. A great many other buildings and institutions were marked, and these seemed to be 'Everything' that was of any particular consequence. The motto was repeated in two words on the envelopes—NEAREST EVERYTHING.

The map and the names were of great value. I looked them over. There was the Post Office—we all want that sometimes. And the Library, that was good. Railway Stations, too, are very necessary things. Then there were great public stores: most people want to know where these are situated. The Mint was marked too, where the money is made and stored. The Academy of Music was there, also Independence Hall, and the Art Museum. A great many theatres were marked and named.

When I had carefully examined it all, I asked myself, 'Is that everything'?

It is the kind of question you ask when you are packing up for the holidays. All the travelling trunks, and cases, are about to be closed and locked. Has anything been forgotten or overlooked? And the question goes round the family—'Is that everything?' I asked the same question that day in the hotel. But everything was not there. Do you know what I missed?

I missed the churches. There wasn't a single church marked or named on the city picture, and it was not because the churches did not exist. I had preached in four or five of the central churches of the city, but not one appeared on the map, even though there were several within a few minutes' walk of the hotel.

Can a city have everything if it hasn't got a church? Is the map of the city complete if it omits the churches? If we take the Church out of our lives, can we say that we have everything without it?

What are the things that are everything to us? The most important things? Food and comfort, and light and air, and clothes and books and all that? But Jesus said, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you.' They are *added*, they don't come first.

A wise old teacher once said that it was a very dangerous thing for a man or woman not to belong to any church. And it's even more dangerous if our young people can think of the map of the city without any church in it, or if they can think of living without belonging to any church. A life without worship, without religion, without Christian faith and hope and love is like having eyes without

sight, and ears without hearing, for it is life without God in it.

Our churches ought to be the best buildings in the city, and they ought to be the most crowded, because they represent the best things in life—the worship of God and the glory of Jesus Christ. They teach us that the things we most truly live by are love and righteousness, faith in God and charity amongst men, the pursuit of truth and goodness and peace.

A great traveller once said that Britain owed much of her influence in the world to her homes and her churches. Then we must cultivate our homes and we must cultivate our churches, both the home church and the holiday church. If we miss Christ we are poor, though we have any amount of money; but if we have Him, we are rich, however little money we possess. That was what the brave-spirited Apostle Paul meant when he said that he was 'as having nothing, yet possessing all things.'

He would have sung with great heartiness the hymn:

I've found a friend in Jesus,
He's *Everything* to me.

The Christian Year.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

A Call and a Warning.

'Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord. . . . O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.'—Hos 6¹⁻⁴.

What stands out as essential in repentance is a man's turning from his sin to God. Two forces account for this turning—a sense of sin and an apprehension of God's mercy, and both have their place; only they are not of equal weight. Since in men the force which draws is stronger than that which drives, the first necessity is a vision of what God is like. Hosea is abundantly conscious of the guilt of men, but he is still more conscious of God's mercy. In the previous verse he has darkly hinted at the possibility of God's leaving the Hebrews to themselves; but when he makes one effort more to get at their hearts, it is not by way of storm and scolding, but by a fresh exhibition of the inimitable grace of God. You cannot have seen my God as I see Him, for no one could resist the appeal of that amazing beauty. And thus, as it were, he takes the

people by the hand and says, 'Let us go together, you and me, to seek Him'; and by way of persuasion, he tells of what his God is like. For he believed, as Paul did, that it is 'the *goodness* of the Lord which leads to repentance.' Let us consider what he says in commendation of his God and ours :

1. He speaks of Him as *near* : 'After two days will he revive us, on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.' No slow approaches are needed, no gradual processes extending over years, for renewal is possible at once. To a mass of men God is little else than a name, a formless rumour of power and fear, but such men do not know the help of His presence. A woman whose boy has died will often grow impatient when good people talk to her of God, for all her boy's ways rise up in her memory, and all he has been to her. Nothing could be more definite; and over against this absolute distinctness of remembrance are a few vague words about God's goodness—a great blank, a face with no features, a formless immensity, without helping power of any kind. That is what also makes repentance difficult. Men are held by such very substantial restraints. What they are is due not to the free choice of to-day, but to the growth of habit extending over years. Education and friendships and the standards and opinions of their set have made their mark upon them; and though at times they would like to make some clear amendment, they are always hampered by their past. When a preacher calls them to attempt a new beginning, their better sense admits that he is right; but as they leave the church this solid fact of habit reasserts itself, and in face of it they scarcely even try. If on their side they knew of a power as actual and as close as the power against them, they might take courage; but because they know of none they are beaten before ever they begin the fight.

2. But further, in commendation of his God, the prophet declares that He is *gracious*. He multiplies pleasant words, attributing to God such gifts as, if we heartily believed in them, would leave us little room for mourning. There are sore hearts everywhere and men whose life is running low, and to these he makes the declaration about God, that He will heal, that He will bind up, that men shall *live*—live and not merely exist—in His sight. The Greek version of the Old Testament adds a delightful phrase, which is a little gospel in itself. 'Let us follow on to know the Lord, and we shall find him as a dawn prepared.' Our day is nearly done, men say, and we now are bound to travel on in

deepening gloom to darkness and eclipse and defeat. It is not so, says Hosea; I tell you of One who can give you the dew of the morning again, and an outlook over the radiant possibilities of a whole new day. God's power is infinite, says the prophet, but it works always through His kindness; it is a power of healing.

Words are often nothing more than words; but the message here is interpreted by the prophet's act and attitude; for he himself is without fear in God's high presence, and taking his people with him, as it were, he associates his confidence with their obscure distrust of God. Since they cannot see, it is the duty of any one with eyes to deliver them from distrust by his boldness, and from fear by his rejoicing. That is where all good men, in their measure, have served the world. They are like the vowels in the alphabet of society, helping into utterance much that else would remain unspoken. There are vague gropings after goodness in men whose standard of life is low: there are shamefaced ideals, and shy instincts which might speak out if some one else spoke first. And when a good man comes, not pretending to superiority but living as a man with men, his courage makes many brave, his trust in God awakens hope in others. 'Come,' says this great heart in an act of loving association with the moral bankruptcy about him—'Come, let us return to the Lord.' And some began to pray, who could never by themselves have prayed; they felt that in God there must be a very wealth of grace when they looked upon the contentment of this sorely tried man. There was a light in his face, which, according to their calculations, ought not to have been there, and it seemed to come to him from knowing that God who to them was only a rumour. So interest stirred; and if they did not wish for God Himself, they wished for the healing effects of His presence, as these appeared in the face of this His servant. 'God took me,' says one, 'from a horrible pit and from the miry clay, he set my feet on a rock, and established my goings (starting me out on life again), he put a new song in my mouth of praise to our God.' And then he adds, 'Many shall see it and shall fear, and shall trust in the Lord,' for faith is quickened by contact with the believing. That is a description of the way in which Jesus Himself helped men and helps them still. 'It is through him,' says Peter, 'that we are believers in God.'

3. The prophet bears witness also to the *endlessness* of God. In his call to 'know, to follow on to know the Lord,' he hints that there is more to learn of God than the wisest has yet declared, that there

are heights beyond our highest. Some people hold back from faith because of the way in which it was first presented to them; to this day they stumble over points of doctrine on which their early teachers laid exclusive stress, and thus they are kept from knowledge of their own. But in God there is room for many opinions. Saint, prophet, evangelist in turn proclaimed what they had discovered of Him, until it might have seemed that nothing more was left to know or to declare. But always others came, like voyagers landing at some different bay in a continent only half explored, and their report is of new territories through which they passed.

Thus the prophet spoke, calling his fellows back to a God so wonderful; but then, with sudden passion, he adds a warning. He saw how easily his message might be abused by men who, for a moment, would catch at it, and then let it go. When they are in trouble many are glad to hear of mercy, but they wish nothing else than mercy. An old Scottish preacher says bluntly, 'Esau grat his fill, but he never grat himself into repentance.' People are ready to leap at what penitence secures, but penitence itself, the deep and resolute turning to God, may lie outside their calculation. Nothing is more baffling than such a temper; and Hosea represents the great God Himself as at His wits' end with men who have desires, and confessions, and even tears, but in whom nothing is deep or enduring. 'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? For thy goodness is like the morning mist, which goes soon away.'

'The great want of modern piety,' says Faber, 'is a deep, vigorous, inward repentance. Life goes too fast for that. Rapid livers and rapid thinkers make rapid worshippers; and rapid worshippers are rapid penitents, and the spirit of inward repentance fares ill with all this. Deep work is too slow for our modern pace.' The contrast is scarcely just as between ancient and modern, for the trouble is of all ages alike. The woman, through whose disloyalty the prophet had to learn his lesson, was glad to see her husband—good, easy creature—come after her; but she had no conception of what his forgiveness of her cost him, or what it aimed at. He had enthroned her once in his heart as queen, and it was agony to think of her as disgraced and fallen. To see her merely clean and decent was far too little, for love is relentless in its demands; but for that she cared nothing, and our superficial penitence fails at the same point.

'We thus judge,' says Paul, 'that if one died for all then all died, and that he died for all that they who live should not henceforth live unto them-

selves, but to him who died for them and rose again.' It is thus that repentance must be deepened by consideration not of what we desire—kindness, healing, friendship—but of what He desires. 'He gave himself for us,' says Paul again, 'that he might purify us unto himself as a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.' That is the Lord to whom we must return, and with whom our life is safe.¹

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

A Sage among the Prophets.

'I turned about, and my heart *was set* to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the reason of things.'—Ec 7²⁶ (R.V.).

The author of Ecclesiastes is supposed to have been a Hebrew sage who lived either in the time of Alexander the Great, or over a century later, when Palestine was being wrested from Egypt by the Seleucid dynasty of Syria. Dean Plumtre conceives him as a Jew of Palestine, who had been instructed in his youth in the oracles of the Old Testament, and disciplined in the rigorous customs of Hebrew piety. From hence he made his way to Alexandria—now rising into fame as a seat of learning. Into this new world of knowledge he threw himself with youthful ardour. We may imagine him as, his mind enlightened and his powers matured, he developed independence of thought, or when, in accordance with his self-chosen title of Koheleth or Debater, he joined in the discussions in which school clashed with school. Thereafter he may be supposed to have tried other experiences, and also to have made adventures in the sphere of action; and at the last to have written a book in which he garnered the wisdom that had been learned, reproduced the occasional moods of doubt and pessimism that had accompanied his pilgrimage, and ended where he began, by re-asserting his invincible Jewish faith in a God who assuredly lives and reigns, though clouds and thick darkness envelop His throne.

So the Preacher's message is twofold.

1. *The Intellectual Message.* This may be summarized by saying that learning is an invaluable possession, but that the pursuit of it is attended by serious drawbacks and dangers. His estimate, in fact, takes the form of a profit-and-loss account.

(1) That wisdom is a priceless boon he affirms in emphatic terms. He observes that it excels folly—which, no doubt, includes ignorance—as far as light excels darkness. He gives two reasons in support

¹ W. M. Macgregor, *Repentance unto Life*, 13.

of this judgment. One is that knowledge is power. 'Wisdom is a strength to the wise more than ten rulers which are in a city.' It is a power which can sometimes accomplish as much even as money. 'Wisdom is a defence, even as money is a defence.' And sometimes it brings safety when all other resources fail. 'There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it; and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city.' What he had chiefly in view in these sayings was doubtless the knowledge of the properties of things, which gives man dominion over Nature, with skill and ingenuity in applying this knowledge for protection against danger and the promotion of material well-being. He gives another reason for affirming the excellence of knowledge, which shows that he had also other kinds of wisdom in view which did not produce palpable material results—such as the visions of the poets, the meditations of the philosophers on the ultimate nature of things, and the meaning of human life. He knows a wisdom which, if it do no more, at least yields a large inward profit to those who possess it. It is the sovereign virtue of wisdom that 'it giveth life to them that have it.' It effects an enrichment and refinement of soul which is even mirrored in the face. When the Preacher said that 'wisdom maketh the face to shine,' he said the same thing, only that he said it more picturesquely, which Matthew Arnold expressed in his famous proposition that 'culture augments the excellence of our nature, and renders our intelligent being still more intelligent.'

(2) On the other hand, we find scattered throughout the book a number of reflections on the disadvantages and disappointments which attend the pursuit of wisdom. One is the painfulness of the student's life. 'In much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.' Was the Preacher thinking of the new burdens that had been laid on his spirit as with widening knowledge he realized the prevalence of suffering in the world? and the vanity of human ambitions? Was he recalling the inward peace which he enjoyed in the sheltered conditions of his early life, and which he imperilled when he exposed himself to the chaotic influences of the wider world? Or was he thinking only of the brain-weariness, the laborious days, the unrestful nights to which he elsewhere makes reference, and doubting whether the gains had been proportionate to the sacrifice? Again, he is sure that much of the labour is wasted effort, since all is a rediscovery of what was known before

—'there is no new thing under the sun.' Further, he complains that the wise do not receive their due recompense. 'I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill.' Nor do they receive their meed of honour. The poor wise man who delivered the city was spoken of for a day, but afterward no one remembered that same poor man. And finally, to omit lesser considerations, death appears upon the scene and reduces the sage to the same level as the fool. Was the labour worth while?

It is true that the debit side of his account has to be revised in the circumstances, and with the outlook of our later age. One of the privileges and glories of these later days is that there is so much which is new under the sun and in the regions beyond the sun. To-day the poor wise man who does anything so considerable as save a city can depend on substantial rewards in both wealth and honour. And as for the crushing argument from the inevitable spoliation by death, the situation has been changed by the gospel which brought life and immortality to light, and the scholar's unceasing toil seems more reasonable in the prospect of the possibilities of eternity.

2. *The Religious Message.* On a superficial view it might appear that the Preacher has no religious message—that he is a seeker after truth, not the apostle of an assured creed. Yet we may be sure that there was some good reason why the author of Ecclesiastes, though he sometimes uses the language of a sceptic, and oftener that of a worldling, was associated with the goodly fellowship of believers and saints in the sacred library of the Old Testament. Part of the explanation is that he rendered a service to religion on the negative side by setting aside the claims of any earthly object to be accepted as the chief end of man. He mentions the chief blessings which are coveted by the mass of mankind—pleasure, wealth, power; and he declares that it is not in them to fill the soul with an enduring satisfaction and tranquillity. Nor, again, is the chief good for man to be found, where it may be sought by nobler spirits, in the achievements and possessions of the intellectual life: this also, notwithstanding its greater dignity and its higher utility, must leave a man, if he have nothing more, with a sense of emptiness and at discord with himself. Human life needs to be rounded off with a yet higher and more comprehensive good.

The Preacher not only felt the need of a religion,

but possessed one which had elements of truth, of purity, and even of moral grandeur. He ever writes as if all serious thinking about human life must take God for one of its axioms. He also profoundly believes in God as the power manifested in the world, the author of the constitution and course of nature, the being upon whom all creatures depend for their existence and preservation, and for the diverse conditions of their lot. His attitude toward God is marked by the deepest reverence. In presence of the supreme reality he feels that speech is presumption. 'God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.' He despises the superstition of the readers of dreams; he warns against the offering of the sacrifices of fools, and he feels that the true service of God is the fear of the Lord which constrains man to depart from evil. He has been charged with scepticism, but his scepticism meant chiefly that he did not profess to know the Almighty as fully as others professed to know Him; and especially that he did not pretend to understand the doings of God in the detailed arrangements of this strange and confused world. He could not undertake to justify the ways of God to man. But he was clear that God and duty are the assured realities on which we must build our lives. And so his book ends with the words which are the instinctive reiteration of the fundamental article of the creed of his fathers—'Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.'

We who live after Christ have a richer, a deeper, a more comforting, a better-grounded creed. From the deeps of the being of the Almighty and All-wise God, the region where the Preacher bowed in awe before the inscrutable, there has shined upon us the revelation of a God of love in the face of Jesus Christ. But there are still lessons for many of us in the message of this sage of the twilight. He is an early and a very interesting witness to the truth, which many in our time need to learn anew, that art and science and letters are no substitute for religion. Moreover, those of us who are rooted in the Christian faith may also learn of him that God is greater than our widest and deepest thoughts; and that it is our duty, even when we cannot understand the mysteries in the providential order, to bow in humility and trust before the unsearchable will. And not least, may we learn from the book and its context that, if we are faithful to the light we have, it will shine to more and more; and that he who shows the fear of God in a life consecrated

to the highest that he knows, may hope in the end to find deliverance from all his bewilderment of mind and travail of soul.¹

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Harvest Sermon.

'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.'—Jer 8²⁰.

Harvest home is often a happy season. When all the dangers which have threatened the seed since it was put into the ground—drought and deluge, mildew and worm—have been escaped, and the last load has been secured, the sense of work satisfactorily done makes man feel contented and glad, with energy for a new start. But harvest home is not only a season of contentment and pleasure, it is often a time of serious reflection. There is something in autumn which seems to make us thoughtful. The days lose their radiance. As the sunbeams slant across the landscape and the birds become silent, and the leaves fall noiselessly to the ground, it seems so much like a parable of human life, descending to its end, that one cannot help looking back and sighing, and looking forward and trembling.

1. Each portion of life has allotted to it its own appropriate work. We are made to work; we must be employed. The powers we possess at one time of our life are not the same as those we possess at another part of our life. The powers we possess should point out our work. In childhood we are dependent upon others. We are like soft clay, capable of being moulded into almost any shape. Then this is the season for education. And youth is a time of hope and ambition and ardent affection, when we feel we can do almost anything. That is a time we should not waste. It is motor-power which may drive the engine or be allowed to escape in noisy waste. And manhood is the time of mature strength, and sound judgment, produced by experience, when a home is to be made and kept comfortable and happy and good, both for wife and children. The powers and the circumstances of each period show what is the proper work of that period. The lesson from this is that each part of our life is a very solemn thing; that if we don't do the proper work of each at its own proper time we lose that which we can never find again. In some cases we may partially recover lost ground. But in doing it at the improper time we lose the chance of doing something else. If we do to-day's work to-morrow, when will to-morrow's work be

¹ W. P. Paterson, in *Sub Corona*, 228.

done? and what if when the judgment comes we are a day behind? Have we thought much about such things as these? Have we felt that our life, however humble, has so much deep meaning in it? Begin this thoughtful autumn-time. It is a special season for reflection.

2. The next thing is that each period of life stands to the succeeding periods in the relation of a sowing-time. Every day we are sowing and every day we are reaping. For in all work there is profit. We hear often people say it does not matter—it would have been just the same if we had not done it. But it does matter. It is not the same. Even the least and most trivial action alters things in its measure, and alters them for ever. From each action of ours there come up two harvests. First, whatever we do is done. If a man ploughs a field, the harvest is that the field is ploughed. If a man paints a picture, the product is the completed picture. If a man tries to relieve distress or to make others happier, the gain is in distress diminished and in happiness conferred. But each action has a second harvest. It consists in the reaction of conduct on ourselves. Not only does the man who ploughs the field have the reward of seeing his work completed and the field ploughed; but as practice makes perfect, he is a better ploughman for his work if he has done his best; and a worse one if he does not care how he does it. The artist not only sees his picture, but he has increased his skill, and mayhap some new perception of beauty has dawned upon him while he has been working which eventually will produce a new power. The man who has tried to make others happy not only sees the pleasure he has given, but has also obtained by his conduct a larger, kindlier heart.

3. But if each period of life has its own appropriate work, and one period is a sowing-time of which the succeeding is the necessary reaping-time, in like manner this whole life of ours in this world has one peculiar all-important work, is one sowing-time; and the next life is the great reaping-time—the Eternal Harvest. Are we doing the work of this period? Is it clear to us what this work is? The work of this life is to be what we called 'saved.' Some people think that it is a fact of the next life, not the work of this. They think that it means to get to heaven; but it does not. It means to become heavenly, rather than to get into a place we name heaven. To be saved and to be safe are different things. Some men only want to be safe. They are quite contented to be idle, intemperate, and dishonest; but they would like to escape condemnation. But to be saved is to be delivered

from all our badness, to have all our mean, greedy, brutal dispositions subdued and destroyed. It is to be saved that we are here; and that is to be 'cleansed from all unrighteousness.'

Is this all-important life-work making progress? The best time to begin it is in youth, when the heart is pure and the affections warm and generous and confidence unshaken, and the power of habit limited and plasticity perfect. The young should take advantage of this precious sowing-time.

But there are too many who, in middle life, have not begun this great work. With such it is summer. The green corn should be waving, but instead there is barrenness or the fruitless prodigality of weeds. The work of being saved is harder for them. The soil is hardening and drying up. They have lost time; and that they can never get back. But still the year is not over. Let them take hold upon the present, and put in some good seed. It cannot perish, and God will give the increase. And there are even those who have outlived the heats of youth and the steady strength of manhood; who begin to feel the inroads of decay; but who are without religion and all its guiding light and vital warmth; whose affections are chilled, whose faith in mankind is dead; whose capability of joy is withered away. An old man with icy heart and peevish temper and greedy craft; an old man who cannot pray, who cannot lean his broken strength upon God, is a sad sight—harvest past, the summer ended, and not saved.¹

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Standards.

A SERMON TO BOYS.

'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'—Mt 28²⁰.

Christ left His disciples to carry on His work in a world of fluctuating ideas, where all standards seemed to be in the melting-pot. The Jew saw his fellows adopting debased Greek ideas, saw the Zion of his dreams vanish before the reality of Roman discipline, saw his leaders divided between a useless intransigence and servile trimming. Rome was no better off. The old discipline of self in citizenship was fast disappearing in a wave of Oriental luxury; the old gods had no appeal but that of nationality; and the East supplied a variety of new cults, from which you took your pick.

Cross-currents everywhere, but for the disciples one unmoving mark—Christ. And because there

¹ W. Page-Roberts, *True Religion*, 100.

was this one star, men and nations came quickly to steer by it. In the chaos and welter of the next thousand years, one principle remains stable—Christ's teaching; one Person rules—Christ. Like the ancient provincial governors far from home, men dishonour Him and His edicts by cruelty and lust and wrong, but they can never get away from Him.

The reason of the confusion of standards at the time of Christ is not far to seek. For long, amid primitive peoples, the idea of right and wrong had held an absolute if narrow sway, but as travel increased, men came to see that right and wrong in one place was not always the same as right and wrong in another: that gods, too, and modes of worship differed. Among the Greeks, first, there grew up a school of thought which held that one man's opinion was as good as another's, and therefore there could be no absolute standard. It followed strictly that right and wrong were really erroneous ideas; the only true right was for every man to do as he pleased. This was the logical issue of the Sophists' teaching, though they did not always press it so far.

But Christ gave a doctrine of right and wrong that was absolute and final, unaffected by the local customs of time and place. He showed that God is love in His absolute Being, and yet could still be love under the limitations of human life in a particular year and a particular place—more, that in these very limitations love found its greatest strength. The Crucifixion showed His ἀσθένεια (His powerlessness) at its greatest; and in that weakness He redeemed the world. In Him we see Love itself, as perfect in human conditions as in the timelessness of Eternal Godhead, utterly Itself everywhere and always.

Time and place become shadows before that reality. The standard is absolute, and that standard is with us even to the end of the world, because it is the living God. Conditions change, men change, social systems change; but through it all, human personality has in it *some* love; *some* power of self-surrender to draw others closer; *some* capacity for finding its greatest strength in its weakness and limitation; *some* joy in accepting weakness and limitation because of the power of service which they bring. It takes a good deal of experience, and often of suffering, to make a man understand how love can be the fount of all, the origin of all, the only final power—and yet be so powerless that it cannot hinder its own daily crucifixion—to see that absolute power is absolute self-surrender, to begin to form the faintest picture of God. This

comes only by experience—by living. But any one can understand that if God be indeed Love, as Jesus Christ came to teach and manifest, then we have a standard outside and beyond all social customs and individual guesses; outside and beyond the things of time. If Christ were God indeed, in Him we see this as a living fact. That is the meaning of 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' He leaves room for social change, but none for the abrogation of right and wrong; for right is love and understanding, wrong is lovelessness and blindness.

You are preparing to go out into a world of standards as fluctuating and confused as any that time has ever known. No doubt some of you have a theoretical creed of sloppy toleration already. Well, in the world you will find it in full swing. Men say: 'So-and-so likes to get drunk—well, it is his own affair, and he has a perfect right to if he likes.' 'So-and-so holds a different view about women from mine; but that is his business. He may be right, just as likely as I.' 'So-and-so likes to gamble heavily—why shouldn't he, if he likes to stand the racket?'

Two simple facts might be pointed out here.

The first is that the people who argue in this sort of way are very apt to hold two contradictory opinions without noticing it. The people who shout most loudly about the right of every man to express himself exactly as he chooses, also shout most loudly about the right of the State to take entire control of a man's work and money, and to interfere in his family affairs. Now an ideal, and a truth, may lie behind one or both of these statements, but it cannot be a clear ideal or a clear truth.

The second fact is that if you decide that one opinion is as good as another—that what a man chooses to think right *is* right—then if *you* think a thing is good for you and *I* think it is bad for you, *I* think you are wrong, and *I* am right in thinking so—which does not seem to get us much further, but which does show that your opinion is at the same moment right and wrong, and so is mine, which is surely a little contradictory! But it goes further, because as soon as you apply the same principle to *thinking* and not merely to acting, it becomes clear that men cannot *know* anything at all: truth and knowledge and reality just vanish, as Socrates and Plato showed long ago.

Of course, in this post-war world of rapid change, the lesser standards alter, and things are apt to get topsy-turvy, but is that a reason for throwing away all that has been definitely learned in centuries of struggle and thought?

'That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us.' Does that mean nothing to you? Is it not, in fact, a better thing to keep ideals, to think clearly, to serve truth, to help the weak, to do no wrong to manhood or womanhood, to make peace, to think and speak no evil, to do no work below your best, to be generous in thought and in act, to see and call out the good in every man you come across rather than the evil, than to serve the fashion and the passion of the moment?

The tolerance of to-day makes one sick. True tolerance lies in 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' But Christ did not see any contradiction between that statement and His indictment of the Pharisees; and there is none. He would not allow the stoning of the woman taken in adultery, but He spoke strongly enough about lust, and he told that woman pretty plainly that adultery was sin—from henceforth sin no more. Tolerance is not the denial of all standards and ideals, but refraining from self-righteousness and from adding to the burden of sinners—great enough often, God knows—by a cruelty that cuts them off from all faith and hope, and kills the germ of love that is in them. Go out to proclaim Christ's standard—to proclaim Christ as the standard. Go out to hate evil; to fight the sentimentalism and muddle-headedness of false tolerance; to uphold, in the face of all ridicule and contempt, your certainty that right is right and wrong, wrong. The world needs leaders; not complacent time-serving nonentities. Of course, you will have to suffer! God made the world, and in the powerlessness of love, He, the eternal, the omnipotent, waits helplessly through His own self-surrender. God came into the world, the historic Christ, and in the powerlessness of love redeemed the world, because love is eternal and unchanging under every limitation. *He suffers!*

And still the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God, to be delivered from the bondage of corruption. *Where* are the sons of God? *When* will they accept Christ's redemption by understanding and co-operating with His love? He is powerless till they do. Yet, for those who can see and understand, He is there, holding up an ultimate absolute standard which nothing can shake; the standard of love, which is oneness with Him and with our fellows. 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'

You may say: 'You affirm a standard which is so general, that it is of no use to me. I want to know whether *this* is right, whether *that* is wrong.'

No one can give you a magic formula, nor dispense you from the responsibility of decision in each individual case. But in this standard of God's love lies the power of a touchstone. Try it, and you will no longer doubt. Sometimes your decision will run counter to the opinion of the society you live in, sometimes not, and sometimes you may make mistakes through inexperience. But your decision will be based, not upon the whim and fashion of a moment, but upon one immutable principle.¹

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Revelation of the Cross.

'When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he.'—Jn 8²⁸.

It is, in many ways, a tragic picture we get in this chapter—Christ is standing before a world which could see nothing in Him, and as He stands He pleads. What He is asking for is not an abstract recognition of His claim; it is for something deeper; for the insight into His nature and quality by which alone we can call Him the Son of God in any real meaning of the word. Till we have seen Him with the inward eye nothing in Christianity is clear, nothing is sure. When we have so seen Him, there is a new light on everything. At the moment the people could not see, because they had allowed themselves to be blinded by pride and false ideas, by selfishness and worldly wisdom, by all the other wrong things that rise, like mist, from our hearts to shut out the face of God. But a day was coming when they would see. The revelation would come through their own act; for that same blindness would lead them, before long, to crucify Him, and then they would see. It was with that belief in His mind that He was facing Calvary. The Cross, in the mind of Christ, was to be the place of His supreme and victorious self-revelation. He faced it, not as the victim of a tragedy, but as the hero of a conflict, which, sooner or later, He knows He will win; a conflict with the most desperate of all enemies—human malice and pride, and all the blindness these can bring. And He was right. It was through His death that the quality of His life and spirit became clear. That is historical fact. It was after He had died that the full wonder of His spirit broke upon the minds of the disciples, and they realized that His fellowship was eternal.

1. How did this revelation come about? For one thing, His death revealed the nature of their

¹ S. A. McDowall, *Creative Personality and Evolution*, 105.

sin, their malice, and their pride. How futile it all was! It could kill the body; that was its cheap triumph; but, after that, there was nothing more that it could do. It could not kill the love that was in His heart; it could not turn the blessing that He breathed into a curse; and it came to them, and to the world after them, that malice and pride were defeated on the Cross because they could not conquer love. That is the real defeat of the men who crucified Jesus. It was the fact that, when they had done their worst, they could not break His spirit, or make Him like themselves; and His death, when all was over, brought that home. It is a curious thing that we do not often realize the full significance of some of our deeds until they are done. Passion blinds us and surrounds the tempting thing with a glamour of its own. Then, when the deed is done, our eyes are opened; we discover we have perpetrated a deadly thing: destroyed something beautiful; defiled something sacred; betrayed some trust; smitten, as it were, the face of God. That is the point of Browning's poem on the effects of revenge.

Now he lies in his rights of a man!
 Death has done all death can:
 Now he recks not, he heeds
 Nor his wrong, nor my vengeance.
 I would we were boys as of old,
 In the field by the fold:
 His outrage, God's patience, man's scorn,
 Were so easily borne!

So it happened with the Crucifixion. We have little record of it in the case of those who crucified Christ; but there is Judas, who was blinded by some strange passion till his soul was twisted and the deed was done. Then it came home to him how base and mean a thing was his betrayal, and in the face of that unveiling he found it intolerable to live. And there were Joseph the rich man and Nicodemus the scholar, who had stood back from discipleship because they were afraid, and who saw in the light of that closing day, as His brave spirit passed away, what a miserable thing their fear had been, and would have given all they had to get Him back that they might stand by His side. Thus the Cross becomes the means of sin's unveiling.

And with that unveiling the way is clear for the second thing that happened: the revelation of love, forgiving and redeeming. Love won its victory because, in the face of sin, it could suffer the last agony, and yet remain love. That is the actual fact, and that unconquerable love is the secret of

Jesus. It is the very nature of His personality. To see that in Him is to see Him with the insight which awakens faith. It is to see in Him that which our hearts call God, and are thereby bowed down in wonder and worship. So it was with the centurion who commanded the execution party. As he looked on the ruin he had wrought, and saw love shining in a radiance of forgiveness and compassion he had never before seen, he said, 'Truly this was the Son of God.'

There are some who have no place for the death of Christ at all. Like William Watson, the poet, they say

What is to me this show of wounds and death?

To me His death is nought. His life is all.

But there is confusion also here. It is not the wounds and death of which we chiefly think when we think of the Cross. That is the mistake men make in the figure on the crucifix. It gives a wrong impression, one not far short of the worship of defeat, and it evokes, maybe, only a subtle expression of self-pity. What the Cross reveals is the spirit that rose on it to a triumphant height of loving, and could have thus risen to that height no other way. It is the courage, the faith, the forgiving love there revealed that wins and saves us; and the Cross becomes the means of that revelation, because it gave Jesus His opportunity to break through in one splendid act of sacrifice in which self was forgotten and love was all in all.

2. But may not these words have a still wider meaning? Do not they suggest the one way in which we can keep alive in our hearts the redeeming conviction? It is easy, standing before the Cross, to believe that love there won a victory. But it is another thing so to keep the conviction that it becomes the fundamental principle of life, that the spirit we see there, transfigured in love and forgiveness, is the key to the meaning of life—the secret of true power, the way of real achievement. All that is involved in the conviction that Jesus is Lord. For it is an empty creed to call Him that, unless we can stand in the face of a world of evil and cruelty and selfish force and say that love is power; that love is the very omnipotence of God. The world is so dominating, its forces so impressive, its appeal to our senses so attractive, that the face which looks down from the Cross upon our streets and council-chambers and battlefields is apt to fade like a dream, unless somehow we can gain the power to keep the vision. So His words take on another suggestion. We know that He is Lord only as we go on to lift up His spirit in daily life.

When the statement became popular at the time of the War that Christianity had failed, Mr. Chesterton replied that the actual truth was that it had been found difficult and not tried. Does not this mean that it is only when faith is tried in difficulties, when, in fact, it is tried out to the point of a Cross, that we become sure of its real power? For only thus do we realize that it succeeds.

If we are to keep our convictions we must live them, and there are many occasions to give us opportunity. There is, for instance, the way of love and sympathy with the suffering of others. It would have been so easy for Jesus to turn aside, to have become absorbed in His own trouble, to shut away His heart; but everywhere He went He lifted up the Son of Man. He made them aware, through that sympathy of His, of a power which was able to heal and redeem. But there also He renewed His own inner conviction that He was the Son of God. And they who give themselves, as He gave, make a great discovery. They discover

in that love which takes them out of themselves a power which can save the world. They may not find the solution of the problem of evil, but they find something better: a fellowship with One who can redeem from evil and overcome it. Think, too, of the way of love in forgiveness of others. That is where the way of the Cross opens up in most of us. The biggest challenge Christ threw out to the world is in the call to love our enemies, and He assures us that that kind of forgiving love is the true secret of overcoming them, because it turns them into friends. It is just there that the challenge to the conviction that Christ is Lord comes home to us in practical life, but that conviction will never become a reality unless we try the way of love; then we know. It may be that when we try that way we shall fail to begin with, as He failed. But we must be ready to carry our convictions out to the point of suffering? And sooner or later the victory is with love.¹

¹ J. Reid, *In Touch with Christ*, 247.

Dogma and Spirit.

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THE title of this article was the title of a theological dissertation which I read long ago, at a time when my critical interest in the problems of theology was awakening, and which influenced my mind considerably. The author was Horace Bushnell, a name still familiar to many besides theologians by profession as that of a New England divine who 'flourished' about the middle of last century. A man of deep and intense spirituality, and a progressive Christian thinker, he wielded an influence upon the preachers of his generation at least comparable to that wielded a little later in the century, on this side of the Atlantic, by Frederick William Robertson. And not only upon preachers, and not only on this side of the Atlantic: it was a Scottish physician that placed in my hands the dissertation aforesaid, on 'Dogma and Spirit,' and he had made a theological companion of Bushnell for many years.

THE LIMITATIONS OF DOGMA.

Dogma, in the general sense of the term, is formulated opinion or logical statement of conviction.

In the particular sense in which it is here used, it is formulated opinion, logical statement of conviction, concerning the matters of religion, or—more specifically—concerning the matters of the Christian religion. The dogmas of religion seek to state or formulate the truths disclosed in religious experience, and the dogmas of the Christian religion the truths disclosed in Christian experience, just as, for example, the dogmas of physical science seek to state or formulate the truths disclosed in sense-perception.

Now the formulation of religious dogma is necessarily imperfect. For it has often been observed (Dr. John Caird, for instance, observes it in relation to theology) that language is an inadequate vehicle of spiritual ideas and impressions. It conveys spiritual things by things of sense. It interprets the world of unseen reality by means of the world that is seen. By image and symbol, analogy and metaphor, it seeks to embody the formless mysteries without us and within. The result is a number of comparatively dull propositions at the best, to represent the glowing inspirations of the Spirit; a result even more apparent