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that dies very hard, that 'human nature does not change.' What, then, is the use of talking of progress? Of what avail is it to praise and commend virtues like brotherhood, justice, and love? It is a commonplace of Christian experience that men do change. The Church stands for change—change of mind and heart—and her philosophy has not had the bottom knocked out of it yet. If men cannot be made new at this time of day, we may cease to talk of civilization. There is nothing before us but stark barbarism.

To build up life in accord with the law of love is the biggest problem of all. It is a gigantic task, but if the Church is not to betray her trust she must proclaim that message and lend her inspiration to all who attempt it.

We should like to believe with Wordsworth that 'man is dear to man.' It does not always seem to be so. On many occasions we wait in vain for the verification of the sentiment. But indisputably 'man is dear to man' when both meet in Christ. It was He who brought together Matthew the Publican and Simon the Zealot and made them blend, and that was as stiff a task as can be imagined, for one was an official of the hated Roman govern-

ment, and the other a fierce Nationalist. Amid the diversions and contentions, the strifes and scrambles of the modern world, the basis of our comfort and confidence is that in Jesus Christ is 'the irresistible beauty of an example,' of reconciling power, which we know is urgently needed to-day. The Church has to nourish and cherish that as her most treasured possession. If she does not, I for one cannot believe that any human institution will preserve it for long. And so, as Dr. Dearmer says: 'There is nothing on the remotest horizon that can take the place of the Church—in her worship prejudice is more easily convicted, variety more readily allowed, individualism more widely acknowledged, and fellowship more deeply enjoyed.' If it be permissible to substitute the words 'Church' for 'nature,' and 'spirit' for 'sense' in Wordsworth's lines on Tintern Abbey, I would say:

Well pleased to recognize

In nature and the language of the sense  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being.

'We are this house of God, if we will only keep confident and proud of our hope' (Moffatt).

## In the Study.

### *Virginibus Puerisque.*

#### Poking the Fire.

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

'Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee.'—2 Ti 1<sup>6</sup>.

ONE of the most uncommon gifts I have ever received was the gift of a poker. It was given to me by a man who worked with steel plates and steel rods, and he had made this poker out of a cold steel rod. The handle end of the poker was the neatly turned and twisted rod in the shape of a bowler's knot. I wonder if you know what kind of a knot that is! Have you ever watched sailors knotting the ship's ropes? Could you make these knots and give them their proper names? My poker handle is a bowler's knot!

This is the time of year when the poker becomes a favourite in the house, and we learn to

Sing a Song of Seasons,  
Something bright in all:  
Flowers in the summer,  
Fires in the fall.

There are not many of us who don't like to poke the fire. The poker becomes the hardest working member of the family.

'Punch' once wrote some letters to his son. In one of them he gave this advice, 'My boy, be a bright poker!' I suspect that 'Punch' had more than one poker at his fireside. He had an ornamental one. It never was soiled, because it never did any work. It just remained in its place, perhaps in its stand to be looked at, and be caressed by the duster. In its very self-respecting polish, the bright poker belonged to the aristocracy, the nobility of the fireside.

The other poker was a stubby little fellow who lay, ready for use, inside the fender. Modestly out of sight of the visitors, only the person who had the right to poke the fire knew where to find it. When the fire was dull the little poker stirred it up to sparkling life and burning flame, filling the room with a cheery glow. Raking out the dead ashes and putting the coal in order, the poker was a useful member of the family.

The bright poker was an idle poker; it never

stirred the fire. The working poker was a household favourite.

There was another letter written by a man to his son, at any rate he called him his 'son in the faith,' and he, too, said something about poking the fire. He wrote to the younger person, saying, 'Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee!'

I wonder if that young life was letting his mind go to sleep! Perhaps he was not doing his utmost, not putting forth all his power. The fire was dull and low, lots of dead ashes in the grate. It was burning sluggishly and needed poking, 'stirring up' as he called it.

Stir up your energy, he seemed to say, stir up your will, increase your application. Rouse yourself to greater earnestness and greater diligence. Don't be lazy, don't be dull, don't be slothful, don't even be uselessly shy! Poke the fire!

I heard the other day of a man who wanted to be a philosopher. So he got some books and sat all morning yawning and poking the fire, and he thought himself a very finished philosopher. But he put the poker in the wrong fire. His life was dull inside; his mind was in a sleepy condition. He needed his mental state stirred up.

Some one once told me of a woman who was seen going down the street one day with a poker in her hand. When she was asked where she was going, she replied that she was 'going to the front.' 'But what can you do at the front with a poker?' inquired the friend. The eager woman answered, 'I may not be able to do very much, but I'll let them know what side I'm on.' Her gifts of perception and of patriotism and courage and devotion were stirred up. Some people never know what side they are on. They never think much about it, and they don't care. They seem to walk in their sleep. They don't quite know where they are.

But if we are ever going to be any good, or do any good in the world, we've got to rouse ourselves to keen interest and eager application. We've got to know what side we're on, and we've got to make our being on that side worth while to everybody, even to God Himself.

Stir up your gift, your mind, your will, your prayers. Poke your own fire!

#### The Periscope.

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

'Cleanse first that which is within the cup.'—Mt 23<sup>20</sup>.

HAVE you ever seen one of those strange craft called submarines, with its decks awash, and its

eyes at the top of that queer little tube called a periscope? The officer on watch sits below in the dark, looking in at the bottom of the periscope, and seeing out at the top; for the mirror below reflects what the mirror at the top-end sees, so that, even if the boat is submerged out of sight, he can watch all that is happening on the surface. There goes a little fishing-boat, and there a mighty liner steaming majestically by—all come and go in that magic mirror. If you had a periscope at home, how handy it would be for looking over obstacles, and round corners, and seeing through stone walls, as our soldiers did in France!

But indeed, while the periscope is a new way of seeing through walls, it is a long time since mothers and sisters learned how to see through small boys—and that's a much harder thing. How is it, I used to wonder, that they always knew when one had been in trouble or in mischief? You would come into the room whistling softly to show how composed you were, or you tried to get away quietly to bed; but they brought you back, a few questions were put to you, and the whole wretched story was out. How did they ever guess? Ah!—the periscope! There are two or three of them we all carry around with us, and folk have learned how to use them to look into our hearts. You had better get acquainted with these, for you never know when somebody is sizing you up.

For example, there's that little pair of mirrors, our eyes. Nothing tells more of what is going on inside our minds than they do. Here is a boy brazening out a falsehood, and all the time the fear of being found out is lurking in his eyes. (I think 'lie' is the ugliest word in the language, don't you?—and a lie the ugliest thing.) 'What a sneak he looks!' said one lad to another in my hearing, and looking round I had no difficulty in detecting the boy whom they were discussing. For, somehow, character peeps out at the eyes. There are shifty eyes, and furtive eyes, and the eyes of the fellow who can always be depended upon to let you down. You have seen people whose lips were smiling, but their eyes were not, and you knew they were not really happy or pleased; it was only a mask they were wearing. And there are young folks whose clear, frank, fearless gaze mirrors the soul of honour within—all fair and square and above-board. How wonderful must have been the eyes of Jesus!

Another periscope is our manners. I don't mean the kind of thing you put on with your party clothes, or when there's company at home. But the sort of person you show yourself every day. Are you one of those boys who must always be

getting their own way, or else everybody hears about it? When you and your little brother are playing with your Meccano, you've got to get the spanner at once, and the rivets have a way of getting into your pocket! Or, when there's an errand to run for mother, do you grouse because you have to leave the hero of your thrilling story in such a fix that you doubt whether he will be still alive when you get back? Or are you one of those folk who have learned not to be a selfish creature, but to give and take, and be a 'sport,' and keep whistling even when your luck is all out? A great writer tells us that 'manners are the shadows of virtues,' and in those daily manners of yours, as in a mirror, people see something which is very deep down in your heart.

And then, I should like to know what a girl or boy thinks funny. A very clever man once said that was an excellent way to judge people. What they laugh at tells us a great deal about them. How many different kinds of laughter there are! There's the clear, joyous laugh of sheer merriment—some of the most gladsome music in the world. There's the coarse laugh of the little wretch who is ill-treating a cat or dog. There's the shame-faced laugh at something that is not nice, and there's the cruel, mocking laugh which leaves a wound behind, for it is at somebody else's expense. I have known a fellow turn absolutely sick at something which set a score of others laughing. He couldn't see the joke; he couldn't see that there was a joke in what was demeaning to his manhood.

So you see that through many periscopes we are daily giving curious views of ourselves, and of all that is going on in our hearts. Now somebody is saying to himself, 'I must be careful not to give myself away!' But that is surely to start at the wrong end of the periscope. Jesus once spoke about people who were very careful about what folk thought of them. 'Cleanse first that which is within,' He said to them, 'that the outside may be clean also.' Let our hearts and minds be filled with loyalty to Him, and cleansed of evil, and those many mirrors we carry about with us will not put us to shame. \_\_\_\_\_

### *The Christian Year.*

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

#### **The Severity of the Divine Love.**

'He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.'—Rev 19<sup>13</sup>.

When Christ's life was ended and His Cross was past, men knew more than ever before about the

tenderness of the Love Divine, but they knew more about its severity also. Here is an instance of this line of thinking which startles the mind into attention. The Word of God is pictured riding forth across the world to claim a Kingdom, but he rides sword in hand and in blood-stained apparel. This is poetry; if it is turned into prose, this theme emerges—the severity, we might almost say the cruelty, of the Divine Love. An excellent commentary upon this idea is afforded by a visit to any historical museum where the past is vividly reflected, and where relics are preserved of the struggles, sorrows, and triumphs of humanity. Such places compel the question—Did ever any great idea ride across the earth—any idea which stirred the hearts of men and shook the ancient foundations—without its garments being sooner or later dipped in blood? It is necessary in such a connexion to think not only of the sufferings of those who have set new causes in motion—the prophets of truth, the pioneers of progress. It is necessary to include in the survey all the restlessness and pain introduced by such causes into the world, whether among friends or opponents, the price of progress paid not by one side only, the agony of division coming like a sword into the life of families and nations, the wreckage of the innumerable battles between ideals and realities. Men are told that the world is planned by wisdom and love: that is our faith, and it may not be an altogether unreasoning or unreasonable faith. But, even if it be so, the wisdom and the love often seem strangely cruel.

There is a principle which seems to be inwrought with the scheme of things, and from which, however much we may dislike it, we cannot altogether escape. It may be roughly summarized in two phrases, the first, that Nature is hard upon life, and the second, that God is hard upon man. Nature is hard upon life. Science has taught us that lesson with tremendous reiteration and limitless illustration till we are weary of hearing it.

The second phrase is borrowed from a wise theologian who adds this as his explanation: 'Every finer vision of God has come with new demands upon men.' In other words, the severity of the Divine Love is apparent, not only in the broader realm of the natural world, but even in the more special and intimate realm of His grace. A hundred instances leap into the mind. Did God give easy days and years to a man like Moses? Nay, He was hard upon the man. Did He give easy days and years to His servants the prophets?

He was hard upon them. He wounded them with the sharp two-edged sword that went out of His mouth so that we can still hear their cries and protests. He emptied their lives from vessel to vessel until it seemed as if there were for them no home, no rest, no continuing city.

1. All these things are focussed in this passage. They are gathered here into a great piece of literature because they were also illustrated in the Christ who stood behind the literature. Long before this the dreams of prophets had pictured not only the coming Deliverer but the price of His progress across the world—an immeasurable price, a crimson price. There was, for instance, that famous picture of the conqueror from the red land of Edom. This passage in Revelation seems to borrow from that in the Second Isaiah and sets forth a like conception. But Christianity itself, apart from any special passage in its literature, is shaped somewhat after this pattern. Some have been *repelled from Christianity* by this very quality—repelled from it either as a doctrine or as a discipline. Some are repelled from it *as a doctrine*. For however much some of its teachings may be restated to suit the modern mind—say the idea of election, or the message of retribution, or the whole set of ideas that centre in the Cross—there is no eliminating a certain stern and absolute element in the Christian conception of the Divine character, that God is as holy as He is good; that for Him good and evil are realities; that He is waging relentless war against all that is opposed to His will. The great controversy which some minds have with Christianity is not over any historical question or any problem which can be settled by documents or by evidence. It is that the Word of God comes to meet them in such imperious guise, as with a drawn sword and an uncompromising message. And if some are repelled by the sternness of the Christian doctrine, others are equally *repelled by the sternness of the Christian discipline*. They find it hard to blend with the idea of self-culture the Christian ideals of self-denial and self-conquest.

I saw Lord Love upon his galley pass  
Westward from Cyprus: smooth as glass  
The sea was all before him. . . . Ever and anon  
As worked upon  
By some familiar Fury, grasping a scourge . . .  
He ran along the transtra, and did urge  
The rowers, and striped  
Their backs with blood; whereat they leaped  
Like maddened hounds, and swept  
The sea until it hissed.

Then I: . . .

'Lord Love, what means this cruelty?'

But he to me

Deigned no reply:

Only I saw his face was wet with tears

And he did look beyond and yet beyond.

Does it not seem as though the only Lord of Love whom the world has ever known treated His followers after that fashion? He bade them take up their cross, and if need be cut off a right hand or pluck out a right eye. Why should it be so? It does not quite answer the questions or silence the protests of the soul that the Lord of Love should 'look beyond and yet beyond,' as though hinting at future explanation. Why should not His terms be easier now? Why should He thrust His sword into the pride and self-will of His disciples, and tell them with such exceeding plainness that their death is their life?

2. In this Apocalyptic picture there are one or two things which help to nourish faith and patience.

The heart breaks into *Te Deum* at the sight of this, that even through the bloodstains on the Divine apparel and in spite of them it is possible to read the words 'Faithful and True.' The problematic and perplexing things in Christianity and in life ought not to shake us out of our natural healthy feelings that the universe is rational and that the great soul of the world is just.

Christianity seems all the more worthy of credence because in this matter of the 'bloodstains' it is of one piece with the universe—because it contains within itself something of the tragic element which we find so widely and so constantly blended with experience.

Agony is not only summoned but sent. Agony is met by agony: the need of the humble is met by the sacrifice of the highest; the God who made the world is no stranger to the pain which has been interwoven with its life. Perhaps from this passage alone we could not be sure of this.

But the reader has only to turn the page to come upon another and complementary thought. Whether or not the author of this book meant them to be fused in his readers' minds, they have been joined without hesitation by Christian experience, because it knows the Christ of whom, in splendid symbolism and in poetry most worshipful, these glowing pages tell. We read in verses not far away about 'the blood of the Lamb.' Men might be afraid to leave the problem of the world's pain and wrong to a God who stood afar off, sublime and cold and pitiless. They need not be afraid

to leave it to One who Himself has borne it and gathered the deepest depths of it unto His own heart.<sup>1</sup>

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT.

**Catholicity of Mind.**

'I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.'—1 Co 9<sup>22</sup>.

It is said that the most powerful thing in the world is public opinion. Its powers can scarcely be exaggerated if it comes into full and unrestricted operation. Ultimately it is the basis of law and the sanction of conduct. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that public opinion must for ever override individual judgment, for it is itself the aggregation of individual convictions. A world in which there is no room for private thought and separate conclusion is a doomed world. Individuals, in practical affairs, do sometimes step out from the common mass of the great throng, and holding aloft new ideas, give lift and lead to new and nobler achievements.

But in this business of leadership—of going before, preparing the way, making paths straight for new discoveries and new inductions—deference must be paid to established faiths as the accepted common heritage of the world. To disregard them, or to set aside this heritage of common judgment, has ever been the way of retarded progress. So for all who are striving to serve their day and generation there is nothing more important to emphasize than *Catholicity of Mind*.

1. *Respect for other men's convictions.*—There must be respect for other men's convictions. Convictions, be it remembered, are moral judgments which men reach often only by painful effort and always with solemnity. Few men are willing lightly to abandon them. Not infrequently are they interwoven with the holiest traditions. They may be false, but they may also be considered precious; and for that cause alone there is laid upon us the responsibility to consider them with respect. Every conviction that has ever had sufficient power to move men to great issues, however false the later judgment of the world may have shown it to be, has unquestionably been based on facts that were once considered fundamental either in the nature of man or in the constitution of society, and has been solved by a process of logical reasoning which was then considered flawless and irrefragable. In not a few instances, indeed, convictions long exploded have been so

<sup>1</sup> J. M. E. Ross, *The Tree of Healing*, 208.

girt about by human prejudice and that ingenuity which prejudice employs, that generations of repeated assaults have almost failed to let in the light. But not infrequently has the assault been more intolerant than the old prejudice itself, so that those who found refuge in the old belief have exhausted every ingenuity of defence and so delayed the desired consummation. One of the primary lessons which the young should learn is that which the experience of human conflict has clearly taught, namely, that before there can be liberty for new thought there must be deference paid to the older beliefs. Few men are ready without question to yield the little truth they hold, and not all men are capable of an easy acquisition of more truth than that which they already have.

This applies not only to beliefs but to prejudice. Nothing is more stubborn than prejudice. It persists long after reason is exhausted in the fight. And woe to the man who ruthlessly sets foot upon it. It takes many forms, it reveals itself in many phases. Sometimes it rears its head in nations, and then comes legislation against 'foreigners' and 'Orientals.' Sometimes it is purely personal, growing out of heredity, environment, tradition, or training. But in almost all forms and cases it is relentless and requires careful treatment. Prejudice, unguided and unguarded, certainly has an immense power for harm. It may even prove venomous to one who handles it roughly. But he is a bold man who tries to extract the teeth of a serpent. It is easier to charm the reptile! Patience will go further than passion; and in the long run it will triumph over prejudice. Human conventions, too, no less than human convictions, need our deference, if Truth is to win its way successfully.

2. *The real purpose of your own opinions.*—If it is essential to human progress that we should respect the views and prejudices and conventionalities of other men, we must needs also cherish for ourselves a broad and inclusive judgment. Truth is many-sided. It is important, then, that we should get the point of view of those who differ from us widely and even fundamentally. From three different spots in that delightful region called Snowdonia, we would get vastly different ideas of Snowdon. From one point it presents the appearance of a mighty eagle. From another, its sides are notched and scarred, gigantic and terrible, without the slightest suggestion of beauty. From the third point, you can see the mountain from foot to summit, set in a gorgeous framework of surrounding hills, presenting a picture of a vast and living thing floating in a

landscape that is liquid with rare beauty. And yet it is the same old mountain all the time. They who have viewed it from one side only know but a fraction of its reality. To *know* Snowdon is to climb. It is the same with truth. Most men see but a segment of it. This often leads them to think that what others see is really not the truth at all, because it is unlike anything that falls to the lot of their own particular observation.

Nor should we stop here. To obtain a catholic-mindedness we must seek to enter into the fullness of life ourselves. Only so can we hope to reach the heart of things. We must learn to look for something deeper than what appears on the surface of things. If we regard only the externals of human society we shall find that irreconcilable differences divide us and sunder us from real fellowship with one another. And our conclusions are made for weal or woe, for what we think of others determines our conduct towards them. But when we look deeper we reach another and safer conclusion. Wherever we discover man, no matter what may be the colour of his skin, the shape of his eyes or the formation of his skull, he turns with the same affection to father and mother, to wife and child, to brother and sister. Whither am I going? He has the same unconquerable impulse to walk with bare hushed feet in the presence of that great, infinite, spiritual, eternal Being who pervades all spaces, whose power made the universe, whose wisdom upholds it, and whose love alone can save it. So is there an element of good in every life, and some measure of Divine truth in every creed.

One of the greatest examples of Catholic-mindedness ever recorded is that which refers to St. Paul's sojourn at Athens. Whilst waiting for the coming of his fellow-disciples he made a tour of the great city, and his spirit was stirred to its depths by the idolatry which was everywhere apparent. But he did not allow his detestation to appear in word or act. On the contrary, he seized upon this very idolatry of the Greeks as the proof of a spiritual sense which had not yet found its true expression. St. Paul saw truth concealed under a gigantic error. What he sought was to release that truth that it might live to some purpose. To uncover truth is the surest way to reveal error.

3. *The place of intense personal conviction.*—Now all this patience, forbearance, sympathy, and breadth of judgment which we have been advocating are not incompatible with the most intense conviction. They may rather be symptoms of it. If

ever the civilizations of the earth are to be blended into one great brotherhood of men over which the ensign of Jesus Christ is to float in triumph as the one supreme emblem of true religion for all nations and languages and tongues, it will be when men are ready to merge their differences, not because they are not true, but because in every creed there is precisely that bit of truth which needs a chance to live so that it may grow to know the larger Truth of Him in whom all fullness dwells, the Truth in which men will yet attain to their ideals. The reasons for this are patent. Catholic-mindedness opens the door of other minds, and the open door implies a hospitality in which friendship and healing are accomplished. England is the country of the open door. There may be perils in it, and for the general well-being wise statesmanship is needed. But the open door of the spirit is not attended by such perils. By a readiness to share the mind so that we may know what each is thinking we steadily gain new conclusions and save each other from narrow judgment.

Moreover, this method disarms resistance. If a man invites us to the sanctuary of his hearthstone, and then unfolds to us all that is most precious in the experiences and convictions of his life, is he likely to take offence at what we may unfold? What if we lead him on to nobler heights of vision than those which he has yet attained? What if we give him a glimpse of a spiritual beauty that he had scarcely conceived possible? Sympathy wins its way to the human soul when all else fails. The passions of war subside when the ensign of mercy is flung to the breeze.

There was a certain Indian chieftain who was feared by hosts of men. He was just about to go upon the war-path against the whites when, suddenly, he lost his little child. He sat down in his tepee a day and a night beside the body of his babe, gloomy and terrible. Then a missionary came with a little coffin bearing a message of heartfelt sympathy, and placed it on the ground before him. After an hour of bitter anguish the Indian rose and placed the little one in the missionary's coffin. Then he washed away the paint and laid aside the feathers which were the symbols of war, and dismissed his followers in peace. That simple act of understandingness had convinced him that the white man was his friend.

So it is the wide world over. It is this very spirit which prepares the way for truth to make triumphal entry into the minds and souls of men, and gives the promise of a fairer day when all races and classes of men shall dwell together in

unity. In this spirit will Righteousness and Peace draw nigh and kiss each other.<sup>1</sup>

ADVENT SUNDAY.

Life's Middle Watches.

'And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so [watching], blessed are those servants.'—Lk 12<sup>36</sup>.

Beyond question the most striking feature of this parable is to be found in this verse, where our Lord adds a special blessing to those who are found watching in the second or third watches. Why single out these for His peculiar benediction? The reason is obviously this, that it was more difficult to be faithful then.

The tedium of the first watch was lightened by the memory of the day that was just gone and the hopes of a good rest when it was over. The darkness of the fourth watch was cheered by the rays of coming day. But those who were called to stand on guard during the second and third periods had a task more difficult. They were neither defended by the past nor inspired by the future. They were summoned from a couch warm with comfort, and were half drowsy with insufficient repose. They had to stand in the cold when the night was coldest; in the dark when the darkness was deepest.

It is a common saying that the beginning of a thing is its most critical part. 'Well begun is half done.' No doubt this is partly true. The beginning of any enterprise is full of difficulties; but it is not on that account fraught with danger. On the contrary, the greatness of the difficulties constitutes the smallness of the dangers. The very fact that the beginner has more problems to face makes him more careful, and the result is that he seldom fails then. A man's weakness becomes his strength because it throws him back upon himself, and we never know what is in us till our back is to the wall. Or better still, it may throw us back on God, and when a man stands there he can never fail.

1. Perhaps there was no time when it was more difficult to be a Christian than in the early years of Christianity, when to the hatred of the Jew was added the ridicule of the Greek and the intolerance of the Roman; when the philosopher said, 'What will this babbling say?' and the judge presented the young disciple with the awful alternative to 'Worship the Emperor' or 'Feed the lions.' Yet there was no time when Christian faith reached so

<sup>1</sup> L. J. Baggott, *Religion of the New Era*, 13.

high as then; when the Church went on from triumph to triumph, until in three centuries she had conquered the world. But when the first watch was over and the long dark ages marked the second and the third, how few were found faithful!

2. So, too, in the *individual life*; when a man begins the Christian race he does so with an ardent and enthusiasm which conquers every temptation and surmounts every trial; but this enthusiasm usually lasts only for a time.

Peter's fall is a striking illustration of the truth of this law. 'Master, though all shall be offended in thee, yet will not I,' he confidently affirmed at the beginning of that long night of our Lord's trial! And at first our Lord's prophecy of his ultimate failure seemed far enough off from fulfilment. See that flashing sword in the garden of betrayal! Others may fly, but Peter stands firm. Yes; in the first watch Simon is faithful. But see, how the long hours wear out the keenness of that braggart steel. See him as he follows so far off. See him as he stands among the servants in the High Priest's hall, so weak and timorous in his testimony that no one knows what he is. The second watch is already telling upon his faith and oozing the courage out of his soul. But now the third watch is passing by. Soon his trial will be over. Soon the dawn will be breaking upon the hills, telling that the long night of temptation is past. Soon the 'trumpeter of morn' will be sounding his shrill clarion of the dawn—yes, but not until Simon has fallen miserably before the Tempter's power. 'And if he come in the second watch, or if he come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants'; but if He come and find them swearing and saying, 'I know not the Man,' ah then the fourth watch will sound only on a sleeping soul!

There is a striking picture which represents Napoleon surprising a sleeping sentry. He has gone round his camp by night on the eve perhaps of a great battle and has come on this man prone upon the ground in profound unconsciousness. Instead of wakening him up, he just takes his musket which he has left lying on the ground and mounts guard himself, looking down from time to time on the faithless soldier. During one of these looks the soldier suddenly awakes, and you can see the agony in his face as he starts up to find his great commander looking down upon him. So the Lord looked on Peter in the hour of his betrayal, and so He looks on many still.

3. But the principle underlying our text may be broadened from individual instances to the *whole of life*. Life may be likened to a night of four

watches. There is first the watch of childhood, then that of youth, then that of manhood and mid-life, and last of all that of life's declining years. Now of these four watches of life the principle of our text is also true. The most dangerous are its middle watches.

In his fine essay on Burns, Carlyle has spoken memorable words about the dangers of life's second watch. 'There are some,' he says, 'who declare vice to be the natural preparative for manhood, a kind of mud-bath, in which a youth must steep himself before the toga of manhood can be laid upon him. It is not so. We become men, not after we have been dissipated and disappointed in the chase after false pleasures, but after we have ascertained what impassable barriers hem us in through life how mad it is to hope for contentment to our infinite soul from the gifts of this extremely finite world; that a man must be sufficient in himself and that for suffering and sorrowing there is no remedy but striving and doing.'

Yes, manhood begins in the power to say 'No!' Watcher of the second watch, be vigilant! Be faithful, and then you will have gained half of life's battle and won half of life's crown. Half? Yes; but not the whole; for note the words which follow, 'and if he come in the *third* watch.' We hear a great deal about the dangers of youth and but little of those of middle life. Yet if we were to count life's shipwrecks we would find as many in the shoals of the thirties and the forties as on the rocks of the teens and the twenties.

What are the dangers of the third watch? They may be described as a general drowsiness of soul, a waning of the moral enthusiasms of youth, a coarsening and materializing of the idealisms of opening life, and above all an ebb-tide of faith. The moral and spiritual springs of life run low.

A professor of psychology, illustrating the power of somnambulism, told of a man who rose in his sleep from his bed and went down the stair to the door of his cottage and still he slept. He opened the door and stepped out into the street of the village where he dwelt, and still he slept. He passed out into the silent country, and still he slept. Not until his naked feet touched the cold waters of a stream that trickled across the road did he waken to the darkness of the night and the strange unfamiliar scene.

So in our churches there are men who sleep on through the strangest and most awakening experiences. The preacher tries to waken them with the message, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.'

But still they sleep. God rings His warning bell by many an experience of joy or sorrow in their life, but still they sleep. Not until their feet reach the cold river of death will they waken to the darkness of a life that is lost, and the morning of a Judgment Day.

One of the great lessons which the Advent season would teach us is that Christ is coming. It was a lesson that was deeply impressed on the Early Church. It has grown too dim in ours.

That coming may take place at the end of the world, but whenever it be it will take place. Christ will come to us, if we are found faithful, and say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy lord.' How great the blessedness of such a faithful servant! Christ Himself has described it: 'Verily I say unto you, he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and come forth and serve them.' What these wonderful words mean in all their fulness we do not pretend to understand. They have no doubt an immediate reference to Christ's first Communion when the Master girded Himself with a towel and washed the disciples' feet ere He sat down with the Twelve to supper; but their real reference is to the greater and grander Communion with His people above, when Christ shall welcome not the Twelve only, but 'ten thousand times ten thousand' to the joy and the peace of His eternal fellowship.

Meanwhile let us be watchful, watchful at all times, but specially in life's middle watches. And if it is difficult to be vigilant at such hours, let us remember this, that Christ is watching us as well; not with malevolent eye as Napoleon scanned the sleeping soldier, but with love and sympathy, and that He will come to those who seek His aid when the night is darkest and the need is sorest.

So Christ ever comes to those who look for Him in their hour of trial. Only one thing is needed, that while we watch we should also pray, pray that ours may be the strength to endure to the end.<sup>1</sup>

#### SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

##### Childlikeness.

'A little child shall lead them.'—Is 11<sup>9</sup>.

It was one of Christ's most daring and beautiful statements that the citizen of His Kingdom must have the heart of a little child. With advancing years he must indeed put away childish things, but for all that he must retain his childlikeness. He need not be learned, great, or gifted, though God

<sup>1</sup> W. M. Mackay, *Days of the Son of Man*, 15.

be thanked if these privileges be his, but he must be childlike. Our Lord stood firm upon this as the prime condition of discipleship.

What, then, are some of the qualities in the child's nature that we should emulate as Christians ?

1. First of all there is *Sincerity*. One of the crying needs of our day in our business, in our politics, in our social intercourse, and in our religious life is for a deeper measure of sincerity. It is so easy to become like that character in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, Mr. Facing-both-ways. One might even think that in some regions of society transparency were the unpardonable sin. And yet how good it is to come across the character which is transparent, honest, genuine, guileless, sincere.

The word sincere comes from the Latin words *sine cera*. When Rome was mistress of the world and her grandees lived in marble palaces upon the banks of the Tiber, sculpture was one of the most prominent features of their costly furniture. Rome was stocked with works of Grecian art. Sometimes in the marble there were original flaws, or flaws caused by the chisel. These were filled by crafty workmen with a skilfully prepared composition of cement. At first it was imperceptible, but after a time the flaw became apparent. So frequently was the trick played that we find a clause often inserted in contracts of those times for the purchase of marble statuary to the effect that they must be *sine cera*. Perhaps these Latin words will come to mind as we sign ourselves 'yours sincerely,' and we must remember, too, that what we sign ourselves to one another we ought at least to be able to sign ourselves to God. We ought to be God's, sincerely, unreservedly, genuinely, with every flaw confessed, with every defect exposed. Hypocrisy—unreality—was the sin of sins in Christ's eyes, because more than anything else He saw that it cut at the roots of character. We have much need to pray in those beautiful words of *A Litany of Remembrance*, composed by the late Bishop of Southwell, 'From affectation and untruth, conscious or unconscious, from pretence and acting a part which is hypocrisy, from impulsive self-adaptation to the moment in unreality to please persons or make circumstances easy, strengthen us to manly simplicity to be, and be seen to be, true ; and from all false appearances save us and help us, we humbly beseech thee, O Lord.'

2. *Simplicity* is another of the child qualities that we should emulate. The rush and luxury of modern life tend to deprave the taste, to make us blasé, and to kill the child-spirit within us. And yet to be truly Godlike we must be simple as

children. The really great men have always been children in simplicity. So Tennyson describes the Duke of Wellington :

Foremost captain of his time,  
Rich in saving common-sense,  
And, as the greatest only are,  
In his simplicity sublime.

St. Paul talks of the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus. It does us good to dwell on that Divine simplicity. Think, for instance, of Christ's mode of life. It puts our artificial life to shame. He was supremely content with the simple life. We can see, too, from the Gospels how He felt drawn rather to the peasant than the Pharisee, to the little child rather than the Scribe. The fact was that His very simplicity obscured His Divinity. Or, think again of His teaching, how simple it was ! No wonder the common people heard Him gladly. What He taught was often hidden from the wise and prudent, but apparent unto babes. We gain the same effect of simplicity as we put the rites which Christ ordained alongside the gorgeous ritual of the Jewish Temple. How simple are the rites of Baptism and the Holy Communion. Once more, think of the simplicity of the gospel message that Christ has left to us under the guidance of His Spirit. As Glover says in that interesting book of his, *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*: 'that Christianity retained its character in the face of the most desperate efforts of its friends to turn it into a philosophy congenial to the philosophies of the day, was the result of the strong hold it had taken upon innumerable simple people, who had found in it the power of God in the transformation of their own characters and instincts, and who clung to Jesus Christ—to the great objective facts of His incarnation and death upon the Cross—as the firm foundations laid in the rock against which the floods of theory might beat in vain.'

3. Again, one of the most fascinating features of the young mind is its *open-mindedness*, its receptivity, its readiness to listen and to learn. Would that it were so with all of us. John Stuart Mill once remarked, 'The fatal tendency of mankind to leave off thinking about a thing, when to them it is no longer doubtful, is the cause of half their errors.' We must continually allow a fresh stream of thought to play about our most cherished opinions and beliefs if we desire that they should grow up strong and healthy. When a photographer is developing a plate, he keeps the liquid in constant motion over its surface and so gradually evolves

its hidden beauty into clearer outline. And so, too, each of us must keep a constant stream of vigorous thought and criticism playing upon the surface of our most cherished convictions if we would have their latent beauty revealed. Huxley well expressed the importance of the receptive mind in a letter quoted in Charles Kingsley's life: 'Science seems to me to teach in the highest and strongest manner the great truth which is embodied in the Christian conception of entire surrender to the will of God. Sit down before the fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever end Nature leads, or you shall learn nothing. . . . I have only begun to learn content and peace of mind since I have resolved at all risks to do this.'

4. But lastly, *the little child should lead us into the true meaning of Faith.* What an exquisite purity there is about the faith of children! Sometimes their confidence in us almost makes us ashamed of ourselves. Father stands at the bottom of the stairs and calls out to his little boy to jump, and from five or six feet up the little fellow jumps with perfect confidence into the strong arms of his parent. And yet our Heavenly Father bids us venture this and risk that for the love of Him, and how often we are afraid of jumping. But we shall never do very much for God until we can trust Him with that same uncalculating faith with which a child confides in his parents.

This is the cry of the human soul in its helplessness. 'Father, clothe me, feed me, supply my many wants, for I have no strength of myself to help myself.' And as surely as we delight to provide for our helpless children and to feel that they look absolutely to us for strength and support, so does God delight to hear our cry of faith and to feel that we are looking to Him to clothe us with His righteousness, to feed us with His own truth, and to teach us to walk with Him, and talk to Him. Such is faith, the child's spirit of dependence, that is what it is in essence, though it needs and gains as life goes on the additional strength that comes from reason and experience.<sup>1</sup>

### THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

#### Christ's Quest and Ours.

'Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?'—Lk 18<sup>8</sup>.

Faith occupies, in the Christian religion, not only a conspicuous but a commanding place. The

great inheritance that has come down to us is largely a history of faith: its trials, its patience, its eclipses, its victories.

It is not strange to find Christ insisting on the supreme value of faith; but the manner of His doing so in this passage is peculiarly arresting. He virtually tells us that this is now to be His great Adventure—the Quest for faith. He fixes His eye on some supreme crisis of the world's history, the day of His own coming, whatever that may mean, and the first, indeed the only question, that springs to His lips is this, Shall He find faith—faith on the earth? Shall He find the soul of the world keeping its tryst with Him? That is the point of the inquiry, Shall He find faith as a normal condition?

There is an even more disturbing and alarming note in the inquiry. Indeed, we must give the question its acutest point. Did He foresee a terrible decline in faith?

Now if this inquiry meant so much to Him, if this be His Quest, what does it mean to us? This challenging question flung with deliberate hand into the face of history, is plainly meant to arouse our conscience and to drive us forth upon an endless but not fruitless quest for faith.

Let us try to make clear to ourselves, therefore, what this Quest of ours must be. It is clear that the end, the supreme end, we must set before ourselves is the discovery of a faith that will endure. It is a persistent faith we must seek. No one but Christ would dare to use the Parable of the Unjust Judge as an example of *persistent faith*, and even from His lips it may seem a hard saying that a victorious faith must be prepared to persist in the face of what appears to be coldness and indifference to the interests of justice itself. But if the heavens give no answer, and the mills of God go on, if the shattering power seems all on the side of evil and only our cry on the other side, how long can we persist?

The importunate, the persistent faith must be a living faith, it must be a *faith in a very present God*. Maurice once said with something of a caustic tone about Carlyle that he believed in a God who lived until the death of Oliver Cromwell. The gibe was not quite fair to Carlyle, but emphatically that kind of faith will not do. An expositor has very shrewdly remarked of the woman at the well of Samaria, that in two phrases, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain,' and 'When Messias cometh,' she betrayed the fact that religion as a vital force was dead in her, and remained only as a dim memory or a distant hope. That will not

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Archibald, *A Memoir*, 156.

suffice. We shall soon lose the energy of faith, unless we believe God to be present in the life of every day.

But we must go a step further—a living *faith can only be maintained by activity*, by exercise. The proverb which says that a man who does not work becomes an astrologer, a star-gazer, is applicable to faith—without exercise it will soon turn to credulity. ‘That we have little faith is not sad, but that we have but little faithfulness. By faithfulness faith is earned. When in the progress of life a man swerves though only by an angle infinitely small from his proper and allotted path, then the drama of his life turns to tragedy, and makes haste to its fifth act.’ Faith is maintained as much by works as works are by faith. The work of self-discipline, of brotherly kindness, of Christian testimony, the simple homely pieties of life—without these faith will die—it must perish from the earth.

And to sum up, faith must be constantly verifying itself, adding new realms to the area of the ascertained, the secure, the irrevocably certain. Faith must be no courtesy title for absence of thought and aversion to thinking.

If our faith cannot stand squarely before science, philosophy, history without fear or apology, then, indeed, is there reason in our day to hear again the question, ‘When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?’

But how can we secure a faith like this? The faith that will persist in our time must be moulded by the creative spirit of Jesus, which began Christianity in the first century, and has kept it in being ever since. He Himself lived so calmly in the peace of God, questioning none of God’s ways, trusting to His wise will from day to day, and He crowned this life with a sacrifice so final, so stupendous, that He became for His disciples, as He must be for every age, the best, the only, guarantee that He shall find faith on the earth when He comes. He is Himself the answer to His own question.

From kingdom to kingdom we may see, if we care, the testimonies crowding on us that when the Son of Man cometh He shall find faith on the earth. But will He find it in us? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. Connell, *The Endless Quest*, 3.

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## Books that have influenced our Epoch.

### W. Robertson Smith’s ‘The Religion of the Semites.’

BY THE REVEREND WILLIAM M. MATHIESON, B.D., BROUGHTY FERRY.

WILLIAM ROBERTSON SMITH’S preface to the first edition of *The Religion of the Semites* is dated 1st October 1889. The book has thus attained its fortieth anniversary; and the years which have elapsed since its publication may be described as quite distinctively ‘our epoch’ in respect of Old Testament studies and the science of Comparative Religion, to mention only the two fields of knowledge which concern us in the present connexion. One of the customary descriptions of *The Religion of the Semites* is ‘epoch-making.’ If the book on its appearance helped to make an epoch in its own domain of investigation, its author had already for nearly twenty years been helping to inaugurate that epoch by a series of writings which mediated to English readers the results of a strictly scientific study of Holy Scripture. From his article ‘Angel’ in vol. ii. of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1875) to his article ‘Zephaniah’ in vol. xxiv. (1888) he had

covered a wide range of Biblical and allied topics. It was in 1881 that Robertson Smith, on his deposition from the Old Testament Chair in the Free Church College at Aberdeen, was appointed joint-editor of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. In the eleven volumes issued before then there were some twenty articles written by him; in the succeeding thirteen volumes there were more than two hundred. From his inaugural lecture (‘What History teaches us to seek in the Bible’) at Aberdeen College in 1870 on through his various pleadings in the long-drawn-out heresy cases which lasted from 1876 till 1881, Robertson Smith had been the channel through which there had come to many of his contemporaries ideas and points of view which were novel. His lectures on *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* (published in 1881; 2nd edition, 1892), and on *The Prophets of Israel* (published in 1882; 2nd edition, with Introduction and Additional