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mental were these three commandments regarded by the Rabbis in the stress of the times that they declare, 'Any sin denounced by the Law may be committed by a man if his life is threatened, except the sins of idolatry, fornication, and murder.'<sup>1</sup>

To the Jewish religious authorities, then, the commandments concerning idolatry, fornication, and murder were *τούτων τῶν ἐπιτάγης* 'these compulsory things,' exactly what the Jewish Christian elders and apostles call them in the decree (15<sup>28</sup>).

The Sermon on the Mount is evidence that this view was held by the Pharisees at an earlier date, for Jesus, in setting forth the righteousness of the Law which should exceed that of the Pharisees, comments first on these very same commandments; murder (Mt 5<sup>21</sup>), fornication (Mt 5<sup>27</sup>), and idolatry (Mt 5<sup>33</sup>). It may be objected that the last deals not with idolatry but oaths. But this is answered by understanding that Jesus condemned swearing on the ground that it indirectly countenanced idolatry. The heathen might suppose, if Jews swore by any created thing, that they too were

<sup>1</sup> *Sanhed.* fol. lxxiv. A.

polytheists. And if Jews accustomed themselves to such oaths they might be led to use the oaths of the heathen as well, and so God's name would be profaned. Hence the Rabbis forbade partnership with a heathen, 'lest at any time the heathen should impose an oath on the Jew, and he be obliged to swear by the heathen's idol; and the Law says (Ex 23<sup>13</sup>), "Make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth."'<sup>2</sup>

We may infer, I think, that Jesus knew of the Pharisee teaching on the fundamental character of these commandments.

Professor Peake admitted that ethical prohibitions would harmonize better with all the circumstances than food-laws, but he was too honest a scholar to adopt this interpretation without a valid reason and merely to evade a difficulty. Perhaps the additional evidence which I have adduced may be found adequate to show that after all there is justification for omitting 'things strangled,' and that on this issue, at any rate, the Western text is to be preferred.

<sup>2</sup> *Sanhed.* fol. lxxiii. B.

## In the Study.

### *Virginitus Puerisque.*

#### White Keys and Black.

BY THE REVEREND JAMES S. STEWART, B.D.,  
ABERDEEN.

'Making melody in your heart to the Lord.'—Eph 5<sup>19</sup>.

Not long ago there died in New York a very famous African. His name was Aggrey, and he was a negro, one of the blackest of the black. He was a great teacher and a superb orator. Best of all, he was a Christian and a saint. He spent all his days trying to make the black folk and the white folk better friends. He lived for that. There was one illustration he used again and again. 'Think of a piano,' he would say. 'You can play some sort of a tune on the white keys of a piano; you can play some sort of a tune on the black keys; but to produce real harmony you must play both the white and the black keys.' You see? Aggrey meant that the world is God's piano, and God's piano, like every other, has its white notes and its black notes, and inside it the most glorious music

is slumbering, wonderful melodies and harmonies waiting for the great Master to come and bring them out by His touch; and God can play some sort of a tune on the white notes, and some sort of a tune on the black notes, but what God really wants to do is to play a 'Hallelujah Chorus,' and of course for that God needs the white notes and the black notes as well.

Some of you are learning the piano. Think of your scales. They are perfectly horrid things, of course, and you simply can't get your thumb under in time, and that little finger just won't wait for his turn, and majors are dreadfully difficult, and minors are twenty times worse, while as for F sharp minor, why, if you could only meet the man who invented it you would tell him what you thought of him. I know. Still, let us think of scales. If you were to use the white notes only, how many scales do you think you could play? Only one, the scale of C. And if you were to use the black notes only, how many could you play? None at all! But you don't like scales. Nobody does. Well then, let us think of pieces. I wonder if I

could guess the first piece you ever played? 'The Bluebells of Scotland,' wasn't it? Well, you try playing 'The Bluebells of Scotland' without using any black notes at all. You can't! Certainly it only needs one black note, and you suspect that that poor black note must feel like the one black sheep in a flock of white ones, rather lonely and lost and sorry for itself; but all the same you mustn't miss it out, or the melody won't be a melody any longer. And if it is so difficult to find a piece without any black notes, do you think you could find one without any white notes? I think that once Chopin, or Liszt, or some one like that, did compose a piece that could be played on the black keys only, but it must be the only one in existence. It comes to this—you can't get real music at all, unless you use both white keys and black.

That is just like life. Life has its white notes and its black notes, its bright experiences and its dark ones.

Take your Christmas holidays, for instance. 'Oh, if it could only be holidays always!' you say. 'If only there were none of those stupid sums to do at night, no tiresome essays about the adventures of a shilling, no irregular verbs; if only the holidays would never stop, instead of galloping past and being ended almost before we knew they had begun, what a splendid life it would be!' Don't you believe it! A life all holidays would soon have you bored to tears. The melody and the music of it would stop. We need the dark keys of discipline and duty as well as the white keys of laughter and joy.

Or take the weather. 'Why can't the sun always shine?' you complain. 'It was going to have been such a great game last Saturday, and I was picked for the team, and everybody was coming to see the match, and we hardly slept a wink for two whole nights for excitement; and then Saturday came, and down came the rain in torrents, and the game was off. Why can't it be sunshine always?' Well, you know, there are some places where the sun does shine always, or nearly always—the South Sea Islands, for instance. But do you know what they have found about the people there? Most of them are lazy and soft, and their very souls are flabby. But in lands where mists are grey and winds are biting, they breed men of muscle and grit and character. We need the dark days, as well as the bright days, to bring life's music out.

Or take your troubles. Everybody has some. Jesus has said we must have some. But why? 'Why can't I be happy always?' you ask. 'Why

should things sometimes go wrong, and people misunderstand, and life hurt so badly?' Ah, that is just God's fingers straying from the white keys for a little, and touching the black keys. But then the music of your life will be all the deeper for that, and the melody all the more wonderful. Perhaps it may even grow so wonderful that the angels themselves will stoop down to listen to it.

Remember—you can play some sort of a tune on the white keys, and you can play some sort of a tune on the black keys: but both are needed, white keys and black, if you are really to 'make melody in your heart to the Lord.'

#### Jesus' House: A Christmas Address.

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

'The Word was made flesh.'—Jn 1<sup>14</sup>.

When on holiday you have sometimes gone to see the house where a famous man used to live, and you are greatly thrilled. 'Just think,' you say, as you stand before a plain brick house in Warwickshire, 'Shakespeare lived there,' and, as you enter with the crowd from every part of the world, you reverently take off your cap. Or you are visiting Edinburgh, and having, of course, read *Treasure Island*, and recited 'The Lamp-lighter,' you go to see the house in Heriot Row 'with a lamp before the door,' and you almost imagine you can see at the window the pale, eager face of little Louis Stevenson with wistful eyes watching for 'Leerie going by.' How romantic that makes a house; it's not just a plain house any more, when somebody big has lived in it.

And Jesus came to live at our House—I mean the house that our body is. Think how, at the first Christmas in Bethlehem, He entered the lowly doorway of human life, and dwelt in human flesh, just like ours. Francis Thompson in a lovely child-prayer tells about it:

'Little Jesus, wast Thou shy  
Once, and just so small as I? . . .  
Hadst Thou ever any toys,  
Like us little girls and boys? . . .  
Didst Thou kneel at night to pray,  
And didst Thou join Thy hands this way? . . .  
And did Thy Mother at the night  
Kiss Thee, and fold the clothes in right? . . .  
Thou canst not have forgotten all  
That it feels like to be small . . .  
So, a little Child, come down  
And hear a child's tongue like Thy own.'

Great artists loved to paint pictures of the Baby Jesus in His Mother's arms, and they always made Him look like the babies of their own country. That was natural, and it is right. Old legends tell of wonderful things which Jesus did when a child: how once, when His mother was thirsty in the desert, He thrust His finger into the sand, and a well of water gushed up. But when we think of Jesus as a Child, we should imagine the dearest little fellow we have ever known. For He lived in our little house of life. And when He had grown up, the love of God looked out of human eyes, and spoke through human lips, and the kindness of God was shown by human hands.

Doesn't that make our body very wonderful and very sacred? 'Your body is a temple,' says the Bible; of course it is, since Jesus inhabited one. Nothing, then, must be permitted that would abuse or defile our body. There are powers and desires in us which must be brought to heel, and held in leash with a strong hand. Frankly, I know of no other way than to hand over control to Christ.

Who is your great hero? Is it Sir Alan Cobham, or that famous cricketer, or well-known footballer, whose exploits you follow with amazed delight? If he were to come to stay with you for even a night, wouldn't you be mighty proud? There would be no living with you at school! And you would develop just the same slight swagger (only not so slight) in your walk, and the same way of holding your head that he had, and your home-folk would smile to note how well you had caught his very accent.

Was there ever a hero like Jesus?—the bravest that ever breathed. He walked straight up to His bitterest enemies, and faced a howling mob without a falter. And He went through torture and death, rather than be unfaithful. What a Comrade He was to those who knew Him; just to have looked in His eyes pulled a fellow together again, and made him feel bold as a lion. The whitest Man who ever lived—how He scorned falsehood, and hated a sham!

And He came to live at our House! We must try to catch His accents. Only courage and kindness must look out at our eyes, for eyes were the windows by which Jesus looked so bravely and gently out upon the world. Only words true and pure must pass our lips, for lips were the door by which His wonderful words went forth to help and to bless. Christmas is Jesus' birthday. People give one another presents then to show how happy they are because He came. What about a gift for

Jesus on His birthday? What about giving Him the gift He most wants—our love and loyalty?

## The Christian Year.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

### Waiting upon God.

'My soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.'—Ps 62<sup>1</sup>.

'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.'—Is 30<sup>15</sup>.

Man has been searching for God since religion dawned, and each one of us has to search for God, if He is to be real in our lives. Religion calls for effort, exploration, experiment. Our spiritual nature has to be trained before it can make adequate response to its spiritual surroundings. But man's search for God is not the deepest truth about religion. Behind man's search for God lies God's search for man. There would have been no religion if God had not from the first implanted in human nature the religious impulse. Having created in man the desire to know Himself, would God have left him without guidance? The picture of God which the Bible offers is of One who seeks to make man a sharer in His truth, who progressively reveals Himself to man according to man's capacity to understand. It is not God's wish to live in isolated splendour. It is His nature to go out of Himself and express Himself in a created universe. Spirit is always creative, and God is Spirit. God, says the Bible, made man in His own image, gave him, that is, a share of the Divine nature, so that he might hold fellowship with his Maker. If that is the basal truth about man, then God must have wanted to make that fellowship as rich as possible. And He did it, as we believe, by giving, not all at once, but gradually, a revelation of Himself. So that behind all human discovery of God lies God's unfolding of Himself. Between man's discovery and God's revelation no sharp line can be drawn.

This thought of the Divine initiative, of God going out to search for man that He may gradually educate him in knowledge of Himself, has important practical consequences for our everyday religious life. It suggests that our highest wisdom may be to follow the advice so often given in the Psalms and 'wait upon God.' A wood or a meadow is full of sounds, which we do not hear if we walk rapidly through them. But if we lie down under a tree or in the long grass and listen, we become aware of this world of varied sound.

So it is with God. He speaks in the secret places of the soul.

Prayer is always effort, for there must be the sustained effort of concentration ; but at least as important in prayer as our strivings and wrestlings with God are our deliberate relaxation and quiet expectancy of what He may have to tell us.

It is interesting to note how modern psychology is emphasizing the importance of passivity in the formation of character. We are told that the imagination has proved itself to be stronger than the will, and hence that victory over temptation is not to be had by the road of strenuous struggle and volitional effort. A man, let us suppose, who has been the victim of some evil habit, makes up his mind one day that he will have done with it. He says to himself, 'I will snap this chain which binds me.' But he fails. Psychology tells us that he did the wrong thing in so acting. What he ought to have done was, not to struggle, but to suggest to himself that he was certain to conquer.

Are we right in such a case as this of speaking of a conflict between the will and the imagination ? It is doubtful if we are ; because the essence of an act of volition is attention. We attend to the thing we want to do, and when we have concentrated our minds long enough upon it, action follows of necessity. Here, before any suggestion of victory can take effect, the man must attend to the suggestion, and that is an act of will. He must steadily hold before his imagination the idea of himself as conqueror. The conflict is not so much one between will and imagination as between two aspects of will, between will as violent struggle, and as quiet attention to an end to be realized. The will is the crown of human personality, and any teaching which minimizes its importance or robs it of its supremacy in the guidance of life is to be deprecated.

Religious teachers have always known that in the up-building of character the negative method of repression is never as effective as the positive method of expansion. We must, of course, pull out the weeds in our lawn if we wish it to be good turf ; but it is just as important to see that the grass is sown thickly, so that there is less room for weeds to find foothold.

The unhesitating verdict of Christian experience is that man is not left to struggle alone. 'I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.' St. Paul had no greater certitude in his life than that he was receiving power from Jesus Christ.

Let us assume that to be true, and then see how the situation is changed for the man whose case

we have been discussing. He has struggled painfully and persistently in the past and has failed. Now he is going to adopt the advice of the psychologist and try the more passive method. He is going to suggest to himself that he is already victorious. He is going into the fight, having banished the haunting memories of earlier defeats with the fear which they engender, his imagination filled with the bright vision of himself with a new character, cleansed and attracted by the good. Is that enough ? Would not his self-suggestions be far more powerful if he could say to himself, 'I see myself made new by *the power of God* ; I know that, if I open my heart to receive Him, Jesus Christ the Friend of such storm-tossed people as myself will give me His living sympathy and His aid' ? To 'wait upon God' is a more effective thing to do than to wait upon an idea of ourselves as renovated characters, once we grant that the Spirit of the Living God can really enter into human personality. Of all the suggestions which we can make to ourselves when we set out to break the fetters of a cramping past, none is more powerful than the suggestion that God is waiting to help us. The suggestion gains, of course, in value in proportion to the adequacy and spirituality of our conception of God. And it is here that Christianity holds the field against all other religions, because of the marvel and attractiveness of its picture of God.

The man who waits upon God is ready to believe that God can really work in his life, can do things in and through him ; and he acts upon that belief, not only by having definite times when he deliberately seeks to realize the presence of God, but by preserving, as a master principle of his life, the temper of expectancy.

In the story of St. Paul we have an illustration of the contrast between the two tempers we have been discussing. Before his conversion he was the struggler, trying to keep the whole law, fighting to be 'righteous' by a stern process of self-discipline. After his conversion, though he did not relax his efforts to live up to the higher standard of Christian living, he had taken the momentous step of committing himself to Jesus Christ, as to One who could mould his life and heighten his natural powers. Henceforth, he walks as a man who knows that the secret of noble and happy living lies in putting God first ; in trusting Him for what He is, and for what He has done ; in waiting upon Him in the quiet confidence that He is a source of life and power.

Not otherwise was it with Jacob when he wrestled

with his strange opponent in the night by the brook Jabbok. The hour of Jacob's weakness proved to be the hour of his strength: he received the blessing; the blessing of the new name which signified the new character. No more was he to be called Jacob or Deceiver, but Israel or Perseverer with God. When his natural strength was rendered powerless the blessing came. Then, and not till then, could God work in Jacob the change He longed to effect. Jacob had to be passive before God, had to wait upon God, before God could transform him.

In the Lord's Prayer, as has often been pointed out, before we make any petition for ourselves, we are bidden to wait upon God. 'Our Father, which art in heaven.' God is, and He is a Father, and He is in heaven. Heaven is where God is, and if we would draw near to Him in prayer we must first try to be in heaven ourselves, and realize His presence.

Our temper must be one of reverence and awe—the quiet solemnity of the man who is coming into the presence of the Great Father of his spirit. 'Thy kingdom come.' We link ourselves up with the purposes of God. We think of the accomplishment of His will; we want to be one with that will, to have no will of our own, but to put ourselves entirely into His hands that He may use us as His agents. That is the kind of atmosphere in which waiting upon God becomes a reality.<sup>1</sup>

#### CHRISTMAS DAY.

##### A Christmas Sermon.

'And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.'—Lk 2<sup>12</sup>.

When we stand at the source of a great river and see a tiny spring bubbling from the earth, it is difficult to realize how that trickling little fountain can grow into the mighty stream which rolls onward in majestic strength, enriching half a continent with its waters.

A like feeling of difficulty, if not of incongruity, must have been present to the mind of the shepherds when they were told by the angel to look for the Saviour long promised in a place and in circumstances which seemed so incompatible with His greatness; and not only so, but to find in those very circumstances the mark of that Divine Presence and Power for which they looked, and which was to enrich humanity with the waters of spiritual life through all coming time.

<sup>1</sup> V. F. Storr, *The Living God*, 44.

Who among us could have stood by that manger bed, amid those mean surroundings where the brute beasts of the field were gathered for shelter, who among us could have stood there and dared to dream of any future for that child, but a life of obscure toil? But we know that this Infant's name after eighteen centuries is the most potent influence upon earth, and that on this morning throughout the whole world the voice of thanksgiving is rising from millions of souls whose thoughts are turned to Bethlehem. We therefore see in this lowly birth more than is open to the eye of the passing spectator. We see that the swaddling clothes and the manger bed have a deep significance; that they are the sign of something infinitely great which is yet to unfold itself. The first lesson of Christmas Day is, therefore, the all-important lesson that Christ our Saviour is not merely the Son of Mary, but the Eternal Son of God, and though for us He has emptied Himself of His glory, He is still Christ the Lord.

But while this is to be remembered, it is also to be particularly noted how the Divine power of our Saviour is manifested—intimately bound up with the humility and weakness of earth. The Saviour of men must also be a man. He must enter human life not as a superhuman being, but by the natural gate of human birth. He must sound all the depths of human experience. There must be no man or class of men who cannot be reached by His sympathy, or He cannot be a Saviour to them, and therefore we see in the swaddling clothes and the manger a sign of the purpose for which He came. The same sign of humility which marked His birth was present to the end. If the manger at Bethlehem was the cradle of the Eternal, and if through it we see the childhood of man encircled with a halo from heaven, we also see the workshop at Nazareth ennobling human labour, and the Cross on Calvary making suffering Divine.

And so we see that this tendency to express itself in the natural and ordinary forms of life is a characteristic of our Saviour's whole work, and of the gospel which in His name we preach. This indeed is the deepest sign of its Divinity. It comes to us in the garb of common life. It is brought to us in great simplicity in swaddling clothes, and because of its humiliation it wins its way to the hearts of common men and is felt by them to be Divine.

What is thus true of Christ and of the work which He came to do is also true more generally of all spiritual realities. They come to us under natural forms, but the natural forms are only valuable as signs of a Divine truth. There is

always this double aspect, according as we look with the eye of faith or merely with the eye of sense. Even in the simplest natural acts and relations there is an outer and an inner, and the outer is the sign of the inner. Little acts which in themselves and to the eye of sense mean nothing, to the eye of faith and love are full of a rich and deep meaning. The whole world is full of signs and symbols. Indeed, is it anything more than a sign of a thought in the mind of God? At any rate this earth on which we walk is something more to the eye of faith than it is to the cynical; it is the work of our Father, and the sign of His presence, and the sphere of our Saviour's life.

The same may be said more particularly of the forms in which Christ's influence has been brought to bear upon our lives. Take, for instance, the simple rites in which our Lord ordained that the beginning and continuance of spiritual life should be marked and provided for: the Sacrament of Baptism in which through the simple element of water the great gift of spiritual purity is exhibited, the Sacrament of the Supper in which through the simple elements of bread and wine the great fact of His death is for us expressed and brought as a living influence to our lives. To the outer eye neither of these rites has any meaning—both are utterly inadequate to the purpose—but to the eye of faith they are the sign of that which is invisible, of the presence of Him who, though He is the Eternal God and endowed with the plenitude of Divine power, emptied Himself of all and took upon Him our common nature, and was first seen to mortal eye as a little child wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. To this, therefore, we return as the great truth for Christmas Day, the source of all its gladness. Jesus Christ was born this day, and by His lowly birth He has lifted all human lives, however weak and worthless, into the light of God's Eternal truth.

The mind which is nearest to God, even while engaged in the commonest duty of the day, will move amid a world of glory and truth. Is it not true that as we go about our affairs from day to day the sun comes forth and floods the world with beauty, and night after night the stars fill the deep of heaven and shine over us like a city of God? And yet our eyes are holden that we cannot see, and still we trudge onward with our faces downward, blind to the glories of our birth. Is it not also true that just as the heavens we see enswathe our earthly home, so also our spiritual life is enswathed by the heaven of Divine truth? The sun of righteousness has arisen with healing in His wings.

And shall we walk in darkness when this great light is given to us? <sup>1</sup>

#### FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

##### The Evangel of Experience.

'Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel.'—Ph 1<sup>12</sup> (R. V.).

Paul was one of those rare men who make light of their misfortunes. He sums up his difficulties in a single phrase—'the things which happened unto me'—and one of these happenings was that he was now in prison. But he had learned the difficult art of turning awkward circumstances to the best account, and thus it is that we find the good news of Christ travelling throughout the whole prætorian guard.

The materialist thinks of the restricted liberty, of the galling chain; he forgets that he still has a free mind, a liberated spirit, an imagination on which no hand can be laid. What was prison to John Bunyan? The jail at Bedford became the birthplace of a Dream which will last as long as Time. Where was Ezekiel when 'the heavens were opened' and he saw 'visions of God'? He was among the captives by the river Chebar. That is not captivity. No man is a captive who sees visions of God. He is the real prisoner who has the carnal mind, who is cursed with dark, self-centred thoughts.

Paul tells the story of his life to the soldier who guards him: the guard is relieved, and he tells the next: the men tell their comrades, and at length the Apostle can write—'Thus it has become notorious among all the Imperial guards, and everywhere, that it is for the sake of Christ that I am a prisoner; and the greater part of the brethren, made confident in the Lord through my imprisonment, now speak of God's message without fear, more boldly than ever.' Such is the contagious influence of a man filled with one aim, fired with one enthusiasm, devoted to one service.

A man's own religious experience, working itself out through ordinary events, may thus become an evangelistic medium. The equipment of an evangelist is comprised not so much in a dramatic theology as in a dramatic experience. It is not contained in a set of doctrinal statements or conventional religious phrases, but rather in the things that have happened to him. The spirit of Jesus Christ works its way in the individual, and outward to the universal. For no man lives to himself or

<sup>1</sup> A. W. Williamson, *The Glorious Gospel*, 161.

dies to himself. A man may perhaps never speak to another of Jesus Christ, and yet he may win that man for Christ. Character has more force than eloquence.

The things that happen to us make up our experience. A man's biography is the record of the things that happen *to* him and *in* him. Things begin to happen to us as soon as we make our appearance on the stage of life ; so that if experience be an evangelizing agency there need be no delay in the furtherance of truth. How does this happening process work out ? Things often fall out to the progress of the gospel unconsciously. We use the word gospel in its largest significance, meaning by it the spirit of love, tenderness, sympathy, long-suffering, sacrifice ; it includes everything that softens, deepens, purifies, and elevates the heart of mankind. In that case we can see how the things that happened to us even in our earliest years may have fallen out to the progress of the gospel.

Take the case of *home life*. The things that happen there should be on this upward and advancing line. Parents have the progress of the gospel committed to their charge. The things that happen to the child at home are largely in the hands of fathers and mothers. What kind of an atmosphere are we seeking to create at home ? What sort of a Sunday have we at home ? The Sunday ought to be one of the brightest days of the week. If the inmates of any home look forward with delight to the approach of Sunday, the things which are happening there are at least tinged with the radiance of God's own sunshine.

Take the idea of the text in regard to *education*. The schoolmaster does not get his due. He is one of the most important factors in life. The schoolmasters of a country ought to be among the finest characters of a country. They should be picked men, Christian in the noblest and completest sense of the term, because they exert influence over young life during its most critical and impressionable period.

How true it is also in the matter of *companionship* that the things which happen to us may fall out to the progress of the gospel. Our friends determine the quality if not the course of our history more than we can tell. If we be really knit to any true friend, there is an unfathomable element in our redemption. These invisible ties keep us right sometimes when we are absent one from another. And there are men we have never seen who become our friends—poets, novelists, artists, teachers, heroes—these often fall out to the progress

of the gospel. They have contributed to the sum of the world's pity, insight, charity, tolerance : they have continued the spirit of the Son of Man. Is it not wonderful and beautiful to think that a sentence from the writings of one who lived, long perhaps before we were born, can kindle light in our minds and shed abroad love and sympathy in our hearts, and so make us friends for ever ?

Whatever our experience has been—light or dark, may in the providence of God fall out to the progress of the gospel. We do but see the surface of things. Life is complex, interrelated, intertwined : no man lives or dies to himself. Some of us who think we are doing but little for God may be high up on the list. It is not for us to judge or to be harsh critics of one another. Let us play well our own part.<sup>1</sup>

#### SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

##### The Christian Secret of Zest.

'Ye are the salt of the earth ; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted ?'—Mt 5<sup>13</sup>.

Dr. L. P. Jacks some time ago wrote an article in which he deplored what he called 'the lost radiance of Christianity.' Is this what Christ means when He speaks of salt which has lost its savour ? Let us look into the phrase and see if we can find its meaning.

When we think of the word salt in this connexion, we generally think of its purifying power. It is an antiseptic. It keeps things from going bad ; it saves from corruption. That is one of its uses. And we have taken the meaning of Jesus to be that Christians should be a kind of moral antiseptic, keeping the world from rotteness. 'Men must have a religion,' says Carlyle in his caustic way, 'if only to save them the expense of salt.' That is undoubtedly a part of our Lord's meaning, for that is one of the effects of vital Christianity. And surely we may claim that, in this respect, it is working. What would the world be like to-day without the influence of those humble people who, in workshops and homes and offices are radiating the spirit of pure thinking and clean love and sincere goodness, because in their hearts they have enshrined the name of Jesus ? They supply the one argument for Christianity which can never be denied—the quality of the Christ-like life.

But that antiseptic quality is not the only value of salt. We use it to give a taste to our food, to stimulate the palate, to give zest to the appetite. Does not this come nearer to what Christ meant

<sup>1</sup> W. A. Mursell, *Sermons on Special Occasions*, 117.

when He said, 'Ye are the salt of the earth'? It is our business to carry into the world a zest for life; to give people a relish for existence; to bear about with us the kind of mood and spirit which will make others feel that life is worth while; to break into the world with a tonic quality of spirit which shall banish its dullness and listlessness, and help people to lift up their heads and go on.

As Jesus looked round on His world He saw that the besetting trouble with multitudes was their dejection. Life for thousands was deadly dull and uninspiring. It had lost its zest. Nothing new ever freshened the surprise of life. Morning after morning, the sky was grey and cloudy, and the whole air poisoned with weariness. There are countless people like that. Mark Rutherford, in *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, describes an old man in the workhouse a century ago. 'He was a poor looking, half-fed creature, with the special workhouse bloodless aspect, just as if he had lived on nothing stronger than gruel and had never smelt fresh air. The old man's face, too, had nothing distinctive in it. He was neither selfish nor generous; neither a liar nor truthful; neither believed anything nor disbelieved anything; was neither good nor bad; had no hope hereafter nor any doubt.' When he was asked about his business, he described how it had slipped through his fingers. 'I was always dull . . .' he said; 'people like to be talked to and I got nothing to talk about, had nothing to say to any of them when they came in. The shop, too, ought to have been painted more often, and I ought to have had something in the window, but, as I say, I was always dull.' That was his whole story. How many people are like that! They have no interest in life, no zest, no heart for its difficulty. No trumpet challenge ever sends its music ringing in their ears. No vision of hope ever kindles their eyes, and so life passes by. They spend their days in a constant state of half-conscious boredom. How much vice or riotous excitement is due to nothing but this dullness! Look at the world to-day, with its shrieking posters, its loud advertisements, its glaring decorations, all making constant appeal to jaded people. What does it speak of but just the dullness of men's lives. It is all an effort to find, outside of us, the source of a joy we cannot find within. The daughter of the late Mrs. W. E. Gladstone wrote of her mother, 'Being so happy, she could afford to be serious.' Unless we have the secret of happiness within we cannot afford to look into the faces of serious things and tackle them, and into the heart of difficulties and meet them. The trouble with many people,

in spite of their apparent jollity, is that life at its core is just tasteless and insipid. They have no hope of a future life, because they have no use for this. They have no fear of death, because they have lost the zest for life. They are just dull.

Now the first thing which Christ's disciples did was to banish the dullness of the world in which they lived. Things began to happen when they were about. People began to think and to dispute, they began to curse them, to stone them. Some said they were drunk. Others said they were mad. But, along with that, unhappy people began to find a new spring of joy. A new thrill came into their stagnant blood. New currents of hope were set flowing. With these Christians about, there was a blitheness as of people setting out on a great adventure that started the pulse beating. And when folk asked what it all meant, they discovered that these men had been with Jesus.

What is it in Christianity that awakens the zest of life? In the first place, it gives us the consciousness that there is a big meaning in life. So many people cannot see any meaning at all in it. That is their trouble. They go through it all as if they were dummy figures in some weird and senseless stage play. How can anything have an interest for us if it has no meaning? Some people, of course, never think about life's meaning at all, never ask questions. Some people take up one of the keys to life that lie to their hand and try to use it, and because it does not open all the doors they throw it away and say hard things about life. They try the key called pleasure, and it fits one or two doors, and for a while it seems as if they had found the secret. But, by and by, they come to doors which that key will not open—the door of pain, that of sorrow, and that other of difficulty, and they discover that pleasure cannot be the real meaning of a universe in which these things exist. Some try the key of personal ambition, and there are certain doors seems to fit. Certain difficulties it enables them to overcome, and even turn to their advantage. But let them meet with failure and disappointment, and they discover that, if personal ambition is the meaning of life, the biggest half of experience is for ever an unsolved enigma; for who can get the real heart of love or friendship if they meet it with the demand for pleasure, or seek in it their personal ambition?

It is here that Christianity steps in. Life has a meaning and we have a place in it. The universe is making for something. God has His purpose, and we are called to share it. As we think of that

purpose in the light of Jesus Christ it begins to take various shapes, and to glow with a winsome attractiveness. It concerns us personally, for one thing. It includes our character as individuals, the shaping of our mind and spirit, the control of our passions, the bringing to life in us of a spirit like that of Jesus. For that purpose we are called to live, to fight against slackness and discouragement, to stand up to difficulty and opposition and disappointment, and all the other things that once made us feel that life had nothing in it. We are called to a fight. The moment we see that, there is a new interest in life. The essence of all true sport is to pit oneself against another in a struggle that calls out all the mind and the muscle. Only, this fight to which God calls us is not against others, but for them, for an end that we can only achieve together. And Jesus came to people who were down and made them feel that life was a fight—'a real fight,' as Professor James says, 'in which something is won for the universe by our success, or lost by our failure.'

As that purpose throws its light across the world, we see it touching other things, awaking other interests, giving rise to various kinds of social movements. Think of the spirit that started hospitals—that fights with disease and sickness. Think of the struggle against vice and injustice and war—those blots on God's universe. Think of the enterprise for which the Church stands, carrying the light of Christianity into places of ignorance and superstition—the fight that has long been behind it.

But, again, Christianity gives zest to life because it has the secret of hope. Life has a meaning, and its meaning for us is a fight. And that fight is a fight which is going to be won. How many people have lost interest because they have lost hope—hope about themselves, hope about the world, hope about the future? We cannot live cheerfully without hope. How many people could get through to-day if there were no to-morrow, and if, somehow, to-morrow did not hold some promise of good? We live by anticipation. Is that an illusion? Some people say it is. Christianity says it is not, provided that our hearts are set on the right things. 'Hope,' said Paul, 'maketh not ashamed.' It is no illusion if it is born of the love of Christ. The fight for character, in the long run, is a winning battle. It is the same with the fight for righteousness; it is a winning battle, if you look far enough ahead. Or think of the assurance of immortality. How many people are hopeless about life just because they have lost hope in the future? We

need to reach out to the horizons of Jesus. That was one of the first points of the Christian offensive upon the degradation of life in the early days—its attack upon death, with its walls of savage despair. Life began to be filled with a splendid optimism for the men who had seen Jesus. They could go on without fear. Pain was nothing. Trouble was a passing cloud. Life was a splendid gift. The whole perspective was changed because they had a background to this present world. All they had to do and to face was a task from God, a trust to keep, a post to hold, a fight to win, and some day they would take it all and lay it down in triumph before the Great White Throne. The reason why life has lost its zest for many people to-day is because their world is not big enough for them to find God in it. Let us find the perspective of Jesus, where an act of kindness has 'cosmic importance,' where our words and deeds, whether good or evil, are shaping destiny and registering themselves somewhere, for good or ill, upon the movement of God's purpose. Let us see life with the eyes of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

#### FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

##### The Quest for God.

'And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.'—Mt 2<sup>9</sup>.

The Epiphany story is the story of a quest, a journey, and a discovery. There are those who wave it aside with a contemptuous hand and mutter 'fairy tale.' It is easy to understand perplexity in a reader who studies it reverently and strives to do justice alike to the historical and the symbolic elements in it without feeling able to decide how much is poetry and how much plain matter of fact. But the man who sees neither history nor poetry in it, and nothing else but fantasy, is stone-blind. It brims over with spiritual meaning, and its message gleams on St. Matthew's page. Wise men out of the East guided by a star on their long journey, consulting the orthodox religious leaders of Jerusalem about their object and their destination, and pressing on to the end and arriving at their goal by the manger of the new-born Jesus—of these facts which are the essence of the story there is no reason to question the literal historical truth. The guiding star may or may not have been connected with some rare conjunction of planets which astronomers declare to have occurred at a date which would fit in with

<sup>1</sup> J. Reid, *In Touch with Christ*, 210.

the facts of the narrative. All this matters little or nothing to the message of the story, which stands out in the Nativity records with a symbolic suggestion of much more than first meets the eye. This is no mere legend, thrust into the preface of the human life of Jesus to strengthen the impression of His supernatural origin. It is spiritually at one with the life that followed, and it strikes notes which we can hear all through the gospel accounts of Jesus.

No wonder Christian art has always loved the Epiphany and has poured out all the wealth and the devotion of genius in depicting it. In the age of persecution we find it frequently in the Catacombs, where no symbolic picture is more popular than the Adoration of the Infant Jesus by the Three Kings. In mediæval times the great masters vied with one another in their treatment of it. Miracle plays and carols made it one of their chief themes. And we to-day, whose sense of reality is increasingly alive to the fact that all truth does not begin and end with scientific inquiry into physical facts, can see in it as much as those who have gone before us. For it is one of those Christian things that come right home to our sense of the need of God, and to the quest for God which is going on within and around us. Where is He, the King of life, who knows its secrets and will show us His way?

The tale of a quest. Some men are never tired of saying that religion has had its day. During the Great War Mr. Arnold Bennett committed himself to a prophecy that, whatever else was doubtful about the effects of the War, this at least was certain that it would destroy Christianity. He has since proved in a paper on 'My Religion' that he has little or no knowledge of what Christianity really is. His prophecy, of course, has proved to be false; Christianity is as alive as ever it was, speaking its message and weaving itself round the hearts of men.

Paul, in Sir Philip Gibbs's *The Unchanging Quest*, says, 'I'm trying to get the hang of it, to worry my way through to some kind of faith. It's perfectly clear to me that without religion the human race is doomed. We've lost all our bearings. We've nothing to hold on to. There's no explanation of life. . . . If I could believe in God I'd have more faith in man. . . . Anyhow, I am not satisfied with scepticism.' Such seekers are bound to arrive, and on the last page of the novel we find him saying, 'I'm getting near the end of my quest—God.'

If a man travels, he always finds that he is not

left without a guiding star. The wise men of the Epiphany were probably the ancestors of the modern Parsees, whose faith comes nearer than any other non-Christian religion to the teaching of Jesus. They held strange beliefs about the stars and their connexion with the lives of men which are utterly incredible to us. But they looked for a coming Lord, who would solve the problem of life more fully than they could, and they went out in search of Him when they thought the hour of His coming had arrived. They believed and acted upon that belief, and God led them into a fuller light.

Every life has God's star of Epiphany above it. 'God,' says Chrysostom, 'caught the Magi with a star, and the fishermen with their fish.' 'God,' says Emerson, 'enters by a private door into each individual.' Centuries apart in time, these two very different teachers see the same fact.

The real trouble with many who seem to be starless is that they will not persevere, or even enter on any real quest. One of our leading publicists, who is no mere pessimist, says that the greatest obstacle to the industrial and financial recovery of the nation is the all-absorbing pre-occupation of people of all classes with their own enjoyment. They spend their money, he says, on immediate gratification with no notion of applying it to anything but personal consumption. The pursuit of pleasure and play stifles enterprise and blinds them to the necessity of hard work. How can a nation dominated by such ideals, or the lack of anything that can be dignified with the name of ideals, hope to meet and overcome our post-war difficulties? Now if that is true, as it certainly is, of economic recovery, it is equally true from the spiritual standpoint. The quest for truth, the search for God, is not a matter that can be toyed with and treated as a hobby or an aside from the main business of life.

One of the greatest scenes in our modern drama is the scene in Mr. Bernard Shaw's *St. Joan*, after the coronation in the cathedral at Rheims. Joan tells the king and the archbishop and the others around her that her voices are bidding her to lead them on to a complete victory, and that she is sure that, if only they will persevere, the issue will prove that she is not mistaken. And Charles, the preposterous king, bleats out: 'O, your voices, your voices! Why don't the voices come to me? I am King, not you.' As if such voices could be regarded as a perquisite of his paltry kingship! And Joan replies: 'They do come to you; but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the

angelus rings you cross yourself and have done with it ; but if you prayed from your heart, and listened to the thrilling of the bells in the air after they stop ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do.'

Lack of serious purpose utterly paralyses the stirrings of the spiritual life within. And there is another thing which is equally fatal to those who seek awhile, but break off the quest. One of the features in the Epiphany drama which mediæval art delighted to dwell upon was the contrast between the pomp and magnificence of the three kings and the poverty and humility of the Holy Family and its surroundings—the penthouse, the manger, and the cattle standing by. The description of the wise men as wealthy kings is probably legendary in origin. But it helps to emphasize the crucial thing in the story, the discovery of the seekers that the end of their long quest is a simple Babe in a manger without any of the adornments that give prestige to human greatness or win human submission.

A young German writing recently about religion asks, 'Is it possible that the humble, contrite attitude of prayer can be postulated for the white races with their scientific conquests? . . . No ! That would mean the surrender of bodily good for the sake of the spirit, a rejection of firm reality for shadowy soul-values, the vanishing of this

world in an Eden-dream.' There is in this young German's sentences the muttering of the spirit of Herod, who is the impersonation of the spirit of anti-Christ in the Epiphany story. If it is 'the firm reality of bodily good' that men are seeking beyond everything else, they will never see anything revealing in Jesus. Pride of power, greed of possession, arrogance of knowledge, all these miss the way to the manger, which is the way to God. It is too simple and too plain.

Step softly, under snow or rain,

To find the place where men can pray ;

The way is all so very plain

That we may lose the way. . . .

Go humbly ; humble are the skies,

And low and large and fierce the Star ;

So very near the manger lies

That we may travel far.

But the crown of the Epiphany story is that there was then, and that there always is, a manifestation of God to souls that seek, of all types, of all races, of all times. 'They came into the house, and fell down and worshipped him.'

There is an end to the quest, an end which is also a beginning ; and the end is finding God in the Incarnate Christ.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> F. B. Macnutt, *From Chaos to God*, 26.

## Contributions and Comments.

### The Rich Young Ruler and St. Paul.

WILL you allow me a few comments on your exposition of Mr. Moxon's 'fascinating article' on the above ? And first I would refer to the article in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES of November 1927, where it was pointed out that Prebendary Webb Peplow twenty years ago put forward the same theory, also another idea that St. John, Lazarus, and the Ruler were one and the same ! Further, a very ingenious theory that he was St. Barnabas !

Putting aside the conjecture about St. Paul being rich, Mr. Moxon says (1) the call to the ruler was a call to apostleship (*i.e.* like St. Paul's). May I point out that our Lord had already called and appointed His chosen Twelve (a sacred number) ? They had been under training for some time. The call to the Ruler was not long

before the Passion. If it had been accepted, there would have been thirteen apostles, a most unlikely thing. I submit, therefore, the call was not to apostleship but to discipleship, the same kind as to many others in general.

(2) The rich young man was a ruler (*archōn*, St. Luke says), usually held to be of a synagogue of which there was a very great number. It has never been held (so far as I know) that St. Paul was such a ruler. He may possibly have been a member of the Sanhedrin. He said that when Christians were put to death he gave his 'vote' against them ; but was a member of the Sanhedrin called a ruler also ? I cannot find any authority for it, nor yet for the statement that a ruler means a 'prominent young member of the Pharisees.'

(3) The claim of St. Paul to be an apostle because he had been called as the rich ruler seems to me to be most unreal and incongruous. For the call was