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understanding and interpreting the Biblical literature.

In summing up the value of the American contribution to Old Testament scholarship, it may be confidently said that America has brought to Old Testament studies a spirit of enthusiasm and an attitude of freedom that have been of great value. In this new land, tradition has lost some of its power. We have, therefore, been able to look at Biblical problems with free and unfettered minds, thus seeing more clearly and deeply than would otherwise have been possible. From that point of view, the future is encouraging. The advocates of tradition are not yet by any means silent; but the modern historical point of view is established in practically all the schools of higher learning, and is fast gaining the confidence of the educated public. Hence we can look forward with confidence to a free field wherein we shall have liberty to interpret the Word of God in accordance with the dictates of reason and intelligence and under the guidance of a free conscience.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Seals.

By the Reverend E. A. Payne, B.A., B.D., B.Litt., Bugbrooke, Northampton.

'The seal of mine apostleship are ye.'—1 Co 9².

Not long ago, as you will all know, there was a change of Government in this country. Those who had been in charge of affairs for the last five years resigned, and others took their places. According to the newspapers, one day early in June all the members of the old Cabinet went in their best suits and top hats, and by special train, to see the King at Windsor, and they gave up to him the seals of their various offices. Then a day or so later all who were to be members of the new Cabinet, in their best clothes (there was one lady, so they had not all top hats this time) and again by special train, went down to Windsor and received the seals from His Majesty. Until they had the seals, they were not really the King's Ministers. The old seals are the sign of authority. They show that the members of the Cabinet have power from the King to act on his behalf. Orders which bear the mark of these seals must be obeyed.

Seals are among the oldest things in the world. Sometimes they have been big and elaborate, sometimes quite small and very finely wrought. Sometimes men have worn them hung round the neck by a cord, sometimes as a ring on the finger. Centuries ago in Babylon official documents were sealed with a marked cylinder. The Egyptians used little models of beetles. Most museums in this country have collections of old seals of all shapes and sizes. Everywhere they have been used to give authority to those who possessed them, and to prove that papers marked with them are really genuine.

There is a story about a seal in the Old Testament. King Ahab wanted a vineyard which was near his palace, but Naboth, the owner, would not part with it because it was a family possession and had belonged to his father and his grandfather before him. Unfortunately, the wicked queen Jezebel discovered the King's wish, and so she planned to get Naboth out of the way. She sent letters in the King's name ordering Naboth to be stoned, and the letters were obeyed, because she had stolen the King's seal to put on them, and when people saw the seal they were sure this cruel deed must have been ordered by Ahab and must be carried out. Since the seal was there all right no one questioned that the letters were genuine.

There is something about seals in the New Testament also. The Apostle Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth says that they are the seals set upon his preaching; they show that he really has authority from God; they are the sign that he is a true apostle; they are the proof of the power of the gospel. When those in Corinth saw the changed lives of Paul's friends, then they could be sure that he had the right to speak about Jesus Christ. When the other Apostles heard of these Corinthian Christians, they had to recognize Paul as properly accredited. You can be seals in that sense. If you live truthful, clean, and helpful lives, then the boys and girls you meet at school will know that there is real power and authority in the gospel which you hear at Sunday School and in Church. They will attend to the message of Jesus Christ because they will see that it has its seals attached to it all right.

A Moderate Southerly Wind.

By the Reverend T. Greener Gardner, Blackburn.

'When the south wind blew softly.'—Ac 27^{13}.

Sir Herbert Tree once asked a gipsy how he decided which direction to take when he moved camp. The gipsy replied, 'I turn my back to the wind.' To those people who desire an easy vagabond sort of life that might sound like good philosophy, but to those who have to deal with young people, it sounds like a dangerous philosophy. No one giving advice to boys and girls would tell them always to turn their backs to the wind; they would rather say that oftentimes the only way to make life worth while is to face the wind, to battle with opposing forces, and if possible to make opposing forces friends rather than enemies.

I remember once being in a sailing-boat in one of England's most famous harbours. With our party there was a 'son of the sea,' a man who had spent years on board ship. We were sailing beautifully with the wind, and I, an ignorant landsman, ventured to say, 'This is all right, but we have to come back again, how are we to manage it?' The sailor replied, 'We'll make the same wind bring us back again.' And so with movement of sail, he started to 'tack'—that's what he called it—and we went from one side of the harbour to the other, gaining a little distance each time, until eventually we landed at the point where we had started. The wind was against us, but its power was harnessed for our service. If we had kept our backs to the wind, we should have gone far out to sea.

You have read the story of the moderate southerly wind, of which the Acts of the Apostles tells us, in the story of Paul's journey to Rome. Paul, drawing from his experience, told the sailors that they had better settle down a little and wait, but there came a moderate southerly wind, and tempted them to reject Paul's advice—they turned their backs to it; but before long it became a hurricane and overcame them, and they suffered shipwreck. Turning their back to the wind brought disaster to them.

You get another story in the New Testament. This time about Jesus. You remember that the disciples were very concerned about Jesus when He set out to go to Jerusalem for the last time. The disciples said to Him, 'Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, goest thou thither again?' But Jesus set His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem. He faced the wind and storm rather than turn His back to them, and because of what He did He became the world's Saviour and Friend.

Once when Dr. Livingstone was in Africa, being troubled with the threat of a hostile chief, he decided to pass over a river, out of the chief's territory, by night, and thus escape the danger of being shot down. But he had read in his New Testament that Jesus had said, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end,' and Dr. Livingstone said those were the words of the world's best gentleman, and He had never let any one down. It was cowardly to go by night and mistrust the word of Jesus—so he went by day, and his faith was verified. He did not turn his back to the wind—he faced what appeared like a storm and overcame it. Boys and girls, with a leader like Jesus, you need not be for ever deceived by the moderate southerly wind, and turn your back to it; it may become a hurricane you cannot turn round and face. You ought not to set out in life trying to find an easy path, but dare to go along the path which makes for life's best development, even when it means you set your face towards the wind.

The Christian Year.

Second Sunday after Epiphany.

Like Perverse Children.

'Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.'—Mt 11^{16-19}.

In outline the picture is less distinct than in other parables, and it is not possible with certainty to decide who it is that gives the call. The order of the clauses would suggest that it is the people who grumbled because John and Jesus did not fall in with their suggestions. Let us play at a wedding! they said, and John sternly answered, This is no time for mirth; but next moment, in a mood of needless despondency, they were ready for a funeral, and were aggrieved that Jesus should not set His face with them to sadness. You are like children, said Jesus, with moods of unreasonable sanguineness and unreasonable depression; and you find fault with men who have some meaning in their temper, if they do not fall in with whims of yours. That is one way of reading the parable. It is more natural, however, to think of John and Jesus as taking the lead, making their proposals,

and being met in turn with a sullen refusal. The uncertainty of reading may be deliberate, and Jesus may intend us to see in the parable the picture of a game at cross-purposes, where both parties wish to lead and neither will follow, where the people make it a grievance that the prophet does not share their humour, and the prophet laments because they will not hear his voice. The people exclaim, How eccentric and wilful are these preachers! and the preachers say, How sullen and unresponsive is this people! Each claims the right to call the tune, and is aggrieved because his plan is not followed. It is the breaking down of a game, a situation which is vexing in a company of children, but how inconceivably grave it is in a society of men and women! 'That generation has not passed away,' says Matthew Henry, 'but remains in a succession of the like;' and the society of our time also imagines that it has the right to say how men shall live, and dismisses as fanatical and eccentric any one who, for deeper reasons, holds to a path of his own. That spirit will never be wanting, or the sad game of cross-purposes to which it gives rise, so long as men are content so largely to be spectators in religion, and to know it only on the outside.

It is of this onlooker's view that we wish to speak.

1. And first, notice how much—or, rather, how little—a spectator in religion is able to see. Certainly he can note the superficial distinctions of parties, John's asceticism and Jesus' geniality, just as the Samaritan woman knew the alternatives of Gerizim or Jerusalem; but below the surface he does not care to go. For many years the Salvation Army was, to a host of people, nothing more than scoop-bonnets and tambourines, and the High Church was all incense and millinery. People said of John, 'He has a devil,' which, in our modern phrase, would be rendered—he is a hypochondriac, full of extravagant fancies. And of the Other, they said, 'He is a gluttonous man and a boon companion,' for that was all they could see in Jesus of Nazareth; and the nicknames serve to measure, not the men who bore them, but the unfathomable ignorance which is possible in the mere spectator. It is pathetic to note that in our classical novels the representation of religion is mainly of this sort; in Dickens, in Thackeray, even in Scott, any fervour of piety appears in the guise of caricature.

That is Christ's point against the spectators, who see the game but will not join in it. They can note the peculiarities of religious people; they can imitate the tones of preachers; they can listen to one appeal and then to another, but in their hearts they do not admit that this is a matter of personal concern, with which their life may be bound up.

What baffled Christ's contemporaries both in Him and in John was their air of aloofness. People thought them stubborn in not going with the crowd, in which they shared the common experience of original men of all degrees; for the impulse of a society is always to subdue and flatten down anything which is exceptional. It would like to trim Samson's shaggy locks and make him a little more like other people; for it does not understand that there are forces which inevitably isolate some men, and drive them along a path which is their own, so that, if they were brought to a tame conformity with their neighbours, it would be at the expense of their commission.

Think of Luther, resolute in not taking directions from the spirit of his age! He had heard God speaking in his heart, and he counted it his duty to attend to none besides. 'Here stand I, Martin Luther: I can do no other: so help me God!' His friends counted that magnificent; but the mere spectator smiled at the notion of any one's taking himself so fearfully in earnest. Why should you stand aloof? men said to John; why should your preaching be always on that key of threatening? There are surely other objects in the world than the lifted axe and the fruitless tree. They reckoned it mere whim in him, which he might have altered if he had cared. And why are you so very unconventional? they said to Jesus. These people you associate with are more than doubtful characters, and it is extremely imprudent for a religious teacher to be seen in such companionship. You have nobody but yourself to blame if your reputation suffers. Again they thought it wilfulness in Him, not discerning that His interest in the reckless and His geniality towards all men went to the very roots of His nature, so that He could not stand aloof if He were to remain Himself.

2. We have spoken of what these spectators could see, little though it was, but we must mention two great things in John's life and in Jesus' which they failed to see; the one of these was the secret of John's rigour, and the other of Christ's buoyancy of heart.

Nothing in life can be more enduringly impressive than such a revival as John inaugurated, when the eternal things come up before men and look near, so that they are driven to judge themselves and all they do as in that tremendous presence. Life at other times is so clamorous that we readily miss the still, small voice which summons us to duty. But, in a revival, men, over whole com-

munities, may be carried beyond themselves, and think no longer of their impediments, but of the uniting necessity of a new life. John in his very figure and tone was an embodied admonition to his fellows: his look, his dress, the penetrating, shattering notes of his voice appealed to something lying deep within them. There was nothing abnormal in being moved by John, the abnormality was rather in those who remained unmoved. For in them also was the human heart which judges itself and accepts no plea; but the spectators' temper held them back.

But to the men of that generation there came another and a deeper word of God. In the world there is so much of sorrow and of gloom that a happy heart may be a boon to a whole society; and Jesus came not with the untroubled brightness of those who never wept, but with the surer light of men who have mastered every power of darkness. He knew pain, disappointment, weariness, indignation; but above all these He knew the love of God, and He was glad. He knew that in the end God must prevail, and that in His own coming a beginning of the end was made. And thus, because He believed and was sure, He banished gloom from His surroundings. His whole bearing, which was complained of, was an embodied gospel, a declaration that God is love and that His mercy has within it room for all His creatures. One might have fancied that this would be apparent even to outsiders; but all they did see was a jovial companion of loose characters, not seriously to be taken as a teacher of religion at all. That was the penalty they incurred by consenting to know religion only on the surface; they missed in John the warning and in Jesus the invitation of God.

There is a day when the attitude of the spectator is no longer possible, when men must deal with the realities and not with the appearances of religion. There is no man by the constitution of his being left an outsider, for 'there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty giveth him understanding.' [1]

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Pioneers of Progress.

'Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.'—Is 62^{10}.

We must study contemporary history if we would truly understand the urgency of this appeal. Fifty years before, the city of Jerusalem had been besieged by the armies of Babylon, and for eighteen months the dreadful strife ceased neither day nor night. 'Upon the streets, the pining children, the stricken princes, the groups of men lean with hunger, the rotting heaps of slain, mothers feeding on the bodies of the infants whom their sapless breasts could no longer keep alive; by the walls, the hanging and crucifixion of multitudes with all the fashion of Chaldean cruelty; whilst upon the hills around the neighbouring tribes are gathered to jeer at the destruction of Jerusalem.' Such is the picture which Sir George Adam Smith has painted of this City of Dreadful Night. Then came the inevitable end. The inner gate yielded before the importunity of battle. The merciless foemen, exasperated by the stubbornness of the defenders, allowed their unbridled fury to do its worst.

The fate of the city found its parallel in the doom of her unhappy citizens. Multitudes were slain, whilst the remnant of the nation became the slaves of the invading host. Isaiah's prophecy of retribution had been at last fulfilled; the Exile was utterly and awfully complete. Thus there settled down upon Judah and Jerusalem the long dark night of a nation's doom, and for half a century no ray of light pierced the thick cloud of their captivity.

In their bondage the exiles learned that their sufferings were not an undeserved calamity. Beneath the stern yoke of the oppressor the majesty of conscience was restored, its function vindicated. Behind them lay the dark ages of delinquent history; and as they read the stained, polluted page penitence began its gracious work.

This was the point to which their captivity was designed to lead them; and, God's purpose having been accomplished, the period of their punishment must end. In the fortieth chapter a new note is heard in the stillness of the night. 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye home to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.'

But scarcely has the voice of comfort ceased than another voice is heard. It is the call to service, to strenuous endeavour—'In the wilderness prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.' The prophet's eyes are lifted toward the far-off city of Jerusalem, and in thought he traverses the weary miles of wilderness that intervene. The returning hosts are not made up of mail-clad heroes flushed with the pride of victory. They are captives who have spent

[1] W. M. Macgregor, *Repentance unto Life*, 60.

their strength in bitter servitude, weary mothers and helpless little children. Such a mixed multitude of feeble folk need adequate provision for their manifold infirmities.

And so with clarion tones the prophet bids the pioneers, 'Go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.' It is the appeal of God to all that is heroic in the nation's life. Only the stalwart souls, ready to do and dare, can obey the call.

Such was the call of God to the men of purpose in this crisis of a nation's history. And, ringing down through all the ages, the same call echoes to-day. To every man of clear conscience and conviction there comes the command of God, 'Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people.' They are lifting weary eyes to the far-off city of God; but between them and that distant goal there looms the wilderness of sin, with its innumerable perils. Lift up a standard for the people that they be no longer leaderless. Rally the scattered forces which have been badly beaten in life's battle and tell them that the day is not lost. Sound the advance, for victory may yet be achieved in the name and strength of God.

> Eyes rekindling, and prayers
> Follow your steps as ye go.
> Ye fill up the gaps in our files,
> Strengthen the wavering line,
> Stablish, continue our march,
> On, to the bound of the waste,
> On, to the City of God!

That is a modern rendering of the ancient battle-cry wherewith the prophet of the Lord inspired the heart of Israel. In response, enthusiastic sons of God have arisen to discharge the duty of the pioneers in preparing the way of the people. Are we not in danger of underestimating our indebtedness to the past? Our present position was not attained in a day. The priceless privileges we enjoy are the bequests of the generations which have preceded us.

And is it possible that we should stand aloof from the progress of the ages? Are we content to be carried as mere drift-wood on the surface of the tide? Shall we not rather join our strength to the forces that are in operation all around us, and bring what power we possess to bear upon the uplifting of the race?

Before us there are opportunities for service, possibilities of conquest the like of which the world has never seen before. The barrier of ancient customs must be broken down, the briars of temptation must be rooted out, and across the trackless bog of human misery we must build the highway of the Lord. Do we say it is impossible? That is precisely what they told George Stephenson when he proposed to build a railway from Liverpool to Manchester. Chat Moss was in the way, and the most expert engineers declared Chat Moss to be an insurmountable difficulty.

And as we look across the dark morass of human woe and sin and helplessness, when we take into consideration the frailty of human nature and its constant bias toward evil, we are sometimes tempted to believe that the path to heaven can never be constructed across the unstable waste of a sin-cursed world. 'It is impossible!' Yes! that has been the devil's cry through all the ages. Have we never read, 'With God all things are possible'? If we will but link our weakness on to God's omnipotence, that word 'impossible' may be erased from our vocabulary.

But that means work; for faith without works is dead. The impossible can only be accomplished by the men who pray as though the issue depended upon God, and work as though the issue depended upon themselves alone. For this purpose were we born into the world, that we might attempt great tasks and commit ourselves to a glorious crusade. Let us build a road by which it shall be easy for others to come again to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. 'Gather out the stones' that hinder so many of our fellow-men from running the race set before them. Is it no reproach to us that there are thousands who stumble and fall over the stones which lust and greed have deliberately placed within their path? Surely it is one of the greatest anomalies of our modern civilization that the same legislature which punishes a man for getting drunk is responsible for putting up at each street corner an incitement to evil-doing. We must break down this tyranny of iniquity; we must sweep away the chronic evils and wrongs which have darkened the human mind and become the unmitigated curse of the human race. We can never cease from toil until public law and administration are on the side of private virtue and civic righteousness; until men shall find it easy to do right and difficult to do wrong.

'Lift up a standard for the people.' What standard can we raise, but the standard of the Cross. When the great French nation rose to the task of self-emancipation, they inscribed upon their banners 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,' and we are apt to forget that they are stolen words. They

form an essential part of the gospel; and through the ages they have been the watchwords of Christianity. In lifting the banner of the Cross, we raise the standard of the brotherhood of man, of civic and religious liberty, of the glory and excellency of the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ; and round this thrice blessed banner we must rally the forces of the world and follow the flag to victory.[1]

For ever ours! for good or ill, on us the burden lies;
God's balance, watched by angels, is hung across the skies.
Shall Justice, Truth, and Freedom turn the poised and trembling scale?
Or shall the Evil triumph, and robber Wrong prevail?
. . . . . .
The day is breaking in the East of which the prophets told,
And brightens up the sky of Time the Christian Age of Gold;
Old Might to Right is yielding, battle blade to clerkly pen,
Earth's monarchs are her peoples, and her serfs stand up as men.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

On Pleasing God.

'We labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.'—2 Co 5^9.

1. We *labour* to please Him. Let us get rid at once of the word 'labour.' It introduces the thought of painful, despondent effort. That is not St. Paul's frame of mind: it is one of eager hopeful endeavour. It is our *ambition*, he says, to please Him, and he tells us precisely what his objects of ambition are. It is not every one who can afford to be so frank. These objects are *two*: to please Christ, and to preach the gospel where it has not been preached before.

It is true that no stress can be laid on the strict rendering 'we are ambitious.' In the first place it is *not* a strict rendering. Our word 'ambition' keeps something of the base associations of its Latin original and is a poor representative of the nobler Greek. But further, the Greek word itself has lost its special colouring and has come to mean *any* eager striving, not a striving for *distinction*. It is the most eager form of pursuit known to higher minds, and is therefore employed for the aims of St. Paul.

[1] R. Moffat Gautrey, *The Glory of Going On*, 146.

Yet there is more to be said than this. The histories of the word and of the man who uses it are parallel. They illustrate each other. Human affections are capable of being diverted like the words which express them, and retain their vividness when they have changed their aim.

Ambition is *checked* by a religious career deliberately adopted as a calling. One sees plainly enough that, theoretically at least, there is no room for it there. But the eagerness of aim in life remains. It is diverted. What becomes of it? Does it merely change colour into an ecclesiastical or religious ambition? Is it working unacknowledged, and asserting itself more and more in the inward struggle of motives? Or does this eagerness of aim take a fresh course altogether and become an eager striving to please our Master? That was St. Paul's history. His passion ran into the current expression in the text: '*My* aim is to please him.'

His ambition left the privileges of pure Jewish blood, the glories of the nation, the perfect fulfilment of the law on which it had rested. It did not venture to dwell on sufferings and achievements. It paused on his children in the gospel, and their salvation by his means, but it rested nowhere finally except in the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We dwell on St. Paul not merely because the words of the text are his words, but because we cannot do without him in this matter. It is because ambition did, as a fact, undergo this transformation in him that we can speak of it as possible for ourselves. What St. Paul did for Christian doctrine by his thought is evident enough both to friends and foes. It is perhaps not so evident what he did for Christian life by *his* life, and yet this was the greatest side of his work.

It must be confessed that in us ambition does not undergo this transformation easily and readily. It remains in the man with a religious career as religious ambition. And there is another strange phase of it. Contrary to the whole tenor of our Lord's teaching, it has been thought spiritually-minded to cherish ambition as to honours and distinctions in the life to come. Fortunately we hear little of such motives now. We need not wonder that ambition should prove so obstinate a factor in human character when we consider how earnestly it is stimulated at all places of education, and not least at our Universities. Can we expect a man to go out into civil life and to make it his first object to serve God in his generation, or to serve his country or his clients or his dependents, if up to that moment we have pressed on him by every means in our power that the first thing for him

to do was to obtain distinction for himself, with the bye-consideration that the distinction would reflect some of its lustre on the body to which he belonged? Can we not see here some explanation of the evident prevalence of *personal* aims in the public men of our day?

Is there anything better, any substitute? There is only one thing better, and that is so difficult, so distant. It is that we make it our aim to please Him.

2. What is the one great difficulty of this transmuted ambition? It is that, as the text says, 'we are absent from the Lord.' 'Whether present or absent,' St. Paul says. It made no difference to him. But it does make a great difference to us. To please a present Master is a motive which all would allow as sufficient. Ambition as a motive for public service would disappear under His eye. And much more would this be the case in His immediate service, the service of His Church. We should be able to do what we wish to do now—to do everything for Him. So we imagine. But now the drawback is so obvious. There is no sign of how He takes what we do.

But this is not quite an accurate account of the matter. We do find indirect assurances of our acceptance in the opinion of men, and in our own consciousness. First, suppose we meet with gratitude and confidence from those we deal with. Here is an assurance that we are pleasing Him. Yet there is danger in looking for it too anxiously, as we soon begin to seek it directly for its *own sake*, and, when that is done, it ceases to be a message. In that case, not only do we lose the higher motive and the close relation with the Lord which it implies, but a wholly different process at once sets in, in the moulding of our character. A life to please the Lord moulds us slowly and surely on His pattern. A life to please men, even good men, moulds us on an inferior pattern.

Secondly, we find an assurance that we are pleasing Him in our own consciousness. It reports an access of peace and hope, a sense of spiritual sunshine. This, we believe, is imparted by Him. Yet we know too well the precariousness of such intuitions. If this joy, in the sense of pleasing Him, is directly imparted, what are we to say of spiritual distress and depression? Are they signs that we have not been pleasing Him, or is it often truer to say of these, 'It is mine own infirmity'? Spiritual depression often does not mean anything more than physical weakness, or at most a temporary weakness of faith. If we urge as a topic of consolation that depression may be purely subjective, is it not honest to own that exultation may be so as well? Thus it may be pleaded that the sense of acceptance may arise from an opposite kind of infirmity. But it can never be an infirmity for a soul which desires God to believe and to rejoice in His love. This is the health of the soul.

Is this, then, to be our object in life, to please Him, and to have nothing to look to here but these phantom assurances, as the sceptic will certainly consider them to be? See, he says, what abundant objects life presents. Can we substitute for them, in their nearness, colour, and potency, something so distant and unrecognizable? Now, doubt does not always hold this language about the abundance of sufficient aims in life, but it is true that they lie round the young in sufficient profusion. Can we keep them in the front and relegate the aim of *pleasing Him* to a nominal headship in the background? No, it must be in the front. We must see all other aims through it, and then we shall see them in their true colour and proportion.

Such a life is a heroic life if not a quixotic one. We want a life which will suit the average mass of mankind who are not heroes. It is true that Christianity is essentially a heroism, but that is just why it is adapted to the mass of mankind. There are in every man possibilities of heroism. They may only show themselves in the passive form of admiring the heroism of others, but they can be called out, and this is what Christianity does.

But, is it *possible* to please God? Had we not better restrict ourselves to the more guarded phrase, 'Keep his commandments,' and abandon the spontaneity, freedom, and interest of so incautious an expression as pleasing God?

And first, is it possible from the human side? Consider the sight of a good man steadily fixing his desire on serving his Master, sacrificing present good to it, striving with himself, beaten and returning to the endeavour, and all this by faith, without any sensible mark to encourage him. How must this appear in the sight of Him for whom it is done, by whose grace it is done? Do the faults and failures neutralize the moral beauty of the effort, or do they only make it more pathetic? It is perhaps dangerous to guess how things appear in God's sight, but something like this seems implied in the conception of Him as our Father. From the human side it is possible to please God.

But is it possible from the Divine side? Can God be pleased? The Psalmist says, 'The Lord's delight is in them that fear him, in them that

wait for his mercy.' And the word which describes the Lord's pleasure in His people runs through the whole range of the Old Testament. Are we to dismiss this expression along with others as anthropopathic? We must remember that it is God in Christ that we are concerned with. God manifest in the flesh. The anthropopathic expressions of the Old Testament (not of course all of them, but such as that we are dealing with) are literally true of Him. He is pleased with me and my efforts to honour and serve Him, just as I am pleased and touched by the loving acts of those who are close and dear to me. Nothing is too small to escape Him if it be done in love and simplicity. He can be pleased. It is a *childish* view of religion, but of such children is the Kingdom of God.[1]

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

The Divine Worker.

'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.'—Jn 5^{17}.

Of all scientists, God is the first and greatest. If God made—or is making—the universe, He knows much more about it and is far more interested in it than all the scientists together. Wireless and the constitution of the atom and 'cosmic rays' are no surprise to Him. What might surprise Him is to find a certain type of sincerely religious people regarding science as a sort of pagan propaganda. God is only waiting for us to find things out as our capacity grows to utilize them. Science is only finding things out—'thinking God's thoughts after Him.' To talk of science and religion as being in conflict with each other is tantamount to affirming that God is divided against Himself. 'All's love and all's Law,' as Browning has taught us. Evolution and Bethlehem have the same origin. So many people have the idea that God only talks theology, but the words of Jesus are, 'My Father *worketh* up to this hour.' For thousands of years the older thinkers, misled by a static rather than a dynamic conception of God, had thought His work complete. To-day, that conception is being replaced by a greater and a truer. 'My Father worketh . . .' Or in the words of the most recent science: 'This is a growing and evolving world, and not a static or decaying one.'

We do not mean that Jesus anticipated evolution. In Christ the Eternal took flesh as a contemporary man. If He had not been subject to the limitations of humanity, He would not have been man: and if He was not *man* we are of all men most pitiable. He did not know everything that God was doing—He said so; which mattered nothing. But He knew that God was doing everything, which mattered supremely. And He knew—not by our tortuous proofs, but by the immediacy and the intuitive certainty of His oneness with the Father, the *principle* of God's all-comprehensive relation to this world. 'My Father worketh up to this hour.' This conception of God, really established, reinforces faith for us, and places religion on a new and unassailable basis. As Canon Streeter points out in *Reality*: 'Primitive religion looks for the evidence of Divine action merely in the abnormal and the inexplicable: in the comet and the thunderbolt rather than in the sunrise and the growing blade—*with the result* that the narrow margin left for the recognition of any specifically Divine activity at all, shrinks day by day with every advance of human knowledge. No small part of human progress has consisted in getting away from the conception of the Divine as essentially the irrational. Science is the great cleanser of human thinking: *it makes impossible any religion but the highest.*'

If science is to have a religion at all, it must be a religion in which God is working—not one in which God delegated His powers to a fallible human institution, or His final revelation to a book, however sacred. Science has long looked out into the black, unfathomable abyss and seen giant nebulæ, which may be worlds in the making: but to-day it is looking upon *this* world as in the making still. This new conception of the world compels a new conception of God, and yet one as old as Jesus—God dynamic—according to Jesus the only true conception of God.

But what we want to say here particularly is, that there is no clearer and more self-evidencing illustration of the vital principle of God's continuing working—and, if you will, of the co-working of God and Christ—than what we call the Incarnation itself. We are coming to see that Christ is not a Divine interposition in the world, so much as the inevitable climax and keystone of the whole Divine process, in the world from the beginning. And if it be objected that it is contrary to the evolutionary process that 'the climax should come in the middle,' the answer is simple. Christ *is* the end of the Divine revelation to the world: but we are, as yet, only at the *beginning* of Christ *for* the world. He is 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.' One wonders if the Seer of Patmos realized what a tremendous thing—what a vital cosmic as well as theological thing—he had said when he wrote that. 'God was in Christ recon-

[1] E. R. Bernard, *Sermons and Lectures*, 14.

ciling the world to himself.' Christ was God working on His largest human scale. Whatever humanity's relation to sin might have been, Christ would have come to the world as the 'Light of the world,' the focus of the Divine interpretation of the world. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' Christ here ranges Himself not merely with a Divine redemptive process, but with the whole historical Divine self-revelatory process. For He elects here to define Himself in terms of the ceaseless Divine working for the world rather than in any lesser or secondary terms.

'My Father worketh up to this hour, and I work too.' The Incarnation has its fullest interpretation as the climax of the Divine 'work.' It is not the Cross, then, that explains the Incarnation: it is the Incarnation that explains the Cross. And the traditional confusion and the many conflicting explanations of the Atonement are largely due to the fatal mistake of endeavouring to separate between the functions of the death and the life of Jesus. We are saved not by the death of Christ, but by Christ, by the unity of His life and death. The Incarnation is the at-one-ment, as Westcott says. And the very foundation-stone of our faith is that He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father, in the fullest sense and the only sense in which it is possible for man to have vision of God.

I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it.

If all this is true—if God is still working—nothing is finished.

The World is not finished. 'The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our God,' but it is not finished. How is it to be finished? Is it to be by some celestial catastrophe: by some interpretation of Adventism which becomes more and more unnecessary and inconceivable as you realize more clearly and fully the truth and implications of these sublime words of Christ's—'My Father worketh up to this hour, and I work'? 'I am here not only as the fulfilment of God's ceaseless cosmic purpose, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the historic symbol of the eternal redemptive principle of sacrifice in the Divine heart; but I am here also as the historic embodiment of the Divine *method*.'

My Father works: He effects His eternal purpose as a worker in the world, not as a prestidigitator in the clouds. 'And I work.' Divine work is going to save this world, work in the spirit and reinforced by the power of the indefatigable, undefeatable, unresting Divine Worker. To give up hope for the world, then, is to be radically false to Christ's most definite revelation of the part God is playing in the world, and the way in which He is carrying it out.

Theology is not finished. God is still working in the human mind. The discoveries of science are not the creations of science: they are merely thinking God's thoughts a long way after Him. It is surely the height of foolishness and unfaith to imagine that God reveals Himself to theologians, but not to scientists. All truth is one. If evolution is true it is as much true for faith as for biology. If the world is a thousand million years old, instead of being created 4004 B.C., this is as true for religion as for science. What basis is there in reason or faith for accepting the fundamental heresy that the only new truths God has to reveal to-day are always about the universe and never about the soul? 'We are always hearing of the failure of Christianity,' says Canon Streeter. 'That failure, I would urge, is in the main due to the fact that the churches have never dared openly to break with the idols of the past, and publicly to discard certain ideas of God and of His ways with man which are no longer the highest we can conceive.' That is true, but why should it be? Why should men hesitate to allow God to lead them to new heights of the vision of the Spirit—if to a new earth literally, why not to a new heaven? If 'My Father worketh up to now,' then religion is not static but dynamic: not a creed, but an ever-expanding Life.

Finally, *Man is not finished.* There are many arguments for immortality. But none more cogent than the argument of man himself. In two senses. First, the argument of what man already is; and second, the argument of what he is *not*—the fact that man is not yet finished, which is our point here. To believe that Nature is content to give man capacities that he never fulfils, and is satisfied to leave him for ever half-finished, is to ask us to believe that that which has produced intelligence is itself unintelligent. And if for Nature you substitute 'God'—the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who 'worketh up to now'—the unfinishedness of man becomes an argument of constraining force for the inevitableness of a larger life.

Quoting a remark of H. G. Wells—'Whether we live for ever or die to-morrow does not affect righteousness,' Canon Streeter very acutely points out that though there is a note of idealism in it, it is not true. 'For if God's righteousness may lightly scrap the individual, human righteousness

may do the same.' It is not reasonable to expect a man to think more of the worth of his soul than God does.

If God sets so little value on personality as to cast it 'as rubbish to the void' at death, then the value we set on it is a complete illusion. And with the intrinsic worth of personality go all moral values. If the next world crumbles, all that is best in this world crumbles too. If Mr. Wells feels that it doesn't make any difference whether he goes on or not, it doesn't matter very much perhaps: but if God feels like that it matters—awfully. But He doesn't. My Father worketh up to now. Then He is at work on us, *and we are not finished.* 'My Father worketh.' Why? Because God is love. And love has never finished.[1]

SEPTUAGESIMA.

An Apology for Cain.

'Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.'—1 Jn 3^{12}.

Was Cain 'the corrupt father of all vice and murder'? Had he a vicious soul? Was he 'criminally-minded'? In a word, was he a *bad man*?

His sin has made Cain the horror of all generations, as the prototype of crime itself. We are not dealing with Cain's sin, however, but with Cain the man. Of the crime itself, there is no need to speak. What can one add more damning than that haunting verse of Scripture, 'The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground'?

Following the records of Genesis, let us see if there are any suggestions given in the story which may make Cain's deed more understandable, less of the senseless, unprovoked piece of brutality it seems, and the man himself less of a blind enigma of iniquity.

The first point usually stressed in a modern court of justice is the question of *motive* or *cause*. Fortunately for our guidance, the motive behind this deed of passion is fully known. The two brothers, Cain the elder and Abel the younger, brought offerings for Jehovah's altar from their own appropriate line of work. Cain, being a tiller of the ground, brought the fruits of the field; Abel, being a keeper of sheep, brought the firstlings of his flock. This difference in the substance or nature of the gifts counts for nothing. In the minds of later Jews it did count, from theological reasons, because of the presence of spilled blood in Abel's offering. But ideally, the offering of both men was perfect. Each gave of his best, the natural produce of his labour, which is always a man's finest gift to God or any one else. The Epistle to the Hebrews, in its great argument for faith, quotes our case as follows: 'By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.' That sentence, it should be noted, reckons each offering as *sacrifice*, but considers one more acceptable than the other, the reason being *faith*, or the heart of the offerer. We may admit, therefore, that the inward state of Abel's mind was more perfect (shall we say, more religious?) than Cain's.

But what concerns us at the moment is the simple fact of the rejection. We should observe what that rejection seemed to imply. According to Semitic ideas, it meant that God had passed Cain by in favour of the younger brother. He was here dispossessed of his 'spiritual birthright,' a leadership that carried with it certain definite privileges, political, judicial, and religious. He was not dispossessed by man (the Hebrews would not have considered that possible), but by an inscrutable Divine election. If this is so (it is the common Hebrew explanation of Cain's rejection), then we can understand the cause of his anger and passion. We often scourge Esau in our thoughts for so lightly regarding this same birthright, and being willing, seriously or in jest, to part with it for a mess of red pottage and to stay a casual hunger. That is a charge at least that no one can level against Cain. He prized it too much.

Not for one moment does this consideration of Cain's motive lessen the crime and horror of murder. It does allow us, however, to estimate what Semitic thought considered to be the 'provocation' that soured his heart.

Passing from the motive of this grim story, are we given any indications of this man's nature and qualities which may lead us to understand him better?

In the first place, he is constantly portrayed to us as a man of amazing vitality and energy, one even with a touch of genius and directive originality, the type of person, indeed, who with great inherent powers may either touch heaven or sink to hell. The record puts this fact in a dramatic phrase when it asserts that 'sin was crouching at his door.' This is a word-parable that at once suggests temptation, like a wolf sitting on its haunches, watching its victim for a chance, unwary moment. Quite obviously, this is a picture describing a man of vigorous passions and temptations, who must guard

[1] H. E. Brierley, *Life Indeed*, 17.

himself carefully, for by the very health and surge of his own nature sin is crouching at his door.

It is easy for some people to control desire and walk straight. In their case, virtue is often a question of a placid temperament and a colourless nature. It is their gain that they are untempted and untorn as more vigorous people are. There are many of us so bloodless and so lustreless that we have not even the longing to break bounds! Our good is to be judged not only by what we do or refrain from doing, but often by the unguessed forces that are resisted.

From the records themselves we may adduce proofs of Cain's amazing vitality and originality. First of all, we are told that he was a tiller of the ground, and Abel a keeper of sheep. It is a remarkable fact in history that the evolution and refinement of civilization have come from the tillers of the soil. The pastoral peoples of the world have made little progress. They live to-day much as they lived in Abraham's time, *static*: for the conditions of their life are unchangingly meagre and simple. Cain was a tiller of the soil, because, like all agriculturists, he had the energy and vision to foresee and plan results. He found an outlet for that energy in constructive work.

Further (how beautifully impartial the Bible is), we read that this despised murderer was the first man to 'build a city.' No doubt, this meant little more than a few rough huts, with a wattle hedge around them to scare off intruders and prowling beasts. But in simple expedients like these lie the origins of all social growth and government. Here by Cain's genius, according to the Genesis story, lies the origin of communal life, and all future social institutions. The natural inference is obvious—that both his good and his evil, in their outgoings, sprang from his aggressive personality of boundless energy and restless genius!

Further, the records (once more startlingly impartial) assert that this fund of power passed as a direct and cleansed inheritance to his descendants. Cain's line of heredity is definitely represented as leading to a string of people of genius and fertile invention! *Jabal*, one of his descendants, is said to be the 'father of such as dwell in tents,' people who could trek with their cattle and engage in commerce, the barterers of the world, who might migrate and find new lands. In such humble origins we can see the germ of commercial progress. *Jubal*, another descendant, is claimed to be the inventor of the harp and the pipe, a man of music and the arts, in whom we see the dawn of artistic things. *Tubal-Cain*, still another of this noted line, is reputed to be the first artificer in brass and iron, a craftsman of skill, in whom the latent seed of Cain's genius once more blossomed in new productive ways.

There is yet one thing to state in his favour. Some years after his crime, when his first child was born, he named him Enoch. That name, as Dr. Driver points out, denotes 'dedication,' 'a new start,' 'a fresh beginning.' What a lovely and suggestive name for the child of a sinner like this! It is usual to deny Cain any true and effective repentance—on the principle, I suppose, that if we give a dog a bad name, we may as well drown him. But is there not more than a suggestion in the name of his child that Cain came to himself in deeper ways than we imagine? May we not see in this name a dim recognition of God's wonderful mercy in shielding him from the consequences of his sin and giving him a new land and a new start? In time, he might find the best proof of that mercy even in his shameful brand. He might come to realize, as many of us do with our own scars, that God's brand may prove His deepest mercy.

These are the conclusions, then, from this ancient tale of tragedy.

In the first place, the greatest curse in human life is not wickedness, but power untamed. In the Middle Ages, the young aspirant for knighthood laid his sharp sword on God's altar, while he prayed steadfastly all the night. That sword represented power to curse or bless. What the world needs is power, power even like Cain's, but *power consecrated*! We need the sword on the altar.

Further, Cain's story reveals how easily sin may gain dominion over an uncontrolled heart. It 'croucheth at the door.' Sin crawls like a panther, ready for its pounce. As we think of that sleek thing pawing at the door, we know that our safety lies in a 'great mastery.' And thank God, if the panther prowls at the door, there is Someone Else there, unafraid of any beast, who knocks, and if He enters, brings perfect mastery to disordered souls.

Once more, the commonest cause of sin is not 'the mind of vice,' or the 'criminal heart,' but a passionate temper. How we laugh at temper! 'It is nothing, and will pass.' Preachers and moralists make too much of trifles like temper! Would God they were trifles! As it is, every deed of vengeance and crime, every wrong that has scarred life, and every ugly thing that has wounded man has come from such little things as temper, jealousy, and envy, *when fanned in a high wind*![1]

[1] J. Black, *An Apology for Rogues*, 17.