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takes its colour from our mental states. Galilee's lake was rough, no doubt, and exceedingly fearful were the hearts of the disciples. But supposing their minds had become perfectly calm during this storm, and supposing their souls had been freed of all fear of mortal peril, would they still have cried 'Lord, save, we perish'? If such a miracle of mind had taken place, would not Galilee's lake have lost its terrors? When there is calm within, the storm outside matters little. In other words, the power of God which comes from a firm realization of His Providence makes all the difference to the natural order because it makes all the difference to us. Such a conception of Providence implies, of course, the reality of man's freedom. It implies also that the notion of 'ordering' which we associate with the idea of Providence is conditioned by the response of the individual. God has a purpose for every man, but this purpose or ordering can only become actual in so far as man freely co-operates with it or gives it the opportunity of realization. Freedom is seen at every point where man opens out his life to God in trustful surrender; and the sequel of this is God's Providential ordering. Stated thus, the old problem of freewill *versus* determinism becomes unreal. In fact, it ceases to be a problem, for the purpose

of God implies both. St. Paul could find no solution of the enigma because he had no postulate of natural law.

Arising out of all this, there is one further phase of the problem which requires examination. Can a purpose of God be discerned in the wide field of History? Is God responsible for the destiny of nations? And how far does such a thought, carried through to its logical conclusion, amount to an inescapable determinism? An unconditional affirmative in answer to these questions must undoubtedly amount to an absolute determinism. Our answer must be a conditional one. It is better to say that God's purpose is both general and individual at the same time. His purpose may be broadly defined as the salvation of souls, and a contribution to the fulfilment of His general purpose has been made whenever an individual soul directs its life along this the end for which it exists. As to how long this will continue, and as to whether God's purpose will ever be complete on this side of eternity, we are not called upon to say. But in speaking of God's purpose for the world we must perforce see it focussed in the individual, for this alone is consonant with freedom, and embraces that distinctive idea of ordering which we associate with the idea of Providence.

In the Study.

Virginius Puerisque.

A Big Funnel.

BY THE REVEREND JOHN PATERSON, B.D., Ph.D.,
DUMBARTON.

'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.'—Mt 7¹⁴.

YOU all know how quickly a crowd will gather when there is anything to be seen. Some one runs and, somehow, all seem to follow. Some time ago I saw just such a crowd gathered on the bridge that spans the Leven, all looking intently over the bridge at something in the water. You won't guess what it was. It wasn't a man or a boy or a girl. It was a boat, or rather a barge, and it was carrying the queerest thing you ever saw. It was a steamboat's funnel, and a big funnel at that, and it was lying on its side as if it were having a rest before it was set upright on the big liner to do its lifework.

Some one who knew all about funnels and ships told me you could drive a carriage and pair through it, so wide was it. It had been made in the engine shop above the bridge, and the liner for which it had been made was built at the mouth of the river, which is a good bit below the bridge, and if the funnel was to be set on the liner, you see, it had to pass through underneath the bridge. It seemed to tower so high even while it lay on its side, like a giant resting, that you would have said it was impossible for it to go through. It could not go through when we were looking at it, but there were men on the barge, and they knew when they would get through for they had studied the tides.

The funnel was waiting for the tide, and when the tide was at the right level in the early morning,—so early that nobody was there to see it go through—it passed down safely to the shipyard, and was hoisted up with a great big crane, and set on the liner, and that ship with that funnel is now sailing

on the ocean. But the most wonderful thing about it all is just this, that when it passed underneath the bridge there were only three inches to spare. It wasn't much, but it was enough. The draughtsman who drew the plan, and the men who built what he had planned, knew that, and they said, 'It will be all right.' But it was a narrow thing!

Now I am sure Jesus never saw such a thing as a ship's funnel, but I think He saw at times something like all this. Perhaps He had seen a camel with its hump, maybe two humps, loaded with baggage trying to go through a narrow gate into the city. It simply couldn't be done until the baggage was removed and the camel stooped a little. He saw, too, many people eager to enter into 'the way which leadeth unto life.' Young and old came to Him, and said, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' Some came running, and Jesus did love those runners of the gospel story. But to them all He said just this, 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.'

At one time, a young man came running, and he was very keen to enter into the way of life. And when Jesus saw his keenness He loved him. But the young man had lots of money, so much, I think, that his pockets were bulging out, as yours sometimes are, although not with money! When he asked Jesus how he could get in, for he was very anxious to get in, Jesus just looked sad, and said, 'You can't go in with all that about you: strait is the gate, and narrow is the way.' You see, there's only room on it for two, Jesus and you; I don't think there are even three inches to spare here. The young man looked at Jesus, and then he looked at his bulging pockets—and he didn't go through. Jesus was sorry, very sorry, for He loved the young man, but the young man loved his money-bags more than he loved Jesus.

At another time an older man came: I think he was too old to run. Indeed, two came together, and they came to pray. They wanted to ask God about 'the way that leadeth to life.' One was a Pharisee, the other a publican. I think the Pharisee was a very big man; perhaps not as big as he thought, but the gate wasn't high enough for him to enter without bending, and he wouldn't bend! In the days of the Covenanters, about whom you will learn soon, there was one brave man, James Guthrie, who was known as 'the short man who would not bow.' He preferred to obey God rather than the King, for he believed the King was wrong. We might call the Pharisee 'the big man who would not bend.' And if you wish to know what I mean by that just look at the other,

how he bends and throws himself on the ground, and cries, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' When men bend and bow themselves thus, I think I hear Jesus saying, 'Come in, come in, eternal glory shalt thou win.'

There were only three inches to spare when the great funnel passed through. That was a strait and narrow way. But the gate through which we must pass to enter upon 'the way that leadeth to life' is even narrower. It's going to be a tight squeeze for all of us! It's certain we shall have to leave a lot behind, all our bad temper and our selfishness and our sin, for 'nought that defileth can ever enter in.'

The Mechanical Servant.

BY THE REVEREND S. GREER, M.A., A.Y.R.

'The wisdom that is from above is . . . gentle.'—
Ja 3¹⁷.

Imagine calling up on the 'phone a man who was on board a liner in Mid-Atlantic, as somebody did the other day! But an even queerer thing is that you can telephone instructions to a new mechanically controlled servant which they have invented in U.S.A. He is shaped like a man, and walks about like a human being, and does the most wonderful things although he is only a creature of steel, and electric wires, and magnets. And he obeys his master's voice. When he is asked to, he turns on the lights, or will start the electric-sweeper, or switch on the radiator, and you can give him his instructions by telephone. 'Hello! Televox!' you say, 'put on the radiator, please; I'll be home in an hour.' What a nightmare figure he must look, champing and clanking about in a dark house, doing what he is told! Suppose he ran into you in the dark! Wouldn't it be weird to see doors opened by him at a word, and have a chair drawn up for you by this tireless, wageless servant, who never gives notice?

But, 'curiousest and curiousest' (and Alice never saw anything queerer in Wonderland), great care must be taken, we are told, to use just the right tone of voice when addressing Televox. For only particular sounds set the special tuning-forks in motion, to control certain actions, and he will respond only to words spoken in the proper tone.

How very human! Have you ever tried in how many different ways you can say 'Come here'? If there is a touch of domineering in it, when it is addressed to you, how your ruff goes up! Yet the words may be almost a caress. Everything depends on the proper tone of voice.

Have you heard of Teddy the little dancing-bear, and how he escaped from his owner one day in the city? Delighted with his freedom, he made off pell-mell down the street, round the corner, along a lane where he upset an apple-cart, into a shop and out again, leaving behind a hysterical girl who had frightened poor Teddy with a broom. It was great sport, and he was enjoying himself tremendously. Behind followed a crowd—policemen, busmen, messenger-boys, shouting wildly, throwing sticks and batons, until Teddy lost his head, and from being playful, he became excited and scared, and was about to attack a snarling dog, when, suddenly, he heard a voice—his master's voice. With a few caressing Italian words, his owner did what all the angry mob had not accomplished, and Teddy fell joyful and slobbering into his arms.

What was that about Televox? Oh yes! 'Great care must be taken to use just the right tone of voice.' Let us try it out on the people about us. 'The wisdom from above is gentle,' says the apostle. Some girls and boys think it rather 'soft' to be nice. Just try! The very next time you are going to answer angrily, or say unkind things, pull yourself up with a jerk, and you will find *what* a jerk it is. It isn't easy at all. Hot speech and hasty temper are not a sign of strength, though some fiery folk talk as if they were. Rather they are the marks of an ill-balanced nature, and nothing ill-balanced is strong. Nothing is so powerful as kindness, nothing so appealing as gentleness. One of the loveliest things said about Jesus in the Gospels is that 'He was full of grace.' How winsome His smile! When He said 'Come,' the boys and girls simply could not resist Him. Shall we then try to be followers of Him, and learn from Him that wisdom which is gentle?

The Christian Bear.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

The Divided Allegiance.

'So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images.'—2 K 17⁴¹.

This is a somewhat remarkable statement. It looks extremely like a logical contradictory. The fearing of the Lord ought to exclude the possibility of the serving of graven images. Sometimes fortunately, and at other times unfortunately, as in this case, many things happen in life that do not happen in logic.

Certainly that was the case with the dwellers in

the land of Samaria. What had happened was that the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom had been scattered, to be lost for ever among the surrounding nations. In their place, a heterogeneous collection of different subject races had been sent by the Assyrian conqueror to cultivate the depopulated land. They brought with them, naturally enough, not only themselves but their gods. Where the name of Jehovah had been supreme, men cried unto Nergal, to Nibhaz, and to Tartak to save them. It so happened, however, that certain disasters fell upon the incoming colonists. There were literal lions in the way, that ate them. Immediately they assumed that there was something wrong with their worship. The theory of those days was that each territory had its own particular god, who not only governed the people, but possessed the actual land. These lion-terrorized aliens, basing themselves upon that theory, assumed that the god of the land was angry at neglect. Wherefore, they sent for some one to instruct them in the manner, that is to say, in the ceremonial modes, of worship of that god. But they did not neglect their own religious rites. So, thought they, they were safe.

How far away these dim guesses at God seem from us, and yet how near is the practice involved! Few verses of Scripture more aptly describe the weakness of our religious life to-day than this one, that we 'fear the Lord and serve other gods.'

What man of us, as he considers himself, but finds an ill-matched company within him? A half-allegiance to Christ consorts with a longing for excursions into territory where He cannot go with us; a niggardly worship of God is balanced by a following of the whispers of our own desires. God is there—a little; but with Him, and more potent over action than He, there is the god of pleasure and of ambition, the god of gold, and the great god of self.

1. In the first place, then, look at this curious fact of the divided allegiance. We all recognize, more or less, an unseen Power with whom we are in relation, and to a certain extent our actions are influenced by the thought of that Power. At the lowest, we are at the mercy of that motive, which, in a world so full of mystery as this is, never altogether leaves us, namely, the motive of fear arising from life's inevitable sufferings and from the unknown. We cannot help seeing sickness and death. Are the dead asleep, or do they live? If they live, in what strange God-lit land, beneath what eyes of living flame and purity, have they their being? As a man thinks he is stilled. And

even if it is in the very lowest room of religion, religious for the moment he is.

But yet, none of us is altogether free from that higher voice that speaks of our true rest in God alone. 'In every man there is a spark of God.' In every man there is a yearning for that life in union with which there is life indeed.

And these two types of experience have their effect upon us. At the lowest, occasionally we are frightened of God; at a higher level we fear Him; on a higher still, we desire Him. And each of these three emotions—fear, awe, and longing—so far affect our action.

At the same time, what one of us is altogether religious? The greatly sanctified are sore to seek. Even amongst honest, Christian folk, where shall we find the man whose every thought and word and deed springs from his union with God in Christ?

'Evil or good,' says Browning,

may be better or worse

In the human heart, but the mixture of each
Is a marvel and a curse.

At the very best it is so poor. The thing is not done deliberately, of course; but the theory behind the practice is a kind of cautious, uncourageous insurance against all risks. In the meantime, there are the pleasures of Egypt. It would be a pity to miss them. After all, supposing this is the end of things, it is as well to get hold of present satisfactions. Wherefore, let there be a little sin, a little of the dazzling, delightful wrong of life. On the other hand there are queer possibilities. Wherefore, let there be a little restraint, a little worship, a little sacrifice, a charity here and there, so as to keep on the safe side of God. The fact is that, to those endeavouring to make the most of both worlds and to fashion their lives upon a scheme which is at once safe and mean, a dread word echoes from Him who knows, 'Ye *cannot* serve God and mammon!'

2. Now the type of man herein described is simply the semi-religious man. Two results can be set forth as following upon his practice.

He will be unhappy. The half-religious man is the most wretched being on earth. 'Without courage,' says Meredith, 'conscience is a sorry guest.' Browning indicates that whole-hearted devotion to a cause is the quality that God chiefly desires in man:

pity, courage, hope,
Fear, Sorrow, Joy, devotedness in short,
Which I account the ultimate in man.

The terrible penalties of wretchedness, which life exacts from the half-hearted, support that view. Nothing is so certain a cause of misery as a divided allegiance. It secures the constant companionship of a shadow, with its darkness flung on every pleasure, its gloom upon every stolen moment of delight. Better be an old pagan, better sin a strong sin than thus attempt to placate God, while we yet offend Him.

Moreover, such a man will be uncertain and therefore ineffective. He will never know quite what to make of life. He will be unsure alike as to its object and as to his own desire; a man who lives in a circle instead of advancing upon a path. 'Oh, half-heart! a whole one though it be an erring . . . does at least live, and has a history and makes music; but the faint and uncertain is jarred in action, jarred in memory, ever behind the day and in the shadow of it.'

3. Now, what are men in such circumstances to do? Why, what these dwellers did—learn the manner of the god of the land; but also, what they did not do—learn that manner properly. We have to emphasize to ourselves afresh the severe exclusiveness of God's claim. The Lord God is still a jealous God. The earth is Mine: the hills are Mine and the sea: your souls are Mine, saith the Lord God. And, indeed, it is a just claim; not only because He claims us as Creator, but because He claims us with the claim of love. 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.'

So the old appeal comes back. We each of us know if we are in earnest about God. We know whether we desire Him to claim us all or not. We know where we can amend in our assent to His claim. There is no other way for us but the way of the great decision that we shall be His, body, soul, and spirit. And we have this to inspire us, that where there is honest desire to belong to God, proved by honest action, God comes in and takes possession. And who shall pluck that which is His out of His hand? ¹

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION.

Our Picture of God.

'Thou canst not see my face: for man shall not see me and live.'—Ex 33³⁰ (R.V.).

'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'—Jn 14⁹.

The noblest idea that has ever entered into the human heart is the idea of God. And the most decisive factor within the soul of man and of

¹ J. R. P. Selater, *The Enterprise of Life*, 36.

civilization is a true and spiritual conception of God. The religion, the ideals, and, consequently, the character of a man, a nation, or an age can be understood only after one has learned in what light God has been viewed.

Our conception of God, however, is not the result of theological dialectic. Like all true knowledge, it is the result of experience—of man's gradual apprehension of the progressive revelation of the Divine. Visiting the Sorbonne in Paris, a traveller paused at the door of a lecture room. 'This,' said the guide, 'is the hall where the doctors of theology have disputed for four hundred years.' 'Indeed,' exclaimed the traveller, 'and pray, what have they settled?'

Theology is, indeed, the queen of sciences; but theology is not religion. It is no more religion than botany can be said to be flowers. Theology is but a telescopic lens which, if it be true to the best spiritual experience of the race, will assist men to see God. But if it be untrue to the best spiritual experience of the race, it will pervert men's view of God.

The idea of God, like all ideas, has had a long history. It is a far cry from the crude animism of our primitive ancestors to the Christian theism of to-day; or, to confine ourselves to the Biblical revelation, from the appearance of a God upon whose face no man can look and live, to the beneficent Being whom Jesus unveiled when He said: 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' Nevertheless there is a vital thread of spiritual kinship running all the way, and if men are to-day seeing the Eternal One with a more clarified vision, it is simply because they are living in the revealing sunlight of the same day which their ancestors knew only in the early twilight. For countless ages man has been painting his picture of God. And the picture upon which he has been working is ever evolving into newer, truer, and more spiritual form and beauty.

Passing by those early forms of religious experience and practice common to all primitive races and to which, in spite of their crudities, all subsequent spiritual progress is related and indebted, we may pause for a few moments in the Old Testament Gallery. We ask: 'Is God great?' and the Psalmist shows us a God whose glory is revealed in the heavens and whose handiwork is written upon the firmament. We ask: 'Does God forgive the sinner after whom conscience, like quick-footed Nemesis, follows by day and by night?' And Isaiah portrays the world's Over-Soul as a forgiving Friend who pleads with men,

saying: 'Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'

What if, with broken heart and hopes all crushed, we must dig a deep grave? What if, when no one can understand our loss, we must see some one die in whose stead we would willingly die a thousand deaths—what then? Does God care? Can He help? And lo! Moses—the austere father of Hebrew monotheism—unveils his portrait of God, 'The eternal God is thy dwelling-place, and underneath are the everlasting arms!'

But, after prophet and wise man had painted their best, came Jesus. The Hebrews had painted well. As a race, they were the religious geniuses of ancient times. And yet, in the best of the Old Testament portrayals of God, something vital is lacking. And it could not be otherwise. It was the finite seeking to express the infinite—the human attempting to depict the Divine.

Centuries ago, when the Riccardi Palace was erected in Florence, a room was set apart for a chapel, and Benozzo Gozzoli, a famous artist, adorned its walls and ceilings with beautiful frescoes. The artist was compelled to paint by the yellow light of a lamp, and through many years, by the same dim and flickering guide, worshippers strained their eyes to see the bright wings of angels and the roses of celestial gardens. At length the wall was pierced, the picture above the high altar was removed, and in its place the pure rays of the sun streamed in, revealing the varied and vivid colours and the beauty of line and shadow so long hidden.

Like the Florentine chapel, the Old Testament picture of God grew to be one of intense beauty. But, like the chapel also, the supreme beauty of God remained hidden from human gaze until the Sun of Righteousness arose in radiant and revealing light over the hills of the world and the Galilæan said: 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'

'Jesus,' says Dr. Cairns, 'passed by the grand classical speech of religion, which was fast becoming a dead language, and took up the dialect of the human heart, and at this summons, and by the transfiguring power of His personality, the name of Father became pure and great enough to describe the inmost nature of the Eternal One.' Ah! Behold the Master Artist paint His portrait. God is a Father. He is a Father whose interests are bound up with the interests of His children; a Father who cares more for one human soul than for all the worlds that make their orderly pilgrim-

ages across the awe-inspiring highways of immensity. He is a Father with a moral purpose; a Father who can, who cares, who wills—and who realizes His holy plans of redemptive love through the instrumentalities of history and of Nature. He is a Father who, considering our frame and remembering that we are dust, carries a blood-red cross upon His breast, and for our redemption mounts each day some new Calvary of pain and vicarious love!

Robert Browning, one of the greatest spiritual artists of the English-speaking world, describes the merciful nature of God when, in *Paracelsus*, he sings:

God! Thou art love! I build my faith on that.

I know thee, who hast kept my path, and made
Light for me in the darkness, tempering sorrow
So that it reached me like a solemn joy;
It were too strange that I should doubt thy love.

But man did not, could not, fully comprehend until, upon Calvary's central Cross he saw God's eternal heartache—'the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world!' Then, and not till then, did man lift his voice and say:

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee:
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

And more, our picture of God is not static. It is in the process of becoming still more beautiful and understandable. Its perfection is not that of Rodin's 'Thinker,' but that of a living seed. The God who spake unto men of old time is speaking still—and speaking in a more universal language. There is much concerning God that we do not know. But of this we are certain: He is a God who is Christ-like, a God who is adventurous, a God who is tremendously in earnest!¹

WHITSUNDAY.

The Tie of the Spirit.

'If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.'—Ro 8⁹.

The text contains St. Paul's declaration that those who have not the Spirit of Christ are none of His. The truth here is in the language of the negative, and yet this is one of the biggest and broadest negatives in Scripture. Not far away in

¹ H. D. McKeehan, *The Patrimony of Life*, 68.

the background is a great positive, that the test of belonging to Christ and His kingdom is no formal tie, no mere statement of belief about Him, but a sharing in His very Spirit.

That is a great statement, and perhaps it is all the greater because it comes from a man whose mental demands made it necessary for him to state his faith in Christ in intellectual formulæ. St. Paul was one of those men with keen intellectual life, who, when they possess a faith, must state it in terms of the mind; but in so doing they do not reduce the faith to a series of dogmas. Behind and beyond the intellectual expression there is the spirit and the life. This distinction could hardly be made plainer than in the transparently clear words of this sentence, which tells us that the real dividing line in Christianity is drawn between those who have the Spirit of Christ and those who have not. This is the supreme test, which is none the less supreme because no way of human devising has ever been able to make the judgment simple and definite in the realm of practical affairs.

Now, if this be the real test of Christianity, it is also the present ground of agreement between the different sections into which it is divided. It is well sometimes to consider that the divisions of which we speak so much are upon the surface—divisions about government, about intellectual expression, about means and modes of worship. But is there any real division about the nature and fruit of religion in the soul? Do we differ at all about the Spirit of Christ when it is seen in the life of man? Not at all. The deeper we go the closer to each other we find ourselves. The true catholicism must find its basis, not upon uniform government or rites or creeds, but upon a common spirit which finds its way to the hearts of men and through them takes the throne of the world.

What, then, is the Spirit of Christ which is the spring of the Christian life?

We speak of men as having the Christian spirit or as revealing the Spirit of Christ. Have we any clear conception of the qualities involved in the name? Very frequently the title is used narrowly to describe the spirit of forgiveness, and tender sympathy with human frailty, and boundless charity, which the world continues to see in Jesus of Nazareth. But, though this may be true as far as it goes, it does not go far enough in description of the essentials of the Christian spirit. If the question were put to us directly, how should we describe the Spirit of Christ? How, for example, should we try to convey what it means to one who knows nothing of the Master's teaching and works?

If we were ever faced with that situation, the first discovery we should make would be that words of description are poor and futile beside that shortest and greatest biography which has ever been written. The splendour which shines through the four booklets which we call the Gospels defies any attempt at reproduction or analysis. Art cannot convey it. Literature cannot exhaust it. Scientific analysis cannot explain it. Reduce it to propositions and you find that you have the skeleton of the life, but not the life itself. Like all the greatest things in the world, it will not be handled by cold touch; it eludes and escapes. Yet, elusive and mysterious as a breath, the life is reality itself. At the end of our efforts all that we can say is the old word, 'The Word was made flesh, and we have beheld his glory.'

But with the life itself to correct and complete the poverty of our descriptions, how shall we gain a clear idea of the Spirit of Christ? Not, I think, in the detailed teaching of Christ, nor even in His works, but, first and foremost, in His consciousness, and in His consciousness one truth which is like the sun lighting every planet in the sky, the Fatherhood of God. He came to bring us that consciousness, to reveal its meaning and its implications, and everything in the life of Jesus serves that aim. Look, for example, at the teaching.

Beginning with God as Father, the conception of man as a child of God leads to a new valuation of the individual life. Man is infinitely precious in the sight of God, his life has the stamp of the eternal upon it, and never, in spite of evil in the world and sin in the heart, can he drift beyond the Father's love and care. But man's new valuation leads to a higher appraisal of his task. He has a life to live in harmony with the will of God, a work to do larger than the boundaries of material gain. What is the dominant note in human duty, both in being and in doing, according to Jesus? Again, the Fatherhood of God inspires the answer—love. If God be Father, there is no room for that stunted caricature of Christianity, an individualistic religion. Man is bound to his fellows, and can only find either himself or God in fellowship. Love is the supreme note in the Christian ethic. Sins against love are gravest in its warnings. The service of mankind becomes, under Christ's interpretation, the most essential of religious exercises, and this because of the spring whence everything rises, the Fatherhood of God. How can you best worship and serve a Father? By helping His needy children. So it is that Christ's ideal of religion finds its expression not in

an individual and lonely bliss, but comes to us again and again in that oft-repeated phrase 'the Kingdom of God.'

Even in the supreme mystery of Christian faith, the death of Jesus, the same connexion is apparent. How does a father deal with the sin of his children? Not by condemnation like a judge, but by sharing in and bearing the shame; and therein lies the human clue to the Cross. The whole story of word and work, life and death, is a connected one, and the foundation of all is the consciousness of God's Fatherhood. This is the Spirit of Christ. By it men are lifted out of self and sin into love and service.

This is the essential note of Christianity. All else fades into insignificance, and, beside it, disputes about modes of worship and statements of belief and validity and order seem incongruous. They seem to have little or no relation to the Spirit of Jesus. His Church consists of those who have caught a ray of His light and in whom His Spirit dwells. They have seen what He came to show, and life and work and hope become new creations. There is literally a new heaven and a new earth. What else matters or can matter? 'If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his'; if a man has it, the means by which it has come can never be invalidated. It is this emphasis which is the crying need of the world to-day. We are moving towards a period of tremendous demand on the finest and strongest in human service. Where else shall we find the inspiration for it save in this consciousness of a Divine Will and Work for ourselves? We are more and more facing the great problems of man's relationship to man within the State, and of nation's relationship with nation in the world. Where is a guiding principle to be found save in the inevitable comradeship of men under the inspiration of God's Fatherhood? The need of the world is one vast cry for a fuller revealing of the Spirit of Jesus on a scale undreamed of hitherto. It is no call to the weaker elements in self, no message of ignoble safety or promise of favoured treatment. It is a call for strong men and women to live and work as makers of a new world.¹

The Seed of Abraham.

TRINITY SUNDAY.

'But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.'—Is 41⁸.

'Think not to say within yourselves, We have

¹ S. M. Berry, *The Crucible of Experience*. 33.

Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.—Mt 3⁹.

The juxtaposition of the two texts is no arbitrary one; each of these sentences illustrates a great underlying principle, a mode of thought suggested in the Old Testament and completed in the New.

In the passage from the Book of Isaiah is shown the greatest element in the Israelitish national consciousness. Apparently these people never forgot their vocation as the children of Abraham. Sometimes they attributed more importance to it, sometimes less. When the nation was at its best, they spiritualized the ideal; when it was at its worst they materialized it, but they never wholly ignored it. The Book of Isaiah is one of the richest parts of the Old Testament, and from the first sentence to the last this idea of the vocation of Israel is suggested or implied in it. In the chapter which precedes the one from which our text is taken the opening sentences are: 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.' It is as though he would say to Israel: 'You have passed through a severe testing time, but you have not ceased to be the people of God. Indeed, the testing time was permitted because you are never to be anything else than the chosen ones, God's Israel. You have Abraham for your father, and the covenant which God made with Abraham he will keep with you.' 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.'

In the light of this Old Testament consciousness let us look at the passage from the New. Isaiah and John are both heralds; there is at least this similarity between them, that they both come as the bearers of good tidings concerning a better day. But they are different in this: while Isaiah speaks with the gorgeous magnificence of Oriental symbolism, and his message is one full of comfort and tenderness, the words of John are utterly unadorned; rugged and grim is the speech of this child of the desert. Yet, like Isaiah, he is the herald of a glorious day. He, too, is standing forth with the object of heartening his people and preparing them for the advent of One greater than he. But the people are not ready for his message, nor for the blessing which he announces. And so his words to them are words of warning, especially to the Pharisees. The people and their leaders had been inclined to content themselves with making much of the tradition of the covenant of God with Abraham,

and they thought comparatively little of what was required from them in the keeping of it. The Pharisees were conspicuous for two particular vices. First, they trusted in their own righteousness and despised others. Their chief sin was that of spiritual pride; but another was, they believed in the externals of religion rather than in change of heart. They insisted much upon their lineage: we are the descendants of Abraham—will not God keep His word to him? What part or lot has the race of mankind in this, which is a special privilege of Israel? John's reply to them is: 'Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father.' Why should God show His favour to men who are morally different from Abraham? God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

What does John the Baptist mean by this saying? We believe that he meant exactly and literally what he said. What he meant, then, was something like this: It is in the power of God to breathe the breath of life into these rocks of the desert, that they should become living souls; and if so, it is conceivable they would be better men than you and worthier successors of Abraham, the friend of God. For who was, what was, this Abraham? If we turn to He 11 we read a Christian description of the man and his character: 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise . . . for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' There are some good and devout Old Testament scholars who are inclined to question the historicity of Abraham, and to say that possibly he stands rather for a national idea, and symbol of the covenant between God and Israel, than that he was an actual historical character. We take a different view. It is possible that Israel did make of Abraham a symbol of the covenant between God and Israel, a grand idea, but there was a man to make the idea and the symbol possible. Cast your eye back along the line of history till its dawning morning is reached, and you will see sitting in a tent by himself on the borders of an eastern desert one like an Arab chief of the present day. Compared with ourselves this Abraham understood little about the meaning of life, little about the being of God; his was spiritual poverty indeed. Here is this Semitic nomad sitting thinking by himself: Is this the way to worship God? Must it always be by abomination, and cruelty, and lust?

Is it all for greed of gain? Is God a kind of devil who must be placated? Is this religion, is this worship, is this righteousness? And as he ponders he resolves: I must leave this society, and I will try whether I cannot live out what I am feeling now. Abraham saw a vision and heard a voice; and by faith he went out, trusting only that the voice which had spoken to him in his prayers was one with the hand that should guide him. Momentous results followed that far-off choice. It was the dawning of a great hour in which Israel was born, and with Israel the Messiah, and with the Messiah the gospel under which we live our lives to-day.

This, then, is the Abraham of whose seed these Pharisees claimed to be. They had not his moral courage, nor his noble spirit; these were not of the kind who would have gone out in pursuit of a spiritual ideal. These were men who had hardened into insensibility, who by their lives denied the spiritual idea Abraham had bequeathed to them, and therefore the Baptist's remonstrance was apt indeed: 'Think not to say, We have Abraham to our father.' As an illustration of what the fiery, indomitable prophet of the desert meant, we have the expression frequently upon our lips: 'His only recommendation is that he is his father's son.' Any worthless profligate who soils a noble name receives and deserves the reprobation of honest men. What you say about him is: This is no descendant of the noble dead; he has no right to bear the name. And this is what Jesus says to the indignant Jews who claimed Abraham as their father: 'If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.' All the great souls of history, God's called ones, God's men, can be put into the category in which Jesus stood when He spoke those words. They are not always recognized as such, but our moral consciousness recognizes where they ought to be. All the rest of mankind must find a different category. Did these Pharisaic time-servers, these bigoted Jews, who were questioning Jesus with the object of destroying Him, really think that they stood in the succession of him who was the friend of God? They did, but the consciousness of humanity since has put them right. We know now who are of the lineage of Abraham. An Anselm comes from the cloister to be Archbishop of Canterbury; he comes forth at the call of God. Reluctantly he turns his face away from that which had been his spiritual home, and takes up the duty thrust upon him by the importunity of a wicked king. The monarch and his aiders and

abettors in wrong suppose that this weak man, this monk, whose business in life is to pray in a cloister, can be easily handled; they shall rule as they please in England, now that meekness sits on the throne of Augustine. But they reckoned wrongly; the strongest man on earth is the spiritual man. All alone, Anselm faced barbaric-materialistic England and vanquished it all alone. But yesterday, as it were, a William Tyndale, a George Wishart, a John Wycliffe, a Richard Baxter, taking not counsel with flesh and blood, came forth from what was, spiritually speaking, the house of their nativity, all alone, into an unknown and untried world, leaving comfort and preferment behind them; some of them to the martyr's death, all of them to suffering, ignominy, and shame. Do they need pity? By no means: these were of the seed of Abraham. And time would fail me to tell of others of whom the world is not worthy. Listen to Jesus again. He is addressing a company of His own countrymen. His mother and His brethren seek Him at the door, and cannot come at Him for the press. He does not repudiate them, but He enlarges the family circle. Looking round at the simple men who sat about Him, peasant fishermen of Galilee, He said, 'Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.' The true seed of Abraham are these.

Look at this old Abraham again for a moment. See him sitting thinking, weighing well the question what was to be done with his life, and let us recognize what is the very truth, that he had far less to guide him than we have. He heard the same voice as we do, but it had not told the world as much, then, as it has told it since. Yet Jesus says: 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.' Abraham, in his lonely desert vigil, never saw Jesus; he had no foregleam of the day when Jesus should speak such words as these; but what he did have was the vision by which he saw the Sun of Righteousness arising in his own heart. That was Jesus' day. The Abraham who spent his early days in a guilty household, in the midst of men who never thought of the unworthiness of serving God by lascivious rites and brutal deeds, one day said to himself, 'This life has to be left behind.' So soon as he had seen that he had seen Jesus' day, and he rose up and went out to meet it. And that is just what we have to do.¹

¹ R. J. Campbell, *The Song of Ages*, 185.