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## In the Study.

### *Virginitus Puerisque.*

Whit-Sunday.

BY THE REVEREND ERIC PARSONS, B.A., EDINBURGH.

'The voice of one crying.'—Lk 3<sup>1</sup>.

FANCY calling a man a Voice! We have all heard of one voice that seemed to wander quite by itself, quite without a body. I mean the 'thin, high, trembling voice' that came floating over the trees on the Treasure Island that Robert Louis Stevenson tells about, that voice which made all the pirates tremble because they thought it was dead Captain Flint singing—a voice without a body. But it was only poor Ben Gunn. There was a body to the voice.

And John the Baptist had a body. Yet he was called a Voice. Why? Because the 'whole man was a sermon.' His words were only a small part of his message. Every bit of him spoke—his shaggy dress, burning eyes, and strong wild figure—all so fierce, and yet with so gentle a touch as he baptized people in the river. Every bit of him spoke, and spoke of God. So he was called a Voice.

You think it strange to call a *man* a Voice? But it is not so very strange. After all, we haven't always spoken to one another with our voices. People used to talk with their whole bodies. Before men could speak or write they made each other understand by pantomime. Babies still do that. And you would have to do it too if you went to France and had not learnt those queer French verbs. Even when we can use our tongues quite well our hands and bodies work with our tongues—every bit of us speaking. When teacher is telling us something we ought not to do he can use words and need not shake his fist at us like the farmer who is too angry to speak because we have trespassed in his fields. But the teacher still wags his finger at us! When a little boy learns to write the spidery, twisty letters, so difficult at first, it is not just his hand that writes and twists and turns. His legs curl round the desk, his shoulders screw themselves up, and his little tongue pops in and out, twisting and curling with the hand that moves on the paper. Every bit of us speaks, telling of what our hearts and minds are set on.

Now we are not like savage men, or babies. We can talk and write. But still our best and truest message is our whole self, rather than our words. In two ways you can see what this means.

John was a voice preaching. Nowadays we listen to a preacher speaking words from a pulpit. But if that is the only way he preaches it is a poor way compared with John's. Nobody takes much notice of words by themselves. The world knows our real sermon whatever we may say. For we are all sermons, each one of us, messages shown to the world—maybe about ourselves—maybe about Jesus. What an idea that is, that we are all Voices, crying and shouting to the world, though we may never speak a word—each of us a sermon about Jesus!

Jesus was a Voice preaching. Nowadays we can read and hear of Him. But oh! to have known and seen Him, watched His ways! He knew that we would feel like that, knew that no book or sermon or words could replace Him or speak to us like His own self. So He never really went away. Of course we cannot see Him. But you know what you ask mother when you really must go to bed and must not shout downstairs, however lonely you feel? You ask her to leave the door open just a little bit, and then you'll feel she is near to you in the darkness. You'll be quite sure that she is there. Well, Jesus has done the same with the ones He loves. Easter opened the door to all His children, and Whit-Sunday kept the door open. And that comfortable feel we have when we know mother is near is like the presence of Jesus. He left us in the dark; He had to. But He left us with a Comforter. He knew that there was no message or word like the presence of Himself.

### A Nasty Wicket.

BY THE REVEREND ROBERT STRONG, M.A., B.LITT., LEEDS.

'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.'—Ec 9<sup>10</sup>.

All of us would choose a good wicket if we could get one, so that we might be free to show our skill, without any of the unexpected difficulties that the bad wicket presents. We don't blame the captain who would rather not accept the risks when he thinks the wicket is too bad for play. But if the umpire decides that the game must go on, we admire the team that settles down to play the game for all they're worth, making the very best of the situation. We say quite rightly, 'That's cricket.'

One of the joys of youth is that we dream of life, and think of the game as one that is going to be played on a good wicket. When we are going up

for our examinations we have a secret confidence that, having done our best, the examiner will ask us just those questions we do know something about, so that we can show our real powers, and make a stand, pleasing to ourselves and everybody else. Or we dream of those later days, when we have passed from the stage of school, and expect that when we go out into the bigger world of affairs we may meet wise kindly people, find a good opening, and in business or profession play the game with some show of glory. We shall be all the wiser if we know that life doesn't always provide a good wicket for our displays, that there are all sorts of tricks of fortune which insist that we go on to play the game when many facts are dead against our chances. Examiners don't always seem specially interested in the things we have got up with so much care, and seem to be fond of those matters to which we have given only the slightest attention. In business, we may find that people are not always keen on giving us a chance, so many of them being too busy seeking chances for themselves, so that they don't mind pushing others out of the way instead of helping them. There is no sense in being afraid of these facts, but it is good sense to make up our minds what we mean to do when the wicket is a pretty bad one, as, of course, it sometimes is.

Here are three rules for playing the game on a nasty wicket.

*Don't sulk.* It would be easy, so easy indeed, that it really isn't worth doing, to sulk about the whole thing. Why should we have to play on a pitch like this? Why should we have such bad luck, when people not half as good as we are, seem to have no end of splendid opportunities? Well, we had better tell ourselves that this kind of talk is not cricket, and in the great game of life a sportsman is not going to spend his time in being sorry for himself. When Elijah began to talk in this rather dreary fashion, there was nothing for it but to get him out of his cave, and set him on the mount before the Lord, so that he might forget himself and see that he belonged to a team. It was rather a shock to him to realize that he was by no means alone, and that sulking was only foolishness. When the hard times come, that bit of good humour which saves a man from thinking too much about his own desires, and sends him merrily into the fray, will help him to win through, and that not without glory.

*Be patient.* When the wicket is tricky there is no time for taking any foolish risks. Saving the game demands a patience that will not tire. Don't let anybody imagine that the patient way is the easy

way. It takes vastly more courage and resistance to play the game after this fashion, than to do rash impulsive things. Only a perfectly disciplined hand, eye, and mind will serve a man when the task is of this order. When the hard times come in life, all the self-control we have been able to develop will find its use. If we have never learned to use the courage of patience, the nasty wicket may easily beat us. This needs to be trained all the time, so that the new situation does not startle us into failure.

*Watch for chances.* On the bad wicket there will come now and again the chance to do a good thing and send up the score. All the men who have ever done anything worth while in the world have done this, not because facts were always in their favour, but because they have learned to expect chances even in bad times, and have not been slow to take advantage of them. Captain Scott was set a difficult pitch, but what a game he played! This is what A. Cherry-Garrard says about him: 'He was not a very strong man physically, and was in his youth a weakly child not expected to live. He will go down to history as the Englishman who conquered the South Pole, and who died as fine a death as any man has had the honour to die. His triumphs are many—but the Pole was not by any means the greatest of them. Surely the greatest was that by which he conquered his weaker self, and became the strong leader whom we went to follow and came to love.'

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### The Christian Year.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

#### Immortality and the Comforter.

'If a man die, shall he live again?'—Job 14<sup>14</sup>.

'If it were not so, I would have told you.'—Jn 14<sup>3</sup>.

Perhaps the oldest and most persistent question of the human heart is that of the immortality of the soul, the persistence of personality beyond the grave. There seems never to have been a time when mankind was not considering it. Job was not the first person to articulate the ancient query; nor was he the last.

To-day, as yesterday, the answers given to this age-old question are of three general types. In the first place, there is the denial of the doubter. In the absence of any actual knowledge as to the reality of immortality such a person insists that he cannot feel that the preponderance of probability is sufficient to justify belief in the theory. Such

a man was Thomas Huxley, for example. Even when he stood by the grave of his oldest child, Noel, overwhelmed with grief, and his great-hearted friend, Charles Kingsley, besought him to find comfort in the immortal hope, Mr. Huxley replied, 'I have searched over the ground of my belief, and if wife and child and name and fame were all to be lost to me, one after the other, as the penalty, still I would not lie.'

In the second place, there is the answer of indifference. Always there have been those who are simply not concerned with the question of immortality for the reason that they deem the whole issue quite inconsequential. Here, for example, are men who are face to face with daily duties, challenging tasks and captivating opportunities. 'Why think of what lies beyond?' they ask. 'To dream of the hereafter dampens one's ardour to work while here. There may not, indeed, be any immortality for the individual soul. Think, then, of the immortality of influence one may achieve. Work not for your own soul's sake, but for humanity's sake.'

Before passing, therefore, to the consideration of the third type of answer—that of the triumphant believer—let us ask briefly just what difference it *does* make whether we believe in immortality. To cite a single aspect of the problem as illustrative of others, it might be wise to consider the mighty difference the belief in immortality makes in the way we think of *ourselves*. What are we, really: animal or spirit, mud or mind, body or soul? If the former, then we may have our little day and cease to be—and obviously it doesn't matter much what one believes about life after death; indeed, the idea of immortality resolves itself into an absurdity. If, however, we are in reality the latter—spirit, mind, soul—then it would seem that nothing short of eternity would suffice for the development of our spiritual potentialities.

It is because of this fact that there has always been a third class—those whom I would call the triumphant believers! Their answer to the age-old question, 'If a man die, shall he live again?' is a mighty affirmative. But it is the affirmative of a rational faith, not of a blind belief, nor yet of demonstrable knowledge. As Martineau remarked, 'We do not believe in immortality because we can prove it, but we try to prove it because we cannot help believing it.' In other words, the ultimate argument for life after death is the *instinct* of the human soul. 'When God wants to carry a point with His children,' says Emerson, 'He plants His arguments in the instincts.' This, it seems to us,

is what Jesus recognized when He met this great issue of immortality with that singularly simple but suggestive statement we have chosen for our second text: 'If it were not so, I would have told you.'

We *know*, really, only the lower things of life. The best things of life we *feel*. We know that two and two make four; we can prove that. But take such a thing as Love, for example—a matter of life and death, if you please. One never knows that another loves him, in the sense that it can be proven beyond peradventure of a doubt so as to convince a mind disposed to believe otherwise. Or take Honour or Integrity. We never know that it pays to be true and honest and strong and noble and pure. All these things are not of knowledge. They are convictions; they are instincts of the soul.

Let us look, then, at some of these instincts; and we shall see how utterly impossible it would be for a good and wise God to allow this human career to cease at the grave.

In the first place, every man is full of *desires*—and the broader and deeper and better the man, the more and greater his desires. Civilization, considered in its wider sense, is but the development of new desires and new ways of gratifying them. Education is but the transforming of low desires into higher, more intellectual, more spiritual desires. Then let us note this: *The better a man's desires in this life, the less probability is there of their gratification!* Nowhere in the lower order of creation are there any desires unless in the environment of the creature there is provided that which can satisfy the desire—nowhere *except in man*. And man's desires! The whole earth cannot meet them.

And what of the *elusiveness of life*? The poet says that man never is, but always to be blest. We live by hope. The realization has always some tiny tinge of disappointment in it. The boy thinks he will be happy when he gets to college, and at college all his dreams are of what he will do when he gets through. And when he accomplishes his success—nine-tenths of them don't accomplish it—but when the one does, he is looking forward still to something, and old age finds him with his back bowed and his hair silvered, still looking forward.

And then, if this life be all, look how all *discipline* is wasted. We spend forty, fifty, sixty years, learning how to live. A man just learns how to live and then he dies. Would a man carefully train his boy to be a mechanic, or an engineer, or

an orator, or a writer, or a business man, and then, just as he graduates from college, take him off and kill him? And would God Almighty train men, the best of men, by the discipline of a long life, until they are more nearly able and competent to do and to think properly, and then drop them into oblivion?

Look, too, at *the highest faculties* we have. The more remote a man's aims, the nobler his life. Is it possible that that man who cares nothing for noble purposes and high thought, grovelling in gross gratification, yet living just decently enough to keep out of the penitentiary and avoid social complications, is reaching the real goal of life, rather than those who are perpetually disciplining themselves to a nobler aim?

Then mark a deeper instinct in man, the deepest instinct of all, *the love of life*, that you can never get out of any human being. We call this the first law of Nature—life! *Eternal* life! Could the language of this instinct mean anything else? Eternal life—there must be! Is it not so, O Christ? And He says, as of old, 'If all the deep instincts of your being were to be blasted, I would have told you.'

And then the Bible! It is a book of promises. 'Yet the patriarchs,' says the Apostle, 'died, not having received the promise.' In our own case this Book promises us that Jesus shall save us from sin. Have any of us been saved from sin absolutely? No; we have been saved in a measure, but only in a measure. The perfect salvation does not come in this life. He has said, 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest.' Have we ever received a perfect rest? Not perfect. Perfect joy? Always some bitterness in the cup. Perfect satisfaction? We shall never be satisfied until we awake in His likeness. And so we come to the gates of death with all these fragmentary promises of our instincts in our hands.

We know the story of the ugly duckling. All the ducks in the barnyard made sport of this little awkward stranger. He couldn't walk as they did; his neck was too long and his wings were too clumsy. So all during his duckhood he had to spend his life the scorn of his companions; until one spring day, when the air was balmy and soft, and they heard above them a strange and distant sound as of birds flying and crying, this ugly duckling looked up and saw a little speck in the sky, and then a waving line, and from that line there came the call to him. He tried his wings, he spread them, and then he sprang from the ground and soared into the air, and his companions knew him no more.

He did not belong to them. And, by the way, I think they said he had *died*.<sup>1</sup>

#### SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

##### Life's True View-Point.

'In heavenly places in Christ Jesus.'—Eph 2<sup>d</sup>.

'I sat where they sat.'—Ezk 3<sup>15</sup>.

Paul's conception of the work of Christ is, in part at least, that it gives men a new elevation from which to consider life. Of course, there is infinitely more in this great word of his. But this it certainly declares: that when a man is laid hold of by Christ, and becomes united to Him by faith, he ascends with Him to heavenly heights, and sees life thence, not merely in its often perplexing detail, but in the grand design of an overruling God. Isaiah anticipated this very thing when he encouraged men to wait upon the Lord that they might mount up with wings as eagles. And both unite in making it abundantly plain that all such experience of elevation is but preparation for active fellowship in the affairs of the valley. The sacrament of communion with the ascended Lord equips His disciples for the sacrifice of self-interest in the service of human need. Those who mount up must in turn descend to run with zeal and courage upon errands of mercy, and to walk without fainting amid the common trials and tests of earth. What we need most of all to-day is, to combine the conception of Paul with the experience of Ezekiel—that is, to realize the fullness of our redemption in Christ; and, thus inspired, to give ourselves to the service of our fellows in His name.

The true order of faith is not that we have to live an earthly life with a view to heaven, but that we are called to a heavenly life with a view to earth. The common idea is that, by developing a certain kind of character here, men are prepared for the ultimate life of service and worship beyond. And much of the pathetic weakness of the Christian Church in these days of crying need is to be traced to this misconception. As a matter of fact the New Testament declaration is that all true life is heaven-derived. It is a gift, offered and received on the terms of faith, to be translated by obedient and loyal devotion into terms of self-sacrificing service.

This is declared and manifested in Christ Himself. It was as the Man of Heaven that He lived among men. In Him the energy of Sonship was transformed into the enterprise of Saviourhood. He

<sup>1</sup> H. H. Crane, in *If I had only One Sermon to preach on Immortality*, 51.

came with the life and love of God—and then sat where the captives sat, amid the lepers, the poor, the broken-hearted, the strugglers. And He sat there, not as spectator, but as partaker of their griefs and sorrows.

We are often content to regard ourselves as Christian because we hold to certain beliefs or observe conventional forms. What we need is a new emphasis to the Evangel, recalling us to the fact that according to Christ's teaching and example a man is a Christian only when he is united to Him in this twofold relationship—toward God and men.

The strongest solvent of the varied human difficulties with which Christ's servants have to deal is sympathy. By this is not meant an affected interest in the affairs of others, after the fashion of the superficial person who has an ear for every man's concerns, and a heart for none but his own. It is the product of a twofold intercourse—with God and men. It is at once derived in the sanctuary, and distilled from life's experiences. Ezekiel had never been the prophet he was, nor uttered the message he spoke, had he not sat where he did with the captives. For identification with the sins and temptations of others most surely enables us to help them in regard to the fundamental and abiding things. We may destroy men by influence exerted distantly; but they cannot be healed save by the human touch of one who sits where they sit.

To this fact the history of all great service bears witness. It was as Peter the Great of Russia sat in the squalid cottages of the moujik—coming thither from his throne—that he was able to carry out the noble changes effected in that empire. Elizabeth Fry, descending from the refinements and pieties of a lovely home to sit in the pestilential prison of Newgate, not only lifted the prisoners into something of her own Christian experience, but ultimately made certain also the reform of prison law in the direction of humanity and justice. And all great missionaries—David Brainerd, James Gilmour, William Carey, Adoniram Judson, David Livingstone, Hudson Taylor, and a host of others—have accomplished their life-work only on this wise.

The only preparation and dynamic for such contact with earth is separation unto God. Heavenly heights are not gained except as weights which hold us down are cast aside and cables which bind us to things material and earthly are cut. And it is there, and there alone, in fellowship with Christ, that the double miracle of elevated vision and elevated motive is wrought. How necessary this is, is the consciousness of all who

know by experience anything of the elusiveness of motives merely inspired by the sight of sorrow and human suffering. These may, indeed, call forth transient emotions. But nothing save the Spirit of Christ can purify the heart of its evil, and so secure us against the danger of becoming infected by the very things which destroy the lives of those we would fain help. Only by sitting with Him can we be saved from losing heart, as we catch the vision which reveals God at work through all earth's changes, and from the fitfulness which renders service worthless by the reinforcement of His own steadfastness.

Life is for us all a great mission. But we shall miss its meaning and opportunity if we fail to regard it from this double view-point.<sup>1</sup>

### THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

#### The Virgin Birth.

'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son.'—Mt 1<sup>23</sup> (R.V.).

The subject of the Virgin Birth is one that has caused a good deal of difficulty to sincere souls, and has given rise to considerable doubt in serious minds. To dismiss the whole subject as irrelevant to Christianity is hardly possible, because it is not only explicitly confessed in the great Creeds, but it is affirmed in the *Te Deum* and in many of our favourite hymns.

1. The literary evidence is by some held to be insufficient. It is confined to two passages in the Gospels.

The story of the Virgin Birth is found only in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, and there only in the opening chapters; for in the rest of these Gospels Jesus is spoken of as if He were the son of Joseph and Mary. Might not these earlier chapters have been added later? All we can say is that there is no manuscript evidence to give any support to this suggestion. It is pointed out that the clear assertion of a Virgin Birth is confined in St. Luke to only two verses (1<sup>34</sup> and 3<sup>23</sup>). Of the first of these there is manuscript evidence for omission; but it is found only in one manuscript, a second-rate Latin version which would carry no authority on any other peculiarity.

A more serious weight attaches to the fact that the early and important Syriac version known as the Codex Sinaiticus reads in the genealogy of St. Matthew (1<sup>16</sup>), 'Joseph begat Jesus.' This reading is supported by two or three manuscripts of the Old

<sup>1</sup> J. S. Holden, *The Confidence of Faith*, 66.

Latin version, and by two late Greek manuscripts. It is possible that this might represent the original text ; for the genealogy as traced in St. Matthew really demands that Jesus should be reckoned as the son of Joseph ; but, even if so, it would only be in line with the conventional statements in the rest of the Gospels where Jesus is spoken of as the son of Joseph. It is because of the great doctrinal importance of the passage that this peculiar testimony has deserved any consideration at all ; it is only an interesting variant. Thus we are compelled to sum up the literary evidence, so far as it goes, as overwhelmingly consistent and unwavering.

But there is the complete silence of the rest of the New Testament. We need not count one way or the other the general habit of Jesus being spoken of both by the people and by Mary as if He were the son of Joseph ; that would be inevitable.

But if there is no evidence elsewhere in the rest of the New Testament, there are a number of allusions which are in keeping with the fact of a Virgin Birth. St. Paul could hardly be expected to refer to it, from the nature of his Epistles and the general absence of detail about the life of Christ ; but he does say, ' God sent forth his Son, born of a woman.' This is not the only Hebrew way of referring to human birth ; and though it does not affirm the Virgin Birth by any means, it does not deny it, as any other expression for human birth might have done. The silence of St. Mark is natural, as he begins his story with the baptism ; but what is curious is that he never mentions Joseph by name at all or refers to the father of Jesus ; and in one verse, where St. Matthew and St. Luke have the question, ' Is not this the carpenter's son ? ' and ' Is not this the son of Joseph ? ' respectively, he has, ' Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary ? ' This is something more than silence, and perhaps something more than coincidence.

2. It is alleged that the story can be explained easier than as fact. It may be due to the influence of prophecy. Our text is a quotation from Is 7<sup>14</sup> ; and it is suggested that the prophecy may have given rise to the whole idea. It will be noticed that there is no quotation of this prophecy in St. Luke ; and it is difficult to see how the quotation can have influenced St. Matthew thus far. For the Hebrew word need not mean ' virgin,' and Jewish commentators do not take the original meaning to be a promise of a virgin birth or regard it as a prediction concerning the Messiah. Like the rest of St. Matthew's quotations, it is so completely apart from its original meaning that it is vastly easier to comprehend how the fact could

have recalled the prophecy than the prophecy have created the story.

It is frequently alleged that the idea of a virgin birth is to be found in heathen religions ; and it is therefore no marvel that it arose in Christianity. But that is just the difficulty ; for even if it were a frequent incident of pagan mythology, that would hardly have recommended it to the Jewish mind, with its exclusiveness and its hatred of heathenism. Moreover, if we examine the alleged instances of virgin-birth myths, as Perseus, Romulus and Remus, or Isis, they turn out to be anything but virgin births.

Others think that the poetic impulse is sufficient to account for the story. We need not dispute that the Nativity stories are poetic in form ; they are most beautifully told, and full of restraint, as a comparison with the Apocryphal Gospels sufficiently reveals. But the poetry is due not to the telling of the story, for that is very plain and matter of fact, but to the beauty of the subject. And if this story had been told merely as a poetic myth in order to show that all birth is pure and begotten of God, it was unfortunate so deliberately to exclude the male parent ; for, owing to wrong interpretations of why this was necessary, it has had anything but this effect. We are driven, therefore, to conclude that no explanation but the one of fact at present holds the field.

3. The real difficulty lies in the want of a rational necessity for the Virgin Birth. This is not satisfied by saying that it was a miracle. We are not so inclined to shy at the word ' miracle ' to-day. We are able to believe that while God works normally along the lines of what we call natural law, He is not bound by that when some higher necessity calls. If the Virgin Birth is a miracle, we have only to show that it was an absolutely necessary miracle. This is not shown, to our mind, by the necessity of introducing a new race ; for the race of the spiritually reborn continues to be born physically in the ordinary way. Neither can there be any plea that it was necessary in order to prove the Divine origin of Jesus ; miracles are not wrought in order to produce faith.

Nor can we accept the common explanation that the Virgin Birth was necessary in order that Christ should be born sinless. For this would involve admitting that the ordinary method of generation is essentially sinful.

A much more natural necessity can be suggested. The Virgin Birth was necessary for the purpose of the Incarnation. Recall what that purpose was. It was twofold : to reveal God to man ; and to

reconcile man to God. For the former, it is absolutely essential that God reveal Himself *in person*; nothing less can give us an assured revelation. Therefore, if Christ is the incarnation of God, His Person must be Divine. But in order to fulfil the second necessity, that of reconciling man to God, that Divine Person must live a truly human life, within the normal limitations of a human body, mind, and soul; so that while the person is absolutely Divine, the life is a truly human achievement. Now, this involves that the person of Jesus must have been pre-existent. But the ordinary method of generation produces a new person; if, therefore, there had been the ordinary method of generation, we should have had two persons, entailing dual personality, with nothing higher to unite; for person is the highest category of being. Or the one person would have had to be destroyed, or suppressed, or absorbed by the other. This is just what Nestorianism was condemned as involving; and it is actually the doctrine favoured by modern Theosophy.

Now, if this necessity was the determining factor in the Virgin Birth, it carries with it very important conclusions. We can only suggest what these may possibly be. It shows that God regards human personality as a thing so sacred that there must be no tampering with it; even for the purpose of saving the race. When God planned to save humanity, He could not begin by destroying a human personality. The Virgin Birth, therefore, puts upon human personality the highest possible seal. It is not, let it be said clearly and emphatically, to be deduced that ordinary birth is not sacred enough; but that human personality is too sacred to be interfered with.

A good deal of the objection to the Virgin Birth has come from the critical study of the New Testament, because that has seemed to reveal that the relationship between Mary and her Son was so strained that it precludes any idea that there could have been anything remarkable about His birth. But it may be just because she knew of that, but interpreted it as involving a quite different kind of life, that on various occasions she did not always interpret His will or understand His actions. If there was a misunderstanding between mother and Son, it was one that was almost inevitable; but it was not a misunderstanding that prevented her from giving to her Son the purity of her heart and the piety of His early days. The gospel shows all misunderstandings gone by the time Christ came to die.

There is something of the revolution of all earthly

standards about the whole business, of course; but that is what it is meant to be. It means the exaltation of lowliness, poverty, and obscurity to the place of power, glory, and fame. It means that male ascendancy is over, for woman here receives the highest place; and it is therefore the guarantee that every sign of subjection is doomed eventually to disappear. It means the exaltation of the mother and the child, the sanctification of sex, and the purification of everything that affects human conception and generation. It sets the absolute seal of Divine care upon human personality.<sup>1</sup>

#### FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

##### Observance and Righteousness.

'Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.'—Am 5<sup>23, 24</sup>.

The prophet  $\text{Amos}$  wants to emphasize the futility of mere religious ceremony and observance without any ethical, social result. It is indeed a tragic picture, this, of a God who is positively bored by worship: who hates our feast days, implores us to leave off our choral services. Tragic, because, with many of us still, the outward sign of religious progress is the proper observance of feasts and fasts and the excellence of our ritual or church music. The Church, as a whole, has not learnt to put the outward observance in its proper place as a means to an end. Neither has it created enthusiasm for the end to which it is the means. The end is God and righteousness. The prophets neither here nor anywhere else disparage religious observance; they only plead for its proper place in spiritual economy. They use startling expressions to wake us up from our complacency. Isaiah, the son of Amoz, talks of the 'iniquity of the solemn meeting,' and chaffs the Temple trampers. Incense has become an abomination: the Lord is weary of the sabbatarians. Jeremiah is implored by God to persuade the people to leave off praying: it is unnecessary because they are quite certain to pray wrongly. Such expressions are calculated to make us very suspicious of the things in which we are most tempted to place our trust. We need to be shaken out of our childish faith in outward things.

Now, however deeply men may become immersed in formalism, whether of one kind or another, there are always the prophets who see the vision of the true God and the inner meaning of religion. Warnings against unreality in religion.

<sup>1</sup> W. E. Orchard, *The Theology of Jesus*, 65.

the recalling of religious men to the practical conduct required of them by their profession, accompany, or shortly follow after, all religious movements. So we find Bishop Latimer calling the attention of his contemporaries to commercial fraud and avarice, lamenting that things are as bad under the Reformation as they had been under the Pope. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were societies for the Reformation of manners and Guilds of holy life. We find the Society of Friends wearied by sermons, and even Bible texts, quite as much as irate against sacraments, and pleading for a pure life in the world and not of it as a result of the perception of the inner light of the spirit. They, the most spiritually minded of Christians, became, and still are, foremost in every kind of social reform. We find William Law suggesting a devout life not merely in the seclusion of Christian homes, but in the midst of business and society. While the thrones of Europe were tottering and labour unrest was disturbing, to the point of murder and arson, the whole country, it was men like Maurice and Kingsley who boldly declared that it was the work of the Church to establish God's Kingdom, and that socialists must be Christian and Christians socialist. While the Church, encouraged by political economy, which it did not understand, or which it manipulated for its own ungodly purposes, talked of laws of competition as the laws of God, these men dared to say it was a lie. These were prophets sent by God to England as truly as any sent to Israel in old days.

There are, then, two kinds of revival always going on in the Church, more or less, the Institutional and the Ethical. So long as they are separated they degenerate or fail. The Institutional becomes formal and remote from life: the Ethical becomes dry and uninteresting, separated from religion. What we want is a combination of the two as in the Person of Jesus Christ. He preaches a righteousness which is to exceed the righteousness of the institutionalists, yet not one jot of the law which the institutionalists love is to be allowed to fail. This they are to do and not leave the other undone. In the very act of teaching men what worship really means He inaugurates the greatest ethical revival the world has ever known. He offers the purest worship that has ever been offered to God by the living sacrifice of a will wholly given to the Father, in a life obedient unto death. The special mark of the Institution which He founds is the mutual love of one member for another. The world is to be attracted to His Church not by ceremonial, but by a surprising oneness like the

oneness in the Godhead; and His Divine mission will be recognized not by the recitation of Creeds, so much as by the spiritual unity which will be manifested. His followers will acknowledge His authority not because He comes to them with the official recommendation of a Scribe or a Pharisee, but they will be compelled to confess that no man ever spake like this Man. For any one who wants the great reality, God and eternal life, there is obviously no one else to whom to go.

The Kingdom of Love is at hand, and men can enter it if they will. The earth need not be this sorry scene of hatred and ill-will. Follow Him, accept His standard of conduct—a life that is ever turned to the Father and bent on carrying out God's will, a life that finds God in feeding the hungry, and tending the prisoners and the sick, a life of mercy and justice and self-control. And all this not merely for the production of a saint here or there, but as a principle of life which is to pervade all human society; it is to overcome the world. It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom. The disciples, then, must be joined together in a body that they may bring about the Kingdom. The Spirit is poured out upon them, and the Church begins. They have a Way of life, faithful to their Master, brotherly to one another.

Here we have the perfection, in ideal, of the Christian Institution and the Christian ethic. Can both live again? Must it ever be that when Christians revive the body of the Church they so often kill the spirit, and when they revive what they think is the spirit they so often decry or quarrel over the body? Can we not have the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace and righteousness of life?

During the last seventy or eighty years there has been a great revival of the Institution in the Church of England. We have rebuilt our churches, our altars, and our fonts; we have improved our services almost beyond recognition; we have re-established our claim to be a true part of the ancient Church of Christ. Side by side with this revival, and often overlapping it, there have been, by the mercy of God, prophets like Maurice and Westcott ever reminding us of the call of Christ to righteousness of national life. There is nothing, perhaps, more sad than the fact that ethical revival is always so much less popular than the other.

Many practical departments of human life are ruled out as not intended to be affected one way or the other by membership in the Church. The newly-confirmed rich young ruler is seldom told

that he is to revise his life beyond seeing to his personal purity in sexual matters. He may receive his rents from slums, and sweat his employees, and generally conduct his business or profession in the same way as the worldlings do.

There is an evil spirit which mars Christianity. It has always been angry with the striker, and was never at all displeased with the profiteer until his selfishness extended its baseness to embrace the whole nation. It still looks upon the clerical reformer as a man who impudently interferes with business.

It seems harder to learn toleration in the Church than anywhere else. It is the balance of the really important things in religion which needs adjusting. Much of the time and energy, which we have hitherto bestowed on the outward, needs now to be devoted to the inward. To rescue the inwardness of religion from being stifled does not necessitate the rejection of the outward. It only requires a greater concentration on what is vital. So far from giving up our sacraments let us believe in their reality and set them working. If all the baptized really believed that they were the present possessors of the Kingdom of Heaven: if all the confirmed really believed that they were endued with the Holy Spirit: if all the communicants really believed that they had fed upon the meat that never perishes: if every one who attended the altar went home from the Sacred Presence to give his own body and his own blood for the service of God and man: if every one who read his Bible were really desirous of being imbued with its spirit of faith in God and the mind of Christ, there would be little need for prophets to call us away from a dangerous externalism, for we should be in heaven while on earth, and we should discover that God had poured out His spirit upon all flesh.<sup>1</sup>

#### FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

##### • The School of Experience.

'I have learned by experience.'—Gn 30<sup>27</sup>.

The reason that preaching counts for so little in certain quarters surely arises from the fact that it seems to great multitudes to be a mere mechanical repetition of something which it is supposed to be necessary to believe, with no vivid consciousness, no real appreciation of the modern, urgent cry of human life.

Grey, grey are all the theories,  
But green the golden tree of life.

<sup>1</sup> J. Adderley, *Comprehensive Religion*, 25.

And so men and women are more and more coming back to the old position that experience is the only real teacher. One of the greatest figures of last century, Ibsen, has said of what is perhaps his supreme creation, *Brand*, 'It came into being as the result of something which I had not observed but experienced.' A modern writer—one of the most modern of the moderns—in a very powerful book has said: 'Life is to me just one great experiment: every time one gets more and more hurt, but one at least learns from experience.' He goes on to speak of the help we get from a man who has really lived, and he cites one who has sung as all real men of genius sing—and all real preachers preach, one might say—with a thorn at his throat. 'I have learned from experience.'

To learn by experience does more for us than all the preaching in the world and all the books we have read. Francis Thompson reminds us of the fiery inner experience, the dire spiritual struggle which set the trenches on Dante's brow.

1. Now let us look at two or three of the things that experience has taught us. First of all, experience has taught us *the inadequacy of the things of sense*; 'the irremediable inadequacy,' as Baron Friedrich von Hügel has phrased it, 'of even the totality of all our present earthly conditions, though improved to the utmost—in so far as these conditions do not include, or lead up to, God and His presence—to satisfy the soul's wants.' Perhaps some of us gain an insight similar to that of Wagner's *Parsifal*, an insight gained through temptation. We come to see that the gratification of the sensual appetites can never satisfy an immortal spirit; the thirst of the soul continues and can never be satisfied in anything other than the Eternal. We are realizing this quite vividly on a great scale in the life of the nation to-day. Matthew Arnold in the memorable *Obermann Once More*, writes of pagan Rome:

On that hard Pagan world disgust  
And secret loathing fell.  
Deep weariness and sated lust  
Made human life a hell.

And we are seeing to-day a recrudescence of precisely the same things which preceded the downfall of Rome. There can be no true life in so far as these things dominate the life of the nation, and every individual who succumbs to their spell is weakening the national life. Every time we believe that in the things of sense—'the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life'—that in these we can find true life; every

time when by our actions we place our faith in these things we are weakening that Kingdom of God which is slowly coming; we are holding back the chariot wheels of Christ's Kingdom. There could be no more fitting prayer for us, even if it be a prayer between sobs, than this:

Pity me still, though eyes that travel hither  
See only how my hands on garlands close—  
Yea, if it needs make some fair blossom wither,  
Or wound me with the thorns upon my rose.

2. Now, in the next place, the lesson taught us by experience is *a new insight into the meaning and glory of suffering*. In Mr. Masfield's recent play in verse entitled *Good Friday*, the only character that really matters—for the figure of our Lord does not appear—is one accounted a madman. He is blind, and at one point he utters these remarkable words: 'I have touched wisdom since they took my eyes.' Think of Milton—as his sight fails him he but learns to see God better. Think of George Matheson, the blind preacher and poet—his sight goes and then he writes the immortal lines:

O Love that wilt not let me go.

Think of John Bunyan writing his immortal allegory in prison. Think of Tennyson in sorrow for his beloved friend, Arthur Hallam, writing his imperishable 'In Memoriam.' Think of Savonarola, of Livingstone, of Father Damien—all are types of those who turned their weakness into strength and learned in the school of experience that sorrow is not the final word, but that in it there is a strange, exultant joy.

3. Or, again, we learn from our own early experience *not to be deterred in life by what seems to be a final set-back*. What we like most of all about Dr. Johnson is the fact that his life was of such a character that he has been described for all time as one who was 'an old struggler'; one who had passed through experiences which might well have overwhelmed another soul, but still faced the future bravely and with such courage as he might. We learn from experience that victory frequently comes only through defeat. The great words of

our Lord, 'Whosoever saveth his life shall lose it,' are interpreted by our own partial experience even here. We know quite well that life is never the flawlessly beautiful thing it appears to confident youth. 'In the midst of the years make known.' It is largely the peril of middle age, when we cannot summon up fresh energy to go on and wage the old warfare and to believe that after all the beautiful early dream is true. Beauty is not simply the thing it appears to youth. The most beautiful thing is worked out from sorrow, courage, prayer, and disappointment—that is the final beauty of life.

We are not minimizing the fact that joy can enable us to live more truly; not turning aside from what every one of us knows to be true—how a sudden, unexpected joy coming into the life irradiates everything—yet we must know that life is not all that, so that we shall not be overwhelmed, not be too greatly surprised when the darker things come.

4. We learn in the school of experience *our own weakness, our own limitation, and we learn to turn to another*. We know there is no salvation in ourselves. We know that it is only by drawing upon an inner and Divine source, upon Christ within, constantly day by day, that we can make life clean, sweet, beautiful, and helpful to others. We learn to trust not in any supposed infallible Church, but in the unfailing Christ. That surely was the secret of St. Paul, who, in one of his highest moments expressed this desire, 'That I may know him and the fellowship of his sufferings.' In life the only people some of us care to know are the successful people. That I may know Him—'despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.' There is no experience so illuminating as that of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. If life has been so far a great disappointment, it is because we have never yet heard the one thing that will illumine it all and make it, if not quite clear, at least not wholly unintelligible. We need something to enable us at least to surmise a hidden harmony in what seems to be appalling discord. Only one master-hand can introduce the long lost chord Divine; it is the hand of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. Major Scott, in *C.W.P.*, cxvi. 199.