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In the Study.

Virginitus Puerisque.

November.

BY THE REVEREND M. S. HOPKINS, B.A., ELY, CARDIFF.

'And Simon the Canaanite.'—Mk 3¹⁸.

NOVEMBER is the most dreary month of the year. I am sure you, boys and girls, do not like it a bit. One of our poets described it as a month of 'no sun, no moon, no stars—November.' He wrote a poem with a lot of lines like that, with words having 'no' before them, and finished it with the word 'November.'

You have no Christmas in November, no Easter, no Whitsun, and no long holidays as in August. All you have to make you jolly in November is Guy Fawkes' night, and that does not last long.

Yet we all know November when it comes, without being told that it is November. Of course, each month is different as each day of the week is different. You all know what Monday is like, don't you? It is a day for beginning things, and it is always hard to begin things. When Tuesday comes you feel in the middle of things once again and hard at work. Saturday is a jolly day, while Sunday—some of you do not like Sunday—but it is the best day of all.

It is the same with the months. We all know that each month has a peculiar characteristic of its own. January, well, that is like Monday; we begin things. We are full of life in January, and sometimes have a little snowballing. Of February we feel that it will soon go, and we look forward to March, when the Spring begins. Then comes April with its glorious sunshine, and sparkling showers in between. Sometimes, indeed more often than not, the Easter holidays come in April.

All the months are different and we know them when they come without any one telling us their names. For instance, when we see the daisies and the buttercups making beautiful coloured carpets of the green fields, and we notice that the days begin to lengthen, then we know that March has come and that Summer is not far away. March, like every month, has an atmosphere of its own.

So has November. It is the month of fogs, of rain, and sometimes snow. It is cold, dark and dreary. But then it has its place as a month of the year. We would not appreciate the joys of spring and summer if we did not experience the winter, nor the morning sun if we did not know the darkness of the night.

The disciples of Jesus were not of a similar nature and disposition. We know of St. Peter as being active and impulsive, St. John as being of a lovable nature, St. Thomas as one who wanted to see things before he believed them, Judas as being greedy. Each one had his own peculiar characteristics; but each one served his Master in his own way.

So do we too. So does each one of you. You, boys and girls, are all different from one another. It would not do at all for us to be built in the same way. A beautiful organ has many keys and different stops and they each one of them have different notes, but when they are touched, each one at the right moment, they give us most sublime music.

Do you know, whenever I think of November, I always think of one of the disciples of Jesus. You will find a list of their names in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. The eleventh disciple on both lists is named Simon the Canaanite, and as November is the eleventh month of the year, I, somehow, couple them together, November and Simon the Canaanite.

We do not read anything about Simon the Canaanite in the whole of the Gospels. There is no record of anything he did or said; we simply read his name as being one of the disciples of Jesus. We read a great deal about St. John, St. Peter, and St. James, but nothing about St. Simon the Canaanite. And yet he must have done much for Jesus. It is the same with the month November. It is not famous for flowers, or holidays, or any great events like children's treats, but it has its place as a month of the year, and we could not do without it.

So it is with all of us. We may not be great at cricket or football, or brilliant at our studies, but we have our place, each one of us, and God has a particular work for us to do.

Consider the Ravens.

BY THE REVEREND ALEXANDER BAXTER, HAWICK.

'Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them.'—Lk 12²⁴.

When I began reading my text, and said 'Consider——' you thought I was going to say 'the lilies,' didn't you? Consider the ravens! the crows! why it makes us think of scarecrows. Crows! noisy, black, ugly creatures they are, and they steal! why, I know a little boy who was

rolling his hard-boiled Easter egg one afternoon and a crow swooped down and simply flew away with it. Consider the crows! yes, says the farmer, I'll consider them with a gun: look at the way they spoil my potatoes. Well, I suppose the crow is a thief, and the particular kind of crow Jesus speaks of—the raven—is a big thief. It will steal all kinds of things and seems to delight in tearing things to bits. It is greedy too, so greedy that we have made him into a greedy word—ravenous. But after all a crow is not a boy or girl. It can't help being greedy. It doesn't know any better. Let us rather consider one or two of the raven's good points.

Do you remember in the story of the Flood how Noah sent out two birds from the Ark, a dove and a raven? The dove, we are told, soon got weary and came back to shelter. But this is what we are told about the raven: It 'went to and fro until the waters were dried up on the face of the earth.' That suggests rather a good point, doesn't it? We have the picture of a tireless, eager, searching bird: persistent—it refuses to give in. '*Consider the raven.*'

Then there is that story about the ravens feeding Elijah. I wonder if it really means that somehow Elijah, by watching the ravens, was able to find food for himself? At any rate people who know tell us that for its size the raven is perhaps the most perfect of birds. It has a splendid brain for a bird, and a fine nervous system. It is a bird very well able to look after itself and feed itself. It is wise, eager, and independent. Now, isn't it worth considering that that is the kind of bird about which Jesus says, 'God feedeth them'?

I read a lovely story about a crow which I want to tell you. It is told by Mr. Coulson Kernahan, who was a great lover of birds and flowers. His wife had a baby crow which had lost its mother and was too young to feed itself. Mrs. Kernahan had also a tame rook in her garden called 'Johnnie.' Now 'Johnnie' took over this baby crow and used to feed it day by day by poking food into its mouth. The baby crow seemed rather to enjoy this and didn't see why it should stop—in fact it got quite lazy as it grew bigger. 'Johnnie' got rather worried about this, and in order to make the crow find food for itself tried starving it. The crow squawked so much, however, that 'Johnnie' gave in and fed it. One day, however, 'Johnnie' was noticed collecting a little pile of curious things—tiny stones, broken snail shells, small bits of twigs, and even a rusty screw. Then he gave his usual call, and the crow came with open mouth to be

fed. Into its open mouth, however, 'Johnnie' proceeded to put the rusty screw, and the other things he had collected. You can imagine what happened—after that the lazy crow went and found food for itself. After it was all over we are told 'Johnnie' rolled over on his back with his legs in the air as if he was delighted with the success of his method.

'Consider the crows': 'God feedeth them': but He does not do it by all the time dropping food into their mouths. He gives them the power to help themselves, and they must use it. God has made them eager, wise, persistent, independent, and He says to them, 'Use your powers and I will feed you.' And so, boys and girls, we must work if we are to eat. We must seek if we are to find. We must learn if we are to be wise. We must try if we are to be good. Jesus said, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' God feeds us by giving us power to work and feed ourselves, by giving us power to help others who are not able to work, and so *He* feedeth us. Let us thank Him and remember the lesson of the ravens.

The Christian Year.

SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT.

The Right to become.

'As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the sons of God.'—Jn 1¹².

Thinking of that sublime passage in St. John which says that 'as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the sons of God,' we restrict ourselves to the mere fragment of a phrase—'the right to become.'

We have stripped the passage of its glory and of its infinite promise. The right to become—what? Anything at all! Deny the possibility of change and improvement, and we are scarce atoms, but mere indistinguishable particles in the cycle of existence.

1. But does anybody deny man that right? The right to become something? Yes; half the philosophies of the world, and much loose thinking that scarce deserves the name of philosophy. It is the characteristic assumption of most of the religions of the East that man is involved in a cycle of existence from which he cannot escape. It invades our own souls whenever we say, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,' 'All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the clean, and to the unclean: to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth

not ; as the good, so is the sinner ; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.'

Half the world is divided on that issue from the other half. Half of every man's single life also is divided from the other half upon that point. There are days and years and moods in which he says, 'I can become,' and there are others in which he says, 'I am nothing, and nothing matters.' We live through all the philosophies in the course of a lifetime without distinctly formulating them. We are not always Christians, in spite of our geography and settled convictions ; sometimes we are Muhammadans, surrendered to Fate ; sometimes we are Confucianists, treating God as an abstraction ; sometimes we are Buddhists, desiring only to be melted back again into the one colourless omnipresent unity, where sleep is rest from desire. We are symposiums of all the religions, and of all the philosophies. It is only by a great effort and by great grace that a man can persist in saying of himself, 'I have the right to become—something !'

Mr. Chesterton, who has a genius for saying profound things in a seemingly frivolous way, has written recently, 'All religious history has really been a pattern of noughts and crosses.' He goes on to say that by noughts he does not mean nothings, but only things that are negative compared with the positive shape or pattern of the other. And then he makes the suggestive statement that the mind of Asia can really be represented by a round O, if not in the sense of a cypher, at least of a circle. The great Asiatic symbol of a serpent with its tail in its mouth is really a very perfect image of a certain idea of unity and recurrence that does indeed belong to the Eastern philosophies and religions. It really is a curve that in one sense includes everything, and in another sense comes to nothing.

With a certain fancifulness he reminds us that the symbol of Muhammadanism is a crescent, or part of a circle, and the scimitar itself is a part of a crescent. The Swastika, the parallel symbol of the Wheel of Buddha, consists of a crooked cross in the very act of returning to the recurrent curve. The idea is that of a wheel going round and round, of a serpent curved and swallowing its own tail ; of all things recurring.

2. Sharply outlined against that background stands the Christian symbol of the Cross. It is a rugged thing at right angles, pointing boldly in opposite directions. In fact as well as in figure it stands for the idea of breaking out of the circle that is everything and nothing. It presents the idea of a conflict stretching outwards into eternity.

The soul requires for its health a conviction that there is a distinction between things. They are not all 'God' in the same sense. Right is not the same thing as wrong. Granted that our ideas of both are relative, and that they may both be seen in changing lights, no sane men would alter black and white until they were alike grey. No amount of toning down can make war the same thing as peace, or a lie the same thing as the truth, or lust the same thing as love.

The Cross of Christ, outlined against the sky, with its sharp right angles pointing boldly in opposite directions, the vertical beam thrust downward into the earth by all that is contrary to God, and the horizontal beam framing the strong arms of resistance, deliberately outstretched in opposition to the contrary principle, is the everlasting witness that in the world there is God and Not-God, right and wrong, truth and error. It calls to men to take sides. It gives the right to become, but only on condition that they, too, shoulder a cross and carry into life the symbol of contradiction.

In such fashion it saves the world. For the world depends for its moral health, and indeed for its sanity, upon clear convictions as to what, so to speak, is 'God' and what is 'Not-God,' or upon what is right and what is wrong. Philosophies that blur that distinction ought to be known as poison-gas. If our distinctions are but partial and are full of human error, the greatest possible error would be to make no distinctions. A community that could distinguish no difference between the wrong that needs resistance and the right that needs assistance would be on its way to perdition. A mentality that declared that 'nothing matters' would itself matter nothing. It would travel in a circle, thrust downward by its indifference, thrust up again by the urge of the moral law. It is a choice between noughts and crosses. By shouldering the Cross, any man, any society, can break through the circle and *become*.

Each one of us has a circle of personality through which we ought to break, and through which we can break by shouldering the Cross. No man should say that heredity has laid down conditions which compel him to travel in a circle. We can break the circle with a cross. There is conferred upon us the 'right to become.'

3. If the right be valid it carries with it as a corollary the other half of this passage. If a man has the right to become something—anything—better than he is, he has the right to become 'a son of God.' That is the message of the Cross. Through conflict and sacrifice to nobler conflict and sacrifice,

on and on, not to absorption but to affinity with God, not to extinction but to expansion, which is the true and only heaven in this world or some other.

We must protest against that conception of the Cross of Christ which makes it only an act of submission. That would be to make the Cross a Swastika, the crooked Cross turning again into a wheel. The Master's Passion was not a murmured 'Yes,' but a ringing 'No.' It was 'Yes' to God, but 'No' to the things that are contrary to God. The things that were 'Not-God' pleaded for compromise or acquiescence, and He answered 'No !' It was the most positive act in all His wonderful life. It was an act that enshrined all His philosophy so that He passed it on as teaching to all His disciples in all ages. 'If you would follow Me, take up your cross ; if you would carry the cross, you must deny—or say "No"—to yourself.'¹

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

How far can Forgiveness go?

'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'—Is 1¹⁸.

There is really nothing elsewhere in the Scriptures which goes so far as this declaration ; for it will be noticed that it does not say merely that sin shall be washed away, but that sins which are scarlet shall themselves be made white as snow. This seems a statement of the impossible : stain can be removed, a person can be cleansed, but nothing can make sin other than what it is.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the common interpretation of the text should be challenged. And reference to the Hebrew will show that an altogether different rendering is equally possible. The words can be read as if they were an indignant rhetorical question : If your sins are as scarlet, shall they be white as snow ?

But a good many scholars hesitate to accept this rendering and are desirous of retaining the statement as a promise ; and, therefore, we shall be taking the safest line if we treat the text as a real question, the answer to which the prophet leaves open, with the burden of proving an affirmative answer resting on those who would argue that such an unthinkable thing is really possible.

1. All the laws of life seem to be against the doctrine of forgiveness. The linking of the universe in a chain of cause and effect, which can never be

reversed, broken, or interfered with, is an idea which has had its effect even upon the sphere of human morality ; and, consequently, the doctrine of forgiveness has come to be regarded as impossible. All sin brings inevitable consequences ; and there is no means of evading them. Even if the repentance of a person who has sinned be conceded as a possibility, and God be reconciled to the person as thus changed, yet this personal forgiveness cannot remit a single consequence of sin. The drunkard who has wasted his natural powers will still have to pay the penalty in his flesh, even if he immediately and entirely gives up his habits.

It becomes a grave question whether there can be any such thing as repentance, because sin has much worse consequences than its physical effects, which in the main only follow on physical sins, and then not inevitably or invariably falling on the person who committed them. The moral effects of sin, and especially of spiritual sins, strike at the very soul itself and render it incapable of repentance. How is a person who indulges in the vain imaginations prompted by pride ever to have his eyes opened to his actual conditions ?

2. It is against such ideas that Christian forgiveness seems so inadequate. It claims that forgiveness is so complete that it wipes sin out altogether ; it is not only the personal forgiveness of God, but the cleansing from the very guilt of sin, so that it need no longer rest in the memory, but can be treated as if it had not been.

The whole question turns upon the personal redemptive activity of God upon the soul of man. Forgiveness is a great human fact which proves the redemptive activity of God. If the automatic, self-contained system of ethics were true, individuals and the race as a whole would steadily get worse ; for the actual consequences of sin are not only physical suffering, but moral blindness ; and where there is moral blindness, there is no power even in suffering to open men's eyes. There must be some moral power, other than circumstances or man himself, which is always bearing in upon him, a light that does not go out when man shuts his eyes to it, but adjusts itself to his rebellion and by secret ways strives to influence his soul. If God was not forgiving, He would not continue to send forth His light and truth ; and if He did not do that man would die. And God can do that because He is the Person He is, because He is Spirit, and therefore able to influence us in all kinds of secret ways from within ourselves, and yet without coercing us, because He acts upon us as one Person on another. And since He is love He is able to

¹ F. W. Norwood, *The Gospel of the Larger World*, 54.

persuade us into a union with Him that renovates our whole person. What is meant by forgiveness is in the first place that ; and it is the permanent attribute and the untiring activity of God.

3. But how much can that forgiveness accomplish ? It surely cannot alter facts. It cannot change the past. And therefore, how can it bring complete deliverance ? It must ever remain a fact that we have done these things : we must contain within ourselves not only the effect of that, but the responsibility for that, which surely we can never afford to forget, and for which we must for ever mourn. This would give us a repentance which was nothing but penitence, fruitless attempts at reparation ; our sins would have to be ever before us. True, and yet not to be thus concluded. By personal communion with us God gets us to look at things as He looks at them. He changes the natural attitude of the heart, and, consequently, the effect of the past is changed upon us. When it is said that we cannot alter facts, we must remember that a fact is not a thing in itself : it is a natural happening conjoined to an *effect* upon a person ; if you can change the person, you can change the effect. Therefore, God's forgiveness does alter facts in so far as it alters their effects.

But must there not always remain a mournful penitence ? We ourselves can never forget that we have done these things ; moreover, we can never forget that we have done these things to God, and in the Cross we get some glimpse of what it has cost God to get near enough to us to have any influence upon us ; how, when we look upon the Cross, can we forget our sins ? This is also true, but penitence must be distinguished from remorse, and from a sorrow that debilitates and paralyzes us from doing anything but dissolving in floods of grief. As we look at the Cross we cannot help remembering our sins, but we cannot but remember also that He loved us in them. He loved us enough to take them upon Himself, the very sins we could not and would not feel, and this either dries the tears before they come, so that the penitence of the Christian is really nothing else than a profound gratitude ; or the tears we cannot keep back at the sight of the Cross are not for our sins, but for His wounds ; and not for sorrow, but for overwhelming joy at the revelation of such love. This is continually re-centring and re-making our nature round Him and His Cross.

But can this change consequences ? It has changed the most important consequences. The actual change which may be wrought in one's body by repentance for physical sins is not so important

as that the spiritual consequences, which are death, should be broken ; we are quite willing to bear the one ; to bear the other would be to suffer moral extinction. But, as a matter of fact, it is likely that there will be even different physical consequences. Just as it is possible for the body to recuperate after an illness, which may have been brought on by some form of injudiciousness, so the mere fact that sin ceases, and still more that there is a new concentration, a new peace, and freedom from inner anxiety, has an immediate effect upon the body.

But what about the effects upon others ? In some cases our sins have injured others. We should always strive to make what reparation is possible, but sometimes it is impossible. We may have helped some one down a moral abyss, and while we have been rescued, they have not. They may have passed beyond any possibility of appeal. There is for this the new power of prayer and intercession, which is certainly not arbitrarily broken by an event like death. Also we have to remember that our influence over others is never so great as to destroy their responsibility. Moreover, in coming into new relations with the Head of the redeemed race, we are helping to take away the sins of the whole world, to counteract the effect of evil forces.

Forgiveness, therefore, can go to tremendous lengths. The redeeming power of Christ is such that it does make sin as if it had never been, not only for the individual, but for the race and for human history. The Church has always been instinctively sure about this. Whatever the fall has been, the redemption of Christ is going to do something more than wipe it out ; it is going to bring about something which will be higher because of the fall. If the fall had not taken place, man might have continued something a little lower than the angels : but now, in order that the human race may never fall again, he is made something higher than the angels. Similarly with the individual.

This doctrine needs to be safeguarded from certain conclusions that might be hastily, though not rightly, drawn from it. It might be claimed that it is better that man should have sinned. Man, as he was made, was a creature perfect of his kind : there is no way of restoring him to that perfection ; but he is made something higher still : a perfection which is His own choice, and from which there is no further possibility of falling. But that does not mean that it is a good thing man fell : it is an evil thing ; only the consequences have been assumed by God, and by His love and

mercy they have been—not destroyed—but completely changed in their effects.

The question asked by the prophet, impossible as it seemed, is therefore answered in the affirmative. Before the consummation of all things, the sins of earth, crimson as they have been, will themselves have been made as white as snow, because their effects will live only in the being of God, where they have been transformed into greater love and greater beauty.

Sin has brought forth a propitiation; not the propitiation of God, nor the propitiation of man, but the propitiation of sin itself: an answer drawn from the heart of the Eternal, the God-man, our glorious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the union in one Person of the Eternal Son of God and the crucified Son of man, the Father's satisfaction, our endless praise.¹

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

How Life shows Itself.

'The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.'—I Jn 1².

There are not a few men and women to-day who think of Christianity as something dull, sombre, devitalized. Nothing could be further from the impression made upon the mind by the records of its earliest and purest manifestation.

Consider the passage before us, written, we are told, by one near the extreme limit of human life. Yet what ringing conviction is here, and what a sense of the nearness and fullness of life as he adds hurried phrase to phrase to emphasize the reality of his experience.

Of speculation about life there had indeed been abundance in the world before this time. Ever since Socrates, the founder of Moral Philosophy, said that the unexamined life was not worth living for man, many of the finest minds of the Greek race had devoted themselves to examining life. For all mere argument about Life, the New Testament substitutes its witness to a fact. 'In him was Life'—that is the challenge which it throws out to the questioning spirit of man.

Life is something hidden, mysterious, always eluding us when we try to express its nature in words; yet it is familiar and well known in our living experience, and it has certain marks or signs which cannot be mistaken. Let us go over some of these marks, that we may understand

¹ W. E. Orchard, *No More War*, 49.

better how we actually know life and recognize its presence. And, as we do so, let us look towards the life of Jesus Christ, to see whether these marks were present there.

(1) First, we may name as characteristic of life its *Power in seeming weakness*. The Parable of the Mustard Seed is one of the simplest and most universal of arguments from the world of Nature to that of Spirit. And the contrast becomes still more striking when the seed falls, not on kindly soil but amid rough and hard surroundings which give it little apparent hope of a prosperous growth. 'I remember well,' says Mr. G. F. Barbour, 'as a boy, a seedling larch which had lodged in a fissure in the heart of a large boulder. At that time it was hardly taller than myself, but in less than twenty years it had grown to be a shapely, spreading tree, full forty feet in height; and the boulder which had harboured the seed lay round the root, broken into several portions.'

This is indeed the characteristic power of living things, that they can thrive in unexpected places, and overcome the apparently strong and fixed and immovable things of the world, because they have the capacity for expansion, for growth. This in turn depends on their power to draw sustenance from the most opposite elements that surround them. The sapling finds its nourishment not in beings like itself, but in the impalpable air and the unyielding rock; and in virtue of this power it not only can live among, but it can turn to the uses of its own development the various elements, hard as well as gentle, in which it has been placed.

Not less is this true in the spiritual sphere. Whenever we see the hard facts of life, as we naturally call them, yielding before the steady, silent pressure of a hidden force which is able to draw strength from adversity and overcome evil by good, we recognize the working—mysterious but unmistakable—of spiritual life. This working of life has been seen in the characters of the brave and quiet men and women of every century, but never so clearly as in that of Jesus.

(2) Again, life is marked by *Originality*. Its forms cannot be predicted even by the most careful and exact scientific thought. It is said that the formation of crystals bears some resemblance to the beginnings of life; but, even if this is true, the contrast is far more striking. For all crystals, however delicate their beauty and however great the variety of their forms, conform to geometrical patterns. But life is independent of geometry. It is indeed true that every healthy living thing shows its nature in the general habit of its growth.

An acorn develops into an oak, not into any other tree. But, while every plant or animal is determined in its development by the type to which it belongs, yet there is nothing monotonous in the forms to which they finally attain. Each has its own differences. As life becomes more free, more perfect, more itself, it reaches a greater variety of form, until even in the natural world, but still more in the spiritual, each living thing is characteristic and unique, or, as St. Paul says, 'a new creation.'

This great law of the operation of the life-force can be readily verified from our own experience. We are always apt to be imitative even in our efforts after good. But we also know that this arises, not from fullness, but from lack of life. If we were completely alive, our best actions would be the most free from rote or rule, the most natural, spontaneous, and varied.

So, beyond all question, it was with Jesus. Let us think of His dealing with individuals—Peter, the Centurion, Simon the Pharisee, Zacchæus, the women who sought Him in distress, the children who come for a moment upon the scene. At every point there is originality, freedom from convention, an entire concentration upon, and adaptation of word and action to, the need of the person with whom Jesus was in contact at the moment—that person and no other. No man can predict the form to which a living thing will grow, nor could any predict the least word or action of the Master; but no sooner was it spoken or performed than it was recognized to be the right word, the one entirely fitting action.

(3) Third, we may name *Self-dependence and the Power to awaken Life in others*. The living organism does indeed borrow such nourishment as it needs from the surrounding world, but the central flame of life burns on, never for a moment extinguished, and in due time kindling other flames like its own. For biology the individual life is never wholly isolated, but always points beyond itself and finds its completion in the creation of other lives. If this be true, then the most perfect life will be that which has the greatest power of kindling life in others, and giving it free play where it has been smothered or obscured.

Here once more we find life at its highest and most potent in Jesus. On the one hand we see its self-dependence, which for Him meant dependence on His Father—on whom, among His disciples or friends, could He depend in the times of greatest stress? He 'trod the winepress alone.' It was given to Him 'to have life in Himself,' but never for Himself. Let us go through the story of His ministry again—noting in thought the continually

self-giving character of His life, and seeing how the smoking flax of one crushed or hopeless or sin-steeped heart after another lightened into living flame at His touch.

(4) From power, amid weakness and self-dependence, we pass to a last characteristic of life—*Persistence*, or the power to endure. This becomes in the moral sphere *Perseverance*, the unquenchable energy, the unbreakable resolve to go on to the day's end. This is the last and most searching test of vitality—does it wear out? The supreme life must be one that endures to the very end. We know how the life of Jesus satisfies this test. No enmity, no disappointment, no danger, could turn Him from His course.

So the great question meets us. Is this the last word about life, that it perseveres to the end, that it is too strong to be turned from its course by all the forces of the world, but that it ends in absolute self-surrender?

But the history of the Life of Jesus does not end with the Cross. Those who had been closest to Him reached the firm assurance—not then, indeed, but afterwards—that His life had not so ended life. He became to them the Lord of Life, who had a life-giving power, greater even than that which He had exercised while He walked and taught and healed in the flesh. And the evidence for this strange and daring belief was supplied by their new experience and by their own transformed lives.

Yet all this took place nineteen centuries ago. Has it any message, any sure consolation for those who have looked forth on a world dominated not by life, but by death? Whenever in these past centuries men have returned to that source of life of which we have been thinking, they have found it flowing still; and all the conflicts which have brought such immeasurable sorrow on the world and have fastened upon it the rule of death, have been due to their neglect of the life which was manifested in Jesus Christ. For that life, if it were given free passage through every region of human activity, would bring us back to brotherhood and peace.¹

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Religion, an Art or an Action.

'And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.'—Ezk 33²².

It is one of the discoveries men have to make for themselves, that beauty and goodness are not

¹ G. F. Barbour, *Addresses in a Highland Chapel*, 57.

necessarily bound up in the same bundle. This had at least been brought home to the prophet. There were in his constituency men of good taste who liked to hear the word of the Lord delivered in pleasant fashion, but there was none of that improvement of conduct which the prophet, being something more than a public entertainer, desired to see among his people.

The subject is one of the oldest in the world. Once more there is staged the conflict between beauty and truth, art and morals. And since men have been able to think about the relations between things, they have found themselves perplexed and irritated by the difficulty of reconciling these two. The view of the artist is common to his tribe. He stands for the things that are lovely. The standpoint of the teacher, the moralist, is different. He is bent on selecting things, dividing them one from the other, not by their beauty or ugliness, but by some quality which has to do with intention, purpose, and conduct.

Consider, then, the artist's point of view. For him there is only one standard of comparison. He wants to know if a thing is pleasing, does it create emotions of delight in the beholder or hearer? If so, then it is good.

Look at the pictures of Raphael. There the instinct for form, pure and lovely, seems carried to its highest range. Remember, however, that the artist cared little for the piety of the characters he represented in such exquisite contours. Think of that period in which so much of pure loveliness was given to the world. We see the story of the time in the life of Cellini, who can rightly claim some of the finest artistic work of his day, who made one statue recognized as a masterpiece, but who was by his own confession an unprincipled villain who set at defiance the maxims of the moralists and sages. Or think of our own poet Swinburne. He seems to have been born with an incapacity to understand any moral appeal, and sets himself in opposition to every doctrine which would demand allegiance to law, or reverence for accepted codes of right.

If we could all agree that the only thing to do in this world is to enjoy whatever is pleasing, there would be no further discussion. But then we immediately come up against certain ideas, convictions, held by many intelligent men, cherished by not a few of the great artists, which seem to challenge any such interpretation. For these men say plainly that beauty by itself is not enough.

Look at the work of some of these men and the difference is discernible at once. They seem to be

seeking for something more difficult to attain than that desired by the pure artist, the man who is a lover of beauty and nothing else. Michael Angelo hammers his rough stone, paints these wild figures of the Sistine Chapel, but plainly he is wrestling not merely to produce beautiful forms, but to use the medium of stone or colour to set forth ideas about good and evil, to preach to the ages, in fact, according to his own theories of what men should believe, of how they should act. So strong is this grasp of the moral element upon him that he will even use ugliness as his servant, making figures which are revolting to taste, that he may impress his message on the mind. Or think of Dante, whose passion for loveliness of form was as keen as has ever been given to men, and yet the whole of his work is governed by an enthralling desire to advocate certain views about life, to proclaim ideas about good and evil. Ruskin as a writer, so concerned for his message that he comes to hate his own trick of fine writing, because men read him for the beauty of his language rather than to appreciate and understand his ideas. And all these men say, in one way or another, that the work of the artist is only of value when it is filled with solid meaning, has purpose, and moral purpose at that, running through every bit of it.

With all this the prophet will entirely agree. He is with them. But the prophet must go further. He is not content with awakening the nobler feelings. He would urge and persuade, and by force of argument and allurements of words would compel men to the actual performance of good deeds.

It has been urged with some reason that the Reformed Churches are too insistent in this demand for conduct. Conduct is not three-fourths of life, whatever Arnold may have thought. It is a part of life over which the soul can only have a limited control, it is dependent on external conditions far more than we think; it is shaped by the growing consciousness, social and communal, of the race, and is perhaps as much a matter of fashion as of ethics, if we rightly interpret it. And the task of the religious teacher is, not to change conduct but to create those emotions which will lead the human soul into happy relations with the infinite. Now there is an element of truth in that. A great Frenchman has made one of his characters say plainly enough that the only way to attain sainthood is to sin much and often. The more men sin the more certain they are to become saints. There is truth even in that caricature of the truth. But are we wrong in transferring the emphasis from emotion to conduct? At least it was the prophet's

way. And was it not that of the Master Himself? Which of these was his neighbour? asks Jesus. And the answer is one founded on right conduct.

Indeed, this has been the mark of prophetic preaching in all times. Glancing over the writings of Calvin or Knox, what is the chief impression left on the mind? Is it that they were verbal artists seeking to please the ear of an accomplished audience? Is it not rather that they are men engaged in the effort to find a way of conduct and to enforce, with every form of argument and appeal, the claims of that way on their readers? And the reforming spirit within the ancient church reveals itself in the same fashion. Savonarola was a mighty mover of the human heart, as those days in the Duomo show plainly enough, but the end of his preaching is seen when the Florentines come to throw their jewels and trinkets on the common bonfire as a sign that they have subdued their love of beauty to the claims of the spiritual life. And if we think of the men who in recent times have stamped the impress of their names on this business of preaching—of Chalmers, wrestling like one possessed of a demon with his great argument; of Irving pouring prophetic contempt on the idols of his generation; of Parker calling down the vengeance of God on a murderous potentate; of Spurgeon, lashing the sins of his time; or of Beecher, swinging himself and all his pulpit powers into the movement against slavery, challenging Virginia

planters and Liverpool merchants alike on the high grounds of Christian morality—we shall realize that prophetic preaching is something more than the manufacture of paragraphs pleasing delicate ladies or bored business men.

What, then, is the conclusion of this age-long debate? Which is the more important, the lovely words, the pleasant voice, or the commanding utterance which appeals to the intellect, sharpens the conscience, drives men to duty? Let us admit that neither is sufficient by itself. If we cut ourselves off from that world of loveliness which lies all around, how barren becomes even our worship, how naked and cold the sanctuary of God. If we live only for the things that titillate the senses, expect to be amused and pleased, but are careless about being warned, provoked, challenged as to our conduct in life, all the finest things in religion seem to fall from us.

Surely the great task of our time, for those of us who are interested in religion, must be the combination of these two. The æsthetic impulse must be satisfied. And the prophetic passion must have its way. Preaching and teaching must again have their end in the creation of the devout life, the development of right ideas concerning human relations, the enforcement of principles of conduct, the observance of which can be seen and known by the plain man.¹

¹ A. C. Hill, in *The Scottish Pulpit*, 105.

The Call of Saul of Tarsus.

BY THE REVEREND FRED C. ANDERSON, M.A., TARBOLTON.

SAUL was 'an Hebrew of the Hebrews.' The Hebrews, by the good pleasure and purpose of God, were the race of mankind specially fitted to be the hearers and speakers of the Word of God. They were characterized by a unique genius for religion. And the men of Israel who were its characteristic and representative expression were the prophets. The Israelites regarded their God as a God who communicated His will and purpose to such as had 'an eye to see, and an ear to hear.' The prophet was essentially a man who had such an eye and such an ear. The prophet saw and discerned the purpose of Jehovah running through the history of His people, and declared the mind of God concerning the tendencies of his own day. The prophet, being such a seer and hearer, stood between the God of

Israel and the men of Israel. As Dr. A. B. Davidson says: 'The prophet is a man of God, a servant of Jehovah, a messenger of God, a seer of the things of God, a speaker of the things of God to men.' The prophets were the flower of the nation—its best and greatest intelligence, its very marrow of moral character, its deepest and truest intuition, its poetry, its music, and its patriotism. In a word, the prophetic character was Israel's spirit and mind and soul and heart. He interpreted the 'idea' of Israel. Saul of Tarsus was nothing if he was not one of the greatest of the prophets—he was 'an Hebrew of the Hebrews.'

Saul, then, was essentially of the order and build and fullest stature of the prophets. His was a spirit and mind and soul and heart fitted to receive the Word of the Lord, just as was the spirit of