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was well calculated to secure a welcome for the book. The author really shows no hostility to Gentiles as such, but only to those who showed themselves to be enemies of the Jews. This meets Paton's objection (see above). In v.[3], in fact, it is plainly hinted that once the king's favour had been secured every official would be eager to please. Doubtless the Jews had recently suffered many petty oppressions, and the hope of paying off old scores would help the author's purpose. If $9^{20-32}$ be original, the linking of the story with the popular, originally heathen Feast of Purim, would help to create an atmosphere favourable to the abandonment of Jewish exclusiveness. Finally, if ch. 10 be original, the author would appear to be anxious to point out how the wide dominions of Antiochus would give rich opportunities to those who entered his service. Sullen acquiescence in the Seleucid rule condemned the Jews to perpetual servitude. Revolt would probably increase their miseries, but a willing co-operation would, as Jason had just demonstrated, help Jews to power. So in the story Mordecai comes to be next to the king, but liked by his own people and able to help them. This was the position our author sought to commend. Why should not a Jew enter the service of Antiochus and win benefits for himself and his people? We need not suppose that the readers were expected to see the significance of every detail of the story. It would suffice if the book simply left the impression that friendly relations with the foreign king were desirable.

We need not accuse this propagandist of lack of patriotism. Friendly relations with foreign rulers, as they had assisted the building of the first Temple, so they had enabled the walls and Temple of Jerusalem to be rebuilt. Yet we can see that his policy would have meant the end of Judaism and, humanly speaking, the frustration of the whole movement of history which culminated in the Incarnation. As it was, within three years Antiochus himself unconsciously wrecked our author's efforts by allowing himself to be bribed into supplanting Jason in the high-priesthood by the still more worthless Menelaus (2 Mac $4^{23ff.}$), thus initiating a turmoil which stiffened Jewish opposition to his schemes. We place the Book of Esther, then, between 175 and 172 B.C., before Antiochus had proved himself to be an unjust tyrant. In the troubles which soon followed its publication it must have been submerged, and when it reappeared the situation described by Cornill had supervened. Its new readers, no longer in tune with the situation that produced it, completely misunderstood its purpose. Seizing only upon the fact that it recorded a Jewish triumph over their enemies, they overlooked the way in which that triumph was secured, and so the book, written to break down Jewish exclusiveness, came to be a bulwark of Jewish national pride. Thus it at last found a place in the canon, where it has been a standing embarrassment to Christian expositors, but need be so no longer.

# In the Study.

## Virginibus Puerisque.

### 'Hurrah for Holly!'

By the Reverend H. L. Picken, Newark-on-Trent.

There are some things which belong specially to Christmas—really Christmassy things, like crackers and carols, turkey and plum-pudding, or mistletoe and holly. I don't know just how Christmas and holly came to belong to each other. I wonder if any one does? Anyway, Christmas without holly is almost unthinkable. And I expect you will already have hung branches of it over the pictures, where its bright red berries will brighten up the room and make everything look gay.

Have you ever noticed that the holly is always at its best in the darkest and gloomiest part of the year, when there are no flowers in the fields and no leaves on the trees? Then see how the holly shines! Look how its bright red berries brighten up the countryside, as though telling every one to cheer up and be happy. It's not everybody, you know, who can be bright and cheery when everything is dull and dreary, but he who is is worth a lot. That is one reason why the holly deserves specially to be honoured at Christmas, don't you think so?

Then have you noticed how shiny the leaves of the holly are? Do you know why that is? That

glossiness makes the holly leaf waterproof. Drop a spot of water on it and see how quickly it runs off, leaving behind it no trace. You see, if the moisture and the damp and fog of the long winter months got into the pores of the leaf, when the frost came it would crack all the little pores open, and the leaf would be destroyed. Then the holly tree would be unable to breathe. So you see the shine is a means of protection. Do you remember that when Moses came back from talking with God on the mountain-top we are told his face shone? It shone so brightly that he had to cover it with a veil. And do you remember that when cruel men stoned Stephen to death because he loved Jesus, as he knelt in prayer suddenly his face shone with a heavenly light? That is what always happens to those who talk with God and who love Jesus—they shine; and so long as they shine, the sharp, biting frosts of unkind thoughts, of bitter and cruel words, of selfish and hurtful deeds, can never get in to spoil or harm their lives.

Then there is something else to notice about the holly. Some has leaves that are quite smooth, some that are all prickly. Often both the smooth and the prickly come from the same tree. You might hardly think it, but it is so; and always the prickly leaves will come from the bottom of the tree, and the smooth from the top where the most and the best berries are. Do you know why this is? Let me tell you. The spikes or spines on the holly leaf, like its shininess, are a means of protection. In the winter-time, when the grass is rank or covered with snow, the cattle will browse upon the bushes and shrubs, so the holly protects itself by making its leaves prickly. But making prickles is a costly business. The holly cannot make a lot of prickles and a lot of berries too. The more prickles there are, the fewer berries. This is why the bottom of the tree, which the cattle can reach, is very prickly and has very few berries. But since the cattle cannot reach the tree-top, prickles are not needed there, and so the holly wisely stops making them, so as to have more strength for making berries.

As there are prickly trees and prickly plants, so too there are prickly people. Perhaps you know some—disagreeable, unpleasant folk; we call them cross-patches. Of course, you are never one! But I fancy I hear the holly saying to such folk, 'You can't make prickles and make berries too!'

And, last of all, it is nice to think of the holly as JESUS' BIRTHDAY FLOWER. We each have our birthday flower, you know. If your birthday is in February, it is a snowdrop; if in April, a daffodil; if in June, a rose; or if in October, a chrysanthemum—perhaps you can fill in the others. And Jesus' birthday flower is the holly.

So we look at the holly, and think of the little Lord Jesus lying in a manger, and we remember that it is His birthday. You would like to give Him a birthday present, wouldn't you? We are all giving each other presents; surely we shall not forget Him? What shall it be? Could you make it a surprise for Him to-day, do you think? How He would love it!



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### The Launching of 'Character.'

BY THE REVEREND JOHN KENNEDY, B.D.,
OLD KILPATRICK.

'And they launched forth.'—Lk $8^{22}$.

I was at a launch the other day, and I think I have seldom seen a finer sight. A big ship stood on the stocks. It was three times as big as this church, and it weighed over eleven thousand tons, so you can imagine I wondered how they were going to get it into the water. It was quite easy. They had placed it on a cradle, resting on a platform that ran at an angle to the river. The cradle was greased, so that it would slide down easily. Then, when the foreman carpenter blew a whistle, they knocked away some blocks, and the ship started to run on the cradle, and splashed right into the river. It floated like a duck. Then three tugs got a hold of it, two in front and one behind, and dragged it away to have its engines fitted.

I wonder if you have ever seen a launch? Perhaps, when you are on holiday and near a shipyard, they will let you in to see one. I can assure you it is worth seeing. If they only let you in you will enjoy the sight immensely.

But in the meantime I just want to tell you that some day you will have the pleasure of having a little launch yourself. Not a little one really. It is a big one. Your whole happiness and good fortune depend on how you go about it. You are building a ship called 'Character,' and some day you are going to launch it on the sea of life. Did you ever think you were building 'Character'? You are building 'Character' at your play. You are building it at the school. You are building it at your home. And some day your good ship 'Character' will be ready for the battle with the seas of life and you will launch it forth.

And when will you launch it? You will launch it when you leave school and go to work. You will launch it when you leave your home and make a home of your own. You will launch it when you

go abroad. You are building it just now, but you cannot go on building it for ever. Some day you will have to launch it and send it forth.

Now I want to tell you how to launch your good ship 'Character' on the sea of life.

First of all, *you must be ready for the tide.* 'There is a tide in the affairs of men leads on to fortune,' great Shakespeare says. But if you miss it, the chance may never come again. This good ship that I saw launched was ready for the tide. They had so timed it that when the tide was at the full it was ready to go forth. If they had not been ready for the tide there would not have been water enough for it to float in, and it might have run aground.

Now the tide you must be ready for is the tide of opportunity. You must be ready for a situation when it comes. You must work hard at school and keep yourself fit in your games, so that, when your chance in life comes along, you are able to go forth to meet it. Don't waste your time. Don't take up with bad companions. Make the best of your schooldays while you can, so that, when the tide of opportunity flows your way, you may launch forth and be successful.

But there is another thing you must attend to if you are going to float your good ship 'Character' on the sea of life. *You need to send it steadily to the water.* When I watched the launching of that big boat we were speaking of, I saw that the men who were sending it off were very anxious. Would it move too fast and dash into the water? Or would it fail to move at all? When they knocked the blocks away, at first it didn't move. Then it moved the quarter of an inch. Then a half inch, then a foot. *Then* it slid gracefully to the river, not too fast and not too slow.

I wonder what your good ship 'Character' is like? Are you a *steady* boy? Or are you always rushing into trouble? It is a good thing to have life about you, but don't you think it would be better if you tried to settle down? Or are you one of those slow boys who can't be bothered with anything? Well, unless you waken up, you will never launch your good ship 'Character' at all. Be steady! That's the best way. Don't dash at things. Yet don't be too bored to do anything at all. It is the steady boy who is successful in the long run.

But there is one other thing you will need if you are going to launch the good ship 'Character,' and if you remember this I don't mind very much if you *do* forget the rest. If you are going to have a successful launch into the sea of life, *you will need a carpenter who is able to see it through.* The most important man at any launch is the foreman carpenter. Others may have built the ship, but he must see it to the water. He must knock away the blocks that hold it back. He must see it runs easily on the slipway. And if anything goes wrong, it is he who puts it right.

Don't you think you would like to have a good carpenter to help you to launch the good ship 'Character'? Some day you will have to leave school and face the world yourself. You will have to launch forth. Wouldn't it be fine to have somebody beside you who would see you safely through? A carpenter—some one who understands the launching of ships—that is what you need. A carpenter? Where shall we go for a carpenter? Why, *Jesus* was a carpenter! Place the good ship 'Character' in His hands and He will watch over the launching and see it safely through.

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### The Sign of the Fish.

By the Reverend S. H. Price, Farsley.

'These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name.'—Jn $20^{31}$ (R.V.).

Boys and girls, you have all heard of the Catacombs, those underground passages that run for miles and miles underneath the city of Rome. Perhaps some day you will go and see them for yourselves. If you do, there are many strange things you will notice. Wherever there is any stone or woodwork men have been busy carving. There is one figure we shall recognize immediately. It has been carved probably hundreds of times in these dark passages. As soon as we see it we shall say to ourselves—Jesus. Yes, it is a picture of Jesus. In the early days, when Christians were persecuted they fled to the Catacombs for safety, and there they worshipped in secret. It might be that among those early Christians there were some who had seen Jesus, and they have carved these pictures. Many of the paintings of the great artists seem to have been copied from these crude carvings. Then we shall notice all sorts of strange signs—some shaped like a heart, or a boat; and most prominent among these signs is that of a fish. What do all these signs mean? It is a strange, secret language.

This sign of the fish is most important. To understand it we shall have to learn a Greek word, the Greek for 'fish'—IX⊛US. Notice carefully. Spell it again, letter by letter—I X ⊛ U S. Five

letters in this word, and every letter stands for another word, and all the five words together make a sentence. This is what we call a 'mnemonic.'

Now let us see what each of these letters means. In Greek there is no letter 'J.' In fact, many languages have no letter 'J,' so they cannot spell the name Jesus as we do. The Greek begins with a capital I—Iesous. That is what our first letter stands for—Jesus.

There is another letter the Greeks do not use, the letter 'C.' 'Well,' you say, 'how can they spell the name Christ?' They begin with this funny-looking letter like an X—Xristos. So now we have our first two words—Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ. 'We believe Jesus was the Son of God,' say these early Christians. So they use two more Greek words, one meaning 'God' and the other meaning 'Son.' You will all recognize the first one, 'Theos'; that is the Greek word for God. You know our word 'theology.' Then the Greek word for 'Son' is Uios. Our sentence has now grown to 'Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'

Then they ask, 'What else do we believe about Jesus?'

'Well,' they say, 'He is a Saviour,' so they find their word for 'Saviour' which is *σωτήρ*.

Now they have used all five letters:

I for Jesus.
X ,, Christ.
Θ ,, God.
U ,, Son.
S ,, Saviour.

I X Θ U S, the Greek word for 'fish.' So the sign of the fish means, 'I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.'

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## The Christian Year.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

### The Shadow of a Great Rock.

'And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.'—Is $32^2$.

There is no result of recent Biblical study more generally accepted than this: that a very large number of the passages which have commonly been treated as Messianic prophecies have really no reference to the Messiah at all. And in many other passages which really do refer to the Messiah—the ideal King whom the prophets taught the people of Israel to expect—the unlikeness of this picture to Him in whom they have been fulfilled—or rather, so much more than fulfilled—is apt to strike the modern mind more powerfully than the resemblance. 'He shall judge among the heathen; He shall fill the places with the dead bodies and smite in sunder the heads over divers countries.' 'Gird thee with thy sword upon thy thigh, O thou most mighty,' and so on. It is, indeed, only because the higher conception of Messiahship had historically grown out of the lower that we are able to trace any real connexion between such conceptions and the conceptions with which Christians are familiar. But in the words of the text we find a picture of the Messiah which comes home at once to every Christian soul as expressing just what our Lord Jesus Christ is felt to be in His relation to humanity at large, and to every individual soul who has accepted Him as Lord, Master, Saviour.

To appreciate the full force of the words, we must remember all that a rock does for the traveller or the dweller in an eastern desert. The barrenness of the desert—at least of the parts of it bordering upon fertile regions—is due not so much to the want of water as to the great storms of heated sand which sweep over the land whenever the wind is strong. Where a rock or a rocky mountain opposes itself to the deadly drift, there, with a very little rainfall, rich vegetation will spring up. The great rock is the source not merely of temporary shade but of permanent fertility and life.

It has been well said that, though the words have received their crowning fulfilment in Christ, the principle which they lay down is of wider extension. It is fulfilled in the influence which great personalities have at all times exercised in human history. Over and over again, in the words of Principal Sir George Adam Smith, 'a single man has been as an hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest. History is swept by drifts: superstition, error, poisonous custom, dust-laden controversy. What has saved humanity has been the upraising of some great man to resist those drifts, to set his will, strong through faith, against the prevailing tendency, and be the shelter of the weaker, but not less desirous, souls of his brethren.'

But there are some dangers about the gospel of hero-worship as it was preached by Thomas Carlyle. It is fair to mention that Carlyle places Napoleon in his gallery of heroes with many apologies and reserves, and he does not seek to palliate his crimes. But still, even when his heroes are on the whole good as well as great men, really good Christians

like Oliver Cromwell and Samuel Johnson, a slight touch of brutality was necessary to qualify them for canonization at the hands of Thomas Carlyle. And a still more serious set-off to much in his teaching that is bracing and salutary is his boundless contempt for the vast majority of his fellow-men, including especially even the greatest and best of his own contemporaries. The feeling with which we ought to regard great men is well expressed by the story of the young artist who, after contemplating in silent admiration the work of some great master, exclaimed, 'and I, too, am a painter.' The lives of great men should arouse in us the feeling, 'and I, too, am a man.'

That is one of the most important ways in which Christ has proved to mankind a hiding-place from the wind, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. He has so enormously enlarged our conception of the capacities of human nature. That what He was other men might become to some extent, through His influence, was His habitual teaching, and it is the teaching of all who have drunk most deeply of His Spirit. 'Of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace.'

Other ways in which Christ has proved the shadow of a great rock to humanity are written large on the face of history. When we read of the cruelties and oppressions of the past, which the spirit of Christ has done more than anything else to sweep away, and of the low tone of morality on many matters which has prevailed and still prevails even in the most civilized of non-Christian nations to-day, the most cold-blooded student of history can discern cause enough to join with the Christian world on Christmas Day, in rejoicing over the birth of Christ. Horrible pages there are, doubtless, in the history of the Christian Church; but all of them are as clearly as possible due to the defeat of the spirit of Christ within the Church, and not to its influence. But to appreciate the fullest and highest sense of the words of the text each of us should be able to feel that to him personally in his own life, Christ has proved the source of spiritual life and fertility.

The best way of knowing whether Christ has had on us the effect which is so beautifully symbolized by the image is to ask ourselves how far we in our turn are discharging to others in our poor way the functions of the rock in a weary land. The most obvious and easy way of doing this is by being useful to others in temporal ways—by serving others and contributing to the general happiness of the world through the faithful, honest, laborious work of our calling or profession or station in life; by zealous discharge of the duties of citizenship; by systematic, wisely-directed, self-denying charity. Never let us suppose that the ministering to the bodily wants of others is a small or contemptible part of the Christian life. Our Lord Himself spent much of His time in healing bodily disease. He saw no materialism in trying to make men happier. But we cannot realise completely that ideal relation of a man to his neighbour which is expressed by the words of our text unless we are also following in our Master's steps by helping to make others better as well as making them happier. Is there any one whom we are protecting from the deadly drift of sin, as the rock stands between the fertile soil and the destroying sand-drift—standing between them and temptation, helping to make goodness easier and more attractive to them, by example, by sympathy, by simply having the courage to let it be known boldly and unmistakably on which side we are in the great never-ending battle between good and evil? Or are we contributing in any degree to do all this for people about us in general—helping to make the moral atmosphere of the society in which we live a little healthier, more bracing, more Christian?[1]

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### Christmas Day.

#### Born in a Barn.

'And she brought forth her firstborn son: and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.'—Lk 2[7].

Year by year Christmas repeats the same sermon, and its text is the unsearchable poverty of Christ. No feature of our Lord's Advent has such power to move men's hearts as the fact that, though He was rich, for our sakes He became literally poor. When the Eternal Word was made flesh and dwelt among us He chose a hard lot, so that He might be at home with the humblest of His brothers and sisters. By this Divine object-lesson He showed the world that there is no respect of persons with God. The Son of Man was born in a barn, with only a mother's love to welcome Him. Christmas carries us back to the naked truth that each nameless baby born in a workhouse is just as dear to Almighty God as any little prince wrapped in purple and fine linen under a palace roof. The earthly life of Jesus Christ corresponded to the hardship and humiliation of His nativity. He was brought up in a

[1] H. Rashdall, *Principles and Precepts*, 93.

cottage. He wore the garments of a workman. He laboured with His own hands. He understood what it means to be hungry and thirsty and weary and of no account. He descended into the moral underworld, that among the outcasts and paupers He might give His mercy away. He laid up treasure nowhere but in heaven. He died penniless, and borrowed a grave for His burial at last. These outward circumstances which surround the Incarnation are like trumpets of thunder to proclaim what price God puts upon our human distinctions. Rank and wealth and luxury and learning—all the accidental things which set men apart from one another—go for nothing in the eyes of Christ.

Christmas speaks to us with many voices, and none of them is without signification. But assuredly it lays an axe at the root of two deadly sins. It utterly condemns the wickedness of class pride and the converse wickedness of class hatred.

1. No state of soul is more anti-Christian than arrogance. Christ always looked upon a man's 'possessions'—his position and property and cleverness and reputation—as mere accidents. The most levelling of all facts, the only secure basis for democracy, is this tremendous fact that God loves all men alike, that He always has loved them, and that He always will. And, therefore, Christ could not tolerate people who plumed themselves on their own superiority and despised others. He withered them with words of flame: 'Ye are they which justify yourselves before men: that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.'

Among modern Christians the spirit of the Pharisee lurks under manifold disguises. How easy it is for us even in church to stiffen with the sense of religious propriety and respectability! The Epistle of James shows that a primitive Christian assembly could even then be dominated by snobs. To-day people in comfortable houses consider themselves above the people who have to crowd in tenements. The children of the retail shopkeeper may not go to school with the children of the wholesale dealer who supplies goods to that very shop. To be purse-proud may be more vulgar, but it is not a bit more wicked than to be puffed up with the sense of our education, our refinement, our culture, our name and place in the world. Many people question this or that article of the Christian creed, but the doctrine which they secretly revolt against is St. Paul's terrible doctrine that 'there is no difference.' And yet every cradle preaches the same doctrine, and every coffin as well—God's humbling, heart-searching truth which the angels of Bethlehem affirm afresh on Christmas Day.

2. Side by side with the evil of class arrogance stands the evil of class hatred. The latter sin is commonly associated with certain theories about work and wealth. Hitherto our civilization—such as it is—has been built up upon the basis of private property and individual enterprise. To-day, however, multitudes are declaring that all wealth ought to belong to the community of labourers who have produced it, that competition should be abolished, and every business be carried on by the State. Now whether this economic gospel be true or false, it can easily be preached so as to rouse acute antagonism between the people who fear that they have much to lose by its acceptance and the people who hope that they have much to gain. It is obvious, indeed, that the main moral postulates of Socialism are deductions from Christian axioms. The gospel declares that all men are 'one man' in Christ, sons of God and brethren. We are members one of another, and as we live by others we can find no rest until we live for others. Christianity teaches us the brotherhood of man; but it does not tell us whether the brotherhood of man will best be promoted in practice by nationalizing all the instruments of production. That problem is one whose very terms can hardly be grasped without some amount of economic training and experience; certainly it is a problem on which the most unselfish saints may hold quite opposite opinions.

For these base human passions of class arrogance and hatred there is no antidote except the perfect and eternal good-will of God. How can any one feel real affection for his rivals, his competitors, his oppressors, if there be no King of Love who cares for us all alike? If Christ had not made us feel that every man is sacred, who would suppose most men to be anything but objectionable or ridiculous? If there be nothing but evolution-ethics to go by, why must we sacrifice ourselves for our neighbours? *What's Hecuba to me?* There is no sufficient answer which does not confess that we are bound to our neighbours in that higher nexus which unites each of us to God's Incarnate love. The only ground for human brotherhood is that which was made manifest on Christmas Day. And we praise the Lord of Glory most of all for this—that He conquers our pride by His own humiliation, and heals our strife by His own sacrifice, and casts out our greed for gain by His own unsearchable poverty.[1]

[1] T. H. Darlow, *The Love of God*, 93.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

### Retrospect: An Address to the Young.

'I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.'—Ps $77^{6}$.

The past! It is not a popular theme. Many will say, Let those live in the past who have no future. For us, let us live in the present. Does not St. Paul bid us, 'Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are before,' to 'press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling'? And his words are echoed by the wisest of German poets, who thus counsels us:

Wouldst fashion for thyself a seemly life?
Then fret not over what is past and gone;
But whatsoe'er thou mayst have lost behind,
Live now as if thy life were just begun.

Yes; such is the language of youth and health and confidence. Young people, and young nations, spurn their past with an almost reckless disdain. The Athenians, when they returned to their city after the Persian invasion, found that the soldiers of Xerxes had overthrown all the works of art on the Acropolis, and they set none of those statues up again. They were all buried, just as they lay, to make a new terrace. Some years ago they were discovered and dug up—those stiff, smiling, quaint statues of the sixth century, with the red and blue and green paint still upon them. The old Athenians cared nothing for them. But when one stands in the museum on the Acropolis among those archaic statues, graven by the rude pioneers of a glorious art, one feels that the Romans or the English, though they have produced no Phidias and built no Parthenon, would not have buried and trampled on the sacred emblems which their fathers made and dedicated, and the effigies of those who had ministered in their shrines.

Can we afford—can we dare—to put our past away from us—to forget it, and treat it as if it had altogether ceased to be? The mystery of time is a very high and deep mystery. We shall not solve it; but let us try for a moment to realize it. If the past were really blotted out and non-existent, there could be no such thing as reality, for the present is a mere unextended point which vanishes every instant, and the future is not yet. The landscape which spreads out behind us, the country over which we have travelled—half swathed as it is in the mists of forgetfulness, with only a few summits standing out clear to our gaze—this ever-fading scene is *real*, whether we know it or not. It is not, and never will be, the same as that which never was. It is not only that

Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are;

but the past still lives as present in God's sight; it is written in His book in characters which no lapse of time can blur. In the past are portions of the threads with which our temporal and eternal destiny is spun. We cannot and we must not try to break them. Sins which are forgotten are not therefore forgiven: perhaps they are just the sins which are not forgiven. There is a story by Charles Dickens about a man who longed to blot out all the disagreeable recollections in his past life. The boon was granted him, and forthwith all the lovable and sympathetic side of his character vanished. He had lost the power of helping or comforting anybody. He found himself distrusted by those who had formerly confided in him; shunned by those who had loved him. At last, in the misery of isolation, he prays that the fatal gift may be revoked. 'Lord, keep my memory green,' he cries. There is much truth in this little allegory.

More particularly let us try to keep our memory green in all that belongs to our home life. The time will come when we shall have to say our last good-bye to some of those dear ones. Do we wish to have little or nothing to remember them by? Our English way of treating our dead is not worthy or natural. Why do we hardly ever mention them? Is it because the subject is too sad to speak of? That ought not to be so, if we are Christians. Or is it simply our national reserve? We ought to think of them in our prayers, even if we deem it better not to pray for them; we ought to read their old letters, and in every way to try not to forget them. Few things are more softening and chastening than an hour devoted occasionally to converse with those whom we have loved and lost. But it is not only the possibility of separation by death that makes it worth while to keep old letters and to treasure old memories. It may help to keep a family together—to prevent that painful drifting apart which so often makes brothers and sisters almost strangers to each other in middle life.

There are also many ways in which recollection of the past may be a valuable guide for the future. The most obvious consideration is that this is the only way in which we can get to know our own characters. As a general rule, our friends can predict the line which we will take on any given

occasion much better than we can ourselves. They remember, and we do not. We have yielded to a temptation nineteen times, and flatter ourselves that we are as likely as not to resist it at the twentieth trial. If we remembered, we might conclude that our only wise course was to avoid the occasion of so many falls.

But besides this, the past gives us things in more nearly their true proportions than the present. If we ask ourselves what are our sweetest and our bitterest memories, we shall not find that they are the things which most excited or agitated us at the time. It is the experience of most people that their sweetest memories are not those of their most brilliant successes, but of the friendships they have enjoyed, and of any tokens of affection and kindness they have received or been able to render.

Nor is the result less remarkable when we turn to our unpleasant memories. It is not the suffering which we felt most acutely at the time that now stings us. Physical pain is almost forgotten as soon as it is over; and as for opportunities missed, mistakes, and miscalculations, though the remembrance of them is very irritating, these are not the wounds that burn and fester. No; here again it is our offences against the law of love—the memory of affection spurned, of hardness, coldness, and ingratitude towards those who deserved better treatment at our hands, of occasions when we have led others wrong—these are the wounds that rankle. Let us think of these things now, while our friends and relations are still with us.

The time will at last come to each of us when the whole of our life will lie behind us, and before us only the gate into that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns. We shall begin then to see things 'under the form of eternity,' no more under that of time. And we know that it is by the whole trend or set of our lives here towards good or evil that God will judge us. By our whole lives—not, as some think, by our frame of mind on the day when we die. Do not then aim only at 'rising on stepping-stones of your *dead* selves to higher things'; but also make Wordsworth's gentler thought your own, 'I would wish my days to be linked each to each by natural piety.' Then your youth need never belong to 'a dead self': you may grow naturally and continuously like an ear of wheat—first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear; and then the Reaper putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is to come.[1]

[1] W. R. Inge, *Faith and Knowledge*, 211.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

**Manufactured Gods.**

'And the residue thereof he maketh a god. . . . He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?'—Is $44^{17.20}$.

The ancient world believed that a god went with his people to war. When, therefore, a people had been conquered, the implication was clear that its god had been conquered. What more natural than that there should creep over the minds of the Hebrews, sick with defeat, the suspicion that their God Jehovah was not so mighty as those cruel war-gods of Assyria?

The strong words of the prophet relate how one of these men who had lost confidence in the spiritual God of Abraham went out to the hillside, felled a tree, and cut the trunk up into parts. One of these he used for baking meat, another he used for baking bread, another he used to make a fire to warm himself, and the rest of the log he made into a god—a god made out of left-over firewood!

Of course such lapse from a spiritual faith seems far away in the past, but the attitude of mind it indicates is by no means ancient. This distrust of the ability of spiritual power, this conviction that in some way a man may make a more efficient substitute for the unseen and often apparently weak God of our fathers' faith, are by no means confined to the days of the Hebrew prophets. For what do we mean by God? Is it not that to which we appeal for the justification of our desires, the court of last appeal for a conscience? We are all in danger of doing exactly as the man of the olden time—of taking something very concrete, very real, and from it making this court of last appeal, thereby turning from the God of Jesus to the god of utility. Whatever God we may have on Sunday, whatever God we may have in our creeds, there are few of us who are not in danger of manufacturing a god for practical purposes. And every such attempt at the manufacture of gods is a testimony to our distrust of the finality of the spiritual order, to our suspicion that truth and virtue, justice and fraternity, love and sacrifice are not, after all, the eternal things of life; that the God whom Jesus reveals is too severe for practical purposes.

1. Sometimes we distrust the very fundamental sanity of the universe and erect *Chance* into a sort of god. Of course we do not make idols in a literal

sense. True, we do not really believe in mascots —but how should we ever hope to win any conflict, from football to politics, without a mascot? True, we dislike to sit thirteen at table, but this is from the regard of the feelings of some one of the thirteen! No, these customs are not idolatrous; they are only silly. Yet, on second thought, they are worse than silly. Each is evidence that men are ready to act as if the universe were not rationally ordered—an aspect of that distrust of God which the gambler shows.

2. But those of us who are above this insanity of trusting to chance too often make a god out of the very things which are of great value in themselves—things of the utmost utility in life as we live it. There is *Business* for example. No man would belittle our commercial activity. The great monuments of our wonderful civilization are due to commerce. Our arts, our sciences, and our splendid institutions—these are all the blossoming-forth of the capacity of men to get wealth. Yet one can clearly see that when a person erects business into a court of final appeal in matters of morals, and substitutes the laws of trade for the Sermon on the Mount, he is publishing his distrust of the ethics of Jesus. We manufacture a god to get permission to do the things which our real God forbids us to do. When a man says that this or that principle is not applicable to business, in face of the fact that his Christian conscience tells him it is right, he is making a god to justify himself.

3. Then there is the god of *Social Convention*. Social conventions are a most admirable necessity of life. But we cannot safely make a god of social convention, to whom we make our final moral appeal. We know perfectly well that many customs do not tally with our ideals. We go shamefacedly to places of amusement, read certain books, wear strange fashions in clothes, dance suggestive dances. Everybody does it, why should not we? 'Everybody does it'—as if custom made everything right!

4. We make a god of *Culture*. Far be it from anybody to belittle culture. To be able to appreciate real music as over against ragtime; to love real pictures rather than the vulgarities of the comic supplement; to appreciate real literature instead of the inanities of the popular fiction; to see that life is full of the laws of beauty, and to enter into sympathy with those laws; to grow keen-eyed and strong; to have fellowship with that which is true and beautiful and of good repute —these are some of the gifts of true culture. The mere ability to do the conventional thing is not necessarily culture. Learning is not culture. Some of the most learned people have manners for which one has to apologize. But to honour culture may be to fashion one of the great idols of our modern world. For it may spring from the distrust of spiritual standards.

Moral vulgarity often comes to us so alluringly through charming music, delicate literary style, exquisite artistic technique, that we are in danger of becoming artistically and technically skilled instead of being morally virile. Experience ought to convince us that this means moral decay. Wherever we see a soul beginning to substitute mere interest in culture for virile interest in moral life, there we shall see a soul erecting a new sort of god who will permit him to act, think, and enjoy and ultimately believe that which the God of Jesus will not tolerate. For in the case of culture, as in that of business and social convention, we do not create gods to make morals sterner, but looser.

5. Sometimes we manufacture a god out of the noblest and most precious material—the god of *Social Service*. To have had any part in setting forth to the world the social significance of Christianity is one of the elements of life of which a man may well be proud. But to make social service an expression of religion is one thing; to make it a substitute for God is another. So to love the Heavenly Father as to enter into fraternity with our earthly brother—that is the heart of the ethics of Jesus. But to hold that there is no immorality, no right or wrong; that life has nothing but universal misery; and that in this service of misery one has the only possible God, is the heart of an altruistic pessimism.

Nothing so breeds heroism as a social passion based on a confidence in the God of the crucified Christ. Nothing is more splendidly Christian than a vicarious fraternity born of confidence in the justice of a loving God. If He is in His heaven, it may not yet be all well with the world, but it certainly will be well. A self-devotion to the needs of the world that has no such faith conceals a distrust of the reality and power of the God of Jesus, and leads to a substitute god who is less than the God in Christ. In the experience of all servants of our fellow-men there come moments of supreme spiritual test, when they must choose between the god of human need and the God who so loved the world that He sent His Son, not to condemn the world, but to save the world.

And similarly in all the higher reaches of our

lives. The most deadly enemy each of us must face is the suspicion that life in its ultimate result is not spiritual. The next most dangerous enemy is the desire to win quick concrete success. We want to tabulate saved souls in statistical tables; to distil reputations from our sacrifices. But God is greater than man's aspirations. The moral imperative needs a God greater than the policies a sense of duty may lead us to adopt.

I stood once in an observatory and watched a great telescope photographing some star that eye had never seen. The photograph, which the great glass had taken on a little piece of glass the size of an old-fashioned window pane, was of the nebula in Andromeda. I am not an astronomer, but I have been told that if one knew just where to look, and if the atmospheric conditions were favourable, it might be possible for a person to see the nebula of Andromeda, with the naked eye, as a tiny point of light. But when this great glass reached into the mysteries of the universe it brought back a sweep of light, as if one were looking on the very brushmarks of the Almighty as He painted infinite space. But even this was as nothing compared with the hundreds and thousands of little spots of light with which the photograph of awful Andromeda was surrounded. 'What are these tiny spots of light?' I asked. 'These,' the astronomer said, 'are stars the size of our sun, or larger.'

If we are to live in a universe where hundreds and thousands of stars the size of our sun blaze unseen in the space of light no larger than a pin-head, we need a God as big as our universe. Here is the real alternative religion thrusts straight at our souls: Shall we trust such a God or turn to some god of our own manufacture?

If a man will follow the God of Jesus Christ, and seriously make his life assume the attitude toward the world which Jesus assumed Himself, he will share in the splendid faith that, however hard his lot, the great process in which we are involved will not end in vanity and the ashes of moral defeat. And such a man, instead of making out of some utility of life a pantheon of gods to help him justify some lowered ambition or desire, will pray to God the Father, maker of heaven and earth, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

And he will not pray in vain.[1]

[1] Shailer Mathews, in *University of Chicago Sermons*, 55.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

**Christ and the Struggle for Life.**

'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.'—Mt $6^{33}$.

'These things'—that is, food, clothing, and the other necessities of our earthly life, the quest for which, in these later times especially, has resulted in what men have agreed to call 'the struggle for life.' And Christ our Master has something very radical to say about it; something which, if heeded in time, would prevent that struggle in so far as it is unnatural, and which at any time may end it upon the condition of human consent.

But the modern world is not listening to Christ. It does not really believe that He has much to say to it. It has decided that these words of His are unreal, rhetorical, impossible, and that His proposal does not and cannot work in modern conditions. It may have been possible, we are told, in a simpler age, when the world's rush had not begun, and when food and clothing were still in the human category, unexploited by brazen commercialism. But things are different with us. Ours is a commercial and industrial age, complex to the last degree. To drop out is to die or to go under. To save ourselves we are bound, therefore, to do the very things which Christ condemns: we must lay up treasure on earth; we have to serve many masters, and we cannot avoid anxiety.

1. Two things need to be said by way of clearing the ground. Understand, first, that our Lord is not preaching the doctrine of what is called 'other-worldiness,' with which He had no sympathy. See Him in action and behold how careful He was to guard the interests of man's material life. In the presence of hunger He supplied food. To misery He offered practical comfort. In His parable of the last judgment He makes the fate of men turn upon the way in which they have behaved towards the unfortunate, the hungry, and the unclothed. Let none say, then, that He was not interested in the material life of man.

2. Neither is our Lord preaching imprudence, bidding men take life as it comes in a careless and improvident spirit, without reference to the future. His great apostle St. Paul perfectly interpreted His thought when he declared it to be the duty of a Christian man to make provision for the future, and that the man who failed to do so was 'worse than an infidel.'

It is impossible to grasp the meaning of these words of Christ, which are such a stumbling-block

to men, unless we first of all see what He was really aiming at. What is it then that He is setting before us? Not a diminished, but a larger human life. Let these words of His ring in our ears—they are His keywords—'treasure,' 'much more,' 'kingdom.' This is the positive thing He offers us. He wants to set us free from entangling and unnecessary worries, so that we may live a richer life. It is that which with both hands He holds out to us. Deliverance, not diminution! . . . And what is His secret? By what means does He propose to us this true care-free life which can mount to the heights and possess the entire landscape? 'Seek first the kingdom of God,' He says. Bring life under one Divine Unity; bind it by one only loyalty, and the rest will all be 'added.' It is a question of relation. Settle the major thing and the minor things will fall, quite naturally, into place.

3. When we analyse the ultimate motives which impel men to their present way of life we perceive that there are three which dominate all: the *demands for security, unity, and tranquillity*. Men wish to be secure, they wish to be united, they wish to be at peace. It would seem, at first, that this analysis is quite inadequate to the facts as we behold them. Upon the surface men appear to be engaged in no such quest. But get behind the mask, which so easily deceives us, and we will find that the wild rush of life is in reality directed to these three ends. And it is to these three things that Jesus directs us by a way that cannot fail.

*He offers us security.*—Let us frankly say that our first anxiety concerns this very thing. We feel ourselves helpless before the possible surprises of the future. It is the unknown that torments us. One day we shall grow old and feeble and unable to work. We may come to want. Knowing the world as we do, we have little confidence in its compassion. It has a way of leaving even its heroes to starve or to remain in penury. When it has obtained from a man all that he is able to give, it forgets him and passes on to another interest. The first resource against any such contingency obviously lies in accumulating for ourselves sufficient to last us through. It is our first line of defence against the attacks of poverty at the end of our term of life. And in itself this is not only not wrong, it is highly commendable. There are prudent means available; such as insurance of one kind or another whereby a man continues to earn by way of his investment to the end of his life, and so protects himself against poverty. But accumulation holds a deadly peril—yes, a double peril. There is the peril of covetousness. Here acquisition becomes a passion, an obsession, a fever. It consumes a man with false desire, and invariably leads to an obscuring of issues and to the death of all higher qualities of the soul. Once for all Bunyan painted for us, in his man with the muck-rake, the spirit of covetousness. The further peril is that of injustice. Once abandoned to the idea of gain, dishonesty easily secures a footing in a man's life. It is gain anyhow and by any means. The thought of self is uppermost: the community is forgotten save as a means of exploitation. And with this there enters another and subtle form of injustice—that is meanness. Proportionately, the acquisitive man gives far less to good causes than the poor man. The revelation made in wills is proof of that. The folly of all this is set forth by our Lord in His parable of the rich fool farmer. He had all he wanted for the remaining years of his life; he could therefore retire, take his ease; eat, drink, and be merry. And God called him a fool! Why? Because he had made his farm pay by means of his toil? Surely not! But because he had missed the best in life. Inflated with the eternal 'I,' he had thought neither for God nor man. And he could not keep what he had acquired. It was taken from him by the merciless hand of death. He left his 'things' for others to enjoy while he went out into the spirit world a beggared soul, shrivelled up with covetousness.

*He offers us unity and clarity*, for it is this, too, that we are seeking. In a stroke or two our Lord shows us human life divided and darkened, through want of a unifying principle. The eye, made for light, is darkened because of the film which a divided life draws over it, like a curtain. The soul, made for liberty, becomes enslaved in the attempt to serve two masters. The picture is drawn to the life. The distractions and uncertainties which drag us hither and thither are due to lack of unity in our nature and in our loyalties. Bring all life under the rule of God, He says, and both light and harmony will possess your nature.

*He offers us tranquillity*—the third great thing of which we are in quest and to which we believe the rest contribute; for we seek security and unity that we may be at peace. But Jesus finds tranquillity, as He finds security and unity, where man will not seek it, or where they deny its existence, namely, in the love of the Heavenly Father. His final word about the anxieties of life centres here. Security is given to us because God cares for us, and when we positively and practically trust Him, seeking first His Kingdom, He will never let us

down. All, therefore, returns to this: have we a Heavenly Father who cares for us, and has He a Kingdom whose rule and law obeyed guarantee the security and peace which we seek? Our Lord shows us the logic of trust in God. He has already given us the greater things; He cannot withhold the lesser. As a fact, we have to trust Him for our food and clothing—these things for which we contend. For it is *His* soil and sun that supply us with all the material for life. Everything is given by Him. We are not asked to trust One of whom we know nothing, but One who has been lavish with His gifts. The struggle for their distribution is due to this, that the gifts have been severed from the Giver and from the laws of His Kingdom. The gifts of God, used according to the laws of the Kingdom of God, could never fail. Not until society accepts the laws of the Kingdom can complete security and peace come to any individual, since we are members one of another. But we cannot wait until all are evangelized. We must begin as individuals and each one seek the Kingdom first. It is not without reason that the 'Te Deum,' beginning in the plural, ends on the singular note. 'We praise Thee, O God . . . we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord'; 'In Thee, O Lord, have *I* trusted, let me never be confounded.' [1]

[1] F. C. Spurr, *Does God Care?* 26.

# Recent Foreign Theology.

## Varia.

Dr. Hugo Odeberg makes a gallant attempt to defend the view that the Book of Ecclesiastes is a unity.[1] The writer, he holds, was no pessimist; such pessimism as he shows is directed only against life 'under the sun,' *i.e.* against immersion in the things of sublunary existence: *that* life is futile. But there is another life, the life of the man who is able to take his stand against the stream of events and to use the sublunary things instead of being used by them. The book is an implicit plea for the latter life, the case for which it presents negatively, so that, despite appearance, the theme of the book is essentially 'the better life.' Earthly existence is not necessarily futile, within it the higher life may be lived. Odeberg represents Ecclesiastes as putting his case thus: 'There is another way of living than that designated by me as "labour under the sun"; that other way of living has permanent results, יִתְרוֹן, abiding value; to that manner of living I want to direct the attention of thoughtful hearers by picturing vividly and emphasizing strongly the nothingness of the life lived "under the sun."'

One reader, at any rate, the argument, skilfully conducted as it is, has failed to convince. The book, as it stands, presents a predominantly gloomy view of human life: the impression it leaves upon the mind is a melancholy one, and at best the moral to which Odeberg thinks it points is, except for a few incidental verses, only reached through inference. Odeberg himself admits the presence in the book of interpolations and additions, but such an admission is dangerous, if not fatal, to any theory which maintains the unity of the book. Once it is made, the way is open for the view that a fundamentally pessimistic book has been supplemented by interpolations in the interests of orthodoxy. But even those who differ from Odeberg may learn from him, and especially from the brief but suggestive commentary which accompanies the general discussion. It is doubtful, however, whether he has offered a satisfactory solution of the famous crux in $3^{11}$, where A.V. and R.V. render 'he hath set *the world* (R.V. marg. *eternity*) in their heart.' He translates, 'in their hearts he has laid *all* times'; but fatal to this rendering, as to R.V. text and margin, seems to be the spelling עֹלָם; in so late a book as Ecclesiastes—Odeberg puts it about 250 B.C.—one would surely have expected עוֹלָם. A useful translation accompanies the commentary.

The book is written in excellent English, with hardly a touch that suggests the foreigner: 'facticities' (p. 30), 'cathegory' (p. 79), 'antithese' (p. 31), 'epicureical' (p. 87), and 'some Jews could *desist* their old faith' are among the very few errors we have noticed. On p. 99 σπέπτεσθαι and πράττεν should of course be σκέπτεσθαι and πράττειν.

[1] *Qohaelaeth: A Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Almqvist and Wiksells Boktryckerei, Uppsala; kr.2.50).

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The Book of Proverbs, as Professor Gemser [2] remarks, hardly makes attractive reading: even

[2] *De Spreuken van Solomo, Tekst en Uitleg*, door Dr. B. Gemser (J. B. Wolters' Uitgevers-Maatschappij, Groningen, Holland; pp. 213; fl.2.90).