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In the Study.

Virginibus Quærisque.

The Chained Man.

BY THE REVEREND R. E. THOMAS, M.A.,
BARNET.

'O Lord, thou hast loosed my bonds.'—Ps 116¹⁶.

NOT long ago I saw a chained man. No, he was not in a show, or a circus. He was underground, but he was not a convict working in the Siberian mines. He was underground in London, and in a place where many people in London may be found underground every day. He was in a train on the London Underground Railway. But unlike most people on the London Underground Railway, this man was chained. Round his waist he had a chain, a real chain, and a strong chain at that.

As I said, he was not a convict, nor yet was he being taken to prison. On the contrary, he looked a very honest and respectable man. He wore a top silk hat and a tail coat. Nevertheless, he had on that strong chain, and the chain was round his waist.

Now to what was this man chained? He was chained neither to warder, nor to keeper, nor yet to the seat of the railway carriage. The fact is, this man was not chained to anything, but something was chained to him. That something was a black bag. Perhaps the bag was full of money, for he got into the train near the Bank of England. Now you have all heard of bag-snatchers. Well, this man evidently did not mean his bag to be snatched. If any one had tried to snatch his bag he would have had to snatch him also, and as he was a big man that would not have been easy. That man had his bag chained to himself.

Now there are many people who are very like that man. They are chained, or at least something is chained to them, though, unlike the man in the train, their chains are of a kind which cannot be seen. Still, they are chained right enough. Some people have money chained to them, and they are chained to money, not because it is their duty to keep safe other people's money, as it was with the man in the train, but because they are always thinking and worrying about money, either about the money they have got, or about the money they have not got, but wish they had got. So they become slaves to money; their whole lives are in bondage to money.

Then there is a Psalm which says of certain people, 'Pride compasseth them about as a chain.'

Now it is an awful thing to have pride chained on to you in that way; it prevents your doing many things which you ought to do, so that you often hear people say, 'I know I ought to do that, but my pride will not let me.' And in the same way, there are others who have bad habits chained on to them. They will say, 'I wish I didn't do this or that, but I can't break myself of the habit.' And still others seem always to be chained to their own worst selves, so that like Paul of old they have to say, 'The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.' So there are many lives which are fettered and crippled.

But there is One who can break every chain of this kind, and can set us free with a glorious liberty. That One is our Lord Jesus Christ. It is true that the first thing which Jesus seeks to do to every life which would know freedom is to bind something else to that life. That Something Else is nothing less than His own self. But he to whose life Christ is bound is set free from every bond which would hold him to base and unworthy things; he can say, 'O Lord, thou hast loosed my bonds.'

Nearly.

BY THE REVEREND T. W. BEVAN, BRADFORD.

'I press toward the mark.'—Ph 3¹⁴.

I came across a proverb the other day. It was this. 'Nearly is not even half-way.' I wonder if it is true. I thought about it and thought about it until—well, something came into my mind about you and about older people.

I remembered one summer's day when, walking in the fields, I observed a boy, red-cheeked and excited, chasing after a butterfly—a Monarch I think it was. He ran here and ran there in quick pursuit as the butterfly darted and rose in its flight. For almost a quarter of an hour he kept up the chase and, finally, as the butterfly approached the high hawthorns on the field's boundary line, he made a desperate attempt to catch it in the cap which he held high in his hand. He was just too low. Another half-inch and the butterfly would have been caught in the cap as the boy brought down his arm in a sweeping movement. I saw the Monarch, now fluttering and turning, ascend and pass over the hawthorns and pass out of view. Crestfallen and tired, the boy returned to the path which ran by the opposite side of the field. In a few moments I knew he must pass me. As he

came near I shouted cheerily, 'You didn't catch him, then?' 'No,' he replied, 'but I nearly had him.' Nearly! Well, in his case nearly wasn't half-way, was it?

Then again, I saw a man, only a few weeks ago, rushing for his train at a northern railway station. He arrived panting and blowing and mumbling something about the last train to London. The train was just passing out of the station. 'Sorry,' said the porter, offering his sympathy to the breathless man, 'the train has just started out.' 'Ugh!' returned the man disappointedly, 'I have missed it after all.' Now that man nearly caught the train, didn't he? But, you will agree, in his case as well as in the case of the boy who chased the butterfly, nearly was not even half-way.

Of course, boys and girls, you know that *nearly* to win a prize, or *nearly* to pass an examination, means a failure to achieve it.

There was once a Governor of a Roman Province called Festus who, with others, had to judge of the doings of that great missionary, St. Paul; for the Jews had laid complaints against him. Paul, in giving evidence, like all brave men, kept nothing back. He told the whole truth of what he was doing for the Lord Jesus Christ and explained how he had been converted on the Damascus Road. Well, Festus had with him King Agrippa, Bernice, and other important people, who became so interested that, though they were Romans, they almost forgot they were examining a prisoner. And King Agrippa, evidently forgetting the seriousness of the case he had to judge, cried out to Paul, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' Almost! That meant he had been nearly persuaded to become a Christian. Paul, growing bolder, cried out, 'I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.' Now 'nearly' in the case of King Agrippa suggests more than half-way, doesn't it? And yet it wasn't, really. King Agrippa was still less than half-way towards the Christian life.

Of course, it was something attempted when the boy tried to catch the butterfly, and again when the man tried to catch the train. And it was something when King Agrippa was caught up in the enthusiasm of Paul's speech. But it was just nearly—almost. Not one of them achieved the object. They did not even gain half of it. The fact is, children, 'nearly' and 'almost' mean defeat.

So I think the proverb is true. And I am never again going to be content with saying, 'I nearly

succeeded, I almost won.' I am going to try to be like St. Paul. He once said, 'I count myself not yet to have apprehended, but I press on towards the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' There was no 'nearly' for him. It was a case not of 'almost' but 'altogether.' That is what I am going to do, aren't you?

The Christian Year.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

The Helpful Trend of Modern Science towards Religion. III.

BY THE REVEREND P. N. BUSHILL, B.A.,
ORPINGTON.

'Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?'—
Mt 16¹³.

We do not, of course, go to science for an opinion about Jesus Christ: religion is really out of its province. Nor do we need to. Our faith is founded upon the conviction of our own hearts, and we need no support from other persons' opinions. But there are people who feel the difficulties of the modern situation: who doubt, for instance—to mention only one difficulty—whether in a world of constant evolution the 'perfect' in any form can yet have been reached. But is not modern thought much more helpful to a belief in Jesus Christ than is commonly supposed? There may still be barriers to the humble acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the Saviour of men, but such barriers are not erected by scientists and philosophers of the present day. Jesus Christ is seen to satisfy the essential conditions which provide the Ultimate Truth of science and thought and life to-day.

1. *Jesus Christ is the Ultimate Truth of Science.*—Science has discovered that there is a meaning to Nature, a purpose; though science has not, and cannot, give us the name. Science to-day does not only admit, but even contends, that there is a purpose in existence, in the universe. Now a dominant purpose implies a personal purpose: an impersonal purpose is really a contradiction in terms. S. B. John in a practical book, *The Finality of Christ*, to which I desire to acknowledge indebtedness, says, after careful inquiry (p. 84): 'the peculiar concepts of religion can not only live in the present view of Nature, but are its very *raison d'être*' . . . 'To be irreligious is to be fundamentally irrational.'

But what about the religion of Jesus Christ, which is our inquiry to-day? Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? We have been brought up on the slogans, 'struggle for existence,' 'survival

of the fittest,' and these still stand for great truths; but to-day we are beginning to realize that the 'fittest' are not always the 'strongest,' and that co-existent with the struggle for existence there is also a 'struggle for others.' With competition there is also altruism in Nature: and as a matter of scientific fact the Biblical truth so well illustrated in the life of Christ that it is the 'meek' who 'inherit the earth' is being realized as true. Professor Thomson (quoted by S. B. John, p. 86) has said: 'the older view of the competitive struggle had too much red in it, and it is possible to interpret the ideals of ethical progress through love and sociality, co-operation, and sacrifice . . . as the highest expressions of the central evolutionary processes of the natural world.' Professor Whitehead, in *Science and the Modern World*, has said: 'In the history of the world, the prize has not gone to those species which specialized in methods of violence, or even in defensive armour. In fact, Nature began with producing animals encased in hard shells for defence against the ills of life. It also experimented in size. But smaller animals, without external armour, warm-blooded, sensitive, and alert, have cleared these monsters off the earth.' Wolves have gone, dogs are here. It is all in harmony with the teaching of our Lord, 'The meek shall inherit the earth.' Science to-day is substantiating the principles of that teaching.

And science to-day is supporting the New Testament story of the Life of Christ. Sir Oliver Lodge in an address to the Westbourne Park Fellowship said: 'The progress of science is tending towards the strengthening of theology in all its vital aspects. Certain occurrences, of which the Bible tells us, have been doubted. I cite as examples the direct voice at the Baptism, the Presence at the Transfiguration, and Saul's vision on the road to Damascus. All these things science is beginning to show were true happenings.' Of course, we got there by the short cut and safe route of faith, but the slower steps of the scientists are now coming there also. Jesus Christ is the Ultimate Truth of science.

2. *Jesus Christ is the Reality of Philosophy's Ideal.*—Right from the days of Greek philosophy before Christ men were inquiring the 'why' and 'wherefore' of the world: what is the ultimate reality? And they found the answer invariably to be in mind or intelligence. And since mind is personal, the Supreme Reality must be personal. The Beautiful, the Good, the True, as ideals in themselves, are not sufficient: you may have a beautiful face with a very cruel heart, and who is enamoured of that? But in Christ you have the

Beautiful, the Good, and the True all personified. And the world is still more beautiful to one who knows Christ: 'Heaven above is softer blue. . . .'

Then there is the concept of value which philosophy and religion alike stress. There is the high imperative, the ideal, the 'ought' of human life. And everything must be sacrificed in the fulfilment of this 'ought.' Dr. Cairns in his book, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, p. 66, tells the story of a brilliant student who lost his life in saving a youth who, despite warnings, was in danger of drowning: a deliberate case of self-sacrifice. Reason was against it, for the more useful man was drowned; and yet our conscience compels us to admit that the young man did right: he did the only thing he could do. There is a philosophic value in that action. And where do you get that sacrifice illustrated to the full as in the self-expressing, self-giving, self-sacrificing life and death of Jesus Christ?

Yes, despite other theories, other philosophies, Christ's ideal of goodness holds the field to-day: it dominates all our laws, and it inspires all our ethics. John Stuart Mill (S. B. John, p. 94) has said that it would not be easy even for an unbeliever to find a better translation of the rule of virtue than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve his life. Not even the War has discredited the ideal of Jesus Christ: Mr. Bernard Shaw has said that 'the only person who has come out of the war with any intellectual credit is Jesus Christ.' And Professor E. F. Scott has said: 'To-day, as never before, Jesus stands out as the moral leader of humanity. The principles which He laid down have been vindicated through the bitter experiences of the last few years, and men of all opinions are now agreed that the society of the future can be securely built on no other foundation.' Jesus Christ is the Reality, the fulfilment of all that philosophy has been seeking.

3. *Jesus Christ is the Answer to Psychology's Requirements.*—Modern psychology teaches us that all action is the direct or indirect outcome of instincts. We have many instincts, some of them very diverse, very different. Wrong-doing is a misuse of these instincts. Every instinct in itself is good; but it needs the right channel for expression. We have discordant desires pulling different ways: these need co-ordination. It is impossible to kill an instinct: it is difficult and even dangerous to repress an instinct. They need control. Now occasionally in ways other than religious this channel is provided: for instance, in times of national crisis, from patriotic motives, all

selfish and self-indulgent instincts may be converted to one aim and object. Even a strong affection for a person may have the same effect. The psychologist admits that it is very helpful, if not essential, that the person should have help from a power outside of himself. Now where better can the psychologist's requirements be met than in Jesus Christ? Conversion is not only a spiritual experience, but a psychological necessity. All the instincts must be centred round one supreme purpose. E. S. Waterhouse, in *Psychology and Religion*, p. 96, says: 'If a life is spiritually out of proportion, if things have got misplaced, if life has no dominant purpose . . . religious exercises are useless. . . . What is needed is conversion, which means not any particular form of emotional crisis or decision, but a re-centring of life, and a revaluation of all its values.' Only Christ can satisfy our instincts, giving them a right channel through which they may be expressed in action. Emotional instincts can find their satisfaction in the family of the Church; fighting instincts can find their expression in working for the Kingdom of God; and the highest instincts of all can find their true fulfilment in self-sacrifice, in treading the path which our Lord Himself trod to the Cross. What men and women need for right action is not more moral teaching, more good examples, but their whole life centring round the great and beautiful life of Jesus Christ, with all our affection dominated by love to Him: . . . in other words, conversion to Jesus Christ.

And so, can we sum up?—'Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?' Is not Jesus Christ in the world of thought to-day the answer to the riddle of the universe, the answer to the needs of men, the one fact that gives reason and understanding and purpose to this world and to human life? You take a chess problem: a few pieces on the board, a problem to solve; for some time it seems a muddle, you cannot see the purpose of some pieces at all; you try one suggestion and then another, and in some vital way they fail. Then at last it comes: you have it! You have found the *key* to the problem: it all fits in: not one piece is on the board without a purpose: it is all as clear as daylight, and you wonder why you did not think of it before. So is the world. So is life. So are you and I. Wonderful, enigmatic, past understanding, trivial, marvellous! What does it all mean? Then bring in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is all clear! Here is the Power for living, and the Purpose for life. Here is the Ultimate Truth of all science and philosophy. Here is the Key to the riddle of life.

'Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?' We can answer with Peter, feeling that we have with us the weight of all true science and thought: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

The Vision of the Invisible.

'And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.'—2 K 6¹⁷.

An individual may be fighting a battle for truth and righteousness against great odds. The world says he is engaged in a hopeless contest and is bound to be broken. What chance had Luther at the Diet of Worms when he flung down his challenge both to the Church and the world? Most men would have said, 'He will have no chance. His enemies will ride him down and crush him with their iron hoofs.' Yes, but they would have forgotten the most important factor of all—the chariots of fire round about Luther.

If, as we look on the world, it seems to us that evil is mightier than good, let us look again and again and again, until we see the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about the righteous.

1. *The Vision of the Invisible.*—We are inclined to think that Elisha is the central figure in this story. The young man seems to us to be simply a necessary piece of stage machinery. But we have as much to learn from the young man as from the prophet. This must have been a great day in his life. It was for him the beginning of days, the day on which the scales fell from his eyes and he beheld the invisible. Henceforth the world could never appear the same to him.

What is the meaning of this wonderful experience that came to him? 'And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw.' His experience was a supernatural experience.

There is an illumination of the soul which cannot be won by mere travail of intellect, though that also has its place in the spiritual life. There is an insight into the dark riddles of the universe which is gained not by laborious scientific investigation but by the awakening touch of the living Spirit of God. Though we may fail to define satisfactorily revelation and inspiration, they are undeniable facts of human experience. The Divine Spirit touches our eyes and we *see*. The way of prayer is the way of vision. It is not a private bypath, but the King's Highway, open to every pilgrim.

It makes all the difference to our interpretation of life whether we have this vision of the invisible.

It will affect our interpretation of the events of life. In the Book of the Acts we have the story of the martyrdom of Stephen. A Jew of that day, having heard of the tumult, might have said to a spectator, 'What happened?' 'Oh,' he would have said, 'it was rather a squalid scene. A fanatical young Nazarene was brought before the Council. He made a most insolent speech to his judges, and, very naturally, he was cast out of the city and stoned to death.' 'Was that all?' 'Yes, that was all.' But was it all? It was all that the spectator saw; but Stephen saw more. He 'looked up stedfastly to heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.' The whole scene is transfigured by the vision of the invisible. It is no longer squalid, but is radiant with a glory Divine. The victim becomes a conqueror, and his judges are judged.

It will affect our sense of values. Two men stand beneath Niagara for the first time, and as they gaze at the majestic sweep of the waters, A. says to B., 'What are you thinking of?' 'Dollars,' is the answer. 'If only I could harness all this power that is running to waste, and use it to generate electricity which should light cities, move trains, and carry messages from city to city and from land to land, I should be a millionaire.' 'What are you thinking of?' says B. to A. 'God,' is the answer in a hushed voice. A solemn awe has descended upon his soul, his eyes have pierced the veil, and his ears catch the messages of Him whose voice is as the sound of many waters. And the one goes away to light his little bulbs in the habitations of men, and to transmit from town to town the words of a day or of a year. But the other goes forth to kindle in men's hearts the light of faith, and to pass from mouth to mouth the words by which men live.

2. *The Courage begotten by the Vision of the Invisible.*—We are surrounded by innumerable enemies who threaten our peace of mind, the integrity of our character, the happiness of our homes, and the progress of the race. We know the names of these foes—temptation, passion, adversity, disease, sorrow, bereavement, death. At any moment one or more of them may swoop down upon us and shatter the frail edifice of our peace or happiness. Is it any wonder that there is fear in our hearts? None at all. Is it possible that the fear may be cast out so that we can face life with a buoyant, hopeful courage? Yes, that is what happens when we see the heavens opened

and behold the invisible. Shut a prisoner up in a dark cell into which there penetrates no ray of light, and he will give way to despair. But let there be but a narrow slit in the wall through which a sunbeam may enter his cell by day and through which he can see even a single star by night, and he will preserve his sanity and courage and hope against the day of his deliverance. And mid the darkness of the world, we can only keep our courage and hope and, in the truest sense, our sanity in so far as we see the light and radiance of the other world.

You will remember that the Psalmist says, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.' He adds the highly significant words, 'There were they in great fear where no fear was.'

It is written of Moses that 'he endured as seeing him who is invisible,' or, as Dr. Moffatt translates it, 'Like one who saw the King invisible, he never flinched.' And if we will read the story of those who have led humanity on with dauntless courage and unwavering faith and quenchless hope, we shall find that they all merit the same epitaph—'They saw the King invisible, and never flinched.' Walking in the light of the vision they cried to their comrades, 'Fear not,' and themselves were unafraid.

3. *The Invincibility of those who dwell in the Vision of the Invisible.*—'They that be with us are more than they that be with them.' Because the children of the unseen can say this, however hard pressed they may be, they are always invincible.

It has been said that Providence is always on the side of the big battalions. The saying is true, but not in the sense in which it was spoken. The big battalions are invisible.

What are these unseen forces? What are the invisible battalions that fight for the man who has gained his franchise in the unseen world? They are the primal forces of the universe—love and righteousness, and truth, unnumbered companies of angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, Jesus the Mediator of a new Covenant, and the mighty all-conquering Spirit of the living God. These are the invisible allies of the children of the Spirit. Who can withstand them? They are invincible, and we through them are more than conquerors.

These days are full of difficulty and perplexity for those who love righteousness and hate iniquity. The forces of righteousness are hard pressed, our individual faith is sorely tried, and we are tempted to give way to panic and to fear. Let us pray that

our eyes may be opened that we may see the invisible battalions. Let us send out a cry for reinforcements, and we shall find that unseen horse-men are fighting by our side, and that chariots of fire encircle us.¹

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Faith in God.

'God, who . . . hath . . . spoken.'—He 1¹.²

'God, who hath spoken'—so, positively and grandly, a Biblical writer begins. Would that today we could put the emphasis where he put it—not on *talking* about God, but on *hearing* God's own speech! The Psalmist called a man a fool who said in his heart, 'There is no God.' But some people thought St. Paul was a fool because he said there *was* a God, and became eloquent in his belief. This introduces us to an aspect of our subject which we had better recognize frankly, and at the outset. The reality of God can never be made plain-sailing. Belief may therefore have to consent to carry within it to the end the quality of oddity. From certain points of view the saints have been absurd people—yet therein lay their creative consequence for history.

We have to face this, then, that there is no simple and easy way out in the high realm of religion. We might remember this, to our profit, when we are in the library pursuing the 'proofs' of God's existence, or wondering what next thing science has to say upon God as it leans back from its uncertain commerce with the atom or electron. It would seem as if religious experience were a kind of collision, sometimes a violent collision. We know God, so to speak, only when God pleases to hit us! This is what the prophets stammer out at us in their great hours. And when we are in conference and debate over God we must consider this unique character of the field we are in.

1. *Faith is so difficult*, in certain moods which visit us, that its continuity in the lives of people should suggest to us that some overwhelming spiritual forces must have entered into their holding of it. And it is the case that this faith has insisted on continuing; it has survival doggedness. There is an interesting criterion applied by New Testament scholars to the study of the original text. They tell us that where there are several manuscript readings of the same Greek text, it is a fairly safe rule that the difficult reading is the correct, the original one. It is possible that a principle of that kind is applicable to more than the study of words,

¹ H. M. Hughes, *Faith and Progress*, 67.

it may be a clue in dealing with the philosophies of life. He would be a poor creature in any case who dealt impatiently with religion because it intensified at first all the problems for him. Even in such a trim and neat field as that of mathematics simple formulæ are not so fashionable as once they were. Perhaps we should go right out for the affirmation that *only* a difficult conception of the meaning of the world is likely to do justice to its manifold of facts and events. Plainly the earth is flat, and is at rest. But not so after all. The actuality is a round earth whirling through space! Faith is the difficult reading, but that may be part of the case and strength of faith.

2. A difficult faith—and yet *how thrilling this faith is!* It is not the first thing, or the early thing, any of us would conceive, that at the root and heart of things there is a Force, a Purpose, a life that acts and desires as Jesus Christ acted and desired. Yet in the high regions of life truth has not seldom an astonishing, a dramatic quality. It is just here that some recent 'findings' of thought appear to us somewhat shallow. We are told that God is simply the symbol of all that we are striving after in our best moments, or that God is the next thing that is to be because we are striving. With all due respect to the desire of such thinking to enhance the significance of the historical order and of personality, is it not in the end prosaic, insipid? The world of faith is also a world where man has a great place, but not the first place. There are occasions, some one has said, when a shudder is a true argument. So also we might say to be thrilled is evidence.

3. Nor is this difficult and thrilling faith without *its intellectual reasonableness*. Here, for example, is the order of Nature—a strange order it may seem to us, and yet it is steeped in rationality; it suggests mind, and the same mind throughout. We say that Nature is hard upon life—yet how queer and gracious that order can be. It has songs in it, it has giving and sharing, it reaches by way of one creature's burden to the larger life for many. We tend to think of Nature in terms of its wild things, but we must take in its 'live, willed things' also, and judge the whole, so far as we may, in the line of its dominant suggestiveness. And in this regard it may be that a bird's nest is more significant for the argument than its size would at first sight indicate. Law and order and intelligent purpose are here. All these, yes, and even more. For there are linkages, fitnesses, mutualities which suggest a peculiar richness in the ground and source of Nature and life. What is the meaning of this

'plus' and 'extra'? Can it be that here, again, the difficult reading is the significant one? Faith with its creed of a Redeemer God can go forth to Nature and find marks of His redemptive activity there. Faith does justice to the greatest number of Nature's facts and that on a higher level.

And, again, there is history in its vast tracts and incidents. It is surely strange that, despite all the horrid things done to and by men, despite all our treacheries and rebellions, the order of life has continued, has been maintained. What is this behind the human story, which does not break it forthwith when it spoils itself, which lingers ere it comes to judge, which seems reluctant to let a nation fall even when it is very evil, and which often works a resurrection? Does it not look as if the quality of patience, of hope, of long-suffering were here in operation? And if the Power behind existence is as faith declares that Power to be, would not the activity of that Power have as one of its forms just that which the long course of our history suggests and incarnates? To the Force that is responsible for our being in life at all, human life must have a value. Indeed, our 'values' are derivative from that original one.

The supreme fact of Nature and of history is moral personality. Faith in God is necessary to interpret the rise and ministry in the world of great moral spirits. If religion is an illusion, the illusion has afflicted most severely those who by all counts were least likely to be so affected. The great personalities of history have been strong in the sense of dependence; always in their hearts an awareness of a Reality, a Life Source whence their strength came, whence came to them 'in moments of clear weather' intimations, disclosures, encouragements. Is it not more likely that we poor critics of these great souls are suffering from illusion in criticism than that they suffered from illusion when they spoke of God, the Living One, accessible to men?

4. For us in the end, as we discuss the grounds of religious faith, discerning paradox in religion and paradox in life, we shall find the issue narrowing down, or rather culminating in the question how we are to classify and estimate Jesus Christ. Beyond all question supremacy belonged to Him. We find nothing in the story of the Gospels to suggest that while we may consent to His ethical authority, His theological authority is not similarly constraining. The fact would seem to be that it was of God Christ made men sure before He made them wise and quick in duty. This is how He has continued to tell in history. Here still is the crucial stance for

our minds, and here the issue is to be decided not in terms of logic alone, but in terms of the insights and loyalties of our total personality.

Thou hast been faithful to my highest need

Yet most I thank Thee, not for any deed,
But for the sense Thy living self doth breed
That Fatherhood is at the world's great core.¹

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

From Magic to Religion: David sends back the Ark and leaves the issue with God.

By THE REVEREND JOHN LENDRUM, D.D., ELGIN.

'And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city. And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation: But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.'—2 S 15^{24, 26}.

As the test of courage is danger, so that of faith is adversity; and one of the marks of greatness in David, King of Israel, is that in the hour of crisis he always responded most nobly. His favourite son, the Absalom he loved and spoiled, had conspired against him, and, proclaiming himself king, had won so much favour and gathered so large a following that David felt his position in Jerusalem to be insecure and sought safety in flight, hoping also thereby to avoid fighting and bloodshed. He left the City with his ministers and officers of state, and, halting at the Far House—the last house on the eastern face of the ridge of Zion—he allowed his bodyguard and such other armed men as held to him to pass on before him, the route lying across the brook Kidron, up the face of the Mount of Olives, towards the Jordan and the wilderness.

For a king who had many a time led his army to victory, extended and consolidated his kingdom, and, to all seeming, firmly established his throne, it must have been a bitter and heart-breaking experience to have to flee from his capital because of the impatient ambition and heartless rebellion of a beloved son. All the people, we read, 'wept with a loud voice,' as the fugitives passed out, and as David and his men climbed Mount Olivet, they were 'weeping as they went up,' with covered heads and barefoot. It was a sore hour for David

¹ J. Macleod, in *A Faith for To-day*, 17.

—this hour of hurried and ignominious flight. How did he meet it ?

With him at the halting-place above the Kidron ravine, among the other officers of his court, were the two chief priests, Zadok and Abiathar ; and they had with them the Ark of God. That the Ark should accompany the king and his troops when they left the City had been taken by its custodians as a matter of course ; and there they were, according to custom and without orders, bearing the Ark and halting and setting it down when the king halted. For to Israel in those days the Ark was their most sacred and precious possession ; and as its presence was believed to be the presence of God Himself and the pledge of victory, it used in time of war to be carried out upon the field of battle. Once indeed, on that dark day in the time of Eli, the Ark had not merely failed to bring victory but had been captured by the Philistines. And it had been kept by them for a while. But David at length had found it and brought it to Jerusalem with much ceremony and great rejoicing, he himself dancing before it in his joy. The Ark, then, was a thing peculiarly dear to David, and to have it with him in the day of adversity and peril would have been a comfort to him and also, as he with others doubtless believed, a succour and a defence. Its presence, too, would have steadied and inspired his followers. Yet, to their surprise and ours, David ordered the priests to take it back, ' Carry back the ark of God into the city.'

Why did he do this ? It was not that he feared for the Ark, lest again it should be taken, sending it back so as to be safe within the walls of Jerusalem ; he was not marching towards the land of the Philistines or against any foreign foe. It was not for the Ark he was afraid ; it was for Absalom. Selfish and disloyal as Absalom had shown himself, David loved him still, thinking of him as foolish rather than bad ; and, just as at a later point when fighting was inevitable, he charged his captains to deal gently for his sake with the young man, so at the beginning of the trouble he shrank from the thought of taking up arms against his son, lest in the fighting he might get wounded or even killed, and shrank above all from what the taking of the Ark with him would have meant—an invoking and even a constraining of the Divine presence and power to work for himself and against his son. To take the Ark with him was, as it were, to pray for Absalom's defeat, and even to make it certain—his defeat, and perhaps even his death. David could not do it ; he would not do it. Even in what must have been one of the bitterest hours

in his experience, when throne and kingdom and life were in grave peril, and he might well have grasped at any and every chance of succour, David was ready to forgo the protection the Ark of God's presence would have brought to himself rather than have it work and tell against his son. With splendid generosity, with noble unselfishness, he ordered the Ark to be carried back into the city.

And by so doing he did far more than he knew. For, taken back that day, the Ark never again left Jerusalem. From that day the Ark had rest. Never again was it carried forth to war. By that brief order of his, ' Carry back the ark of God into the city,' he broke through a custom and struck the first blow at a superstition.

In a critical hour, when he was in dire need, David sent back the Ark. He refused to use the Ark—that is, to bring in the presence and power of God—because to use it thus for himself was to use it, and to set the Divine power a-working, against his son. To send back the Ark was, he felt, the right, the unselfish thing to do. And even as he did it, light broke upon him, and he had sight of a great spiritual principle, a principle which leads away from magic which seeks to coerce God, towards true and pure religion which never forgets to worship and adore. To use the Ark as men aforesaid had used it was to make use of God ; it was to compel Him to do the will of man. And that, in a flash of spiritual insight, David saw, could never be right.

It was not humble, it was not reverent. It was mortal, sinful man daring and presuming to set himself above God, trying to make God a servant and a tool. No, said David to himself and to Zadok, he would not dictate to God, would not try to impose his will upon God ; he would leave God Himself to decide what the issue was to be. If it pleased God to restore him to his throne and city, so that he should look on the Ark once more and God's dwelling-place, that would be well—very well. But, on the other hand, were it God's will that he should be a wanderer and Absalom reign in his stead, that also would be well. It was not for him to force the hand of God ; he would leave himself entirely in His hands. ' Behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.'

Whatever his faults may have been, David had the root of the matter in him. He could sin, but also he could repent. He had the fear of God in him, the spirit of reverence and a great humility. His religion had in it the essential element of

adoration. Hence, even in the day of adversity, he does not tell God what He has to do, does not plead his own deserts, does not clamour for his own way. Instead of seeking to impose his will on God, he is ready to wait until God shows what His will is. And thereby David teaches us how to pray. In asking what we know to be in accordance with God's will—growth in goodness, for instance, or the spread of the gospel—we may ask it boldly, and the intensity and importunity of our prayer will tell for and hasten its fulfilment. But when an issue still hangs in the balance—the recovery or life of a friend, the success or failure of an enterprise—while we cannot but pray for what our hearts desire, we may not demand it; we may not forget, we should humbly face the possibility, that the other thing may prove to be what God wills. In the presence of God we who are but men, ignorant, foolish, and sinful, may never cease to be reverent and humble, bending our heads in worship, submitting ourselves to His will, leaving all with Him.

Strangely enough, not far from the place where David, sending back the Ark, left himself in the hands of God, there was in later days the Garden of Gethsemane, where our Lord, in a far darker hour, yet with even more perfect faith, prayed the prayer which must ever be our supreme pattern and exemplar:

'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.'

'O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.'

That the cup might pass from Him, that He might be spared the drinking of it—such was His desire, natural and human. But He did not demand it, clamour for it, press for it. He left Himself wholly in the hands of God. If He had to drink the bitter cup, He would drink it, not resigning Himself to it as to an evil fate, but accepting it as His Father's will, wise and good. And it was there in the Garden, before Calvary, and in the secret place of the spirit, that the real sacrifice was made—the sacrifice of the will. There the Son of David, the Son of God, 'offered Himself without spot to God.'

SEPTUAGESIMA.

An Examination of Christ's Generation.

'He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he

power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.'—Jn 1¹¹. 12.

What did Christ's generation think of Him? Many of us are inclined to argue that it does not matter at this time of day what His generation thought of Jesus: for they have been convicted, by all other generations, of the world's greatest historic misjudgment. They saw Him, but did not see His majesty. They heard His voice, but missed His eternal message. They actually had this wonderful Lord in their midst, and they nailed Him to a cross!

At first sight, it may seem needless or worthless to ask what Christ's age thought of Him. No doubt this is true so far as any justice to Jesus Himself is concerned: for the world has finally given Him its adoration. But the inquiry may be necessary in justice not so much to Him as to His maligned generation.

1. It is true to say—that lonely Cross is the final proof—that Jesus was rejected by His own generation. It is a pity, however, that those who quote this judgment as a general condemnation of Christ's generation do not stay to finish the quotation. For the Evangelist purposely added another clause. 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.' It is a joy to know that countless numbers did receive Him, and believed on His name. Indeed, it is by their passion, sacrifice, and loyalty that the world and the Church are what they are to-day. With the exception of that last week in Jerusalem, Christ's work was pursued with wonderful friendliness and receptiveness. What happiness He had, what attentive crowds, what loyal friendships, what adoring followers! We think so much of the black enmity of the priests of Jerusalem, who hated Him because He seemed to assail their religious system and invade their privileges, that we forget the countless homes throughout the land where He was welcomed, and the serenities of love that made Him glad.

Further, let us remember that all the workers and eager servants who afterwards turned the world upside down were 'his own.' We forget that He founded a bigger 'school' of workers in His lifetime than any other teacher in the world. It is so easy to overlook the fact that during the whole Galilee mission, which comprised the greater part of His earthly ministry, there were bands of approved followers, seventy at one time, preaching His message and doing His work of grace.

Still further, 'his own' were the great means for that astounding propagation of the gospel all over

the known world that is still our modern amazement. In one century these people did more, under greater difficulties, than all the other centuries have done together. And this is the great fact—that *wherever 'his own' went, they went first to 'his own.'* We forget this in the light of later hostility and persecution. What a welcome they received among the scattered Jews of the world! We know that in certain cities St. Paul was opposed and persecuted by the Jews—but again only by the ruling class. There can be no possible doubt that from the Jewish people came the first, the most passionate, and the finest Christians! 'He came unto his own, *and his own received him gladly.*'

It was the ruling class—the Priests, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees—who plotted Christ's death and procured His crucifixion. Some of the Jerusalem mob (they could not be numerous in that narrow street outside the Prætorium; and many even of these were strangers from all quarters at the Passover), called aloud in prejudice for Christ's death, primed by the priests in their midst. But to say that the *people of Jerusalem* put Jesus to death is quite untrue. It may be admitted, perhaps, that a section of the priests, as God's official representatives, was, or should have been, in a special sense, 'his own.' In that sense, and only in that sense, 'he came unto his own, and his own received him not.'

2. The common people of His own day passed some wonderful judgments on Him, which have never been bettered in any age. In the first place, we are pointedly told that they were astonished at His *authority*.

His own generation saw clearly that He did not need to grope His way to moral truth, waveringly and fumblingly, as their own Scribes did. He spoke about God and God's will as a personal revelation: *He knew God*. To them, His message was like light: we never need to prove light, we know it. It was like power: we cannot define power, we feel it. It was like truth: there is something instinctive in us that rises up and greets truth as self-evident.

3. Christ's generation, in its puzzled way, recorded a second judgment equally honourable to itself and Jesus. We read that they discerned one quality of our Lord and His work which they and we, for lack of a better term, might call His *uniqueness or originality*.

St. Mark tells us in his opening chapter that when the gathered crowds heard Jesus speak of His Kingdom and of God, they cried out in amazement, 'What new doctrine is this?' The emphasis

in that remark is quite obviously on the word *new*. Again, in chap. 6 the same Evangelist notes that the people exclaimed, 'From whence hath this man these things? And what wisdom is this that is given unto him?' St. John remarks that the priests and Pharisees, the custodians of God's past messages, were dumbfounded at His words, and asked with amazement, 'Whence hath this man letters, having never learned?' This does not mean that they were astounded merely at His cleverness or His ability, or even at His inconvenient knowledge of the Bible. That, of course, is implied; for they wondered how He, who had never been at the recognized 'schools,' could possess this broad and exact knowledge of Scripture. But it implies also sheer amazement at His *interpretation* and *insight*, and also at the daring with which on occasion He actually supplemented the Old Testament, or even set it aside.

We meet critics in our own time who exult in showing just how much of Christ's teaching can be paralleled from other sources—something that Hosea or Plato or Seneca has said. They fail to see that, even if we could do this, it would not affect Christ's originality. It would, indeed, be a remarkable thing if we could not gather from other sources many parallels of things Jesus has said; for God has given all mankind the religious instinct and inspiration, and we have been dimly groping after moral and spiritual truth all through the centuries. In any case, Jesus did not profess to bring in something that was not there before, but only to perfect what we have been groping after since man was man. Even if one could parallel every saying of Jesus from other sources, would that affect His originality? We have lately discovered that Daniel Defoe, in writing *Robinson Crusoe*, used an obscure Dutch story which was written round the same theme and situation. But that does not affect any sensible person's notion of Defoe's originality; for he took what was dead and gave it life. In its motives and climax, *Macbeth* is taken from an old uninspired chronicle. Do we consider Shakespeare any less original because he gathered his dramatic material from earlier sources?

Even if it were true, which it is not, that one could parallel Christ's teaching from other sources, yet the judgment of His own generation would stand, that He was a new original source of truth from God. They saw what some of us fail to see—that His uniqueness lay not only in what He said, but in what He was! His life in all its moral perfection and in its absolute dependence on God was His greatest originality.

4. Our records have preserved another appreciation of Jesus by the men and women of His own day that should be observed by us with particular delight. St. Luke makes the following comment on the popular impression of Christ's ministry: 'And all bare him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth.' That phrase 'words of grace' does not mean only gracious, kindly words, contrasting, perhaps, with the harshness and dictatorial bluntness of the Scribes and Pharisees. That is suggested, no doubt. But far deeper than that, the people felt the essential *message of redeeming grace* that lay at the back of His words. What they noted was a question not only of the manner or 'manners' of the messenger, but of the content of His message. The old hard legalistic notions of God were wholly absent from His preaching. He spoke of God, first and last, as Father, as a God of love, mercy, tenderness, and pardon. It was not that He emphasized the laws of God's righteousness less than the Pharisees did. Indeed, He spoke of the justice and even the anger of a righteous God more than any legalist ever had done. But beyond this, about this, and mellowing this, was His message of the welcoming, forgiving, redeeming heart of God

the Father. That God could so immediately and so fully forgive a repentant sinner, as was shown in the Parable of the Father and the Prodigal Son, was a doctrine of grace that must have moved His age with a joyous astonishment we can never understand. And the puzzlement of the Elder Brother in the story is only a proof that the official legalism of the day could not grasp the full grace of the message.

None the less, His own age noted and hailed the grace of His message as 'good news.' The record says that the common people heard Him gladly. Not only were they pleased when He so brilliantly refuted the Pharisees and turned aside all their dialectic obstructions, but they took the big message of God's love to their own hearts. That people such as Matthew, the outcast publican, should be among His chosen Twelve, and that a man like Zacchæus or a woman like the Magdalene were among His ordinary friends, is sufficient proof that the sinners heard Him gladly and responded to His message of grace. There can be no doubt at all that the multitudes of His age received Him, welcomed Him, and followed Him. He came unto His own, *and His own received Him with passionate adoration.*¹

¹ J. Black, *An Apology for Rogues*, 159.

Man's Origin and Fall.

BY THE REVEREND J. H. MORRISON, M.A., ABERDEEN.

DR. EMIL BRUNNER declares that the doctrine of the Fall is of the first importance. For sin is not just a bias of the will, but an integral element in human nature as it now exists. Man *is* a sinner, he is affected by sin in the kernel of his personality. But Brunner, as is well known, is at war with the dominant thought of the age. Opposed to him are many Christian teachers who, under the influence of a doctrine of evolution, ignore or minimize or expressly repudiate the idea of a fall of man. Here is a vital issue. Is man a fallen being, or is he a heroic aspiring creature with the morning sun striking on his uplifted brow? Were they mistaken who spoke of him as strayed and lost and sinful, and must we now crown him with the proud title of *Homo Sapiens*? Should we hail his total achievement with a rousing 'Bravo!' and cheer him on his upward way, or should we preach the

gospel to him? In short, is he needing to be redeemed from his fallen state by the grace of God, or is he capable, given time, of being his own saviour?

The raising of this vital issue is due to the complete ascendancy which the doctrine of evolution has gained over the thought of our time. It has not only affected every department of knowledge, including ethics and religion, but it has brought about a new mental orientation which seems to render certain ways of thinking impossible and obsolete. It may not be inappropriate if we attempt some brief inquiry into the ascertained and established facts as distinct from theoretic speculations, and endeavour to find out how far these facts entitle us to go, what conclusions may legitimately be drawn from them, and what bearing they have on the Christian doctrine of man.