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seemed directly to apply to him, and to be too pertinent to be mere coincidences, or indeed other than supernaturally inspired. Further, he found that when he yielded to the movement, he attained a peace hitherto unknown. He was also impressed by the definitely good effects produced upon the lives of other people. He decided that the French Prophets were what they declared themselves, and he prophesied with them, and for a time suffered for his convictions in an Edinburgh prison. Some of his own prophetic utterances were amongst those published; but they do little beyond convincing us of his knowledge of the letter of the Bible.

The Prophets were heard of in other parts of Scotland. There is mention of them at Cupar, in Fife; and, when Calamy visited Aberdeen, he and his friends were suspected of belonging to this movement, and were at first very coldly received. Some knowledge of what was going on was spread by the strongly hostile books of Spinckes and others, but in Scotland especially by what was written against 'the loathesome and dangerous gangrene of delusion among the pretendly inspired Cevenois,' the work of James Hog of Carnock, one of the foremost orthodox theologians of the day.

The movement had all the usual characteristics of eccentric religious enthusiasms — a strange credulity and exalted self-assurance, an attitude ranging from pity to contempt for those outside, a feeling of superiority towards the organized Church, a lack of interest in ethics, a disdain of dogma and form, an arbitrary method of Scripture exegesis, and a general want of a sense of proportion. At the same time there was the genuine mystical feeling, an enforcing of the importance of inward and personal relationship of the soul to God.

One is struck by the common origin and common features of these movements, and by the way in which they combine the helpful and the harmful. It is easy to mock at them. Yet they appealed to souls in need. One realizes how difficult it often is to make up one's mind whether one does more good or more evil in ignoring, in opposing, or in supporting them. One certainly feels the mysteriousness of the human soul, and the ignorance of our best psychology.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Something with a Sting in it.

By the Reverend T. Crouther Gordon, D.F.C., B.D., Clackmannan.

'Nettles had covered the face thereof.'—Pr 24[31].

Some people make soup out of it. Other people can make paper out of it. And all boys hate to touch it. What is it? Our old enemy the nettle. I often wonder why God made the nettle at all, because it stings everybody that comes near it. Have you ever looked at the sting through a microscope? Well, if you do, you will see that it has a sharp point, which pierces underneath the skin, and from this point a tube leads back to a bulb of acrid fluid. Now, when that fluid runs into your flesh it makes you jump. This is how the damage is done. There is not a boy worth his salt who has not stumbled through some old dump or dust heap, only to be caught among the nettles. And yet very few boys or girls know anything about this very queer plant.

One of the strange things about the nettle, for instance, is that there are two kinds, the gentleman kind and the lady kind, but these two kinds never mix. They have no dealings with each other. They never, so to say, pass the time of day. They never smile and say, 'Good morning.' And I think it is very queer that these plants that never mix, but keep all to themselves, have got such a nasty sting. But, if you think of it, this is quite usual. Think of it. An old bachelor, who lives by himself and never mixes with ladies or other people, isn't he a nasty old fellow with a sting? Yes, very often. You remember old Scrooge, who lived by himself, who said, 'Every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding.' The old rascal! Do you feel the sting there? And boys and girls who won't mix in the playground are just the same. They say nasty things with a sting. Very often if you are the only one in the family, you grow selfish, and have no time for other little pals. You won't mix, And then you say stinging words. I know of little girls who won't play with others because of a patch or a darn in the stocking. They won't mix. And this is what stings worse than a nettle. Be like Jesus, who mixed with rich and poor.

Now here's another queer fact about the nettle. It does not sting a rabbit or a bird. It stings only

the hand of man. But the nettle grows only where man has thrown his rubbish or waste. In an old garden where a man has been too lazy to work the nettle springs up and stings. Among the ruins of old houses that man has spoiled or allowed to rot the nettle grows and stings. Out of all the waste there comes a sting. And you will find too that out of all the waste of your life there comes a sting. You see a fellow getting a good position that you should have got, but you wasted your time, and the sting comes out of that waste. Conscience comes and stings. Try to live your life that you may have no stinging regrets. Work, and work hard. Live straight. Let there be no waste places about your life, and there will be no sting.

But the best thing about the nettle is this. It stings only in self-defence. You know how a wasp will sting you, without you meaning to hurt it. But it is only when boys go trampling where they should not, that the nettle stings their bare knees. And this is a good rule for boys and girls. I sometimes see cheeky little chaps who are always wanting a fight. They kick and trip and bully even the quietest fellow in the street. Do not you be like that. Have a bit of a sting in you, of course, but never sting unless in self-defence. You will find that there is a way of getting the bully's conscience to sting him, and this is the best way to do.

A team of Christian boys in China played a team of boys, not Christian, at football. When the game ended, the little pagan fellows demanded to play two hours longer, but the referee could only allow half an hour. The Christians won, but the other team refused to cheer and said stinging things. Then the captain of the Christians shouted, 'Come on, boys, three cheers for the other team.' Then they asked them to have a wash-up and a good tea. When the beaten team was going, their captain said, 'Well, if this is the Christian way to play the game, we would like to be Christians.' And this is the best way to sting.

Give Alms of such Things as ye have.

By the Reverend R. W. Stewart, B.D., B.Sc., Aberdeen.

'Give alms of such things as ye have.'—Lk 11[41].

As I was walking along a road in Bayswater in London, called Porchester Gardens, last July, I saw a poor blind man sitting on the pavement with his back against the wall. Beside him was a little Cairn terrier dog, and beside the dog there was a tray on which were arranged a row of little biscuits, each of them about the size of a big button, and beside the tray there was a plate into which he hoped kind people passing by would put a penny or two—for the blind man was begging.

But he did not keep all he got to himself, for this was the plan he had made. Whenever any one dropped a penny into the plate the terrier got a biscuit. Thus he shared his profit with his dog. The dog was not greedy, he knew just to take one biscuit. I think quite a number of people who might not have given a penny to an ordinary blind man liked to give something to this one who always let his dog get a biscuit when he got a penny. It seemed rather funny, and I hope it was out of kindness that he did it. Then I thought it had a lesson in it for all of us. Do we always share the things we get—give alms, that is, go shares, give a present to some person who hasn't any, 'of such things as ye have'? Notice this—'of such things as ye have.' It is not much use telling you girls or boys to give money, for I don't suppose you have much yourselves. But what things do you have? When you get something, a lot of something, do you share it round?

I know a man who likes fishing. Sometimes he fishes a long time without catching anything. One day he caught a very big salmon. What do you think he did with it? He cut some slices off it and sent them to several of his friends. And I knew a lady once who got a present of a very large box of tea, enough to do her for more than a year. But she did not keep it all. She made up some of it into a number of parcels, and sent them as presents to some people who hadn't much of their own.

Here we are in church, enjoying our beautiful church, decorated every Sunday with flowers. Some people who would like to come are ill and can't. What do we do? Every Sunday we send the flowers to some one who hasn't been at church, to cheer them by their beauty. It is a little way of giving alms of such things as we have.

Some people when they get a lot of money put it in the bank to save it up for their old age. Quite a good plan. But then I know people who first of all, before they put it away, give some to help those who have not enough. Jesus Christ says words in praise of the generous person. If you would grow up generous and kind, you must begin when you are little. What is the first thing children get? Perhaps bags of sweets. How we like to see a child offering a sweet out of its own bag to a brother or sister. It is all it has to give, and it is learning to be generous. When one is older, perhaps one may get a new bicycle. You can let your

brother or chum have a turn. A great poet once saw a poor old hungry beggar-man on a snowy, winter day break off a bit of a crust he was eating and throw it to some hungry sparrows; and he made this song about it:

The song of beggars when they throw
The crust of pity all men owe
To hungry sparrows in the snow,
Old beggars hungry too.

Remember the poor man who gave his little dog a biscuit whenever he got a penny; and try to be kind. 'Give alms of such things as ye have.'

The Christian Year.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Promise of Power.

'Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' —Mt $18^{19.\ 20}$.

These verses are among the most familiar in the Gospels. The promise contained in them has been cherished by the Christian community from the earliest times. The more that Christian men and women have found themselves a weak, insignificant band face to face with a hostile world, the more they have felt that when they came together in the name of their Master, His presence and His power were with them. They taught that all their coming together should be in the name of Christ, and should so be able to claim the presence and the power of God behind their requests. We repeat often the familiar adaptation of these verses in the prayer of St. Chrysostom: 'Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee: and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name, thou wilt grant their requests . . .'

But the promise and its explanation have suffered often a fate common to familiar things, and perhaps especially common to the familiar things of religion. They have been cited so often that their meaning has been unnoticed and forgotten. Look at the subtle change which has already come over the promise in this beautiful prayer. Jesus tells His disciples that if any two of them agree in anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them of His Father which is in heaven, and adds as an explanation, but also as a limiting condition of that astounding promise, that when two or three of them are gathered together in His name, He will be in the midst of them. We now say, 'Almighty God . . . who dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name, thou wilt grant their requests.' We have put the emphasis on the power and might, and have come almost to suggest that if we come together in the name of power, we shall have the power of God behind us, as if some easy formula or rite or word would give us what we want without deserving or working for it. That is something we do not really believe, and we would not dare to act as if we did believe it; and so we add a condition of our own, a condition entirely unattached to Christ's promise, 'as may be most expedient for us.'

Let us ask ourselves what the promise contained in these verses really does mean, consider whether it is a promise we are prepared to take advantage of, and then ask whether we do believe and have reason to believe that it will be fulfilled.

The best commentary on these verses is given in the story of the request of the sons of Zebedee, described in the tenth chapter of St. Mark's Gospel. The sons of Zebedee come to Jesus asking that He shall do for them 'whatsoever they shall desire.' It reads as though they had heard the promise of our text and had now come to put it to the test. There were two of them, and they had agreed on what they were going to ask. Jesus asks them what it is they want, and they reply, 'to sit, one on thy right hand and the other on thy left hand in thy glory.' Jesus asks them if they are prepared 'to drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with,' as though that were the condition or price of the glory and reward for which they were asking. When they say they are prepared, they are told that they can share Jesus' cup and baptism, they may pay the price, but assurance that they will get the glory is not a thing which Jesus can grant them.

It looks as though the promise had been tested and had failed. But Jesus explains how entirely they had misunderstood His spirit and what He meant by 'in my name.' If they had been together in His name, they would have understood that 'whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all,' and they would never have thought of asking for what they did.

The second of the verses of our text is a statement of what we must with our whole heart desire if it is as Christ's disciples that we agree together. For if we are His disciples, surely what we most must ask and want is His presence among us. Christ's promise is that if we want that, we shall be given

it, that with His presence we shall have His power—a power based on the same conditions and of the same nature as was His.

If we are inclined to think in a disillusioned way of the myriads of times in which we and other Christians have asked for things in Christ's name and not had our requests granted, we should ask ourselves how often our requests have been even compatible with asking that Jesus should be among us. This promise is a promise to disciples who want the presence of their Master above everything else, and none of us is more than a faint-hearted disciple at the best. We have most of us a natural desire for power, but do we really want the kind of power that Jesus had? For no one ever so wholeheartedly refused the ordinary means of power as He did. He seems never even to have thought of riches or authority, or any one of all the various ways in which we can dominate our fellows. 'Whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister.' That is a lesson which it is very hard to learn. But it is the lesson we must learn if we are to make any effort to be followers of Christ. We are doing things in Christ's name whenever we are simply and sincerely serving others.

The last and perhaps the most noticeable thing about the promise in the text is that it is not a promise to isolated individuals but to a group, to men who are unitedly following in the way Christ pointed out, who are comrades and partners in the service of others. With this in mind we sometimes read the 'two or three' of this passage as though its whole meaning were that Christ's presence would be with *even* the smallest group, though of course He would be present with greater force and power when great numbers of men united in His service. Many of us have been present at a great service or meeting where we have been part of a multitude of men and women truly waiting upon God, and have been wonderfully moved and exalted by it. But impressive and stirring as such experiences are, it was not of such that Christ was thinking. He was thinking of His own small band. For being brought together in Christ's name means coming to that unity of mind and spirit and purpose which only the intimacy and common experience of a small group can produce. It was the Twelve, and not the multitudes who heard Christ, who made the Christian Church; it was Francis and his companions who made the Franciscan movement.

We are continually faced nowadays with world-wide or nation-wide problems, and we must of necessity have world-wide or nation-wide organizations. The pressure of that necessity tends to make us feel that we do nothing unless we do it on a grand scale, unless we are part of a great movement, evangelizing the world in this generation, bringing about socialism in our time, or perhaps saving the world from it, or making the world safe for democracy. Such great organized movements are necessary, and devotion to them is an honourable service. But we must not treat them as ends in themselves, nor forget for whose sake they should exist, as then the life and freedom and creativeness go out of us and out of them.

There is no miraculous power in a society whether small or large, but only as inspired by the spirit of Christ. If our society is to be a power in our lives and in the world, we must learn to look on life in the way Jesus did. Let us try to remember the bearing of these words, and of this promise upon the troubles of the world we are living in to-day. A seething industrial unrest marks a breakdown of our industrial civilization, a moral and emotional unrest the breaking down of our religious teaching and institutions. How can we seem to have achieved so much, and yet have failed so tragically? Is there not one common cause of failure underlying our political and social and moral catastrophes? Are we not witnessing that decay of organizations and of procedures which comes about when forms created by spirit, and shaped for the expression of the power of spirit in life, are renewed and multiplied and elaborated with no corresponding renewal and development of the spirit that gave them a glorious and creative power? Such renewal of the spirit cannot be speeded up, nor standardized, nor be made a matter of mass-production.

> There is no expeditious road
> To pack and label men for God,
> And save them by the barrel-load.

But the renewal of spirit will come (and here lies our privilege and our responsibility) whenever and wherever two or three gather together in the name of Christ.[1]

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT.

Ideals.

'Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.'—Ac 26[19].

St. Paul tells us in blunt words that there was a time when the name of Christ was anathema to him, and the symbol of all that was most hateful. That being so, he acted naturally, and fought Him with all the passion of his resentful soul. It was active and bitter opposition pushed to the extremest

[1] A. D. Lindsay, *The Nature of Religious Truth*, 55.

limits. He was loyal to the light that was in him. Could that lead him to fight against God? Yes! Life is like that sometimes. Some of the biggest mistakes of our lives are made when we are trying to be loyal to the truth, to work for the best, and to be true to the highest. It would be much easier for us if we could always find the truth the moment we wanted it, if we never made grievous mistakes except when we were hot to do evil.

Are we not living in a topsy-turvy world, if a man can be fighting against God all the time that he is loyal to what he thinks to be the truth? Not at all. It is only another illustration of the ignorance of man, his short-sightedness. We are all apt to think the last revelation the final one. It is difficult to remember that now we see through a glass darkly, and easy to imagine that we are seeing face to face. It is easy and human to mistake the part for the whole. We are always putting a term to the self-manifestation of God; we are eager to put the full stop before God has finished spelling the sentence.

Paul, in his loyalty to the revelation of God through Moses and the Law, and in his determination to uphold the traditions of his fathers, was at one time but a partisan. This was the abiding mistake of those who remained enemies of Christ, because of the revelation that had been already given. The partisan worships and is loyal to the form of the truth rather than to the truth itself. The Apostle was in danger of making this same mistake. The whole truth is too big for the forms that enshrine the part, and often the larger truth seems a flat contradiction of the lesser. Jesus said that He came not to destroy but to fulfil the truth contained in the Law. And it was inevitable that the larger truth of the gospel should seem to destroy the truth of the Law, because the new truth could not be put into the old form. The new wine burst the old wine-skin.

But Paul was saved from this ultimate mistake because he was always seeking the truth revealed in the Law, rather than the mere Law. The Pharisees and Scribes were concerned with the words of the Law, honestly trying to find their grammatical rather than their religious meaning. By additions of varying merit they tried to apply the letter of the Law until it covered all the new conditions of each new age. Paul, on the other hand, was ever seeking the revelation in the Law, ever seeking to plumb its spiritual depths, and in this way was able to appropriate its excellence, and no less was made to feel its essential limitations. He that doeth—he that lives in the spirit of the partial revelation shall be brought to the fuller revelation. The Apostle here claims, before those that knew him from his youth up, that he had lived 'according to the most rigorous party in our religion.' And the first outcome of this was fierce opposition to Jesus. But this period of opposition, inevitable under the circumstances, was of necessity only temporary. The very loyalty which led him to oppose, brought him to Damascus—to the fuller light of the revelation that there shone about him.

There is a curious similarity in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. Some one seemed to show him a many-storied palace, whose arcaded chambers were filled with shields and arms and banners, marked with the Cross of Christ, and when he asked to whom these belonged, his guide replied: 'They are for thee and for thy knights.'

When he learned of the expedition against the Germans led by Count Walter de Brienne for the restoration of the Papal fiefs in the south of Italy he prepared to join the crusade. At Spoleto the first halt was made. 'Francis,' called the voice of God, 'who can make thee the better knight, the Master or the servant, the rich man or the poor?'

Then said the voice: 'But thou leavest the Master for the servant and the rich man for the poor.'

And Francis said: 'What dost Thou will that I should do, O my Lord?'

And the Lord said: 'Turn thee back to thy own land, for the vision that thou didst see meant heavenly and not earthly equipment, and it shall be given thee by God and not by man.'

Obedient to the vision, Francis gave up all thought of rejoining the band of Assisian soldiers, and rode slowly home that day, revolving in his mind this grace vouchsafed of direction in the path of the Spirit. . . . One wonders how the struggle shaped itself, how keen were the pangs which moved him, as one fair temporal hope after another took on the likeness of a phantasm and trembled into nothingness at the potent presence of these unwonted and unseen realities. Only this we know: he obeyed, and, in obedience to the Will, he found the Way, the way of the Cross, Christ Jesus, from which he never swerved.[1]

God will be gracious to the man who sincerely fights in the twilight of an old truth against the dawn of the larger truth, if that fight be indeed sincere, as it often is. No man can do more than give his 'utmost for the highest,' even though his highest be pitifully less than God's best for us. No man can do more than this. And none should do less, though many of us fail before such a test.

[1] A. M. Stoddart, *Francis of Assisi*, 71.

There is one phase of this position that has particular and important bearings for us to-day. We hear much of the relativity of all knowledge, especially knowledge of the Divine. It is argued that no truth is the full truth. It is on these grounds that we are tempted to be weakly tolerant, to be idle in our search for the truth. It is only by an effort that we can understand the vehemence and passion with which men in the old days fought for their truths, which we now see to be so very partial, and in many cases actual mistakes and errors.

The only way to find the error that lies in all our conceptions of truth is to put our whole life into the *living* of them, not into the arguing for them or talking about them. We know that the life that we now live is not the best life, but not on that account can we refuse to live, to wait idly until the higher truth and better life come to us. Our civilization is pure savagery compared with that which shall be when the Kingdom of God shall have come on earth, and the will of God shall be done on earth. But that Kingdom will not come if we run away from that which is, but only if we go through that which is to that which is better. Likewise, though the knowledge of God which is ours at this moment is immeasurably poorer than that which shall be given unto men, and even unto us, not on that account are we absolved from fulfilling the commands and following the behests of the truth which is all we have at the moment. If ever we are to know more of the unspeakable glory and the unsearchable riches of the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, it can only be as the reward for our loyalty to that which we know now.

'Upon this, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.' What a blessing it would be if all men dare be even as this man. If he had been a politician, every under-strapper would have made capital out of his *volte-face* and never have lost an opportunity of quoting old speeches against him. As it was, the Church cast it in his teeth for a long time. It might almost be said that no man shall enter into the Kingdom of God unless he be strong enough to be thus divinely inconsistent.

Paul knew the Supremacy of the Christian Life. 'And Agrippa said, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' 'I would to God,' said Paul, 'that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.' And as he warmed to his task and lost himself in his favourite theme of Christ, the pomp and tinsel splendour of the court paled, and the thin, emaciated figure dominated the scene. As he brought their minds to the contemplation of the sublime ideals that mastered himself, and as he spoke of the Lord whom he loved to the death, the poverty and bareness of their lives stood out in pitiful contrast. They were made to feel even though it were but for a moment, that there is no life comparable with the Christian life. All other is but a vain show when our eyes have seen the King in all His glory. Our light afflictions, which are for a moment, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that not only shall be, but is already revealed to the Christian.[1]

First Sunday in Advent.

The Kingdom.

'And being asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God cometh, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you.'—Lk $17^{20.21}$ (RV).

Palestine in the first century, like England in the twentieth, was in a disturbed condition. There was the deepest unrest in men's minds, much discontent, not a little resentment and revolt. The Jews were a subject race, but they cherished the memory of their lost freedom. They loved to dream of a future which should fulfil all the bright hopes which the prophets had kindled and give back all, and more than all, the greatness which had once been theirs. Many circumstances led them to believe that the hour of their deliverance was at hand, and they became more than ever excited, restive, and credulous. In this mood they easily fell victims to the impostors who appealed to their prejudices, trading on their hopes, and abusing their confidence.

There are few more dangerous explosives than great ideas in small minds; and this idea that 'the kingdom of God' was destined to be set up on earth, and to surpass all the legendary greatness of Israel, was too large for the ignorant and prejudiced minds into which it was brought. Accordingly they had formed so false a notion of the fact, that when at last that fact appeared, they could not recognize it, and thrust it aside with impatience and hatred. 'He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not.' When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, there was no welcome prepared for Him. 'There was no room for them in the inn,' is the pathetic record of the first Advent of the world's Redeemer.

The mistake into which the Jews who rejected

[1] A. Hird, *The Test of Discipleship*, 11.

Jesus fell is really the same as that which is ensnaring men still, though truly the forms in which it appears are widely different. It will then be worth our while to inquire what in its essential character the error of the Jews really was, since it is the same error which still besieges our souls.

St. Luke relates that on one occasion the Pharisees asked Christ bluntly when the 'kingdom of God' was coming. The phrase was both familiar and very suggestive. It had perhaps been taken over from the Book of Daniel, and had come to stand in common usage for the fulfilment of that great expectation of national triumph which the prophets were understood to authorize. It is essentially the same question which the Apostles are reported to have asked on the Hill of the Ascension when they came to their risen Master, saying: 'Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' To this question, which plainly had behind it so great a volume of popular faith and feeling, Jesus made reply: 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you.'

This short, pregnant sentence, 'the kingdom of God is within you,' has been understood in two ways, for the Greek admits of two renderings. We may read 'the kingdom of God is within your hearts,' or 'the kingdom of God is actually present in your midst.' The difference is not so great as it sounds. Whether our Lord had in view the rightful state of men's hearts, or rather was thinking of those disciples in whom that rightful state already existed, He was bent on disallowing the notion of an external system in which men as they actually were could be gathered, and which the question of the Pharisees implied. The Jews were eagerly looking for a social upheaval or political revolution which would suddenly enthrone them as the world's rulers, and thus establish Jehovah's Kingdom on earth. All the mischief to their minds lay in the conditions under which they were living; they never suspected that it had a deeper and nearer root in their own sinfulness. Christ pointed them to a transformation of men's hearts, slow, silent, searching, from which, by an inevitable consequence, the whole intercourse of society should be cleansed and exalted.[1]

James Martineau says: 'The kingdom of God is not a business, set up in rivalry with worldly business; but a divine *law* regulating, and a divine temper pervading, the pursuits of worldly business.'

What is really the same fundamental truth is stated by Vera Brittain in her latest book—*Testament of Youth*—'I do not believe that a League of Nations, or a Kellogg Pact, or any Disarmament Conference, will ever rescue our poor remnant of civilization from the threatening forces of destruction, until we can somehow impart to the rational processes of constructive thought and experiment that element of sanctified loveliness which, like a superb sunshine breaking through thunder-clouds, from time to time glorifies war.'

When once we have grasped this truth that 'the kingdom of God is within men's hearts,' a spiritual kingdom holding its citizens in allegiance to an unseen yet ever-present King, we shall be in little danger of tying our hopes of human virtue and happiness to any specific social or political policy. The genuine Christian is the master, not the slave, of his circumstances. He proves a truth which has often enough been asserted. 'Manners makyth man,' says the old Wykhamist motto, implying that money, rank, and fortune cannot make him. 'A man's a man for a' that,' sings the Scottish poet, pointing the same moral. And when in the Sermon on the Mount our Saviour bade us not be anxious about food and clothing, but rather to 'seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness,' He was emphasizing the same high doctrine. But, while all this is true and primary, it would be a great error, a grave misunderstanding of our Lord's teaching, to think that Christians ought not to concern themselves with the duties of secular citizenship. On the contrary, it is apparent that the very type of virtue which Christ requires and which He Himself exhibited supremely on earth, demands a frank acceptance of the burden of common life. 'The Son of Man came eating and drinking,' we read in the Gospel. 'I am among you as he that serveth,' He said of Himself. 'Is not this the carpenter?' asked His fellow-townsmen in resentful scorn. One of His most characteristic sayings was, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Now such sayings are meaningless if they be separated from the implications of life in society. The Christian character—loyal, humble, serviceable to others, sacrificing self—requires for its development and expression a personal acceptance of social obligations. 'Ye are the salt of the earth,' 'Ye are the light of the world,' He said, using metaphors which imply social contact, and the quiet exertion of personal example in the myriad contacts of common life. The home, the school, the State, the Church—all the inevitable groupings of civilized men and women grow to their best in Christ's service. Christianity is truly called the religion of humanity,

[1] H. Hensley Henson, *The Kingdom of God*, 7.

because only as Christian does the human race fulfil itself.

Let us come nearer home, and bring our discourse into direct relation to ourselves. We, like the Jews who questioned Jesus, are very discontented with the state of the world. Contentment is never common in the best of times: but in this sad world which has been broken by war can it anywhere be found? The very bitterness of our resentment against social wrongs and hardships shows that we are neither cynics nor pessimists. We, too, have our cherished dream of a 'kingdom of God' some day to be set up on earth, in which all that now darkens and disorders the lives of men and women shall have disappeared, and justice, peace, purity, and love shall triumph in human society. But here comes in our danger. Like the Jews we are tempted to forget the present in our absorption with the future. We carry our hopes into another setting than that which frames our actual lives, and take for granted that they can only be fulfilled by dramatic changes in all the arrangements, social, economic, political, which now control us. It occurs to us as little as it occurred to the Jews to look for the Kingdom in the common course of experience. To us, then—discontented, expectant, looking for change—Jesus says, 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: the kingdom of God is within you.' The Kingdom does not depend on great changes of circumstances, for all the changes of that kind which are needed have their promise and potency in a change of heart which need not wait. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.' It is only by multiplying 'the sons of the kingdom' that its establishment can be secured. The prophet's picture of Messiah's reign included this, basing the social well-being on personal goodness. 'Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, desolation or destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls salvation, and thy gates praise. . . . Thy people also shall be righteous.'

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

The Finality of Christianity.

'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.'—Mt 24^{35}.

'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.'—Heb 13^{8}.

Members of a certain school profess to discover a serious deficiency in the teaching of our Lord which leads them to anticipate the failure of Christianity and the coming of another teacher with a surpassing gospel. Emerson gave expression to this disappointment and prophecy. 'The history of Christ is the best document of the power of character which we have. He did well. But he that shall come shall do better. The mind requires a far higher exhibition of character, one which shall make itself good to the senses as well as to the soul; a success to the senses as well as to the soul.'

One half of the Emersonian view is literally correct. Our Lord did rigidly abstain from intermeddling with the existing order of things; His teaching was confined to one section of our complex nature, to one out of our manifold relations. 'My kingdom is not of this world,' was the definition that He gave of His mission, and with this solemn avowal His whole career was severely consistent. He came to redeem mankind, to make all things new, by breathing a new life into the souls of men. Forms, methods, and systems for the development and control of civilization are quite outside His range. He aimed at realizing the highest social ideals by the dynamic of spiritual truth alone; the greatest venture of pure thought that this world has ever known.

Was, then, our Lord mistaken? Have the ages proved Him in the wrong, and shown the need of a mightier redeemer, whose mission should aim at the immediate realization of all worldly power, wealth, beauty, and pleasure? To assist us to give a right answer to these questions we cannot do better than adduce the testimony of one of the ablest jurists of our generation. A letter written by the eminent French philosopher and statesman, Alexis de Tocqueville, to Lord Houghton, is an illuminating document on this very question. 'I cannot make out why in these days so many distinguished minds evince the tendency to approve the Mussulman. For my part my contact with Islamism produces the very opposite effect on me. The more I see of that religion, the more convinced I am that from it springs the gradual downfall of the Mussulman. Mahomet's mistake, which was to weld together a code of civil and political institutions with a religious belief, in such a way as to impose on the former the immovability which is the nature of the latter, was in itself enough to doom its followers to inferiority first, and then to unavoidable destruction. Christianity derived its grandeur and sanctity from never having entered any paths but those of religion, leaving the rest to follow with the progress and free development of the human mind.'

Architects refrain from the temptation of combining material of dissimilar quality in the same

building lest changes in the temperature cause expansion and contraction in the steel bars, and so tear asunder the solid masonry in which they are embedded—a faint figure from the material realm of the fatuity of attempting to bind together in one system methods subject to the contingencies of time and space, with principles of eternal obligation.[1]

'My words shall not pass away.' 'Jesus Christ the same.' It is worth while to think of some of the ways in which these great sayings justify themselves to the Christian of to-day. We are feeling after what is permanent in the midst of change just as were the men and women to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews was first addressed. With a very imperfect grasp of what Christianity gave them in its place, they were confronted with the fact that their new faith had separated them from the Judaism in which they had been born, and a crisis was impending which they could not understand, the crumbling to pieces of the power of Judaism under the advancing power of Rome. This was no common trial; and it is not strange that their hearts were failing them for fear. It was, as we would say, a time of transition. There was only one thing that could brace and fortify them for the conflict in which they were so hard beset. The unchanging Christ was with them, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and to Him, amid the welter of change around them, they could cling with patient faith.

We to-day are keenly conscious that our lot is cast in a period of quite singular and peculiar unrest. We see this in the outward form and fashion of life as we know it. The men and women who passed away at the beginning of this century would find the world extraordinarily different if they came back to it again now. And the difference goes deep into the very fabric of life itself. The world of thought, which so largely determines what we are, is full of reaction from convictions which were once considered to be permanent and assured. Even science is troubled with a 'fundamental scepticism' about itself. The pillars of government and social organization are being shaken. Something is being born, we know not what. Not only the convictions of faith, but its presuppositions also, are being called in question. It is not to be wondered at that men are crying out for what is unchanging, and turning eagerly towards all that offers a lasting and unchanging support. It is just here that we can find an answer in our faith. Whatever else it does or does not, it claims to be changeless in its essence. And that essence is Christ Himself. Christianity has still its guarantee of permanence and the pledge and promise of victory in this world of change and ferment, because it is the religion of the unchanging Christ.

Jesus Christ is changeless, first, in the unique perfection of His character. Age after age has been directed to the Gospels, with the challenge, 'Show us the point where He falls short.' '*Ecce homo!* Behold the man!' The centre of gravity in the fact of Christ for sinful men is not, after all, that He is perfectly holy, but that He loves them and is mighty to save. But that power to save depends, in the last analysis, upon His own perfect goodness. If He is fallible in this, He is fallible in all. Amid all our changes there is one change which has not come and is not coming. Mankind has discovered no rival to the moral supremacy of Jesus. All honest and unprejudiced men are still ready to acknowledge this, that alike in the world's yesterday and in its to-day there is one thing that remains unchallenged—the absolute uniqueness of the moral and spiritual beauty of the Jesus of the Gospels.

Jesus Christ is changeless, next, in His power to meet the deepest human needs. There is one thing which is apparent to any man who considers our changing human conditions; it is that, however greatly man may vary superficially from age to age, in all that goes to make his manhood he remains fundamentally the same.

> Love, hope, fear, faith—these make humanity;
> These are its sign and note and character.

Man is always the same in his need of God, in his need of forgiveness, in his need of spiritual aid to conquer sin, in his need of the life eternal. And just because Christ brings him these great gifts, and men have discovered no one else who can give them as He gives them, He remains for us what He was to those who first received Him, the one source of satisfaction for our deepest needs.

Jesus Christ is changeless, again, in His power to transform and redeem human lives. Verification is a keynote of modern religious thinking; and we could wish no better foundation upon which to rest our faith in Christ than this—His unchanging power to prove Himself true in the experience of those who make trial of His offer of grace to help in time of need. It would be difficult not to regard the New Testament as a spiritual romance, if it did not find its counterpart and continuation in England to-day. The severest test of Christ

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Stability of the Spiritual*, 93.

is neither the literary examination of the records of His life on earth, nor the critical co-ordination of the historical elements of the witness borne to Him by His earliest disciples. It is rather the age-long putting to the proof of His redeeming power in the lives of men and women who, conscious of their need of Him, have found in experience that 'He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.'

These are some of the ways in which the changelessness of Jesus Christ can be tested. Discover a higher and better than He; discover men and women who do not need God, forgiveness of their sins, power to conquer their evil selves, eternal life, or, needing these things, cannot find them in Him; discover human lives that present problems which, taking Him on His own terms, He cannot solve—discover these things, and you have discovered a state of change which will so react upon Him that He can no longer survive unchanged. But until you have done that, He remains what He was in the past, to-day—yea, and for ever.

The changing world, which has outgrown so much, has not outgrown Christ. Unequalled in His supreme moral and spiritual beauty, He stands among the sons of men, the great Alone. His touch has still its ancient power, and He touches life in its to-day at the same points and at as many points as He did in its yesterday. He has proved His power to transcend time and all its changes. The stream of the perennial verification of Christ in human experience flows out of the fact of what He absolutely and eternally is in Himself. If indeed it be true that in Him God came to dwell among us, the very God incarnate among men, God cannot disown Himself and, so to say, leave Himself behind to make way for Himself again otherwise and anew. The Incarnation has given us God for ever. The gospel of Bethlehem, if it is true at all, is true once and for all. You cannot unfact fact.

Can length of years on God Himself exact,
Or make that fiction which was once a fact?
. . . . . .
But truth divine for ever stands secure,
Its head is guarded as its base is sure.[1]

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

The Old Supports.

'Go and shew John again.'—Mt 11[4].

Canon Raven has told of 'a supreme experience' which once was his through his love of birds and his ability to tell others about his hobby. It was in a prison. The dingy white-washed room was cold and bare; the prisoners were lads whose youth so spent was infinitely tragic: warders sat at the end of the rows. With his lantern he took them a-rambling through haunts of finches and warblers, owls and falcons, and so at last to the marshes and the sea. A redshank's picture was on the screen, and the lecturer described its wariness and its cries of alarm. And at the word the authentic cry rang out in that prison hall—'perfectly rendered in pitch and notes and spacing.' The next photograph was of a curlew. And once again there rang out the cry of that wild bird, plaintive yet jubilant. You know that cry. 'There is passion in it, and a broken heart, endurance and defiant fortitude, even a touch of exultation and of laughter through tears; there is the Cross in it, and the triumph of life tortured but unsubdued. And in that ghastly place it came as an ecstasy. For a moment we were free.' The boy who whistled the magic notes there in the prison must have listened hour after hour to the voice of the wild, and felt stirring within him a passion of response. There he found himself through some deed done in the flesh away behind bars where moorland and shore were mocking memories. But when the curlew called, he was his old, free, clean, potential self once again.

What a height of tragedy we touch in this picture of that wild, Nature-loving creature of the wide, open spaces of the desert beyond Jordan, confined in that stuffy cell down by the Dead Sea, crushed and forgotten of God and man, bereft of faith and hope. How once the rocks had rung with that strong cry, 'Repent!' With what triumph of conviction and strength of certainty had that clear voice once proclaimed the Lamb of God. Can we recognize it now in that faint whimper, 'Art thou he'?

The situation is tragic, almost unbelievable, that any one who had ever had the grace to rise to the heights of spiritual assurance to which this man rose should ever come to this. That querulous whimper from Herod's dungeon chills the blood at this far-off day. Is there, then, no one safe from the assaults of doubt?

One thing we grasp at. At the blackest hour of his night John kept in touch with the best he had ever known. He might have been utterly and dreadfully mistaken about Jesus. It was possible that he had claimed far too much for Him and staked far too much upon Him, but He was the best and highest he had ever known, and it was to Jesus that he turned in his desperate hour. It was to

[1] F. B. Macnutt, *From Chaos to God*, 167.

Him that he confessed his awful misgiving. And if access to the ear of God means anything, it means that we may tell Him the utter truth—tell Him, as Fénelon said, in that daring advice which he gave to a young correspondent, that He bores you. The strain one day became too much for the Baptist, and he sent away to tell Jesus that he was being forced to conclude that He was not the Lamb of God after all.

And the poor demented creature got that wonderful reply, that reply which makes one always certain that we can be frank and natural in all our prayers. Our Lord was not shocked or horrified. He was not dismayed. He does not even appear to have been surprised. As soon as the messengers from his poor afflicted friend had got out of earshot He began to tell the people round about what a big soul He thought John the Baptist was. There had never been any one like him in all the world.

And what was the reply of our Lord to the messengers who had come with the Baptist's dreadful question of doubt? Just five words of utter simplicity in our English tongue. 'Go and shew John again.' We see from the Revised Version that it is even a mistranslation of the Greek word whose significance is, 'Go and report to John the things which ye do hear and see.' And yet, if inaccurate, it is an inspired translation. It is a rendering which goes to the root of all restoration of the soul. 'It is not sufficiently considered,' said Samuel Johnson, 'that mankind requires oftener to be reminded than informed.' 'Go and shew John again.' Tell him the old, old story. Tell him in his prison that the curlews are still calling. Jesus is not scandalized by this apparent lapse on the part of the Forerunner. But how will He meet this desperate emergency? What can He say to heal the soul of the Baptist and relieve his doubt? There is infinite patience and understanding. His own faith was going to have laid upon it one dark day almost more than it could bear, so that He, too, in His awful hour would cry aloud that He was forsaken of God, His Father. Jesus knows that the sweetness has gone out of the wild honey for John. Take him gently and tenderly back to the old supports, He says to the messengers. Take him back to where he used to be, to his mother's knee, and his great days of faith, take him back to the old camping-ground where first he pitched his tent. 'Go and shew John again.' So calm, so confident, just as when He stilled that poor hysterical woman's outburst, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.' Just one word brought back peace and poise and knowledge and salvation. Just her own name—'Mary.' That was enough to steady her soul. 'Go and shew John again.'

And what are we to show him? No theological argument can avail to help him in his hour of desperate need. No marshalling of proof texts, no glib assurance that all is for the best, least of all any smooth and ready cant. What, then, can we do? 'The things which ye do hear and see,' personal experience, to-day's evidence.

John Keats in one of his letters warns us that it is never any use to argue and debate, and try to convince in that clumsy fashion. 'A man should whisper results to his neighbour,' he says. And with his dying breath he told the world how he had heard the nightingale, and what it had sung to him; and Keats's nightingale has gone on singing to men through the long dark night.

'We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest,' they said to St. Paul, as they grouped about him in his lodging at Rome. In an age of unsettlement and many conflicting reports and changing opinions this is still the cry. They do not want to know what the orthodox view is, or what we have read that So-and-so thinks. They want no second-hand opinions. But when they have got a hold of a man who has travelled far, and suffered, and believes in Christ through it all, they do desire still to know what such an one thinks about the only things which matter.

'Every man we meet who experiences inward emancipation through God is God's word to us,' as Wilhelm Herrmann, of Marburg, used to tell us.

> Through such souls alone
> God stooping shows sufficient of His light
> For us i' the dark to rise by.

Let us go and tell that the old gracious thing is still happening, that it has happened in our own experience—light coming to those who were groping in the dark, folk who had stumbled by the way being lifted up again, foul and leprous creatures being made clean and sweet, the poor having good tidings preached to them. And last of all that Christ understands, and that there is a special blessing for the man who still holds on when things are at their blackest.[1]

[1] Hubert L. Simpson, *The Nameless Longing*, 67.