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## In the Study.

### Virginibus Puerisque.

#### A Whitsunday Sermon.

BY THE REVEREND S. GREER, M.A., AYR.

'Ye shall receive power.'—Ac 1<sup>8</sup>.

As the motor-car approached, the garage door mysteriously opened, and stood wide for the car to enter. Yet nobody was near, and no hands had unfastened the garage bolts. It was like magic, though the driver had not even cried, 'Open, Sesame.' But in his approach to the garage he had, at a certain point, passed through a ray, like a beam of electric light, and it was this that had set the mechanism in action, and swung the door wide. Marvellous things can be done by these rays which nobody sees, or feels, but which you can't escape. On one of the London Underground railways the train, as it comes rushing in, passes through a beam, and so switches on a red signal-light. I saw one lately which counted the people who went through the entrance to a station; when you broke the beam you heard a click, and you knew you had been spotted.

How is it done? I don't know. Lots of things in the world can't be explained. They are there, and you see them work, but you can't account for them. Some stupid people refuse to believe in religion because they don't quite understand how it all comes about. They work their brains into tangles; their thinking gets all into knots. Some things are easier to try out than to explain. Did you ever hear about the frog and the centipede—the little creature with about a hundred legs?

The Centipede was quite happy  
Until the Frog in fun  
Inquired, 'Which leg goes after which?'  
She, upon considering which,  
Worked up her feelings to a pitch  
That she lay helpless in a ditch  
Forgetting how to run.

Fortunately it's not necessary to understand everything about running in order to get there, or everything about rays, or religion, in order to find difficult doors opening to you when you come up to them. That was the great discovery some people made at the first Whitsunday. These men in Jerusalem had seen Jesus die. Then suddenly they were conscious that He was near, and was speaking to them. They felt His courage in their hearts,

and they knew they were equal to anything. Some of them were foreigners. They didn't always understand what each other said, but they each understood what Jesus was saying to them. Nothing could dismay them now. Their Friend, though unseen, was guiding them. Difficulties disappeared in a marvellous way as they went forward, and the road lay open to them with all the barriers down. 'Ye shall receive power,' He had promised; now His power was changing them, so that they hardly knew one another.

Don't think of Jesus as Someone who lived long ago, but as One who makes Himself known in the happiness and courage and kindness and love of the best folk you have ever met. How are we to come to know Him? We must tune-in our heart to Him. A little girl had been naughty, but afterwards she was dreadfully sorry she had been so sulky and unkind. She came to her mother and said how ashamed she was, and Mummy had given her a great big hug. All that morning afterwards, as she played with her doll, she would look up now and then and say, 'Hello, Mummy!'—just to be quite sure it was all right now. We should feel like that about Jesus, and then a wonderful strength will steal into our hearts. We won't be afraid to speak the kind word, or do the right thing, even though it hurts. Through Him you may become big and true and brave. Just glance up, and catch the beam from His eye; then you will feel that anything is possible for you.

#### The King who died, climbing.

BY THE REVEREND R. OSWALD DAVIES, LEICESTER.

'Aim at what is above.'—Col 3<sup>1</sup> (Moffatt).

1. On February 18th of this year the world was shocked by the sad news of the sudden death of a king. It was that of Albert, King of the Belgians. He was a king greatly beloved by all his people, and who had also won the esteem of the outside world. His one passion was rock-climbing; and, sad to say, it was through this very passion that he came to an untimely end. Nothing thrilled him more than to set out with rope and rucksack to scale some forbidding height. Particularly tragic were the circumstances of his death. Returning home to Brussels from a visit to the Ardennes, he stopped at Marches les Dames on the banks of the Meuse, and set out to enjoy a couple of hours'

exercise by ascending the rocky pinnacle of Corneille, a peak of about one hundred feet in height. Corneille, after all, was but a pigmy height to this experienced and vigorous mountaineer, who had conquered great Alpine heights. Nevertheless, the Corneille had its dangers. Its ascent was particularly steep, and its stone brittle and slippery. This was his last climb; some hours later he was found at its foot—dead. King Albert had met his Corneille. He who had conquered Alpine heights and had trod the peaks of the Dolomites met his fate in this sudden side-ways fashion, at the hands of this pigmy, second-class height.

And does not this tragic event speak to us of what may happen to us in our life? Often when you are faced with some big difficulty, which looms ahead of you like some forbidding height, you know your task is great, and you brace yourself for the fight. It is when some smaller difficulty faces us, which seems unimportant, that we fail and fall. It is over the smaller difficulties we often come to grief. Some small mean act, some slight untruth, some trifling dishonesty—these have often brought a great downfall. Beware, then, of the Corneilles of life. Be always on the alert when climbing the smaller heights as well as the greater ones. 'Let your loins be girded about,' as Jesus said. Be prepared, and you will not fall.

2. Again, King Albert, in his last ascent, was climbing alone.

This noble king knew no fear, neither physically nor morally. He was a hero, in the true sense of the word. He was not afraid of difficulties, and was able to face them alone, whether in the adventure of rock-climbing or in the pursuit of his country's service.

In August 1914 a mighty army knocked at the gates of his country, seeking a dishonourable passage through it. The choice he had to make was a most difficult one. He might have chosen the easy path; but, like the true mountaineer he was, he stood on the side of right and honour and liberty; and, unafraid, withstood to his utmost the invading army of Germany. He was not afraid to stand alone, if need be.

We must not be afraid of difficulties, nor to stand alone for the right. Learn early in life to stand always for the right and for truth, even if you have to stand alone. Say, as Martin Luther did, in the face of his formidable enemies, 'Here stand I, so help me God.' Depend upon it, God will always be with you, and will not forsake you. And is not Jesus our supreme example in this? He knew no fear. He faced unflinchingly diffi-

culties which you or I shall never be called on to face; and He faced them alone. 'He trod the winepress alone.' What a fearfully lonely road was the road that led to the Cross. One by one His disciples and friends forsook Him and fled. He was alone in Gethsemane; alone before Caiaphas, the High Priest; alone before Pilate. Yes, He was absolutely alone. But, because it was the way of truth and honour, He faced it all unafraid.

3. Finally, King Albert died, climbing.

This noble king will always be known, I am sure, as the king who died, climbing. While he was still ascending, while on a glorious adventure, he died. With his face toward the skies, striving, struggling, thus he died. It is a grand thing to say of any man that he died, climbing. There can be no nobler epitaph than that.

When Dr. Howard Somervell and his companions of the Mount Everest Climbing Expedition of 1924 had reached the highest camp, they were so worn with their arduous climbing that they wondered whether they had not better give up. The night before, however, Dr. Somervell had read in his pocket Testament these very words of Scripture: 'Aim at what is above.' That settled it. Next morning he and his companion started climbing again. They had to take five breaths to every step; but on that day they got higher than men had ever gone before without oxygen. 'The fight was worth it—worth it every time,' said Dr. Somervell.

Above all, we think of Jesus, who set His face towards the summit of that

green hill far away,  
Without a city wall,  
Where the dear Lord was crucified,  
Who died to save us all.

And on the Cross that awaited Him there, Jesus, our King, died—climbing! Start your climbing now. Aim at what is above.

### *The Christian Year.*

WHITSUNDAY.

**Come, Creator Spirit!**

'And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.—  
Ac 2<sup>4</sup> (R.V.).

Undoubtedly, in our reading of the Pentecostal event, we have wondered how all those strangers who had streamed into Jerusalem heard the Apostles in their own tongues, so as to understand the great

deeds of God about which they witnessed. We have wondered about it, and perhaps rejoiced over it, as we would over a great promise. For we feel somehow related to these strangers as though they were flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, feeling ourselves even nearer to them than to the Apostles. Just as they came from afar, so do we. We are separated by centuries from Jesus, we speak a totally different language, we have totally different insights and outlooks. What has a person of to-day in common with that age, with that generation? Again and again we discover anew that there is a great chasm which yawns between the now and here, and the then and there. And can this chasm be bridged, this difference dissolved? Can human beings, who are separated from Him by time and space, hear Him speak now as though He were present, out of the mouth of His witnesses?

What the story of Pentecost tells us is that Jesus not only was, but that He is, and will be. He does not exist here or there in a certain place; for Him there is not only a 'once' and a 'then,' but He is yesterday, to-day, and the same in all eternity. In a word, Jesus is 'standing in the midst,' and that means that around Him the world still stands as a circle around its central point. And just as every point in the circle is equidistant from the centre, just so it is no farther to Him to-day than it was in times past.

'This is my body broken for you, my blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.' That is as true to-day as it was a thousand years ago, and it will be as true a thousand years from now as it is to-day. Jesus stands as the centre. This story tells us that on Pentecost, when Jesus was spoken about, all understood. Of what significance are the differences of language and culture as compared with this great redeeming Word which He came to tell us? We are often concerned as to how we may present Jesus to the differing ages and stages of life, so that men may understand Him. How should we preach to the cultured? to labouring men? to youth? How much more important it is to consider whether it is Jesus who is proclaimed. If it were really He of whom we spoke, would we need to trouble ourselves about these differences of age and social station? As the circumference of the circle is around the centre, so all the ages and stages are placed around Him. Or as a grenade crashes through the structure of the house from the top to the bottom, so the Word of God which Jesus brings crashes through the structure of life in which we humans dwell, from the pinnacle to the

deepest basement. This, then, is what Pentecost proclaims—this one thing: that Jesus is the centre, and that history with all its generations still stands in His presence, and that all distinctions vanish before Him.

Now, of course, *that* Pentecost in Jerusalem, that past event had, and still has, something of an advantage. That particular Pentecost became an actual reality! There *were* people who had ears that heard, eyes that saw, and because they did, the truth that Jesus came to proclaim streamed from them as a light in the night—the truth that is not simply one truth among others, but the one central fact of the world that is valid for all men. But, after all, they have no advantage over us, for it is possible for us to have what they had. They, too, are but a point on the circle's circumference, of which Jesus is the centre, just as we are. Why should it not become manifest on every point of the circumference, and burst forth in every age and in every tongue, that Jesus is Lord? Why should not Pentecost really and finally come again?

The truth that we human people are closely bound together through all times and generations is not so strange and so remote. There are great differences among us, but there are greater similarities. The remarkable fact is that in considering the similarities we find they are not the successful achievements of life, but the deep depressions. We need to descend into the valleys and depths of our lives in order to come to the place where we feel very near to one another, to the place where we feel that we are all sinners, that we all go astray and that we spend our lives in a thousand mistakes and follies. And there is a fact that includes everything else—the fact of death—in which we are all united from the year two thousand B.C. to two thousand A.D. Therein we stand together like children in a great circle, hand in hand. That is a centre to which all our eyes are turned, which every one of us without exception knows. A dark and a tragic point indeed! It is no small matter to have death as the centre of life, death and his premise, sin and sorrow.

Now we can measure what Pentecost means. It means nothing less than that behind this central point of death a new central point arises. Behind death, the Prince of Life; behind the transient, the Eternal; behind death, the resurrection. All this general transiency, imprisonment, and chance-existence of mankind are invalidated. That which until now is called sin shall be forgiveness; that which until now is called transiency and the grave shall be called eternal life; that which until now

is called man's wit and wisdom is called God's Word by which we live !

This great reversal, this great light which arises upon the people who have wandered in darkness—this is something it is difficult for us to grasp. It is the miracle of the Holy Spirit. Where a person understands Jesus Christ, then it is no longer his own human spirit, but God's Holy Spirit who has given him the understanding and who gave his spirit the witness. The miracle of the Holy Spirit is to make Jesus Christ contemporary, to place Him and His truth in the centre, applicable for us through all times and generations. We the strangers, we the distant, are able to be stewards with God !

The Kingdom of Heaven is come nigh. But why is it that we feel and know so little about it ? Why is it that this good news which can burst graves asunder and raise the dead has been so small, so insignificant, so commonplace among us ? Let us attempt an answer. Our life is a wandering alongside a wall. But this wall is broken here and there by hidden doors which lead into the Kingdom of Heaven. We are not far from the Kingdom. There is no point on the circumference of the circle that does not bear a direct relation to the centre. There is no moment of time that is without the eternal light from above. If in spite of these possibilities we have such vacant and dead stretches in our lives, if we stand at the wall and not at the doors, the fault is indeed our own. Here is where our guilt and responsibility confront us. We think of the word of Jesus : who is not for Me is against Me. The Holy Spirit seems to be behind a wall, and it seems as if our behaviour either adds more stones to it or it takes stones away. For we are doing one or the other every moment of life. Either we are approaching Pentecost, approaching that word which God has for, and wishes to speak through, every situation, or we are departing from it. Either we are worshipping death, or we are worshipping the power of love.

Too often we are guilty of some foolishness or sin. We say Yes to the low and the common. We open the door to hate or some other passion. In such a situation, what does it mean to take one step towards Pentecost ? It means that we feel ourselves guilty and suffer because we feel it, and that we will not consider our precarious situation lightly. Actually we treat it too lightly always. We quickly come to the surface only to slide back into the depths again. Is that not something to fear ? something to make one ask, seek, and knock ? Our Lord requires nothing but that we place our-

selves under judgment and acknowledge that we are aliens, living in a land of estrangement, for then only will we have a longing for home. Nothing avails but that *one* thing through which our lives receive a new centre which is Jesus Christ. When it becomes clear to us that not only for the heathen in far-away lands, but for us as well, only one remedy is great enough—then we will again face Pentecost. For it is the way of Jesus to come to us when our hearts are heavy. When we are at our wits' end, then the Holy Spirit can give us an answer. But how can He give us an answer when we are still well supplied with all sorts of answers of our own ? Nothing blocks God's way more than our profession that goodness, excellence, and wisdom creep *up out of ourselves*. But when we come to the point where we know nothing, when we surrender to Him, then He can come with power.

O come, Creator Spirit, come and dwell with us.<sup>1</sup>

#### TRINITY SUNDAY.

##### The Life of Worship.

'Above him stood the seraphim : each one had six wings ; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.'—Is 6<sup>a</sup> (R.V.).

'There was a throne set in heaven.'—Rev 4<sup>a</sup> (R.V.).

We have gone through the seasons of the year from Advent to Pentecost, and now we are at Trinity Sunday, face to face with the majesty of God, known to us in the symbolism of the creed, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the response which man must always make to this majesty of God is adoration, is worship. In this passage from Isaiah we begin with the worship of heaven. Here we have the picture, simple in its magnificence, the vision of the Lord high and lifted up, with His train filling the Temple. In Revelation, the Jewish and Christian symbolism seem to be mingled, and before the throne we see the living creatures full of eyes, and the four-and-twenty elders sitting. But in both the majesty of God fills the centre of the picture, and finds its response in the worship of those who stand before Him. In both we have that song of praise, which has been embodied in the liturgy, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts ; the whole earth is full of His glory.'

That is the worship of heaven, and of that all our

<sup>1</sup> K. Barth and E. Thurneysen, *Come, Holy Spirit*, 171.

earthly worship is a reflection, a shadow, a symbol. Its inspiration lies in our consciousness of the worthiness, the might, the glory, the goodness, the love of Almighty God. It rises to its height when it joins with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, to praise and magnify His glorious name.

Let us ask ourselves whether we know what such worship means. How are we, to whom it is given, 'to acknowledge the glory of the Eternal Trinity, in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity'? Words do not help us much here. As we throw out those great phrases from the ancient Collect for the day, we cannot help remembering the question which St. Thomas à Kempis puts in the first chapter of the *Imitation*: 'What will it profit thee to argue learnedly about the Trinity, if thou hast not humility, and so art displeasing to the Trinity?'

We cannot do better than try to find in the figure of the seraphim a picture of what man's attitude must be in face of God. The seraphim are, of course, angelic powers, God's ministers, winged with flame. And it is in their wings that we are to see what worship means, or at any rate to find some of the elements which must enter into it. Above the throne Isaiah tells us he saw them standing: 'Each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.'

1. 'With twain he covered his face,' veiled his eyes, as he stood before the light ineffable. That is surely the basis of all worship, without which it cannot exist; the reverence, the awe, the unceasing wonder, which the human soul feels, when once it realizes the perfect beauty, the unimagined holiness, the infinite power of the Almighty and Eternal God. We are not going too far if we say that here we are standing at the fountain-head of all religion. Think of the seers of the old days: Abraham looking up at the stars of the Syrian night; Moses as he followed his sheep in the silent spaces of the desert; Samuel, David, Elijah. Was it not always because they found themselves in presence of the mystery high as the heaven, deep as the ocean, silent as death; was it not always because they had learned to wonder, that they learned to pray? And just as these men pass through the things that are made, to find the power and wisdom of Him who made them; led on through the mysteries of day and night, of desert and mountain, of seedtime and harvest, of life and death to the Eternal Father, by whose will and word all things are created, so must we be led on still. The world is still as full of

wonder as it was when Isaac walked in the fields at evening-time, or Elijah watched the fire and wind and earthquake among the mountains. And through it all, God is still speaking, with that still small voice, at sound of which we can only veil our faces as Elijah did.

We cannot do a worse thing for the boys and girls, before whom life is unrolling itself, than let them think for a moment that what we can see and know is all, instead of being rather a curtain, which hides all that we cannot know. What do we know of electricity, or of the Röntgen rays, or of radium? How can we explain the marvel of the beetle's wing, or an insect's eye? Why are the hidden parts of the flower, which only the microscope shows us, as lovely and marvellous in their structure as the parts which we and the butterflies can see and admire?

2. With two of his wings each seraph covers his face, with two he covers his feet; he wraps them, that is, about his body to hide himself. For with the sense of the greatness of God comes the sense of our own littleness. 'I am but a little child,' are the words that rise to the young Solomon's lips, when the Lord appears in a vision with the offer of His infinite bounty. 'Woe is me! for mine eyes have seen the king, the lord of hosts,' is the cry of Isaiah when to him the vision of God's holiness is granted. And when to St. Peter there comes the knowledge of Christ's glory, he falls at His feet, as St. John fell afterwards in Patmos, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' Self-knowledge, self-abasement, confusion of face, contrition, we can have no worship without this. For we cannot stand, foolish and sin-stained as we know ourselves to be, before the eyes of Him who knows all the secrets of our hearts. That is why our services begin with Confession. But that self-abasement is not the end; we confess our sins in order that God's pardon may come flooding in to heal and to restore; we learn our own weakness that we may lean upon His strength; we empty ourselves that He may fill us. Personal ambition has given way to a zeal for God. It is not when a man's eyelids close in death, but all his life, that he makes his own the familiar words of the hymn:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.

And because he has hidden himself, he has found himself, found himself in Christ; his purpose is God's; he has gained the quiet strength, the lasting peace, of the consecrated man.

3. And there we might stop, for worship is an

end in itself ; we cannot get beyond it ; to worship like that is to share the life of heaven. And yet, to complete the picture here, there are those other wings, the twain with which the seraphim do fly. For the life of worship can never be an inactive life ; the contemplation of the God whose name is Love, must always lead us to the deeds of loving service, which mark the lives of those who are being made again after the likeness of their Father.

And if we are tempted to ask, Why not just go our own way, and choose the easy life ? the answer comes that to do so is to deny the whole truth of our being, it is to be a traitor to our trust, it is to throw ourselves out of gear with the universe of which our manhood is the crown.<sup>1</sup>

That is what George MacDonald has taught us in his two sonnets :

Go thou into thy closet ; shut thy door ;  
And pray to Him in secret : He will hear.

That is how one begins. And the second, which follows it, runs like this :

Hark, hark, a voice amid the quiet intense !  
It is thy Duty waiting thee without.  
Open thy door straightway, and get thee hence,  
Go forth into the tumult and the shout ;  
Work, love, with workers, lovers, all about.

#### FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

##### Unfeigned Faith.

' I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice.'—2 Ti 1<sup>6</sup>.

It was the same faith, and yet it was not quite the same. Three generations lived together in that household, all Christian, but each had its own experience and expression of the faith. For a lad's religion, if it is to be healthy, cannot be an exact copy of what his seniors believe and practise. When faith is *unfeigned* or sincere, it is more than a mere echo or imitation of other people's. We are genuine Christians as we are ourselves. We learn much, indeed, from those who are older or younger than ourselves if we are sensible ; but the suggestions we receive from their faith and character have to be worked into our own lives. Otherwise religion may become unnatural. Which means that we identify it too closely with some particular stage of life, instead of realizing that as faith is unfeigned it is so various in its appeal that

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Aitken, *Fellow-Workers with God*, 204.

it enters into human experience from first to last, adapting itself to every phase of our nature and satisfying men and women wherever they find themselves in the course of the years. From beginning to end of life God can find us, the same God. There need be no break in our religious experience.

God is not a God of age alone, merely a God for people who are tired or sick or lonely. And, on the other hand, faith is not a heat of the young blood, something that stirs our early enthusiasm and then disappears before the stern realities of middle age and a sober knowledge of the world. Religion, when it is real and really understood, is neither a morning cloud nor an evening mist ; it is a continuous experience that opens up as human life advances, a power which can thrill us alike in youth, in middle life, and in old age, with its inexhaustible variety of interest. Our Lord is the answer to all our questions. He stirs in our minds the very questionings that make us alive, especially when we are in our earlier years. But He also meets us at every later point of our development, wakening fresh hopes and generous aims. We draw a breath of relief in our tired moments. That also is God, laying His cool hand upon our fevered spirits. I don't see how we can read the Gospels without noticing how Jesus understood and sympathized with the true spirit of youth in its reckless abandon, its uncalculating ardour, its cheerful indifference to risks, and its sanguine enthusiasm for new, better ways of life. But He also satisfied those who were feeling the strain of life. No, as we interpret faith, we discover that it grasps all life. It is unfeigned as it is living, and as it is living, sustained by thought and action, it is a comprehensive match for all the turns and changes that meet us in the development of character.

The variety of our needs brings out the capacity of religion. Youth, middle age, and old age, for example, require a strong God, though each phase of our discipline calls out a special expression of religion as a power. But a still more apt illustration is visible when we remind ourselves that religion supplies us with a glow as well as with a moral force, for unfeigned faith reveals a God who can enrich life with a joy that changes its forms, even as it continues to be a real experience. As religion is not all anticipation nor all reminiscence, it impresses itself upon us with an experience in which we discover that we can enjoy God naturally at any stage of our course.

God means every stage to have its own enjoyments. There is a natural succession of pleasures

for our human nature ; a happy childhood is an end in itself, and so is a healthy, sanguine youth, for instance. What we want is not a forced plant, for God never seeks, and neither should we if we are sensible, a snowdrop in August or a chrysanthemum in the month of February. Timothy's *faith dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, and in his mother Eunice*, but it was his faith as well as theirs, their faith as well as his. No doubt Lois and Eunice saw something in the joy of the Lord that the young man did not. If they were wise, they would rejoice in his experience of happiness, even although it was not now possible for them to share it exactly, for the gaiety of heart which is not incompatible with inward strictness does not commonly outlast our earlier years, and yet there are quiet forms of joy that are not less rich in stimulus and perception than the more animated and enthusiastic type which is so happily visible in some of our youth-movements to-day. No, a young person's religious happiness is not to be either exalted or depreciated at the expense of middle life or of old age. The real mischief is when people forget that the deepest form of joy, God's inward joy, changes its expression and alters its accent and emphasis as we grow older, becoming different in quality and taste, although its essence, the experience of being at our Lord's disposal and of living for others as we live with Him, remains identical. The natural aim of God is to work with all of our life, as it passes through childhood, adolescence, middle age, and old age, not with our strength and vigour alone, nor merely with our times of sober reflection and strain, but with all of them together, one after another.

Such is the unfeigned faith. It is not stereotyped ; it will change as we advance in experience, change inevitably in outlook and content, and change precisely because it is unfeigned or sincere, change because it is living and because we are living. Its power of changing is one proof that it is vital and natural. With such a God as we have and know in the Lord Jesus Christ we are in touch with a rich, lasting course of experience which is not to be exhausted. There is no incongruity between Jesus and youth, between faith and vitality, between religion and the vivid moments, the wakening faculties, the whole flowering of energy in life's opening years. But the day is not all morning. We need a faith which contains some message for the afternoon and the evening as well. And we discover that, as the years gather over us, the light that sent us to our morning labour brings us rest no less than energy. Our coming in as well

as our going out is blessed. Or, at least, it may be. Stevenson remarks that instead of singing a despondent *Miserere*, 'a person up in years often prefers *Jubilate Deo* for his ordinary singing.' Why should he not ? Always provided that we remember how at any period the real source of misery is the temper that makes us proud and selfish. No pleasure that we succeed in winning from this temper carries any real joy with it. To obey the commands of the Lord is the prelude to any enjoyment of His comforts. The joy of the afternoon and the evening is all the sweeter and the less spoiled as we come to it with less and less to regret of duty unperformed, of days that have been wasted, and of temptations unresisted in the earlier stages.

'I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, that dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and in thy mother Eunice.' Perhaps the Apostle is recalling this, to remind the younger man of what he and they had in common. Timothy may not have been so conscious of the values in this relationship as he should. For it is a disquieting thing to notice how the ages fall out, instead of sharing their experiences and seeking to appreciate what they possess together. Ought not youth and age to make an endeavour to share their experience patiently ? For if we assume that one stage contains all the essential elements of the faith, we are doing violence to the naturalness of our religion, and such a position, whether it is taken up by seniors or by juniors, narrows the range of our discipline.

Live thy life,  
Young and old,  
Like yon oak,  
Bright in spring,  
Living gold ;

Summer-rich  
Then ; and then  
Autumn-changed,  
Soberer-hued  
Gold again.

All his leaves  
Fall'n at length,  
Look, he stands,  
Trunk and bough,  
Naked strength.

What we all wish is a faith rising in childhood and continuing with us as we grow older, altering its form as the mind widens and as insight deepens,

but always there, always capable of making the heart leap with delight as life is visited by some revelation of God's light. And in our religious experience this glow may be ours, as we look up to what shines upon us in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, either in the morning or in the afternoon or towards evening. For, should we ever lose that thrill, should it ever come to pass that our heart ceases to leap up at the sight or summons of the Lord, then we are losing what makes life worth living.<sup>1</sup>

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

### The Banquet of the New Life.

'A certain man made a great supper.'—Lk 14<sup>10</sup>.

Some people do not get all the joy they are entitled to out of their religion simply because they withhold themselves or part of themselves from the adventure of the soul. Some people seem to be afraid of getting too much religion; the real danger is to get too little of it—too little to be *happy* in it. They put us in mind of timid children paddling in the sea; they are too interested and curious to keep out, and they are too timid to go right in: consequently they get the chill of contact but not the glow of a plunge. The general notion which many people have of the religious life is that it is a life of sombreness, a colourless, insipid kind of existence; but nothing could be more remote from the truth. To those who are truly rooted in Christ it is a life of banqueting—the banquet of the New Life, a feast of fine things.

'The whole thing is a song,' Temple Gairdner said to a friend before his death. 'Thanks be to God for His unspeakable Gift and gifts.' Sir Reginald Kennedy-Cox of the Dockland Settlements gives to his autobiography the title *The Happiest Man*. 'I am the only man I know,' he writes, 'who has been entirely happy all his life. People will probably murmur "Liar" under their breath, but really I have been intensely happy.'

Christ, in the parable from which our text is taken, symbolizes the gospel as a feast, and that is the thought to which we ask your attention.

1. *Think, first of all, of the joy of forgiveness.*—'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,' said a man who had been kept awake all night by the consciousness of his failures and iniquities. He acknowledged his sin unto God, and God forgave him. It is the same man who ends up his spiritual autobiography with

<sup>1</sup> J. J. Moffatt, *His Gifts and Promises*, 197.

the words: 'Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.'

We are told that people do not trouble about their sins to-day. But sin has consequences. Whether it be anticipated and indulged in the imagination, or presented continually to the mind by memory, it produces disastrous moral results. Morbid introspection is a disease of the soul—a practice which not only tends to magnify one's shortcomings, but even to multiply them. But that is a different story from that of the man who does not find sin serious enough to think about it, and to make him feel uneasy. Where there is no sense of sin there is no passion for righteousness and holiness. When the Divine light breaks in upon the soul, however, there you also find a keen sense of guilt and imperfection. But every sin-haunted man and woman may come to this great feast of the new life to partake of the heavenly joy of forgiveness.

2. *Think, again, of the joy of Divine acceptance.*—In spite of all our powers, our feeling of self-importance and independence, we are but creatures dependent in a thousand ways we scarcely realize; and sometimes something happens which makes us painfully conscious of our weakness, our dependence, and our sinfulness. What happens then? We look round, just to find our bearings, and to ascertain our relation to those powers and beings that can help us to survive the calamity which threatens to overwhelm us. This feeling of impotence, dependence, and sinfulness may be produced by ill-health, misfortune, or some sin; and we have seen souls groping in the dark for some one or something to which they could relate themselves and which would help them to pull through in their time of need. In those dark hours of trial and conflict and guilt there is nothing that so helps and comforts the souls as the assurance that it is acceptable unto God. If that assurance can be wrung out of any crisis, the soul can face the issue with courage and hope and joy. It is the blessedness of acceptance, which is one of the fine things of the banquet of the new life in Christ.

3. *Think, again, of the joy of holy fellowship.*—There is, indeed, no fellowship so satisfying and so stimulating as that of men and women who are one in the highest things of the soul. If the fellowship of the Christian Church does not attain to this standard, it is not due to the lack of resources in the gospel, but to the lack of enterprise and the barrenness of Christian experience on the part

of those who call themselves Christians. Those, however, who know religion as life will testify to the incomparable joy of holy fellowship with kindred and living souls. The author of the First Epistle of St. John laid great stress on the idea and experience of fellowship—the fellowship of believers with one another, and their fellowship with God the Father through Jesus Christ, the Son. Gnostics, Jews, and others who withdrew from the early Christian Church did so because they had never really been members of the Christian community. They had either failed to grasp the meaning of Christianity, or they had failed to gain a vital experience of the new faith. They found no joy in holy fellowship because they had failed to discover the true secret of religion. Many fall out of the Christian ranks to-day for a similar reason: they came to the Church but they never came to Christ, or they leave the Church because they have first left Christ. But to those who are in Christ and in the Church—the true and living Church—the unalloyed joy of holy fellowship is a greatly prized possession. The joy of the highest fellowship of the soul is another rarity of this spiritual banquet.

Mr. Hugh Redwood, in *Lay Sermons and Parables*, says: 'After a West End meeting one night I returned by tube with a party of friends, three of whom were Salvationists in uniform. As the train pulled up at a station, the door of the front compartment opened and the driver made an unlooked-for appearance. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," he said with a pleasant smile. "God bless you. I'm glad to see you." Never was truer benediction. One scarcely expects (though I don't know why) to hear a motor-man quoting Corinthians, and one man I know, who was pressed in spirit, felt the comfort of unseen hosts.'

4. *Finally, think of the joy of liberty.*—This is the feast of freed men and freed women in Christ. The power of sin has been broken in their lives. They may at times yield to its seductions, but it no longer exercises a tyrannical sway over them. And who can depict the joy of the souls that have been emancipated from the clutches of a paralysing sin? Every sin weakens the soul's power of resistance until in the end it becomes helpless and wingless, having largely lost its soaring instinct and soaring capacity: but through the power of

Christ these are restored to it, and the soul recover its eagle-passion for the boundless sky. Of course there are many low-flying Christians who remind you of sparrows rather than of eagles. It does not take them long to descend from their highest flight to mundane things, because they never get far away from them. But to those who trust and cultivate the passion for spiritual freedom comes a power which carries them away into the realm of glorious liberty and unsuspected visions and joys. And one of the great joys of the Christian fellowship is the feeling that it is a communion of free spirits in Christ.

'We've broke through,' cries a character in Margaret Prescott Montague's story, *Deep Channel*, 'we've broke through, O my Lord! Freedom—freedom! There ain't nothin' big enough to hold it. Shout, you mourners, you shall be free—free in the Lord! the deep channel! We ain't hung up in the shallers no more—the jam's broke and we're out in the deep channel of the river, travelling free in the peace of the Lord.'

In order to attain this soul liberty we must be prepared to let go everything that keeps the soul in bondage. A little boy once got into difficulties in the home. The mother heard a sudden cry of distress, and ran to her terrified child to discover that his hand was fast in a vase with a narrow neck. She tried hard to release him, but her efforts were in vain. She did not want to break the vase because of its valuable family associations. By and by the father heard the screams of the frightened child and he hastened to the scene of distress. Being less perturbed and somewhat more philosophic than the mother, he quickly observed that the boy's hand was clenched tightly in the vase. 'Open your hand, boy,' said the father, 'open your hand, it will then come out.' 'But I'll drop the penny, then,' replied the child innocently and sobbingly. He would rather be in bondage and cling to his penny than let the penny go and obtain his freedom. He had not realized that that was the only way to freedom. We must let go selfish pleasure, pride of position and power and possession. Anything and everything that keeps us in bondage must be dropped if the soul is to gain its freedom and dwell in the company of those whom Jesus Christ has delivered from the tyranny and bondage of sin.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. Rees, *How to handle Life*, 71.