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silent. May it not have been possible that in that home just at that very time there were some children having a meal, and their puppy playmates were seated near them, with expectant eyes? If so, that sight would have suggested to Jesus the nature of His remark: 'Let the children be satisfied first of all; it is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the pups.' That is equivalent to His saying to her: 'But if I am merely the Jewish Messiah, as you call Me, then you have no claim on My help at present.' One can see that it is the problem as to what were the exact limits of His mission which is still at the back of His mind. He is also talking to Himself, I think, as well as to her. He does not yet feel certain of the Father's will. But the suppliant's eyes are upturned to the Master's face. There is a kindly smile or a humorous look accompanying the words, and she answers in a like mood, and through her answer the Divine will is disclosed to Jesus. She takes up the allusion to the dogs. 'Sir, you are quite right—the puppies do not get the children's food, *but they don't go hungry*. They get the crumbs that fall and the scraps left over. There is provision too for them in the household.' In that answer Jesus saw the solution of His difficulty. There's provision also for the outcaste and the idolater and the foreigner in the household of God. So He commended her faith—her faith in the love and pity of the unknown God, whose Messenger He was, her faith, too, in Himself, despite His long silence and His apparent disinclination to heed her—and He gladly granted her request.

Dr. Campbell Morgan, in his exposition of St. Matthew, has described what followed. While Jesus toured in those, and other, parts on the outskirts of His own land, crowds came, and brought their needy ones. And Jesus healed them all: He treated them just as He had done to His own people. And these non-Jews did what many Jews had failed to do—they 'glorified the God of Israel.' Once, four thousand of them had stayed with Him till their own food supplies were exhausted. Yet He fed them as He had previously fed five thousand of His fellow-countrymen.[1] These foreigners—despised by the Jews and outside the commonwealth of Israel—received even more than the crumbs; they shared in the children's bread. So the Messiah of the Jew showed Himself to be also the Saviour of the World.

[1] Dr. Campbell Morgan regards the different word for 'basket' used in the account of the Feeding of the Four Thousand as indicative of the fact that the crowd was a Gentile one, and not a Jewish one.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

The Bird with a Powder-Puff.

By the Reverend R. Oswald Davies, Leicester.

'I will make it a mere haunt of bitterns.'—Is 14^{23} (Moffatt).

There is a strange and somewhat rare bird which haunts the marshlands of our country. It is a shy bird, hiding closely among the reeds. It is the bittern.

1. If, however, this rare bird cannot be easily seen, it can, on the other hand, be easily heard. From February to June, if you chance to live in its country, you will have no difficulty in hearing its call, which is a most remarkable and penetrating sound. Should you hear it for the first time you would say: 'What is that? It is the bellowing of a bull;' and your heart would go pit-a-pat. Or, perhaps, you would say, 'It is a fog-horn.' Such would be the impression made by its call, which is a long, booming sound. There is no wonder that the ancient Romans called it 'The bellowing bull of the reeds.' That, then, is the first interesting fact about the bittern.

The bittern tells us that there is a voice to every life. The life of every girl and boy speaks. How important it is that that voice speaks of the good and not of the bad. We sometimes hear from a gramophone record the marvellous voice of Enrico Caruso, the great Italian tenor. He is long dead, but his voice sings on! And so, in a deeper way, the voices of great men, though dead, still speak to us—men like Plato, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Dickens, and above all the Lord Jesus. We cannot, I suppose, be a Plato or a Shakespeare, but we can see to it that the voice of our life shall be a good one.

2. The second feature of the bittern is more

interesting still. This bird actually possesses a powder-puff—in this case a very necessary article of toilet. If we examine her at close quarters, we see certain brilliant white patches on the upper breast and on the outsides of the thighs. These are the powder-puffs, and their task is to produce powder. Watch her at her operations. She has been catching food for her young, eels being the main item of their diet. The catching of eels is a rather sticky business, for not only have they to be speared—they have to be thoroughly beaten and shaken as well. By the end of the process both her head and neck are thickly covered with a sticky substance. Having fed her young, she rubs her head and neck repeatedly in the powder-puffs until she looks quite ludicrous, covered over with a white powder. After this she takes a rest, during which the sticky substance is being dried up, and then it is all scratched off carefully so that the feathers are again free and uncontaminated and able to do their proper work. For, should the bittern, for any reason, be unable to do this, ill-health would ensue and death would be the result.

And if cleanliness is a matter of life or death to the bittern, it is more so in the lives of girls and boys. Sin is indeed a 'sticky substance,' and it is not easy to be rid of it. While it sticks your life will be unclean and contaminated. You must, at all costs, get rid of it; for, if not, the life of your soul—the best part of you—will languish and die. 'Create in me a clean heart,' prayed the psalmist, and Jesus said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart.'

3. That, however, is not the end of the process. Having got rid of the sticky substance, thus making the feathers clean again, they have now to be re-waterproofed. The feathers cannot do their work unless they are waterproofed. Thus alone can they protect the skin. This time the bittern turns to her waterproof gland, rubbing her head and neck thoroughly in the gland. In this way the feathers are restored and made waterproof once more so as to give proper protection to the skin.

And like the bittern we, too, need protection. You now enjoy the protection of home. What a wonderful protection it is! The day will come, however, when you will no longer need the protection of home. But to the end of your life you will need the protection of Jesus. He alone can keep you from evil. Having what the Bible calls the shield of faith, which is loving Him, you can face life knowing that you will be safely preserved from the contaminations of the world.

Muddled Messages.

By the Reverend T. Greener Gardner, Matlock.

'All things work together for good to them that love God.'—Ro 8^{28}.

One day, when visiting, I saw a boy struggling with a jig-saw puzzle, and by the number of pieces of wood which were on the table it looked as if it might be a very big example of that kind of puzzle, but as I looked at it only a very small portion was put together. The boy looked up from his task and said, 'There's no picture from which to copy for this puzzle, and there are hundreds of pieces—but I'll stick to it until I have finished it.' And he did, for some days later I saw the completed picture. What a jumbled heap of bits of wood it was when I first saw it, and yet it was a very fine picture when it was completed. The picture was there all the time, but it was first necessary to put the many pieces of wood in their right positions before the picture could be seen and appreciated.

I wonder if any of you have seen the advertisement issued by the Post Office about the secrecy of any message which they send by wireless across the ocean to America? At this end there is an instrument which so mixes up the words, that should any one tap the message they would receive such a jumble of words that they would not be able to understand the message sent out. At the receiving end, however, there is another instrument which just puts back the words in the right order, and those for whom the message is intended receive it in the manner desired by those who sent out the message.

Perhaps you heard the Post Office officials tell this story over the Wireless one evening. They mixed up messages and music, and then they used the translating instrument and we heard just exactly what had been sent out by the sender.

When I think about jig-saw puzzles and about the Post Office muddled telegrams, I also think about our lives, and particularly about our prayers. I am sure that many things which we do in life do not appear to those around us as we wish them to appear. The spirit behind the various actions may be quite all right, but they are open to misinterpretation, and are misunderstood.

I am equally sure that many of our prayers are so strange that, if any one but God listens to them, they are incoherent. Now when we think about these things, there is a saying of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans which comes to our minds. It is this: 'We know that all things work together

for good to them that love God.' These words are a great help as we think of the mixed interpretation of the actions of life, and the muddled prayers we utter. God knows what we mean, and He can put them all in the right order. God knows what we intend to do, and what we wish to say. So it seems as if life is just like the jig-saw puzzle, or like the muddled words of the telegram. However, we know that the hundreds of small pieces of wood in the puzzle can make a fine picture; they only need to be put in the right places; the telegram simply needs the rectifying machine at the other end, and the message will be received in the right order. Just so God looks upon our actions and upon our prayers, knows what we desired to do, and what was behind our prayers, and He will put them in the right order, all things working together for good because we love God. Some day we shall see the pieces of life forming a complete picture, and the muddled actions and prayers finding meaning and order—if we love God. It is because we love God that all things work together for good.

The Christian Year.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Fear of Spiritual Chance.

'And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.'—Mk 5^{17}.

This is the only recorded instance of people actually telling Jesus that they wanted to be rid of Him; excepting, of course, when the end came and they shouted, 'Away with him.' While He pursued His mission of mercy and healing He was eagerly sought after. But in this case the result was eagerness to get rid of Him. There may have been other occasions when people wished to be rid of Him. We are sure there were. We are sure He was dismissed by individual people every day just as He is still. But here was a whole community, in whose midst an outstanding work of God had been done, beseeching the Man who had the Divine power and grace to do it to clear out.

They had at least the advantage of being honest. There are people, faced with miraculous happenings to-day, who are not always so honest as the Gadarenes. They do not tell Jesus in so many words to clear out—they would never dream of doing such a thing—but they take care to keep out of the area of these miraculous happenings. Wisely, too, if they do not want to be changed! It is not safe to come too close to Jesus. We never know what might happen, all in a moment. We might be so changed that our friends would not know us. They would look at us in a scared kind of way, the way the Gadarenes looked at the dangerous lunatic, now sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. Many are scared of such happenings, almost as scared as of death itself. They do well to be scared. The instinct which tells them that spiritual change is like death is right. A person who is really changed, morally and spiritually, is a quite different person.

So it is a fact that there are those who are praying Jesus to depart out of their coasts and allow them to be happy in their own way. Fear of what such a change might mean to themselves, fear of coming too close to supernatural powers are at the root of this. These are fears we have all known.

'I have always liked,' says Professor Rufus Jones, in *The Trail of Life in the Middle Years*, 'the story of the boy in the primer class who was told by his teacher at the beginning of his education to say A as she pointed to the letter. "I am not going to say A," the boy replied, "for if I say A, you will want me to go on and say B!" He dimly foresaw the drag of the whole alphabetic system which would eventually carry him irresistibly on to Z, and with precocious wisdom he announced his declaration of independence before the remoter complications emerged.'

Here we find One who had supernatural power, who had control over the natural elements, coming close, very close, to those people. The context is the incident of stilling the tempest. The two incidents are related. The Man who could control the tempestuous wind and waves could also control the capricious and tumultuous passions of men. No wonder that people are scared in the presence of such power: when they see drastic moral changes in some notorious character; when, as in this instance, they saw this wild man of the tombs sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. 'That frightened them,' as Moffatt puts it. It was not his madness that now frightened them; it was his sanity; or rather the Power that brought it about. Such things seem uncanny to most people. It is extraordinary how largely superstition enters into religion. In the primitive stages of religion it is hard to distinguish the one from the other. The fetish-worshipper desires to be on good terms with the spirits, to have the friendly ones on his side. He wants their protection, but without desire to have any more to do with them than is absolutely necessary. There is no thought of entering into communion with them.

This may be primitive religion, but it is not remote from current religious practice.

In his book, *The Procession of the Gods*, Dr. Glynn Atkins shows how the Greek worshipper desired no more than to propitiate the god, to change the mood of the god towards himself. That is the essence of superstition. It tries to change God's attitude towards man without changing man's attitude towards God. But religion only begins when there is a disinterested desire to enter into communion with God. The Greek worshipper had no other desire than to propitiate the god, to gain something by it, and to trouble him no further. For this he coined the phrase 'a please-go-away-God religion.' It exactly describes what the religion of multitudes is. They want to have the benefits of religion, the comfort and the protection of religion; they want to 'cover' themselves, as it were, against serious accident or loss, without the least desire to have any personal dealings with the God they invoke on these critical occasions, much less to commit themselves to Him in any way that would compromise their freedom. It would be regarded by worldly friends as nothing short of a disaster if this or that prominent business man got suddenly converted. It might upset even the share market, if this or that big financier 'got religion,' as the saying is. It is an expressive phrase. It suggests an epidemic. It is true of real religion in these days. It is going about. One can never tell who might get it.

Of course, we can take precautions. It is possible to clear our coasts so thoroughly that we are in no danger of coming face to face with Jesus, or into close quarters with the gospel challenge. We can insulate our conscience so effectively that it is proof against conviction. We can come to church and listen to the most challenging appeals with perfect safety. We should not want to do without the church. It has its uses. We want to maintain relations with God, even if they are of the come-and-go-as-you-please order. But is it worth while having such a relationship? Would it not be better, more honest, to cut out religion altogether? It would indicate some degree of reality. If we cannot bear the thought of Him, we do not like Him; and if we do not like Him in this life, it is not to be expected that we shall like Him in the next. That was what Robert Louis Stevenson said about Matthew Arnold when he heard of his death: 'Matthew Arnold dead? He won't like God!' We know the conditions on which we can like Him. We know that He cannot abide sin or abide where sin is. So that by indulging in any sin, any relationship or habit that cannot bear the light of His close scrutiny, we are bidding Him depart.

Some of us are trying to find an excuse for our own attitude by trying to justify the attitude of the Gadarenes. After all, they were justified in asking Jesus to go away. His visit was attended by considerable loss to them. The devils went out of the man and went into the pigs. It was the most natural thing for them to do, the most natural place for them to go. Why should a man or woman made in the image of God ever have a devil? you say. There is no such thing as demon-possession to-day. Is there not? What about that temper which got the better of you the other day, when you slammed the door after you? 'A devil of a temper,' we say. We are right. You may not think it a serious matter. It certainly did not seem to matter much in the old days. Some of the saintliest men had ungovernable tempers. They called it 'righteous indignation'! They never thought that it had to be cast out, like this or any other demon. Of course, they were not happy saints. There was a gloom about their religion. We did not know then why it was. We know now. We know that this and every other devil must be cast out.

This man, we are told, was possessed of an unclean spirit. But the forms in which it manifested itself were legion. Have you ever thought of this as a possible explanation of your unhealthy thought-life? You would not like to think that you were possessed of an unclean spirit. Yet, what is the cause of those thoughts, which of yourself you would never think of conceiving; those mental pictures and images which, if thrown on a screen, would shock you?

Have you ever really wanted to get rid of them? Naturally, like the devils in this story, they do not want to go. Of course not; they always make a bid for the *status quo*. They want things left as they are. But all these devils of the imagination—and their name is legion—can be in a moment and for ever exorcised, banished. They can be sent into the swine, their natural affinity, suited to their nature, and in panic made to rush down a steep place into the sea, where they are drowned: drowned in forgetfulness, in God's forgetfulness and ours. Christ can so deliver us from the empire of demonic misrule, can heal us of this abnormality that keeps us isolated not only from Him but from our fellows, can restore us to healthy—and happy-mindedness, giving us positive purity; not only freedom from pride, self-love, and self-idolatry, but

His own creative goodness and redemptive love, His own spirit of purity and grace.

Spirit of purity and grace,
Our weakness, pitying, see:
O make our hearts Thy dwelling-place,
And worthier Thee.[1]

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Beware of the False.

'Beware of false prophets.'—Mt 7^{15}.

False prophets! A prophet is a man who speaks for God, how then can the word false be put before prophet? Surely there must be something wrong here? Can the spiritual man be false? Is the slime of the serpent on the altar? Is the lie in the sanctuary? Let us make no mistake. Eden was the sanctuary of God, the garden of the Most High, and the serpent entered there. The air was fresh, and the flowers were bright. It was the place of happiness, and delight, and yet the old history tells us of the serpent in Eden. There are people who say, If you only get the environment right, it will be all right. Good drains, good housing, good circumstances, good environment, good surroundings, and you will get your people good. Even though we have an Eden, we cannot keep out the serpent.

Now it is our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ Himself, who gives us this scare, this 'Beware!' When we enter a Roman house at Pompeii, we see marked on the pavement below us, *Cave canem*, 'Beware of the dog.' Here, at the very threshold of the Christian Church, we have a '*Cave*,' for the Lord Himself has uttered it, and He says, 'Beware of false prophets.' He belonged to the new Covenant which fulfilled the old, and here He speaks in the language of the old Covenant, but His Apostle, Paul, carries on the same caution. How does he look at it in the new Covenant of Grace? 'Beware of false apostles,' he says—the same idea, the same caution. And in another place he speaks of 'Satan transforming himself into an angel of light.' How otherwise could he hope to succeed in duping any of the better sort of mankind?

If this seems very hard on the pulpit, we too have our caution. What are we to beware of? We are to beware of false brethren. But, surely, the very term of brother proves that he would never be false. The false brother; the one with whom we have fellowship, whose hands we shake, whose eyes we have looked into, whose company we have kept. He pretends to be what he is not, and he pretends not to be what he is. The man who will come sitting by, as the Pharisees watched Jesus, that they may see something whereof they may have to accuse their brethren. In the pulpit, as well as in the pew, there is need to beware of false brethren. And God, who hates the false shekel, the false measure, hates the false prophet, the false apostle, the false brother, the false man. He hates all that is false. 'If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss; O Lord, who may abide it?'

1. Well, then, let us consider this in connexion with *the Christian Church*. The Christian Church must be true. It is that society which is governed by the spirit of truth. That is the life of the Christian Church. If there were no spirit of truth, there would be no Church, and the spirit of truth is to lead the Church into all truth. The Church must not countenance a lie for one moment; not for any expediency of position or popularity can the Church countenance a lie. That was the difficulty at the time of the Reformation. The religious orders had taken the vow of poverty, and they held the fattest and richest of all the English land. 'True,' they said, 'but it does not belong to us individually; it belongs to the Order.' But the English people saw through that lie, and when they were all swept away, they allowed it.

2. What is true of the Church must be true of *individuals*. God requires 'truth in the inward parts.' We must not say we believe, because we take it for granted; because we have been told we must believe. If we *say* our Creed only, it is patter, nothing but patter. If we believe it, it is an act of faith. The gospel says, 'Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven.' What could be better to say than 'Lord, Lord'—that is an orthodox creed. We cannot pick a hole in that orthodoxy. It is the right name, but we must be true in our hearts when we say it. We must do what our Lord tells us. Better hold a false faith and have a true heart than hold a true faith and have a false heart. God requires truth in the inward parts. Our profession which the world can see must be the evidence of an inward and changed life, or it is only 'put on.' Do we forgive our enemies? Yes, of course, we do. We want to live comfortably with all those that are round about us. Will that pass? No, our Lord puts it differently: 'If ye from your *hearts* forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.' This is the test whether we love the Master, and are one with Him. If, looking over all those who have done us any injury in this world, we have no feeling against them, but pray for their salvation, having

[1] E. Macmillan, *Seeking and Finding*, 45.

naught against anybody, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us.

Be what thou seemest; live thy creed;
Hold up to earth the torch divine;
Be what thou prayest to be made;
Let the great Master's steps be thine.

As we seek the truth it expands in front of us, enlarges, becomes a horizon of infinite capacity and joy. Beyond that hill there rises the horizon, and we say, 'If we get to that hill, we might be able to put our hands against the horizon.' But when we climb that hill, the horizon is just as far. It is the same horizon, and it is just as expansive. So too, when we know one truth, we shall see another, and it ever expands and enlarges before us. The reward is in the search, and in the joy of finding what is true. We can measure the earth. We cannot measure the horizon. And we cannot measure God—lost in the infinite truth. But we shall know the truth when we get behind the horizon, and into the presence of God. When the truth makes us free, we are free indeed.[1]

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Incompleteness of Life.

'Now I know in part.'—1 Co 13^{12}.

'Not that I have already obtained.'—Ph 3^{12} (R.V.).

'It is not yet made manifest what we shall be.'—1 Jn 3^{2} (R.V.).

The three texts are given from three different books. There is a link that binds all three together and makes a unity of them. They all express a certain sense of incompleteness. The first gives expression to the Apostle Paul's sense of the incompleteness of his *knowledge*. The second gives expression to the same Apostle's sense of the incompleteness of his *achievement*. The third gives expression to the Apostle John's sense of the incompleteness of *character*. Now this sense of incompleteness is not peculiar to the Apostles who wrote these letters, or to those first Christians to whom they were addressed. It is common to us all. The youth in Longfellow's familiar poem is every one of us—we all grasp that banner with the strange device—'Excelsior.' We all realize that there are loftier heights to which we ought to attain. We all long for a completeness which is not ours at the moment.

Is this sense of incompleteness not one of the things which separates us by a deep and impassable gulf from the brute creation? It may be that on the physical side we are allied to that creation, but there is a spirit in man which separates him by a whole continent from the noblest of the creatures. There is no sign of discontent with their lot about the animals—the cow out in the meadow, peacefully chewing the cud, is the very type of placid content. The animals give no hint of any desire to be something better and finer than they are. Except in Æsop's fables, they do not seem to be jealous of one another; the ass does not want to be a lion, and the frog does not envy the cow its size. They are satisfied to be what they are. But man *knows* he is incomplete. He is vividly aware that he is partial and unfinished. He knows he is a bundle of unrealized potencies. He knows he might be a far greater and nobler being than he is.

1. *Incompleteness of Knowledge.*—'I know in part.' Every serious man makes that confession. Of course no individual is master of the total sum even of our ascertained knowledge. Men specialize. But if we could concentrate into one mighty brain the vast sum of ascertained knowledge—if we had a kind of super-scholar, who was a sort of Acton, Kelvin, Darwin, Lyell, Herschel, Hegel, rolled into one—this would be still his confession: 'I know in part.' The preacher says he set himself 'to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven.' He confessed that it was a 'sore travail to be exercised therewith.' But he seemed to think he had really achieved his aim. 'I have seen all the works that are done under the sun,' he says. He little realized that what he knew was but a drop in the ocean. The modern man, though his knowledge is infinitely enlarged, is more conscious of his ignorance than of his knowledge. Scientists are busy in every direction with their researches. And, prompting all this research work, accounting for all the patient toil of scientists in every laboratory in the world, is this feeling, 'We know in part.'

And what is true of secular knowledge is true also of our knowledge of God and eternal things. The Bible is full of confessions of the incompleteness of our knowledge. At the best it is only 'parts of God's ways' that we know. Jesus Himself, in so many words, told the disciples that there were great truths about God which were as yet beyond their understanding. 'I have many things to say unto you,' He said to them, on the eve of His passion, 'but ye cannot bear them now.' This increased knowledge came to them in part during their lives. 'They followed on to know the Lord.' But at the very end, the Apostles would, with unanimous voice, have confessed, 'We know in part.' And that is how the case still stands. We believe we have truer conceptions of God than they had in the early Christian centuries. The Spirit

[1] Father Stanton, *Faithful Stewardship*, 24.

has been taking of the things of Christ, and revealing them unto us. But still it is only parts of God's ways we know.

2. *Incompleteness of Achievement.*—'Not that I have already obtained.' Paul was aware of calls to which he had not as yet been able to respond, and tasks which as yet he had not been able to finish. He felt himself debtor both to Greek and barbarian, both to bond and free. He felt he owed the gospel to them. He had vast and daring plans for world-wide evangelism.

There was for years in Piccadilly, in London, an unfinished building, overlooking the Park. It was quite clearly meant to be a fine building worthy of its position. But its erection seemed to have been stopped half-way. Probably it was, first of all, the War, and then the enormously enhanced cost, that brought operations to a standstill. Anyhow there it stood for years, with its steel girders in place, showing what kind of a building it was meant to be—but a mere frame, a mere skeleton of a building. Architect and builder, looking at that skeleton of a house, could use the words of the text, 'Not that we have already obtained.' And is not that unfinished building a symbol of human life? Men and women have been made for great things. There is a certain grandeur in the plan, a certain greatness and nobility about the design. Some, it is true, never seem to get on with the building very much. But even in the case of those who have set to work to build faithfully, in accordance with the great Architect's plans, when evening comes, and we have to lay down our tools, we haven't a fair and finished house to look upon—but a mere frame, a shell, a skeleton—like that derelict house in London. We never finish. And that is part of the bitterness of death, that we have to leave things we meant to do, half-finished or not done at all. This is the universal confession: 'We have not already attained.'

3. *Incompleteness of Character.*—Character with most of us is a poor and partial thing. We are painfully conscious of it because we know that we ought to be better, and that we are capable of being better. Why otherwise are we afflicted with a sense of humiliation and shame over our failures and shortcomings? We do not feel shame for things we cannot help. We do not reproach ourselves that we can't sing like Melba or Caruso; we don't blame ourselves that we haven't got the brain of Einstein or Sir Oliver Lodge. We don't feel any shame that we are not as physically strong as others. But we are humbled and shamed as we think of our imperfect characters.

The deduction we want to draw from this sense of incompleteness—this incompleteness which never allows us to be satisfied, which strives and pants and yearns for a completeness that is ever beyond its reach—is this, that sometime, and somewhere, that completeness must be ours. It is giving God's character clean away to say that He made us the beings that we are with these longings after a completeness which never becomes ours in this life if, after all, He meant to disappoint and cheat us. That makes God out to be a sort of monstrous Aristophanes making cruel sport of His human creatures. 'I believe in the immortality of the soul,' said John Fiske, 'as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work.' For years that derelict building in Piccadilly remained just a skeleton, a shell. But ultimately the building was resumed, the architect's plans were completed, and that one-time shell of a building now offers to those who can afford it the most luxurious flats in London. And so it will be with us. We are not to remain partial, truncated, incomplete. God will perfect that which concerns us.

Paul and John had no doubt of it. God's character was a guarantee of it, for God was no mocker, and He never did His work by halves. So they looked forward with confident assurance to another life:

> Where every task in which they failed,
> And all wherein their courage quailed,
> Where all the good their spirits planned,
> Is done.

If it is objected that all this amounts to nothing more than an inference, we might reply that at any rate it is an inference based on the very character of God, which is a fairly sound foundation to rest upon. But we will not admit that it is a mere inference, for this reason: that God's plan for mankind has been revealed in Jesus. In Jesus God has shown us what He means manhood to be. Now the unique thing about Jesus was this—He was complete. He was complete in knowledge. He knew the Father. He was complete in achievement, for that was the cry He uttered almost with His dying breath—'It is finished.' He left no loose ends, no unfinished tasks; the great work of redemption was complete. And He was complete in character. He is the one example in history of complete and perfect humanity. In Him is revealed God's plan for the race. Other things are revealed in Him, doubtless; but this is, too, God's plan for us, God's purpose for us. Jesus is not to remain the sole and solitary example of perfected and completed manhood. He

is to lead many sons into glory. In Jesus we see God's plan for the race. What we see in the Cross, from one aspect of it, is the measure of God's resolve to carry out His plan. And, in the long run, can anything or any one defeat or thwart His purpose? [1]

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Disappointed Shipbuilder.

'Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold; but they went not: for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber.'—1 K 22^{48}.

The statement is more than a mere incident from the naval annals of Judah. *It is a universal experience with many of life's ambitions.* Who is there who has not set his heart upon something as precious in his eyes as the far-famed gold of Ophir? Who has not built his ships and made his plans for them to go and come again? 'But they went not.' Is not that just the sum of many a life's tragedy? Where was our Ezion-geber? Who was it? Is there anything more haunting than the pathos of eyes that grow weary watching for the ships that never will come in?

Each heart can chart the rocks of its own Ezion-geber, but we do not readily speak of them to others. But when a writer lifts aside a corner of the veil of his inner life and shares with us some of those secret thoughts, do we not draw to him with something of affectionate regard? Is not this the power and charm of Lamb's 'Dream Children' and of the more intimate writings of some latter-day essayists? And is the meaning of it not just this, that we know that love's labours are never lost? that after all it is better to have set sail for Ophir than never to have got the length of Ezion-geber? As Joaquin Miller puts it:

> Unanchored ships, that blow and blow,
> Sail to and fro, and then go down
> In unknown seas that none shall know,
> Without one ripple of renown.
>
> Call these not fools; the test of worth
> Is not the hold you have of earth.
> Lo, there be gentlest souls, sea blown,
> That know not any harbour known;
> And it may be the reason is
> They touch on fairer shores than this.

That is the other side of seeming defeat to which Lord Rosebery called attention when unveiling the Memorial at Flodden Field. 'I am here because, proud as I am of Bannockburn, I am not less proud of Flodden, not merely because of the valour of the army, but because of the spirit of the nation. . . . All seemed to be dead but the spirit of the country. Let us always bear in mind that heroes and heroism are visible and produced not in the splendour of triumph but in the anguish of adversity. It is well, no doubt, to be conducted to the capital and crowned among the acclamations of the people, yet the hero who most appeals to us is not the conqueror, but he who in the naked agony of catastrophe and despair rises superior to fate and leads captivity captive. It is to him that goes forth the eternal sympathy of mankind.'

The ships of Jehoshaphat brought back no gold from Ophir. This man, too, was foiled in his enterprise. But he was enriched with other spoils—wealth of experience and the priceless gift of sympathy with other broken people and things. Many of us have, like St. Paul, essayed to go into some Bithynia. Well for us if, like him also, we discover that the contrary wind is the spirit of Jesus.

There are *many also who could parallel Jehoshaphat's disaster in their religious experience.* We are not told what caused the damage to the fleet of the king of Judah; but we are led to infer from the account in the Book of Chronicles that he suffered loss through joining himself in an unholy league with Ahaziah, son of Ahab, the godless king of Israel. That has been the cause of many a shipwreck of faith since then. There have been those who have set out with high hopes for Ophir, but who have taken on board that which has wrought their ruin. Others have hugged too close the land they should have boldly left behind, or have knowingly tried to thread a dubious course through rock and treacherous shoal. Jehoshaphat seems to have profited by his sharp loss, for we are told that he would have nothing to do with the suggestion when Ahaziah sent again, saying, 'Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships.'

The gold of Ophir—that ancient Biblical symbol for the true spiritual treasure—can only be reached by the ship that is manned for that sole purpose.

We can take no others on board when we set out upon that quest. When it comes to making the venture of faith we have each to build our own ships and to make the voyage alone. We too built ships to go to Ophir for gold; but they went not. What was the nature of the wrecking rocks of Ezion-geber? Were they moral or intellectual? There are many who could not steer by the chart of the harsh and narrow creed which was thrust upon them, or who would not trim the sails of honesty to catch only one aspect of God's truth. Have they

[1] J. D. Jones, *Richmond Hill Sermons*, 173.

ever considered that perhaps God was never given fair play when His claims were presented to them? that the wrong chart was handed to them? Or it may be that the way to the open sea was obscured in a mist of tears or a fog of doubt, and the ship of faith was wrecked on some jagged misconception of the nature of God.

The sacred historian thinks it not unworthy to be recorded that Jehoshaphat made ships to go for gold. He chronicles a disappointed dream, an unsuccessful venture. 'Jehoshaphat made ships to go'; that was the main incident. 'But they went not'; that was an untoward accident. And the great thing to be recorded about any of us is just that we made ships to go to Ophir. We deal with a God who can pass a verdict like this upon an honest life. 'It was well that it was in thine heart.'

An altar was recently excavated on the great Roman road in the north of England, an altar dedicated, not to any of the warlike gods of Rome, much less to the gods of pleasure and ease, but 'To the Discipline of Augustus.' Far from home those rough soldiers felt their commander's eye was upon them. To that faithful spirit of duty they raised their altar, that spirit of discipline which made them go through the old weary routine, that same spirit which had made and extended, maintained and guarded, the bounds of their Leader's empire.

There are certain moments when we all gather about that rugged altar of faithfulness to duty and the Unseen Commander. Even though our whole being rebels against it we make an effort to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land. There are moments when the heart and the mind of us cry out for real things; when the false and the feeble will not do; when, in fact, they are insupportable, and jar with every conception of what life really means. These are life's saving moments, when once again we make ships to go for that

> treasure that is ours to hold
> Secure, while all things else are turned to dust;
> That priceless and imperishable gold
> Beyond the scathe of robber and of rust.

And while Jehoshaphat's sinking ships are settling, let them speak to us also of *the venture of immortality*. That is the last voyage, and one which we all must face. That is a far-off Ophir indeed, and very precious the gold which awaits us there. Are our building plans ample enough for that long voyage? Can we but say, at the most, 'It may be we shall reach the Happy Isles'? Then there is One lying asleep, as yet in the hinder part of our ship, who waits for us to wake Him. Not till the hour of our recognized and acknowledged need will He arise. Christ has taken the peradventure out of life and the future. 'Be of good cheer about death,' Plato could say; 'and know this of a truth—that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death.' That was putting it negatively. Christ said it positively, that God is a Pilot who has never yet failed to bring home all His ships to the haven of their heart's desire. 'If it were not so I would have told you.'

And though to us who stand watching on the shore it sometimes seems as if the precious craft was broken, yet we know that all is well; and even while we weep it has come to pass that they have escaped all safe to land.[1]

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Self-Examination.

'By the grace of God I am what I am.'—1 Co 15^{10}.

During his early ministry, St. Paul was often put to the hateful necessity of defending himself—and that against his fellow-Christians. His pre-conversion life laid him open to such attacks. In many places he makes vehement answer to his accusers, but nowhere more effectively than in these simple words, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' When Newman was attacked by Kingsley for Jesuitism in his *Road to Rome*, he gave a spirited reply by simply writing his life and calling it, *Apologia pro vita sua*. His life was its own best defence.

Looking at our text thus, we see it suggests: (1) a *wise self-scrutiny*—'I am—what?'; (2) a *noble answer*—'I am what I am'; (3) a *great secret*—'By the grace of God I am what I am.'

1. In the wise self-estimate which Paul here gives of his life, there is a great question enshrined, 'I am—what?' Let us recall the time when he first put that question to himself. It was on the Damascus road, when Jesus appeared to him and 'apprehended' him like a thief in the night. Paul's question then was—'Who art thou, Lord?'; and when the answer was given, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest,' there at once arose in his mind this other—'Then, what am I? My life must be all a lie. I must be self-deluded, a murderer and blasphemer.' That was the question Paul put to himself then and during those days of darkness that followed; and it was out of the answer he gave it that his new life was afterwards built. It must be the same with us. 'If Christ be what He is,

[1] H. L. Simpson, *Put Forth by the Moon*, 155.

then I am—what?' If Jesus is God, then what am I? What is my relation to Him whom men crucified but whom God has exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour?

This is the first great subject for self-examination which Paul elsewhere presses upon us when he says, 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith. Do you not understand that Christ is in you? Otherwise you must be failures' (Moffatt's translation). Let us then examine our faith and test it; but how? We answer by Christ's text, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' Is our faith bringing forth the fruits of faith?

But there is also another use of self-examination. It is to see whether we are using our faith day by day as an instrument of Christian progress; or whether our faith, true as it may be, is not being choked by the temptations and trials which come on us from day to day. This is the kind of self-examination which Paul enjoins when speaking of the Holy Communion and its worthy observance. 'But let a man,' he says, 'examine himself and so let him eat of that bread.' It is on this text that the Church has always enjoined the duty of self-examination as the true preparation for the Lord's Supper. In doing so one has done right, but it should, as Law has said in *Serious Call*, be done by us every night before we go to bed.

2. Such are the thoughts suggested by the question of self-scrutiny in the heart of our text —'I am—what?' And now let us look at Paul's fine answer to that question—'I am what I am.' As we have seen, he put this question to himself years before this. The first answer his conscience gave it was, 'I am the murderer of Stephen, the blasphemer of Christ.' But he did not rest there. 'Am I that?' he said. 'Yes; but I shall be so no longer. Henceforth I am Christ's and Christ's only.' This was his answer, and we know what came of it. His life became a glowing testimony to the faith he professed. 'I laboured more abundantly than they all,' he could truly say,

> Lone on the land and homeless on the water
> Pass I in patience till the work be done.

Thus it is that now when his detractors would point the finger of scorn at his past life, he simply points them to his present, and says, 'I am—what I am.' When it was suggested to Sir Christopher Wren that he should have a tablet to his memory placed in his great creation, you remember his fine reply, 'Si monumentum requiras, circumspice.' Can we say that? Does our practice square with our profession? It is no little thing when a man can say, 'I am what I am. There is no pinchbeck in my character: there is no false veneer over my inner life.' You say, 'Is this but pride?' Yes; but a just pride. John Bunyan was not a self-righteous man, but when he was accused of licentiousness he gave an answer in which we may hear a ring of true pride: 'If all the adulterers in England were hanging by the neck to-morrow, John Bunyan would be alive.'

3. But while a healthy self-examination may bring the soul to a true pride, such a pride will always be accompanied by a deep humility. This is brought out by the opening words of this wise self-estimate of Paul, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'

'Grace,' as we all know, was one of Paul's favourite words. All his life he was pursued by the thought that, whatever he did, he owed to the grace of God. This kept him free from any temptation to self-righteousness. So he ever seemed to grow humbler as he grew older. The more he became, the less he thought of himself. It has been pointed out that in this Epistle, written comparatively early, he calls himself 'the least of the apostles'; while in the Ephesians, written long after, he calls himself 'less than the least of all saints.' One would think he could go hardly lower in self-esteem, yet he reaches even a lower depth in his Epistle to Timothy, when he declares that, 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, *of whom I am chief*.'

And this is the result of all true self-examination in the sight of God. 'How unsatisfactory it all looks,' said a great preacher as he lay dying. 'Self, self, self, has been in it all,' said another. We might fill pages with such confessions, but it is unneeded. They are always the first result of the soul's vision of itself in the sight of God. The language of Job expresses a universal experience. 'Once I heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.' But the final word is not self-abhorrence. It is hope: it is confidence, yet a confidence mingled with humility. 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' If there is humility here, there is hope also. If the grace of God turned the murderer of Stephen into Paul the Apostle, who shall limit its power with any man? Only let a man yield himself to it and it will build out of his life, however poor it may seem to him, a noble temple of His love, from which every day there will rise this anthem of praise—'By the grace of God I am what I am.'[1]

[1] W. M. Mackay, *Our Attitude to Self*, 225.