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In the Study.

Virginitus Puerisque.

'Mr. Anonymous.'

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

'When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men.'—Mt 6².

Have you ever heard of the gentleman named 'Mr. Anonymous'? As a matter of fact he is rather a difficult person to meet—you often hear about him, you sometimes see his name in lists of subscriptions, but detect him you cannot. He sometimes calls at the office of some Home for poor children, and leaves £100 on the counter, and disappears like quicksilver. The other day Mr. Anonymous—or was it Mrs. Anonymous?—wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society promising £3000 towards clearing the deficit on the Missionary funds! I read this in *The Times* the other day: An unknown woman, who called in February at the headquarters of the British Sailors' Society and left fifteen £10 notes without revealing her name or address, has called again and left a further twenty £10 notes. Of course, his appearances and disappearances are not always in connexion with money. Sometimes you read in the papers that a little boy fell into the river: a young man passing by saw him: he quickly threw off his coat, jumped into the river, and rescued the boy: the young man disappeared without leaving his name and address. Mr. Anon! That is what the name signifies—'without a name.'

There is a story in the Bible of a Master Anonymous. A boy was out for the day with his lunch, and he followed the crowd, as many a boy would do. And what a crowd! Five thousand people! This boy had without any difficulty wriggled his way up to the front where a wonderful Man, with such a lovely expression on His face, was speaking. Then there was a little discussion between this Teacher and the few men standing close by Him. What is it all about? hungry? bread? money? Master Anonymous is now quite close to one of the disciples. 'I've got my dinner with me, the Master can have this if He likes.' 'There is a lad here,' says Andrew to the Master, 'who has five barley loaves and two small fishes, but what are they among so many?' The lad can just hear the

Master say, 'Good; make the men sit down,' and then he watches with eyes wide open, and mouth open, too, with astonishment. His lunch is enough for all! Master Anonymous! No name given, but what a kind, unselfish act of his.

It is great fun acting Mr. Anonymous. The greatest real fun I have had was in a church where I was minister: the church was going to have its two hundred and fiftieth birthday, and one of the members came and said that he wanted to make a birthday present of £250: *but* he did not want any one to know his name—or shall I say, her name? Now, how were we to do it? Well, a scheme was thought out: it happened that the County Association Committee meeting was to be held, and we arranged for the announcement to be made there that a certain friend in the county had anonymously given £250 to our church. The delegates came back with the welcome news! And what fun we had. I could see a twinkle in the eyes of 'Mr. Anonymous' when at a church meeting we passed a resolution of thanks, and he himself had to hold up his hand and thus pass a vote of thanks to himself!

Have you ever tried being Master Anonymous or Miss Anonymous? It is great fun: you try! Mother comes home, and finds tea already laid; who has done it? Oh, Master Anonymous! Mother goes upstairs, and finds the bedroom all dusted and tidy; who has done it? Oh, Miss Anonymous.

There is only one time when it is wrong to be Mr. Anonymous, and that is when we have done something wrong. For instance, some one disturbs the class at school, and does not own up, and the whole class gets into trouble. That is not playing the game. Or, some boys are playing with a ball in the street, and quite accidentally the ball goes through a window: the man comes out of the house, but not a boy is to be seen! They have all disappeared like lightning! They are all anonymous! No, that is the time to own up, and give in your name and address with the plea, 'Please, sir, I'm very sorry, but I did it.'

Yes, it is unfortunately possible to deceive people by being anonymous when we have done wrong: but it is joyfully possible to please people by giving a helping hand anonymously. Remember this, however: there is no 'Mr. Anonymous' in God's

books. All secrets are known to Him : nothing is hidden, evil deeds, evil thoughts. But the good things also are known, Jesus said that even a cup of cold water given to a needy one would not go by without God's reward.

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Just like a Parrot.

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

‘ Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.’—Ps 10¹⁴.

I WONDER if you noticed in the newspaper not long ago that there was a great deal of fuss and bother in Berlin one day. Of course it is no surprising thing to hear about fuss and bother in Berlin. But this time the cause of it all was surprising. What do you think was causing all the commotion? Not Nazis, nor Communists. But just a parrot.

It all happened right in the heart of the city, at one of the busy cross-roads, near which the parrot lived. You know how busy cross-roads in the centre of a great city are, and what a job it is to regulate the traffic. Well, it seems that in Berlin, or at least at this particular crossing, they don't regulate the traffic by automatic lights—green for ‘Go,’ and red for ‘Stop,’ nor yet by a policeman signalling with his arms. They do it by a voice. Some one, I suppose, is watching the traffic from a place of vantage, and to each stream of motors and things he says ‘Go,’ or ‘Stop,’ according to how he thinks it should be controlled. The voice comes out loud and clear through a loud-speaker of sorts, and the drivers of the vehicles must do as the voice says.

Well, it was near this crossing that the parrot lived. And, when the windows of the room where he was were open, he could hear this voice saying all day long, in German, of course, ‘Go,’ ‘Stop.’ He heard the voice say this so often that after a time he also learned to say ‘Go,’ ‘Stop.’ That was all right, of course, and quite what you would expect a parrot to do, and as he was not speaking so as to be heard in the streets it caused nothing but amusement. But one day the door of the cage was left open. The parrot thought he would do a little exploring. Perhaps he wanted to make closer acquaintance with the voice outside which he had heard so often. At any rate, he flew over in the direction the voice came from and then, perched in a tree, he began to let the voice know there was some one else who could say ‘Go,’ ‘Stop.’ And not only did the unseen voice soon

know this, but many other people became aware of it also. Drivers of motor-cars and others who wished to navigate that busy crossing in a safe and orderly way now heard two voices saying ‘Go,’ ‘Stop,’ in a most confusing fashion, and all the traffic was soon in a hopeless tangle. So they sent for the fire-brigade. Why the fire-brigade, I do not know, except that the fire-brigade had ladders which could reach up the tree where the parrot was. So the firemen brought their ladders, but as soon as they reached the branch where the parrot was, the parrot hopped on to a higher branch. This was repeated from branch to branch, and it continued for quite a time, and all the while the parrot kept up his ‘Go,’ ‘Stop.’ But at length he had had enough, and he flew back to his home of his own accord and in through the still open door of his cage. And peace and order came again to Berlin.

Now, what I want you to notice about this parrot is this : No doubt he was a very clever bird to be able to learn and repeat words ; but, nevertheless, he really did not know what the words he used meant, and he certainly did not think of their effect. But I fancy he is not the only one who has used words sometimes in that way. Have you, for instance, ever found yourself saying words which are supposed to be prayers, and then, all of a sudden, you have discovered that you really did not know what the words meant, or at least you were not thinking of what they meant? It is easy to do that. It is easy to repeat the Lord's Prayer and not think what it means. But that is not really praying. It is only using vain repetitions. We should think it very rude to talk to some one and not to know what our words meant, or to think of what they meant. How much worse is it to talk to God in that way!

Then sometimes we may make glib promises, we may say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ when some one asks us to do something, or not to do something. We may say it without really knowing what we are saying, and then, when we are expected to be as good as our word, we find ourselves in a very awkward position. Or we may say unkind things to people, or careless things about people. Afterwards, when we discover how our words have hurt, or what mischief they have done, we say, ‘Oh! I really didn't mean anything. I wasn't thinking what I was saying.’

So a great deal of the trouble and confusion in the world comes because boys and girls talk like that parrot, not knowing what they say or what God will think about it.

The Christian Year.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Faith in Man.

'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him?'—Ps 8^{3, 4}.

'If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.'—Jn 12²⁶.

What is the Christian view of man? That is by no means an easy question to answer. The Scriptures can scarcely be said to speak with one voice on the matter. Indeed, on the surface at least, there would seem to be very profound differences of view. That is true even of the chief oracles of Christianity—the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. On the words of Paul have been built elaborate systems of theology that represent man as fallen, without hope in the world but for the saving grace of God. On the other hand Jesus is represented as full of faith in man, as the friend and encourager of even the sinner and the outcast, as challenging man ever to enter upon the limitless heritage that belongs to men of faith. These divergences we do not mean to pursue, but rather to probe for that deeper identity of view that lies beneath the seeming differences.

1. Which of us at some time or other has not stood still to watch one of those wonderful sunsets when Nature flung into the sky a riot of gorgeous colour, and the whole foreview became a mass of living flame with a splendour that beggars description? And somehow that sheer loveliness commanded us, stilled us, and filled us with a holy awe.

Two impressions stand out from such a spectacle as that. There is an immediate sense of wonder, awe, prostration before the *mysterium tremendum*. Before such loveliness what is man? 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him?' And then there is a sense that comes from reflection—that only to man is that power of appreciation given. What meaning would that dazzling splendour have apart from the eye that sees and the mind that appreciates? Man's mind is the measure of all that beauty. Man must be lord of creation to be called on to inherit such radiance.

Imbedded in that appreciation, then, are two valuations of man: First, the sense of his insignificance before the Master mind, the creator of the glories of the universe; and then the sense of man's

power and potency, his inherent greatness as the possessor of mind, judgment, æsthetic appreciation.

While Ps 8 is distinctively Hebrew, perhaps we can distinguish in these two reactions the difference between the Hebrew and the Greek thoughts about man. The Hebrew has acknowledged man's insignificance before the awfulness of God. The Greek has stressed rather his human powers, his mind and all the energies and gifts wrapped up in that possession. On this continent and from Christian pulpits these rival views are still trumpeted. On the one hand, from the United States particularly, we hear the challenge to man to believe in himself. The humanists would make man a God and a creator of God. Others—especially those who have heard the notes of ancient Calvinism or of the newer school of crisis in Germany—protest that man is nothing, God is all in all. Both views have their strength and truth. Both can claim a measure of vindication. But the final test is: what do they make of this human life, its meaning, its issue, its final purpose?

2. Why should not man believe in himself? What is the meaning of all the toiling and moiling of creation without him? Picture the natural process from the beginning of time. The grey mists, the upheaving of mountains, the slow grinding of the glaciers, the sea withdrawing to its boundary and the rivers to their channels. . . . Strange creatures arise and move upon the face of the earth and take their fill of food and sleep and sport. What if God scatters His splendours about the universe? What does it matter? Beasts browse on. Only when man comes are these splendours appreciated and turned to spiritual value. It is a position of staggering greatness!

For tho' the Giant Ages heave the hill
And break the shore, and evermore
Make and break, and work their will;
Tho' world on world in myriad myriads roll
Round us, each with different powers,
And other forms of life than ours,
What know we greater than the soul?

What lies behind all the proud achievements of civilization if not man's faith in himself and his powers? Was it not well that man should have ambition, restless energy, a genius that would reach out and create? What of the splendours of Egypt and Babylon and Nineveh? Have we not all a pride in these memorials of a vanished past, these pomps of yesterday? Were they not colossal achievements? What especially of the creative arts? Is it not an inspiring thing to see a man

possessed of an idea, burning to create? Walk through the galleries of a great city and—who can but admire? There is so much of richness. The mind is satcd with seeing. Each single canvas is a triumph of the human spirit.

It was this outstanding faith in himself that made the Greek supreme. And this faith in our human powers gives us truth and more truth, beauty and more beauty. But the Greek was conscious himself that it was not all. 'Many a wonder lives and moves, but the wonder of all is man'—so sings the immortal chorus of the *Antigone*.

3. But there is a greater contribution that has been made to mankind—and that rests on another kind of faith—that faith that stretches out in wonder and astonishment, that sense of awe and mystery that acknowledges man's littleness and summons him to believe in something outside of himself. The Hebrew leaves room in his life for a greater magnitude that cannot be measured by the mind of man. Stooping low he passes through the doorway to a larger discovery than criticism or science can yield. To his humility is vouchsafed a revelation. Man is the crown of creation. That is a great faith. Man is the son of the Creator. That is a greater.

What is the chief end of man? 'To have a fair name,' the Greek was ready to answer, measuring himself by his fellow-humans and their valuation. But the Hebrew set One Greater over against life, a Transcendent and Holy One to whose absolute Will all lesser purposes must needs conform. The Creator of the dazzling universe, said the Hebrew, reaching out with his reverent faith, is a moral God. It was his supreme discovery. And he went on in the prophets to know One who desired mercy and not sacrifice. He who made Orion and the Pleiades is He who hates the evil and loves the good. He who tells the number of the stars is He also who heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds. Then finally came One making manifest that behind the mystery of the universe is a Father's face: the All-Righteous is the All-Loving too. The Greek ideal of life as a glad brimming wine-cup to enjoy had to be transmuted into a cup of hate and death drunk joyously by the will of God for the sake of others. 'Father, glorify thy name!' How? 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' God declares His character in the Cross. Eternal Love vindicates its claim to rule by sacrifice and self-giving. This is the supreme element in man's nature, the ability to reach up to fellowship with a self-giving God. Eternal Love seeks in us

the responsive, flaming heart of love, the will to sacrifice for love's sake.

Dr. D. S. Cairns tells a story of one of his students. He was at home on the shore of the Moray Firth in a little fishing town—not far from Lossiemouth. The sea is full of witchery and charm and power as it beats upon that coast. It was all so still out there that morning where the young Divinity student sat reading. A boy passed by. He was evidently a stranger. He made for waters that were known to be dangerous. Maclean cried out in warning—but was unheeded. He resumed his reading. Suddenly a cry from the sea! The book is thrown down. There is the boy struggling with the current. Maclean made straight for the water, and swam out, catching hold of a plank that came in his way. He reached the lad in time and tried to manœuvre him to the plank. But the current was sweeping both outward. The lad was exhausted. Again and again he slipped off the plank. But Maclean persisted, and with a heroic effort succeeded in saving the lad. But his own last ounce of strength had been spent. He sank, and was drowned.

It was a brief, but a great, career in Divinity. If the cosmos is meaningless until man appears with a mind to appreciate it, so man himself is meaningless in that splendid arena till he lifts his physical existence up to a moral splendour for the praise of God who made him.

We believe in man—in his power to appreciate and to analyse, to seek out and to sift truth, to build civilizations and to create priceless works of art. But we believe in him most when he flings his quintessence of dust into the sea that another may live. Man is spiritual, and his true end is the production of spiritual qualities—courage—love—honour—the things that cannot be bought with a price and do not die with death.¹

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Religion in the Light of Friendship.

'Abraham believed God . . . and he was called the Friend of God.'—Ja 2²³.

At the outset some people may object that to speak of God as our Friend, and of ourselves as friends of God, is unworthy. In reply, we can only say that what is good enough for the Bible ought to be good enough for us. And the Bible does repeatedly use this description; moreover, it is of interest to observe that it uses it rather more frequently in the New Testament than in the Old.

¹ J. Dow, in *A Faith for To-day*, 47.

The great New Testament passage for this subject is the fifteenth chapter of St. John, that inner sanctuary. There in three successive verses the word comes back and back. It is used to explain the Cross: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' It casts light on Christian obedience: 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' And, then, it is chosen to indicate the deepest sort of knowledge of God's mind, a sort of knowledge we somehow share with Christ Himself: 'I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you.'

Thus, we see, friendship is not too low a word for our purpose after all. Jesus gives us the right to use it. And now, taking it from His hand, let us ask whether to think of religion in terms of friendship, as the relation of friends in its highest form, may not make luminous for us some of the great things in faith.

1. To begin with *faith*, there surely is a real similarity between trusting a friend and trusting God. And in both cases the difficulties are much the same. A man believes in his friend's goodwill; he is convinced that he has his interest at heart. And yet the goodwill is not manifested in *every* part of the friend's conduct. He has other duties than being a friend to us; he has to travel, he has to carry on in business, he has to serve the community. But more, some parts of his behaviour may even at first appear to indicate disloyalty or ill-will. He would be bound to support a rival for a vacant post if that other were twice as well qualified; he might be compelled to resist some plan of ours. None the less, a man trusts his friend—why?

The reason is something like this. It is because in the past there have been times of intense mutual revelation, and for ever after *those* are the moments which we take as the key to our friend's nature; there the spirit was disclosed which gives to his conduct all its purport and meaning.

Now this exactly is what Christianity asks us to do with God. It says: the Power, the Presence that made and sustains the world has looked into our eyes through the eyes of Jesus Christ. There was that creative moment of revelation between Spirit and spirit. In His face we saw the truth that God is our Friend. Therefore we are able to trust. Behind all the appearances of indifference and heartlessness in the material tracts of the world, what we saw in Jesus is still there. No doubt we cannot prove by grim logic that God is faithful love any more than we can that our friend might not

deceive us. No doubt we are taking a risk. Yet, just as we can be sure when a comrade grasps our hand in the hour of joy or danger or sorrow that he will stand by us to the end, so the touch of Christ has given us assurance of God, and by His presence we know that God will never let us down.

2. Again, if friendship is the right analogy, consider how black *sin* looks in this light. Among the strange things that were said and circulated during the Great War none perhaps was so queer as some descriptions of the moral and spiritual condition of the Army. But at least this can be said, that at bottom soldiers had and have an inexorably severe code of morals, in the sense that from one end of the Army to the other the betrayal of a friend was regarded as an unpardonable offence. To play false to a comrade, to go back on him and injure him deliberately—this was the last degree of baseness. And if we really start from that point, and work out its implications, we shall discover that it opens up into a pretty useful and certainly a very severe and exacting standard of morals.

People say: Why, the modern man is not worrying about his sins at all, and why should he? Let us for one moment carry this over into everyday life. Ask how it looks there. What would be said of a man who came to neglect or deceive or hate or calumniate the kindest lifelong friend, and who, when the facts were pointed out to him, replied: 'Well, that doesn't worry me in the least'? What should we think of ourselves if we had done this? But we have done it. Sin is turning our back in scorn on all that God has been for us. But there is more behind. If a man has a friend, and injures him, that is sufficiently bad, but what if he were to injure one of his children? There essentially is sin. If we are selfish, we are harming the life of others who belong to God. If we are envious and callous and unjust we are striking at the happiness of those for whom He cares, and who ought to have been sacred to us on His account. The meanest and darkest and most hateful feature of the whole business of sinning lies in this, that it tramples the great Friendship down into the mire.

3. Observe how friendship makes *forgiveness* easier to apprehend. 'The further I have gone in life,' writes R. L. Stevenson, 'the harder I have found it to understand what forgiveness means.' And yet, thank God, sin *is* pardoned.

If we were talking to some one who felt it all but impossible to take this in, we might well fall back on the analogy of God as the friend of sinners, and ask what other friends do. Most of us feel that the

best friends we have ever had in this world are those who lived round us in the old home where childhood was spent. There was a mother there, or a father, who forgave our childish faults. We *experienced* pardon there, as between human friends.

But if love can do this, love on earth and between man and man, then how much more can love in heaven do it! We may argue straight from the best things in human life to the very heart of God. That is what Jesus did in the most wonderful story He ever told—the Parable of the Prodigal.

Here, then, is one great test and touchstone which we can apply to the friendship of God—He is willing to forgive. But in the background there is a test even greater—namely, willingness to suffer in order to bring about forgiveness, to make it possible. We may shrink pitifully from making it up with an old intimate who has wronged us, because of the bitter pain it will cost us to go seriously into the matter and have it out with him in explanation and appeal. And yet, if we were able to look back after accomplishing the reconciliation through whatever suffering of ours, how we should give thanks that we had been led that way. That inevitable suffering for forgiveness' sake was laid on God also, on Him most of all, and His response to the tragic need is Calvary. In Jesus' passion we see the pardoning agony of the Father.

4. Once more, the friendship of God explains how faith gives men *character*. We are all familiar with the phrase 'a self-made man.' For the most part we attach the epithet to persons who have scored a notable worldly success, say, in the acquisition of wealth or fame. But we never by any chance affix the adjective 'self-made' to people who are eminent in goodness. We will search the world in vain for a human being now possessed of strong or fine moral nature who has not been led forward to that by men better than himself, in the shadow of whose nobler being his immaturity grew up and came to strength.

And that, too, is the secret of personal religion. God our Friend, Christ our Intimate—there lies the explanation of how certain people take on a radiance of nature that brightens the world for all the rest of us. It is not that they have secured a privilege denied to others, it is that they have been in earnest over a possibility within the grasp of all, without exception. They have let God's Spirit lead them into God's friendship.

5. There is one remaining point. It is this: that when our friends die, we do not forget them. We retain them in our memory and in our love,

and in desire we send our anticipations on to a good time coming when they and we shall be side by side again. It is more true of Christ even than of affectionate human hearts that when *His* friends die, He does not, He never will, forget them. Through that power of His to which death is but a weak and empty shadow He undertakes that all whom He had chosen and who have chosen Him shall come to Him through the darkness, and that separation shall have an end. It becomes plain why immortality *must* be at the heart of the gospel. There is One who has taken us into an unchanging love, to which even death can make no difference. So that, when for us the hour strikes, and we lie down at last, it may be as if we heard the very voice of Christ: Ye are still My friends; because I live, ye shall live also.¹

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

There is One who keeps Troth.

'And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.'—Jn 14^{13^d}.

One of the joys of exploring the mind of Jesus is the joy of discovery. He is always leading us to windows out of which we look upon scenes of truth and matchless beauty, unknown before. He is full of delightful surprises. One moment He shows us a picture of purity in the heart of a child. The next moment He makes us see an angel smile. We miss the whole point of the story of the Prodigal Son unless we are able to see the angels smile.

'He wakes desires,' as Sidney Lysaght says in his beautiful poem:

He wakes desires you never may forget,
He shows you stars you never saw before;
He makes you share with Him for evermore
The burden of the world's Divine regret.
How wise were you to open not—and yet
How poor if you should turn Him from the door.

'He shows you stars you never saw before'; and here in this magnificent promise, 'If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it,' we have a star of the first magnitude. 'We have the word of the King,' the Covenanting martyrs cried as they stood unfeared upon the scaffolds of the Grass-market, declaring that the moment after death would find them in a Kingdom of light and joy and beauty. 'We have the word of the King for

¹ H. R. Mackintosh, *The Highway of God*, 75.

it, and of a King better than His word.' And the passing centuries change neither the word nor the King.

'If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.' But what is anything? This word anything is the blocking word in the promise, and it is so difficult and so stubborn and so immovable a word that thousands of people have simply given the promise up. Does 'anything,' it is asked, mean that if a man asks God to give him £20,000 he shall get it? Does it mean that his mother, dying of some incurable disease, may be saved? Does it mean that his business difficulties may be prayed away? And the answer is that 'anything' means any real thing, any enduring thing, any spiritual thing. Our bodily welfare, or the possession of a lot of money, or the comfort of staying in a fine house can all be lumped together and labelled 'Perishable Goods.' And Christ's great promise does not run here. Indeed, as Father Stanton of St. Alban's remarked, 'If God gave us all we asked for, I should think we should most of us be in hell by this time.' What are the big 'anythings' we may ask of our King?

1. Let us ask and keep asking for that jewelled gift we foolish people think so little of and talk so casually about—the forgiveness of our sins. Forgiveness is the golden key which opens the heart of God. We are forgiven, and lo! the door swings open and we walk together into a new life of communion and gladness with the great Friend of our Race. Pity the despairing hearts who doubt or despair of the mercy of God. In Eden Phillpotts' novel, *The Secret Woman*, is the tale of two women's tangled lives—Ann Redvers, and Salome Westaway who steals Ann's husband. The foolish husband dies, and the hearts of the women are purified. Together one winter's day they meet in the quiet churchyard and are reconciled. 'There are things too small for God to heed,' whispered Salome, 'and my broken life is one of them.' But Ann cried, 'Never, never—all, to the pattern of the frost on these dear graves, be the thought-out invention of our God. Nought's too small for Him, and nought too great. I've larned that, and I've larned what God's forgiveness means. Ours be but the shadow of this. He comes three parts of the way.' Ann's eyes blazed into a sudden passion of faith and love. 'The haste o' God, Salome, the haste o' God. Quicker 'n the lightning. A sigh of sorrow brings Him or one humble thought.' No theologian has given us so captivating a picture of the deep forgiving Love of God. Love running hot-foot to forgive. And Jesus says, 'Claim it. and

receive it. If ye shall ask this thing in my name, I will do it.'

2. Ask for the mind of Christ. We cannot describe it. It is easier to describe the sunrise, or an autumn moon floating in a solemn beauty over a Western Isle. For when we think of His mind we think of His charity. And when we think of His mind we think of His sanity and power to see all things in clear proportion. When we think of His mind we think of His patience, and of that fire of pity that burned on earth and still burns in heaven for all His brothers and sisters who are poor or lonely or sad, or gone out of the way. When we think of His mind we think of a noble and generous heart who breaks for all of these the bread of sympathy and understanding and unwearied kindness; and, thinking of Him so, is it any wonder that we fall upon our knees and pray in accents of yearning and of faith: 'O Father above, give us the mind of Thy Holy Son Jesus. Lord, evermore give us this bread'?

3. Ask this great thing. Let us ask for the power to be what we believe. Ask for the power to live as we pray. Ask for the power of the Holy Ghost.

4. Ask this greatest thing. Let us ask for the assurance of our own immortality. This is the last and largest gift of the Father to any earthly child. It is a very lovely boon, and it has come to His children in a thousand strange and wonderful ways. In dreams and visions of the night Jesus has whispered to some, 'I am thine, and thou art mine for ever'; and some have knelt at the Cross and heard a trumpet blowing down the sky—The Lord Jesus Christ has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through His glorious gospel. And some have gone down a valley road where all was gloom, and at the last milestone the valley was bathed in golden light and a shining pathway to the throne of God, and a voice saying, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. Because I live, ye shall live also.'

His face pale and wasted, his body shrunken by long imprisonment, but his eyes gleaming with heroic ardour, John Huss, the earliest European martyr of the Reformation, was sentenced to death upon the 8th day of June 1415, by the Council of Constance. When his doom was read, one of the judges asked if he had aught to say. It was a dramatic moment and had an unforgettable sequel. Huss, answering never a word, fell upon his knees. 'I pray,' he cried, 'to Thee, God Almighty, I pray for everlasting life through Christ Jesus.'¹

¹ A. MacLean, *High Country*, 57.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

A Root and Branch Gospel.

'These that have turned the world upside down are come hither.'—Ac 17⁶.

THEY had preached precisely the same gospel that had been proclaimed from the first, that Jesus suffered for sins and rose again the third day, and they were called radicals for their pains. Do we realize to-day that, if we are Christians at all, we believe in a subversive fact which means a revolutionary attitude towards our own life and towards society?

People are asking what is the secret of Jesus? That is, of course, the great problem of Christianity. That He was a sinless human being matters in itself very little to any one. It is doubtful whether the records of His life are sufficient in themselves to prove a phenomenon so extraordinary. What our own experience does show us all is the presence of the gospel in the world after nineteen centuries as an organized and living power, incomparable in its effects, marvellous in its recuperative force.

Men are asking what is the meaning of this vitality, but too often they seek for the answer in the wrong place. They want to find the secret of Jesus in what He taught, the words He uttered, the principles He exemplified. This never was the gospel, and never will be. It is where Paul the radical placed it when he preached at Thessalonica. It is the acceptance of a new and tremendous fact, which to the mind that grasps, the spirit that believes, means a revision of the whole scheme of thought and action. We can never account for the steady resistance which the faith of Jesus has persistently made throughout the centuries to the conservatism of human imperfections by exclaiming with the Galilean crowd, 'Never man spake like this man.' Let us read our New Testament and we shall find that the ambassadors of Christ are never the exponents of a doctrine, but the witnesses to a fact. 'This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses.' 'Ye killed the Prince of life whom God raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.'

'They have turned the world upside down,' said the Jews of Thessalonica, when St. Paul came to their city with this message of Divine deliverance. 'The world' here means the Roman Empire. And there is no more certain fact of history than the essential antagonism between Christ and Cæsar. Some of the ablest of the primitive Christians no doubt failed to see, as many sincere Christians in

these modern times fail to see, what from the point of view of earthly politics is the inherent radicalism of the gospel. Not only Nero and Domitian, but Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, the very flower of political wisdom and moral enthusiasm, were committed to the expression of the name of Jesus. Do what they would, no other course was open. For that splendid creation of human intelligence rested upon a theory which took no account of a larger spiritual world, and therefore of the stupendous fact which determines the destiny of mankind—that He who was born of the Virgin Mary had risen on the third day from the dead.

If we are at all to understand this we must really know by a practical and living experience what conversion means. For Christianity is not the conclusion of an argument. It is the joyful recognition of a fact.

Of what is St. Paul thinking when he speaks of 'the foolishness of preaching'? He knew from his own vivid story that conversion means nothing else than the admission into the realm of our personal experience of the risen and ascended Jesus. We may say if we like—indeed, St. Paul himself confesses—that he was prepared by the leading of events for the revelation of God's Son. But it was no master-mind that pointed out to the acute and accomplished Saul a fatal flaw in the logic by which he justified the rôle of a persecutor. We cannot explain the author of the Epistle to the Romans, the hero of the missionary journeys, the martyr of Tre Fontane, by an inward development of spiritual life. 'Have I not seen the Lord?' That is the simplest of all explanations, which St. Paul himself gives, and which, once admitted, accounts immediately for that sharp break in his activity.

Conversion all through the Christian centuries has meant this, and this only—the capitulation of the citadel of Mansoul to the great and commanding fact of the incarnate and ascended Redeemer, with the inevitable transformation of thought and action which follows from this surrender. To one man it will mean abandonment of vicious habits, to another the abatement of intellectual pride, to another the joyful solution of the dark problem of existence. Is it to be wondered at that men and women, when this mighty truth comes home to them with all its tremendous power, seem to change their whole course of life? They see with larger, other eyes, so that all their thoughts, all their actions, all the various details that make up their life in the world, have been given a new focus, have all grouped themselves in their true

and proper proportions round a new principle. He that now sits upon the throne of their heart's affections has spoken to them, saying, 'Behold, I make all things new.'

If we carry out this great Christian gospel into the practical affairs of daily life and human intercourse it means now, as it meant in the days when St. Paul preached at Thessalonica, a turning of the world upside down. 'Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven!' Well, then, if that be the gospel, the message of an eternal Father to His disobedient children, the forgiveness of sins is the one thing that matters in human life; the one regulative purpose which is to determine the development, not only of the individual life of each man who knows that he is a sinner and that Jesus Christ is his Saviour, but of this great complex web of business, pleasure, thought, action, and pain which we call human society.

Were we all to go about in society determined, like St. Paul, to know no man after the flesh, we must not expect to be popular. We say a great many pretty things, especially in the earlier weeks of the Christian year, about what we are pleased to call the Incarnation, about peace and love and goodwill. We sing 'Good King Wenceslaus,' and light up our Christmas-trees in charitable institutions, and say to each other, 'Good Christian men, rejoice,' for somehow or other the Babe of Bethlehem has taught us to be kind to the poor. Then come the noble words of the prophet, interpreting the Manifestation of Christ: 'He was wounded for our transgressions. . . . We hid as it were our faces from him.' Hid our faces? Of course. It is a great subversive fact, this gospel of the grace of God.

That all men are equal may be a pretty subject for declamation, but it is refuted by the obvious facts, we say. That is exactly what the Jews thought when they had no dealings with the Samaritans. That is what Saul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, thought until the day when he saw the Lord whom he persecuted enthroned in glory as the power of God unto salvation to the Greek as well as to the Jew. Why cannot we translate the language of the New Testament into that of the present day? The Jew stands for all natural exclusions—of

caste, of birth, of wealth, yes, even of capacity. The Jew stands for the efficient in every age, for those who claim preferential treatment on the ground that they are ready to take up the white man's burden of running public companies for the benefit of the shareholders. We do not in this enlightened age talk of 'the uncircumcised Gentiles.' But what, for example, shall we say of 'the inferior races' who are manifestly designed by Nature, if not for hewing wood and drawing water, at any rate for the fulfilment of the law of sacrifice by working for the benefit of others?

It is in the light of such a situation, says Dr. Fosdick, that one must understand the New Testament's account of Peter's difficulty in calling on a Gentile. Peter would have insisted that he was a Christian. He would have died for Jesus. 'One of the first and best sermons preached in my time,' he might have said, in defence of the Messiahship of Jesus, 'I preached myself.' But all such talk about his personal devotion and his theology would have got him nowhere in this new emergency he was facing. He was asked to visit a Gentile who was inquiring about Christianity. Now Peter in all his life had never called upon a Gentile. At that point his Christianity came into collision with his prejudice. All honour to him because, so many centuries ago, his Christianity won the day! As he said to Cornelius later, after he had crossed the racial barricade and found a friend upon the other side: 'Unto me hath God showed that I should not call any man common or unclean.' That was Peter's second conversion, and there is no genuine Christianity without it.

Are we proclaiming as a challenge to what people tell us is the law of Nature the grand doctrine which St. Paul learned at once, not by rummaging among the records of former ages, but by sitting at the feet of the Redeemer, that there is no difference because all have sinned, that in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free?

Let us hold fast the one fact which upsets the world. Let it grasp us till it lifts us to that loftier spiritual plane where alone we can see life steadily and see it whole.¹

¹ J. G. Simpson, *Christian Ideals*, 225.