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Huxley and Herbert Spencer had no doubt that Israel itself began with ghost-worship and passed through Ancestor-worship, Fetishism, and Totemism to reach the level of the God of the older portions of Judges and Samuel, and eventually to the higher level of the Jehovah of the Prophets. But was this the true course of events? If man began with belief in a throng of serviceable ghost-gods, would he be likely enthusiastically to welcome belief in a moral Creator, who could not be bribed and who only cared for obedience? May we not

rather opine that the moral element in Jehovah worship was the survival of the primitive, divinely taught ethics which we have seen to be known to primitive man. This primitive belief may well have been kept alive by men of religious genius, such as Moses and the Prophets and Psalmists of Israel, and brought to perfection (as we who are Christians believe) by our Lord Jesus Christ. This belief in a Supreme Being assures us that from the first God revealed Himself to man and taught him at last to worship in spirit and in truth.

In the Study.

Virginitus Puerisque.

The Power of a Name.

BY THE REVEREND DR. C. W. BUDDEN, M.A., CROYDON.

‘There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.’—Ac 4¹².

You have heard a wonderful story: how a poor cripple who had lain on his mat at the gate of the Temple of Jerusalem for years, begging from the people as they passed in and out, had been suddenly healed by Peter and John so that he could walk and run with the best of them. But how had Peter and John done this wonderful thing? That was the puzzle. Reports said that their own explanation of the matter was simply this: ‘And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong.’ Yes; but what was the name that had such power? That was what the rulers and the great ones wanted to know, and so they summoned Peter and John before them, and asked, ‘By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?’—and the Apostles had made answer that it was the name of Jesus Christ that had effected the miracle, and then they added: ‘There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved’—and that is my text.

Now every one wants to be safe. It is one of the great blessings of our own land that we live in safety, so different from a country like Spain, where no one seems safe. And we know that many people seek our country as a place of refuge—a sanctuary. Even a murderer is protected by the Law until he has been tried and found guilty, and when a man commits a crime he does not hide from the

vengeance of those he has wronged. The man he is terrified of is a policeman. But this was not always so. In olden days, before Law and order were established, personal vengeance followed the criminal. But personal vengeance is a bad thing. ‘Vengeance is mine,’ saith the Lord, ‘I will repay it.’

In the Middle Ages churches were used as places of refuge into which fugitives could enter and enjoy at least temporary safety. At the north door of Durham Cathedral there is a large knocker which was sounded by a person claiming sanctuary. In the sacred building two men were on duty day and night ever ready to open the door quickly and let the fugitive in. And in the East, where blood feuds were carried on from father to son, these places were numerous. We recall the old cities of Refuge that were established in Palestine. But there were other methods of taking sanctuary, some of which survive to-day. A man, pursued by the avenger of blood, may seize hold of the dress of a woman and find temporary safety—that law holds good to-day among the cattlemen on the western ranches of America. Or a man might take refuge in the house or tent of a person. No matter what trouble or inconvenience might be caused by the presence of the uninvited guest, it is thought very disgraceful to refuse such an asylum if it be sought. Many lives are saved every year in Bible lands to-day by these means.

But perhaps the house or tent is not accessible. Then the fugitive may call upon the name of some person of power and rank, and this appeal to the name is considered equivalent to entering his house. If the chieftain whose name is thus called upon be

a strong man—greatly to be feared—the pursuer would hesitate, if there were witnesses, to risk his vengeance. So we read in the Psalms: ‘Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength. For strangers are risen up against me’; and in Proverbs: ‘The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe’; and in the Second Book of Samuel: ‘I will call on the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.’

Now there is a very well-known story in the *Arabian Nights* which bears on all this: the story of Ali Baba. Ali Baba was a poor woodcutter, but one day when he was in the forest he heard the leader of a troop of horsemen say to a rock, ‘Open, Sesame!’ and at once a door opened in the rock and all the men went in. And when they came out again, he heard the leader say once more, ‘Shut, Sesame!’ and the door closed, and the rock was as before. When the men had ridden away, Ali Baba went himself to the rock, and said, ‘Open, Sesame!’ and behold the name was with power on his lips as well as on the leader’s, and the door opened, and Ali Baba passed in. Oh, the wealth he found there, the silver and the gold that had been laid up for ages! Ali Baba was rich now, as rich as the leader himself, for the magic name had made him welcome to everything. And that is what the name of Jesus does for us—it welcomes us to all that Jesus has Himself. There is nothing He has but He wants us to share too, when we are Christ’s, and are trusting in His Name.

Now Ali Baba could be rich and happy to the end of his days; never wanting anything so long as he had these stores of riches to go to, and so long as he remembered the name which had the power of opening the door to them. And neither will you want any good thing as long as the Name that is above every name is the Name you love above everything and every one.

But there is a sequel to this story. Ali Baba had a brother called Cassim. When he learned how Ali Baba came by his wealth, he determined to go to the cave in the rock and clear it out, and keep all the riches for himself. So he went with eleven mules—meaning to bring them back laden with gold, and when he came to the rock, and said, ‘Open, Sesame!’ the door swung open for him as for Ali Baba. But when he got inside and the door had closed upon him, the sight of all the wealth that was there stirred up in his heart such selfish, proud, and ambitious thoughts—thoughts about what a great man he would become, and what a grand house he would have, and what magnificent clothes he would

wear, and what dainty food he would eat—that he quite forgot the name which had the power. When he had gathered all together ready to put on the mules, he tried and tried and tried, but couldn’t remember the name that would open the door. He knew it was the name of some sort of grain, but which kind it was he couldn’t recall. He tried barley—‘Open, Barley!’ he said, but the door didn’t move. Then he tried the names of other seeds—oats, wheat, and so on; but the door would not open. None of these names had any power with them. So the miserable man perished in the midst of all the wealth he had coveted for himself.

That is a very interesting story, is it not? Yet it is more than a tale—it has a great lesson for us all. Just think! Why is the Name of Jesus so powerful? It is because the Name of Jesus is Love. That is the secret of its power. For the Name is not a kind of charm or incantation which would be effective whoever and however any one spoke it. Indeed, we often repeat this sacred Name to no purpose. We say it often in our prayers, and often in our hymns, and we may wonder why nothing happens—but it is just because we have not taken the *Power* of the Name into our lives. When we do that, when we put love and loving thoughts into our lives, then we shall learn how true it is that only by this Name, and by no other name, can the world to-day be saved.

‘Leerie.’

BY THE REVEREND JOHN B. DAVIE, M.A., LEITH.

‘Let your light . . . shine . . .’—Mt 5¹⁴.

Directly opposite our house there is a street lamp, and one of the things my children loved to do was to go to the window on winter afternoons as dusk was falling, and watch for the lamplighter—‘Leerie,’ they called him—coming round to light the lamp. Probably some of you like to do that too. Nearly all young folk are interested in Leerie. Many years ago there was a little boy, who lived in Edinburgh, who was lucky enough to have a street lamp opposite his window, and used to watch every evening for the lamplighter. When he grew up, he became a famous writer and poet—Robert Louis Stevenson—and he wrote a poem about Leerie. Most of you probably know it:

My tea is nearly ready and the sun has left the sky;
It’s time to take the window to see Leerie going
by.

Some little boys want to be engine-drivers, and

some to be soldiers or sailors or policemen ; but young Robert Louis Stevenson thought he would like to be a Leerie.

Now Tom would be a driver and Maria go to sea,
And my papa's a banker and as rich as he can be ;
But I, when I am stronger, and can choose what
I'm to do,
O Leerie, I'll go round at night and light the lamps
with you !

Stevenson never became a lamplighter, and I don't suppose any of you will either ; but all the same, I think it would be a fine ambition for any of us, just to try to do what Leerie does—go about the world lighting lamps and scattering light wherever we go.

For the world is a dark place for some folk, boys and girls—a place shadowed by sadness and suffering and hardship and disappointment ; and it would be a great thing, wouldn't it, to be able to light a lamp here and there that would bring a little brightness into some shadowed life ?

And there are so many lamps we all could light and keep burning ! There is the lamp of cheerfulness. We all come up against little troubles that worry or annoy us at times, but it does no good to pull a long face or to make other people miserable about it. Keep smiling. A smiling face is like a ray of sunshine to sad hearts.

Then there is the lamp of kindness. Do you remember how, when men did the cruellest deed in history and nailed the Lord Jesus to the Cross, darkness fell over all the land. There is a little parable in that fact. When we do unkind, cruel, selfish things, it always darkens the world. But every time we do a kind and helpful action, it makes everything brighter not only for those we help, but even for ourselves.

I'm sure there are lots of others you can think of—the lamp of courage, the lamp of truth, and many others. Keep them shining in your life, and the world will be a brighter and happier place for your having lived.

The story is told of Spurgeon, the great preacher, that late one afternoon he was walking up Norwood Hill in London with a friend. Some distance ahead of them, moving up the same steep incline, they could see a lamplighter, lighting lamp after lamp, until he disappeared over the top of the hill. Turning to his friend, Spurgeon said :

'I hope my life will be just like that. I should like to think that when I've gone over the brow of the hill, I shall leave lots of lights shining behind me.'

Wasn't that a fine thought, boys and girls ? Could you and I have any higher ambition than just this—so to live that we shall leave lots of lights shining in lives made brighter and better and happier for having known us ? But if we are to do that, then our own hearts must be lit with love to the Lord Jesus, and there is only One who can kindle that flame in us—He who is the Light of the World. Let us try to be like Him and loyal to Him in all our ways, and let us ask Him day by day to help us to be brave and loving and kind. Then we too shall be lamplighters, and leave lots of lights shining behind us.

The Christian Year.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Christian Rule of Life.

'Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's ; and unto God the things that are God's.'—Mt 22²¹.

Every reformer must be met by such criticism as came to our Lord. What are you going to do really ? What is your meaning behind your fine speeches about the rights of man, or the right to work, or a living wage, or justice ? Or, what is your theory of the relations between Church and State ? How far should private morality govern nations ? Who is to decide in the long run what a man may do or may not do—the individual, or the State, or the Church ? If the time is out of joint, how do you propose to set it right ? And, if your views are carried out, what will become of what people call vested interests and cherish so carefully ? Or, what will become of the ordinary root morality—that which we believe has been the true basis of the State—if your theories of liberty have scope ?

Something of an answer to all these questions may surely be found in Christ's reply to that question of temptation so politely introduced and so ensnaringly framed.

Our Lord never answered a question, as we read the gospel record, simply as if it were a thing of present interest, some difficulty that had momentarily arisen, and could be settled and done with. He always views every question, in the old phrase, *sub specie aeternitatis*. So when we ask what are our duties towards society, we must ask with our thought also on what are our duties towards God ; because we cannot live one side of life rightly unless we live the other side rightly also. 'Render there-

fore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's ; and unto God the things that are God's.'

There are two kinds of people in the world, those who think that the world exists for them, and those who know that they themselves exist only as part of something immeasurably vast and great. Nowhere do we see the difference more plainly than when we look at young people beginning a life for which they have just become fully responsible. But the choice recurs again and again all through life. Is the world a great store out of which one goes and takes what one wants ? Or is it a stupendous system whose Maker and Builder is God. How well it was said by a great American Bishop, ' To one man God is a vast means working for his comfort ; to another man God is a vast end to which his powers strive to make their contribution.'

We shall never make anything of life or of any work or part in it, scholarship, music, painting, history, or even criticism, unless we take the second view and relate what we have to do to something far greater than what is already in existence.¹

Duty to God is the standard and the test. It is first and foremost ; all else in life circles and gathers round it. God is above Cæsar ; nay, if we render to Cæsar it is because we render to God. ' Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's ; and unto God the things that are God's.'

There seem points in Christianity which rather connect it with anarchism than with constituted authority—its unflinching criticism of social conditions, its demand for justice, and its undying hatred of injustice, its indignation against oppression and wickedness in high places, its sympathy and tenderness with the oppressed and outcast. The gospel is a social message, a proclamation of the rights of the poor and weak, and it might be thought almost to give an excuse for revolution. Also, the loyalty it demands for ' another King, one Jesus ' seems to lift its followers above all lower judicatories. It proclaims the spiritual independence which makes a man free from outside interference. There was a temptation in early times, as there is still in all times of high feeling and spiritual vision, to despise the inferior power of the State, and make a man a law to himself. Antinomianism is a heresy which insidiously dogs the heels of spiritual religion. When we say rightly that the spiritual man alone can be the judge of spiritual things, it seems an easy step to go further and say that the spiritual man can refuse to be judged of any in any sphere.

Apart from such extravagances of Christian freedom, there have been times when insurrection has

been a sacred duty in the interests of the social order itself, as well as in the interests of freedom and the higher life of man. There have been times when true men are called to obey God rather than men. It is said of a philosopher who was disputing with Augustus Cæsar that at a stage in the dispute he began to weaken in his argument. When asked afterwards the reason, he replied, ' Would you have me contend with the master of thirty legions ? ' There have been times when no such graceful concession has been possible for Christians, when they have been driven by the imperative of conscience to contend at all costs and stand firm against all powers of earth, against Cæsar and his thirty legions.

At the same time the divine right of the State in its true sense is upheld and enforced in the Christian teaching. Some organization of society is necessary for the moral order of things, and so the Christian faith in practice has been the strongest bulwark of the authority of the State, that men may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Constituted authority has rights over us by virtue of our existence. The social order is of God : law and its representatives have their source of power in God ; and it is the duty of Christians to give honour and willing obedience in so far as conscience permits. This is a lesson of our Lord's own life, who came not as a revolutionary and advocated no political propagandism, and who pointed to duty to God as the great standard and test of all life.

The text may be read not only as a plea for obedience to lawful authority and the recognition of the supremacy of the State, but also as a plea for active interest in public affairs by all who have pledged themselves as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is especially so in a democracy, when government after all is the embodiment of the people's will, when it is representative of ourselves. If we blame it, we have only ourselves to blame. It has claims on us : we have duties towards it, and what have we done to make the kingdoms of this world the Kingdom of God and His Christ ? If we complain of civic or national government, if we lament about public life or social needs or reforms or the want of reforms, if we sneer about politics as a game, a sphere for personal ambitions, whose is the fault ? The responsibility for the State, the law, politics, and social conditions is ours. The gospel is concerned with soul first, but the life that is offered to God must spend itself in the service of men.¹

So when we think truly of Cæsar, we must think

¹ W. H. Hutton, *A Disciple's Religion*, 194.

¹ H. Black, *According to my Gospel*, 258.

truly of God. We cannot serve man truly unless we serve God too. So true is it, as Crashaw said :

All we have is God's, and yet
Cæsar challenges a debt ;
Nor hath God a thinner share,
Whatever Cæsar's payments are.

We cannot serve God truly, unless we serve man too. If that is a commonplace now, it is Jesus Christ who made it so.

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT.

Jehovah-Tsidkenu.

' The Lord our righteousness.'—Jer 23⁶.

' Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us . . . righteousness.'—1 Co 1³⁰.

Righteousness of the requisite standard is not humanly attainable, but a name like this puts us on the way to its ultimate possession. Jeremiah uses the name on two occasions and in different references. On the first occasion it is the name of the ideal king—' This is his name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah-Tsidkenu ' ; the second time he uses it, it is the name of the ideal city or kingdom—' This is the name wherewith she shall be called, Jehovah-Tsidkenu.'

The ideal king is portrayed as being perfectly righteous in character, and as promoting righteousness throughout his realm. The ideal city or kingdom is depicted as being righteous altogether in its citizens and in all its conditions of life. However difficult or apparently impossible the attainment of righteousness may be, the conscience of man has long felt that it is righteousness that exalts a nation, and that righteousness is the ideal state of being.

When Dr. Alexander Whyte died he was described as the last of the great old race of preachers of righteousness. Those preachers of righteousness were in truth a great old race, Elijah, Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, Paul, Calvin, and others with them. They were men who preached righteousness as those who sought it for themselves above all recognition or reward, and as those who sought it for their society and generation as the true foundation of security and peace. They knew that perfect righteousness is of God and must be God-given ; they had a profound sense of God, and preached and lived as if God were behind them and beside them. They were like men with an extra sense, a sense of sight and sound and smell and touch and taste, and, above all, a sense of God.

In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, Barth

wrote : ' The deepest longing in us is born of the deepest need : oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down ! Oppressed and afflicted by his own unrighteousness and the unrighteousness of others, man—every man—lifts up from the depths of his nature the cry for righteousness, the righteousness of God. Whoever understands him at this point understands him wholly. Whoever can reach a hand to him here, can really help him. This is the reason why such prophets as Moses, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist are figures never to be erased from the memory of humanity. They uncovered to men their deepest need ; they made articulate their conscience within them ; they wakened and kept awake the longing within them for the righteousness of God. They prepared the way of the Lord.'

1. The texts set before us the final and ultimate *standard of righteousness*. It has been urged that where numbers of men are gathered together they have the right to agree among themselves as to what things may or may not be. In other words, they have the right to erect a standard of morality approved by themselves and adapted to their needs. But the world needs more than a number of nations living according to their separate standards.

There are some things that we may fix for ourselves, laws of local societies and institutions, wages and working hours. But there are some things that are fixed for us : the rising and setting of sun and moon, the ebb and flow of ocean tides, the coming and going of the wind, the rotation of day and night, seedtime and harvest, summer and winter ; and in the spiritual world as in the natural there is somewhere an absolute standard as fixed as the sun, where right is right and wrong is wrong, and nothing can by any means mix them.

2. This name that the prophet gives to the ideal king and the ideal state raises the further question as to the *source of righteousness*. Manifestly it is not found in ourselves ; not alone because the Scriptures say so, but because our own hearts say so. ' None of us has strength to rise,' confessed Seneca. ' Oh, that someone would stretch out a hand.'

' To will,' the Apostle Paul cried, ' is present with me : but how to perform that which is good I find not.' Long and patiently he practised the plan of the Pharisees to attain righteousness. Sometimes he thought he had it or almost had it, yet it eluded the grasp of his eager fingers ; then after repeated failure he abandoned the quest because he had found some better way. ' That I may be found in him, not having mine own righteousness . . . but

that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.'

'What should I do,' exclaimed Thomas Chalmers, 'were it not that it is written, "Christ died for the ungodly." Never am I in a better frame than when dwelling in simple faith on Christ's offered righteousness, and making it the object of my acceptance.'

That was where John Bunyan found the resting-place of his heart. 'One day as I was passing into the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, Thy righteousness is in heaven, and methought withal I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand. There, I say, was my righteousness, so that wherever I was or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me He wants my righteousness, for that was just before Him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday and to-day and for ever.'

3. The name has this further content, that it reveals to us the *secret of righteousness*. Martin Luther has discussed four kinds of righteousness. There is a political righteousness, that which implies obedience to the laws of the State and the principles of good citizenship; there is a certain ceremonial righteousness, which is attained by the observance of certain forms of ritual; there is also a certain legal righteousness which is obtained by a due regard to the Mosaic Law, and the explicit commandments of God; and there is a moral and spiritual righteousness which belongs to the inward life, as against these other purely external conditions of being.

Outward forms will not command the inward state, but the inward life can command the outward form. 'The Lord our righteousness,' not the standard only, not a substitute merely, but the secret of being in which a completely new manner of life becomes an actuality.

This righteousness which Christ creates and cultivates in our experience is above the level of merely customary ways of living; it means a quality of life that is not subject to human opinion and fashion, nor accommodated to the spirit of the time.

Christ is the secret of that righteousness in every rank and level of life. He kept His own soul unspotted from the world; no life was ever more roughly handled or more severely buffeted or more persistently tempted, but He yielded at no point,

and He is to troubled and tempted souls the strength and courage of righteousness. He is the inward motive and constraint of all those who make it the supreme business of their life, by all the aids that heaven lends to serious men, to practise the righteousness that approves itself unto God.

4. If the Lord is our righteousness we can possess a remarkable *serenity* about present and ultimate things. He will suffice for all time, present and future, and for all conditions. Men who have lived and died seeking this one prize, believed in it, though it eluded them. Though they died before they attained it, they believed in it as if they were sure they would take up its quest again on the other side of death; and if there were other worlds to conquer, they would conquer them too, and at last come to that promised righteousness, 'When we see him we shall be like him.' 'Henceforth,' cried one who joined in this quest with all his heart, 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.' The prospect was both peace and power to his life.

'The crown of righteousness,' Florence Nightingale said, 'that word always strikes me more than anything in the Bible. It is strange that it was not happiness Paul wanted; not rest, not forgiveness, not glory that was the thought of that glorious man's mind, when, at the end of the last and greatest of his labours, all desires were so swallowed up in the one craving after righteousness that, at the end of all his struggles, it was mightier within him than ever, mightier even than the desire for peace.'¹

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

The Coming of the Kingdom.

'If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.'—Mt 24²³.

A warning. Sufficiently impressive, one might think, but strangely disregarded. At all times in the history of Christianity there have been men who would point to the immediate coming of Christ, with particularity of time and place; at all times they have had deluded followers, and the shame of repeated disappointment seems to be no hindrance. Some of us can remember startling examples of this kind of prediction. How shall we account for it?

There was in the days of the gospel a vague

¹ J. Macbeath, *What is His Name?*, 113.

expectation, hope or fear, of a great catastrophe which should usher in the Kingdom of God. This was general ; but some reduced the vagueness to precise detail, and wrote exact predictions of varied character. Their writings were what we now call eschatological, teaching about the end of the world. The Lord Jesus, in declaring that the Kingdom of God was at hand—which is the first meaning of the gospel, the Good News—did not brush aside these expectations, or even these predictions. He made use of them as imagery of the truth which He had to impart. There was no difficulty about this for one who habitually taught by parables. We shall come back presently to the truth which was so taught, but we must first remind ourselves that almost all the disciples of our Lord had been in the habit of taking that imagery as reality, an exact description of things that were actually going to happen. The result was that two currents of thought continued to run side by side. To take a familiar example, the imagery is treated as prediction of actual fact in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians : ‘The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the triumph of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord.’ The writer of that description was perhaps Silvanus, St. Paul’s companion, but it was written with St. Paul’s approval ; and five or six years afterwards something of the same sort was written, with greater sobriety, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, which was certainly St. Paul’s own. But alongside of this we also find something of a different kind ; not prediction of an end to come, but recognition of an end that has arrived. The stories of the Old Testament were written, says St. Paul, ‘for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.’ That became the conviction of the Apostolic Church. ‘Little children, it is the last time,’ wrote St. John. Nay, what he wrote is more emphatic : ‘It is the latest hour.’ This way of looking at the end finds its completion in the Book of the Revelation of John. The sense of the book is that there is much yet to happen, but that even now it is the time of the end ; the judgment is set, and the books are opened.

How did the Church come to this consciousness of the end as actually present ? We must go back to the personal teaching of the Lord Jesus. Using the eschatological imagery of the time, He led men away from the habit of taking it for reality. They were not anxiously to scan the future, ‘for, behold,

the kingdom of God is within you.’ Perhaps the words mean rather ‘in your midst,’ but the sense remains the same, for this kingdom is invisible to eyes that look on outward things. He proclaimed the immediate coming of the Kingdom ; men then living should see its coming. How and when, then, did the Kingdom come ?

A careful reading of the Gospel will give the answer. At first Jesus proclaims in the most general terms that the Kingdom is at hand. Then there is a limit of time fixed ; the Kingdom was to come in the lifetime of men then living. But still, the day and the hour no man knows. But at last the Son knows the day and the hour, and declares it. You have the declaration of Jesus before Caiaphas. ‘Now and from this time onward ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.’ Here is something future, but also a present reality. The Evangelists who recorded the prediction of the Kingdom within that generation recorded also this more tremendous affirmation. He who made the affirmation was soon to hang on the Cross, and there the robber pleaded for remembrance when the Kingdom should come. But the answer brushed aside the hope of an uncertain future : ‘To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.’ The Lord spoke as reigning king, lifted up on the Cross against the clouds of heaven—and Caiaphas saw. Saw what ? Who shall say ? There is a prophecy quoted as apt : ‘They shall look on him whom they pierced.’ Did He see beyond ? But even the faithful who saw were slow to understand, and even after the Resurrection they still teased the Master with questions about the times and seasons of the Kingdom. The old answer was given once more : the Father has put these things in His own power ; but then there was a promise : ‘Ye shall receive power’—it is not the same word in the Greek, but the connexion seems obvious—‘after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.’ The Holy Ghost came, and Peter at once declared the meaning of it, as spoken by Joel the prophet : ‘It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.’ In the last days ! These men were they upon whom the ends of the world were come. In the light of the Resurrection they saw and understood the Cross, the coming of Christ into His Kingdom ; and they proclaimed it. ‘Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.’

And yet we pray, ‘Thy kingdom come !’ and the language of futurity has never ceased. At the end

of the Apostolic Age men were querulously asking, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' It was necessary to warn them that, although they were indeed living in the last day, yet the Day of the Lord may well outlast a thousand years of man's reckoning. There is still a future: the completion of the Day. But the Day is here, and we are living in it. Our eyes do see the establishment of the Kingdom, though not yet its final triumph. Our eyes do see the throne set, and judgment given. For it is the Day of Judgment in which we live. It is when Judgment becomes terrible that we are most aware of its presence; but present it is always, whether in the stirring of a single conscience or in the crash of an empire. The Kingdom present and Judgment present are not to be denied. They force themselves upon the Christian understanding, even when the tendency to futurity and expectancy is at the strongest. Our Advent hymns are almost inevitably controlled by that tendency, but the truth breaks through:

Great God, what do I see and hear!

It is the cry of a soul conscious of the Kingdom and of Judgment. And there is an answer no less conceived in terms of the present:

Lo, He comes in clouds descending.

The use of imagery is not obsolete. The meaning of the imagery is not completely realized, and until that be done, alike in thought and in action, the language of imagery will be a wholesome stimulant. But we must remember that it is imagery of the present as well as of the still veiled future. We must hold fast, with whatever difficulty, the consciousness of the Last Day, of the Kingdom come, in which the Church of the Apostles rejoiced and endured.

It is a general consciousness, common to the whole Church, however dimly illuminated. We are not to look for Christ here or there, in local or temporal manifestation: 'For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall also the Son of Man be in his day.' The Kingdom is in our midst, established in the universal Church of Christ; it is within us, whosoever Christ reigns in the hearts of the simple. 'I saw, and beheld a white horse; and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering and to conquer.'¹

¹ T. A. Lacey, in *Advent and Christmas Sermons*, 65.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

The Gospel according to the Enemies of Jesus.

'We know that thou art true.'—Mt 22¹⁶.

'This man doeth many miracles.'—Jn 11⁴⁷.

'This man receiveth sinners.'—Lk 15².

'He saved others; himself he cannot save.'—Mt 27⁴².

Of all that can be declared concerning Jesus Christ our Lord this is possibly the most unexpected and surprising, that it was His enemies who actually said the most acutely perceptive and invitingly glorious things about Him. The extent of their testimony, taken together, is such that it actually comprises the entire gospel in its essential facts and features.

Of course, at the time, the things His avowed foes said of Him were intended for contemptuous and venomous insults. But, even so, they spoke more truly than they knew; as most people do when they set forth anything they see in Him. A man's friends, as we all know, may be biased in his favour. What they say of him may be sheer partisanship, suspected on that very account as enthusiastic overstatement. But not so his determined enemies. The bitter opponents of Jesus Christ were all unconscious that one day their scornful taunts would become the triumphant proclamations of His followers.

It was one of them who said: 'We know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth. In contrast the time-serving custodians and teachers of conventional religion with whose ways we are only too well acquainted, we know that thou regardest not the persons of men.' What an unintended tribute to the moral perfection of His life! It was this that authenticated the credibility of His teaching beyond all reach of denial and disproof. His ways and His words were woven of one piece. He was Himself the supreme commendation of His doctrine. With every desire in the world to discredit Him no man was able to convict Him of sin. His life set then, as it has set ever since, a standard in the conduct of men's inescapable relationships, Godward and world-ward, which arraigned every man at the bar of his own conscience, and forced him to an acknowledgment of guilty shortcoming. Jesus Christ was then, as He is still, Himself the convincing evidence of the absolute-ness of His claim that He had come from God. No other explanation fitted the facts of His life. Nor ever will.

On the testimony of His enemies, then, we, with our need of final truth on which to build, and by

which to guide life, may individually rely with confidence upon Jesus Christ. He is God's full and final word to this world. He is the Truth.

Then it was a crafty and determined enemy, in a dilemma into which His activities had forced the ecclesiastical authorities of His day, who declared: 'This man doeth many miracles.'

Unlike some of those who set out to make the Christian religion acceptable to the modern mind by eliminating Christ's miracles from its reliable records, His foes of that time did not attempt to deny them or to explain them away. That line of attack they knew to be of no use whatever. And if Christianity is not miraculous, superhuman and supernatural, it is nothing. Nor has it anything of effective help for sinful, incapacitated man. For, apart from Christ's power to do the humanly impossible for and in those who confide in Him, what hope is there for the recreation of sin-wrecked and ruined lives?

His miracles, attested by His enemies, are the epitome of those processes of grace by which He meets the deep needs and liabilities of our human nature. They are acted parables of His might. In the stories of lepers cleansed, of devils dispossessed, of tempests stilled, of hungry crowds fed, of paralytics vitalized, of elements transmuted, we see Him at work in circumstances which answer to our own present moral and spiritual situations. And what a gospel is this! That the Christ with whom we have to do, who seeks us down the devious ways of life to which we have turned, does in these very situations 'many miracles'! Our deranged and deteriorated capacities may be renewed! Our tastes and dispositions may be changed! Our lost things may be restored to us, and to the services for which they were divinely entrusted to us!

We may take it from His antagonists that He actually did miracles before them which, in sheer self-interest, they would have pooh-poohed out of existence if they could. We may take it from Himself direct that neither in this respect nor in any other has He changed one whit.

Another group who sought to blight His reputation and to inflame active disfavour against Him by playing upon popular prejudice said: 'This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them! He actually goes the length of making the hated tax-farmers His friends! Every one is aware that a man is known by the company he keeps. We know of what sort these people are with whom He consorts. He's no better than they are!'

And all unwittingly, by the implied slander, these too proclaim His undying glory. For if anything

is true of Him it is this—that He is the friend and brother of those who have failed and fallen and cannot rise. Mark that neither condonation of their sin, nor extenuation of their failure, nor condemnation of themselves, does He ever suggest. It is not in any such fruitless way that He befriends men. Simply He offers the help of One who entirely understands their nature. One who estimates to an ounce the weight of the temptation which has overborne them. One who knows their secret battles and defeats and remorse. One who loves them and whose love will go to all lengths and stop short at no sacrifice in order to serve their interests and the glory of God which is bound up with them. The aim of His friendship, which is the greatest reality in all life to those who welcome it, is to uplift and transfigure them into ever-increasing likeness to what God intended them, from the beginning, to be. And the possibility of such a life Jesus Christ sees in the unlikeliest.

When the full story of this age of scientific accomplishment comes to be written, one of the most amazing wonders to be chronicled will be the achievement of synthetic chemistry which, from the black, unpromising, unbeautiful by-products of coal-gas manufacture, has evolved the most exquisitely coloured dyes, the most potent drugs, the most reliable disinfectants and antiseptics, the richest sweetening substances, and the most fragrant perfumes. It used to be said that, 'You can't touch pitch without being defiled!' Now, since the magician's wand has passed over it, it is truer to say that you can't touch it without being enriched! And when it has been told as it deserves to be told, that story from the book of natural science is simply a parable of the mighty transformation effected in the life of that man who accepts the overtures of the Friend of sinners. He's the Friend of sinners! His enemies said it! His friends—a motley lot—know it and glory in it!

The malignity and hatred which dogged His footsteps throughout His life were not silenced even when their aim had apparently been accomplished. As He hung upon the shameful tree, His enemies cried: 'He saved others! Himself he cannot save!' They remembered Mary, out of whom He had cast seven devils; and Matthew; and Zacchæus; and the sons of Zebedee; and Bartimæus; and Lazarus; and many another. Beyond all cavil He had saved them. It would have been futile, in face of what the populace knew, to deny it, though it was little these disdainful scoffers realized of the content and meaning of the term they used. And it was altogether beyond

their comprehension that the fact with which they taunted Him: 'Himself he cannot save' attests for all time the redeeming reality of the Everlasting Love of which He was the supreme expression. Obtuse though they were, they had unconsciously hit upon the profoundest truth in all the philosophy of helpfulness as well as in the entire episode of the world's salvation. For there is no other way, there never has been, of saving others than by losing one's own life.

On the occasion of the Garibaldi Centenary in 1907, *The Times* leading article contained these words: 'A statesman of genius may secure our admiration; a loyal king our passionate loyalty; a prophet our eager acquiescence, and, in times of crisis, the obedience of our will. But it is the man who is willing to die for us that wins our love.'¹

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

The Twelve Gates.

'On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates . . . every several gate was of one pearl.'—Rev 21^{13, 21}.

'And the city had twelve gates.' These words are a call to a great charity, a great catholicity, in our Christian experience. There are many varieties of that experience, and we dare not claim that ours is the only true and valid one.

One still meets the unwarrantable assertion that the gateway of the Church is the only entrance into God's everlasting Kingdom. To this view the Roman Church clings tenaciously. Our forefathers sternly contested it. In this we would follow them.

Another familiar assertion to which many cling stubbornly is that unless one can state with precision the day and hour of one's conversion, one cannot claim to have entered into the Kingdom which is everlasting. In support of this view the classic example of St. Paul has been cited. But was that conversion so sudden as it seems? We must not forget that Paul was born a Jew, which means he had learned to revere Jehovah who ruled in glory, and whose power was manifest throughout the earth. Paul, too, was a Pharisee brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and therefore had profound and solemn reverence for the law of Moses. The young man who conforms to the Ten Commandments is not far from the Kingdom of God. Once more, Paul was familiar with Greek culture, which emancipated his intellect from the narrowness of Jewish tradi-

tion. Recall, too, that he was one of those who stood by consenting to the death of the first Christian martyr. He was among the men who saw Stephen looking upward in the last hour of his earthly life, calling upon God to lay not this sin to the charge of his murderers. His conversion was not so sudden as it seemed.

We must remember that behind many decisions there may be unrecorded preparation. Nor must we forget that very many enter the Kingdom of God without apparent effort. They open their lives to higher influences as flowers open to the sun. Their Christian life conforms to the law of growth.

In his fascinating vision of the future Kingdom, John saw that into it from every side of life there are gateways. The symbolism of the twelve gates is almost inexhaustible. But in the first place they remind us that *all peoples and races shall come to the Lord Jesus Christ*. The names of all the tribes are writ above. There is no social problem and no racial problem when we meet at last around the throne of God, Jew and Gentile, men of the North and the South and the East and the West, rich and poor, black and white, brown and yellow—what a Pentecostal commingling of hearts and voices when the one Eternal Father pours out His Spirit upon all flesh! Here is the promise of the perfect democracy, the true brotherhood of man, the last and greatest League of Nations. We may see in this vision a great call to support our missions, both at home and abroad, that the light of the gospel may be shed into every dark corner of the world.

Again, the thought of the twelve gates should give us a new conception of *Christian unity*. It is a narrow and ignorant creed that wastes its strength in self-pride and barren controversy, declaring that it alone has the keys to the presence chamber. As a matter of fact there are no keys in human hands. The gates are flung wide open, and though at each an angel sentry stands, we smile at the very thought that the parleying for admittance will be concerned with fine points of ecclesiastical polity or theological niceties of doctrine. Far different will that questioning be, searching out the deep things of the soul. When Christian and his companion, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, went up to the gate, there was written over it in letters of gold: 'Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.'

But the other, the grim side of the picture, is found in the closing verse of this same chapter. 'And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomina-

¹ J. S. Holden, *A Voice for God*, 77.

tion, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.'

We might pursue, almost indefinitely, this metaphor of the twelve gates, the different methods of approach by which men come at last to God. *We may think of it in terms of age.* Those pressing in at the East gate are they who accept Christ in early youth, when the sun is just rising upon their life.

'They that seek me early shall find me.' In days when Communism is Christianity's fiercest competitor, the Church must exert herself strenuously to lay her hand in guiding benediction upon the children, claiming them for Christ. Parents do well to remember that the easiest portals through which little ones may pass into the Kingdom of God are before them now in early impressionable years. 'On the east there are three gates.' We are either making it easier or more difficult for them to enter through these gates into the Kingdom of God.

From the South flock those who make the great decision in the noontime of their years. Others, again, come to the Saviour of men when the shadows lengthen in the West, at the sunset hour. And finally there are those who find salvation only by the North gate, when the winter storms begin, and human life is dying in mist and cold.

Or we might let our imaginations play over *the various types of mind which grow together into the supreme and final truth.* The Eastern gate is that of mysticism and introspection. The Western is that of practical service and humanitarian zeal. From the North comes the rugged intellectual fervour for doctrine which gave Calvinism so great a hold upon our Scottish Church. And through the South gate enters the mind ripened by the warm sunshine of affection and of love.¹

East, North, South, West, there are gateways

¹ T. B. S. Thomson, *The Quest of Youth*, 43.

into the Kingdom of God. No person is barred, no nation is excluded. Right round and through the whole world of human experience there are set before us open doors which no man can shut. At the twenty-first verse of the chapter the words occur, 'the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the several gates was of one pearl.' Whence came the idea? The writer had loved his Master well, and once he heard Him say, 'The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls. And when he had found one pearl of great price he went and sold all he had and bought it.' And the men addressed said to one another: 'That is precisely what we have done. We have given up all we counted dear; we have surrendered our pearls of joy and comfort for him. But in him we have discovered the pearl of great price.' And so in later years, a devoted disciple was stirred in the loneliness of exile to share his thrilling vision of the City of God in which we enter through gates of pearl. Whether it be the East, the North, the South, or the West, the gate is always 'the pearl of great price,' it is always Jesus Christ. He meets us at every turn of life. He meets us in every vicissitude, for His is a love that follows hard after us and will not let us go. It is through Him, and through Him alone, that we enter into the Kingdom of God. And we can do it now. Moreover, if that word applies to individual men and women it applies no less to nations to-day. Amid international discord and confusion; amid dark and grievous misunderstandings, Jesus stands before the Eastern and the Northern, and the Southern and the Western nations, the undismayed champion of human values. When shall we emphasize to the world that Jesus is its light and its life, that only through Him can come emancipation from everything that hampers growth of brotherhood? This is the function of His Church.²

² W. E. Blackburn, *Christ shows the Way*, 22.

The Eighth Commandment.

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THE basis of society in the Hebrew nation was *theocratic* and not *sociocratic*; moral obligations were recognized as divine commands, and the sanction was the authority of God and not of the

State. In the second group of the Decalogue, dealing with man's relation to his fellows, there is a progressiveness in the demands made. The bond of the family comes before any general social