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In the Study.

Virginibus Quærisque.

Catching the Train.

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

'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.'—Ec 12¹.

I once knew a boy who lived in the country and travelled daily by train to and from school in the nearest city. Like many other young folk he was generally very loathe to go to bed at night, and as a result he often felt rather sleepy-headed and lazy in the morning, and had a tremendous scamper to be in time for his train. One morning he came panting on to the station platform just in time to see the train steaming out. 'Man, Jamie,' said the station-master, 'if you had run a bit harder, you'd have caught the train.' 'Oh,' replied Jamie, 'I ran hard enough, but I didn't start soon enough!'

Boys and girls, there is a railway called Life, and at the end of it there is a station called Success, and many people miss the train to Success, not because they don't run hard enough, but because they don't start soon enough to catch it. They dawdle and take things easy and waste the opportunities that come to them early in life, and find they can never in later life make up what they have lost. How many men I have met who have deplored to me that they did not take fuller advantage of their opportunities at school! They had worked hard, and got on so far in their calling, but found the way blocked to further promotion largely through lack of education or qualifications, and they wished, when it was too late, that they had 'stuck in' harder to their lessons at school.

I know there is an old proverb which says: 'It is never too late to mend.' That is a very blessed and comforting truth. Thank God, no matter how we have failed, it is never too late to mend our ways. But I venture to suggest that a thing which needs mending is never quite so good as a thing that has never been broken or spoiled. And, in any case, that proverb is one for older folk. Let me suggest a better proverb for you young people: 'It is never too soon to start right.' If you are to make a success of life, the sooner you begin to seek it, the more likely you will be to reach it. Therefore, make the most of your opportunities *now*! Work hard at school. Cultivate habits of diligence and thoroughness. Remember now . . . in the days of thy youth!

But here in church, boys and girls, we are reminded that there is another and finer kind of success than worldly success. Have you ever thought of this? A man may be a soldier, a sailor, or a candlestick-maker, or anything else—that to some extent is an accident of circumstances—but he can never be anything else than a man! And therefore his main task is to make a success of being a man! What does that mean? We learn that from Jesus Christ. He was the one perfect man who ever lived, and so the highest success we can attain in life is just to be Christlike in our character and life. But if we are to make our lives Christlike, it is never too soon to begin; for the longer we delay, the more firmly set we become in our habits of life; and if they are bad habits, the harder and more difficult it is to master them and to turn to better ways. And therefore, boys and girls, begin to serve Christ *now*. Don't say to yourself: 'There will be plenty of time to serve God later, when I grow older.' It is never too soon to start right. Give yourself into God's keeping *now*, and make up your mind to serve Him faithfully henceforth.

In the glad morning of my day,
My life to give, my vows to pay,
With no reserve and no delay,
With all my heart, I come.

Filaments.

BY THE REVEREND R. A. HARDY, B.A.,
BLACKLEY, ELLAND, YORKS.

'Ye shine as lights in the world.'—Ph 2¹⁵.

Do you know what a filament is? If you look at a clear electric lamp when it is lit you will not forget very soon. For that brightly shining circle of wire in the bulb which gives out so brilliant a light is the filament of the lamp. You cannot bear to look at it for long, and as you turn your eyes away you must think how wonderful it is that so tiny a piece of wire should be able to light up a large room. Hour after hour it goes on gleaming. The word filament, according to the dictionary, comes from a Latin noun which means 'a thread' of cotton or wool. And that is what the first successful electric-light filament was—just a cotton thread.

The story of the invention of the electric lamp should inspire us, because it is a triumph of patience and endurance. The chief hero was the world-

famous inventor, Thomas Edison. For a long time he had been in search of an inexpensive material which would give light when charged with electric current, and would not break easily. To-day we use thin metal wire, but in Edison's early life such wire was unknown. Some men who believed in the genius of the great inventor had raised a considerable sum of money to meet his expenses, and for twelve months he worked with little or no result. Many people turned against him, and some of his backers thought their money was lost. But Edison laughed back at his critics on 21st October 1879. On the day before, he twisted a piece of cotton thread into a horse-shoe shape, and sealed it in a glass bulb which was gradually exhausted of air. Then a current of electricity was passed through the filament. It glowed brightly! How long would it last? Thousands of other filaments, made of every conceivable substance, had only shone at the most for a few minutes. This fragile filament, however, was of a different sort. Hour after hour it gleamed forth through the night and into the next day, until it had attained forty hours of life. Thus was the first electric lamp born. Edison now tried to make the filament shine even more brightly, but in giving it more electric current he broke it. It is very amusing to read of the weird mixture of materials used by Edison in his search for a durable filament. Tissue-paper, horse-hair, silk, hemp, etc. Even hairs from a human head were tried. One of the assistants, of the name of Mackenzie, had a red beard, and several filaments were made from it. The hair filament burned brightly, but soon shrivelled up.

Now, a good filament is not necessarily the thickest or toughest. Everything depends on its being able to hold a high charge of electricity. And this is true of human beings also. Although we are weak, yet it is wonderful what good we can do and what help we can give, if only we can keep the power and love which our Lord Jesus gives to us. We have seen how soon some of Edison's filaments were burnt out. They shone wonderfully well, but only for a time. And some men and women, and boys and girls too, are like that. They get tired and give up. In the Bible Jesus speaks of good men as lamps illuminating the dark world. And we know that Jesus is the Light that lighteth all the world. So if we are to shine for Him, we must be filled with His spirit of love.

Lead lives of love; that others who
Behold your life may kindle too
With love, and cast their lot with you.

The Christian Year.

SEPTUAGESIMA.

Doing the Impossible.

'And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters. And he said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat, and walked upon the waters, to come to Jesus.'—Mt 14²⁸⁻²⁹ (R.V.).

The thing that holds our eye and grips our heart in this amazing story is the figure of Jesus riding the storm. This power-story fascinates us, because it so manifestly is an exhibition of power, explain it how we will. Also the element of sheer risk gives it added colour and piquancy, the utter abandonment of Jesus to a high way of living, and His complete regardlessness of the beaten paths of safety. But above and beyond all such considerations is the feeling it awakens in our minds that our Lord here is challenging us to rise with Him to another and higher type of life than the one we normally live. Tertullian long ago said of Jesus: 'He became what we are, in order that we might become what He is.' The feeling persists in our minds that this picture is not simply a unique and solitary display of exceptional power, but is really an acted parable of the type of thing a Christ-filled life should be.

That this is not a fanciful interpretation is clear from the reaction which the vision of Jesus awakened in Peter's mind. 'Bid me to come to thee *upon the waters*.' This request was not motivated by his affection so much as by his spirit of adventure. He wanted to live his life on the same basis as Jesus. Who amongst us would not wish the same? And the life of Jesus, calm, strong, and adequate, as for one moment we glimpse it here battling successfully with the crude and colossal forces of Nature, as elsewhere with the forces of society, becomes for us the norm to which all adventurous hearts aspire. But how are we to get on to this power-level of life?

The first step in this overcoming life is *consciously to direct our wills towards Christ*. John Bunyan in a memorable phrase characterizes faith 'as a leap from the ladder blindfold into eternity.' Yet there is something defective in this definition, for the eyes of faith are not really bandaged. There are always present two elements in a genuine faith—seeing and following, perception and loyalty, intuition and courage. Peter's faith, as it exhibited itself here, was not a blindfold leap into the dark. He had the intuition that Christ was out there beyond him, on the waste of the heaving waters,

waiting to welcome him. He was sure he had heard His voice, was certain he had seen His form. Even although that form was new and unfamiliar, it was that vision that called forth his faith. He not only saw, he resolutely followed where he saw. It is at this point that most people become limp and hang back.

'It is an enterprise,' says Clement, 'it is an enterprise of noble daring to take our way to God.' Look what it meant in Peter's case. His initial act of faith was, to use a phrase of Kierkegaard's, 'a desperate sortie.' Peter was an experienced fisherman, and he knew the terror of the sea. It was, indeed, an enterprise of noble daring to step out of the comparative safety of his boat, and walk in the darkest part of the night into a boiling sea, and into the teeth of a tempestuous gale.

How many of us have the courage to face up to the demands of a faith like this? Are we prepared to give up our fancied securities, and commit ourselves to a risky and uncertain course of life? Are we prepared to leave the familiar and face the unknown with Christ? Are we willing to step off the material basis of life, the basis of prudence, expediency and human calculation, and step out on to the spiritual basis of life, relying on no arm of flesh for support but on Christ alone.

The second point is to *realize that this daring and adventurous type of life is precisely the life to which Christ calls us*. 'Bid me to come to thee upon the waters,' said Peter, and Christ said, 'Come!' The commentators on the whole are less than just to Peter in their interpretation of his motives for acting as he did. They are disposed to look on this request of Peter's as a gratuitous display of swagger and presumption, and they interpret Christ's invitation as designed to teach a foolishly reckless disciple a salutary lesson on the folly of overweening ambition. But surely such an interpretation is quite alien to the method of Jesus.

When Jesus says, 'Come!' He means us to come. He put all His heart behind that invitation to Peter, and nothing disappointed Him more than Peter's failure to come all the way.

Jesus loved the man who was prepared to play big stakes for His sake. He would have subscribed to the sentiment of R. L. Stevenson, 'Life is an affair of cavalry, a thing to be dashingly used and cheerfully hazarded.' Like the Psalmist He would have said: 'I hate a man who is half and half.' He loved adventurous and even reckless natures that spilled the red wine of life in prodigal love and selfless devotion at His feet.

Professor Joseph McFadyen draws attention to

our Lord's fondness for the word 'all'—'giving all,' 'forsaking all,' 'sacrificing all,' 'loving with all the heart, mind, and strength.' His great men and women are those who flung everything into the scales on His side—the widow who flung all she had into the treasury, the pearl merchant who sold all that he had, Peter who forsook all his friends and his security for the privilege of going to Christ on the water. This spirit of utter abandonment of self and goods to causes and spiritual values supremely worth while appealed to Jesus, because it was akin to His own nature. His was a giving life, and when He gave, He gave with both hands freely. He kept nothing back, not even His life. 'This is my body,' He said, 'and it is broken for you, my blood and it is shed for you.'

The third point to notice is *the astonishing success of the venture of faith*. We must not allow Peter's temporary failure to cloud for us our appreciation of his achievement. So long as he lived his life on a supernatural basis he was gloriously equal to all the forces arrayed against him. He only failed when he slipped off that basis on to the nature level. Dr. Fosdick quotes the penetrating observation of an American journalist: 'There are plenty of people to do the possible. You can hire them at forty dollars a week. But the prizes of life go to those who can do the impossible. If a thing can be done, experience and skill will do it. If a thing can't be done, only faith can do it.'

Emerson says: 'They can conquer who believe they can.' That claim needs qualification. To be sure there is a large measure of truth in it. There are powers resident in the human will that have never been exploited. The amazements of history are the achievements of men like Napoleon Bonaparte, who carved their way to fame and power through an indomitable faith in themselves. But no degree of self-confidence will ever give us power to do the humanly impossible. Peter with all his self-confidence could not walk on the water. He could swim through the water, and on another occasion he actually did take this method of reaching his Master, but he could not walk on the water, with all the self-confidence in the world. Well, here he is doing the impossible thing, and he is doing it, not because he believes in himself, but because he believes in Christ.

Faith is the faculty by which we tap the resources of God, and the limits of faith are set, not by our personal exertions, but by our capacity to appropriate the power of God. If we believed in Christ enough, we should do the impossible too. That is the measure of the task that we, as Christians, are

set in the world to do. We are here to do impossible things, to attempt impossible tasks, to bring to pass impossible results. 'All things are possible to him that believeth.'

One word of appeal to those whose lives are not lived on a faith-basis. Let us see that we do not put the challenge of this incident lightly aside, as if it were something that did not concern us. On the contrary, it is a matter of grave concern, because our response to this challenge determines our way of living. Life is not a matter of choice, it is a relentless necessity. Whether believers or not, we must face its imperious demands. Of necessity we must make the same voyage over the same waters. The journey is not a matter of choice, it is only the way that we travel that is.

We are living in troubled and unquiet times. Forces dark, inscrutable, and sinister are gathering on the horizon. Even the boat to which we cling offers no sure security. At any moment a great sea wave, some sudden cataclysm, may destroy it and overwhelm us. All our material securities, the things that stand between us and the ultimate disaster, are of the flimsiest kind. The only real question that faces us is how we are to fare through that inky darkness and across that risky way? The Christian policy is to capture the secret of riding the waves with Christ. It is to dispense entirely with the use of the boat, and in the illuminating phrase of Walt Whitman: 'To make friends of the winds and the weather.' This victory over circumstances, this conquest of the world and all its forces, this independence of all security except the security of God are given only to those who, like Peter, venture all for Christ and count the world well lost for His sake.¹

SEXAGESIMA.

The Presence of the Absence of God.

'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.'—Psa 130^{1, 2}.

Chesterton says somewhere that there is a great difference between the absence of the presence of God and the presence of the absence of God. This sounds like a jingling trick of words, but it is seldom safe to dismiss Chesterton at that. I think he is distinguishing between complacency and hunger; between our human eagerness to justify and save ourselves and the spirit which has nothing to say except, 'If thou, O Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?' but which

¹R. Menzies, *The Magnet of the Heart*, 131.

still can look expectantly to God, hoping in His word. It is the difference between the man who preens himself in view of his achievement, polishing each leaf of his gathered laurels, and Isaac Newton confessing at the end of his life that he had gathered only a few pebbles on the shores of truth; or St. Paul, strong and sweet and spiritual, writing to the Philippians, 'I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' Complacency is 'the absence of the presence of God': hunger is 'the presence of the absence of God,' and contains the promise of life and growth and satisfaction.

Karl Barth and his followers have done our generation the distinguished service of pressing home with power the truth that what we call 'religion' or 'religious experience' is always in danger of lying on the wrong side of this contrast. The cardinal sin of man is pride, the refusal to acknowledge his deep, constitutional sinfulness and to undergo the experience of being pardoned, and consenting to live in the state, so unthinkable to self-will, of entire submission to the Divine will. Man wants at all costs to justify himself. This is a central motive of humanism in all its varied manifestations, even the most idealistic of them; but, according to Barth's analysis, it is equally the motive of much of what passes for religion. In one camp Christ is acclaimed as the product of the human race, worn like a feather in the cap of humanity, or carried like a flag or mascot in the van of idealistic enterprise. But the individual man who resolves to be Christlike does not always impress his neighbour with Christlikeness. The 'Christian' nations, proclaiming aloud their desire and intention to have done with war, occupy themselves at Geneva with months of dialectics, and go home to re-arm. It is one thing to take Christ's teaching as the last word in human idealism: it is another thing to recognize in Christ's teaching the revealed will of the Lord of heaven and earth.

In another camp the whole traditional scheme of Christian faith (including, of course, a belief in the divinity of Christ) is taken bodily over into the control of men, translated week by week into appropriately solemn rites and discourses and practices, managed by men, and by men harnessed to the chariot of the world's need, as men understand that need. But in all this there may be no surrender of human egotism; the whole transaction may be conducted on a horizontal plane on which men

retain their assurance and self-will. For all their multiplied labours and organized campaigns, the Churches do not actually transmit salvation to mankind or make the wilderness to blossom like the rose. They did not prevent the War, nor are they leading the nations with any obvious authority into the reality of reconciliation. It is one thing to take over the traditional Christian formulas, expounding them and seeking to insert them like a mainspring into the mechanism of the world's life—over all which human operations there must still be written, 'the absence of the presence of God': it is another thing, and not within the power of men and Churches, to be born again and to be commissioned and enabled by the Spirit of God.

Near the ruins of the Border abbeys you may see, built into the walls of comfortable little dwelling-houses, fragments of carved stones which once formed part of the sacred edifice. Here it may be a lintel inscribed with a text from the Vulgate, there a corbel in the form of a pomegranate or a bunch of foliage. Is that not a symbol of what much modern religion has done with Christianity? It has taken this little fragment of doctrine and that little piece of artistic ritual, and fitted them into an essentially human scheme of living, but it has lost the sense of the transcendent God whose prerogative it is to be obeyed, and in whose will alone is our peace and security. The most hopeful sign of our times is that we are beginning to suspect that a man-made civilization is not so secure as it sometimes looks, even when it salutes Christ with a show of deference.

'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.' This Psalmist had learned three lessons which men and Churches have to learn over and over again.

First, he had learned to realize the darkness and danger of his situation in view of the holiness of God. He compares himself to a watcher by night, let us say to a military sentry. When a sentry stands at the head of a sap and looks out into the eerie darkness, there is not much danger of his mistaking his real situation nor of his settling down to comfortable musings about human life and destiny. He knows his personal peril and his personal responsibility. Do you think that vitality will ever come back to religion before religion recovers a piercing sense of the fear of God? Shortly before he died, William James congratulated his contemporaries that they were able to pass from the cradle to the grave without knowing the meaning of fear. Can we corroborate that verdict to-day?

Secondly, the Psalmist, crying to God in his distress and anxiety, learned that God speaks and can be heard by men who listen intently. I remember once taking out a platoon of a Training Reserve Battalion on night-exercises. We marched out into a large field, halted, and for a few minutes stood in the blackness of a very dark night, listening quietly. When the men were asked what they had heard, there was brisk answering, for the exercise was novel and a welcome change from the monotonies of the barrack-square. All had heard the bark of a dog and the rumbling of a belated lorry; some had heard the movements of another platoon in the next field, and so forth. At length, a country-bred lad made the astonishing statement, 'I heard the sound of running water about ten yards away.' Yes, it was true: a practised ear had detected, and it was possible for all now to detect the sound of a runlet which had its course beneath a hedge and spoke with a quiet, continuous voice. Once it had been heard, the gentle sound of that unhurrying water seemed to be the very voice of the night itself. There is a voice of God which speaks to men who hunger and thirst after righteousness. It does not cry aloud above the noises of the world; it has to be listened for in quietness and intentness of spirit. That word of God to man is Christ—not the Jesus of the humanists, the projection into history of their own idealisms—but the Christ of God, risen and ascended, constraining and commanding, judging men and offering them His terrible gift of pardon.

Lastly, having heard the word of God, the Psalmist learned the meaning of faith and dared to believe all things and hope all things. 'Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.' How should we not hope all things, if the word which God speaks is the word of pardon? How should we not believe all things, if Cross and Resurrection and Ascension are God's word to the sinful world? ¹

QUINQUAGESIMA

On Believing in the Love of God.

'And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us.—I Jn 4¹⁰.

But have we? We may know the story of God's great love in word and deed, but have we *believed* it? Are we living as if we did?

Some natures find it hard at times to believe in the affection even of their best friends. So strong a character as George Eliot, for example, was not

¹ A. C. Craig, *University Sermons*, 59.

exempt from this weakness. She writes to one of her close friends: 'I can't help losing belief that people love me—the unbelief is in my nature, and no sort of fork will drive it finally out.'

Choice spirits who give a lead to others have 'this rare faculty not only of "supposing" and "inclining to think," but of knowing and believing.' So we read in our Carlyle, and when Carlyle wrote this he had been reading life. Convictions are more effective than mere opinions, and convictions imply a ripe insight which is not dependent upon hearsay or any indirect touch with reality. What furnishes stimulus as well as steadying confidence within the Church is the presence of people who are able to say, *We have known and believed*, not simply 'we incline to think,' or 'we suppose.' Sometimes we do not know what we believe; we may well have less faith than we imagine that we possess, or perhaps more faith than we think. Again, the true quality of our belief is not always what we assume it to be. No, it is one mark of sensible people to know what they really believe, but it is also a note of moral health to believe in what we know, that is, to live by our convictions; for who can expect to be sound or vital in religion if he is not putting what he knows about God into action and application, daring to put it to the touch? Therefore, as we value religious sincerity and effectiveness, we had better be asking ourselves, 'Do I know and believe God's love, or is it little more than vague hearsay than an abstract idea?' We say occasionally that we have a working knowledge of some subject, meaning that, while we do not pretend to understand all its details and technique, we do know enough of it to make it a working power in our ordinary life. Now the goodwill of God has issues and methods that are mysterious, sometimes terribly mysterious: in this world we can only hope to have some working knowledge of His love. But the question is, Have we even that?

In the first place, we may make it difficult for ourselves to believe in God's love if we neglect the supreme proof of it in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is all very well to cry, with Browning—

'God! Thou art love! I build my faith on that.' But 'that' is itself a faith which requires to be built on something deeper, and what is that deeper foundation but the redeeming purpose of God manifested in the Lord Jesus? His life is the interpretation and proof of God's love, as nothing else can be. And whenever this core and centre of our religion is forgotten or undervalued, the result before very long is an uncertainty about the love of God, an uncertainty that spreads till it renders

people weak and vague and sentimental, even with the unsentimental New Testament in their hands.

Then selfishness weakens the sense of God's love. Our faith in a sense depends upon our life. We really cannot believe higher than we behave. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love. When we allow ourselves to slip into unforgiving habits of intercourse, into a cynical or uncharitable temper, or into any ungenerous attitude, when we fail in plain duty and service to our fellows, we are destroying the power of believing in love altogether. A mist rises from the low marshes of preoccupation with ourselves which clouds our vision of God's love. For how can that love be in any sense real to us if brotherly love is not a reality?

But, even apart from all this, it is frequently a strain to believe in God's love when we encounter in our own lives or in the lives of others some of the tragic, staggering facts of the world. Even the dutiful and innocent meet things that seem to deny outright any love divine. We remember in *Hamlet* how Laertes finds his sister driven insane by cruelty, and how, listening to the poor girl raving, he cries aloud, 'Do you see this, O God?'

The love God has—in our shaking world, in our desperate poverty, in our empty homes, in our broken hopes, in our incurable diseases, in our crushed affections. *The love God has?*

Yes, *the love, the love God has for us*. For He has not changed. We may perhaps help ourselves to believe in His goodwill by falling back upon two considerations which have often helped to rally the uneasy. The first is, that His love is not mere fondness, but alive with a moral purpose, and that if He denies us something it may be because we shall be the stronger for doing without it. Then, again, we need to bethink ourselves that what happens to ourselves is part of a wise, large order extending over all the world—a mysterious order which goes beyond our individual intelligence.

Such considerations do not avail to answer all our questions. But surely they help to persuade some of us, in our dismay and resentment, to take the larger view that the Lord may not have forgotten to be gracious.

Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor, sets down in the first part of his diary what he owed to the influence of this person and of that in his life; among other items he notes this: 'From my brother Severus I learned to cherish good hope and to believe in the love of my friends.' Have we not to learn the same kind of lesson that the pagan saint learned, and to learn it here and now in relation to our God as well as to our friends? If

it be weak and even silly to let ourselves become incredulous about the loyalty of friends, if it is unreasonable to distrust an affection which cannot always be expressing itself, is it not equally morbid to be uncertain about our God, when prayer for a time seems to be unheard, or when we cry out into what appears to be a silent, empty universe? Shall we not venture to believe that His purpose still holds good? In fact, is that not what we are really doing when we repeat the Lord's Prayer? For, as we pray that prayer in the spirit of the Lord, we are not calling upon God to fulfil some duties which we are afraid He may be likely to forget; it is not to remind Him of His responsibilities, but rather to remind ourselves of what He has surely promised to do for us and with us in the fellowship of His Son. We say 'Our Father,' to inspire our confidence anew in His purpose of good.

There are inconceivable things in this world, plenty of them, but surely for us, inside God's household and order, the most inconceivable would be that, after all that has passed between Him and us, He has for some reason lost interest in His children and creatures. We can believe much, but not that—no, not for a second!

Hold to it, then, hold to it as a fixed point, without any ifs or buts, that His sure purpose is not proved to have broken down. They do tell us, in some corners of our knowing, sceptical generation, that such religious belief is 'the most empty and pretentious of notions,' a 'mere form of neurosis,' no more substantial than a rainbow that plays prettily over the plunging cataracts of human heart-break and agony in this loveless, godless universe. 'That we know, they tell us, that we believe. So be it. But they are wasting their wisdom if they try to lecture men and women out in the open, who, whatever sights daunt them, see the Cross of Christ with the life that led up to it and the life that streamed from it, the life that still streams from it, into any wilderness that human beings make for themselves by doubt and disobedience. Their testimony is otherwise; it is, that at this time of day we are not acting unreasonably or presumptuously when we look up out of any bleak, bare place and tell ourselves, 'God is mindful of us, God will continue to take care of us, come what may.' And this is no solitary faith. We are not saying it for the first time, and we never say it alone. Join them, for they are a great and growing company, join those who are wise enough and brave enough to confess, 'We have known and believed the love God hath to us'—even to us, and even to-day.¹

¹ J. Moffatt, *His Gifts and Promises*, 234.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

Our Lord's Temptations—and Ours.

BY THE REVEREND HARRY Q. MACQUEEN, M.A.,
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'One that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'—He 4¹⁴ (R.V.).

The late Dr. Stalker once asked a company of young men whom he was to address what subject he should deal with, and received the reply: 'There is only one subject worth speaking to young men about, and that is temptation.' That was, of course, an overstatement, but did indicate a sense of the vital importance of the subject, which is, indeed, one that profoundly concerns everybody. The temptations of age differ from those of youth, but no one entirely escapes from the furnace of trial so long as he wears the garment of mortality. This is a warfare from which there is no discharge. And temptations are innumerable in variety, being closely interwoven with people's characters, temperaments, and circumstances. What is a strong temptation to one is no temptation at all to another, nor are we subject to the same temptations at different stages of our development.

That our Lord Himself was subject to temptation should save us from despair when we are sore beset and imagine ourselves outcast from the way of purity and goodness. When evil suggestions arise in our minds, or when we are tempted to trifle with truth, or to turn from the rugged path of duty to languorous ease, we should recall that Jesus, our Lord, was 'tempted of the devil.' Even He, the Pure and Holy One, had to fight such battles. Therefore, clearly, temptation is not in itself sinful; it only becomes sin when coquetted with, embraced, unresisted. St. Augustine described the progress of temptation as 'a thought, a picture, a fascination, a fall.' Sin enters in at the second stage when we dwell, with pleasant dalliance, on the suggestion which has arisen in the mind.

The inward spiritual struggle endured by our Lord at the outset of His public ministry is generally called 'The Temptation,' but it must be remembered that it was only one of His temptations, as the Evangelist indicates in the words—'the devil departed from him for a season.'

Our Lord, who alone could have given His followers the account of this inward struggle, clothed it in vivid, pictorial language; but the graphic imagery must not blind us to the reality of the struggle. Such struggles are always intensely lonely—always 'in the wilderness,'—and always fierce—'with the wild beasts.' And the *time* is

also significant. Assaults of temptation may come when least expected ; that is part of their subtlety. The attack does not always come in an hour of conscious weakness, when one might be on one's guard ; often it comes in the train of some great hour of the soul. This outstanding temptation of our Lord followed hard on the assurance of Divine approval at His baptism. Happy are they who have armour, prepared beforehand, instantly available against sudden attack, who can fall back on some sure word of God. 'It is written . . .' There often lies the secret of victory.

The circumstances of this particular set of temptations seem to have been these. Jesus—prepared through 'the silent years,' by communion with Nature, by the discipline of a lowly home, by intercourse with His fellows in carpenter's shop and village street, and by meditation on the teachings of the Law and Prophets—was now conscious of an urge to go forth and proclaim the message of the Kingdom which burned within Him. But, being truly man, who must reach his decisions through travail of soul, He saw not clearly, as yet, the best way of accomplishing His mission. Could He accomplish it by alliance with one of the existing parties? He passes in review the prevalent systems of the time, feels their allurements (and we may admit that there was much of good in them, while remembering that the corruption of the good is the worst), and then resolutely puts them, one by one, aside, and starts on a lonelier and more weary road which led to victory for the cause of God, but only by the way of Calvary. The rejection of the other ways, in spite of what they had to offer, was His victory in the Temptation.

The leading parties of that time were the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Herodians, and they were much more than merely political parties, and sought to influence more profoundly the lives of those who adhered to them. They might be compared with present-day Fascism, which seeks to dominate life in a way that older parties did not attempt to do ; or with Communism, which is for many people a religion as well as a political and economic system.

In considering the party of the Sadducees, Jesus would notice that stress was placed on the survival of the nation, which would be a good thing if the nation were to remain true to her high destiny, conserving those great religious values for which she had testified and suffered throughout her chequered history, and being 'a light to lighten the Gentiles' as prophets had conceived her mission. But mere national survival, while surrendering

religious vocation, our Lord would regard as a seduction of evil ; and this was what, in practice, Sadduceism had come to stand for. As Stephen Liberty says : 'The possession of the Temple and the whole religious heritage of the nation were an asset, not for the winning of the world for Jehovah, nor even for the establishment of an independent theocracy, but for the glorification and enrichment of a few ruling families.' In figurative language, 'bread,' merely material sustenance, was what the Sadducees had come to stand for ; therefore Jesus resolutely put from Him the idea of working with or through them, with the words : 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'

But could He work with the larger and more popular sect of the Pharisees? These people did believe in the national vocation ; they held that God's people should be separate and holy ; they demanded strict obedience to the Law, and were eager proselytizers. They read, though not understandingly, the Messianic prophecies. Jesus realized that they might wish Him, if He cast in His lot with them, to accept the rôle of Messiah, as others had done. This spectacular method—doing something dramatic of their own devising, and expecting God to approve and confirm it—was really 'tempting God,' that is, devising tests for Him. 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God' was the answer of Jesus to this temptation.

There was yet another party, the Herodians, which might conceivably be the instrument with which He could work. Could He fulfil His vocation as 'Son of God' by alliance with them? Stating it briefly and crudely, the Herodian policy was that of worldly common sense : it was the policy of compromise. The Herods were attempting to weld Gentile populations together, under nominally Jewish sway, by an alliance with Rome, the price of which was a tacit recognition of heathen gods. Jesus rejected with scorn the thought of such compromise—'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and *him only* shalt thou serve.'

In some such way did our Lord consider the appeal of the various parties of His day, and He rejected each in turn as He noted the temptation inherent in it. To strive to fulfil His calling through one or other of those parties would have been the easy way, since it is always easier to make use of what is at hand than to be a pioneer. But He saw the snares—neglect of the nation's true destiny ; 'tempting God' in the sense of seeking to compel (as it were) His intervention ; and worldly compromise—and so to adhere to any of these parties,

as a means to attaining His end, appeared to Him a temptation of the devil. He, therefore, rejected the allurements of these parties, and went forward on that long and lonely road that led past the Tree to the Triumph.

And because *He* had to face life in lonely agony of soul, feeling the fascination of lower ways and

rejecting them, though they might seem to lead more quickly to the goal, we, in our trial hours, may be sure of understanding and of aid. 'We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' Wherefore, *Sursum corda!*

The Authority of the Bible To-day.

BY THE REVEREND HEDLEY HODKIN, M.A., MORPETH.

IN seeking to persuade either a jury or a political meeting, the speaker, whether barrister or statesman, has to consider not only the cogency of his reasoning and the best method of presenting the facts, but equally the mental powers, habits, and prejudices of those to whom he speaks. In inquiring how we may lead the men and women of our generation to an acceptance of the authority of the Bible, we must not only be able to explain clearly in what that authority consists, but we must understand some of the characteristics of what is called 'the modern mind.'

'The modern mind'—not in general or in the abstract, but that mind as it approaches and views religion—how can it be explained? It is sceptical, credulous, critical of organized religion, full of reverence for science and the scientific method—but the characteristic which concerns us most here is this—it is a generation which has lost the sense of God and of a spiritual world. The cause of this fading of the consciousness of God from the life of our time is not far to seek or difficult to explain. We are living towards the end of one of the most exciting and sensational eras of scientific progress and change in the history of mankind. For four thousand years the economic life of man hardly changed at all. All that our great-great-grandfathers knew of science and of engineering in the eighteenth century was known to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Then within a few generations the whole face of the world and the economic bases of life were fundamentally changed by the development of machinery, engineering, and scientific knowledge and method. Now, it is a psychological fact of human life that the range of man's interest and attention is limited. Charles Darwin, for instance, confessed sorrowfully towards the end of a life of austere and noble devotion to scientific study that 'he could not endure to read a line of

poetry, that Shakespeare nauseated him,' and that he lost all taste for music and pictures—to the consciously felt impoverishment of his life. Similarly our generation has been so dazzled and fascinated by the achievements of science that it has not been able to give attention and thought to the spiritual world, with the result that the sense of this other and higher world has been lost. As F. J. A. Hort pointed out over sixty years ago, 'Everywhere we have offered to us a higher world and a lower. The lower world is always the most tangible, obtrusive, alluring. The higher world is always the most impalpable, secluded, severe.'¹ Happily, however, we are said to be near the end of this era of scientific advance, and, like children too long engrossed with their own toys and amusements, we are beginning to look around and to be aware of another, a wider, deeper life around and above us.

By one of the ironies of history this age of scientific advance coincided with times of great intellectual and spiritual poverty in the life of the Church. In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, apart from the great Cambridge school of Coleridge, Julius Charles Hare and Frederick Denison Maurice, the Church in England was quite unequal to the demands of the new age, clung suspiciously to outworn forms of belief, and regarded science and the new knowledge as an enemy. At this time the scientific method of study applied to the books of the Old and New Testaments shattered the old view of the authority of the Bible, but the insight and courage to put a better one in its place were lacking. The position to-day is this—just as the mind of our generation is beginning to feel after God and to realize the need for religion, it feels perplexed, uneasy, uncertain about the Bible. Has not the Bible been 'disproved' by science, is the

¹ *The Way, the Truth, the Life*, 161.