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Supposing He has done that, supposing you have allowed Him to do it and are now infinitely in debt to Him for having done it, what will it mean for us to know God as our Father? Not merely that we accept the idea of His kinship with our nature and rely on His kindly disposition; but that we let Him establish a direct line of authorship with our life and father our impulses, our thoughts, our ideals, our intentions. Jesus kept accepting His life and its meaning at intervals from God. As has been said: 'His every wish and motive had its heredity in the Father whom He trusted with loyal childlike confidence, and served with a grown son's intelligent and willing comradeship.' It is up to us to let Jesus infect us with that spirit.

Again, if God is similar to Jesus, and we see Him through Jesus' eyes, we shall be quite sure that there is just one God, and that He rules everything there is. Polytheists have a host of gods—one for the forest, one for the wind, one ruling the sea and another the sky and so on. We imitate them, do we not? by having one thought of God for home life and religious fellowship, and another for business and politics and international affairs. All that division must go; if Jesus is trustworthy at all, what we see in Him is the only possible God. His will is the principle that must be put down at the foundation of family life, prosperous industry, decent statesmanlike foreign relations, righteous social arrangements. To put it in a single word, He is not our God only, He is the God of other people. When we treat our neighbours shamefully, or acquiesce in their being treated shamefully because they are so weak they cannot call society to account, then it is He we have to deal with really. That is how things are, according to Jesus. If He is right about the centre, He must be right about the circumference. If we see what He saw, we must see a Father with a passionate interest in all others—men and women and children, light-skinned and dark-skinned races, Britons and Germans—and when we think of other people, and adjust our life to theirs, we have to remember that, or there will be trouble.

Long since men believed that, were the great Nile tracked to its source, its origin might be found in some tiny spring, some scanty nameless rivulet. But when explorers finally pierced the secret, it was to discover that the river sprang from a vast inland sea, sweeping with horizon unbroken round the whole compass of the sky. So we are prone to fear lest the river of salvation, that flows past our doors and into which we have dipped our vessels, might, if followed back to its fountain-head, prove to be fed only from a grudging and uncertain store. But in truth the Father's mercy is like the rolling sea at the continent's heart—that sea from which the great river bursts, full and brimming at its birth. It is from everlasting to everlasting. Shall we not rise up to take it for our own? Shall we not live in the joy of it, and freely take its power for holiness, for power, for brotherhood? 'I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Birthdays of Good Men and Women.

II.

'Who against hope believed in hope.'—Ro 4^{18}.

Gloomy November!

'Tis late before the sun will rise,
And early he will go;
Grey fringes hang from the grey skies,
And wet the ground below.

The sun itself is ill bested
A heavenly sign to show;
His radiance, dimmed to glowing red,
Can hardly further go.[1]

These verses were written by a poet whose memory is very much beloved. One of the reasons why so many people love him is that even into his very saddest poems he brings a note of hope. They never end in the sad minor key.

[1] *The Poetical Works of George MacDonald*, i. 365, 366.

Listen to the last verse of this November song, and you will understand what I mean.

But while sad thoughts together creep,
Like bees too cold to sting,
God's children, in their beds asleep,
Are dreaming of the Spring.

You boys and girls think only of November's gloom. But I remember speaking to you about a boy who gathered potatoes in a field with his mother one November afternoon, and how, although he did not notice it, there was a plough going quite near. That meant that the farmer was preparing for the spring. He had no doubt of its coming.

I wonder how many of you have your birthdays in November, and if you have ever thought that it was a misfortune to have been born in this the dullest of all the months. To-day, I want to tell you about a boy who was a November baby, and who turned out to be one of the bright spirits of this earth. He was delicate during the whole of his somewhat short life; and when in 1894 he died at the age of forty-four, ever so many people all over the world mourned his loss, for they loved him. They had got to know him through the delightful books he wrote. The story of his life was read eagerly here, there, and everywhere. His letters, published in a volume by themselves, were read with even greater interest. They had been written to his friends when he was far away from his native Scotland. Now, you may occasionally hear summer visitors to Edinburgh, especially those who come from America and far away Australia, saying, 'Take us to see the house where Robert Louis Stevenson was born.'

The part of Robert Louis' life that most people like to read best is the beginning. There we are told about the time when he was a little boy. Poor little fellow, he was scarcely ever well. Croup, pneumonia, and feverish colds kept following each other all the time; in winter he seemed constantly to be coughing. But his father's favourite name was 'Smout'; he knew little Louis was plucky.

There were two people who had a great deal to do with making Robert Louis Stevenson the sort of boy he was—his mother and his nurse, Alison Cunningham, whom he always called, 'Cummy.' To the end of his life he loved Cummy. No wonder. She was the one who taught him to think of the Bible as the best book in the world. She read it very often, and talked to him about doing what was right, so that his young mind became full of religious thoughts. One day he came to his mother and said, 'Mamma, I have drawed a man; shall I draw his soul now?' Another day he said to her, 'You cannot be good unless you pray.' 'How do you know?' his mother asked. 'Because I have tried it,' was his answer. Cummy read the Bible in a very impressive manner. Her little charge kept making pictures in his mind as she went on. The pictures were all taken from places near his own home. The 'pastures green' of the twenty-third Psalm were stubble fields by Edinburgh's *Water of Leith*; 'Death's dark vale' was an archway in the nearest cemetery.

His cough gave 'Lou,' as Cummy used to call him, many sleepless nights; he sometimes prayed for sleep, or for morning to come—his poor little body felt all shaken. Cummy would lift him out of bed and carry him to the window, where she would show him one or two windows still lit up; and then they would tell each other that there might be other sick little boys waiting like them for the morning.

Doubtless Cummy helped to foster within him the hopeful spirit that buoyed him up through life. When he became a man and was writing his books—among them were some that boys and girls like to read—he had to fight a battle with ill-health all the time And by perseverance he trained himself to write well. 'He's an awfu' laddie for speirin' questions,' said an old man who knew him; 'whenever you turn your back, awa' he gangs and writes it a' doon.'

Through his long and trying struggle with ill-health Louis was more than merely hopeful. He had the mirth of a child. One friend described him as 'skipping upon the hills of life.' When at last he found he could not live in this country, or indeed anywhere in Europe, he settled in far away Samoa. He loved his home in Scotland, and was very sorry to leave it; but he made up his mind to be thankful and glad in the lonely Pacific island. No doubt his gaiety must occasionally have cost him an effort; but Cummy's lessons came back to him there. He used to say he felt sure that he believed everything was for the best because he believed in God. 'I saw the sea to be great,' were his words, 'and the earth in that little corner was all friendship to me. So wherever a man is, he will find something to please and pacify him. In the

town he will meet pleasant faces of men and women and see beautiful flowers at a window, or hear a cage bird singing at the corner of a street; and for the country—let him look for it in the right spirit and he will surely find it.'

And, boys and girls, listen to one of the prayers he wrote for use at family worship in Samoa:

'The day returns and brings us the petty round of irritating concerns and duties.

'Help us to play the man. Help us to perform them with laughter and kind faces. Let cheerfulness abound with industry.

'Give us to go blithely on our business all this day, bring us to our resting beds weary and content and undishonoured and grant us in the end the gift of sleep.'

When at last he lay dead in the hall of his house one of the Samoan chiefs came, and crouching beside the body said, 'I am only a poor Samoan, and ignorant, others are rich and can give Tusitala presents: I am poor, and can give nothing this last day he receives his friends. When Mataafa was taken, who was our support but Tusitala? We were in prison and he cared for us. We were sick and he made us well. We were hungry and he fed us. The way was no longer than his kindness. You are great people and full of love. Yet who among you is so great as Tusitala? What is your love to his love?'

He was buried, by his own request, away up on a hilltop, and the Samoan chiefs have forbidden the use of firearms on the hillside where he lies, that the birds may live there undisturbed and raise about his grave the songs he loved so well.

It is a good message that the story of Robert Louis Stevenson's life gives us—that we must meet whatever comes to us with thankfulness and hope. He had a sure foundation for his gladness. It was laid in Cummy's days. Many a time he would be fearful and doubt the goodness of God. But joy he felt to be a duty because Jesus said, 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad.'

Robert Louis Stevenson when a little boy said, 'You can't be good unless you pray.' Be like him; try it.

Slippery Places.

'Slippery places.'—Ps 73^{18}.

I expect you think they are about the jolliest places in the world, and I quite agree with you. What a high old time you can have when the frost comes and you go skimming down the long slides, or flying over the ice on your skates, or sailing down the hills on your toboggan! If you get a fall or a bump or two it only adds to the fun. You pick yourself up and are none the worse. Yes, that kind of slippery place is just splendid.

But the slippery places I am thinking of aren't a bit like that. They are covered with thick black mud, and if you fall down you come up all muddy and dirty—that is to say, if you don't sink altogether in the mire.

Now perhaps you are wondering where these places are, because, of course, you want to avoid them. Well, they are to be found in any place where we are in danger of doing wrong. When we are with bad companions, we are in a very slippery place. When we are doing something we would rather our mother did not see us do, we are in a slippery place. When we are tempted to tell a lie to shield ourselves from punishment, or crib our exercises to save ourselves trouble, we are in a slippery place. When we are very sure of ourselves, sure that nothing could tempt us to do wrong, that nothing could ever make us fall, however much other people might tumble down, then we are in a very slippery place indeed, and the slightest push from behind will send us sprawling in the mud.

1. Now the first thing I want to say about these slippery places is—never walk into them of your own accord.

There was a young fox once who was just setting out in life. He didn't know very much about it, but he had the sense to ask the advice of those older and wiser than himself. So he went to his father and asked him would he please tell him some trick by which he could get away from the hounds if they were chasing him. Father Fox was a wise old gentleman, and he bore several scars which showed that he had been through many a tough fight. But when his son asked him that question he shook his head. 'No, my dear boy,' said he, 'I can tell you of no such trick. In my experience, the best plan is to keep out of the hounds' way.'

And that is the safest way to deal with the slippery places—keep out of their way. Sometimes they are disguised. They look very safe and pleasant till we try to walk on them. But more often they are well advertised. There is a big danger board up with letters a foot long which the

eyes of conscience can read only too well; and if we come to grief on them it is our own fault.

A good old man tells us how, when he was a small boy, a minister came to his home and gave him a piece of wise advice which he never forgot. 'When in trouble,' he said, 'kneel down and ask God's help; but never climb over the fence into the devil's ground and then kneel down and ask help. Pray from God's side of the fence.' And that just means, don't run into temptation, don't walk on to the slippery places of your own accord.

2. But sometimes we find ourselves in a slippery place by no fault of our own. Sometimes we are suddenly met by a big temptation although we have tried to keep to the firm, straight path. And all of a sudden our feet feel shaky and we are terribly afraid we shall fall in the mud. What are we to do then? Well, there are just two things we can do.

First, we must plant our feet as firmly as we can and walk on steadily and carefully till we reach safer ground. God sometimes lets temptations come to us in order that, in conquering them, we may become stronger, and better, and braver.

And, second, we must remember that God is holding us up. If you look up the second last verse of the second last book in the Bible you will find a beautiful sentence that the minister often repeats at the end of the service. It begins, 'Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling,' or, as the Revised Version of the Bible puts it, 'Now unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling.' And I want you to remember these words every time you find yourself in a slippery place.

Have you seen your mother helping your little baby brother to walk? She puts her hands under his arms and holds him up so that he cannot fall. God is just like that. He puts His strong hands under our arms, and if we lean on Him we need never stumble, however slippery our path.

The Topaz.

'The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it.'—Job 28^{19}.

November is often a dull, gloomy month, but it brings us a cheerful, sunny stone—the topaz. The topaz got its name in a curious way. Topaz comes from a Greek word meaning 'to seek.' The stone was first found in a certain island in the Red Sea which was often surrounded by fog. And because

the sailors had to seek long for the island ere they found it, they called the gem 'topaz.'

How many of you know a topaz? Well, as there are three different stones called 'topaz' you will be excused if you don't recognize one when you see it. The true topaz is a stone which comes to us chiefly from Brazil, and it is usually golden or yellow or honey-coloured. But it is found also without any colour at all, clear and limpid, and then it is so like the diamond that it is very difficult for ordinary people to tell the difference. These colourless topazes have been nicknamed 'slave's diamonds,' but there is a prettier name than that for them. The Brazilians call them *pingas d'agoa*, and the French *gouttes d'eau*, both of which mean 'drops of water.'

The second stone known as 'topaz' is our old friend the corundum, only it is yellow corundum, not red corundum like the ruby, or blue corundum like the sapphire. This yellow corundum is called the *Oriental* topaz.

The third stone known as 'topaz' is one we are all very familiar with, for it is neither more nor less than the stone which is set in kilt brooches and other Highland jewellery, the cairngorm or Scotch topaz. I expect a good many of the girls here will have a piece of jewellery set with a Scotch topaz, and if any of the boys have a plaid to their kilt they will be very proud of the cairngorm which fastens it on the shoulder.

Now, to return to the first, or real topaz. There are several remarkable things about it. To begin with, it is three and a half times heavier than water. Then if you heat it, or rub it, it becomes electric like amber. If you heat it slowly to a red heat (having first packed it in lime magnesia or asbestos) and cool it equally slowly, you will find that your yellow topaz has turned pink. That is how pink topazes are made, for the natural stone is never that shade. Then though the topaz is a hard stone which cuts and polishes beautifully, strange to say it is very brittle, and if you let it fall you may pick it up in two.

The topaz was supposed in olden times to bring its wearer beauty, wisdom, and long life. It was also believed to quench thirst. Perhaps that was because the colourless topazes are so like drops of pure water.

There is a story of a thirst-quenching Indian topaz whose owner was a Hindu magician or necromancer. One of the Indian Rajahs or

princes, who was fighting a neighbouring prince, asked the magician to help him to win a battle. The battle took place, but alas! the magician's help was vain, for the Rajah was beaten and the necromancer himself wounded to death. As he lay dying on the battle-field he heard near him the groans of a poor wounded soldier who was crying out for a drop of water to quench his burning thirst. With a last effort of strength the necromancer threw his precious jewel to the soldier, telling him to lay it on his heart. No sooner had the man done so than his thirst vanished and his wound healed.

Well, that is only a tale. But I have told it you because I think its meaning and that of the topaz are one—'Be sympathetic.' What is sympathy? The dictionary tells us that it is 'feeling with' others. There used to be an old conundrum (I expect it is still alive)—'Why is sympathy like blind man's buff?' 'Because it's a fellow feeling for a fellow creature.' Now I want to ask you, 'Why is sympathy like a topaz?' And I shall give you three reasons.

1. *It is cheering.*—The topaz is a cheerful stone. Did you ever notice that yellow is a cheerful colour? It is. It 'makes a sunshine in a shady place.' If you have a yellow paper on a dull north room, that room will look as if the sun were streaming into it. So sympathy warms and cheers.

2. *It is electric.*—It is something that goes out from you to some one else, or comes from some one else to you. You can't catch hold of it and say, 'This is sympathy'; but it is like a wave of electricity—you feel it. It makes you tingle with pleasure. It attracts you like a magnet.

3. *It is fragile.*—It is a delicate sort of thing. You can't bounce in on somebody and blurt out, 'Now I'm going to be sympathetic. I'm going to say so-and-so and I'm going to do so-and-so.' You must go about it in a more delicate way than that. Often sympathy can't be put into words. A look or a touch is enough.

A man who was a famous preacher tells that when he was a boy there lived in the next house a man who was a hopeless drunkard. The boy's father was very anxious that the man should be cured, and he tried all in his power to help him. But the poor man found it impossible to resist turning into a public-house when he passed its open doors, and saw its flaring lights, and smelt its smell of whisky. At last, after trying and failing again and again, he said to the boy's father, 'I think if I could hold some one's hand I might manage it.' The little chap heard this and was keen to help, so he offered himself for the job. Day after day he went and slipped his hand into that of the man and guided him safely past the danger spots. He didn't say anything. All he did was just to give a friendly grip; but it was the finest kind of sympathy, and it worked the man's cure.

Now a word of warning! Don't keep your sympathy for people who are sad or in trouble. Spare some of it for those who are specially happy or joyful. The Bible says, 'Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep.' And you'll notice that it puts the 'rejoicing with them that rejoice' before the 'weeping with them that weep.' Perhaps that is because most people find it easier to be sorry for others' woes than to be glad at others' joys. I don't know why that should be, unless it is that there's a little bit of jealousy at the bottom of our hearts, and that little bit of jealousy comes up to the top when we hear of any one who has had any special good fortune.

Boys and girls, if you are ever bothered with that mean little feeling, give it no mercy, kill it right away. Do the sympathetic thing and the fine thing. Rejoice in your friend's joy. Here's the message of the topaz in other words, 'Halve your friends' sorrows, and double their joys.'

The Christian Year.

Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity.

The Election of Matthias.

'And they prayed, and said: Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen.'—Ac 1[24].

If a reason be asked for the particular character of this congregation, it is given in the first words of the text—*They prayed.* We can well understand why they prayed. The Bridegroom had departed from them. They were a band of mourners. There was Mary the Mother of Jesus weeping for her Son. And there was Mary Magdalene weeping for her Saviour; and Peter mourning for his denial of his Lord; and Thomas mourning for his faithlessness; all mourning for the brother who had fallen from his bishopric and gone to his own place.

Peter had important and very solemn duties to

fulfil. He began by preaching the funeral sermon of Judas Iscariot 'who was guide to them that took Jesus.' He then delivered the edict for the election of another apostle. Finding the warrant in the 109th Psalm, he read it aloud :—'His office let another take.' Thereupon he invited the assembled company to select one, who, along with the eleven, should be a witness to the world of the Resurrection.

Two names were put forward—two out of the seventy, very likely, whom Jesus had called and sent out to preach the good news of the Kingdom. Both men seem to have enjoyed the confidence of their fellows, and, though different, doubtless, in their respective temperaments, to have manifested such devotion to Christ and such zeal for His cause, that either gave promise of proving himself a worthy apostle. Their general qualifications for the office, the tone of their characters, that is to say, and the integrity of their conduct, had led to their being selected as a leet. It was a magnificent testimony for an hundred and twenty people to record about two of their number.

'They prayed,' Luke tells us, 'and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew of these two the one whom thou hast chosen, to take the place in this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place. And they gave lots for them; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.'

However strange and unfitting a recourse to the lot in a solemn moment like this may appear to the Western mind, to the Jew it was a natural and reverential expedient.

But we must be careful to observe that the Apostles did not trust to the lot absolutely and completely. That would have been trusting to mere chance. They first did their utmost, exercised their own knowledge and judgment, and then, having done their part, they prayerfully left the final result to God, in humble confidence that He would show what was best.

The two selected candidates were Joseph Barsabas and Matthias, neither of whom ever appeared before in the story of our Lord's life, and yet both had been His disciples all through His earthly career.

And Matthias found himself (1) the successful candidate, (2) *the successor of Judas Iscariot*, (3) an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Of Matthias nothing further is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. This, however, is not surprising, for, with the exception of one or two incidents recorded of St. John, and the fact of St. James' martyrdom, the only acts of the Twelve commemorated are those of St. Peter. Clement of Alexandria quotes from the traditions of Matthias (*Strom.* ii. 163) and Eusebius (*H.E.* 25) mentions apocryphal gospels ascribed to Peter, Thomas, and Matthias, which implies that his name carried apostolical authority. It is remarkable, however, that in the earliest named groups of the apostles the twelfth place is taken by St. Paul. As an apostle of Jesus Christ he filled an office of great honour and privilege. Utterly unjust, surely, would be any account of the emotions which worked within him, if, besides the tempting whisperings of self-congratulation, and the salutary feeling of self-distrust, we failed to record the deep-seated solemn joy that he was no longer Matthias, but Matthias an apostle of Jesus Christ. The throne of Cæsar did not carry greater responsibilities; but neither did it cover its occupant with greater glory than the ministry to which Matthias was ordained. For the mighty empire of Rome was destined to flourish for a season and then decay; but the Kingdom of Christ, in the establishment of which Matthias was called to bear a pioneer's part, was to expand throughout the whole earth and endure for ever and ever. We are called to be witnesses of Christ to our generation. Who amongst us needs to be urged to embrace such a high privilege, and to undertake such a glorious office?

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Disease.

'Who healeth all thy diseases.'—Ps 103^3.

1. Disease is abnormal, because under fair circumstances the human being tends to revert to health. Over and over again, in the early days of our colonies, we have seen stunted, ill-thriven settlers with bad heredity rear a family of better stature and better health than themselves, and their grandchildren were observed to be again larger and more robust. Such reversion to health is only a dramatic instance of a scientific commonplace. We are warranted in setting down disease as abnormal.

2. All its abnormalities are—from the point of view of beauty, order, economy — disgusting. They mean, every one of them, that some stream that ought to be pure is impure, that some tissue that ought to be clean is unclean. In a diseased system the stream of the heart's blood, which ought to be cleansed by the exquisite respiratory process of oxygenation, is not cleansed, or some food which ought to be changing by a beautiful and delicate chemical process into clean living matter is, instead, decaying within the living organism, acting within the veins, or within the tissue, exactly as filth and decaying matter act in our streams or our streets.

If you think of a limpid stream running through a beautiful garden, and think of it again filled with the refuse of the slaughter-house, thick with the garbage of a village, its banks as foul as its water, evil-smelling, poisonous, you have a very good illustration of what food not thoroughly assimilated produces in the body, of what blood not thoroughly oxygenated is.

3. It is wasteful. For quite a long time now, every Christian society that sends out missionaries to do the highest spiritual work of converting men to the knowledge of God and building them up in that knowledge, has found it necessary to apply a strict physical test before taking any candidate into its service. This fact speaks for itself, and it is sufficiently obvious of every kind of religious and social service, except one, that ill-health reduces the working value of the individual.

The one service not thus impeded obviously is prayer; but it is a very serious question whether it has not been one of the greatest mistakes in religion to suppose that prayer can ever be as effective when divorced from social activity. We are ready now to hold this true of the prayer of the cloistered saint; it is no less true of such invalids as are his modern representatives. It is not in the effort to forsake the world for God that man has seen the truest vision of Divine Love, but in the effort to bring God into the world. It was the pagan idea that the body was the enemy of the soul that gave rise to the notion that the weak and sickly could exercise most perfectly the gift of prayer. While a diseased life that can know no other service than prayer may undoubtedly thus serve, it is also true that the same person in health, steadfastly desiring to pray, would produce better results. And to the waste of the patient's life we must add the tragic expenditure of time, money, and energy lavished daily in mere attendance upon the sick.[1]

Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity.

The Development of Personal Religion.

'How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?'—Hos 8^5.

Personal religion, if it is to be worth anything, must be progressive. It admits of advance and demands it. It is a principle, and must work. It is a power, and must have exercise. It is a life, and must grow. It may not stand still for a moment, either on its intellectual, or its devotional, or its practical side. Spiritual waxwork is quite as dead as any other waxwork, and far more ghastly. But what is a stationary personal religion but spiritual waxwork? What, however, are the conditions of the development required?

1. *Realization.*—It is with this that all true personal religion begins. The moment of trust is the moment of union. Then it is that the first flow of the life-sap commences, and the spirit of man receives its first true impulses Godward, from the Spirit of God. The sense of personal acceptance draws out affection. Love begets and increases love. The wilful sinner in the city becomes at once the willing servant at the Master's feet. Now if you check faith you check the flow also. The life is poor because the love is cold. And this is just what is happening to many. There is too little reality, because there is too little realization. Peace is essentially necessary to progress. No man works well in chains. If our personal Christianity is to be of a wholesome and vigorous sort, it must have its roots deep down in a consciousness of present forgiveness Short of this we shall only dwindle and shrivel up, and become the mere shadows of what we should otherwise have been. There would be more true personal religion if there were more of real personal resting on Christ.

2. *Faithfulness.*—A further condition of development, and so a further help to Godliness, may be found in Faithfulness. And by this is meant not so much faithfulness to convictions, or even faithfulness to truth, but rather the steady ongoing discharge of life duty. There is a religion of daily life which is quite as important as, and infinitely

[1] Lily Dougall, *The Practice of Christianity*.

more difficult than, the religion of daily devotion. It is not common just because it has to do mainly with common things. For to carry Christ into all companies, to cultivate the honesties of trade and profession whilst steeped to the eyes in business, to maintain a true morality in politics and public affairs whilst expediency is the order of the day, to make a conscience of the genialities and courtesies and unselfishnesses of social and family life, whilst self-indulgence and independence are the great gods of the age—in a word, to live out the second halves of the Epistles of the Imprisonment, and to move in man's world with a single eye to God's glory—all this may not amount to being great, but it is being faithful. It is the possession and exhibition of the mind of Christ. And such faithfulness, whilst it has regard to common things, has regard also to the things which are called little. With it nothing is really small, because 'all duty is one,' and because there is nothing into which God cannot be brought. And the inbringing of God at once ennobles everything, whilst the intention of pleasing Him at once consecrates every act and redeems it from the charge of insignificance.

3. *Fellowship.*—It was a wise saying of that prince of missionaries, that true exemplar of personal religion, Henry Martyn, 'May I never prefer work for God to communion with Him.' It is indispensable to the existence of all right godliness. For the life that God gives can be sustained only by that which God is. The spirit of man grows by what it is fed on, and its proper nourishment is the supply of the Spirit of God. For this we must walk, not only in, but with, the Spirit. Fellowship consists, not only in that which touches the devotional side of religion, the prayer, the praise, the participation in sacramental acts; not only in that which touches its intellectual side, the thoughtful study of God's Word, or the reverent observation of God's providence, but something beside and beyond it. It is personal intercourse with a personal God. It is the habit of speaking to Him as a man speaks with his friend. It is the looking to the unseen yet ever-present and abiding Comforter, as He joins us by the way. It is the listening to the unseen yet most impressive Teacher as He takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us, and especially at the Holy Communion. It is the leaning on the arm of the unseen but ever-ready Guide and Counsellor, as He says, 'This is the way; walk ye in it.' This is fellowship; where this is there is a growing acquaintance with God's character; a fuller knowledge of His glory in the Person of Jesus Christ; a clearer tracing of the finer lines of His truth, and with this a gradual transformation into His likeness. For if it be true that resemblance comes of lifelong partnership, if it be true that 'he that walketh with wise men shall himself be wise,' then he who companies with Jesus, he who walks with Wisdom itself, shall be changed from glory to glory by the Lord the Spirit. Union, communion, communication, these give a depth and force to all true personal religion.

4. *Expectation.*—We must have motives as well as means, and we find one in this—the hope of the Advent. If we are to live soberly, righteously, and godly (only another name for personal religion), we must look for the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. For this enables us to deal with our specific hindrances. It is the thought of this Personal return, with its promises of rest, reunion, and reward, which helps us to purify ourselves even as He is pure. It acts as a lever to our affections, and also reminds us of things above; it throws its light on the true nature of heavenly things: it disillusionizes, it disentangles. It nerves under disappointment, it quickens in the face of difficulty. Above all, it delivers us from the paralysing power of sin, by revealing and bringing near to us the possibilities and power of the holy life beyond; and as there is not a hindrance which it cannot meet, so there is not a grace which it cannot assist. Take any feature of God's character which requires imitation, and you will find it urged and enforced in connexion with the paramount truth of the Lord's return. If then we are to live in the present that the future may be sure, we must also so live in the future that the present may be what it ought to be—holy, consistent, trustful, charitable.

There is a cry abroad that our religion is losing all its fibre and muscle, that it fails to supply a law sufficient for guidance; fails to grapple with the vices and follies of the day; is a sort of Christianity without much of Christ in it. This is not the truest way of putting the case, but it has some truth in it. Personally, we may need a reminder of a certain lack of strength. If so, we have to travel more from the Temple of the twelfth year to the house of Nazareth, from the carpenter's shop to the seashore of Capernaum, from the solitude

of the mountain to the solemnities of Calvary, if that strength is to be won. Let us take a fresh departure, remembering that Christianity is only a series of beginnings over again.[1]

First Sunday in Advent.

Vision.

'Your young men shall see visions.'—Ac 2^{17}.

The first Pentecost made Peter. He is no longer rash, impulsive, weak, but at once prudent, courageous, strong. No finer illustration of what Pentecost can do for a man is anywhere to be found. Pentecost makes ordinary men extraordinary, lifts the commonplace into the sublime, and transfigures daily drudgery with the splendour of Apocalyptic vision. Above all, Pentecost gives vision; and it is vision that makes the difference between one man and another, between one church and another, between one age and another, and between one nation and another.

1. The function of vision is to touch men to fine issues, to reveal the possibilities of their nature, and to give motive power for their realization. Vision is indeed the dynamic of achievement. You cannot do anything without a vision, not even an ordinary day's work. 'Where there is no vision the people perish.'

Moses beheld in the desert a bush burning with fire and not consumed, and in that day entered upon his life work. Nothing would ever daunt that man's faith, who for the briefest moment had caught the sheen of the Divine Presence. The rocks of the desert would yield water to God's people, and the skies drop manna; across the desert he would see the land flowing with milk and with honey and be content to die. For him henceforward the world was transfigured, and 'every common bush' was 'afire with God.'

His vision came to him in comparatively early life; and we of this generation have been witnesses of the power of visions to make young men willing to give their lives for an ideal even as Moses did. Our young men had dreams of bringing into the world more love, more truth, more justice, more courage, more purity: they saw a vision like the one Henry Martyn saw on his way to die at Tocaloj, 'a new Heaven and a new Earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.'

2. Mankind must ever see visions, must dream dreams, if it is to retain its pulse of youth and hope. Art must have made dreams—dreams of a light that never yet has been on land or sea, of a consecration that has never yet touched and mellowed the fair face of the earth. Art perishes if it is not bent on new ventures, if it is not busy with experiments beyond the borders of the country already won by the masters of other days. Poets, above all, must dream. They are those who retain their youth longer than the rest of us. And they must verify their youth, their child-soul, by confidence in their own vital spontaneity, by the unfaltering faith in their new and sacred gift, such as carried Wordsworth and Browning through the dark years when their voices slumbered in the ears of men and their message was as a tale of little meaning. Music must dream, for it is the very breath of the coming life that is still behind the veil, still in pause before the call, still expectant, still unformed, still unsounded, unmeasured, unfulfilled. Music in its yearning mystery prophesies of the secrets that are waiting to be revealed. Music must ever dream.

'Mankind must ever see visions, if it is to retain its pulse of youth and hope.' A lonely island is the annex of Heaven when a man has a pure heart. Sublime experiences come and go swiftly, but do not leave a man the same. The sun sets, but the afterglow remains. The vision is henceforward a light upon the man's path, and a burning hope within his soul.

What a wealth of glory may be poured into obscure lives, as when a highland cottage is filled with the light of the setting sun, because the window is open to the west! William Blake lived with his wife in two rooms, and when the fashionable world beat upon his door he saw it come and go unmoved. 'Leave me,' he prayed, 'my visions, and peace.'

And visions are often an uplifting power in a weary, prosaic life. They bring in the unseen world to redress the balance of the seen. There are two scales to the beam, one hanging on this side of the veil, full of tribulation, the other beyond the veil, weighed down with heavenly recompense.[2]

'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver through his windows seen
In Spitalfields, looked thrice dispirited.

I met a preacher there I knew, and said:
'Ill and o'erwork'd, how fare you in this scene?'—
'Bravely!' said he, 'for I of late have been
Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, the Living Bread!'

O human soul! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,
To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam—
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!
Thou mak'st the Heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home.[3]

[1] H. James.

[2] J. Watson, *The Inspiration of our Faith*, 68.

[3] *Poems of Matthew Arnold*, 115; 'East London.'

3. But in many respects the Bible is the most alive and practical of books, concerning itself not with dreams, but with the waking realities of everyday life. We know but little of the writers of the books of the Bible. But we know this, at least, that they were not, as a rule, visionaries or mystics, living apart from their fellow-men in a sort of transcendental world.

Take, for example, the Hebrew prophets. Many of us find the utterances of the prophets exceedingly obscure and perplexing. But the reason of this is certainly not that they stood aloof from the world of men and lived in a dream-world of their own. Quite the contrary. If anything is certain about the prophets, it is that they were men of like passions with ourselves, born and bred in the midst of the people to whom they were sent, and in close touch with the movements and questions of their own age. Among them were men of action—counsellors of kings, statesmen, and social reformers—whose minds were alert to mark the changes both within and without, the hopes and fears, the troubles and the successes, that were stirring all around them.

'The prophets,' said Blake in the *Descriptive Catalogue* to his exhibition of pictures, 'describe what they saw in vision as real and existing men, whom they saw with their imaginative and immortal organs; the Apostles the same; the clearer the organ, the more distinct the object. A spirit and a vision are not, as the modern philosopher supposes, a cloudy vapour, or a nothing. They are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments and in stronger and better light than his perishing and mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all. The painter of this work asserts that all his imaginations appear to him infinitely more perfect and more minutely organized than anything seen by his mortal eye.' 'Inspiration and vision,' he says in one of the marginal notes to Reynolds' *Discourses*, 'was then, and now is, and I hope will always remain, my element, my eternal dwelling-place.' And 'God forbid,' he says also, 'that Truth should be confined to mathematical demonstration. He who does not know Truth at sight is not worthy of her notice.'[1]

4. Visions belong to youth. Young men are lured to the study of politics through a vision. The victim of unholy ambitions had his days of wonder as he looked into the future and thought of the possibilities of his own nature. Bossuet, the great Bishop, was the writer who, at the critical moment in Napoleon's life, had 'touched the trembling ears.' 'The "Discourse of Universal History,"' says Lord Rosebery in 'The Last Phase,' 'had awakened his mind as Lodi awoke his ambition. On the fortunate day when he happened on the discourse, and read of Cæsar, Alexander, and the succession of empires, the veil of the temple, he tells us, was rent, and he beheld the movements of the gods. From that time in all his campaigns, in Egypt, in Syria, in Germany, on his greatest days, that vision never quitted him. At St. Helena it forsook him for ever.'[2]

How are we to preserve our spiritual vision to old age? Francis Thompson, that wonderful modern poet of mysticism questions his 'Mistress of Vision.'

> 'Where is the land of Luthany,
> Where is the tract of Elenore?
> I am bound therefor.'

She answers:

> 'Pierce thy heart to find the key;
> With thee take
> Only what none else would keep;
> Learn to dream when thou dost wake,
> Learn to wake when thou dost sleep.
> Learn to water joy with tears,
> Learn from fears to vanquish fears;
> To hope, for thou dar'st not despair,
> Exult, for that thou dars't not grieve;
> Plough thou the rock until it bear;
> Know, for thou else could'st not believe;
> Lose, that the lost thou may'st receive;
> Die, for none other way canst live.'[3]

Second Sunday in Advent.

The Blessing of Old Age.

'Your old men shall dream dreams.'—Ac 2[17].

There are two periods in human life to which dreams and visions belong—dreams and visions, at least, of any persistence and depth. They belong to young men and old men. The child has mere passing fancies, idle day dreams, brown studies. The imagination of the young man becomes strong—his visions project themselves and persist. During the strain and pressure of middle life the imagination loses its power, the routine of existence dulls the visionary faculty. But in the leisure and quiet of old age it asserts itself again. It would be more correct to say that the old man's power of dreaming dreams depends a good deal on the way the young man has used his power of seeing visions. If he has injured or wasted it, it may not return with any vigour; but if he has

[1] Arthur Symons, *William Blake*, 13.

[2] Lord Rosebery, *Napoleon: The Last Phase*, 159.

[3] Francis Thompson, 'The Mistress of Vision.'

not misused it, it tends to reappear. Young men naturally see visions, and old men dream dreams.

If any difference is intended here between the words 'visions' and 'dreams,' it is probably that visions imply the full activity of spiritual power more appropriate to the young, while the inspiration of men in calmer age is more fitly typified by the dreams that come at night when deep sleep falleth upon men. It will be admitted, I think, that the second part of the text is not so often fulfilled as the first. The dreams of old men are a more striking because a rarer sign of a spiritual outpouring than the visions of the young.[1]

1. It is no doubt the special province of the young to see visions. Youth is the time of courage and initiative. Visions are often little use to the aged, the spent, the weary. Age is apt to be unduly cautious; it sees a lion in the way. The young man says there is no lion, or if there is he is 'going' for it. The world is kept moving by the young; for theirs is the courage, the dash, the go, the initiative, essential to achievement.

It may be well, however, to remember that there are exceptions to the rule. In his diary Stopford Brooke wrote: 'I know so many old men who have much deeper feeling for life and keener desire to get out of it its treasures than the young men whom I meet possess. They are even more reckless than the young men. Whether this arise from many of them having no belief in immortality, and therefore being determined to wring the last drop out of the sponge of life—or whether it arise from their indelible immortality emerging amid the decay of the body—I do not know. But I do know it seems to me strange in contrast to the studied apathy and boredom of life which I meet so frequently among the young, and which bores me by its contact to extinction. Those follow the gleam: these never see a ray of it.'[2]

2. In old age beautiful things seem to speak more and more instantly to the mind. Perhaps the faculty of eager enjoyment is somewhat blunted; but the appeal, the sweetness, the pathos, the mystery of the world, as life goes on, fall far oftener and with far more of a magical spell upon the heart.

Just as we take a rambling walk because we know that a district is beautiful, so they indulge a rambling mind because they know that a whole existence is interesting. A boy does not plunge into his future more romantically and at random than they plunge into their past. Even the folds and stretches that our tired feet have left behind them become transfigured with exquisite beauty as we press courageously on and thread the labyrinth of life's long lane. The Present has a lovely way of wreathing an aureole about the brows of the Past. And even though the Present seems nothing but a dreary commonplace, the Future will do as much for her in God's good time. He maketh everything to be beautiful in its time; but it may not be the present time. To-morrow we shall see the glory of to-day. 'You always said my lane would turn,' wrote the 'Lady of the Decoration,' 'and it *has* turned into a broad road bordered by cherry-blossoms and wistaria.' It is always so. The birds in the hedges on either hand are singing that we really lose nothing that is behind by pressing bravely towards what lies before. All the loveliness of the lane is ours, even though we have nearly reached the end.

When well stricken in years, Victor Hugo remarked to a company of friends, 'Winter is on my head; and eternal spring in my heart. The nearer I approach my end the plainer I hear around me the immortal symphonies of the world which invites me.' When I go down into the grave my day's work will begin again the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes on the twilight to open on the dawn.'[3]

> Grow old along with me!
> The best is yet to be,
> The last of life, for which the first was made:
> Our times are in His hand
> Who saith 'A whole I planned,'
> 'Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be afraid!'[4]

3. The dreams of age, which are 'the true interpreters of its inclinations,' have as necessary a place in the development of the kingdom, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, as the visions of youth. Each in its own place is best; and the one is meant to supplement the other. No dream of age is to be all a dream. The dreams which are born from the brooding of age over the past are to be spiritually profitable. The dream stuff gathered from the past is to be transfigured in the light of the new revelation. The impulses awakened are not to melt away into thin air, but are to be transmuted into spiritual power to be

[1] H. W. Horwill, *The Old Gospel in the New Era*, 136.
[2] L. P. Jacks, *Life and Letters of Stopford Brooke*, ii. 471.
[3] J. M. Campbell, *Grow Old along with Me*, 26.
[4] Browning, 'Rabbi Ben Ezra.'

applied in the practical affairs in life. Ordinary dreams affect our waking thoughts; Spirit-born dreams affect them ennoblingly.

> That holy dream—that holy dream
> While all the world was chiding,
> Hath cheered me as a lovely beam,
> A lonely spirit guiding.

The golden dreams of age come from cherishing the golden visions of youth. The man who has been disobedient to the heavenly vision of youth, and has allowed his life to become sordid and commonplace, has nothing out of which to manufacture golden dreams when he is old. Every good old age must have had its vision, and must have held to it, and followed it, until it became a dream.

Prophetic souls who have moved the world have mostly, like Isaiah and Paul, been young men when they saw the vision that transformed their lives, and thrust them forth to their predestined task. And when they were old they doubtless dreamed the dreams which made their closing days the best; thus fulfilling in themselves the purpose of Christianity to redeem the whole of human life from unprofitableness, and through the Spirit's outpouring, by which young men see visions and old men dream dreams, to keep the life of age from thinning out, making it rather increase to the end 'with the increase of God.'

The Conception of a Finite God.

By the Reverend F. R. Tennant, D.D., Lecturer on Theology, and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

The word 'infinite' as applied to God or to His attributes is not a Scriptural term, although it has always been applied to the Deity in Christian theology. Even the almightiness, omnipresence, and omniscience, which have been asserted or implied in certain passages of the Old and New Testament writings, do not transcend the finite unless the world as created, indwelt, and known by God be assumed to be infinite. It is from Greek philosophy that Christian theology borrowed the word in order to apply it to God and His attributes.

Again, it may be observed that Christian or other forms of religious experience do not presuppose or involve the necessity of regarding God as infinite. The religious belief that to God our hearts are open and that from Him no secrets are hid, or that in answer to prayer He is able if He will to satisfy human needs, does not imply a Power more than *adequate* to know and to do what religious experience demands; and that is within the limits of finitude, however much it be. Hume and Kant made a point against the old cosmological and teleological 'proofs' of the existence of God when they remarked that we can never argue from any kind of effect to a cause greater than is sufficient for the production of that effect; and the satisfaction of the demands of religious experience is but a particular case of this general truth. God conceivably may transcend in knowledge, power, etc., the finite; but from the world or from our experience we cannot strictly infer that this is so.

Hence it may reasonably be asked whether the borrowing by theology of the idea of infinity from Greek philosophy was necessary or beneficial. And when we examine the various senses which the word has borne, it appears doubtful whether we can answer the question in the affirmative.

In ancient Greek philosophy, the source from which theology derived the concept, 'infinite' first meant boundless in the sense of essentially devoid of all defining limitations, and was therefore identical in meaning with the word 'absolute' in one of its current acceptations. In this sense 'infinite' was appropriated by gnostics and mystics, but not used, save perhaps very exceptionally, even by the platonizing Alexandrine Fathers. The second sense of 'infinite' with the Greeks was similar to that in which the term was used till lately in mathematical sciences, where it denotes the endless in space, time, or number: that which cannot be attained by successive acts of addition. This sense is again inapplicable to God, who is without