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In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

How to get Full Marks.

'Having your conversation honest.'—I P 2¹².

THAT big word 'conversation' makes you think of when Mother has friends in of an afternoon; and there's a buzz of talk all round the room, as if a swarm of bees had settled down in it. But it doesn't mean that here. Somebody once translated this verse 'Do things bonnily,' and that is right, for it's your old friend of the Greek grammar, *καλός, καλή, καλόν*. 'Do things bonnily'; let us think of that.

When you're at your lessons, there are two points needed, if you are to do them really well—the thing must be done right, and it must be done neatly. And both are required; one of them alone is not enough.

Perhaps you're at a Maths paper; and perhaps you are a neat-handed little lass. And so the figures are made daintily, and the lines are beautifully straight, and there is not a blot or a correction anywhere. And, when you give it in, the examiner, glancing at it as he lays it on the pile of papers, says to himself, 'Ah! this is splendid!' But if the answers are all wrong, he can't give many marks. It's neat, but it's not right; and it must be both.

Or, the other night you were out playing, and the time ran on before you knew, and it grew late, and there was all your work to do—an exercise, for one thing, Latin, or Greek, or French. And you did it absolutely right, without one single slip. But, when you came in, your hands were hot and soiled, and you didn't wait to wash, just sat down as you were. And in the hurry you made blots here and there, and rubbed out so hard you tore through the paper, or when you were blotting it some one nudged you and the thing got smudged. And when your teacher saw it, 'What's this?' he said; 'certainly it's right, not one mistake in it, but it's so untidy! If you ever give me such an exercise again, I'll make you write it out ten times.' It was right, but it wasn't bonnie; and it must be both.

And that is so with the biggest lesson of all. People forget their French, or let slip lots of things, and yet manage along fairly well. But there's one lesson we must never forget, but always be getting

better and better at it, the hardest of all lessons—living. And if we want to get full marks there, we must do it right, and we must do it bonnily.

You know what I mean. When they were down in the Antarctic, and the food was running out, and their strength was giving, you remember how one of them whose feet had gone bad so that he could hardly walk, and was keeping back the rest, got up one day and said quietly, 'I'm going outside, I may be away some time'; and went into the storm where the blizzard would freeze him to death in a very little while. And the others looked at each other, for they knew what he meant, knew he was throwing away his own life to give them a chance to live. That was a fine thing which thrills us. It was done so bonnily. He gave away his life with no fuss, as if he were handing a copper to a beggar.

Or, when Admiral Duncan, the great Scottish sailor, was cut off by the enemy, and thought there was no chance of escape, he sounded till he came to a shallow place, and nailed his colours to the mast-head, and 'we'll make a fight of it,' said he, 'for when we and the ship are all under the water, the flag will be fluttering above us still.' And that moves us yet. It's not enough to do the right thing, we must do it bonnily.

Now, you remember that. There's that old, old trouble about going to bed. You sit as still as a mouse, and the time runs on, but at last Mother notices you, and then the thing begins. You plead, you wheedle, you argue; when that won't do any longer you get on Mother's knee (that is good for ten minutes usually), and then you say good-night, and that spins out to another five. And it goes on and on, till at last father looks up and growls out, 'Send that boy to bed at once, and be done with it.' And you have to go. You do it, but not bonnily. But when there is a horrid thing to face, we mustn't only do it, we must do it bonnily. When the *Birkenhead* went down, and the glorious order rang out, 'Women and children to the boats!' the troops lined up and went down in their ranks, watching the sharks that were waiting for them. That gives us a thrill. It was the right thing done, and it was done so well.

Or you are sent a message, and you have to go; but your face is sulky, and your feet drag, and you

are cross and peevish over it. Yet the other month when the *Egypt* sank there was a printer on board, and he had put a lifebelt on, was waiting for the plunge, when a woman rushed past him in a panic, and back again, searching desperately for a belt. And with that he took off his, and handed it to her. 'Madam,' he said, 'this is yours!' And she was saved, but he was drowned. There is something glorious in that. He didn't only do the right thing, he did it so splendidly. Suppose one of the crew without a belt had come to him, and said, 'Look here, there is a woman over yonder with no lifebelt.' And suppose he had answered, 'Well, what about it? My life is as much to me as hers can be to her.' And suppose the sailor had replied, 'Oh, but she's a woman! Play the game.' And suppose he had said, 'Well, there's something in that,' and had taken off his belt, and handed it to her with the words, 'There you are; but, mind you, this is pretty hard on me.' Even so, he would have done a noble thing, have died for a stranger. But he did it so bonnily, threw away his life as easily as if he were offering her his seat in a tram-car, didn't wait to be asked. 'Madam, this is yours!' And that was all. That is the way to get full marks, to do the right thing and to do it in a beautiful way.

And nobody can teach us how to learn to do that like Jesus Christ, who always did the right thing and so bonnily. A man dashed in with a story of a sick servant, and before he had well begun, Christ was on His feet. I will go and heal him, He said, offering eagerly, not waiting to be asked. And on the Cross He didn't whine and struggle and hate His enemies, or just bear what had to be borne. 'Father, forgive them,' He said, 'for they know not what they do'—doing it grandly. Live near Him, watch Him, imitate Him, and He will show you how life should be lived, and then God looking at yours will eagerly give you full marks, because it will be both right and bonnie.

Stick it!

'Never despairing.'—Lk 6⁹⁶ (R.V.).

You all know, don't you, what 'perseverance' means? It's to stick in when it seems no use; it's to keep trying over and over and over again; it's to play your hardest till the whistle blows although three goals down; it's not to get put off your game when hit for a couple of sixes, but to

say to yourself, 'Well, we'll send down another kind of ball this time'; and when you've tried your home sum three times, and been wrong, to take a new bit of paper and sit down and do it all over again; it's to be plucky and keep at it.

That is what made Britain. We aren't a very clever people, so folk say. But we can hold on. In all our wars we begin badly, but we can take punishment and stick it, and in the end that wins. In the Great War we had a very bad time till we got going, and the armies were ready. But the boys at the front just set their teeth and stuck it out, and that pulled us through. 'Ours are the bravest soldiers in the world,' said a famous Frenchman; and a famous Englishman made answer, 'Well, I can't say that of ours: others are just as brave, but ours keep brave a quarter of an hour longer.' It's that last quarter of an hour that makes the difference. If you want to be a real Briton you must never despair, but stick in when things look all black and difficult and horrid.

And if you want to be a Christian, that is still more true. Never give in, says Christ, never lose heart, never admit that you are beaten. Up again! up again! You've been hammered, and battered, and down time after time; but the fight isn't over till the sponge and towel are thrown in. Up again, and try once more. And this time you may manage it. That's difficult, isn't it? We try something, really hard; to bite our lips and hold back ugly, passionate words, and they slip through before we know; to do what we know we should do, and each time we forget; to keep from being selfish and tempery and ill-natured, and we can't. And by and by we say, 'Ah well, it can't be helped,' and just give in, and stop; pull up the stumps half-way through the innings and won't play on because our best wickets are down for next to nothing; troop off the field because the other side has scored a goal. 'No, no,' says Christ, 'that will never do. No real boy would act like that.' A Christian is one who can stick it when it's hard, and there's not much to encourage one. Perhaps last session you did poorly, and got bad reports and you lost heart. Well, try again this session. Perhaps your temper is a constant bother; it catches upon any little thing; it blazes up over nothing at all. And you have often meant to put it right, and tried, but nothing came of it. Begin again, says Christ. There's a goal against you. But here's a new kick-off. All on! and after the ball!

and you may score this time, if you play hard, and don't stop trying.

Did you ever watch salmon leaping? It's a fine sight. They are going up the river from the sea, and come to a high fall, and what are they to do? They leap at it—a wonderful leap that would make the boy who won the high jump at your school sports look foolish. It's done it! No! It has fallen right into the heart of the boiling water, where it roars and tumbles over, and is swept down again. See! It tries again, and again, and again, a full dozen times. Ah, it's growing tired, that was a very short one. But it doesn't give in. It lies and waits, until it has recovered, and then at it once more. It never gives in till, sooner or later, at the first or at the twentieth time, it leaps right over, and so away up the river. And are you going to be beaten by a little creature like a salmon? Has it got more pluck and grit than you? A Christian, says Christ, is a boy or girl who won't surrender, sees what is right, and struggles to it till he reaches it; keeps trying, picking himself up after each fall and trying once again all in good temper and with a big heart that won't give in, till at long last he manages it, and the thing is done.

The Christian Year.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Fear.

'Through fear of death.'—He 2¹⁵.

A threefold fear oppressed the world, into which Christ entered, with His gospel of overcoming love—a fear of demons, of death, and of fate. These were regarded as powers, non-human and inhuman, recking nothing of man's need or longing, deaf to his entreaties, unmoved by his tears. Such divine beings as men believed in could do little to help their votaries, whose most zealous, or most expensive devotions, left them still a prey to unrelieved terror. Through faith in Jesus, the Son of the Father's love, a way was opened out of all this gloom into a realm where God is supreme and no powers can compete with the supremacy of love (Col 1¹³). Redeeming love has invaded their citadel, and broken the bars of their fortress, and liberated their captives. Now there is nothing, up or down, in the wide world, which can withstand Love's omnipotence. This explains both the pains and the impatience with which New Testament writers combat the worship of angels, and repel

any idea of invading by other mediators the sole sufficiency of Jesus. Jesus saves—He absolutely and He only; and nothing can withstand Him!

(1) Not *demons*: Jews and Gentiles alike believed in malignant beings, who occupied the environment of human life, and could plague and even destroy their victims. Whether beings, such as the men of these days believed in, really exist, has been much debated. Converts from non-Christian religions frequently have maintained that they do; and such Christians have gloried in the defeat of demons by the Name of Jesus in a manner that recalls the exultation of the New Testament. There is no debate as to the phenomena. The only question is as to what they portend. Do they demand as their explanation the existence of malignant forces? Or are they sufficiently accounted for by phases of our own sinful self, such as may be disclosed by hypnotic treatment? The answer does not affect the beneficent fact of Love's overcoming power. Whatever forces of evil rage in our environment, and assail our sin-weakened wills, they are impotent to harm a soul that has taken refuge with Christ. This does not mean that there will be no manifestation of these enemies of our life. But it does mean that deliverance from their worst assaults is certified to faith; and it does open a new avenue for the duty and the power of intercessory prayer.

(2) Not *death*: wherever death is brought within the scope of the moral judgment, it cannot be other than terrible, when that judgment is heavy with the guilt of unforgiven sin. Where there is no knowledge of God in His love, death must be a hated foe, or, at best, the anodyne of an eternal sleep. Against it, life and love enter their passionate and unavailing protest. Yet this enemy, too, Jesus traced to its stronghold, the grave, and wrested from it its prey, the human spirit. By dying, He vanquished the power of death, and released from thralldom those who lay under a lifelong fear of death. Death is one of the 'all things' that belong to us, inasmuch as we belong to Christ, as He does to God (1 Co 3²²). It is to be anticipated with solemnity and deep awe of soul, as a great and wonderful event in which Love and Faith meet together, and triumph in the last earthly conflict with sin. The catacomb inscriptions at Rome have often been cited as containing imperishable witness to the wide con-

trast between the pagan and the Christian attitude toward death. That contrast must always exist, according as the human conscience does or does not acknowledge the victory of love over sin and the grave. A world with the dust of a dead Christ blown across its surface would be still under the dominion of sin, and the terror of dying. A world which beholds Christ's empty grave is under the dominion of redeeming love; and, through the shadows of sorrow, and pain, and dying, faith's uplifted face meets and reflects the radiance of ever-living Love. How far does the Great Salvation extend? As far as the distance that separates the grave from the Throne, where the conquerors sit with the conquering Lord, as He with His Father.

(3) Not *fate*: this is the ultimate shadow that sin casts upon the human spirit. The sunny Greek temperament felt it like a chill at the heart of its joy of living. The very gods of Hellas owned its power. Modern thought conceives it differently; but, in essence, it is the inevitable counterpart of ignorance of Divine Love. It means that the goal of the world's history is determined by a power, or principle, or tendency, to which the needs and aspirations of the human spirit are irrelevant. A man may make a fight against fate, or he may ignore it in the engrossing occupations of business or pleasure. But it remains always his master; and ultimately he sinks beneath its despotism. To a world in the grip of a great despair the Gospel of Love makes known a God who has achieved His redeeming purpose in Christ, and is pledged to carry it forward through time to eternity. Salvation does not overleap time and leave neglected the intense interests, the keen anxieties, the deep sorrows, which belong to our earthly career. It is a false spirituality which ignores the common needs of every day, and treats common providences as a mere appendix of God's grace. God's providence is part of His gracious dealing with our souls. It is to be well observed what faith in providence really is, and what it carries with it. It is faith in the God who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; and it warrants the conviction that He will surely give us everything besides (Ro 8³²). In that 'everything' is comprehended all that is needed to bring our Salvation to its perfection. Our faith in providence, accordingly, is far other than a pretentious Theodicy, presuming to prove by intellectual demonstration that this

is the best of all possible worlds. Faith's affirmation is that God is Love. Its proof is the atoning Cross. Its inference is 'that those who love God, those who have been called, in terms of His purpose, have His aid and interest in everything' (Ro 8²⁸). Therefore faith faces the darkest, most heart-shaking mysteries of earth, not with a theory which claims to solve all problems, but with an experience which underlies and overreaches the whole of human life.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

A Time of Joy.

'That your joy might be full.'—Jn 15¹¹.

As the fourth Sunday is the last in the course of the preparation, and nearest to the actual Advent, it sets forth the state of mind which such expectation is calculated to produce. It might be supposed that the looking forward to the coming of the Lord would create great mental depression, a fearful foreboding, an utter extinction of joyousness from the life of men. The contrary is the truth. The note of the fourth Sunday is joy. The angel who appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of Christ spoke of it as a joyful event. 'Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.' Immediately after the Annunciation Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, and in her Magnificat she said, 'My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!' Our Lord often spoke to the Apostles of the joy of the Sacred Heart; He calls it 'My joy.' After the Resurrection the disciples 'believed not for joy'; and after the Ascension, in spite of all their suffering, they were filled 'with great joy.' Indeed, this holy joy is mentioned far too often in the Epistles to make it possible to quote the instances. St. Paul's own hope for himself is that even in martyrdom he may finish his 'course with joy,' and endure all things even as the Master, who 'for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.' The Apostles had ever in mind the Divine Master's promise, 'Your sorrow shall be turned into joy,' and 'your joy no man taketh from you.'

1. *What is joy?* Happiness, pleasure, and joy are commonly used as if they were synonymous, but they really refer to conditions essentially distinct. Pleasure comes from the senses, and happiness from our surroundings, *i.e.* from our 'hap' or lot in life. But 'joy,' literally, denotes a leap or spring, as does the Latin word 'exult,' which means

a leaping forth. Coleridge, addressing a noble Christian lady, sings :

O pure of heart ! Thou needst not ask of me
 What this strong music of the soul may be !
 What, and wherein it doth exist—
 This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
 This beautiful, and beauty-making power
 Joy, virtuous lady ! Joy that ne'er was given
 Save to the pure, and in their purest hour—
 Life and life's effluence, cloud at once and shower ;
 Joy, lady, is the spirit and the power
 That wedding nature gives to us in dower,
 A new earth and new heaven
 We in ourselves rejoice !

The joy that is a fruit of the spirit arises from the deep secrets of spiritual satisfaction. It is the sense of health and wholesomeness when the soul lives and breathes in its native air. It is fellowship with the eternal springs. It is the assurance of all-rightness in our relations with the eternal God. One gropes for all sorts of analogies to express the wealthy fact. It is the joy of the wedded union between the soul and the Lord. It is the interpassage of covenanted love. It is the interchange of sacred confidences. The soul has come to herself, and she has found herself in God, and all her springs are in Him ! 'Have you water all the year round ?' I said to a friend who had built a house in a somewhat droughty place. 'Yes,' he answered, 'our wells are very deep !'

2. Christian joy is a joy of very startling independencies. It is perfectly amazing what this joy can do without, and yet keep on burning. It can do without material treasure. It can do without friendly circumstances. We find it shining in the association of persecution and pain. The New Testament writers appear to love to startle us with the shock of a great surprise. We turn to its pages, and we are reading some black record of hostility to the Christian faith, a record of inconceivable suffering, and just when our spirit is sinking before the almost certain despondency and despair of the followers of Christ, we are aroused by the shining wonder of a strong joy. 'The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.' 'And they departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ.'

3. Joy is vital. It ministers to bodily, mental, and spiritual health and strength. We cannot overestimate the value of joy in the religious life,

even in its most hard and strenuous hours. Temptation is best encountered, not with a light heart, as if there were no fear, but with a heart glad in the assurance of God's help. A flow of happy feeling braces men for effort.¹

President H. Churchill King says: 'Joy directly increases our vitality. Greater vitality gives greater sense of reality. This means stronger convictions. Of convictions, purposes are born. And conviction and purpose make influence certain. The spiritual life may not safely ignore these facts.'

4. *The secret of joy.* Here is the secret—(1) 'Abide in me, and my joy shall abide in you.' It is the joy of a deeply intimate communion with Christ. The deeper intimacy gives a larger freedom, and it is the larger freedom that gives birth to joy and song. And how do we get this deeper communion? How do we pass into the inner rooms of the love of our Lord? We do it just by giving Him entry into the inner rooms in our own souls. We get no deeper into Christ than we allow Him to get into us. Indeed, what we really mean by getting into Christ is permitting Him to get into us. Our intimacy with Christ is just in proportion to the surrender of ourselves to Him. If I would deepen my intimacy with Christ, the way to do it is to open another room.

(2) And the second secret of spiritual joy is this: the joy wells up within us in ever-deepening copiousness as we co-operate with our Lord in the service of His Kingdom. 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' But would all the neighbours be able to rejoice with Him in equal measure? Suppose one neighbour had been out with Him on the wilds, and shared in the perils and mishaps of the search, would he not be the one who would enter most deeply into the joy of the finding? That is the principle: they who have shared in the toils of the quest will share in the joys of the conquest. 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'²

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

Immanuel.

'And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us.'—Mt 1²³.

Matthew is quoting from the prophet Isaiah. The circumstance and conditions of the prophecy

¹ G. Steven, *The Warp and the Woof*.

² J. H. Jowett, *The Friend on the Road*.

were roughly as follows: Ahaz was afraid of the confederacy of Ephraim and Syria, and despite his timidity in asking a sign which should be a token of their overthrow, Isaiah offers him a sign; a young woman shall conceive and bare a son, and shall call His name Immanuel, and this child shall live to see extraordinary political developments, in which the confederate nations shall disappear. The almost immediate fulfilment of this prophecy is, of course, the only thing that would be a sign to Ahaz. It means, briefly, that by the birth of a child now about to be conceived the conditions shall so have altered that the mother shall call her child Immanuel, God with us.

Was there no Messianic experience, then, in the mind of the prophet? Did Isaiah mean nothing further than that a certain child about to be born would be called 'Immanuel' by his mother in token of her faith that God was still with Israel. It may well be that Isaiah expected not only a child to be born with this name, but that the Messiah would appear in the person of the little son of one of the royal wives.

So far as we know, Isaiah's prophecy, even if understood without a Messianic reference, was not literally fulfilled. There is no trace of any child being called Immanuel. If the prophecy was Messianic, referring, perhaps, to one of the king's sons—probably Hezekiah—it was also unfulfilled. The name was too big for Hezekiah. He did not answer to it.

But here comes in the remarkable fact, that though, in its primary application, the prophecy was falsified by the event, and Isaiah lived to see it falsified, he left it standing in the book of his prophecies. The meaning of this is surely that, though mistaken in his choice of the person in whom the hope was to be fulfilled, the hope itself was no treacherous or delusive one. Some day, Isaiah knew, the great and glorious Person would appear in whom men would feel that God had in very truth come to dwell in the midst of them, and who would fittingly answer to this majestic name—Immanuel, God with us. So he left the prophecy standing, and it became the great and inspiring hope of Israel. Centuries passed, and one and another great man appeared, but none of them answered to the name. Josiah, Nehemiah, Judas Maccabæus—the name was too big for them all. And then Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, in Bethlehem of Judah, and Matthew, thinking of the

life which had so humble and insignificant a beginning, finds the great and glowing anticipation of the prophet at last fulfilled. There had at length appeared in the world one who answered to this majestic name—Immanuel.

So candid and open souls—like Nathanael and the writer of this Gospel—greeted Him as the promised Saviour, the King of Israel, because in Him was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us.' This great faith about Christ was born of their experience of Him. Jesus made the men and women about Him feel He was Immanuel by the words He spoke and the deeds He did. He produced the sense of God within them; He did the works of God upon them. It was because they had found God in Him that they were sure and certain that Isaiah's great word found its fulfilment and satisfaction in Jesus.

What does this glorious and majestic name of Immanuel mean as applied to Christ? It means that Christ was unique. He was a prophet—but He was also much more than a prophet. He was the comrade of men—but He was also much more than their comrade; He was their Master and Lord. He was an enthusiast; the zeal of God's house consumed Him—but He was much more than an enthusiast; He was the mighty quickener of earnestness and zeal. He was men's friend and brother—but He was also infinitely more; He was their King and their God. When we attempt to whittle away the uniqueness of Christ and to empty Him of His dignities, we are not getting 'back to Christ'; we are getting away from Him. To those who stood nearest to Him He was no mere man. Spite of His humble home and His seamless dress, His glory flashed and blazed before their eyes. They heap up dignities and honours upon Him; they add title to title. And at the finish all the dignities and honours and titles they give Him leave His essential glory undescribed. For this Jesus to them was more than man: He was God manifest in the flesh, 'Immanuel, God with us.'

Remember Browning's triumphant confession:

I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ,
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All question in the earth and out of it.

If Jesus be really Immanuel, God with us, what mighty truths does the fact proclaim?

1. The first truth it proclaims is that God has appeared in human life, that in Christ *God became a man*. Staggering and stupendous though the Incarnation is, it is not an incredible thing, but a supremely rational and natural thing. If God is a Personal Being, it is natural that He should reveal Himself. As Dr. Illingworth says: 'We cannot conceive a Person freely creating persons, except with a view to hold intercourse with them when created.' I do not and cannot believe in a deaf and dumb God. I believe in a God who can and who will hold intercourse with the creatures He has made. The naturalness of the Incarnation comes from the nature of God Himself. It comes also from the nature of man. Man is *capax Dei*. He has a capacity for God. He is a moral and spiritual being. This at once makes Incarnation possible and likely.

It is possible because the kinship between God and man is deeper and more vital than the difference. God breathed into man the breath of life, and he became a living soul. In the image of God created He him. God is Spirit, and man is spirit too. It follows from all this that if God must reveal Himself, it is in and through man He must do it, for only in man can He do it adequately or fully. He can show His power in the material universe, His wisdom on the field of history; but to show His love, His self-sacrificing and redeeming love which is His essential nature, He had to reveal Himself in the person of man. Man's nature makes it possible for Him to do so.

Man's nature makes the Incarnation not only possible but likely. For human nature is not only *capable of God*, it is also *eager and athirst* for God. 'Thou hast made us for Thyself,' said Augustine. Wherever you see man, you see him groping after God, if haply he may feel after Him and find Him. These instincts, we believe, are prophetic of their own fulfilment. God does not invest a man with useless powers. He does not mock him by planting within him instincts impossible of fulfilment. If He gives men this instinct for God, it is because there is a God to be seen and known. It was not Isaiah's great prophecy only that was fulfilled, but the anticipation and passion and desire of a world were satisfied when, in Jesus, God became 'Immanuel, God with us.'

2. Because God in Christ has become Immanuel.

He is now a *God to be known*. This is not to say, of course, that men had no knowledge of God before Christ came. Men could not gaze at the works of God without being reminded of His power and Godhead. The world inevitably suggested the thought of a Creator. But you can never learn a person's *character* from the works of his hands. A watch may tell you that there must be a watchmaker, and that the watchmaker is possessed of great cleverness and skill, but the watch can give you no inkling of the nature of its master's temper and spirit. The fact is, the real secrets of personality can never be disclosed by means of *things*. Personality can only express itself through personality. You have only to read the Bible to discover how inadequate and how mistaken men's notions of God were before Christ came. You have only to think of foreign lands to know how inadequate and mistaken men's notions of God are to this day where Christ is not known. In Christ God has made Himself known. 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'

3. *God as Redeemer*. A verse or two before the text Matthew tells the story of the angel's announcement of Christ's forthcoming birth. He told Joseph what the child's name was to be. 'Thou shalt call his name Jesus,' he said, 'for it is he that shall save his people from their sins.' And then the Evangelist goes on straightway to say that all this was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin should bear a son, whose name should be called Immanuel. That is to say, according to the Evangelist, the birth of a Saviour was the coming of Immanuel. God, in order to become a saving God, had to become 'God with us.' He had to share our lot. For sin cannot be blotted out with a stroke of the pen. Its pain and curse can be removed only by being endured. And that is why God in Christ took flesh. That is why He lived our life, and faced our temptations, and bore our sins, and carried our sorrows, and died our death. He did it all that He might become a Redeemer. God in Christ has become God with us to rescue and redeem us.

4. God is with us again, not simply to rescue us from our sins: He is with us as our *Friend and Helper every day*. You have noticed how men and women in the Gospel story grew strong and brave in the presence of Christ. The unstable Peter grew steadfast, the miserly Zacchæus grew generous, the defiled and polluted Mary grew holy, when Christ

was nigh. Somehow or other, He helped them to be their best. And Christ is still the same. In Him, God is our Friend and Helper.

He is Immanuel, *God with us*. Here on earth we touch His hand, we see His face, we hear His voice. 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' You remember the old story that in the fiery furnace into which the three young men were cast there was seen to be One with them like unto the Son of God; and when they drew them up they found the flames had not kindled upon them, and they had come out of the fiery furnace unscathed? The old story is a parable of universal experience. In our fierce trials we too find we are not alone.

'God with us!'—the news has transfigured the world. Fear and dread have gone; and hope and joy have taken their place with us. And yet, to know the fulness of the joy of the gospel of the Incarnation, we must individualize that announcement. He must be, *God with me*.¹

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Follow the Gleam.

'Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.'—Mt 2^a.

This visit of the magi, the worshippers of Mithra, who came to lay their gifts at the feet of Christ may have mythical elements in it, but it need not be wholly legend. The question is a vexed and difficult one—whether historical or not, the story is full of meaning; it is at least a part of the homage of the imagination of the Early Church to the memory of her Lord. He was the fulfilment of all the hopes that clustered round the thoughts of the coming Deliverer. In the heart-throbs of the mother, in the spiritual outlook of the devout souls who waited in the Temple, or fed their sheep on the hill-slopes, in the strivings for an unknown ideal among the wise and reverent of all nations, there was a great and glorious expectancy, and He it was who satisfied all, and surpassed all, these yearnings of the spirits of men.

These wise men from the East rose and followed the star. This vision of the star is the message of Epiphany. It tells us that Christianity has in it the essential note of all romance. There is a light which flashes and is gone, and yet survives. There is a light which eludes, but never deceives. There

is a light which guides as it flies. There is a light which comes only to those who seek in the night, and can feel after what they cannot find, and can still nurse 'the unconquerable hope,' and can never lose heart. There is a light which is for ever in motion, and can be retained only by moving with it. There is a light which is always just ahead of where you stand. You must follow if you would arrive; and the following must never cease. 'Up, and follow the gleam!' So the Spirit cries. Lo! the star still goes before you.

1. Every man has his star. Jesus had His star. You have your star. I have my star. Something grows upon us like a point of light out of the Unseen. Our life is not all earth-bound. Its centre is beyond the starry systems of the sky. God's thought and purpose for you and me is our star; our ideal destiny is our star; anything in us that recognizes a heavenly influence, that acknowledges a celestial destiny, that links us with the power and grace of our Maker and Redeemer, is our star. Our star is the symbol that for each of us there is heavenly work to do on earth and a heavenly crown to gain when earth's journeyings are done. Those star-led men wending their way to the cradle of the Infant Christ stand for the men and women who see visions and dream dreams, but who are not content with seeing and dreaming but take toilsome journeys and fulfil lowly tasks on their way to realizing their dreams.

2. The star stands for all the gracious illusions of life which lead us to our true realities. God has that way with men. He does not plant us face to face with life's ultimate realities at the start. He lures us on; He sets guiding lights in our sky. How the path to knowledge has been beset by illusions! Century by century the thirst for scientific truth has been tormenting the hearts of the wise and the teachable, and their way, so far, has been from one illusion to another, and even to-day the wisest of all wise men will tell you that their knowledge of the great cosmos may be only a larger illusion. Does that make them give up the quest? Some, indeed, give it up, and cry, with mocking Pilate, 'What is truth?' Others halt doubtingly, and become scientific sceptics. But still the star leads on, breaking now and again through scattering clouds and over storm-swept seas; and still the chosen spirits follow its lead, feeling sure that each headland takes them nearer to port, and that every discarded system and

¹ J. D. Jones, *The Hope of the Gospel*, 154.

explanation is a step towards God's ultimate truth. And what illusions have beset the path of religion! Abraham saw Christ's star, and was 'glad.' We can see it shining in the sky of the 'Old Dispensation' from point to point, and moving across the centuries through the troubled hours of that long night of waiting which beset the people of God. Lawgiver and prophet, psalmist and seer, saw that star, and followed it on and on till they fell exhausted, but with their faces towards the light. 'These all died, not having received the promises; but having seen them and greeted them from afar.'

3. God's stars always lead us to our goal. God leads us, it is true, through illusions and from one illusion to another, but not that He may land us in final confusion. If we follow the gleam long enough, and far enough, we shall come to the Grail at last.

Let us arise and follow our star! It will lead us into strange places, perhaps; over many a craggy height, down into many a deep and shadowed valley, through many a haunted forest; but it will ever be on towards the goal of our desire, towards the divine fulfilments of our life. Perhaps, having followed it far, we may for a time miss the star, because we have wandered out of its way, as did the wise men when they turned towards Jerusalem. But as they once more saw the star, when they turned towards Bethlehem, and rejoiced with exceeding great joy, so we shall recover the power of vision when we tread the lowly path of duty.¹ How blessed if, in His strength, not our own, we can say at the end: 'I have seen His star, and by His great mercy I am come to worship Him.'

¹ E. Griffith-Jones in *C.W.P.* xcvi. 304.

Contributions and Comments.

The Sacrifice of Isaac.

THE Divine command to the Patriarch Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering (Gn 22) is generally regarded as a testing or proving of the faith of the Father of the faithful in One God. 'Now I know that thou fearest God,' is conclusive on that head. The difficulty connected with the event lies in the unwillingness to believe that the Almighty could for any purpose command His servant to act in a way which contradicts all that we hold as to the love of God for His children. Human sacrifice was common in the days of Abraham, and the offering of the eldest son was felt to be the highest proof that men could give of their devotion to Deity. Was this feeling the outcome simply of human minds pondering on sacrificial values? Or, was it a putting into practice some innate instinct, the realization of an idea latent in the humanity which we are told was created in the image of God? If man is God's image, if all that belongs to the truth of his being has its counterpart in the being of God, then the idea of the sacrifice of the best must be of Divine origin, and the perversion (if it was a perversion) connected with it which took the form of offering children must be attributed to the sinful condition which ensued the Fall. But was it altogether a

perversion? Was it not rather an anticipation of the great sacrifice when God Himself 'gave his only-begotten Son' to die for our redemption? Looked at in this way, the command to offer Isaac becomes part of the method by which God taught men by symbols the eternal realities concerning Himself. God and His methods being what they are, such a command was a necessary incident in the long process of teaching the world through prophets who have always been the exponents of the Divine will.

If the command to offer Isaac was a foreshadowing of a greater offering to come (albeit already in the Divine Mind) the circumstances of the lesser offering should have some symbolical relation to the greater. We find these in the expressions used in the command. The Voice said: 'Thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest.' At the Baptism of our Lord the same Voice proclaimed: 'This is my Son, my beloved' (St. Matthew); 'Thou art my beloved Son' (St. Mark); 'Thou art my beloved Son' (St. Luke). The descent of the Holy Spirit at the Baptism led St. John to say: 'I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God,' with the subsequent declaration that He of whom he bore witness was 'the Lamb of God,' that is, the sacrifice ordained for the redemption of man.