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his own. This new edition of his famous book makes students of the New Testament more emphatically his debtors than ever.

We are delighted to learn from his preface how much labour he has spent on the restoration of

friendly relations among the nations. And one can only think of this new edition of *Licht vom Osten* as bringing Christian scholars of every race and tongue to sit anew at his feet.

H. A. A. KENNEDY.

New College, Edinburgh.

In the Study.

An Evening Prayer.

O God, Bless now and always, we pray Thee, the services of Thy House, and wherever Christian people have this day raised their desires unto Thee, do Thou hearken unto them, O Lord. Spare in Thy great mercy all who have offended Thee this day. Have pity upon the children of darkness who misuse the night for their own evil purposes, and let them not continue in the folly of their ways. Grant that those who have quarrelled or complained this day may not let the sun go down upon their wrath or discontent. Do Thou guide aright the traveller on his way, and protect and provide for all the helpless. Heal the sick, if it be Thy holy will, and comfort all who mourn. For those who cannot sleep through suffering of mind or body, do Thou shorten the hours of darkness by Thy presence. Watch with loving care, we beseech Thee, over all our absent kindred and friends, guiding their steps in the ways of security, righteousness, pleasantness and peace. Guard Thou the aged and the little ones; and whether this night be like all the past ones to us, or to any of Thy people anywhere the last, grant that we may all alike be found safe in Thy gracious keeping, and so bring us, Heavenly Father, in Thine own time and way out of this world of darkness and change into Thine Eternal light and rest and peace, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Virginibus Puerisque.

An awfully Big Adventure.¹

'Keep cool, keep awake. Your enemy the devil prowls like a roaring lion, looking out for someone to devour.'—1 P 5⁸ (Moffatt's translation).

Do you ever feel that somehow you have been born at the wrong time altogether; that you are dreadfully unlucky to be here when things seem to be so deadly dull and stale and slow compared

¹ By the Rev. A. J. Gossip, M.A., Aberdeen.

with what they used to be in the old story-book days? You are deep in some exciting tale that won't let you sleep at night—about the French Revolution, or the Cavaliers, or the wars of Prince Charlie, and of how some lucky beggar of a boy, no bigger than you, got mixed up in the very centre of it all, and had such glorious adventures, and escapes so narrow that you breathe hard even when you read of them, and he went through it all! Or else it is some girl who, when everything seemed over and the enemy triumphant, outwitted them ever so cleverly, and they were baffled after all—all through a girl as young as you! And then you waken up, and, after that, real life, your life, seems drab and tame and unexciting, like a wet Saturday afternoon when you have played all the games, and read all the books, and still it pours, and there is nothing left to do except glue your nose flat to the window pane and wish that it were time for tea! Nothing really big and creepy ever happens to you. You know how the books open. 'A lonely and bespattered horseman was riding slowly through the fading light,' and before you turn the page he has ridden straight into all kinds of exciting things—that sudden scuffle in the dark when, from under the shadow of the great trees, they leap out on him, and he is down; that eerie inn out on the lonely moors where in the silence, when the very night seems listening, he hears a knife being sharpened in the next room, and then some one softly tries the handle of his door. And there are duels; and a mad leap for life, and the horse just does it; and heaps more adventures, all tumbled together! In these days it seems a boy couldn't stroll down a common street without running into dozens of them. But when you turn a corner there is never anything better than a dog chasing a cat, and you're lucky if you see even that!

Surely things have grown dreadfully old, and tired, and not nearly so interesting as they used to

be! I don't know about that. Exciting things still leap out on one sometimes suddenly enough. Once, when I was a lad, and walking down a quiet street, three little ladies ran out and cried they were so glad to see me, and would I throw a burglar out of their house! With some exaggeration I said that I would be very pleased, and they gave me a candle, and I started searching, with the sure feeling that very soon somebody was going to be tumbling down the stair, and that somebody was going to be me! As it turned out there was no burglar; but that was not too bad for a quiet lad, one quiet evening in a quiet street. In any case, life can be still tremendously exciting; and many people, Christ's people, have the most thrilling adventures every day. When Christ was here He used to tell folk that, if they were going to be on His side, they would have a wild, splendid time of it, and that there was no use of any one thinking of it at all unless they were prepared to stand rough weather, and to take knocks, unless they had grit and pluck and a big heart. It's going to be gloriously exciting, so He said, and added, 'That's why I am so sure that you will come; you couldn't possibly keep out of this!' And it is exciting, the nice kind, like the last five minutes of that football match when the other side were on your line and all but over, and they just kept them out, and could they manage? Ah! they're in! But no! He's down, just outside the line. And you shouted yourself hoarse, and couldn't keep still, and loved every minute of it. Well, it's like that. Didn't you know, and did you really think that it was dull and stale? Anything but that! The men in the Testament keep telling us how thrilling it is. It's like a soldier on campaign watching in an outpost in No Man's Land, all his nerves listening. What's that, was it a twig snapping? Or, like a boxing match against some great strong bully, and you have to be clever and very watchful all the time or he will floor you. Or, like a race, the last ten yards, and it's neck and neck, and one must go all out to win. Or, here is Peter saying it's like being out in the jungle, knowing that a lion is quite close, though where, you aren't just sure. And you crouch near the fire, and heap on brushwood to scare him, and daren't doze over even for a second. There he is roaring; that means he is going to spring. Is it at me? Steady now! It's as exciting as that.

But what does he mean? There is no lion in your house. Mother wouldn't let him in; she makes

fuss enough when you bring home some stray puppy, or half a dozen rabbits; would never allow a lion to prowl about her nice clean house with its great wet paws? But, of course, he means temptations, those horrid things that are always hunting us, and that leap at us so quickly, when we never knew that they were anywhere near; that seize and carry us off, and worry us, and maul us. They do come dreadfully suddenly, don't they; and it is never safe to forget about them, is it? A man lately was telling us in a book of how he went shooting; and crawling along a narrow ledge of rock, with a sheer height above him and a deeper one below him, he turned a corner, and came face to face with a leopard, I think it was, that crouched to spring. And his heart went pit-a-pat, and he could only stare at the two great, green, glaring eyes; but his revolver fired of itself, and one of the two eyes went out, for he had shot straight into it. And with that the great beast sprang at him, and all but swept him with it down, down to a horrible death far below. And it was all so sudden and so unexpected, that the man stood trembling and dizzy and sick. And sometimes you are playing a game merrily, and all at once temper leaps out at you from nowhere: or you get into a hole at school, and in the flurry, before you realize what you are doing, you have said something not quite straight. You are not thinking about danger, turn a bluff of rock, and there is a leopard with its glaring eyes! It's terribly exciting. Indeed you will not manage at all by yourselves.

In South Africa there was a native village where every night a man-eating lion seized on some one. They built traps, and it broke them; they tried to scare it, kept awake, shouted and made huge fires; but always there came a wail, and somebody was gone, night after night. And at last a great British hunter heard of it, and took pity on them, and travelled hundreds of miles, and said, 'I'll get him for you'; and he did. And you do your best, but these great prowling brutes, temptations, are too strong and far too clever for you; and they beat you down time after time. Ah! but there is a mighty hunter, Jesus Christ, who has heard about it, and has come from very, very far to help you. Your traps aren't strong enough, your little bows and arrows can't stop these big beasts' rush. Although you try to keep awake, you doze and then they get you. Ask Jesus Christ, and He will keep you safe. Ask Him to help you and He will. It

will still be gloriously exciting, one long 'awfully big adventure,' but with Him beside you, you need have no fear, no fear at all.

Sunshine, Twelve Hours.¹

'Let your light shine.'—Mt 5¹⁶.

Clever men have made instruments for measuring the sunshine, so that you can know how much of it there was on any given day. Some of the simplest of them are something like this. There is a little glass ball, and when the sun strikes on it, it gets hot, and burns a small black mark on paper that is behind it: and, as a clock ticks, this paper, which has the hours and the minutes and the seconds printed on it, moves, so that the mark becomes a narrow line along it. But, when the sun is hidden, the glass ball grows cold, and nothing happens to the paper then. So that, when evening comes, you have a record of the day. See! It was beautiful sunshine right on until twelve o'clock, but at twenty to one a big cloud spread across the sky, but only for ten minutes, for look here, the burnt line begins again. At three the sun was lost, and never showed again, except just for a second or two at about half-past six. It's all set down, and can be read at any time. It's like the books at school, where the good days and the bad days are all marked. You can't remember what you did on a night four months ago, but the books show. That day you had a headache; or was it a splendidly exciting story some one lent you? anyway you didn't stick in to your work, but scamped things, and fell badly in the class, sank down to twenty-seven: or that other night when you got tired of that, and made up your mind that you were going to stick in again, and you went up to third or fourth. It's all there in the books; and if Dad were to ask the master how you have been getting on, he could look up and say, 'Well, during December he was fairly idle, but he has been doing really well since then.'

And so they keep a record of the sunshine of the bright days and the dull, of the gold hours and the grey, of the places that get lots of sun and those that don't. And any morning in the paper you will find where the sun was shining the day before, and for how long—Brighton, thirteen hours; Greenock, one second, it may be; somewhere else, nil.

You, too, have got a sunshine gauge, and I wonder

¹ By the Rev. A. J. Gossip, M.A., Aberdeen.

what your one shows—dull days or bright ones, happiness or grumps? There are some boys and girls so merry and good-humoured, with such a knack of making other people happy, that they are like a ray of sunshine; and, when they go back to school, things get very dreary for those left behind, and mother misses them just dreadfully, and, as they said about a cheery laddie long ago, 'The village seems asleep or dead, now Lubin is away.' That is what people felt about Jesus Christ. When they were with Him they all felt cheery and happy-hearted, for life was a fine thing, full of sunshine. One of them tells us that to him it was like this. In the old days he had often been out at night on the lake fishing, and sometimes it was cruelly cold, and they were wet through with rain and spray, and the winds cut them to the very bone, and it was all horrid and miserable. But the sun rose. And what a difference that made. Their clothes dried, they grew warm, their fingers, not stiff any longer, could haul at the nets and at the ropes, and they got on; their spirits soared up like a singing bird, they laughed and jested, and sang and grew quite cheery again. And since Jesus came, and as long as I am with Him, there are no dull days. For He is like the sunshine—hours and hours of it the whole day long, and never a cloud hiding it; and one is always happy all the time.

I wonder what your gauge shows to-day? Is there that burnt mark running along the paper, or is the ball quite cold? Perhaps you have had a rather bad day so far, were late in getting up (and why is it that it is only when one is in a hurry that buttons come off and things break?). Perhaps when you were about finished dressing, you found something on the chair that ought to be down near the skin, and had to strip and start again, and porridge was cold, and mother said you had to take it; and you were late again when they were going off to church (who is it hides your cap just when you want to make up time?); and yesterday you couldn't get to the match for it was too wet and cold, and you've been sitting here in church nursing that sore, and sulking over it—no, the paper seems unmarked so far, never a blink of sunshine. Ah, well, it's early yet, and, if you want, you can still have many hours of it before the evening comes. It looks like a wet afternoon, but it can be quite summery and bright inside. Be decent and play with the wee ones, and you will really find it first-rate fun, for baby says such odd things, and a

tea-time you'll be telling them to mother, and shouting over them. Make up your mind that you're not going to growl because you must stay in, and you'll find heaps of jolly things to do indoors. It's only half-past eleven yet. If the sun comes out now, your day may still show 'sunshine, eight hours—not too bad after all, with such a horrid morning! But if you want to have it all day long, remember as soon as you waken to run to your friend Jesus Christ, and stay beside Him, as near to Him as you can; for beside Him it is always midsummer, and the flowers are always out, and the birds are always singing, and day by day the gauge shows, 'Sunshine, twelve hours.'

The Christian Year.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

God walking in the Garden.

'And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?'—Gn 3^d.

Is this history or is it parable? Is it an incident in the life of one man and woman, or is it something that might happen to any of us? The writer wants to express the fact that we have fellowship with God. How could he have expressed it better than by saying that God walks with men? We understand the figure at once. We see the beauty of the idea—God walks with man in the garden in the cool of the day. But do we find God with us in our gardens? T. E. Brown has a famous poem about a garden and God's place in it.

A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!
 Rose plot,
 Fringed pool,
 Ferned grot—
 The veriest school
 Of peace; and yet the fool
 Contends that God is not—
 Not God! in gardens! when the eve is cool?
 Nay, but I have a sign;
 'Tis very sure God walks in mine.

There are three great truths in the text.

1. Men are made for the enjoyment of God's company. That is expressed by the words 'they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the

garden in the cool of the day.' That is one of the greatest truths that we can know. If we do not know it, it may be said that we know nothing, for it explains both creation and redemption. It explains why the world was made by God at first and why the Son of God came into the world afterwards to redeem it. We are made to enjoy God's company. How can we enjoy it? Just as Adam and Eve enjoyed it. They walked with God in the garden. That is to say, they thought of Him in the midst of their work and their pleasure.

But there is another way in which we may enjoy His presence, His company—that is, in direct worship, whether public or private. We have one day in seven set apart for the purpose. If we hear the voice of God when we walk in our gardens, we are certain to hear His voice still more clearly when we worship in His House. We read the 'Word of God' as we call it—that is just another way of saying we hear God's voice in the Bible. And what are we doing when we pray to God but just holding fellowship with Him? This is the very best definition of prayer that can be given—it is holding communion, or fellowship, with God.

But I think we may fairly look upon praise as enjoying God's company just as truly as the reading of the word or prayer. When we sing our psalm or our hymn we understand that He is hearing us. What would be the use of singing them if He did not hear us when we sing? Many of the psalms and hymns are direct prayers, and have no meaning whatever unless it is true that God is listening to us while we sing them.

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
 O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
 Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
 For we have no help but Thee.

And many of the psalms, and many of the hymns too, express the enjoyment of God's presence. Take, for example, the Scottish metrical version of the rooth Psalm:

All people that on earth do dwell,
 Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.
 Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell,
 Come ye before Him and rejoice.

In short, every act of worship is meant to recognize the nearness of God, His readiness to hear us, and our pleasure in His company. We walk and talk with God in the sanctuary.

2. But now we come to the words, 'they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.' Here is a complete change. Something has evidently gone wrong. What is it? It is the same thing that has gone wrong with every one of us. Adam and Eve have sinned—they have been selfish; they have thought of themselves and not of God; they have preferred their own will to God's will, choosing the way that was right in their own eyes without thinking whether or not it was right in the eyes of God. Sin is simply selfishness. Adam and Eve can no longer enjoy God's presence. Instead of enjoyment, what we now see them showing is shame and fear and hiding. These are the three things that regularly follow upon sin. In this story, which is so wonderfully told in the third chapter of Genesis, the *shame* of Adam and Eve is expressed by the idea of their *nakedness*. It was not nakedness of the body that troubled them, but nakedness of the soul. They knew that God saw right into them; their conscience told them that, as it tells every one of us. They could no longer look God in the face. But conscience not only makes us ashamed, it makes cowards of us. 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all.' Adam confessed that; 'I was afraid,' he said. We are not always manly enough even to confess it. But whether we confess it or not, *fear* is an inevitable result of sin. The third result of sin is *hiding*. They hid themselves among the trees of the garden. This is a very common result of sin. When we sin against God we are always trying to hide ourselves. What are the trees that we hide amongst? Sometimes it is pleasure. We try to drown our conscience by going in for all kinds of enjoyment. Sometimes it is work. We must not give ourselves time to think, and so we keep ourselves busy. But whatever it is we try to hide behind, it is all in vain. Adam and Eve could not hide themselves from God among the trees of the Garden of Eden, and we cannot hide ourselves from Him among the trees of work or pleasure or anything else, however thick their leaves may be.

3. But now comes the best part of the whole story. When God says, 'Where art thou?' we think He has come to condemn us, but He has come for no such purpose. He has come to redeem us. He does not need to condemn us, because our own hearts have condemned us long ago; we condemn ourselves. Christ Himself tells us that He did not come into the world as a judge. He came as a

Saviour. 'I came not to judge the world, but to save it.' And He saves it by the power of love.

When Christ came into the world He came saying, 'Where art thou?' When you read the story of His life you find that He went about seeking the *lost*.

Now this was done out of love. You will never understand the meaning of the coming of Christ into the world until you see that it was due to the love of God. If there is one text in the Bible that you must know by heart it is the text, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son.' In order to convince them that He came into the world not to condemn it but to save it, Jesus had to spend His whole life going about doing good, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, raising the dead. And even then they did not realize that it was all for love that He had come into the world. They did not realize it until at last He willingly died for the world. Then they came to understand what He meant when He said, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'

Now the purpose of Christ in coming into the world was to restore us to the enjoyment of God's presence. And that can only be done by love. For we cannot enjoy the presence of God unless we love Him; and we love, as John says, 'because he first loved us.' What is the effect of the love of Christ upon us? How does it bring us back into the enjoyment of His company?

First of all, it rouses in us a sense of sin. Sin, as we have seen, is selfishness. Now you will never drive selfishness out of people by condemning them; you will only do it by loving them. For it is only when they see your love that they see their own selfishness.

Then the next step is that we are sorry for our sin. As soon as the Prodigal saw that he had been selfish in taking all that belonged to him and spending it in riotous living he was sorry for it. 'Father,' he said, 'I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' It was the father's love that made the Prodigal feel sorry. It was the love of God that made David sing those wonderful penitential psalms.

And then, last of all, comes our response to the love of God. 'We love because He first loved us.' 'Where art thou?' is no doubt the question of the righteous judge from whose eye no tree in the garden

can hide us ; but it is also the voice of the compassionate Father who Himself comes down from heaven to look for His lost one.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Concerning Giving.

'Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.'—2 Co 9⁷.

1. *The root of a fine beneficence.*—The practical precepts found in the text emerge out of the Infinite. They suck their nutriment from the very heart of God. The soil in which they grow is that of profound devotion. Look at the soil of this particular Epistle to the Corinthians—at the fifth or sixth chapter, or give patient examination to this rare representative portion of the eighth chapter, 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich'; or take the culmination of this ninth chapter, 'Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift.'

Paul's own liberality is always a fruit, and never a work, and it is the product of his communion with the Eternal. First of all, he had passed through a mighty spiritual experience which he can only describe as a transition from darkness to light. That glorious emancipation had made him the love-slave of his Deliverer, and he watched with vigilant love-eyes for the faintest indication of his Master's will. 'The love of Christ constraineth me!' And out of this liberty of the love-slave there emerges a spontaneous and fervent gratitude which expresses itself in every form of liberal and bountiful service. Paul was a great giver because he had so greatly received. Paul's liberality can be traced to Calvary; all his giving had its roots at the Cross.

2. *The nature of a fine beneficence.*

(1) The negative aspects. There is an absence of grudging. That is a very expressive word, and its real content is given in the margin, where we find the alternative phrase 'of sorrow.' That is to say, there are some people whose giving is 'of sorrow,' as though they were in pain, and the transaction is done to the accompaniment of sighs and groans. It is not that the gift is withheld; it is that it comes so reluctantly, as though some heart-strings were snapping in the passage. And what is the explanation? Just this: the soul is wedded to a thing instead of to an ideal, and the extraction of the thing is an agonizing divorce.

Dr. John Hall puts the matter thus: 'It is a shame for a rich Christian to be like a Christmas-box, that receives all, and out of which nothing can be got till it is broken in pieces.'

And then the apostle mentions a second negative characteristic; true liberality is not 'of necessity.' By this phrase he most clearly implies that there are people who give just because they are compelled to give. Their liberality is a 'forced' product, and, like all forced things, lacks nature's matured sweetness and charm. Social conventions can exercise a compulsion which elicits apparent liberality. Some people give because others are giving, and it will not pay to be out! Such liberality is like the slip of paper lying in the railway track, snatched up in the suction of a passing train and whirled along in the path of a common destiny. This liberality is caught in fashionable currents, and transiently moves 'of necessity.' Now the apostle teaches that no such small 'necessity' characterizes the Christian grace. It does not give because it must, it gives because it wants to. Its constraint is the gentle constraint of devotional love.

(2) But the apostle leaves these merely negative and somewhat colourless attributes and proceeds to more positive characteristics. True liberality is simple, having been *born in the heart*. It is not engendered in the regions of calculation and expediency, but in that deep, elementary, vibratory region, the abode of the sympathetic chords of the life. There can be no fine liberality if these are untouched and unstirred.

But let no one imagine that the apostle is proclaiming the intended domination of blind emotions. True liberality is inclusive of both emotion and *understanding*. The basal sympathy is to express itself in intelligent purpose. 'According as he hath purposed in his heart.' Christian graces are not blind dispositions; they are lit up by the ministry of a vigilant understanding.

Further, this virtue of liberality is not only simple and intelligent, it is *warmed through and through with a most genial heat*—'God loveth a cheerful giver!' Can there be any more gracious and welcome experience than this one of having to do the King's business with a man whose heart is stirred and whose purpose is clear, and who just baptizes you with sunshine that he has caught from the countenance of his Lord? And yet, after all, there is a more delightful experience than so gracious

a meeting with this so gracious a man, and that is, to be the man, with our own hearts stirred like harp chords, and our own purpose clear with the counsels of the Almighty, and our own sunlit face throwing reflected beams of cheery goodwill upon every form of noble enterprise.

3. Now, if this high quality of liberality is to be manifested in our life, there are one or two matters to which we must give attention, altogether apart from those primary and radical conditions to which we referred at the outset.

(1) *The spirit of liberality requires to be kept informed.* To deny the information is to refuse the requisite incitement. Liberality works through certain prepared conditions, and one of the requisite conditions is that we should provide it with news. There will be no liberality where nothing is known : and therefore next to our knowledge of God we require the facts of human life.

(2) But even facts themselves may lie in the mind as infertile as marbles in a boy's pocket. If facts are to become operative and incentive, our *imagination must be brought to play upon them.* If we could see conditions as they are in the overcrowded parts of our great cities, if we could imaginatively enter into their inner significances, significances that cannot be told in speech, and if we could track some of their far-reaching relationships, and open out these stubborn facts like the opening of a chestnut burr, everybody's liberality would leap to the enterprise of institutional work. And what applies to this applies to the entire field of Christian service. We must get to know the insides of our facts, and we must use every available means to obtain the knowledge.

(3) But even with all this the heart would still be exposed to the most insidious snares. There are people who are most unquestionably in Christ, and who even exercise such imaginations as we have tried to describe, and yet, through lack of ordinary business arrangement, their giving is marked by niggardliness and stint. No liberality will continue generous and ready and cheery unless there is some *basal and systematic arrangement.* In the old Jewish dispensation the brotherhood of God's people were commanded to set aside one-tenth of their income for unselfish service. But in the case of men of affluence, this is by no means an adequate proportion. A man with a thousand a year ought not to be contented with the consecration of a tenth. He should rather follow the example of

one conspicuously wealthy man in our country, who began in very humble circumstances, and who in his comparative poverty systematically assigned a tenth for service, but he increased the proportion with the increase of his wealth, and he now assigns one-third to the service of his fellows and his Lord.

Let us set aside a certain proportion, determining that proportion in the very presence of our Lord. And what will be the effect? In the first place, it will save us from the peril of assuming we have given more money than we really have. There are some people who unfortunately estimate their liberality by the number of appeals that are made to them, and not by their responses. And systematic giving will save us further from countless worries and petty casuistries. We shall not have to be continually arguing with ourselves, and pleading with ourselves, and excusing ourselves. No, there will be the simple inquiry : There are our resources, and here is the appeal : can it be met?

And, last of all, *systematic giving makes liberality a delight.* To go to our consecrated money is like having a private bank in which we can draw for the work of the Lord.

'God loveth' such a giver! What an inheritance! What a baptism! Such a man lives in the love of the Almighty. It is enough. In this divine good, life will reach its consummation and its crown. The man is even now 'for ever with the Lord.'¹

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Failure.

'And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.' — Lk 5⁶.

Many of the personal incidents in the lives of our Lord and His disciples light up, like transparencies, with vivid spiritual instruction. One of these is that most suggestive experience of Peter and Andrew and the two sons of Zebedee, when they 'toiled all the night' with their nets and drew in nothing. That long night's work—and probably hard work too—meant failure. Peter's sad words, 'Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing,' might be written under the history of more than one human undertaking.

In common with the man of the world, the Christian suffers by the failure of earthly hopes and mundane prospects. His dreams perish. His plans

¹ J. H. Jowett, *The Transfigured Church*, 241.

miscarry. The child of God is not exempt in this respect from a share in the common experience of mankind. He labours for some earthly prize, but another carries it off. He plants a vineyard, but another eats the fruit.

But beyond this liability to failure in the concerns of this life, the Christian is exposed to the consciousness of failure in a domain which the worldly know nothing of. The worldly man can experience a sense of failure only in the narrow concerns of this world; his theatre of hope and action is contracted; but the Christian is exposed to the bitterness of failure in the vaster concerns of the spiritual world, in the loftier dreams of holiness, and in the Christly standard of self-denying service.

As a Christian, he obtains a new conception of the majesty and solemnity of life; he sees a new vision of his purpose in existence; he realizes the supreme beauty of holiness, as well as the obligation he is under to make it his final goal; he perceives a new standard of life altogether—the life of service, in the place of the old worldly life of self-pleasing. New spiritual faculties are created in him, new perceptions, new desires. The Holy Spirit implants within him a new set of spiritual instincts which demand to be satisfied by earnest self-culture and whole-hearted service. And just in proportion as this conception of a wider, ampler, nobler life comes to the Christian, so does it open a new and wider door for the entrance of failure and disappointment.

1. He is acutely conscious of failure in his devotions. Prayer seems so unheard and mechanical at times. He prays and prays, and yet no answer comes out of the silence. Or his thoughts refuse to centre themselves on God. And even when they obey the strong authority of the will and cease to wander, how hard it is to realize that one's prayer has been breathed straight into the ear of a Personal and Loving Father. We have sought communion with our Father, and yet we feel that we have failed.

But have we failed? Was the prayer of the Syro-Phœnician a failure when the Master passed on in silence and answered her never a word? Did she turn to go home broken-hearted, and say to her afflicted daughter, 'I have failed!' No; she won her way through that barrier of cutting silence, and only cried again in greater earnestness. Is she not utterly crushed by Christ's reply? No;

she takes the very words of the Saviour and turns their point against Himself. 'Truth, Lord; yet even the dogs are not left to starve. They are allowed the droppings of the table. This is all I ask.' Then her cloud broke and the sunshine poured into her heart. Then the Master's meaning was clear. 'O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.' What had looked like failure was only a discipline of love. She received the boon she had craved for her child, but she received a greater blessing still in her own nature.

2. And in our self-culture, also, the element of failure is prominent; we seem to make no progress. We are tripped up to-day by the same temptation that proved so dangerous twenty or thirty years ago. We have spent all our days grubbing up the same weeds in the garden of the soul, but they are growing still.

Is our self-culture a failure because it seems so unprogressive? It may be that we are not making much advance along the line of conflict with some one besetting sin, and yet gradually but surely that very conflict, with all its apparent failures, is developing our moral character in some other direction. We are perhaps endeavouring to overcome the fiery temper that causes us so much shame and self-reproach. But, alas! our battles with it seem to be more often lost than won. This is bad—very bad—yet we may discern a soul of goodness even in our present evil. Is not that oft-lost battle affecting powerfully the other side of our nature and lowering our pride? How harsh we used to be in our censures upon others when they sinned! Ah, it is not so now. We take kindlier, tenderer views of their failings to-day. And as we grow in meekness we grow in influence. Thus our oft-mourned failure may be a hidden victory. The passionate temper which is left like 'a thorn in the flesh' to buffet us may be developing the beauty of meekness in us daily, and endowing us with the powers of attraction which humility and tenderness and compassion always exercise over other men.

3. We are conscious of failure in our service too. The souls we try to win seem just as indifferent, just as callous as ever. We see no token of success.¹

Surely we have all shared the depression of the fruitless morning. We have all known something of that weary home-trudging when we have

¹ G. A. Sowter, *Trial and Triumph*, 127.

nothing to show for our toil. Gilmour in his diary in Mongolia moans again and again because he has no proofs of successful labour. And many a minister among the poor, and, still more, many a minister among the rich, has the same disheartening mornings after heavy and laborious nights. They toil, and toil, and they have nothing to record; and next week finds them washing their nets, returning again to the waters, and going home again with empty hands.

But is Christian service a failure because we see no results? Surely not. The man who leads a sinner out of the gloom into the clear shining of the Saviour's redeeming love may be only completing the work of other servants of Christ who have taught and warned and pleaded and prayed in former days.

Yet when we appear to be meeting only failure in our service, we must examine ourselves and see if there has been any defect or needless incompetency in our methods of work. Were we as skilful and tactful as we might have been? Did we let out the nets with discerning prudence? Or did we just throw them out in thoughtless heaps? Can we humbly say that, 'as much as is in us,' we did our duty?

4. But whether the failure be real or only apparent, we should note the virtue which resides in continued obedience to God. 'And when he had left speaking he said unto Simon, Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught.' And Peter obeyed in spite of defeat. And now let us enunciate a great law in human life. Obedience to the Master releases divine energy. Our disobedience always imprisons the energies of God. Obedience liberates imprisoned energies, and we never just know when the liberated energy will wear the last obstacle down and make us grandly triumphant.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Open Door.

'Behold, I have set before thee an open door.'—
Rev 3^o.

1. Sir William Ramsay says that the 'open door' refers to the exceptional opportunities for Christian service which its geographical position had put in the way of the church at Philadelphia. 'Philadelphia,' he says, 'lay at the upper extremity of a long valley which opens back from the sea.

After passing Philadelphia the road along this valley ascends to the Phrygian land and the great Central Plateau, the main mass of Asia Minor. This road was the one which led from the harbour of Smyrna to the north-eastern parts of Asia Minor and the East in general, the one rival to the great route connecting Ephesus with the East, and the greatest Asian trade-route of mediæval times.

The Imperial Post Road from Rome to the Provinces farther east and south-east coincided for some considerable distance with this trade-route. Through Troas, Pergamum, Thyatira, it reached Sardis; and from thence it was identical with the trade-route by Philadelphia up to the centre of Phrygia. Along this great route the new influence was steadily moving eastwards from Philadelphia in the strong current of communication that set from Rome across Phrygia towards the distant East. . . .

Philadelphia, therefore, was the keeper of the gateway to the plateau; but the door had now been permanently opened before the Church, and the work of Philadelphia had been to go forth through the door and carry the gospel to the cities of the Phrygian land.¹

2. But the words of the text do more than speak to the local circumstances of an individual church in the centuries long ago. They are of universal significance. And they mean that there is a great field of service at our gate to-day. 'What a fine field! What a fine field!' Dr. Guthrie was heard to say as he looked down from one of the Edinburgh bridges over the crowded closes and wynds that formed part of his parish.

And there is an open door abroad also. In the early days of the missionary movement the great prayer our fathers used to offer was the prayer for 'open doors,' because vast countries like India and China were practically closed against the Christian missionary and his message. But the prayer for 'open doors' has become superfluous. Every door has in the course of the decades become open to us.

3. Again the words of the text mean more than that there is a fine field here and abroad. They contain the Christian philosophy of life. They tell us of how God deals with His children, both of what He gives and of what He demands. And they are true to the whole spirit of Christ's gospel, which for all of us is the supreme illumination of that great theme.

¹ *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 404.

What does God do for men, what does He give? Where are the limits to be drawn between what God does for man and what He wills that man shall do for himself? The answer to that question can be given with some confidence. God gives His truth to men; there it is for us to read and ponder in an open Book. God reveals Himself to men, and that too is shown us in the Book of His truth. God unveils before the eyes of men a purpose for all human life, setting upon men the seal of their childhood to God. God prepares a Kingdom for men, ordering life in such a way that they are able to realize the highest possibilities of their natures. God promises His help to men in their struggle against all the weakness inherent in their natures and against all hardship in outward circumstance.

But then God stops, and the Divine Voice says, 'Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it, but thou thyself must enter in.' That is the message of the gospel in brief and general terms. There is the outline of what God gives and does, and there also is the point at which He waits for the co-operation of man's own energies. God will do anything short of invading the sphere ruled by man's own choice. He prepares the Kingdom for him, sets forth the laws which must govern its life, promises help to the man who needs it. There is the open door which no man can shut. But the man must enter in by an act of his own will. Over that threshold no one shall pass like a slave in the grip of superior power; every one who enters at all shall walk like a free man.

Man is made free both by what God does and by what God refuses to do. And both those kinds of freedom are suggested in the words of our text. There is first of all the freedom of the open door, the kind of freedom which is only possible because of what God gives and does. God makes life an open door for all His children. If it were a closed door, if there were no answer to the hopes and desires of the soul, if no Kingdom were prepared, we should be slaves indeed. I can imagine no more bitter slavery in the world than creatures with great hopes, but with every door of fulfilment closed and barred. God's assurances and promises are the opened doors of life, freedom to aspire and to hope, life a broad place with space for the soul to breathe. That is the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Then also there is the freedom of the un-compelled entrance, the freedom which is ours because

of what God refuses to do. He will not make us enter the inheritance He has prepared. No force will be exercised to bring men in. The gates will always be open, but there must always be a gate, a threshold which can be crossed only by an act of will and effort.

Now in this emphasis upon freedom Christianity stands midway, as it were, between a certain kind of pessimism and a certain kind of optimism. There is a brand of pessimism which closes all the doors of life. It makes life a prison-house of mechanical cause and effect; we are all the products of impersonal forces working blindly to an unknown end. There is no freedom of choice for us here in this world; all our decisions are the result of past choices, and at any given moment we can do no other than we actually do.

As against this pessimism Christianity proclaims the gospel of the open door. There is a certain kind of optimism also, which seems, though not perhaps to the same extent, to limit the freedom of man and to sap his sense of responsibility. This order of thought suggests that there is something deeply embedded in the scheme of things which is working towards progress. Evolution it interprets as an unfolding of this good, as though events must work in that direction whether man wills it or not.

Christianity is as deeply opposed to that facile optimism as to the gloom of absolute pessimism. It discovers no evidence in history that things move forwards inevitably towards a beneficent end. It sees, on the contrary, that immediately human effort relaxes degeneration begins to set in.

There are ages of decay when progress receives a check and old battles have to be fought all over again. That is the Christian reading of history, and as against any idle trust in the tendency of events to do what we want for us, Christianity flings upon man working in union with God the burden of the world's good.

In relation to the world situation to-day the two tendencies in thought which we have already described will be found asserting themselves. There are some who say that we are involved in the chain of stern necessity. All that we can do is to look on as spectators while mighty forces which we are powerless to control mould the world which our children will inherit. Others there are who from an opposite standpoint wonder what God is doing and look to Him to interfere in the order

of events, and are often reduced to doubt because of His silence.

What has Christianity to say to the heart of the age? It can only reassert its teaching that man is free, that the world has an open door before it, if it will only summon faith and courage to enter.

The message of the Church to men is, the Kingdom is prepared for you, the issue is in your own hands, but you yourselves must believe and obey and enter in.

4. We must pass from these wider applications to that region of personal life in which a message like this becomes even more real. And once again it is the two notes of freedom which speak to us. All God's doors are opened for us. The promises and invitations of the Scriptures, the picture of life triumphing over all its foes, these are the opened doors. Nothing can prevent our entering in except our own lack of will and effort and faith.¹

So many things seem to close the doors of life. There is the unexpected disappointment. In his younger days, A. B. Davidson had ambitions after a certain path in life, the entrance to which lay through a severe examination. He went up for it and failed. The consequence was that, by and by, he became a Professor in Edinburgh, and a most profound and helpful influence in the lives of hundreds of his students. Davidson was turned into that path of usefulness, one cannot doubt, by God.²

¹ S. M. Berry, *The Crucible of Experience*, 135.

² A. Alexander, *The Glory in the Grey*, 185.

The doors seem to be closed. But they are not. Never believe that God shuts a door. It may even be sin which we have indulged, and yet at the end when we turn back, we find the opened door. 'When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and ran to meet him.' It may be the awful loneliness of sorrow. But that door is opened also. 'I go to prepare a place for you.' It may be suffering and care. There is an entrance still. 'If so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.' And for everything which conspires to make the world hard and dreary and disappointing there is this word which meets us at every turn, 'Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' He has opened all the gates for us, and whatever way we are walking, there is an open door before us.

And then there lies the little which rests with ourselves, our own committal of self to God. Surely it is a tremendous truth that while nothing in the world or out of it can shut the doors which God has opened, yet a spirit within our own hearts, a little faithlessness, a sullen indifference, a low contentment, can keep us on the outside of those opened doors. We can separate ourselves and take a lonely path and miss the glory of earth and heaven. But thanks be to God when we do come to ourselves and take the decisive step of return, there are no refusals to bar the way. Life under God's grace is an open door, and the supreme condition of living in the only sense that counts is the opened heart.

For the Sake of the Sufferer.

BY THE REVEREND W. PARTON SHINTON, COWRA, NEW SOUTH WALES.

OF the many miracles Jesus wrought upon the extended tour so briefly described by Mark (1³⁰), 'And he went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out devils,' the healing of the leper is the only one narrated in detail.

Why was this miracle the best remembered, or the most significant among so many?

It contains several features which, so far as the Gospels go, had no parallel earlier in the ministry of Jesus, and so no parallel earlier in the experience

of the six apostles who saw the event and kept the story.

The first special feature is that here for the first time Jesus is dealing with leprosy, that creeping disease which the Jews regarded as incurable, dreadful because inflicted directly and wrathfully by God Himself to punish outrageous moral evil. Jehoram, in a despairing rhetorical question, cried to Naaman, Am I God to recover a man from his leprosy? Lepers were rather abhorred for their