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likely to agree with Diodorus when he says that long application is necessary before one can succeed in reading it perfectly. But the volume before us makes the study of hieroglyphics as attractive and simple as so essentially intricate a study can be made. The first part deals with the principles and the evolution of the system and with its extension into the cursive hieratic and the still more cursive demotic, incidentally discussing the difficulties of the vocalization. The second part sketches the story of the attempt to decipher the hieroglyphics, beginning with the allusions to them in classical antiquity, whose writers do not seem to have clearly grasped their phonetic as distinct

from their ideographic value, continuing it through the patristic allusions on to the tentative and not very fruitful work of Kircher in the middle of the seventeenth century, and reaching its brilliant consummation in the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone, which was discovered in 1799 (inadvertently given on p. 102 as 1899). Appended are twenty-three tabulated lists of hieroglyphics, together with carefully explained specimens of all three kinds of texts. The interest and value of the discussion are heightened by a good reproduction of the Rosetta Stone, with its hieroglyphic, demotic, and Greek.

JOHN E. MCFADYEN.

Glasgow.

In the Study.

An Invocation.

As rest is sweet to the weary, and the cooling stream to him that is athirst, so are Thy Sabbaths to us, O Lord, and the fountain that springs up in Thy house. Like as the hart desireth the water brooks, so let our souls thirst for Thee, the Living God, that in Thy presence we may find both strength and peace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Can you stop yourself? ¹

'Say ye of the righteous, that *it shall be well with him*: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! *it shall be ill with him*: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.'—Is 3¹⁰. 11 (RV).

WHY is it, do you think, that ferns like to grow in the shade? that they shrink back into the woods, or gather in great clumps in the cool hollows? Oh! just because they always do it. Yes, but why? Other flowers, as a rule, make for the open as fast as they can, pant for light and air and warmth, love to bask in the sunshine. Look at the crocus, how it holds up its cup to have it filled with sunshine. But ferns slip away into dim and shady places, among the trees, or under the steep banks, anywhere almost where there is not much sunshine. Why? I don't think that you would ever guess.

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

For wise men tell us that the reason is this, that ferns are among the oldest things in the world—ferns and toadstools, and some others. There are people who are very proud because they belong to an old family, because for hundreds of years their fathers, and their fathers' fathers have lived in the old house there, far up the avenue in the great park, and for hundreds of years have sat in the great square pew down in the little village church; because there are dozens of monuments, and the figure of an old crusader with his feet crossed, and stained glass windows, all with their name upon them—this one to their ancestor Sir John who fought at Crécy, and that one to Sir Thomas who fell at Flodden, and all the rest of them. But the ferns are a far, far older family than any one's; they have been living, not for a few centuries only, but for hundreds of thousands of years, for millions of them it may be, for all I know, have been living indeed so long that the earth is quite changed since they began. Then there was very little light in it, no glorious, sunny, summer days, no real days, as we would say, at all, but only a creepy kind of twilight. For there was everywhere a kind of thick, hot, steamy mist, and the sun never properly pierced through. And ferns lived then in a dim shade, because there was nothing else but shade. And they have never lost the habit. The old mists have all gone long, long ago, the sunshine streams down upon everything, but the ferns don't like these new-fashioned notions;

they shrink back into the woods where the shade they know still lingers. They cling to their old ways, they have never got over them, never got out of them, all these millions of years. So, you see, how very careful you and I must be, what we do and what we don't do. Because when once you get into a habit, it is desperately difficult ever to get out of it again. Look at the ferns, the silly things! And it is so easy to make a habit. You remember where that path runs through the meadow or over the moor. How was it made, just there? Well, one day some one strolled across, and some one else who came behind, seeing that the grass was pressed down a little, took the same road, and the next, and the next, and the next, just followed those who had gone before them, till now a track has been worn bare and broad, and everybody goes that way, although, perhaps, it is not the straightest, but goes winding and twisting quite a lot. So, once we do anything, we are all apt to keep on doing it. Watch that cart on the road; you see it too has jolted into that deep rut that all the former carts have made. Be grumpy to-day, and you'll be apt to be grumpy next night you are out playing. Lie in bed too long this morning, and you'll soon grow into a habit of it. And a habit once made is very difficult to break. It's like running down a hill. Unless you stop yourself right off, and once you have started it is not easy, you just have to go on faster and faster, and though you begin laughing, it soon gets horridly bumpy; but on you have to go, quicker and quicker, even when you don't like it, not one bit. And so cross people get crosser and crosser, and nice people get nicer and nicer. And we must be very careful what we choose, and how we begin.

Long ago in Greece there was a horrid little chap who was dreadfully cruel to some birds, and they didn't only give him the birch rod, but they put him to death. For, said they, if he has begun like this, what will he do when he has run a little farther down the hill? To-day he is cruel to poor birds, to-morrow he'll be cruel to men and women. Better put him out of the way! That seems hard, and yet look at the ferns, and see how difficult it is to break a habit, when it is formed, or to stop being what we have once become.

You girls sometimes look at mother when she is tired and headachy. Wait, you tell yourself, till I'm grown up, and what a splendid time I'm going to give her; no tire then, but I'll get her

everything she wants. And it is nice of you to think of that. But I'm not sure that anything will ever really come of it! For you're so selfish now in heaps of little things that I'm afraid that you'll be selfish when you are grown up too! If you would clear the table for her now, and offer to run messages now, and see things for yourself that you might do, without always waiting to be asked, and sometimes sulking over it, then I would have more hope. But the ferns began to live in the shade, and they still live there, even yet. And if you start off being selfish, take you care that you don't end by getting worse and worse, that you aren't always selfish. Or you fellows lie in bed dreaming of the splendidly brave things you are going to do; how you will win the V.C., or save some one from drowning, something fine and noble. Well, I hope you will. But it does not look very likely just at present. For the other day when you got into a hole at school, what then? Didn't you rather funk and say what wasn't altogether straight, instead of owning up to things and taking your punishment like a man? But, if you want to be brave, you must start being brave. For a good habit is like a bad one, you must begin; and, once you start it, it grows easier and easier, until at last you couldn't possibly do anything else, couldn't be anything but brave, and are brave every time, and without thinking. And so let us be very, very careful how we begin. For look at the ferns still growing in the shade, and missing all the glory of the sunshine! And some silly people do make such a mess of things!

About a Mould.¹

'Then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.'—Ex 32²⁴.

There is nobody so wise that he has not said something foolish at some time; and we say the most foolish things when we have done wrong, and don't admit it, and are trying to find excuses. Then we persuade ourselves that amazingly silly things are quite sensible.

Here was Aaron, who had made a golden calf for the children of Israel to worship, taken to task by Moses for what he had done, and this is what he says: 'It's not really my fault. You can't blame me. I put gold into the fire and a most extraordinary thing happened. It turned out a calf!'

Did any grown man ever talk such nonsense?

¹ By the Reverend Stuart Robertson, M.A., Glasgow.

Aaron knew very well that you could go on putting gold into a fire for ever and it would never turn out a calf, unless—and this is what he didn't mention—you first made a mould. He had made a mould which made it certain it would turn out a calf. He didn't need to wonder what it would turn out. He knew, and had no right to be astonished or to say he wasn't to blame.

Imagine anybody at the dinner-table saying, 'Isn't this wonderful? Cook put jelly and water and fruit and things into a pot and it turned out this beautiful shape!' Every one would laugh and say, 'Of course it did, because she put it all into a mould and it just had to turn out that shape.'

It's not an accident that the king's head is on a penny. It's there because it was stamped there, and if you go to the Royal Mint you can see the dies that stamp it on the penny.

Now about these words 'stamp,' 'mould,' 'shape.' We talk of people 'cast in honour's mould,' 'a fine stamp of a man.' The Bible says Jesus was 'stamped with the character of God.' We say of a boy, 'How is he going to turn out?' 'How is he shaping?' And the answer is, 'He'll turn out the shape of the mould that is made for him.' It's just like the pudding; all the things that go to make a man—will and impulses and affections—are poured into a mould when he is young and they can take any shape. The mould makes certain the sort of man that he will 'turn out.' There is no guesswork about it. It is certain.

Father and mother are trying to make the mould for you, so that you will turn out fine men and women.

You don't always like it. It restrains you. You want to do just what you like. Some boys and girls go their own way and their character is shapeless, like a shape that has not set and collapses when it is turned out. Some pour their thoughts and desires into evil moulds and turn out evil men and women. God has shown us the mould into which He wishes to shape our natures; it is Jesus Christ. We are meant to bear His likeness, to have His character stamped on us; and all that God does to us in our life is meant to make us turn out to be like Him. No man, good or bad, just happened by accident to turn out what he is. Life brings us trials and hot temptations and fierce strains. They are like the fire, but they themselves don't make us good or bad. There must be the mould for the gold to run into and take shape.

It is not easy for fathers and mothers to mould us right. It is very difficult for us ourselves. Only Jesus Himself can really do it. Will you let Him? Give yourself to Him in the beginning and no one will wonder how you are going to 'turn out.'

Bring your golden beginnings, your *wavering* wills, and *wandering* affections, your *fitting* thoughts and restless minds, that are ready to take any shape now. Bring them to Him and let Him mould and shape your character into a noble Christian shape, bearing His own image.

Aaron made the calf mould and wasted the people's gold. Our Lord makes no mistakes. Come to Him in the beginning then with this prayer,

O may Thy Spirit seal our souls,
and mould them to Thy will,
That our weak hearts no more may stray,
but keep Thy precepts still.

The Christian Year.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Strength and Joy.

'The joy of the Lord is your strength.'—Neh 8¹⁰.

It was in the days of the return from Babylon that the two leaders, Nehemiah the soldier and Ezra the scholar, came upon the page of history. Nehemiah had his rougher part to play first. Now, that work done, the patriot yielded to the student, and the law was read to the people. But the faces of the multitude grew graver. An occasional sob was heard as law solemnly followed law, and they began to realize the conditions on which they might dwell within the new-built walls. Finally, there broke forth the great cry of a nation in tears. The crowd was ignorant, and in the reaction after their exciting labours they were ready for any discouragement. But the leaders knew how much remained to be done, and that strength was needed now more than ever. Life demands of us all that we be strong, and our hearts respond in a great longing. To be able to fight and to labour and to wait, to be competent for our tasks—what heart does not answer to the delight in strength?

But there are many sorts of strength, and some of them are of little worth.

1. There is *natural robustness*, mere weight of muscle, unimpaired health, and unbroken success. This had been the kind of strength which the

Israelites had exercised in their building. The sheer force of the work had carried them on in the excitement of the hour, and it had been enough for that labour. But now they collapsed when they realized life's finer tasks and more exacting demands. Such blind strength is coarse-grained, often feelingless and inconsiderate, never delicate enough for more than the rougher tasks.

II. Again, there is the *passionate strength of sorrow*. Every one knows the amazing feats which desperate men may perform; and, when the first outburst of such emotion has passed, it is still possible to be strong in a dogged, hopeless fashion, resolute without enthusiasm. Such strength might easily have been sought for by these Israelites, now that their old strength was broken. These laws were impossible, and there was no use trying to please their God.

III. There is the *glad strength of God*. It was to men standing among such alternatives that the words were spoken. The Lawgiver was also the Rejoicer, and He would have men to rejoice in His joy and so be strong. There could be no escape from the laws which had discouraged them. Through the law the people must pass on to the heart of God, and there find joy. The people were learning God's laws with consternation; the leaders knew His character and heart. And they knew that He who had given the sombre law was joyous for evermore. At the heart of things, in the depths of the universe, there was unflinching gladness. If they are to bear the laws of their God and still be glad, it must be because underneath the stern mask of commandment there is a smile on the Lawgiver's face. They are to rejoice with their God while they obey His laws.

Heart, heart, how slow thou art
With thy morning hymn of praise!
Does the love no joy impart
Which has lit up all thy days?
Why so sad, amid the glad
Sunshine, which is God's and thine?
Oh, the bliss that may be had,
Lost in thoughts of love divine!¹

Certain characteristics mark this glad strength which is to be found for men in God.

1. Such strength is *intelligent* and not blind. If we have seen the Creator rejoicing in His works,

¹ Walter C. Smith.

there is something to be glad about. Behind the joy lies not merely muscle or emotion, but reason and right thought. As the walls of Troy were supposed to have risen to the music of their builders' singing, as all works of art have been defined as the expression of their maker's joy, so men who take their tasks from God, sharing His joy of creation, rejoice in them and do them well.

2. Such strength is also *unselfish*. God is blessed because He is for ever blessing. It is this generous joy, rejoicing in doing good to others, which alone gives real strength to character. In a world like this, where there is so much misery, it must sometimes occur to every happy spirit to ask whether any man has a right to enjoy himself. He has such a right only on condition that his is the generous joy of the Lord. 'We may dare to be very happy while doing our utmost to help a brother.'

3. Further, this is *peaceful* strength. With God there is no spasmodic effort. The heavens are calm above earth's strained and anxious life. In God, by faith we do enter into His rest, and are 'strong in grave peace.' God's peace within a soul makes room for joy, and to be glad thus quietly is to be strong.

4. Lastly, this strength is *victorious*; it is strength which has been reached through weakness. God, as we have seen Him in Jesus Christ, has conquered sorrow and death, and revealed a joy achieved through pain, and a strength made perfect in weakness. It is such strength that is found in the joy of the Lord, for all our joy also has in its heart some conquered sorrow.

This glad strength is available and it is our duty to possess it. We have no right to weakness and gloom. Our God rejoices, Christ is risen, and the hosts of heaven are singing a new song. There is gladness at the heart of things. It is for us to believe it and to win the victory of faith. For those who do believe it, and rejoice in God, out of weakness are indeed made strong.²

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Harvest.

'Give us this day our daily bread.'—Mt 6¹¹.

'Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.'—Jn 4²⁸.

The harvest season was much more protracted in Palestine than it is with us. It involved more

² J. Kelman, *Ephemeræ Eternitatis*, 113.

toil, and it necessitated the employment of more hands; for not only was there no reaping machine in use, but even the scythe was unknown. The grain was levelled, slowly and laboriously, with the sickle—an implement similar to our shearing-hook, but somewhat larger in sweep, and with the point turned backward instead of forward. When at last all the levelled swarths were securely bound and dried and placed in the stackyard, the Jew of our Lord's day and his family and servants feasted and rejoiced. Gladness and merriment were the prevailing notes. Then along with his brother farmers and their male servants from all over the land he and his servants made their way to the capital to attend the House of God and to keep the Feast of Pentecost. In giving thanks for the harvest, then, we are following the example of God's ancient people.

Let us look at some lessons the harvest brings us, and in doing so let us take the two texts together.

1. The petition 'Give us this day our daily bread' seems almost a trifling one. On the one side of it there is the will of God, reaching out into the height of heaven. On the other side of it there are our sins, reaching down into unfathomed depths. And then, between these two infinities, spanning the distance from cherubim to Satan, there is 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Our sin runs back to an uncharted past, but in this petition there is no thought of yesterday. The will of God shall be for evermore, but in this petition there is no to-morrow. Give us this day our daily bread—supply us with a little food to-day—feed us till we go to rest to-night. But when the prayer is set in the light of harvest it is no longer insignificant, for not a crust can be bestowed unless the sun has shone, and the rain fallen, and the earth been quietly busy for millenniums.

There is a lesson here about the *greatness of the things we pray for*. Our tiniest petitions might seem large, if we only knew what the answer would involve. There are things for which we ask that seem little things. They are not plainly vast like some petitions, as when we pray for the conversion of the world. Yet could we follow out that prayer, that little private individual prayer, we might find it calling for the power of heaven as mightily as the conversion of the nations.

2. In the second place, in the light of harvest *think of the toil that lies behind the gift* of daily bread. There are some gifts which we shall always value

because of the love which has suggested them. There are others which mean much to us because of the thoughtfulness which they reveal. But now and then a gift is given us which touches us in a peculiar way, because we recognize the toil it cost. A man might despise manna, even though manna was the bread of angels. It came so easily, and was so lightly got, and was so lavishly and freely given. But daily bread is more divine than manna, for it, like manna, is the gift of heaven; and yet we get it not till arms are weary and sweat has broken on the human brow. Think of the ploughman with his steaming horses driving his furrow in the heavy field. Think of the sower going forth to sow. Think of the clanking of the threshing mill, and of the dusty grinding of the corn, and of all those who in our baking-houses are toiling in the night when we are sleeping.

3. In the light of harvest think of the *hands through which the gift of daily bread is given*. Whose hands? Are they the hands of God? 'No man hath seen God at any time.' Are they, then, the hands of the illustrious, or of those whose names are famous in the world? No, ~~it~~ reaches us by the hands of lowly men. It is by these that the Almighty Father shows that He is hearkening to His children. It is His recognition of obscurity, and of lives that are uncheered by human voices, and of days that pass in silence and in shadow into the silence and shadow of the grave.¹

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Our Opinion of Christ.

'What think ye of the Christ?'—Mt 22⁴⁸ (R.V.).

'What think ye of Christ?' Jesus asked the men of His own day. Many people spoke of the Christ: yet the name after all mattered little. Different people could use the same name in different senses. The important thing, the thing that mattered, was the opinion behind the name. Were they looking for a mere descendant of David who should wear the royal purple and break the Roman power? or had they caught any glimpse of a Lordship loftier than David's; a King who should reign as God reigns, by authority over heart and conscience?

1. There is a dignity in being allowed to have opinions. Just because we are men and women it is ordained that each of us shall be in ourselves

¹ G. H. Morrison, *The Afterglow of God*, 274.

a perpetual judge and jury; and life resolves itself into an endless procession of people and things moving before us in order that we may pass judgment upon them, in order that we may form an opinion about them.

And if we have really trained and exercised ourselves to take life seriously and to form a careful and considered judgment in regard to its more important matters, that is a greater dignity still. There is a sense, Lord Morley says in the essay on *Compromise*, in which taking thought does add a cubit to our stature.

2. We must watch our opinions, and we must watch them on two sides—on the side of their sources, and on the side of their fruits.

(a) Our opinions need watching on the side of their sources. How do our opinions come to us? I suppose some of them come to us along the line of family or social tradition; they are the product of the past. Others, again, are more the product of environment. They are borne to us on the wings of the wind; they are afloat in the air we breathe. They come to us, perhaps too often, wrapped up in our morning newspapers. Some of them, let us hope, are dug out of the earth with the spade of our personal inquiry, and knocked into shape by the hammer of our own logic, and tested with the touchstone of our own experience. Others, again, are somewhat affected by our tastes, affections, and desires.

Now it is just on this account that our opinions need watching so much on the side of their sources: our whole selves go to the making of them, and so, if there is any bad strain in us, it may have its effect upon our opinions.

(b) But our opinions also want watching on another side—not only on the side of their roots, but also on that of their fruits; not only on the side of their sources, but also on that of their outflow.

There is such a thing as a divorce between thinking and doing. On the whole there is less fault to be found to-day with men's thoughts about Christ than with their practical attitude towards Him. Many men to-day are ready enough to acknowledge Jesus as the perfect Man; many of them are ready to salute Him as Lord, but it is quite another thing to obey Him in their daily life.

What does this mean? It means that, while there can be no right doing without right thinking, it by no means follows that right thinking will issue

in right doing. Man has a will. 'I see and approve the better, but I follow the worse.'

'Not every one,' our Lord said on one occasion, 'that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.' It is so to-day. There are men whose thinking about Christ seems to be right, but their practical attitude is wrong. They acknowledge Christ as God's Son, and then neglect and ignore Him in life.

But here it is not only the will that is at fault. There is something wrong with the belief also. Where there is a divorce between creed and conduct it proves that there are other ends and interests in which a man believes more passionately than he believes in his creed. His so-called creed may be a nominal creed, but his real opinions are his real guides. Our real opinions about Christ are bound to have some reflexion in our activity. Opinions are powerful, because opinions shape ideals. The two are in such close contact that it is difficult to draw a hard-and-fast line between opinion and ideal and tell where the one stops and the other begins. 'This I think' tends to blend with 'This I do.'

3. The solemnity of having an opinion. As we form our opinion of Christ we ourselves are on trial. Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God, presents Himself to our gaze; He asks what we think of Him. Shall we pass Him by with a careless glance as one who matters little to the world and less to us? Or shall we openly and frankly oppose Him, counting His goodness evil, and our evil good? Or shall we call Him Master? It is well to decide upon our knees how we shall answer. We are really judging ourselves.¹

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Inaction.

'If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'—Est 4¹⁴.

The Book of Esther is a great favourite with the Jews; the Christians, on the other hand, are rather shy of it. For one thing there is no mention of God from beginning to end of the book. And there is the slaughter, which somehow goes against our Christian thoughts of forgiveness and mercy.

¹ J. M. E. Ross, *The Christian Standpoint*, 81.

Luther said of it: 'I am so hostile to this book that I wish it did not exist, for it Judaizes too much and has too much heathen naughtiness.' But whatever we think of the book as a whole there is one great text in it, and for that text alone it is worth retaining among the books of the Bible. It is this text.

1. So we may disobey God, then, by simply standing aside and doing nothing. 'If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time.' The teaching in this verse is in line with New Testament teaching rather than Old Testament. When the children of Israel arrived at the kingdom of Moab on their journey to Canaan they found a large tract of excellent pasture land suitable for the tribes who were rich in flocks, like the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh. These tribes begged Moses to allow them to settle there permanently. But Moses answered with indignation, 'Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?' He warned them that if they simply sat still in their own fields, and did not cross the Jordan to fight with the enemy, they would pay the penalty of their indifference to the great cause, if not immediately, then at some future time. 'Thou and thy house shall perish.'

And, to turn to the New Testament. We remember what our Lord said concerning the Judgment Day, when He should come in His glory to judge the earth. He tells us that in that day He will separate men as a shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats: that He will set the one on His right hand and the other on His left, and that to those on His left hand He will say, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels. These shall go away into eternal punishment.' But who are these upon whom such a doom is pronounced? What had they done? They had done *nothing*. And that was their sin, and for that they are punished. 'For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink.' The morality of the Old Testament did not get beyond the Ten Commandments, which are nearly all negative. They tell you what sins we must avoid committing. And it was quite natural that a Jew should ask, 'What actual evil have I ever done?' 'I have never transgressed a commandment of God. I have never been an extortioner or a perjurer.' But Christianity supplies another standard to the conscience. 'Except your righteousness,' says

Christ, 'shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.' What do ye more than others?—that's the question. And Jesus is not satisfied merely to find men guiltless of any deliberate sin. He separates the sheep from the goats on quite another principle. Those on the left are not accused of positive ill-deeds: they may have kept every one of the Ten Commandments from their youth up, but they have neglected the poor, the sick, the prisoner. They have made no attempt to use their influence on the side of Christ and morality. They have simply stood aside, content to look on. Inasmuch as ye did it not!

In the parable of the Talents it is the same truth that is emphasized. The man who received one talent was not guilty of any particular sin except that of inaction, of inactivity. He did not use the one talent he had in God's service. And yet hear the Master's words: 'Take therefore the talent from him, and cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.' Or look again at the words which Christ addresses to the Church of Laodicea. He does not charge her with committing sins such as those of Ephesus, or Pergamum, or Thyatira, or Sardis, and yet He pronounces a far more bitter curse upon her. 'I know thy works,' He says, 'that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.' It is the curse against uselessness, against the shirker and deserter from the battle of the Lord.

In the *Divina Commedia*, Dante tells us that in hell there is a special place which is prepared for those who have lived without blame and without praise. There he places the people who were neither hot nor cold, neither against God nor for Him, but only for themselves. 'When I saw them,' says the poet, 'I knew that this was the crew of miserable wretches who are hateful to God and also to the enemies of God. Mercy and justice alike disdain them: let us not speak of them, but look and pass them by.' Dante could understand energy and purpose even when exerted in the cause of evil: he had keen sympathy for some whose great sins had rightly condemned them to everlasting punishment. What he could not comprehend was the man who simply stood aside: who withdrew himself from the conflict and shirked all responsibility.

2. What is it that prevents us from coming to

the help of the Lord? The temptation in the case of Esther was to the silence of selfishness. Her people might suffer, but she ran very little risk herself. She was in favour with the king, and if she did anything for the people she would probably lose her position and perhaps even her life.

That is a type of silence that we are often tempted to. It is really astonishing how many Christians can preserve a prudential silence when an evil demands denunciation. 'Who knows,' as Mordecai put it, 'whether God has not called you for just such a time as this?'

It may be that some great cause is in danger. Its advocates and its opponents are pretty evenly balanced. But there is one strong man who, if he would speak, could turn the fortunes of the day; for men believe in his sincerity and disinterestedness, and the humbler supporters of the cause are waiting in hope to hear what he will say. But he sits in silence or makes an unworthy speech of compromise. He lets the golden opportunity pass, and it may be that a great injustice is done or the cause of truth is retarded for years for want of the word he could so easily have spoken.

Blot out his name then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more footpath
untrod,
One more triumph for devils and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God.

But the call may come to us equally in the office, in the workshop, in the field or at home, and if we do nothing we are an influence dead against the influence of Christ. 'He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.'

3. But God's work is not arrested by our failure to do it. He gets it done in some other way. 'Then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.' There is a wonderful encouragement in that. God leaves none of His work unfinished. *It* can do without us, but *we* cannot do without it. 'Thou and thy father's house shall perish,' said Mordecai, and that great principle is true not only as regards the life to come, but true in this life also. Mordecai did not say whether the destruction would come immediately. People do not become reprobates all at once. The process of individual and national decay is usually, if not always, gradual. And at the last the judgment consists in the deterioration of character that comes to a man when he consistently ignores his duty. It consists also in the unhappy retrospect of a life that might have been worth something, but which is of no consequence to man or God—just a handful of withered grass. It consists in the self-contempt and wretchedness which come to a man in that hour when he is forced to face his own soul and to see himself as he is.

The Face Value of the Gospels.

BY THE REVEREND EDWARD BEAL, TSOLO, SOUTH AFRICA.

To 'depreciate the Jesus of History out of reverence for the living Christ' would be a fallacious procedure in one's search for the spiritual implications of Synoptic criticism. Christianity without its historical groundwork degenerates into a merely academical religion or speculative creed. Its insistence upon the tangible incarnation of Divine manhood upon earth is its most vital characteristic. Its vivid picture of the historical Jesus—that flawless man of God who has left His footprint upon the common dust of our highways, who talked to the vendor in the market-place, whose quick eyes

smiled in pity upon outcast men and women, whose generous social warmth could call the imbecile out of his gruesome retreat and the children to His knee, whose soul was deeply involved in human friendships—this picture is indelibly engraved upon the hearts of millions of simple Christians. In Galilee the Divine metaphysic was once for all disclosed to fisherfolk and tax-collectors. 'We know nothing of any Eternal Christ except as the spirit of Jesus working out its influence in the hearts of men.'

Yet it would be an act irreconcilable with the