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great blessing in this for me.' Is any commonplace so necessary in the heart of war?

'Mid the maddening maze of things,
When tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed ground my spirit clings,—
I know that God is good!

3. It is customary to-day to formulate all things under three heads—God, self, the world. Has the Story of Creation anything to say about the second of these? In other words, has it any doctrine of man? Its tremendous doctrine is that man is like God! 'In the image of God made He him!' Here also a vivid contrast with Hinduism may be traced. Once the writer, trying to urge a Hindu servant to take care of himself when plague was rife, asked him, 'If you were to die in a day or two, what then?' The answer was ready, 'It wouldn't matter.' Only another bubble burst! The stagnation of India through the centuries is not a little due to the Hindu doctrine of the worthlessness of man. Why should the mere froth of time's useless sea struggle after progress? Yet, on the other hand, many a Christian treats the precious doctrine that 'man is made in the image of God' as though it were only theological lumber! In reality, the whole of Christianity depends upon it. Could God have become incarnate in a being quite unlike Himself? How grotesque the heathen stories of incarnations in animals are! Or, could the Spirit of God 'dwell in the heart' of a being altogether alien to His nature? More and more religion is coming to be defined as the fellowship of man with God. Fellowship is possible only between those who are more or less alike. To-day man's distinctive mark is called personality. He shares this with God. Here is another letter in the alphabet of true religion. Perhaps the most helpful of its consequences is the worth of the individual for God, or, in Biblical phrase, the creed that every man is a son of God—even though he be a 'prodigal' son. For a father cares for his children, not in the mass, but one by one. There is a long series of names published now and again in to-day's papers—the Roll of the Fallen. Some clerk draws it up, no doubt. To him it must tend to become a mere list of names. But every name has broken some one's heart. Are they mere names to God? Has He nothing to say to the mourning mother? What He says is: 'I too loved him, for he was My child as well as yours—and I am caring for him still.' One of the marks of the Methodist Revival was that common men thought of themselves as people who severally had worth for God. Here is a verse of theirs that the timid hymn-books of their children omit:

Cease, my child, thy worth to weigh,
Give the needless contest o'er;
Mine thou art: while thus I say,
Yield thee up, and ask no more.
What thy estimate may be,
Only can by Him be told,
Who to ransom wretched thee,
Thee to gain, Himself was sold.

God can do anything; all that He does is good; I, weak and sinful I, am His child—these are the first lessons of religion.

In the Study.

Herodias and Salome.

An Ancient League of Hate.

'It is not lawful for thee to have her.'—Matt. 14^4.

'Give me here in a charger the head of John the Baptist.'—Matt. 14^8.

Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus and Bernice. Her father Aristobulus was a son of Herod by Mariamne, daughter of Hyrcanus. Her mother Bernice was the daughter of Salome, Herod's sister. According to Mk 6^{17}, and probably Mt 14^8, her first husband's name was Philip. This Philip, half-brother of Herod Antipas, had succeeded to only a small share of his father's kingdom (the government of Trachonitis and Ituræa). His marriage with Herodias was an ill-assorted affair. He was more than double her age; one can therefore easily understand how there would at least be little or no pretence of love and affection between them.

Herod Antipas had also a strange marriage story. His father, Herod the Great, had been engaged in a long and troublesome war with a powerful border tribe, ruled over by an Arabian prince or Emir,

called Aretas. When at last it was brought to a close, it was an article in the conditions of peace that the princess of the Damascenes should marry one of his sons. Antipas was selected for the unhappy union. Being based upon political convenience, with no pretence of real affection, it was destined to be broken when a time of special strain came.

I.

Herodias.

1. Herodias was a passionate and imperious woman. She chafed at her husband Philip's ignoble descent; his mother was a Boëthusian, while hers was a Maccabean princess. But what galled her even more bitterly was her exclusion from all the magnificence and pomp of the regal courts. It was the practice of petty rulers in Herod's position to make frequent visits to Rome, where they danced attendance on the Court, waiting for any crumbs of imperial patronage which might come their way; and it was during one such visit to the Eternal City that Herodias formed an intrigue with Herod. It may be mentioned, as an indication of the disgusting state of morals which prevailed in the Herodian family, that both the husband whom this princess was quitting and the paramour whom she was following were her own uncles. Herod's intention was to divorce his lawful wife, when he reached home, and to marry Herodias; but, being informed beforehand of what was impending, his wife fled to her father, Aretas, king of Arabia.

Even the sickly public opinion of that day rose in indignation against this monstrous injustice. The whole of society in Judæa felt outraged when they knew that the wife was expelled from the palace, and that Herodias and her daughter Salome took her place within those walls. John the Baptist had an interview with Herod Antipas. Herod was probably attracted by the contrast between his own life and the stern simplicity of the Baptist. He was attracted to him by the strange moral magnetism that compels iniquity to have respect for honour, integrity, and goodness. And in that interview which the Baptist had with Antipas he presented the simplicity of his character, the divinity of his courage, and the unpurchasable integrity of his morals. Without the least approach to circumlocution, and aware that there was but one thought between them both, one of guilt and the other of rebuke, he looked Herod full in the face to say, "It is not lawful for thee to have her."

Herod knew that that was the truth. Herodias also knew it. But truth, when it condemns us, scorches the heart, and the heart of Herodias blazed with such anger that, had she been able, she would have killed the preacher on the spot. Unable to commit murder in act, she 'nursed her wrath to keep it warm.' She had a grudge against John, and she kept it. Grudges when cultivated increase in size and vitality. She waited her opportunity, and it came. The devil never fails to supply opportunities for evil to those who patiently wait for them.

¶ It was rumoured that Queen Mary was about to marry the son of the King of Spain, of course a Catholic. On this report Knox had commented in the pulpit with such energy as to displease his own friends, and flatterers were not slow to carry his words to the Court. On his arrival there he found the Queen in a towering passion, which lasted throughout the entire interview; every attempt of his to explain himself being met with the question: 'But what have you to do with my marriage?' 'I have borne with you,' she exclaimed through her tears, 'in all your rigorous manner of speaking; yea, I have sought your favours by all possible means, and yet I cannot be quit of you. I vow to God, I shall be revenged.' He pleaded that he was not his own master in the pulpit, but had to utter what was given him. But the same angry rejoinder burst from her; and she added the contemptuous question: 'And what are you within this realm?' But it was now his turn to score; and he replied, 'A subject born within the same; and, albeit I be neither earl, lord nor baron, yet as God made me, how abject I ever be in your eyes, a profitable member thereof.'[1]

2. In Herod one sees the depth of evil possible to a weak character. The singular parallel which he, Herodias, and John present to Ahab, Jezebel, and Elijah has been often noticed. In both cases a weak king is drawn in opposite directions by the stronger-willed temptress at his side, and by the stern ascetic from the desert. He was certainly not insensible to John's character, and his feebleness is seen in the fact that he both wanted to kill him (Mt 14^5), and was afraid to do so (Mk 6^{20}). He even protected him against his wife's malignity.

¶ With weakness accepted and offered as an excuse for failure, Stevenson had little sympathy. 'Those who go to the devil in youth, with anything like a fair chance, were probably little worth saving from the first; they must have been feeble fellows—creatures made of putty and packthread, without steel or fire, anger or true joyfulness, in their composition; we may sympathize with their parents, but there is

[1] J. Stalker, *John Knox*, 74.

not much cause to go into mourning for themselves; for, to be quite honest, the weak brother is the worst of mankind.'[1]

3. Herodias was not a woman to tolerate John the Baptist's reproof, and it was not long before she succeeded in silencing his voice: she dreaded the possibility of Herod's being stung by remorse under the vehemence of his remonstrance, and putting her away. She had an iron will sharpened to an edge by hatred, and knew her own mind, which was murder. Between them, the weaker nature was much perplexed, and, like a badly steered boat, yawed in its course, now yielding to the impulse from John, now to that from Herodias. Matthew attributes his hesitation as to killing John to his fear of the popular voice, which, no doubt, also operated. He had not strength of mind enough to hold to the one and despise the other of his discordant counsellors. He was evidently a sensual, luxurious, feeble-willed, easily frightened, superstitious and cunning despot; and, as is always the case, he was driven further in evil than he meant or wished.

¶ Herodias neither thought nor cared about after results. It is even so that the great master of the human heart depicts Lady Macbeth:

> Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour,
> As thou art in desire?

One can fancy the words coming from the lips of Herodias to her husband. Macbeth might reason and reflect and hesitate, Lady Macbeth had thought for nothing but the getting rid of King Duncan. Herodias had thought for nothing but the getting rid of John the Baptist.

4. What a miserable destiny to be gibbeted for ever by half a dozen sentences! One deed, after which she no doubt 'wiped her mouth, and said, I have done no harm,' has won for Herodias an immortality of ignominy. Her portrait is drawn in few strokes, but they are enough.

John's remonstrance awoke no sense of shame in her, but only malignant and murderous hate. Once resolved, no failures made her swerve from her purpose. Hers was no passing fury, but cold-blooded, deliberate determination. Her iron will and unalterable persistence were accompanied by flexibility of resource. When one weapon failed, she drew another from a full quiver. And the means which were finally successful show not only her thorough knowledge of the weak man she had to deal with, but her readiness to stoop to any degradation for herself and her child to carry her point. 'A thousand claims to' abhorrence 'meet in her, as mother, wife, and queen.'

¶ Yes, it was a real feeling of hatred—not of that hatred which finds pleasure in doing a person some harm, but of that hatred which inspires you with an irresistible loathing for a person who, otherwise, deserves your respect, which makes you loathe his hair, his neck, his gait, the sound of his voice, all his members and all his motions, and, at the same time, attracts you to him by some incomprehensible power, and compels you with restless attention to follow every minutest act of his.[2]

II.

Salome.

1. At last the opportunity came for which Herodias never ceased to watch. The king's divorce of his Arabian wife led to the proclamation of war. The desperate father, whose warlike spirit had made the great Herod quail—'the old desert lion, whose claws had been more than once felt in Sebaste and Sepphoris'—took up arms to avenge his outraged child, and the forces of the Tetrarch were being massed on the frontier. Before they crossed, Herod, taking the occasion of his birthday, entertained the chief captains and civil authorities to a great banquet in the castle of Machærus. Considering the object of the war, we can well imagine that the jealousy of the guilty queen would be excited to the highest pitch by the presence of officers of the army. To ingratiate herself and make her cause more popular with those who had undertaken to defend it, she persuaded her daughter, the beautiful Salome, to submit to an act of no little condescension for their gratification. She placed herself in the degraded position of the professional dancing-girls, whose office it was by immodest arts to please the tastes of a licentious court.

Many a shameless woman would have shrunk from sullying a daughter's childhood, by sending her to play the part of a shameless dancing-girl before a crew of half-tipsy revellers, and from teaching her young lips to ask for murder. But Herodias sticks at nothing, and is as insensible to the duty of a mother as to that of a wife.

¶ Am I to call this woman mother? Because by nature's law she has authority over me, am I to be trampled on in this manner? Am I to be goaded with insult, loaded with obloquy, and suffer my feelings to be outraged on the most

[1] J. Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 213.

[2] Leo N. Tolstoy, *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth, The Incursion*, 210.

trivial occasions? I owe her respect as a Son, but I renounce her as a Friend. What an example does she show me! I hope in God I shall never follow it.[1]

2. Herod was in the mood to be delighted with a display of this kind, and, flushed with wine, his tongue spoke great things. In his saner moments he knew that he could not give away even a stone of his palace without the consent of his Roman masters; but in this state of maudlin generosity he offers to give Salome anything she likes to ask even to the half of his kingdom, confirming his promise with an oath.

¶ It is said that, when Sir Andrew Clark recommended a patient to drink wine, the latter expressed some surprise, saying he thought Sir A. Clark was a temperance doctor, to which Sir A. Clark replied, 'Oh, wine does sometimes help you to get through work; for instance, I have often twenty letters to answer after dinner, and a pint of champagne is a great help.' 'Indeed,' said the patient, 'does a pint of champagne really help you to answer the twenty letters?' 'No! no!' said Sir Andrew, 'but when I've had a pint of champagne, I don't care a rap whether I answer them or not.'[2]

3. One Evangelist says that the girl was instructed beforehand what to ask, while another says that she went to consult her mother. No wonder, however, that, even if she had been instructed beforehand, she went to ask when she received such an offer. Half of a kingdom! What might she not have obtained—palaces, jewels, gorgeous apparel—all that a girl's heart could desire! But that stony face, congealed with hatred and fear, met her hesitation unmoved. 'Little fool, you know not what you ask: what would all these things be to you and me, unqueened and outcast, as we may be any day if John the Baptist lives?'

So she came back into the hall, and said, 'Give me here in a charger the head of John the Baptist.' She was still playing the saucy devil-may-care; and it is easy to imagine the roar of laughter and admiration with which the pretty wickedness of this request would be greeted by the tipsy revellers.

The awfulness of the request, its diabolical vindictiveness, its shameless cruelty, made an impression even upon Herod's wine-soaked brain.

For a moment the fate of John and that of Herodias hung in the balance. Would the manhood and the kinghood in Herod prevail? Would he say, 'No; I have been betrayed; no hand shall touch a hair of the head of the man whom I am protecting'? Alas! it was the opposite half of Herod's self which came forth—the weak, cowardly side. He was swept away by the drunken shouts of his courtiers; he affected to believe that he felt scrupulous about his oath. Perhaps the strongest motive of all was dread of the bloodthirsty fury by whom the whole scene had been contrived.

Then to side with Truth is noble when we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses, while the coward stands aside,
Doubting in his abject spirit, till his Lord is crucified,
And the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied.[3]

4. Salome had played her part well. But what a burden was that for the girl to receive and carry away in the charger! Doubtless she kept up her gay and frivolous mood as long as the eyes of others were upon her; but surely her heart quailed when she was out of the lighted hall and alone with the ghastly object. The eyes of that other face, however, did not quail, but flashed with the fire of hell, as they devoured the hated features.

¶ The girl's criminality largely depends upon her age, of which we have no knowledge. Perhaps she was too mere a child to understand the degradation of the dance, or the infamy of the request which her, we hope, innocent and panting lips were tutored to prefer. But, more probably, she was old enough to be her mother's fellow-conspirator, rather than her tool, and had learned only too well her lessons of impurity and cruelty. What chance had a young life in such a sty of filth? When the mother becomes the devil's deputy, what can the daughter grow up to be, but a worse edition of her? As she stands there, shameless and flushed, in that hideous banqueting-hall, with her grim gift dripping red blood on the golden platter, and wicked triumph gleaming in her dark eyes, she suggests grave questions as to parents' responsibility for children's sins, and is a living symbol of the degradation of art to the service of vice, and of the power of an evil soul to make hideous all the grace of budding womanhood.[4]

5. We need not dwell longer on the details of the revolting story. There have been several pictures of Salome with the head of John the Baptist exhibited in the *Salon* at Paris. Of what possible use are such representations? To what sort of taste do they minister? There was no picture of John looking with flashing eyes at the guilty monarch as he said, 'It is not lawful for thee to have her.' That is the scene which is worthy of remembrance: let it abide in the

[1] *The Confessions of Lord Byron*, 9.
[2] G. W. E. Russell, *Sir Wilfrid Lawson: A Memoir*, 141.
[3] J. R. Lowell.
[4] A. Maclaren.

memory and heart; let the tragic end serve only as a dark background to make the central figure luminous, 'a burning and a shining light.'

Far from the dreadful circle of good men
Who play at godliness, here will I wait
The Strong, the Pure, the Tameless, who shall come.
His feet shall be within the ceaseless stream
Which sets towards the Sea. He shall endure
Unresting change; yet to his steadfast eyes
Winged life shall mediate Eternity,
And on his ears shall fall
The solemn music of creative joy.
He shall discern the unreal from the real,
He shall strike fire from out the souls of men;
He shall emancipate all fettered loves
And bring to birth the hidden Sons of God
Of whom Creation travails until now.[1]

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Virginibus Puerisque.

I.

Christmas, 1917.

'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.'—Matt. 2[2].

1. ONE Saturday afternoon a boy set out to go a message to a farm at some distance from home. His way led him through a wood. He had begun to learn about flowers, and he was learning with all his might, for he loved to hear his teacher explaining about them. But what was better, the lessons had opened his eyes to the beauty of the fields and the woods. Well, on this particular afternoon when his mind was full of his favourite subject, a thought flashed through his mind. It was, 'God must be good who made all this.' The thought possessed him all that day; and it was still in his mind next morning. When he was quite an old man, and looked back over the years, many a time he said to himself, 'Oh! if I had only tried never to lose sight of God and His goodness, what a different life I would have had.'

[1] E. Underhill, *Theophanies*, 45.

I wonder if any of you have begun to read Tennyson's poetry. Some of you must at least know his 'May Queen,' but I do not suppose you have read a little poem called 'Merlin and the Gleam.' I am going to read part of two verses of it to you. This is the first one:

I am Merlin,
And *I* am dying,
I am Merlin
Who follow The Gleam.

Now, listen to the very end of the poem

Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,
And crowd your canvas,
And ere it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow The Gleam.[1]

2. Your Christmas sermon is about three men who, long ago, followed The Gleam. They were very clever, and so learned that they are always spoken of as the Wise Men of the East. They lived in a country where the stars shine with a brightness of which we in this misty island have little conception. They kept continually looking up at the heavens; sometimes they felt comforted about things when they looked, and sometimes they read prophecies of the future. You see, they were not merely students of astronomy, they *worshipped* the stars; and they did this not because they thought of them as God, but because the stars spoke to them above everything else of His power, and wisdom, and goodness.

Gazing up into the heavens one night, they beheld a new and very bright star. Oh, how *very* bright it was! They called to each other, and together they talked and discussed it. They were sure this must be the star that was to appear about

[1] *The Works of Tennyson*, 830.

the time when the great King who was to rule over all the world was born. They knew the prophecy: 'There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.' When, therefore, they saw that the star shone in the direction of the land of Judæa, they could not doubt its meaning. Immediately their thoughts turned reverently to the King who was coming at last. They felt they must at once go and worship Him.

It was a long journey to undertake, but what did the length of the road matter to men who had seen the star? If sometimes they did lose sight of it, they never lost hope. When they arrived at Jerusalem they expected that even the beggar on the street would be able to tell them where the Babe was. But to their question, 'Where is the new King that is born?' the answer came, 'What King? We don't know of any King.' And, looking up as they wandered about in the great city, they could not even get a glimpse of the star. But if they did not feel as hopeful as before, something better took possession of them; it was faith. They felt sure that God would lead them to the right place at last.

Will the wind blow out the stars to-night?
Dread is the cruel storm fiend's might.

On the darkened road as I vainly grope
I long for the cheery Star of Hope.

But I know up yonder free from scathe
Burneth the steady Star of Faith.

The clouds will lift and the winds will cease,
We shall welcome the gentle Star of Peace.

3. King Herod's interest was aroused when he heard that a new King was expected. He did not like the idea at all, so he called the learned Jews together, and asked them where Christ the Messiah should appear. They knew from the sacred books of the prophets that the honour of His birth was promised to the little village of Bethlehem. Herod then sent for the wise men and asked them all sorts of questions. The men had always the same story to tell. They had, they said, come to worship Him who was to be born King of the Jews. Herod then told them to let him know as soon as they succeeded in finding the Babe, as he also wanted to worship Him. But we know that Herod's real intention was one of murder instead of worship.

As soon as the men heard that the birthplace of the King was to be Bethlehem, off they went. As soon as they got outside of Jerusalem, strange to say, the star appeared again; and they felt so glad when they saw it move on towards the little village. At last it stood over the very house where Mary and Joseph were staying. Theirs was a very humble lodging — only a stable. But in that stable the wise men found a little Baby, and that little Baby was your Saviour and mine. Don't you think it is a beautiful story? The wise men 'followed the Gleam,' and now at Christmas-time all the world feels glad because they did so.

The star rises for you every day. 'God is good; He has given me everything that makes me happy.' That thought comes to you sometimes. It is the Gleam. Don't lose sight of it. Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress* tells us of a man who was very unhappy because of sin. An Evangelist gave him a parchment roll and there was written within it, 'Flee from the wrath to come.'

'The man therefore read it, and looking upon *Evangelist* very carefully, said, Whither must I fly? Then said *Evangelist*, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder *Wicket-gate*? The man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then said *Evangelist*, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the Gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.'

These are simple words, boys and girls. If you keep the shining light in your eye, and pray to your Father in heaven for His help, one day you will, like the Wise Men of the East, thank God for the Star of Bethlehem.

II.

God's Gifts and Ours.

'All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.'—1 Chron. 29^{14}.

This is a verse of a hymn that was sung at a gift service about a thousand years before Jesus came to earth.

King David had gathered together all the princes and rulers and great men of the kingdom to ask them for offerings to build a House for God. He himself had given very generously, and when he asked for gifts from the people they brought such splendid presents of gold, and silver, and

brass, and iron, and precious stones that the king's heart was overflowing with thankfulness. Now you know that when David was very glad, or very sorry, or very sad, he made a song about it. And so, on this occasion, he sang a hymn of thanksgiving to God for all His good gifts. And while he was singing he felt that he couldn't give God anything that God hadn't given him already. Riches, and honour, and strength, and the power to give, all came from God, and he could only give Him back His own.

1. Now you have brought God presents to-day, presents that are going to make some of His less fortunate children happy. And those are presents that God loves very much, the presents that will give joy to somebody who is sick, or poor, or lonely, or sad. But I want you to remember that you wouldn't have had these presents to give, that you wouldn't have had anything at all, if God hadn't first given it to you.

God is constantly giving us presents. He gives us life, He gives us health, He gives us home, He gives us parents and brothers and sisters and friends. He has given us this beautiful world to live in and the beautiful things in it. He gives us food to eat, and sleep to refresh us. He gives us books to make us wise, and toys to make us glad. He gives us good desires, and kind thoughts, and noble ambitions. Best of all He has given His own Son to live for us and to die for us. So we cannot give God anything that He hasn't given us already.

2. But don't run away with the idea that God thinks any the less of our gifts because we give Him back His own. I wonder how many of you get a Saturday penny. Well, suppose you didn't spend that penny on sweets, and suppose you added a few more Saturday pennies to it and bought your father a present, do you think he would value the present less because he had given you the pennies first of all? You know that that is absurd. You know that he would treasure that present far above many grander ones, because he would think of the love and the self-denial that it stood for.

God is far more loving, far more understanding, than any earthly father, and He loves to have our little gifts.

Some years ago a minister was getting married, and the members of his congregation had subscribed a big sum of money to give him a handsome present. The day before he went away a little child in the congregation came up to him and shyly pressed a sticky penny into his hands with the words, 'That's your present from me. It's my two-Saturday's money!' The minister thought more of that penny than of all his grand gifts. He wouldn't part with it for a golden sovereign. I think God feels like that about our gifts.

Perhaps it cost you something to bring your present. You had to renounce some little pleasure to buy it, or you gave one of your own treasures. Well, God saw all that, and He loves the gift all the more for it.

Or perhaps you spent long hours making something. God saw all the love that went into your bit of work. He knew how often you pricked your finger, how often you gave up playing to toil at it. He saw the tear you bravely brushed away when everything went wrong. Yes, He saw it all, for God is never too busy to notice the things we call small.

3. God makes us free to do as we will with His gifts, and some people keep all God's gifts to themselves. Don't be one of these shabby people. You know if somebody has been very kind to you, you feel you would like to do something for them, and that is the right feeling. Well, God has done much more for us than the kindest and most loving of friends. Did you ever think about what you could do for Him?

You have brought presents to-day and that is good, but there are other gifts God has given you. How are you using them?

Sometimes you hear people talking about their friends, and they say, 'So-and-so has a gift for painting,' or 'a gift for music,' or 'a gift for writing.' Now if you have a gift of that kind it is a great responsibility, because it is a power to make the world either better or worse, and whether you make the world better or worse depends on the way you use your gift. Well, if any of you have a gift of that kind, remember it is a glorious opportunity, and resolve to use your gift in the service of all that is pure, and noble, and kind.

But most of us are just very plain, very ordinary, very commonplace people, and we are never likely to make a stir in the world. And yet I think we have all a gift of some kind. Perhaps it is a gift for plodding work, perhaps it is a gift for running errands, perhaps it is a gift for dusting a room or cooking a dinner, perhaps it is a gift for being kind, perhaps it is just a gift for cheering somebody

with our smile. I don't know what your special gift is, but I know you have one. And I know this too. If you are using that gift to help somebody else, then you are serving God, you are giving God back His own.

There is one gift we all have, and God wants it above all other gifts. It is the gift of our heart. Perhaps you think it isn't much worth, but God sets tremendous value on it. He prizes it above all other gifts you can bring. Will you give God back this gift? It is His by right, and He gave His own Son to win it. Will you give Him back His gift, or will you keep it to yourself?

III.

A New Year's Chat.

Mr. George Bedborough has written, and Mr. J. P. Munro has illustrated, a series of addresses or papers which teachers may deliver or parents read to their children. They are nearly all about animals, and they are nearly all new. But the one we shall quote is neither. Its title is 'A New Year's Chat: With a Story at the End.' The title of the book is *Not Only Men* (Letchworth: Garden City Press; 3s. 6d. net).

'The world is bright even in this winter light, for the sun shines, and birds sing, and there is hope in every heart. We know that there must be an end of the cold, the frost, the snow, and the fog. We are sure that soon the warm rains will come again, the lambs will be born, the sun will get strong, the trees will look green, and we shall be at play in the old fields. This is a happy world; let us be glad we live in it. If we not only live, but we are young and well also, we need not dream of any higher condition for ourselves, for our earthly life has nothing better in store for us than this.

'Why, then, must we think of things which are evil when all that is seems so good? The loveliest sky has clouds in it. The sunshine is itself the cause of shadows. There is not only the soul of good in evil things, there is also a hint of evil in the good things of life. It may be that a rose without a thorn would be less beautiful. Perhaps darkness helps us to enjoy light all the more. Who knows what end may be served by all that is ugly, horrid, and cruel in life? My answer to all these questions is that the youngest of my readers knows as well as that great man the Editor all that can be known about it.

'The fact that we do not know these things must not make us think they do not concern us, or that we have nothing to do in this world except to enjoy the sunshine and to forget that there are shadows. This might be possible if all the men and women, all the boys and girls, and all the animals and birds and fishes had an equal share of the bright sunshine and of the dark shadows of life.

'It so happens, we know not why, some of us have all the sun and others have, or seem to have, nothing in their lives except dark clouds.

'We all know how in many homes in Europe to-day somebody is weeping for dear dead loved ones. We see in our streets already many cripples, but this is only a small sample of what is in store in the days to come. Those of us who are too old or too young to fight, or of the sex which suffers in a hundred other ways, we have a duty which should be a work of love and an aim in our lives. We have to help in the great work of brightening the world again and of making men and women happy.

'The best way to be useful in life is not to waste time in wondering how evil things came into the world, but to make up our minds to fight these evils. We may not win, in the sense of utterly destroying all evil—none but a very foolish fellow will ever think he can do that. The best of having the aim of fighting evil is that we shall succeed in destroying *some* of the evil. This will be a real and lasting gain to us all. If all the human race had the same aim, there is no end to the good which we might do; but it is no use waiting for others; we must do all we can do, in the hope that we shall not be alone.

'Although I do not know why there is so much apparent evil in the best of things, I think I see one reason why there is something good in the worst of things. Surely the reason for this is to keep us all from becoming prigs. We have to fight evil—that is most needful; but if we bear in mind the whole time that in the midst of evil, somewhere, somehow, there is something good which has got to be found and saved while we destroy the evil around it, we shall then begin to learn something as well as do something.

'As this is a New Year's Talk, I am bound to tell you that the right place to begin your desire to take away the evil, is at home. Not your brothers and your sisters, still less your father and

your mother, but 'at home' in a nearer sense, namely, yourself. 'Look after number one' mostly means 'Be selfish,' but I mean it in the sense of looking at your own faults before you look at those of others. Even in that case I want you to remember that there is a good side to your own faults, and that if you seek for it and make up your mind that you are going to destroy only what is evil, you will find it wiser, more promising and much more useful than feeling sore and despairing over yourself. Never despair of anybody, least of all yourself.

'There once was a King who loved music more than any other art. He had brought to his Court the greatest singers and the greatest players on all sorts of instruments. After every concert he loved to chat with the artists whose music he had enjoyed. There was one player, the most nearly perfect of all he had ever heard. This player played the King's best-loved music, but he also played many things which he himself composed while at the piano. These were strange songs, and not all of them pleased the King. Knowing how excellent was the great artist's tastes, the King asked if he could explain why all his music did not equally appeal to the King's ear. The musician said, "There are three chords in my music you do not yet love, but you will love them some day."

'A year later the King married, and to his astonishment the next time the artist played to him there were no longer three, but only two of the songs which he did not favour. "Why," he said, "that is one of the loveliest tunes I ever heard in my life, I only wish I could enjoy the other two as well." "Only wait," said the musician.

'The King waited. The years passed. A son was born, and then a daughter. At first the King was too busy to entertain his old friend, who lived far away, and visited the Court but rarely. When he did come, and played his finest songs, the King was enraptured. With the exception of a single song there was no music the artist played which the King did not love. "I see," he said, "your prediction is coming true. Some day I suppose the one remaining harshness will turn to harmony." The artist smiled, and said but one word, "Wait."

'Years rolled by and the King was old. He had fought in many wars, he had gained great fame, but he had never forgotten his artist friend. Often he asked him to play all his songs, especially the one which always sounded harsh in his ears. Its tones did not change with the years, and the King sighed. He did not want to die until he had tasted the full beauty of this concealed treasure-song.

'His good Queen died, and the harmony which had held back so long began to creep into his soul. His son and daughter died, and as he wept he thought he heard a few notes more of the song he now more than ever wished to hear. Great suffering came to him, his realm was torn asunder by war, and the King was nearing his end. His physician asked him if he had any great desire to accomplish before he died. "I have two," said the King. "I wish my realm to be at peace, and I long to hear a song I never yet have loved."

'The King's desire for peace came as he lay dying . . . and through the open window he caught the strains of a new harmony, the most glorious music mortal ever heard. It was as if the notes of music which had made all the warring discords of the world had suddenly found their right place in a perfect harmony of rapturous sound. It had the glories of war without its reality, its poetry but not its horror, its power but not its guilt. The King died satisfied; his end indeed was peace.'

Point and Illustration.

Hame.

The Invisible Guide (Headley; 3s. 6d. net) is Mr. C. Lewis Hind's latest book of irreproachable essays. They are of the war. They gather round one reticent and heroic lad who died, and yet lived. There is much revelation of human nature. One day the author travelled to Scotland with some Australian soldiers. One of them came off at Stirling, and the author came with him.

'There may be finer sights in the world than the view from the ramparts of Stirling Castle—"the key of the highlands." But that's the sight for me. Here, in life-giving air, history, romance, and the wonder of Nature are fused. Here is infinity. And there was my friend, the close-cropped Australian soldier, swinging towards me through the Douglas Garden.

'His eyes swept round the tremendous landscape, his throat contracted; the muscles worked vigorously. His arm shot out, the brown index finger rigid—"There's hame!" he murmured.

He turned away and ascended the steps of the Douglas Room. Reverently he knelt down before the communion-table used in the Castle by John Knox.

'I walked to the open doorway.

'When he rejoined me he said, "You understand? I promised Dad."

'I understood.'

'I hate the Bible.'

Mr. Edwin Pugh, the novelist, has resolved to write his autobiography, and to publish it in volumes. He has published the first volume, which contains the record of his life to the age of twelve, under the title of *The Eyes of a Child* (Chapman & Hall; 6s. net).

Mr. Pugh does not send forth his biography under his own name. He calls himself Tobias Morgan. That is to give him reasonable space for his imagination to stretch itself in. If in your literalness you were to challenge any date or deed, he could point you to the hero's name. Tobias Morgan is, however, just the little precocious and wildly imagining boy Edwin Pugh was, and whose joys and sorrows are set down candidly. Not his sins. We take it that he kept his youth fairly if not fully clean from at least the meaner and uglier sins, though some sins of violence are confessed.

He was brought up in a London suburb, in one of its lower streets; a street, however, with a consciousness that there was a lower street round the corner. Nowhere in the social scale could class be more distinct from class. His education was mismanaged. But he loved books.

How he loved books! And of all the books he loved he loved the Bible most dearly—loved it most, he says, and hated it most. He speaks candidly about the Bible, as about himself.

'I have read many thousands of books. A goodly few of them have profoundly impressed and strongly influenced me. But none of them has so impressed or influenced me as the Bible has. None of them has wielded a tithe of the power over me that the Bible has wielded. The whole sum of their combined effect upon my mind and character does not equal the effect of the Bible. The Bible was the first book read to me, it was the first book I read; I have read in it diligently all my life. I was reading it yesterday and this morning. I have a copy of the Bible open before me as I write. Between almost each sentence of this chapter I refer to the Bible. I love the Bible. I hate the Bible. The Bible alone among books has still the power to move me to every good and evil impulse in the gamut of human emotion. Its wonderful stories, the beauty of its poetry, its wide and deep philosophy, its inimitable wit and its incomparable worldly wisdom: all these and all its other attributes of great literature still have for me their ancient charm, their up-to-date appeal. No other book, written either before or since the earliest parts of the Bible were written, interests me, engrosses me, absorbs me, as the Bible does. In no other book can I so completely lose myself. In no other book can I so completely submerge the man I am in the child I was. In no other book am I so completely revealed to myself as the man I am and the child I was. All my thoughts and feelings, all my doubts and fears, my hopes and aspirations, are inextricably bound up with the teachings of the Bible. And because it thrills me with delight, because it nauseates and disgusts me, because it inspires me to the highest endeavour and the most devout self-abnegation, because it darkens my soul with horror and loathing, urges me to angry protest, drives me to despair, uplifts me and torments me, moulds me into the likeness of the great I Am, and would speed me on to madness and destruction as the devils that Christ cast out of the men possessed sped the Gadarene swine: because it can do all this and more unto me, because it has played so large a part in my spiritual and mental development, I cannot away with the Bible, I cannot ignore or forget it, I cannot render any true account of myself without taking it into first consideration.'

The Descent.

From the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge comes a fine attractive volume on *The Meaning of the Creed* (6s. net). It contains fourteen articles by fourteen men, edited by the Rev. G. K. A. Bell, M.A.

The men are scholars, every one, and the book is all alive. It is written, moreover, with a sense of that demand which Englishmen always make—an idiomatic English style. We shall be believed when we say that Canon Scott Holland is one of

the writers, and the rest are fit to be read along with him.

Another of the writers is the Rev. J. K. Mozley, Dean of Pembroke College, Cambridge. We shall rest content for the present with quoting what Mr. Mozley says on the Descent into Hades: 'There is but little space to speak of the following words: "He descended into hell." They are words of great comfort: when we think of the dead whom we love so well we ask: "What can we know of that strange country to which they have passed?" And we answer: "It is a country where Christ has been." There is a beautiful hymn by Archbishop Maclagan which imagines for us the joy among the spirits of holy men of old when our Lord came among them. It is not mere imagination; there is the promise to the dying thief, there is St. Peter's statement that "the gospel was preached also to them that are dead," and we may mention an old tradition which Bishop Irenæus of Lyons, who wrote at the end of the second century A.D., received from a presbyter who had listened to disciples of the Apostles, that Christ, when He descended into Hades, proclaimed there His advent, meaning, doubtless, His incarnation. And so Dr. H. B. Swete has pointed out that it was the privilege of the Church of Aquileia in North Italy, in whose Creed the words first stood, "to hand down to a remote age . . . an apostolic belief which affirms that the Incarnate Son consecrated by His presence the condition of departed souls."'

The Significance of the Hat.

The eccentricities of the Schoolmaster are an unfailing well of amusement. And of course we look to Ireland for the most eccentric. 'The principal of this particular school of Banbridge, Mr. Andrew Mullan by name, was by way of being a character, and had his own ideas of how to run a school. He had a wholesome belief in the ancient dictum that to spare the rod was to spoil the child, and so his first act on the opening of school was to lay upon the desk, with solemn deliberation, his symbols of authority, namely, a ruler and a cane, and with these ominous instruments ready to hand the work of the day was duly begun. Like most gentlemen of his profession, Mr. Andrew Mullan was of somewhat uncertain temper, and scholars anxious to read the atmospheric conditions likely to rule during the day, were given an unfailing chart to aid them. This, strange to say, was found in the particular kind of hat which he wore. A soft felt hat signified normal, and was received by the scholars with smiles and inner congratulations. If he appeared in a silk hat—easily ruffled—they knew he was riding the high horse, and that at any moment a storm might develop, so a more sober spirit had to be adopted. But if Mr. Andrew Mullan appeared in a red cap, symbol of the executioner, then with blanched cheeks and heavy hearts the scholars looked forward to the issues of the day, knowing all too well that summary castigations were in store for them.'

Mr. Mullan was one of the schoolmasters of John Brown Meharry, who was born at Ballymena, County Antrim, in 1845. He became known as a popular preacher, first in Armagh, then (crossing the channel) in Newcastle, and last of all in London, and died a year or two ago, a doctor of divinity, not only a popular preacher but a greatly beloved pastor. The short biography which the Rev. James Burns prefixes to the volume of sermons now published and entitled *The Rev. J. B. Meharry, D.D.: Sermons* (Hodder & Stoughton; 3s. 6d. net) is an accomplishment in the writing of vivid appreciation, and it raises some questions. Should the pastor be also a politician? Should he ever be a social worker? Dr. Meharry owed his success to the determination to be neither.

The sermons are the sermons, not of a popular preacher, but of a victorious son of God.

A Crusader of France.

France has been the wonder. And the reason can be given. It has been the discovery of religion, the discovery of God. How anxious our own padres are to tell of men and officers, this one and that, manifesting some least symptom of piety: the French padre has no occasion to rack his memory.

Yet even in the French armies there can be but few officers like Captain Ferdinand Belmont, whose letters home have been translated and issued under the title of *A Crusader of France* (Melrose; 5s. net). What a home to come out of. Catholic? Protestant?—who can tell? But so simply Christian. This son, the eldest of three, who all fell, was only four-and-twenty; yet he writes home for prayer to keep him *from the moral risk of too much comfort.*

'For the two months,' he says, 'we have been waging this trench warfare, we have never lacked what is necessary, or at least indispensable; but have we not insensibly lost in warlike value and in disinterestedness? For there is no doubt about it, sacrifice and suffering are the true school of character. Comfort, when one accepts it, is a danger—a redoubtable enemy against which one must be on one's guard. And I am sure that in these times I have still far too much leisure and comfort. Beware of the terrible danger of egoism and effeminacy. Consequently I count at all times on your prayers; there is no other source from which to draw the grace to do one's duty.'

For such a man these are the only perils of the present; the future has none. The Preface which M. Henry Bordeaux contributes, opens with this: 'A peasant of Savoy heard of the death of the second of his sons, killed in the Vosges, as he was setting forth to the fields for the autumn ploughing. The oxen were yoked in front of the house. The postman handed him the letter bearing the heading of the Prefecture. He went into the house to fetch his spectacles, read in the presence of his wife, who, anxious, had followed him, and in that of the neighbours, who already knew the news, and then, handing the paper to the companion of his life of labour, said simply:

'"God found them ready."

'He added slowly:

'"My poor wife! . . ."

'And he went off to his ploughing.'

The Faith of a Farmer.

There is a story of a famous minister who arrived in Perth and found that his shoes needed mending. The resident minister recommended him to 'a very godly man.' 'It is not a godly man I want, it is a good shoemaker.'

Can we not have both? Mr. William Dannatt was a successful farmer in Essex. He was so successful and representative that 'he was called as a witness before the Committee on National Wheat Stores that sat in 1897, and led to the Royal Commission of 1905 on the Supply of Food and Raw Material in Time of War. Mr. Dannatt's experience was unique and invaluable.'

But he was also a man of God. The diary which he kept in his later years has been published, or at least selections from it. Here is one entry: 'How well the influence of the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit of God, is expressed in the words of that beautiful hymn:

"Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed
His tender, last farewell,
A Guide, a Comforter bequeathed,
With us to dwell!"

'Yes, I think it hardly possible to use better words, more true, comprehensive, or more concise, than those of this hymn. It has been my favourite hymn for a long time, but we very seldom have it in church now. What can be better than the words:

"He came sweet influence to impart,
A gracious, willing Guest,
While He can find one humble heart
Wherein to rest.

And His that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven.

And every virtue we possess,
And every conquest won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone"?

'What, I say again, can express better than these three verses the blessed gift of the Comforter, given to us by Christ our Lord? They seem to breathe a peace, a quietness, a purity, the very essence of our Blessed Redeemer Himself. The word "humble" is so appropriate; it is the one and only suitable word. The humble heart is indeed acceptable to God above everything else. And then the concluding verse, just a short outpouring of the spirit for this most blessed Gift, a perfect prayer to God:

"Spirit of purity and grace,
Our weakness, pitying, see;
O make our hearts Thy dwelling-place,
And worthier Thee."'

That is very simple. There are more profound things in the diary. But to how many farmers is the Holy Spirit so intense a reality? The title of the book is *The Faith of a Farmer* (Murray; 5s. net).