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crucified, and Pilate, willing to content them, delivered up an innocent man to their will. St. Mark, however, gives no explanation of the inducement which caused the procurator to take a course so unusual with a Roman judge.

The conclusion of St. Mark's Gospel has been lost, and so his account of the Resurrection cannot be compared with that of St. John. If, indeed, we could assume that St. Matthew reproduces, with some additions, the narrative of St. Mark, a comparison between the Second and Fourth Gospels would be as instructive here as elsewhere. At any rate the concluding words of our present Gospel, 'neither said they anything to any man, for they were afraid,' seem to suggest that St. Mark's narrative would, as usual, have been fragmentary and disconnected.

St. John's account must, therefore, be considered by itself. He tells us that Mary Magdalene went early to the sepulchre and saw that the stone had been removed. She at once ran to tell Peter and John, who hastened to the tomb, found that the body of our Lord was not there, and returned to their own home. Mary, however, remained at the sepulchre, and seeing a man whom she supposed to be the gardener, asked him if he had placed the body elsewhere. On our Lord uttering her name, she recognized Him by His voice. That same evening ten of the apostles were in a room with the door securely fastened—for they were still in great fear—when Christ appeared to them. This appearance is confirmed by St. Luke, and evidently formed part of the common tradition of the Early Church. The following Sunday the disciples met together once more, and our Lord appeared again to satisfy the doubts of Thomas. In the interval of waiting for the Ascension—an interval which is confirmed by the Acts—the disciples returned to Galilee and resumed their ordinary occupations. The main characteristic of the narrative is its naturalness and simplicity. It is confirmed on all the points that really matter by the writings of St. Luke, but a comparison with them seems to show the difference between personal knowledge and second-hand information.

The result of this investigation seems to be to disprove the view that the author of the Fourth Gospel merely intended to write a theological treatise and invented his facts to suit his theories. It is equally unfavourable to the view that the author was only a follower of the apostles, and got his information second-hand; or the conjecture that, though he was actually present at the events he described, he was too young at the time to obtain an accurate impression of what really occurred.

It has been no part of the intention of the writer of this article to dispute the accuracy of St. Mark. St. Peter was one of our Lord's intimate friends, and a work based on his occasional discourses might well be extremely accurate, but it would be likely to be fragmentary and not in strict chronological order. It is only when the Second Gospel is regarded as a complete and connected account of our Lord's life and work, into which the narratives of St. John—such as the Judæan ministry or the Raising of Lazarus—must either be exactly fitted or declared an historical romance, that any careful investigation shows that any such claim can by no possibility be maintained.

In the Study.

Abimelech.

'Be sure thy sin will find thee out.'—Nu 32^{23}.

'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'—Gal 6^{7}.

Nothing shows the extent and significance of Gideon's influence so much as the anarchy that followed his death. In Old Testament history he appears as one of the most successful Hebrew judges in maintaining order. While he was there in Ophrah religion and government had a centre 'and the country was in quietness forty years.' His burial in the family sepulchre in Ophrah is specially recorded as if it had been a great national tribute to his heroic power and skilful administration. But, the funeral over, discords began.

The trouble is to be traced to his household. Among his wives, who were so many that he is said to have had seventy sons, he had a distinguished Canaanite woman of Shechem. In this

town the old Canaanite noble family of the benê Hamôr lived in peaceful association with Israelite intruders. Their god, who had his temple amongst them, was El berîth, also called Ba'al berîth, the Lord of the Covenant—perhaps the protector of this very compact between Canaanites and Israelites. The reception of the Canaanites into Gideon's household was doubtless intended to bind the only half-Israelite Shechem to his kingdom.

On Gideon's death it appeared that his rule was regarded as a legitimate kingship, at all events over Manasseh and Ephraim. There happened here what appears in the case of none of the other Judges. Every one took it for granted that Gideon's crown would pass to his family as hereditary right. It was probably destined for the first-born, though possibly nothing had been settled, and so a contest for the inheritance on the part of the brothers was to be feared. Among the claimants there was no man of power. Gideon left many sons, but not one of them could take his place.

1. The confederation of cities half-Hebrew, half-Canaanite, with Shechem at their head, held in check while Gideon lived, had begun to control the politics of the tribes. By using the influence of this league a usurper who had no title whatever to the confidence of the people succeeded in exalting himself. The usurper was Abimelech, son of Gideon by the Canaanitish woman already mentioned. He was in a way just the man to be popular in Shechem. His overture to the people made a decided impression. 'Which is better for you,' he said, 'that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubba'al, should bear rule over you, or one man? Moreover, consider that I am your flesh and bone.'

His mother's kinsmen took up his cause, in which they doubtless discerned their own interest, and easily persuaded the freemen. They certainly preferred a ruler of Canaanitish blood to the legitimate sons of Gideon, and delivered the city to Abimelech. They furnished him with money from the temple-treasure, treasure accumulated from gifts, payment of vows, penalties, and the like, which was drawn upon by the authorities for public purposes, or in times of emergency. If there was any public treasure besides, it was kept in the temple for security; and the wealth of private persons was often deposited there for safe keeping. So it was, doubtless, in a small way, at Shechem. With this treasure out of the temple of Ba'al berîth, he hired a troop, went with them to Ophrah and murdered his seventy brothers 'upon one stone.' Abimelech thus became Lord not only of Shechem but of the whole dominion which Gideon had united under his hand. The narrator even calls him, in so many words, ruler 'over Israel.' Hence, from this time onwards, he does not regard Shechem as the main point. On the contrary, turning his back on it, he resides at another place, and contents himself with leaving Shechem to its civic chief, Zebul, who, without doubt, plays the part of an adherent of Abimelech.

It is a story of selfishness, deceit, and cruelty. From Gideon overthrowing Baal and proclaiming Jehovah to Abimelech bringing up Baal again with hideous fratricide, it is a wretched turn of things. Gideon had to some extent prepared the way for a man far inferior to himself, as all do who are not utterly faithful to their light and calling; but he never imagined there could be so quick and shocking a revival of barbarism. Yet the ephod-dealing, the polygamy, the immorality into which he lapsed were bound to come to fruit. The man who once was a pure Hebrew patriot begat a half-heathen son to undo his own work. As for the Shechemites, they knew quite well to what end they had voted those seventy pieces of silver; and the general opinion seems to have been that the town had its money's worth—a life for each piece and, to boot, a king reeking with blood and shame. Surely it was a well-spent grant. Their confederation, their god, had triumphed. They made Abimelech king by the oak of the pillar that was in Shechem.

2. Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, escaped the massacre at Ophrah. In the Greek mythology there was a divinity who was regarded as the living impersonation of the Retributive Sentiment of the universe. They called this divinity Nemesis. It was her office to pursue evil-workers and avenge outraged justice. She was the impulse of righteousness, as it spontaneously expresses itself in the most sensitive human souls, projected as far toward the infinite as finite conception could carry it, and then, for the purpose of being made a wholesome dissuasive from crime, clothed with divine attributes and placed among the gods. Through her there was heard the sharp, clear voice of celestial resentment against wrong-doing. Through her expression was given to the divine

wrath which wickedness is certain to arouse. To do evil was to invoke her sure displeasure. No immoral outbreak could escape her vigilant watch; and with relentless fury she gave chase to all who dared to violate the divine will.

All seemed safe and prosperous to Abimelech, when from the heights of Gerizim a voice of ill omen—it might seem a prophetic voice, certainly a voice big with unwelcome truth—rang in the streets of Shechem. The passers-by, the throng in the market-place, the base adherents and flatterers of the new-made king, were startled by the sound, and, looking up to the rock which overhung their town, saw Jotham, the youngest son of their great benefactor and deliverer, Gideon.

From a safe position he shouts in the ears of the assembly his fable of the trees who made them a king, giving it a pointed application to the Shechemites and their new lord. It is a piece of satire of the first order, brief, stinging, true. The craving for a king is lashed and then the wonderful choice of a ruler. Jotham speaks as an anarchist, one might say, but with God understood as the centre of law and order. It is a vision of the Theocracy taking shape from a keen and original mind. What was this man to whom Shechem had sworn fealty? An olive, a fig-tree, fruitful and therefore to be sought after? Was he a vine capable of rising on popular support to useful and honourable service? Not he. It was the bramble they had chosen, the poor grovelling jagged thorn-bush that tears the flesh, whose end is to feed the fire of the oven.

Surely the sweet morsel in the mouths of the successful conspirators must have turned to gall and wormwood as their own base ingratitude and treachery and the vileness of their worthless king were thus gibbeted before their eyes. Surely their guilty hearts must have sunk within them as the sure consequence of their misdeeds was held before their eyes with such marvellous power of conviction. It is this inevitable Nemesis, this certainty that men will reap what they have sown, this exposition of the naked hideousness of wrong-doing, this vileness of sin, breaking through all the glitter of success and all the glare of present prosperity, wealth, or power, in a word, the just judgment of God written by the finger of God upon the wall, or declared by the voice of God from the pulpits of His truth, that men so obstinately close their ears and shut their eyes to, but which the word of God so resolutely declares.

Our deeds are like our children that are born to us; they live and act apart from our own will. Nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never: they have an indestructible life both in and out of our own consciousness.[1]

No one was ever even the involuntary cause of great evils to others, without a requital: I have paid and am paying for mine—so will you.[2]

We need to learn—what the fashion of this generation is so reluctant to face—that we live in a world in which this law prevails, that it is the vainest thing to seek to evade it, and that it is next to criminal folly to bring up children in the belief that this law is not true.[3]

3. While Jotham is a man full of wit and of intelligence, he has no practicable scheme of government, nothing definite to oppose to the mistake of the hour. He is all for the ideal, but the time and the people are unripe for the ideal. He evaded their anger by speedy flight, but the sting had gone to their hearts. For, indeed, he added to reproach and threatening the taunt that in accepting Abimelech they had made the son of a maid, a despised concubine, their king, simply because he was near of kin. The taunt of Abimelech's origin formed the key-note of the whole fable.

If he did nothing else, by his wonderful speech Jotham succeeded in driving a wedge into the unity of the two parties. The Israelitish party in Shechem could certainly not be wholly inaccessible to such reflexions as Jotham's speech gave rise to. They lay in the nature of the case, especially if Abimelech was neglecting Shechem itself.

Jotham's speech is hardly to be deemed historical; it is the way in which the author sets forth, at the appropriate moment, the true nature of the new kingdom, and foretells what will come of it. It is noteworthy, however, that these words are uttered, not, as in so many similar cases, by a nameless prophet, or by an angel, but by the man from whose lips they come with the most dramatic fitness. In this also we may perhaps see evidence of the antiquity of the whole story.[4]

4. Abimelech maintained himself in power for three years, no doubt amid growing dissatisfaction. Then came the outburst which Jotham had predicted. 'God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of

[1] C. Gardner, *The Inner Life of George Eliot*, 117.

[2] *The Confessions of Lord Byron*, 73.

[3] W. B. Carpenter, *The Spiritual Message of Dante*, 107.

[4] G. Moore, *Judges*, 246.

Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech.' Without troubling themselves about Abimelech and the rest of his dominion, they began to plunder and waylay, and attacked the passing caravans from the heights around Shechem, as much to their own profit as to the injury of Abimelech's rule. Abimelech would have reason to exercise special forbearance towards his native place; he had nothing to gain by further alienating this kindred people.

The movement of affairs is rapid, as if the stage were being cleared for the real and important action that is to follow. The accession to their ranks of Gaal, the marauding chieftain, gives them the requisite stimulus towards open rebellion. So natural does the development of events appear, that there is danger of overlooking the overruling providence of God. What may be termed the 'poetic justice' of the political movements of the time and their results renders it impossible to credit the sublimely neutral forces of nature with the working out of the issues. God wrought through the natural forces and the complications of the political sphere.

The ultimate and greatest triumph of historical philosophy will really be neither more nor less than the full proof of providence, the discovery by the processes of scientific method of the divine plan which unites and harmonizes the apparent chaos of human actions contained in history into a cosmos; and the first attempts, however feeble, to trace such a plan marked the dawn of a new era of thought.[1]

5. In Gaal the men of Shechem put their confidence such as it was. At the festival of vintage there was a demonstration of a truly barbarous sort. High carousal was held in the temple of Baal. There were loud curses of Abimelech, and Gaal made a speech. His argument was that this Abimelech, though his mother belonged to Shechem, was yet also the son of Baal's adversary, far too much of a Hebrew to govern Canaanites and good servants of Baal. Shechemites should have a true Shechemite to rule them. Would to Baal, he cried, this people were under my hand, then would I remove Abimelech. His speech, no doubt, was received with great applause, and there and then he challenged the absent king.

Zebul, prefect of the city, being still at least in name attached to Abimelech, heard Gaal's speech with anger. He immediately informed his chief, who lost no time in marching on Shechem to suppress the revolt. He divided his troops into four companies, and in the early morning these crept towards the city, one by a track across the mountains, another down the valley from the west, the third by way of the Diviners' Oak, the fourth perhaps marching from the plain of Mamre by way of Jacob's well. The first engagement drove the Shechemites into their city, and on the following day the place was taken, sacked, and destroyed. Some distance from Shechem, probably up the valley to the west, stood a tower or sanctuary of Baal around which a considerable village had gathered. The people there, seeing the fate of the lower town, betook themselves to the tower and shut themselves up within it. But Abimelech ordered his men to provide themselves with branches of trees, which were piled against the door of the temple and set on fire, and all within were smothered or burned to the number of a thousand.

[1] D. Macmillan, *The Life of Robert Flint*, 235.

At Thebez, another of the confederate cities, the pretender met his death. Men and women had fled thither, and Abimelech adopted the plan which had succeeded in the case of Shechem of taking the tower by fire. As he stood before the barricaded door, he was hit by a millstone which a woman flung on his head from above. Abimelech called his armour-bearer, and said, 'Draw thy sword and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him.' So ended this first and not very well-sustained endeavour to create a stable power in Israel.

Sin, once committed, seems over and done; sinners promise themselves impunity, and earthly judges sleep; but the cry of violated purity—as of yore the cry of an innocent brother's blood, and in later ages the cry of labourers' hire kept back by fraud—fills earth and heaven, eloquently appealing to God to punish the guilty.

> My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale.

This idea of crime demanding retribution pervaded the ancient world; it was exhibited with terrific power in Greek tragic poetry. God acts according to the strict laws of justice, His judgments are preceded by a full and impartial inquiry, He condemns no man without a trial. 'He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.' Vengeance is called His strange work. Still He vindicates His character as the Judge of all the earth, who will by no means clear the guilty. All His judgments have a merciful purpose. His severity has love at its core as its motive. It condemns the wicked in mercy to the rest of mankind. It prevents the torrent of sin from rushing over the world. It seeks the purity of the race when it removes

those families which have become horribly depraved. 'When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.'[1]

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Virginibus Puerisque.

I.

August.

'For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.'—Is 28[20].

There was a boy—his name was Ronald—who lived in a very pretty little cottage at the edge of a pine wood. His father had died when he was only four years old, leaving his mother very poor, and she had other boys and girls to provide for besides 'Ronnie.'

In the month of August she always let her little cottage, and went with her children to live in a wooden hut at the end of the garden. It had been fitted up so that they could eat and sleep in it; when the boys were not doing either the one or the other, you may be sure they were running about in the wood.

The mother was quite happy; she was a very good woman, and felt sure that God would help her to win through her difficulties till the time came when Ronnie and the rest would be grown up. How she planned over the providing of beds for them in the hut. Ronnie's was made out of a box. He did not like it; it was too short even for a little fellow like him, and the one covering that served for a blanket was so small that though his mother wrapped him in it when he lay down, as soon as he turned it was just as if he had no blanket at all; he could never get it wrapped round him again. He begged his mother to allow him to go into the wood to sleep; when she refused he cried like a baby and told her that his bed was too short and the covering too narrow for any *man*.

Now, isn't it strange to have a prophet giving us a text like this, 'For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.' People must have known what a short bed and narrow blankets meant long ago; I believe they were more accustomed to that sort of thing than we are—for the words had come to be a proverb.

What does the proverb mean? Isaiah meant to express great discomfort, the discomfort little Ronnie knew something about—misery, in fact. Isaiah was more than a prophet. He was a statesman as well, and one who never feared to speak his mind. Statesmen who do this generally succeed in making enemies; but Isaiah did not care, he felt that he was speaking the truth. In this chapter he is accusing both Judah and Israel of acting in a way that would in the end bring their countries to ruin. They thought themselves very clever in having made treaties with both Assyria and Egypt. 'Don't you fear,' they answered him, 'we will keep ourselves quite safe. We have made a covenant with death, and hell does not make us afraid; when the trouble you prophesy about comes to us, we shall be all right.' Isaiah saw nothing but misery in front of them. 'Give up scheming,' he urged, 'do what is right, and trust God for the rest.' Then in criticizing the position they took up, he used the proverb, 'For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the cover narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.'

'What has the proverb to do with us?' you boys and girls ask. 'We are not like the Israelites, nor are we old enough to have anything to do with the affairs of the country.' That is quite true, but you have to do with your own affairs, and you occasionally manage them very foolishly. I know a girl who decided that when she grew up she would be a fine lady. She pictured herself in grand dresses and gay hats, and when she went to visit at any house, it was noticeable how long and how often she looked into the mirror. But that girl grew older; years made a difference to

[1] J. Strahan, *Hebrew Ideals*, 120.

her face, it was no longer a young face, and it bore an unhappy and discontented expression. The text is quite a fit criticism of what she was in her early days. 'The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.'

A boy makes up his mind that when he grows to be a man he will make money and become rich. 'Then I can do all sorts of things,' he says to himself. 'I will build a fine house, and keep a motor to drive home from business; I will take long holidays and travel all over the world.' A teacher had a talk with a big boy like that. 'Here is a sovereign,' he said. 'Look, now it is very small when I hold it up, not an inch across; yet if I hold it close to my eye, it can blot out for me all the beauty of earth, and all heaven too.' That is a case of a short bed and narrow blankets.

But it may be very different. A poor woman lived in a single room; she had to work very hard for a living, she sewed all day, and often late into the night. That surely meant a short bed. But as she looked out at her little window she said, 'There are folks that like a front window, but give me a back one. Mine looks out to the sun and the green grass, and the sky too.'

A writer of stories tells of a working man—a joiner. He was a good workman, and had a lovely voice. Sometimes above the plane and hammer you could hear him singing:

> Awake, my soul, and with the sun
> Thy daily stage of duty run;
> Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
> To pay thy morning sacrifice.
>
> In conversation be sincere;
> Keep conscience as the noontide clear;
> Think how All-seeing God thy ways
> And all thy secret thoughts surveys.

That joiner's outlook went far beyond the short bed of the workshop—it went right up to heaven.

But I think the best story of the kind I have ever read is given in a poem by William Blake. It is about a little chimney-sweep who lived in the days when boys were made climb up the chimneys to clean them.

That must have been an uncomfortable life—worse than any short bed with narrow blankets.

> When my mother died I was very young,
> And my father sold me while yet my tongue
> Could scarcely cry, 'Weep! weep! weep! weep!'
> So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.
>
> There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
> That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved; so I said,
> 'Hush, Tom! never mind it, for, when your head's bare,
> You know that the soot cannot soil your white hair.'
>
> And so he was quiet, and that very night,
> As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight! . . .
> That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
> Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.
>
> And by came an angel, who had a bright key,
> And he opened the coffins and set them all free;
> Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing, they run,
> And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.
>
> Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,
> They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind;
> And the angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
> He'd have God for his father, and never want joy.
>
> And so Tom awoke, and we rose in the dark,
> And got with our bags and our brushes to work.
> Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm:
> So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.[1]

The little sweep was unhappy; he turned and turned again in his short bed, until he felt there was somebody in heaven who cared for him. To live without faith in God means that 'the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.'

II.

A Garden without Water.

'A garden that hath no water.'—Is 1[30].

Have you ever looked at your garden after a long spell of hot, dry weather? The ground is baked and parched and seamed with cracks, and the poor little flowers droop their weary heads. Of course you go round with a watering-can and do your best to revive them, but if you happen to live in a town where the water supply is limited, sometimes the order goes out to stop watering the gardens. Then you know that if the rain doesn't come soon, the flowers will shrivel up and die.

But away in the East they are much more dependent on water for their gardens than we are. For the sun shines much more hotly and there are

[1] William Blake, *Songs of Innocence*, 14.

long periods when rain does not fall at all. And in these lands you can imagine what a terribly dreary thing a garden would be that had no means of getting water. Everything would be shrivelled and burnt up. It wouldn't be a garden at all.

Now I want to speak to you about two kinds of parched gardens.

1. The first is the garden of our own soul.

It is a very beautiful garden, for God has made it, and there are many fair flowers in it—the flowers of purity and love and gentleness and kindness. But unless our garden is well-watered these flowers cannot grow; they will droop and wither away. Now the strange thing about these flowers is that though they are ours we cannot make them grow. We cannot bring the refreshing showers to water them. Then what are we to do?

What do they do in these hot Eastern countries? In some parts of Persia the rain falls for only a few hours in each year, and yet there are gardens there. How do you think they keep them flourishing? Well, they bring the water in pipes from the mountains many miles away. These mountains are so high that their peaks are covered with the everlasting snows, and so the supply of water never fails.

And if we want our soul-garden to flourish we must get our supply of water from an everlasting source. We must ask God to water it with the pure water of His Spirit, and when they are refreshed with that stream the fair flowers of character will blossom and abide.

2. But there is another kind of parched garden you may find in the world. It is the thirsty garden of other peoples' lives.

Some people have their hearts dried up for want of a kind word or of somebody to love them, and so they become hard and bitter and disagreeable. There are very few fair flowers blossoming in their garden. And other people have become withered by some great trouble, or by a great many little cares, or by love of money.

Now God wants you to be raindrops to water these parched gardens. Perhaps you don't think it is very pleasant work, perhaps you think you would rather water gardens that are fresher and more beautiful, but don't you think it would be splendid to help to make the flowers grow in these dry, barren places? I believe that children can do this work much better than the grown-ups.

Away in the Orange River Colony there is a wonderfully fruitful farm. Half of it lies on the side of one hill, the other half on a hill opposite, and between lies a valley. On one hill grow acres of wheat, on the other there is a splendid fruit orchard. Now this farm has a history. Once the land was dry and bare and unfruitful because there was great scarcity of water. But one hot day the farmer climbed one of the hills and lay down near the top to rest. As he lay there his attention was attracted to a low gurgling sound beneath the surface of the ground. There was no water to be seen, but he felt sure there must be a hidden spring beneath the rock. In great haste he descended the hill and rode off to the nearest town for an engineer. Very cautiously they opened the rock and out rushed a stream of clear refreshing water.

That stream was the making of the farm. They led it down the hill and up the opposite slope, and now the farm is one of the most fruitful in the State.

What that stream was to the parched land you can be to the parched lives around you; you can refresh them with a kind word, with a loving deed. And then some day, perhaps, the flowers will bloom and the fruits will ripen in these dry, dreary places, and what before was a desert will become a beautiful garden.

III.

The Colour of Virtue.

'I am ashamed and blush.'—Ezr 9[6].
'Neither could they blush.'—Jer 6[15].

Did you ever hear the story of how the Virginian creeper got its blush? The story is only a legend, but it is very beautiful and worth repeating. It tells that when the plants and flowers were first created they were all green; but God sent down to earth one of His angels, and told him to give each flower a colour of its own. So the angel flew busily over the earth, and each flower he touched turned some lovely shade. He gave the crocus its gold, and the violet its purple, and the rose its red, and the poppy its scarlet, the forget-me-not its blue, and the snowdrop its white. He was a very busy angel, I assure you, as he flew over hill and dale and wood and field painting all the flowers he saw.

But alas! he missed a very small creeper lying hidden in the shadow of a great wall. It felt dreadfully sad to think that the angel had passed it

over, and for a little while it lay on the ground and wept. But after a time it cheered up and said to itself, 'Well, though I may not be beautiful I can always be useful. I'll set to work and cover this great bare wall.' So it climbed and spread, and climbed and spread, till the wall had a magnificent covering of green.

In autumn the angel returned to earth to see how his flowers were looking, and, as he flew, his eye lit upon this wonderful green thing spreading all over the wall. Though it had no colour but green, it looked so glad and busy that the angel stopped to admire it and praise it for all it had so bravely done. And when the angel spoke, the Virginian creeper felt so pleased to think what it had done was good in the angel's sight, that it blushed a glorious crimson. And when autumn comes and flowers decay, the Virginian creeper still blushes crimson, remembering how the angel praised it long ago.

That is a pretty legend—isn't it? 'Yes,' I hear some of you sigh, 'but I'd rather the Virginian creeper blushed than *me*. It's so horribly awkward, I just can't keep from blushing, and the more I want not to do it the more I do do it. I'm so ashamed of myself sometimes.'

Boys and girls, you should never be ashamed of blushing. What you should be ashamed of is *not* being able to blush. A blush is a really good thing, and it is only right that your rosy cheeks should sometimes grow a few shades rosier. Why! we blush for pleasure, we blush because of praise, we blush with honest indignation, and I *hope* we blush for shame or guilt.

Of course I know there's a sort of blush that really is most annoying—the unnecessary blush. It is the blush that you feel when you walk into a room or a public building, and you are certain that every eye is upon you, indeed you feel them boring holes in your back. It is the blush that comes when you and a few others are accused of some fault, and you, who are not guilty and know nothing about it, flush a brilliant scarlet. Well that blush comes from shyness or self-consciousness, and the cure for it is just to forget yourself. A hundred chances to one nobody is thinking of you or taking special notice of you. At such times try hard to think of some other thing or some other person, and you will be astonished how that will help to keep the blush away.

So much for the unnecessary blush! But there are times when a blush is necessary, and if we don't blush then we are in a sad case indeed.

You will notice we have two texts to-day, and the first says, 'I am ashamed and blush.' That was the prophet Ezra speaking to God. Why was he blushing? He was blushing because he loved the people of Israel so much that he was ashamed of their faults. The second text is from the prophet Jeremiah. He also loved the people of Israel, but what grieved him was that they were so hardened in their sins that they couldn't even blush for them.

Boys and girls, it is a dangerous thing if we can't blush. It means that we are no longer ashamed, that we no longer feel guilty when we do wrong, that we have grown absolutely brazen.

'Courage, my boy,' said Diogenes of old, when he saw a youth flushing. 'That is the colour of virtue.' Diogenes was a Greek philosopher, and he must have known the explanation which the Greeks gave of shame. The Greeks said that Jupiter was so sorry for the miseries that men brought on themselves by their sins that he sent Mercury to implant in their hearts justice and shame, that these two virtues might save the world from ruin.

We are wiser than the wise old Greeks, for we know that it was God who implanted in man's heart the senses both of shame and of justice; but the Greeks were quite right in their idea that justice and shame helped men to be good. If we are ashamed to do wrong deeds, if we are ashamed to listen to evil words and horrid stories, if we are ashamed of meanness, or covetousness, or untruthfulness, if we can blush for all these things, and blush also the hot blush of anger at wrong done to others, then there is some hope for us. People will think none the less of us for such blushes; and God, who sees the faintest tinge of red, will rejoice that His child can fly the flag of virtue.