---

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

would have no alternative but to declare itself bankrupt—had it not astutely refrained from keeping any accounts!' (67). Of the early Tübingen school, and the Dutch radicals, who are led by the common hypothesis of Hellenization to results in other respects opposed: 'The two wrestlers are chained together; whichever of them throws the other into the water, must drown along with him' (107). In another case Dr. Schweitzer's musical studies supply him with a fine image—which embodies moreover a welcome admission. Freely recognizing that familiarity with the Greek language counted for something in the moulding of Paul's thought, he writes: 'He found at his disposal a tone-system in which the modulations necessary to the development of his theme stood ready to his hand' (171).

And here, to conclude with, is an illuminating comparison with more than a touch of poetry. Pointing out that it is not fair to judge the possibilities of the contemporary Jewish theology from the later Rabbinism—any more than it would be to judge the Reformation from the seventeenth-century Lutheran scholasticism—he says: 'The picture which the Epigoni draw for us shows only a sun-scorched plain. But this yellow, withered grass was green and fresh once. What did the meadows look like then?' (38).

# In the Study.

## Virginibus Puerisque.

In his chatty book of Reminiscences, to which he has given the title of *Some Pages of my Life*, Bishop Boyd Carpenter tells this story: 'Once Mr. Bucke's subject was St. Paul's statement, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." The heads of his sermon were threaded on the line of "How St. Paul preached the Gospel": he preached it freely; he preached it fully; and so on. When he came to the second head, and wished to describe how St. Paul preached fully, he put in contrast the short sermons which some people desired. "I met a young curate," said Mr. Bucke—"I met a young curate the other day, who told me that he thought five minutes were long enough for any sermon. *I have no doubt his congregation thought so too.*"'

Five minutes is considered long enough for a children's sermon, and the question is, Do the children think so too, and do they think so always? There are preachers to children who preach twice five minutes and sometimes more, and the children listen throughout. One of these preachers is the Rev. J. Thomson, M.A., of Carmyllie. Mr. Thomson has won fame as a preacher to children, and recently he published a volume of his sermons, calling it *The Six Gates* (Allenson; 2s. 6d.). Here is an average sermon. Is it too long?

### Our Mother the Worm.

'I have said . . . to the worm, Thou art my mother.'—Job $17^{14}$.

I am sure you will say this is a strange text, and cannot teach us much that will be helpful, but I trust you will be agreeably disappointed, for these words are full of great meanings. We know what they meant on the lips of Job. He was in the depths of despair because of all that he had suffered in body and in mind, and he felt so low and dispirited that he thought he might actually claim relationship with the worms. A worm stood, in his eyes, for all that was despised and worthless and mean, and he had been so afflicted by the hand of God, that he could utter these words of utter humiliation—'I have said to the worm, Thou art my mother.' Can we imagine a man lower than this, more abject in his feeling of degradation? We know Job did not mean these words to be understood literally; it was only what we call a figure of speech, to express as clearly as possible how miserable he felt. But what would you say if I were to insist that his words are true in a very real sense, and that you and I, as well as Job, can say to this despised little creature, 'Thou art my mother'? In one sense we owe our life to our mother; she gave us birth; and in another sense we owe it to the worm we speak of with so much contempt. What I am to try to do now is to show you how true it is that, if it were not

for the worms that move in the earth, we could never live, and if we manage to prove this, then we can repeat these words of Job in a way that even he never dreamed of.

It is true that in all ages, and among every race, the worm has been regarded as the type of all that is low and contemptible. In the Bible this is very clearly seen. If you turn up its many references to the worm, you will always find it speaks of it as a creature to be despised and avoided. What is a serpent but a big worm; and what does the serpent stand for in the Bible? It stands for sin; and, in the awful pictures we have of the place where sin is punished, we find 'the worm that never dies,' as the symbol of the dreadful consequences of sin. Turn where you will in the Word of God, you will not find a good word said about the poor worm, because, in those days, no one realized the good a worm could do.

Now this feeling with regard to worms has prevailed throughout the world down to our own day, but in the year 1881 something happened which changed for ever our low opinion about this creature. And what do you think that was? Why, just the publication of a book devoted to the subject of worms. Who would ever have thought they were worthy of a man's study and of the labour that a book entailed? Yet so it was.

Some of you have heard of that great man of science, Charles Darwin, who has done so much to throw light on the wonderful way in which God works in the making of the world, and of every creature that lives in it. He has done more than any man to increase our wonder at the marvels of growth, and the meaning of it, and to increase our reverence for the God who rules and controls all the processes of the world of Nature. And one of the best things he has done is to show us how God uses the little worm as one of His great instruments for sustaining the life of man on the earth. For forty years Darwin studied these creatures. All that time, with marvellous patience and keen insight, he was watching them, noting their habits and the work they did. He kept them in flower-pots in his home that he might watch them day and night; he got his friends to watch them too, and tell him what they had seen, and he sent to his naturalist friends all over the world requests for information about the habits of the worms in their own countries, in India, America, Australia, and through all Europe. Just think of what a change in the attitude of men to the worm this signified—the foremost men of science of the time all engaged in studying its habits. Then in 1881 Darwin published his book *Earth-Worms*, and, for the first time, we understood all that we owed to these creatures we had hitherto regarded with contempt. Then we understood that, were it not for them, life would be impossible on the earth, and that Job had given utterance to a great truth when he called the worm his mother. We speak of the earth as the Mother of us all, but the earth could not support a living thing were it not for the worms that break it up, and make it fit to sustain all that lives in it and on it.

Before we come to speak of the work the worm does, let us look for a little at the worm itself. There are hundreds of different kinds of worms, some that live upon other animals, some that live in the water, and some that live in the earth. It is about these last that we are to speak. I do not need to describe the worm. We all know it with its tube-like, glistening brown body, and we know how it bores into the earth, but we may not all know that the worm has feet to help it to creep along. We do not see them without a magnifying glass, but it has no less than eight to each little segment or ring of its body. They are just like hairs, but help it to move along and keep it from slipping back when it is climbing the steep ascents of its home. It has no eyes that we can recognize as such, but its skin is so sensitive that it knows the difference between dark and light. When light strikes on its body it 'feels' the light as we feel when any one touches our skin. This sensitive skin is just like a hand to a blind man. It enables the worms to know where they are and to avoid any danger in their path. They cannot hear, but they make up for it by their keen sense of touch. This is why they disappear into the ground whenever you go near them. They neither see nor hear you, but they feel the slight shaking of the earth as you walk over the ground and know that danger is near. They are said to feel the rain striking the earth, and I have read that blackbirds know this and tap on the ground to deceive the poor worms, who imagine the rain is falling with its nice moisture, and come up and are caught. There is a weird little poem by George Macdonald, whose delightful books every boy and girl ought to read, which explains the way in which he thinks the birds get their worms for food:

What gars ye sing, said the herd laddie,
What gars ye sing sae lood?
To 'tice them oot o' the yerd, laddie,
The worms for my daily food.

An' aye he sang, and better he sang,
And the worms creepit in and oot;
An' ane he took, an' twa he loot gang,
But still he carolled stoot.

I expect the man of science would remind the poet that the worms cannot hear, but science and poetry are two very different things. If worms have no sense of hearing, they have a slight sense of smell, and are guided to their food in some degree by it. This food consists for the most part of leaves and grass, generally decayed, and the remains of insects and grubs. I am sure you have often seen leaves and grass half-buried in the ground, and, when you pulled them up, you found that they had been dragged into a worm-hole for food. But, besides this, the worms actually eat their way through the ground, and, no doubt, take up from the earth they swallow what is good for food. They live in long holes in the ground, and these they form partly by eating the earth, and partly by pushing it aside. They keep the walls from falling together again by lining the sides with fine earth and cementing it together with the slimy substance we find on their bodies. They need moisture for this purpose, and soon die if kept perfectly dry. These holes in which they live are often of considerable depth, sometimes as far down as four feet, and very often at the bottom there will be a wider part filled with leaves and seeds, where the worm sleeps all winter till the iron-bound soil feels the first touch of spring.

Such are the worms in themselves. The next point to consider is—What do they do? What use are they in the earth?

To put it generally, I would say they enable every living thing to grow. Take the case of any plant that grows in the ground. The greater part of its food it takes up by means of its roots which go down into the soil. But suppose that the soil were as dry and hard as a piece of iron, what would happen to the poor plant? Why, it could not draw a single atom of food from the ground, and would die. Now the little worm as it bores its way through the ground breaks it up, lets the refreshing rain get into the soil and so moisten the roots; it grinds down the earth itself, as we break down food for the little folks, in order that the plant may take it in; it brings down decayed leaves and other matter which acts as manure for the plant; and it throws up to the surface the earth which has passed through its body and which is now rich in material for the nourishment of every green thing. Although they are small, they are very numerous. Darwin tells us that there are over fifty thousand of them to the acre of ground, and that, in the course of a year, these busy little workers will lay about ten tons of fresh soil over every acre. He has further calculated that in the course of ten years they cover the whole surface of the land throughout the globe with a layer of fine mould two inches deep. As he says, 'The plough is one of the most ancient and most valuable of man's inventions; but long before man existed the land was regularly ploughed, and it still continues to be ploughed, by earth-worms.' In other words, if it were not for these worms the earth would be like a piece of iron; so hard that no rain could ever penetrate it; so closely packed that no roots could go down into it, and, even if they could, so dry and dead that no living thing could draw one grain of food from its stony heart.

Are you beginning now to realize how much we owe to these little creatures hidden in the earth? Just think of one or two things that would happen if there were no worms down there. For one thing, there could be no grass, since no seed could ever penetrate the iron soil of itself, and though it were buried in the ground it would be just as helpless, since the ground would be like iron all through. But then, if there were no grass, that would mean no food for the cattle and for every creature that lives on the grass; and since there could thus be no cattle, there would be no meat. But, you might say, we could live without meat of this kind. Then you would have to be called a Vegetarian, one who lives on the plants which grow in the ground, but we have just seen that these are entirely dependent on the worm for their life and growth. There is, of course, corn and wheat; we get our bread from these, and could easily live on bread. Yes; but we have just seen that the grain could no more grow than the grass if there were no worms to prepare food for it. And so all these channels of food would be closed to us. Then think of the birds which we might use for food; if you trace the matter out, you will find that, in the

end, they are dependent on the worms too for their food. A great many of them live on worms, and others on fruit and insects. But there could be no fruit any more than grass. And there could be no flowers, not one bit of beauty would be left in the field, and garden, and wood, for all would die. But that would mean that the insects which feed on the flowers would die too, and so they would be gone in their turn. There could be no honey, because there would be no flowers for the bees. The fish would die in our rivers and all round our coasts, and, finally, there would be no food for any living creature on earth, and all because there were no worms to make the earth fit to support life of any kind.

Surely Job was wiser than he knew when he said to the worm, 'Thou art my mother.' Is there not a very real sense in which this is true? Do we not, under the wise working of God, owe our very life to these humble creatures? Is there not a lesson here for us, in our pride and seeming independence, that on the work of these little instruments of God our life depends? As we see the great trees that wave their heads proudly in the forest, we are to think of the lowly worm working away in its dark chamber in silent faithfulness, making life possible for the giant growth that stands above it. As we see the beauty of flower and fruit, the glory of the rose and the delicate flush of the peach, we are to remember that they owe their beauty, first of all to God, and then to the humble creature He has made which plays so great a part in giving colour and brightness to the world in which we live. As we see the grass that clothes the fields, and the corn that waves in its golden richness through the autumn, we are to look behind to what they stand for as the food of the world, and to give its meed of praise to the little creature we so often crush, unheeding, beneath our feet, without whose labour the fields would be bare and dead.

Let us now sum up what we have been saying about the worm, by emphasizing two plain lessons it teaches us:

First of all, it bears witness to the significance of common things.

We began by pointing out, how for centuries the worm had been regarded as so common and despised a creature as to be beneath the notice of any one, unless it was needed, as Job needed it, as a symbol for abasement. We end up by finding that this commonplace reptile is one of the most important creatures God has made. What a mistake the world has been making all these years! But how do we know that this is the only mistake that has been made about commonplace things? How do we know that there are no works of God lying at our very feet that might rouse us to worship and adoration if we only understood their place and meaning in the great world of nature? Pliny, in his *Natural History*, says: 'Let not things because they are common enjoy for that the less share of our consideration.' That sounds in itself a very commonplace remark; but it is a profound truth to all students of Nature. But it is true, not merely in the sphere of science, but for all who try to understand the way of God in the world of daily life and experience; and there is no truth we are so apt to forget. Let me tell you a story to show what a wrong point of view the most of us have with regard to so-called common things, whether they be actual works of God or experiences of life.

Some years ago a steamer going from New York to Liverpool was burned on the voyage. A boat-load of passengers succeeded in leaving the ship and were saved, and among them was a minister belonging to Dublin. When he returned from his ill-omened voyage he was the hero of the hour, and told his thrilling story far and near with great effect. He used to dwell especially on the signal mark of God's favour and mercy he had received in being picked out from among so many and saved from death. It was a marvellous and special providence that had so cared for him and preserved him. He never told his story without dwelling on this aspect of it, the uncommon mercy of God, as he might have called it. One day he was recounting his strange experience to a company of people, among whom was the great Archbishop Whately. When he came to the end and made the usual remarks about the extraordinary providence that had snatched him from the burning ship and spared his life, Whately turned to him, and said, 'A wonderful occurrence! A great and signal mercy indeed! But I think I can surpass the wonder of it with an incident from my own experience.' Everybody pricked up his ears and listened for the passage in the archbishop's life which should show a yet more marvellously merciful escape than that of this minister from the burning ship. Whately went on in the expressive

manner for which he was celebrated: 'Not three months ago I sailed in the packet from Holyhead to Kingstown'—a pause, while the archbishop took a copious pinch of snuff, and his hearers were on the tiptoe of expectation—'and, by God's mercy, the vessel never caught fire at all. Think of that, my friends!'

You see the moral of such a story as this. The Dublin minister did well to marvel at the goodness of God in saving his life in such a remarkable manner, but Whately did better in reminding him that it is not in the outstanding and remarkable experiences of life alone that we may trace the finger of God, but in the common mercies of our common day. An old writer put it this quaint way: 'When a man was going along the street one day to his wedding, a brick fell from a chimney and struck him on the head; and he was laid dead. And the preacher will say, "It was a strange and mysterious providence." Well, there was another young man on a later day going through that same street on his wedding-day; and a brick did not fall and strike him; was not that event as much a providence as the other?' Of course it was, but, as some one once said, we think that exclamation points are the whole of life, and we notice only the startling things and overlook the commonplaces that reveal the hand of a wise and loving God as clearly as the most amazing incident that ever filled the world with wonder.

Do we seem to be forgetting our humble friend the worm all this time? By no means. What we have just remarked has a direct bearing on all we have been saying about it. It is one of the 'common' things of life, and, as such, has the usual chance of being overlooked. But we are to be wiser than the rest of the world, and seek for the wonders of God's providence even in such things as the world counts common. As the angel told Peter in his vision, there is really nothing common in the world; everything points to the marvellous power and wise and loving providence of our Father in heaven. If He can do such wonders by means of a lowly worm, what may He not do with such creatures as you and me? If we find such a lesson in a little worm, what may we not find elsewhere in the great book of Nature where God has written more fascinating stories than you will find in any book of fairy tales? Like the poet, we too may find:

Tongues in the trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

We are not to go out of our way to find these things that speak so plainly of the power of God; the great lesson for us to learn is that we find them at our very feet. As our mothers have taught us the first lessons of life, so let us go to the little worm, which we need no longer be ashamed to call our mother, and let it teach us the first lesson we are trying to learn just now, the significance of common things.

There is a little poem which teaches so well the other part of this lesson, how these significant things are part of our very life and closer to us than we know, that I must close this point by quoting it:

'Oh! where is the sea?' the fishes cried,
As they swam the crystal clearness through:
'We've heard from of old of the ocean's tide,
And we long to look on the waters blue.
The wise ones speak of the infinite sea:
Oh! who can tell us if such there be?'

The lark flew up in the morning bright,
And sang and balanced on sunny wings:
And this was its song: 'I see the light,
I look o'er the world of beautiful things:
But flying and singing everywhere,
In vain I have searched to find the air.'

The other lesson I should like to emphasize is the power of small things.

What a frail, soft creature the worm is. How easily you can crush it. How unfit it seems for the work it has to do in the hard, unyielding earth. And yet what a work it does! And we have seen only a very small part of it, after all; but we have surely seen enough to convince us that God can use very small and humble means to reach His great ends in the world. As an eloquent preacher said, 'The world's Ruler defeated Pharaoh with frogs and flies; He humbled Israel with the grasshopper; He smeared the splendour of Herod with worms; on the plains of Russia, He broke the power of Napoleon with a snowflake. God has no need to despatch an archangel; when once He is angry a microbe will do.' In another of his books the same preacher emphasizes this lesson from the point of view of what man can do. He says: 'The modest daisy was sufficient

theme to secure for Burns a place amid the immortals; a single string stretched on a wooden shoe was all that Paganini needed to demonstrate the master minstrel; and a bit of canvas, a few inches square, was ample to testify to all generations that Raphael was the prince of painters.'

One could make a very interesting collection of incidents in history and experience, great in themselves but remarkable for the smallness of the causes which produced them. Pascal, for instance, tells us that had the nose of Cleopatra been shorter than it was, that is, had she been less beautiful, the course of the world's history might have been very different! A little insect choked Pope Adrian to death, and his death brought a change in the whole current of the life of his time. Anacreon, one of the greatest of the lyric poets of Greece, was said to have lost his life by swallowing the skin of a raisin. In such a simple way there was lost to the world one of its great singers and some of its most exquisite music. You will remember, I am sure, many cases where a very small thing was sufficient to hint to some keen, wise brain wonderful possibilities, such as the apple that fell in Newton's garden and gave him the conception of the great law of Gravitation; the shirt waving in front of the fire which is said to have suggested to Stephen Montgolfier the idea of the balloon; the accidental placing of spectacle glasses by a little boy at play, which resulted in the discovery of that wonderful new eye to man, the telescope. And so on, one might go seeing at every turn the great lesson we are trying to learn just now from our friend the worm, the power of small and utterly insignificant things.

A sermon is not of much use unless it has a practical application. What practical point is there here that one might apply to one's small hearers? Surely it is the power, the great, unknown power that dwells even in such as you. The greatest men that ever lived began life just in the same way as you begin it, with the same childish weaknesses and follies, and at an early age probably showed very little signs of future greatness. How are we to know that in our midst we may not have in the person of a little child, perhaps your companion, perhaps yourself, another of the great ones of the earth? We cannot tell; all we know is that from seemingly weak and insignificant persons and things have come most of the great achievements that have won the admiration of the world.

You think you are but a small boy or girl, and must therefore have a very small part to play in the world around you. Just think of this little incident which happened in New York some years ago. Right in the middle of New York harbour there used to lie a great mass of rock, so large indeed that it might almost have been called an island. This rock was a constant source of danger to all passing vessels, and many a one had spoken of removing it, but no one could be found to undertake such a gigantic task. But at length a man of sufficient courage and determination was found who was willing to make the attempt. For months he had men working on the rock boring holes in it far beneath the water and filling them with dynamite cartridges. At last the work was finished and the rock honeycombed with holes, and each hole was connected to the others by means of an electric wire. What was the next step? Away in a room in the heart of New York there was a small company assembled, and on the table in the centre of the room was an electric instrument. Amid an impressive silence a little girl stepped forward and touched an ivory button, and in a moment an electric spark flashed along a wire to that rock in the centre of the harbour. Down below the water there was a noise like muffled thunder, and the next instant there was hurled into the air a vast mass of rock and water, which fell back again with a mighty crash into the sea. The great rock had disappeared for ever, and it was done at a touch from a little girl. How proud she must have been that day, one would think, and how proud you or I would have been if we had been the one chosen to do this striking deed. Ah! but you and I can do greater things than the blowing up of that dangerous rock. There are far more terrible rocks in the very path that we and our brothers and sisters are taking, and there can be no greater work on earth than the removing of these, perilous as they are. You know what I mean; all the temptations and the daily, hourly dangers that beset the path of every one through the world. Do not say you cannot do very much to help another. Remember the little worm and all that it does in its dark and silent home to make the earth fruitful for us all. It might well

be appalled if it knew how much depended on it and its labours, but I am sure it never thinks of that, but just quietly and steadily does the work God has given it to do, and, as we have seen, achieves a great end. Let us all try and do the same; never stopping our work because it does not seem to be very heroic, or very successful, or even very pleasant; but, like the little worm, let us do the task that lies before us, and it may be we will realize in time the great truth that God has need of us all and that His world would be incomplete without us and our work.

If that is so, and I know it is, then we are all of supreme importance in this world of ours, and while this need not make us conceited, it should give us a new self-respect and also a new understanding of our kinship with every living thing on God's earth which is there because God has placed it there for His own divine ends. We are kin with the worm not merely because it is in a very real sense our mother, but also because we are, after all, both of us, part of God's great plan of life, and from this point of view stand somewhat on the same level. Coleridge must have felt this when he wrote the well-known lines:

> He prayeth best who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear Lord who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.

In closing this study of the worm, let us take to heart these other wise words of another poet and another lover of animals small and great—they represent the attitude we ought all to adopt to these humble little creatures to whom we now know we owe so much:

> I would not count among my list of friends
> (Though graced with polished manners and fine sense,
> Yet wanting sensibility), the man
> Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.
> An inadvertent step may crush the snail
> That crawls at evening on the public path;
> But he that has humanity, forewarned,
> Will turn aside and let the reptile live.

# The Ordering of the Spiritual Life.

By the Rev. J. M. E. Ross, M.A., Golders Green.

**'Seven times a day do I praise thee.'**—Ps 119[164].

The Psalmist's habit need not be turned into a rule for every man. The only commandment that we in the New Testament era have on this subject is St. Paul's 'Pray without ceasing.' And to pursue that ideal, which must be a matter of spiritual attitude rather than of spoken words, is better than to follow any hard-and-fast plan of prayers and praises, seven or any other number of times a day. The Moslems have a very instructive legend which tells how Mohammed by divine counsel ordered his faithful people to pray fifty times a day. But when he was taken up to heaven to receive his final instructions for the ordering of the new faith, he met Moses, who said to him, 'Your people will never be able to bear it, for I tried the children of Israel with fifty times a day, and they could not accomplish it.' So Mohammed went back to the Throne of the Highest and asked for some remission. Ten prayers were taken off the day's demand, and again ten more at his renewed request, and so on until the number of daily prayers was reduced to five. Then Mohammed met Moses again, and told him how things now stood; and Moses said, 'I tried the children of Israel with five, but they could not carry out even that. Return to your Lord and ask for a further remission.' But Mohammed answered, 'I have asked until I am ashamed, and I cannot ask again.' There is much human nature in that story,—human nature of all ages, races, and creeds, which feels a certain tedium in the ordered uplift of the soul to God, and finds it easier to make rules of devotion than to keep them when they are made. We shall agree, being Christians, that 'without ceasing' is a better rule than seven times or five times a day, and a spontaneous flight of the spirit better than a fixed round of devotion. Without ceasing!—so be it then: if we interpret it not in terms of spoken