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matic words of our Epistle. The solemn warning of Hebrews and the verse before us recall Jesus' description of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as a sin which shall not be forgiven (Mk $3^{28.29}$). But the ultimate background of both statements is to be found in the Old Testament, within the sphere of covenant-ideas. In Nu 15^{22-29} provision is made for an atonement in the case of those who have sinned 'in error.' Such sins necessarily interrupt the covenant-relationship, but the atoning sacrifice procures the Divine forgiveness, and thus the maintenance of the relationship. 'But the soul that doeth aught with an high hand . . . the same blasphemeth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people' (Nu 15^{30}). Here we have the Johannine application of this Old Testament idea. The presumptuous sin *par excellence* within the Christian community is denial of the Son of God. Under the new covenant also the penalty is 'exclusion from the Divine society.' That exclusion is final, and is therefore equivalent to death in its largest significance.

In the Study.

The Seven Words.

I.

Christ the Intercessor.

'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'—Lk 23^{34}.

Behold the scene! The Cross is laid on the ground. Our Blessed Lord is stretched upon it, His arms are extended, and the cruel nails are driven first through His hands and then through His feet. It was probably whilst this torture was being inflicted that the first word was spoken, and unlike the other words it was repeated again and again, for the Greek word (ἔλεγε) which is translated 'said' is in the imperfect tense, and signifies 'He kept on saying.' As the cruel blows of the hammer drove the nails through the tender flesh and muscles, He kept on saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

The Cross was lifted up from the ground and dropped into the hole prepared to receive it, terribly increasing our Lord's suffering; but He went on with His prayer, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

All sin was gathered round Him there: the envy and jealousy of the priests, the moral cowardice of Pilate, the callous cruelty of the executioners, the brutal and heartless curiosity of the mob. Our Lord, as He looked down upon the upturned faces, read in them as in hideous characters every sort of sin.

What could He do? For three years He had gone from one end of the land to the other on missions of love, preaching to sinners; but He could do that no longer, for His feet were nailed to the Cross. For three years He had done works of love, laying His hands in healing and blessing on their sick; but His hands were nailed to the Cross, so that now He could do that no longer.

There is one thing left; His tongue is still free, He can pray for them.

¶ Jean Paul Richter says this mode of death includes all that death can have that is horrible and ghastly; dizziness, cramp, thirst, tetanus, starvation, sleeplessness, fever, publicity of shame, mortification of untended wounds, all intensified just up to that point at which they can be endured, but stopping short for long weary hours of the point which gives to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness. Now, mark the first evidence of 'the mind of Christ.' The cruel custom of binding up the mouth of malefactors, that they should not inflame the populace with declamations from the cross, was omitted in His case. He will speak. What will He say? He has been hanging there three hours crucified by those He made (Jn 1^{3}). Surely there will come now some word of tremendous malediction. Listen! Turning His weary eyes up to Heaven, He says, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'[1]

¶ We see Him, our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, taken from among men. As in the old sacrifice no angel went into the Holy Place, no angel put on the long white garment, no angel wore the breastplate, but a man taken from among men, so too our High Priest is One that is taken from among men, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who is in all points tempted like as we are. He is lifted up, the Priest and the Sacrifice and the Offering, and He makes intercession for the transgressors. 'Father, forgive them.' He asks for forgiveness for the transgressors—that is what the transgressors want. He makes intercession for the transgressors. What the high priest did of old

[1] B. Wilberforce, *The Power that Worketh in Us*, 130.

in the Highest Place, who sprinkled all the vessels with blood, He, having sprinkled His murderers and those that executed Him with blood, makes intercession for the people.[1]

II.

For whom was this Intercession made?

1. First—it was made for His actual immediate murderers, the Roman soldiers, and for the imperial people of Rome generally, whom they represented. They knew not what they did. As St. Paul afterwards said (1 Co 2^8), 'None of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' 'So foolish were they and ignorant, even as beasts before thee.' The gracious tender Saviour of men interceded for their sin of ignorance.

2. Again, it was offered for the Jewish people, who had impiously imprecated His blood on themselves and their children. Now we know they had space to repent for forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. We know too how, in the past, many came to drink in faith the blood which they had shed when 'they knew not what they did.' And we know, for the future, that God has not cast them utterly away, for 'the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.' How many thousands of these people from the Day of Pentecost onwards were the fruit of that prayer, the great Day will reveal.

3. It was offered for the multitude 'that came together to that sight'; and St. Luke tells us the result—'beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.' And may we not trust that it was offered even for the Priests and Scribes and such Pharisees (like Saul of Tarsus) as were not hypocrites, for, in Ac 6^7, St. Luke tells us that at the time of the ordination of Deacons a great company of the Priests were obedient to the Faith.

4. Lastly, all sinners come under conditions within the compass of this Intercession. For we must connect the Saviour's word with the Saviour's act: both have a universal and an eternal significance. As He is dying, a sacrifice for the sins of the world, so He is pleading for the forgiveness of the sins of the whole human race. The word is said at the beginning of the last act in our Saviour's suffering life. He has endured many gross insults and outrages which by their sinfulness might have brought down God's vengeance. This is the crowning act; after it there is nothing more that man can do, or the Saviour suffer. And so now the one oblation for the sins of the whole world is being offered, the atonement is being made. The Priest pleads in word the sacrifice of Himself which He is offering in deed. Father (He seems to say), accept this sacrifice of Myself, forgive the sins, for which I am now dying. He is pleading that His blood may not be upon us for our destruction. He is pleading that this great sin—the sin, not of individuals merely, or of a nation and generation, but of the whole human race of all time, may not have death as its wages. Yes, and He is doing infinitely more than that: He is pleading that the blood of His willing sacrifice may be upon us, one and all, for our cleansing and redemption. John the Baptist had a few years before looked on Jesus as He was walking, and had said to his disciples, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' Our Lord in His first prayer seems to repeat John the Baptist's word. He speaks to His Father in heaven, and says, Behold the Lamb of God, the sacrifice for all. Look upon it, O Father, and forgive man.

¶ Jesus prayed in anticipation for all those who still crucify Him. This petition is so exceeding broad as to cover the entire area of fallen humanity. The sins that murdered Christ were ignorance and selfishness, envy and pride, the fear of man and the love of money; and one or more of these sins is in every human soul. All of us are doing every day what makes us need an interest in the Redeemer's dying prayer.[2]

When on the fragrant sandal tree
The woodman's axe descends,
And she, who bloomed so beauteously
Beneath the weapon bends,
E'en on the edge that wrought her death,
Dying, she breathes her sweetest breath,
As if to token in her fall
Peace to her foes, and love to all.

How hardly man this lesson learns,
To smile, and bless the hand that spurns;
To see the blow, to feel the pain,
And render only love again!
One had it—but He came from heaven,
Reviled, rejected, and betrayed;
No curse He breathed, no plaint He made,
But when in death's dark pang He sighed,
Prayed for His murderers, and died.

[1] *Father Stanton's Last Sermons in S. Alban's, Holborn*, 144.

[2] C. Jerdan, *For the Lord's Table*, 188.

III.

The Plea.

'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' What a world of tenderness and compassion it opens out! No thought of anger or impatience; no thought of bitterness, least of all of revenge; no pleasure in the knowledge that a punishment was in store for all this cruelty and malice; only a prayer that they might be forgiven—an excuse for them that they knew not what they did: they did not know the wickedness and ingratitude of their cruelty.

1. It is wilful, deliberate, conscious transgression for the forgiveness of which the Crucified Saviour pleads. The soldiers, Pilate, the Jews, the sons of men—all are responsible, all have disobeyed conscience, all have wilfully trifled with their souls. The soldiers make their game of an unoffending prisoner. Pilate condemns a man whom he knows to be innocent. The Jews have rejected the Holy One. But none of the actors in that great tragedy—save only, as it would seem, Judas the son of Simon, of whom the Master said, 'It had been good for that man if he had not been born'—had made evil his good and thus crucified the Son of God. All were betrayed, seduced, deceived into sin—the soldier by his love of brutal sport, the governor by his fear of the people, the Jew by his lust of worldly power—of all it was true that they knew not what they did.

Their ignorance did not arise from want of education. Christ's most active enemies, the men through whose agency He was condemned and crucified, were among the most learned of the age. Nor did it arise from their lack of knowledge of Him as the Son of God. In the Saviour's life He Himself, His Father, the Angels, His forerunner John, His mighty works and words, all testified of Him. That they rejected their testimony proved a want, not of knowledge, but of understanding. It was an ignorance of the heart, rather than of the intellect. It was the ignorance of the spirit, rather than the mere details of the events of His life and death. Herein lies the revelation of man's true state. The ignorance of man today, whereby he crucifies afresh unto himself the Lord of Glory, is an ignorance of spirit which can be overcome only by a great spiritual awakening.

¶ The prayer, 'Forgive them,' is the finest blossom of Christ's own teaching, what makes forgiveness of enemies a reality to all time and a possibility for every man. It was the creation of a new thing in the world—love deeply wronged daring to love, unashamed, in the face of the enormity that wronged it; and the new was to be a creative thing, making the apotheosis of revenge for ever impossible. But the miracle of tenderness is the reason—'they know not what they do.' Passion is blind, hate sees only the way to gratification, not whither it tends or what it means. Christ does not extenuate the ignorance, but He allows the ignorance to lighten the sin. It does not cease to be a sin because done in ignorance,—the very ignorance is sin—but Christ wishes, as it were, that everything personal to Himself should perish from the Divine view of their act. The prayer may be said to embody the feeling of God as He looks down upon man, sinning in fancied strength, heedless that Omnipotence lives, Omniscience watches, and Righteousness rules, just as in the crowd about the Cross we see man, untouched by the wondrous Divine pity, going on his mocking way, vengeful to the bitter end.[1]

2. But is ignorance itself guiltless? If ignorance quite obliterates the guilt of sin, and if the sinner can always say boldly, 'I knew not'—then there would have been no need for this intercession of the Mediator. But, at the same time, if ignorance did not mitigate guilt, He never would have used the plea. 'Ignorance,' says an old writer, 'does not *deserve*, but often *finds* pardon.'

Ignorance gives no man a claim on God; ignorance is not our Foundation; ignorance is not that which taketh away the sin of the world; we are not to say, 'Being justified by ignorance, we have peace with God.' Ignorance is the name of that false pilgrim the sight of whose fate at last made the Seer exclaim, 'I saw that there was a way to hell from the gates of heaven'; ignorance is not innocence, it is often a sin; and one sin is no salvation from another. 'We must account at the day of judgment,' says Matthew Henry, 'not only for the knowledge we had, and used not, but for the knowledge we might have had, and would not.' Could not the Holy One have summoned the crucifiers to His bar for this very ignorance of Him? Theirs was ignorance in the land of revelation; ignorance owing to shut eyes; ignorance which, in the moment of His prayer, was doing despite to the spirit of His grace, and flinging out in a rage all the hateful venom of fallen souls.

Sins of ignorance are yet sins, if knowledge was within our reach. The neglect of the poor who lie at our gates, complicity in unjust treatment of the workers who supply the luxuries which many of us

[1] Samuel Cox.

enjoy, carelessness to inform ourselves as to the opportunities of work and prayer which life presents to each of us—these may all spring from ignorance, but yet are they sins of ignorance, for we might have known. They are sins, and need God's forgiveness and the grace of Christ for amendment; they are among the sins which He bore on the Cross.

¶ The intention does not alter the act, but it qualifies the guilt. *Ohne Wissen*, says the German proverb, *ohne Sünde*, 'Where there is no knowledge, there is no sin.'

The rule holds in the affairs of common life. You remember, for example, how Shakespeare's King Henry v. explored the camp at Agincourt *incognito* in the darkness, and the soldier Williams hectored him and picked a quarrel with him, and took his glove for a gage and wore it in his bonnet. By and by came the *éclaircissement*, and Williams was charged with treason. 'All offences, my lord,' he pleaded, 'come from the heart: never came any from mine that might offend your majesty. . . . Your majesty came not like yourself; you appeared to me but as a common man; witness the night, your garments, your lowliness; and what your highness suffered under that shape, I beseech you take it for your own fault and not mine: for had you been as I took you for, I made no offence; therefore, I beseech your highness, pardon me.' 'Here,' cried the king,

> 'fill this glove with crowns,
> And give it to this fellow. Keep it, fellow;
> And wear it for an honour in thy cap.'[1]

IV.

The Teaching of the Prayer.

1. We are here taught, in the first place, the simple and primary duty of forgiveness of injuries.

That sweet lesson of forgiveness we need. It seems to be quite lost sight of that our Lord is almost more exacting, if that were possible, in relation to forgiveness than in relation to purity. Few of us, perhaps, have really very much to forgive. An unkind letter, an implied taunt, a social slight, some worry, real or fancied, about money—that is generally all *we* have to pardon. We should ponder what possibilities of forgiveness there are in the Christian life from the first word of the dying Lord. All is included in St. Paul's loving exhortation—'forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.'

¶ In Cologne Cathedral is the tomb of Archbishop Engelbert. When first I saw it, I stood by it, unable to tear myself away. The figure of the Archbishop is beautifully sculptured, lying on the tomb. Of the angelic beauty of that face no words of mine can give an idea. Nothing of classic sculpture comes up to it. The old Greeks carved beautiful faces of well-proportioned features, but in this face there is more than beautiful proportions, a soul pure as that of an angel, a heart burning in its Christian love seems to have moulded and illumined and sanctified the human face. It is the face of an angel that looks on God. Well!—this Archbishop Engelbert was cruelly murdered by a robber knight, in 1225. He died like his Master, praying for his murderers, in his Master's words, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'[2]

2. Christ Himself had said, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' And yet this was greater; for He laid down His life for His *enemies*, for those who murdered Him. His love was so great that not even the horrid crime they committed could kill it. He looked around upon the faces of the mob—faces stamped with the marks of every crime, some distorted with envy, hatred, and anger; others bearing upon them traces of sensuality, cruelty, and violence. He saw around Him faces upon which were imprinted every crime which can defile the soul. Still He loved them; and why?—Because they were men, made in the image of God; and beneath that horrible overlying surface of sin He saw the piece of silver stamped with God's image, worthy of God's love—the human soul.

From this first word of our Lord, then, we learn the supreme virtue of supernatural love: that we are to love people not merely because they love us, or because they are lovable; but because God loves them, because they are creatures of His hand; because under the unattractive exterior there is a soul for which Jesus died; and because we cannot love God without loving our neighbour. If we have this love we shall forgive those who have wronged us, and pray that God may forgive them and bring them to possess that light and love which in His mercy He has vouchsafed to us.

We shall pray, as we think on the Saviour's prayer of forgiveness, first, for a forgiving heart, and then for grace to enlighten that darkness of ignorance which is the root of sin. We shall pray, and in the order which the Litany teaches us to pray, first, 'That it may please God to forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts'; and then, 'That it may please Him to give *us* true repentance; to forgive us all our

[1] D. Smith, *Christian Counsel*, 165.

[2] S. Baring-Gould.

sins, negligences and ignorances; and to endue us with the grace of His Holy Spirit to amend our lives according to His Holy Word.'

¶ There are few grander stories in history than the tale of Fra Giovanni Gualberto. He was a cavalier of Florence. His brother had been put to death in a duel by an enemy, and in accordance with the custom of the time it became his duty to avenge his brother's death. All his mind was given to tracking out the slayer of his brother that he might slay him in turn. For some time he sought for him in vain, until at last, one Good Friday morning, as he was riding up a hill opposite Florence, at a turn in the road he suddenly came face to face with the man whom he had so long been seeking. He leapt from his horse and drew his sword. His enemy, being entirely unarmed, could only fall on his knees and extend his hands and implore pardon. Gualberto raised his sword above the head of his foe, and as he did so he saw a crucifix set up to mark the road for pilgrims to the church. As his eye caught the figure on the cross he was struck with the likeness between it and the man who knelt with outstretched arms before him. He paused, drew back his sword for a moment, and, gazing still on the crucifix, he seemed to see the figure on the cross bow His head towards him. He caught the meaning of the lesson and sheathed his sword, and flung his arms around his enemy's neck and pardoned him. They swore eternal friendship, and there and then agreed to withdraw from the world with all its malice and hatred, with all its ungodliness and untruth. They withdrew from the world, and founded the great monastery of Vallombrosa.[1]

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[1] Mandell Creighton.

Virginibus Puerisque.

I.

October.

A TIME OF HOPE.

'Rejoicing in hope.'—Ro 12[12].

I should like to take you with me one of these October afternoons to a field in a certain parish in Scotland where I feel sure you would see potato-gatherers busy. That field is associated in my mind with a very interesting memory. Long, long ago I stood in it and watched two women at work lifting potatoes. A boy was helping. He had been given an afternoon off from school for this special purpose.

The two women had thin brown arms. They wore the common colourless dress of outworkers, but one had a red napkin tied round her head, and the face of the other was hidden by an old print sunbonnet. I was very young at the time; they did not seem to mind my standing beside them, and they went on talking just as if I had not been there.

Three or four boys came along the road which ran past the field, and shouted to their potato-gathering companion. He looked up at his mother without speaking. 'Surely gang, laddie,' she said. 'Jamie's a clever laddie,' she said to her companion, as she stood watching him disappear. 'I couldna' keep him back. . . . There he is up the maple tree, the rascal!' She looked proudly to a field on the other side of the road. 'He's first of them all. . . . He got the prize for singing sol-fa, just the other day. "Mother," he said to me last night, "the maister says that I'm to get on

to be a pupil teacher, so this week I'll ha'e gathered my last tattie. Four ither tattie liftins, an' I'll be settin' out to the college. Then I'll buy ye a silk gown. Ye would like that, wouldn't ye, mother?"' So she rambled on, although her companion gave no response. There was hope in that autumn field; and there was love. People who have been brought up amongst country folk know the love they have in their lives, and how they can hope even when things look pretty black.

I have spoken to you more than once of the great French artist Millet. He was the son of a French peasant, and he loved to go to the fields for picture subjects. 'The Gleaners,' 'The Potato-Planters,' and 'The Angelus' are the names of three of his well-known pictures. The peasant women he paints may look tired, but somehow I always imagine them talking to each other about beautiful things; a little about their Sunday dresses, perhaps, and a great deal about love.

Then I feel sure that occasionally their conversation would be about religion. How could they help it? In Millet's 'Angelus' there are only two figures—a man and a woman. It is twilight. Like most working people, at the end of the day, they are healthily tired. They have been bending their backs to field labour. But in the picture the man stands with bared head and solemn mien: the woman reverently—as if in prayer—beside him. They have heard the Angelus calling them to pray to their Father in heaven. Some of us can remember a time when the older people used to speak to their young friends about having 'the blessed hope.' Millet's field workers had it. Sometime, when you boys and girls have a little money to spare, you should buy a small copy of Millet's 'Angelus' to keep as your very own. It will do you good to look at it.

I am reminded of another picture I saw not very long ago. It was called 'Potato-Gatherers.' But, as I dare say some of you bigger boys and girls know, there are artists who think more of colour than of putting any meaning into their pictures. The one who painted the potato-gatherers would, I know, have despised preaching a sermon. Yet he did it. The autumn air seemed to be full of leaves fluttering to earth. But there were birds, and they looked as if they were singing ones. The light was too fresh, and the sky too bright for sadness. Through the thin foliage of the trees a brown field could be seen. On it two horses drew a plough. Wasn't the painter unconsciously preaching that Autumn is a time for preparation as well as hope; not only for ingathering but for ploughing?

Go, chilly autumn,
  Come, O winter cold;
Let the green stalks die away
  Into common mould.

Birth follows hard on death,
  Life on withering;
Hasten, we will come the sooner
  Back to pleasant spring.[1]

You are back to school. Your holidays are a thing of the past. You enjoyed them, I know. Even when father and mother were sad, you felt that it was good to live. But those holidays were preparation for the school year that is before you. Autumn should be full of the best kind of hope in a boy's or a girl's life. What is in your mind? Like Jim, the potato-gatherer, think of October as a month when you ought to take big steps forward.

Did you ever hear your father or your mother speak of the Autumn of a person's days? That is old age. A famous poet wrote a very fine poem on this subject. He makes an old Rabbi speak and tell what he thinks of the Autumn of life. Listen to the first verse:

Grow old along with me!
  The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
  Our times are in His hand
  Who saith, 'A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be afraid!'

If you grow up to be good men and women, you will be able to be full of hope all your days. But you need God's help to keep good even in the playground. The whole verse from which your text is taken, says, 'Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.' *Continuing instant in prayer.* That means praying always. Don't forget.

II.

Nettles.

'Nettles.'—Pr 24^{31}.

I think everybody, even the tiniest body here, will be able to remember the text to-day—first

[1] Christina Rossetti.

because it is only one word long, and second because if you have ever met it and shaken hands with it you won't have been able to forget it. Now I wonder what the text is? Well, if you turn to the twenty-fourth chapter of Proverbs and look at the thirty-first verse, about the middle of the verse you will find it. Now can you guess? Yes, the word is 'nettles.' We are going to take 'nettles' as our text to-day.

If you look at this verse and the one before it you will see that the writer is describing the field or vineyard of the lazy man. And I'm afraid that field was a very sad sight. The wall was all broken down in places and the ground was covered with weeds. Thorns choked the corn and the poor vines couldn't get room to breathe for nettles. If you have a garden of your own I hope it isn't a copy of the field of the lazy man; because I'm afraid you won't be able to grow very many flowers in it if it is.

Now, I think hardly anybody has a good thing to say about the nettle. We call it 'that nasty nettle' or 'that horrid nettle.' When we see one we carefully avoid it, and if we don't see it—well, it soon lets us know where it is! Hardly anybody has a good word for the nettle, but before we have done with it to-day I hope you will think it isn't quite such a bad sort after all.

We are going to begin with its faults first, and of course its biggest fault is its sting. How does the nettle sting? If you look at it you will see that the leaves and the stem are covered over with fine hairs. These hairs are hollow, and at the place where they are joined to the nettle there is a little pocket filled with poison. The points of the hairs are sharp and hooked. When we touch the nettle lightly these sharp points prick our skin, then the poison flows down the hairs, gets in under our skin and forms those white blisters which are so painful. But now comes the interesting part. Why do you think the nettle has those poisonous hairs? It isn't just to annoy you when you go picking wild flowers. No, it wears them for very much the same reason as the bee and the wasp carry their stings—just to protect it. If it were not for the sting the nettle would be eaten up by rabbits and other animals, but these creatures have learned to avoid a plant that blisters their tongue and their lips, and so the nettle goes on its way flourishing.

Now there are some people very like nettles. They have sharp, stinging tongues and they say things that hurt and rankle and make their friends feel sore for long after. Well, I hope there aren't any of those people here, but if there are, I want to say to them that there is just one thing they must do. You know if you want a nettle not to sting you, you must grasp it firmly, and if we want our tongues not to sting we must keep tight hold of them too. It will be hard work sometimes, because if we've got that kind of tongue, it often stings in spite of us, but if we have Jesus on our side holding hard too we are bound to win in the end.

But now I want to say something nice about the nettle, because nettles have their uses like everything else. Some people make very good, nourishing soup out of them and others use them as a vegetable which tastes not at all unlike spinach. But that was not the use I was really thinking of. It was something much more wonderful. Do you know that the nettle is a sort of protector of other plants. Shall I tell you how?

Have you ever seen a plant called a dead nettle? It has a white flower and it generally grows among the stinging nettles. Perhaps you mistook it for an ordinary nettle, and if it was not in flower, that was not surprising, for the dead nettle has made itself look so very like the stinging nettle that it is difficult to distinguish them. The only difference between them when they are not in flower is that the leaves of the dead nettle are a little lighter in colour, and that the stem of the dead nettle is square while that of the stinging nettle is rounded.

The dead nettle has no sting and it is really quite a different plant from the stinging nettle, but why do you think it pretends to be like it? Just to protect itself from being eaten by animals. When a rabbit comes along he says to himself, 'Oh, there's one of those horrid stinging things. Catch me touching it! No, no, I know one better than that.' So off he hops to the nearest clump of clover little knowing what a treat he has missed.

Do you see how the stinging nettle protects other plants? It takes all the blame so that they may go scot free. Don't you think that is rather a decent sort of thing to do? I'm afraid none of us are very ready to take the blame for other people; sometimes we aren't even ready to take the blame for our own foolishness or wickedness. But I think it's a fine sign when a boy will stand up and take the punishment for another rather than get him into a row.

And I think the nettle in this way is very like Jesus Christ. He took the blame for us. He stood between us and the consequences of our sins. But there is one difference, and it is a very big one. The nettle is at fault itself—it has a cruel sting, and it is taking the blame for its own faults as well. But Jesus was utterly blameless. He did no sin, and yet He took the whole burden of our sin upon Him so that we might go free. I want you to understand and remember that always—Jesus took the blame for us. We can never, never repay Him for that, because it is so big a debt that nobody could ever pay back the thousandth part of it. But there is one thing we can do, and it is the thing He wants most of all. We can love Him, and in loving we can serve Him all the days of our life.

Point and Illustration.

From the War.

The Rev. J. E. Compton has kept beside him the good stories and other illustrations of Scripture texts which the newspapers of the last two years have contained, and now he publishes a selection of them in *True Illustrations from the War* (Allenson; 1s. net). How shall a selection be made from so good a selection?

I.

A Man who lost his Nerve.

Mark xiv. 66–72.—Peter's denial.

Acts iv. 13.—'Now when they saw the boldness of Peter. . . .'

The true story of a soldier who was afraid, yet afterwards proved himself to be a hero, was related yesterday by Professor J. H. Morgan in a lecture at University College, London, on his experience with the British Expeditionary Force.

A sergeant in the Expeditionary Force, the lecturer said, 'lost his nerve and ran away. He was tried by court-martial, and sentenced to five years' penal servitude. But in the interval between the sentence and its confirmation the famous attempt of the Prussian Guard to break through our line was made, and every available man was rushed up in support of the British. They included the prisoner's guard, and the prisoner, of course, followed suit.

'He had recovered his nerve, and not only fought well, but performed an act which in ordinary circumstances would certainly have brought him a medal for gallant conduct, and probably the V.C. As a result the man's sentence was quashed, the record expunged, and he got back his stripes and an absolutely clean record.

'That sergeant,' added Professor Morgan, 'was responsible for an Act of Parliament, for it occurred to the authorities that if there was one such case there might be others. The result was that the Attorney-General rushed through the House a special Act applying to court-martial the principle of the First Offenders (Probation) Act.'

II.

'How tender Brave Men are!'

Romans xv. 1.—'We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities ("bear with the weaknesses," Weymouth's trans.) of the weak, and not to please ourselves.'

I will tell you a very beautiful story which I heard this morning from a great surgeon going his rounds of the hospital. It is a story which helps one to understand the British soldier.

A certain officer who had taken part in the storming of Hill 60, and who lay for thirteen hours on the ground grievously wounded, was brought eventually to this London hospital, and was visited by my friend the surgeon. The surgeon asked him, 'How did you feel, now, lying there unattended for thirteen hours?' The officer replied, 'I'm ashamed to tell you. I behaved very badly. I groaned for hours.' Then his eyes shone, and he said, 'I felt so ashamed that I apologized to the wounded Tommies near enough to hear me. And do you know what they said to me? They said, "You go on groaning, sir; it eases you; never mind us; you were not brought up hard as we were; we know that; it's easier for us to bear pain than what it is for you." And that wasn't all. Do you know, some of those splendid fellows crawled up to me in the darkness on their hands and knees, in spite of their wounds, they did really, and—well, they kissed me.'

The surgeon looked at me as he finished. 'How tender brave men are!' he said gently; and added, 'You remember, Nelson asked Hardy to kiss him.'

Conscience.

Mr. Claud Field has compiled an Anthology on Conscience and called it *The Dweller in the Innermost* (Headley; 2s. net). He has called it so after Watts' great picture with that title. The picture is reproduced together with the explanation of Mrs. Watts: 'From the mysterious depths of the heart of nations and of men, a voice has ever cried out against things evil. This picture is a vision of that inward protest, a steady celestial light is on the forehead—the eyes pierce through the many shams to the truth of things. One day with no uncertain sound the trumpet will proclaim them.'

The book is introduced by Mr. Gilbert Thomas. And the introduction by Mr. Gilbert Thomas on Conscience is as well worth its place in the Anthology as any quotation it contains. Here is the heart of it: 'I would say, then, that a man's conscience is entitled to liberty just so far as it inspires him to live according to a scheme of life which, if universally adopted by his fellowmen, would tend towards the stability and health of human society; and that, on the other hand, you have a perfect right to interfere with a man's so-called conscientious beliefs, if those beliefs cause him to live according to a scheme of life which, if universally adopted, would obviously tend towards the crippling and disintegration of human society.' But what if the welfare of society should demand the sacrifice of some particular nation? 'The answer should, I think, be challenging and clear. Either, as I see it, we must take a frankly materialistic view of life and deny Conscience altogether, or, recognizing its sovereignty, concede to it the liberty even of endangering the physical safety of a particular nation. It may be a hard saying, but where is the alternative?'

Enough of Mr. Thomas. Out of the Anthology itself take this from Mazzini: 'Upon a day in the sixteenth century at Rome some men bearing the title of Inquisitors were assembled to decree the immobility of the earth. A prisoner stood before them. His brow was illumined by genius. It was Galileo. The old man shook his old and venerable head. His soul revolted against the absurd violence of those who sought to constrain him to deny truths revealed to him by God. But his pristine energy was worn down by long suffering and sorrow; the monkish menace crushed him. He strove to submit. He raised his hand—he too—to declare the immobility of the earth. But as he raised his hand, he raised his weary eyes to that heaven they had searched throughout long nights to read thereon one line of universal law; they encountered a ray of that sun they so well knew, motionless amid the moving spheres. Remorse entered his soul; an involuntary cry burst from the believer's heart. "*E pur se muove!*" ("And yet it moves!").'

Silent Prayer.

One of the subjects of fresh interest and hopefulness at the moment is silent prayer. This is what the Rev. A. A. David, D.D., Headmaster of Rugby, says by way of encouragement in *Twelve Short Meditations for Intercession Services* (S.P.C.K.; 6d. net).

'We have seen that words and phrases are necessary when men meet for supplication, and agree as to their petitions. We have seen that they help us by touching the imagination, by kindling faith, by opening new avenues to God.

'But it is a mistake to depend wholly on words, and to follow only when and as they lead. When we *think about* God, words cannot guide us beyond a certain point. God cannot be contained in buildings of human handiwork. "Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have built!" So also He cannot be restricted to the narrow limits of human language, or fully described by the phrases we use of one another.

'In the same way when we *think towards* God, words can guide, but they cannot carry us. Prayer is a movement of ourselves, a turning towards Him, where He is ever to be found, close by our side; a coming to Him, a breaking away from something, across some boundary; a penetrating through some separating screen; a meeting, for on the other side of it He stands. Now all these are matters of effort and impulse, and they depend not on words, but on wills.

'Let us essay these flights of the spirit, for they are essential to intercourse with God. "Come unto me," says Jesus, and we must move before we speak. But let us also remember that for every feeble step we take towards Him, He moves with a hundred times more strength and speed towards us.'

Central America.

The series entitled 'Handbooks to Ancient Civilization' is published by Mr. Lee Warner. It is a series of handsome volumes, thoroughly illustrated, and written by scholars. The volume on *Central American and West Indian Archæology* has been entrusted to Mr. Thomas A. Joyce, M.A., and it could not have been placed in more reliable hands (12s. 6d. net). Not even in America itself, with all that the Government of the United States has done and is doing to encourage the study of the ancient civilizations of the American continent, and with all the special students whom that encouragement has discovered, could an author have been found more able or more willing than Mr. Joyce to do justice to this difficult subject. The book which he has written is without doubt the best handbook to the customs of the Indians of the Centre and the West that has been published.

Mr. Joyce is a student of other students. How much of his book is 'original' we cannot tell, but certainly he has not gone in pursuit of originality. He has made himself acquainted with the work of specialists. He knows who they are, and how to use them. This for a successful handbook is as it *must* be.

For an explanation of that important word *Zemi* he goes to Mr. Fewkes. But, first of all, this is what he says himself about the healing of the sick among the Tainan: 'One of the chief functions of the priests was that of healing the sick. They were expert herbalists, and many of their remedies were of real value, but they relied for the most part upon trickery to gain the confidence of their patients. There were local variations in treatment, but the principal features were the use of tobacco and the application of massage. Sickness was regarded for the most part as due to the anger of some zemi, to whom the sufferer had, perhaps unwittingly, given offence, and who had shown his displeasure by miraculously inserting some foreign body in the anatomy of his victim. It was first necessary to ascertain the reason of the malady, and for this the patient was brought to the doctor, who endeavoured to attain a sort of physical sympathy with him by adopting the same diet and by dressing as far as possible on the same lines. Both doctor and patient were freely dosed with tobacco, and the priest during his state of ecstasy was supposed to hold converse with the zemi and ascertain the cause of the sickness. In serious cases the priest would visit the invalid, having prepared himself by blacking his face and concealing in his mouth a pebble or small bone wrapped in flesh. All children and unnecessary individuals were turned out of the hut, and strict silence was preserved. The priest purified himself by taking an emetic, prepared from a certain herb wrapped in the skin of an onion, and then seated himself in the middle of the hut with the patient, and proceeded to massage his limbs in a downward direction, as if forcing something from his body. Then pretending to hold something in his hands, he ran to the door and cast it out, exclaiming, "Begone to the mountains or the sea." Returning to the sufferer, he proceeded to suck at certain parts of his body, finally producing the object which he had concealed in his mouth, and which he triumphantly displayed as the cause of the trouble. If it were a stone, it was believed to be a charm of great value, especially serviceable in childbirth, and was kept wrapped in cotton and given portions of the owner's food, like the other household zemi.'

Who are the Zemi? Fewkes explains the word in this way:

'The name was apparently applied to gods, symbols of the deities, idols, bones or skulls of the dead, or anything supposed to have magic power. The dead or the spirits of the dead were called by the same term. The designation applied both to the magic power of the sky, the earth, the sun and the moon, as well as to the tutelary ancestors of clans. *Zemis* were represented symbolically by several objects, among which may be mentioned (1) stone or wooden images, (2) images of cotton and other fabrics enclosing bones, (3) prepared skulls, (4) masks, (5) frontal amulets, (6) pictures and decorations on the body. Of these classes the first probably represents the element of nature-worship in the native religion, the second and third the element of ancestor-worship, while the fifth and sixth may be regarded in the light of protective magic. The nature-zemi had various functions, some presided over agriculture, and of these different types promoted the fertility of different food-plants. Many of the fertility-zemi were buried in the fields, and the habit was so strong that, in the early days of the Spanish occupation of Santo Domingo, the natives stole

the images from the churches and interred them in their plantations. Others brought luck in hunting or fishing, and others again had control of the rain or of the winds. Each man had his personal zemi, and there appear to have been family zemi and tribal zemi also, the latter being kept in a hut apart which was owned by the Cacique.'

The Adventure of Death.

The Christian teacher has long taught that death is not to be dreaded. Now the medical man comes to teach the same. *The Adventure of Death*, by Robert W. Mackenna, M.A., M.D. (Murray; 3s. 6d. net), is from first to last an argument in favour of the easefulness of Great Death. It is a delightful book to read. On any subject Dr. Mackenna would write delightfully. Into this subject he pours the joy of his heart as well as the powers of his graphic pen.

He says: 'After the South African War I had many opportunities of talking the matter over with some of the men who fought through it, and I obtained ample confirmation of the opinion which I had already formed from my reading, that, in the heat of battle, the fear of death is absolutely obliterated. These men told me that the most testing time was the five minutes before the action began. Then there was tense anxiety, and a curious sense of uncertainty, sometimes accompanied by a feeling of thirst; but once the heavy guns had commenced to roar their challenge, and hurl their death-dealing shells, all fear of death was forgotten, swallowed up in the excitement of battle. Even the wounding or death of a comrade close by did not suffice to reawaken the dread of death, and some who were wounded have told me that at the moment of their injury they were unaware that they had been hurt, and did not realize that they were stricken men till they were overcome by weakness. But after the fight was over, and the din of battle had ebbed into a great and vague silence, as they lay on the veldt and longed for the arrival of the ambulance-men, worn out by loss of blood and tortured by thirst, they tasted in apprehension the bitterness of death.'

'A young Welsh officer told me quite frankly that when he first came under shell-fire he felt tempted to turn and run; but he was arrested by the thought that he must set his men a good example, and this spirit of *noblesse oblige* which has saved the honour of our Empire upon many a stricken field enabled him to steady himself and stick to his post. How this traditional spirit of the British officer reacts upon his men was made clear to me by a Gordon Highlander who was inured to battle on the retreat from Mons. He confessed to a feeling of extreme uneasiness until he noticed how calmly and collectedly the officers were going about their duties. He drew immediate encouragement from this observation, and made up his mind that, come what might, no action of his should tarnish the honour of his regiment. At a later date he received promotion for consistently brave conduct in the field, and, though many times in very dangerous situations, he assured me that no fear of death or anxiety for his personal safety ever worried him after his first baptism of fire. He was severely wounded by machine-gun fire at Neuve Chapelle, and as he lay in the "no-man's-land" between the opposing trenches he had so little thought of danger that he raised himself on his elbow to admire and applaud the magnificent charge of a territorial battalion of his regiment. His movements apparently attracted the attention of an enemy sniper, and the arm on which he had raised himself was shattered, but even then he felt no fear of death.'