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

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expository-times\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

illustration or exemplification of a universal principle of God's working, a principle or law which may be stated thus: That God conditions the bestowal of His blessings on the co-operation or working along with Him of His children.

It is so in the natural world. God conditions the bestowal of the 'gifts of nature' on our co-operation, so that the earth will not yield its harvest without man's labour. It is so, too, in the intellectual world; in the field of scientific discovery, for example. God does not publish abroad His truth in the sky, so that we have but to open our eyes to see it. Only when we give ourselves to intellectual toil do we give God the chance to reveal to us the knowledge of His laws for our own and others' benefit. This is wherein consists the chief responsibility of our gifts or talents. 'If my hand slacked, I should rob God.' And what is true in the natural sphere and in the intellectual is most of all true in the moral and spiritual sphere. Here, above all, God conditions the bestowal of His blessings on man's co-operation in faith and prayer.<sup>1</sup> Just as in the natural world, unless men work, God will not bestow His material blessings; and as in the intellectual world, unless men think, God will not bestow His blessings of truth: so in the moral and spiritual world, unless men pray, God is hindered in the bestowal of His greatest gifts and in the realization of His deepest purposes.

And if we ask why this is so, the answer is that it is not because of any unwillingness or lack of willingness on God's side, as if through our entreaties we could turn Him to a better mind. That, said Jesus, is a pagan or sub-Christian view of prayer. 'They think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.' Rather it comes of God's very

<sup>1</sup> This is very helpfully worked out in H. E. Fosdick, *The Meaning of Prayer*, ch. iv.

Fatherliness, and of the greatness of His Fatherly purposes for His children. For a fundamental consideration in this matter of prayer, as in all God's dealings with His children, is that God, being the kind of Father He is, is more concerned for His children's good than for their pleasure, for His children's character than for their immediate comfort. If in the natural world God gave the material blessings of life without man having to work for them, where were the opportunity for the development of the physical side of his being? If in the intellectual world God revealed the blessings of truth without man having actively and energetically to think and investigate, where were the opportunity for the development of the intellectual side of his being? So, in the moral and spiritual world, if God bestowed His blessings on ourselves and others without our having to pray for them, where were the opportunity for the development of character—in particular, of that childlike faith and trust and surrender which, after all, is the fundamental condition of glorifying God and doing true service to our fellow-men? It is not that prayer changes God's mind and will, or turns Him to a greater willingness to bless; it is rather that prayer provides the conditions which give God the opportunity to realize His willingness and to bestow His gifts in such a way as that, when received, they shall be used for His glory and for our own and others' good.

So it comes to this: Prayer truly conceived in terms of Jesus' thinking is *the opening of our lives to a Father-God, so that He may have the opportunity to realize His will and purposes in and through us*. It is the means, not of trying to get from God what we want, but of enabling God to give us what He wants. 'Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him. After this manner, therefore, pray ye . . .'

## In the Study.

### A Prayer.

O GOD our Father, Who hast made us, and Who knowest how these frail hearts of ours are caught and held by every vivid trifle, how in the dust and din and bustle of our crowded days we are jostled

far away from Thee, how half a hundred clamorous nothings to which we must attend fill our small minds and leave no room in them for Thee, now that, escaped for a little from the roar and noise of the world, with a thick door swung between us and our usual distractions, we can have a breath-

ing space, can sit in stillness, and have time to think, and to be cool, and to recall Thee to our minds again, be pleased in Thy great kindness to heal the fever and the fretting of our souls, to take from us all that offends Thy holy eyes, that being pure in heart we may see God. Make Thyself real to us, so near and real that we cannot but recognize Thy Presence with us. And being in it, knowing ourselves face to face with Thee, may we not fill the holy place with a babble of our vain talk and our own foolish desires; but, bowed in reverence, wait with hushed hearts for Thy voice to us. Speak, Lord, for Thy servants hear.

### Virginibus Puerisque.

#### How to be Happy.<sup>1</sup>

'The time of the singing of birds is come.'—Ca 2<sup>12</sup>.

It's a great time when the birds come back, and the summer is full of their happiness and singing! They are game little fellows, aren't they, who start the day in great heart and the best of spirits, as you do yourself, you who waken up all of a piece and altogether! One moment you are fast asleep and the next you are bolt upright, with your eyes quite round and big and wide and never a sign of sleep in them: this second you are sound as sound can be, and in a trice you are tootling on that trumpet, or already you have dragged your favourite tattered book from under your pillow and are crawling over Daddy in his bed, thumping him hard, and crying, 'Read to me!' And he, who only wakens bit by bit, beginning at his toes and reaching his head last, growls and grunts, and opening half an eye tries to read with that, for indeed he knows the story pretty well by now—though if he makes the least mistake you always catch him—and keeps the other one and a half eyes tight shut and tries to sleep with them! But the birds are like you; as soon as they waken they are up and singing, you can hear them long before you rise. There's a blackie; and that's a thrush! And out on the moors the grouse are calling, 'Go back! Go back! Go back!' And there's another lovely waily kind of singer crying, 'Courlie, Courlie, Courlie!' Do you know his name? And the larks are winging up and up, and everybody near is standing still a moment to find and follow their wee bodies as they soar and soar. But none among them, so they tell us, can sing like the

nightingale. The sparrows chatter and gossip and tell each other all the news and scandal; the starling—ah! he is very good at it; he will sit on a branch for long enough singing to his lady friend, 'Pretty girl! pretty girl! Dear! dear! Come away!' And there's another poor fellow—can you guess him?—whose wife has given him a very poor breakfast, and he can't get it off his mind; sits all day long saying to himself over and over, 'A little bit of bread and no cheese!' But there is none of them like the nightingale. And yet, the wise men tell us, the nightingale hasn't always got its lovely voice. When he is a young thing he doesn't sing; but only when he is mating, and when he and his wife are building the nest. It's slow work building nests, and she gets tired of it, and it's then he sings and sings his glorious songs to cheer her up. And when she is sitting on the eggs—that's very boring, days on days of it. You know, and you remember how you hated, that summer you were ill, having to lie in bed week after week; or you know when you have a long French exercise and can hear the click of the bats outside, how sick you get of having to stick in, and how inclined you feel to chuck it up and chance a row. Well! the nightingale gets weary like that; and it's then that her mate sings to her, sings on and on and on. And this is a queer thing, isn't it?—the very day the eggs are hatched, or almost so, he loses his glorious voice, he can't sing any longer, can only make a harsh, ugly, grating croak.

There is something for you to think about. It is when the nightingale is thinking, not of himself one little bit, but of somebody else, and trying to be nice to her and cheer her up and play the game, that he comes to his best and is happiest and sings just because everything is so glorious and jolly. You think that if you are to have a good time you must grab; and if there is something splendid you cry out, 'Take me! Me first!' That is the way to be happy you are sure, and to have a good time. But you're wrong! The nightingale is happiest when it's not thinking of itself at all; and if you could forget yourself, and what you want, and what you like, and would give mother a hand now and then instead of always choosing what seems better fun, and would let the little ones have a chance, not always make them do what you prefer, you would really be far happier than you are the other way. Selfishness is a mean cheat; it takes your money and then doesn't give you what it promised,

<sup>1</sup> By the Reverend A. J. Gossip, M.A., Aberdeen.

not the real thing. It's like the fellow, who after you had saved up ever so long sent you faked stamps; or the man who sold you a knife, and you saw at once it hadn't Sheffield on the blades, and said so, but he told you it was every bit as good; and it won't cut at all, was far worse than your old one in a day! Happiness is a queer thing; if you run after it, it's like the rainbow foot, you never reach it, though it always looks as if you were quite near. But if you forget about it, and think of other people, you will find it in your hands.

Look at the nightingale, and listen to him singing as nothing else can do, and all because he has clean forgotten about himself, and is trying to make others happy.

But why ever does he stop and lose his voice? I think perhaps it's partly his wife's fault! You see, at the start there was just him and her, and they were very much to one another. But when the wee ones came, there were so many of them, and they were such dears, that she rather forgot about him; or if she noticed him, was apt to scold and say, 'You haven't brought a worm for the last quarter of a minute! Why are you idling there? And what do you think a great hulking thing like you is for?' And he feels a little sad about it and stops singing. That's perhaps the way of it. And you had better think about that also. Mother, too, goes singing about the house, for she too is very happy. You are a cosy little nestful; and she loves you, and you love her; and it's all just as nice as nice can be. But if you were ever to forget her, she would stop singing and grow very sad. Forget about her! you cry, and you laugh at such a silly thing. For how could anybody forget mother? And yet other children had the nicest mother, so they thought, in all the world; and she too played with them, and worked for them, and tucked them in at night, and came to them at once all the way up the stairs whenever there was trouble, a tumble or a broken knee or a hurt finger to be mended, and they too loved her very much. But they've gone out into the world now, and they don't seem to remember her or anything about it. How horrid of them, do you say? It is; and yet, how often did you write your mother when you were away? Once! Only once! or not at all! What with the cows and the hens and the car, and the splendid time you had out in the country, had you no time for her? But that looks rather as if you too might forget about

her by and by! And that will never do! If I were you I would give her an extra hug to-night when she comes round, an extra long and tight one, just to let her know that you'll never forget her, never, never, never!

And then there is this last thing worth thinking over. If anything goes wrong with the nightingale's nest just after the little birds are hatched, say the first day or the next, if a cat gets at them or something terrible like that, the nightingale gets back his voice. He starts, he and his wife, making another nest, and she sits on another set of eggs, and all the time he sings and sings as gloriously as ever. But if he has lost his voice for, say, a week before that cat comes prowling, then he doesn't get it back, and doesn't build another home, goes croaking harshly all the summer. And so you see if you are drifting into any ugly thing, you had better stop at once. You are a decent little chap, as straight as straight can be. At least you used to be so, but are you just quite as honest now, or at school are you beginning to shuffle a little? You used to be a really unselfish wee lass, but is that going! Take you care; you can perhaps do things like that once, or it may be twice, and stop them, but if you keep on doing them a very few times more you'll find you can't. The nightingale has lost its voice. To-day it can get it back, and probably it can still manage it to-morrow, but by the next day it can't. Take care, if you are ever going to get rid of that new, ugly thing, and be again the clean, honest, sunny little fellow that you were, then you must do it now.

#### Broadcasting.<sup>1</sup>

'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart sendeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure sendeth forth evil things.'—Mt 12<sup>35</sup>.

Most people are interested in 'listening in,' and a great many, with bought sets, or home-made sets, are busy at it.

But 'broadcasting' comes first to give us something to listen to, and that is what I want to speak about.

How many broadcasting stations are there in Great Britain? You tell me 'six,' and perhaps you go on to tell me 'they are 5SC, 2LO, 21T,' and so on. Well, I would like to say there are about forty-five million! Everybody is a broadcasting station, you and I, and every one. We

<sup>1</sup> By the Reverend Stuart Robertson, M.A., Glasgow.

broadcast what Jesus calls 'idle words,' that is, the words we say without thinking, the words that just spill over out of the 'abundance of the heart,' the words that come out because the heart is full of them. We are not specially thinking what we say; they come out in fun, in anger, in chatter, and we don't think where they go or who hears them.

At one station the Children's Talk was being given, and it sounded as if the speaker loved the children and his task of speaking to them, but an 'idle word' spoilt it all. He finished up, 'Good-bye, my dear boys and girls. Shut off that wretched machine!' It was overheard.

Now Jesus says, 'A good man out of the fulness of his heart broadcasts good things, and an evil man, evil things.'

Let me show some of both sorts.

Once Jesus was praying to God. He wasn't thinking of His disciples. He was just letting the fulness of His heart overflow to His Father. But the disciples heard Him; and when He finished, they came and asked Him to teach them to pray.

Paul and Silas were once in prison, in an inner cell, sore from scourging, with their feet in the stocks. They weren't thinking about the other prisoners, and they sang praises to God, and the prisoners listened. They had never heard anything like that in prison before; groans, curses, and bitter complaints they had often heard, but not praises sung to God. Can't you imagine how it would set them thinking?

The poet Browning has a beautiful poem which tells of a day in the life of a little Italian mill-girl. It was her one holiday in the year, and as she went about she sang a happy song about God, because her heart was full of joy and God. Different people heard it, and the poem tells how it comforted some who were sad, and stopped from evil some who were sinful. Pippa never knew. She just broadcasted a good thing out of a good heart; and she goes to bed wondering if her life could ever touch the lives of those others to help. She didn't know that she had done it by her idle words.

Here is the other sort. Peter is standing by a fire in the courtyard of a house denying that he is a disciple of Jesus. He gets angry, and oaths and curses pour out broadcast. Then he sees Jesus looking at him. He realizes where his words have gone, and how they have hurt, and Peter rushes out weeping bitterly.

An English king is in France, and some news is

brought to him that makes him furiously angry. Hot words burst from his lips. 'Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?' The evil words fall on evil ears. Soon men are spurring on the road, and in a short while the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas à Becket, lies murdered in his cathedral, because King Henry broadcasted wild and angry words without thinking how far they would go and what harm they would do.

Sometimes a father checks his son for using some foolish phrase, and he gets the answer, 'I heard you saying it.'

Little boys listen to what the big boys say and copy it. Little girls listen to the big ones and do the same.

Take care what you are broadcasting. Our thoughts are our own, but after they are spoken they are out of our power to control.

'If I should *spe*ak thus,' says a wise old Psalmist, who was thinking very bitter things—'if I should *spe*ak thus, I would offend against the generation of thy children.'

If we have bitter thoughts, we must keep them to ourselves for the sake of others. It is not easy always to do it, for full hearts spill over. Therefore the best way is to ask God to keep our hearts, so that they be full of His love, and the things that are good and happy and kind. Then we will broadcast nothing that will hurt, and much that will make for happiness in this listening world, and we will not need to fear when God calls us to account for our idle words.

## The Christian Year.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

### The Ministry of Restoration.

'Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.'—Gal 6<sup>1</sup>.

The recurrence of inconsistency and even scandal in the life of the Christian community is a disheartening incident which always has to be reckoned with. Perhaps we blame the methods of conversion for such mishaps. We say, on the one hand, that crude revival converts, subjected to extreme momentary excitement and imperfectly instructed, are sure to fail after a while. If, on the other hand, we are in sympathy with special revival movements, we are apt to blame the quieter methods through which people are gathered into

the Church, and assume that the nature has not been agitated and radically changed. Such pleas are irrelevant on whichever side they are used, for, as a matter of fact, the breakdowns come impartially and have no discernible connexion with the methods through which men and women are brought into the Church.

And so a ministry of restoration is necessary. It does two things. It makes for the protection and nurture of the weak; it also makes for our own spiritual perfecting.

1. *The ministry of restoration is necessary for the weak.*—The word 'brethren,' which introduces the appeal, strikes the keynote of the argument, for brethren cannot be made or unmade at will. The bond between us and those with whom we have had communion in the presence of our Lord is not ended by what may prove only a temporary aberration from the best standards of Christian conduct, however grievous and exasperating the lapse may be. Whilst any residuum of the truth which saves remains in the heart and conscience of those overtaken in a fault, we must recognize the obligation growing up out of our participation in the one bread and the one blood. Christian discipleship implies incorporation into the body of which Christ Jesus is the head, and he who falls into transgression has not lost the possibility of a revived adjustment to the sacred functions of that body. Bishop Lightfoot tells us that the Greek word for 'restore' means, in its primitive etymology, to set a bone or put back into its right place a dislocated joint. Now, whilst it may sometimes be a duty to the body to cut off a part in which actual mortification has set in, the readjustment where the condition is not obviously hopeless is a duty devolving upon those who have the necessary qualifications for the task.

Whilst this task is of urgent obligation, it is also immense in its difficulties, and demands qualifications of surpassing delicacy. To treat the fallen disciple as a common sinner may be accepted as a grave offence, and call forth the rage of wounded pride. He has lost, moreover, the temper which once helped him to bear rebuke, and indeed to welcome it, whilst he was a loyal member of the believing brotherhood, seeking honestly to know himself, and to press on after the highest spiritual perfection he could conceive. He is perhaps poised between self-justification and despair. He is intent upon maintaining his self-respect; and to do

that he must blame the religion which has permitted him to fall. Harshness, unjust reproach, recrimination, any superior assumption on the part of the man who assumes the office of restorer, will do mischief rather than effect good. The Apostle singles out for the delicate and vital work of restoration those who are spiritual in temper and habit of mind, a qualification which lends itself to plain and simple tests. The spiritual man is one who, in his prevailing modes of thought and feeling, has become subdued and sensitive to the will of the all-surrounding Spirit of God. Spirituality arises not from a quality of temperament, but from a receptive habit of soul. The spiritual man is steeped in the fulness of the Divine life, and his dispositions are assimilated to those dispositions of gentle and tender helpfulness which have their home in God, and are conveyed by His Spirit to others. The Spirit puts His own impress upon the man who is designated to this Christlike work of readjustment and restoration. For to recover is in reality the work of the Divine Spirit Himself, and the Spirit seeks a spiritual man to be the instrument of it. No other qualification will avail for the great enterprise. If we would take part in the enterprise, we must cultivate spirituality—*for spirituality is fitness.*

2. *The ministry of restoration is necessary for our own spiritual perfecting, and only those who are spiritually minded can undertake it.*—The recovery of others is a motive to spirituality, and we shall be confirmed in the rarest attainments of the religious life by the work for which we fit ourselves. The Church is unspiritual where this work is undone, or pursued with but indifferent success. Moreover, strong motives are necessary to sustain a man in the task of recovering the fallen to their lost purity of faith and life, and such motives are found only amongst those who are deeply spiritual. These perceive what a tragedy it is for a man to lose his place in the spiritual order and to disappear from the providential sphere where such possibilities were within his reach.

Meekness is allied to spirituality, and there can be no effectual ministry to those who are estranged where there is a temper of wrath, pride, and spiritual superciliousness. The task must be begun, continued, and ended in the spirit of lowliness. The spiritual man is always humble, for he has learned his dependence on those inspirations which come down from God. It is his own sense of nothingness

which enables him to receive the subtle influences by which he is transformed and spiritualized. 'Considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.'

The highest spirituality is altruistic, for its genius constrains it to sympathy with those who fall, and a tireless endeavour to lift them up. That Church is not the most Christlike which is careful of its reputation and has an immaculate record, but the Church which risks even its own name in stretching out hands to the weak, and within which the spiritual find time and faculties absorbed in bringing back those who have gone astray. The genius of spirituality is practical. The function of the man who is possessed by the Divine Spirit and inspired with the Divine breath is to restore those who have been overtaken in offence and transgression.<sup>1</sup>

#### TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

##### A Blessing.

'The good will of him that dwelt in the bush.'—Dt 33<sup>16</sup>.

This is part of the blessing with which Moses blessed the children of Israel. He had brought them out of Egypt through the great and terrible wilderness to the borders of the Promised Land. In a few days they were to pass into the land, and take possession of it. But Moses himself was not to go with them; and so, before they parted, he bestowed his blessing upon them.

He blessed each of the tribes separately, calling them by the names of their ancestors, the sons of Jacob. These sons of Jacob had stamped their character upon their descendants, and Moses, who knew them so well, knew that God would work out His purposes in each case according to the lines of that character.

The finest of all the blessings is that pronounced upon the tribe of Joseph. For if the tribe of Joseph possessed the character of Joseph himself, and if their destiny was to be in accordance with it, they were fortunate indeed. If David is spoken of as the man after God's own heart, we might perhaps speak of Joseph as the man after man's own heart. Moses seems to have felt that. At any rate, it is a wonderfully beautiful blessing—that blessing with which he blessed the tribe of Joseph. It is full of beautiful phrases—'fruits brought forth

<sup>1</sup> T. G. Selby, *The Commonwealth of the Redeemed*, 154.

by the sun,' 'the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof,' and then it ends up most unexpectedly with 'the good will of him that dwelt in the bush.'

The old man's memory suddenly went back forty years. One event in his life stood out beyond all others—the event that called him to his life's work. One day in the wilderness he was arrested by the sight of a bush burning and not being consumed. And out of the midst of the bush a voice spoke to him. That voice was the voice of God, and the God who spoke to him in the bush had been with him throughout his whole life since that day. And now he had reached the end of the course. He had fought a good fight and finished the course. He had been tested by prosperity in Egypt and adversity in the wilderness, but through it all he had stood firm. This God had been his comfort and strength.

On that day on which he looked with amazement at a bush burning and not consumed, a new thing entered into his life which made all the difference to him. His spirit awoke that day to the knowledge of another Spirit. His will surrendered that day to a stronger Will. He became servant that day to a new Master—a Master who paid him with sufferings and trials without number, but whom nevertheless he had found it a delight to serve. And now, looking back over the forty years he had served Him, he feels that the best blessing he can bestow on any one is just this—'the good will of him that dwelt in the bush.'

What kind of a God was He?

1. For one thing, *He was tender and sympathetic*. His words to Moses were: 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows.' That is a God whose good will is worth having. It is a strange thing that, although God was spoken of in that way at the very beginning of their history, the Israelites never thought much of the sympathy of God and never had any real understanding of what it meant until Christ came. But when Christ came, that was the revelation above all others that He brought with Him. That was the very reason why Christ came into the world—because God had seen our afflictions and knew our sorrows. It was a tender, sympathetic God who had been with Moses all these forty years. We find just the same God in Jesus Christ. Have we realized how sympathetic

He is? The writers of the New Testament try ever so many ways to make us understand it. They speak of Him as having a fellow-feeling for our infirmities, and as having been tempted in all points like as we are. When the crowds came to listen to His preaching, "Jesus thought of them as sheep without a shepherd and worried by dogs. And again and again we read that He had compassion on the multitude.

2. But there is another thing to notice about this God that dwelt in the bush. He is *a God that gives a man great tasks to do in life*. 'Come now,' He said to Moses, 'and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.'

We are sometimes told to be satisfied with little things in life. There is a verse of one of our hymns which says :

The trivial round, the common task,  
Will furnish all we ought to ask,  
Room to deny ourselves, a road  
To bring us daily nearer God.

There is a great truth expressed in that hymn—the truth that we may serve God well in carrying out faithfully the most ordinary duties of life. But there is a danger all the same of misapplying that thought. We are not to make it an excuse for remaining content with the common and easy duty if God calls us to an uncommon and difficult one. And He may call us more often than we think. The truth is, we do not want to be called to difficult tasks, and so we do not hear God's call when it comes. Moses would a thousand times rather have gone on keeping the flock of his father-in-law all his life long than have accepted God's call to go down into Egypt to deliver the Israelites. Let us look for the call of God in our own lives and let us take up the task He offers us, however hard it may seem.

3. For there is a third thing to be said about this God that dwelt in the bush: *If He calls you to a hard task He gives you strength for it*. He sends no man a-warring on his own charges. He promises 'as thy days so shall thy strength be.' More than that, He works along with us, giving us strength for the task by going with us to the discharge of it. Moses hesitated, as he well might, but God said, 'Surely I will be with thee.' That made all the difference. Moses had some idea of the difficulty of the work that lay before him, but its difficulty was far greater than he had any conception of. He had difficulty in

persuading the Israelites to let him go to Pharaoh and ask for their deliverance. He had far more difficulty in persuading Pharaoh to let them go. But none of these difficulties was to be compared with the difficulty of leading them through the wilderness. We may say quite safely that but for God's presence with him he could not possibly have done it. And we must not think that men are different now from what they were then, or that God is different. If He puts us in some trying position or calls us to undertake some arduous work, He will be with us and carry us through. Remember Moses, who endured as seeing Him who is invisible. But certainly his life is worth remembering as that of a man who used all the powers that God had given him. And at the end of his life he could speak of this God as one whose good will was the highest blessing that any man could have.

Is not this true of our Lord yet? Whom has He failed? When has He broken His word? Who can say that he has gone to Him for strength and has not received it? Have we known any higher blessing than this of Moses—'the good will of him that dwelt in the bush'?

#### THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

##### The Excellence of the Commonplace.

'But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage.'—2 K 5<sup>11, 12</sup>.

The irritation of Naaman is so natural that it hardly requires any words of explanation. We recognize in a moment what vexed him so, just because we have often been so vexed ourselves. Naaman expected a striking and startling cure. He knew how the Syrian magicians would conduct themselves. They would come forth in procession, muttering their incantations, and moving their hands in mysterious fashion over the sufferer. Something of this kind, no doubt, Naaman was expecting when he rode up in state to Elisha's door. Then came Elisha's message, 'Go and wash in Jordan.' Go and do something that any man could do. And it was all so commonplace—so ordinary—so utterly lacking in dramatic interest, that Naaman was intensely irritated.



1. Naaman was not alone in his irritation, for *the dislike of the commonplace is well-nigh universal.*

There is another Bible story where the same intense dislike makes itself manifest. 'Is not this the carpenter's son? Do we not know His brothers?' It was with such words that the Jews discredited Jesus. They were intensely irritated at the commonplaceness of this Messiah's advent. It was a prevalent belief of the Jews that the second Adam would come in full-grown manhood like the first. They had the convenient habit, which we all possess, of forgetting the prophecies they wanted to forget. Suddenly, in some epiphany of glory, perhaps from the secret of the Temple, Christ would appear. Then Christ was born in a little hillside village, and He was rocked in His cradle by His village mother, and He wrought with His father who was the village carpenter, and He played with His comrades in the village streets—and it was all so commonplace to unobservant eyes—so untouched with a single gleam of scenic splendour, that the Jews, like Naaman, were very angry, and went away from Christ Jesus in a rage.

But to come nearer home and think of ourselves—are we not all prone to the same irritation? Think, for example, of how we regard our newspapers. A man takes up his paper with a feeling of expectancy; he rarely lays it down without some disappointment. We say, There is nothing in the newspaper this morning—nothing—and so we throw it down. What we really mean is that there is nothing startling, nothing to thrill and hold us by its tragedy.

Is that faint vexation not akin to Naaman's when he was bidden by Elisha to go and wash in Jordan? Does it not indicate that it is very hard to realize the value of the ordinary? The fact is we are half-savage at the heart yet, and have never lost the savage delight in glaring colours.

Much, too, of the disappointment that unfolding life brings with it is connected by very real yet subtle ties with this deep-seated vexation at the commonplace. When we are young we all dream heroic dreams. We start from childhood, as Naaman did from Syria, not knowing anything, but seeing glorious visions; and we have all pictured in our schoolboy years what is going to happen when we meet Elisha. Then we, too, come to the borders of our manhood and our womanhood—we approach the threshold we have so often dreamed of in those days of the heroes when we were

little children; but the pageantry we looked for and the glory we foresaw do not meet us any more than they met Naaman: like Naaman we are just bidden go and wash in Jordan. Our joys have nothing remarkable about them—they are just the joys of a thousand other homes. There is nothing spectacular about our sorrows—we can point to a score of hearts which have been torn like ours. We are not such geniuses as we once thought we were—matched with the great world we come to find our level—life is more ordinary, and far more commonplace, than we ever dreamed of in the golden morning. So springs one disappointment of maturity; so springs the temptation to innumerable sins. It almost seems as if the promise of life had cheated us—life has evolved so differently from our expectation. How many men turn away in a rage from life's plain duties not because they are difficult, but because they are dull!<sup>1</sup>

2. *The dislike of the commonplace is dangerous.* It is dangerous first because the commonplace is the warp and woof of life. No inspired moments may have flashed out of a blue eternity into our soul to fire it to dazzling deeds that challenge the world's attention; deeds upon which we can look back with a perennial satisfaction that says: 'My soul, because of that bright exploit, thou hast not lived in vain!' There may have been in our experience no 'Crowded hours of glorious life' to make us feel that it is worth while to endure the plodding round for the sake of the occasional intoxication of soul that kindles the imagination and sets the pulse a-beating to the tune of a glad triumphal march; or to persuade us that, though our canopy be clouds, yet it is good to walk beneath them for hope of the golden brilliancy that will, ever and anon, stream through the murky mist and flood the world around us. We have not known these experiences, and may not expect to know them; a myriad million paltrinesses, a multitude of trivialities which no man can number, overtaking us with the dull mechanic regularity of clockwork, have commandeered our life, and spread it over with their drab monotony. Nevertheless, although

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time,

yet shall our faith prevail, nourishing itself upon the knowledge that our times are in the Father's

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Morrison, *The Unlighted Lustre*, 52.

hand, and that one day, He, in His marvellously tender skill, will gather up the loose threads of our purposes and the broken ends of our achievement and make them warp and woof of a luminous eternity.

A hope like that is an inspiration, but it must not be used as an opiate. There are monotonies in the lives of others for which it is our business to find a remedy. There are samenesses in our own lives where we must see not sameness but variety. He who says that the million blades of grass are all the same has surely never seen two blades of grass together; for the significant truth is that there are not two of them the same. With similar minuteness of unparalleled workmanship, the loving hand of the Ever-blessed has scattered His ministries of comfort, of joy, of beauty, of laughter, of faith, of hope, of love, over the stale monotonies of life, that whosoever will may behold and find them.

Goethe has pointed out in *Poetry and Truth* that all our comfort hinges upon the unfailing recurrence of the most ordinary phenomena, such as light and darkness, the flowers, the fruits, the seasons; and that it is only when we withdraw our natural interest from these that we begin to loathe our very existence and to find our days a burden.

The dislike of the commonplace is dangerous, in the second place, not only because it is the lot of most of us, but because it affords us our greatest opportunity.

'I remember,' says Mr. Graham,<sup>1</sup> 'having once, in the hearing of a farmer, expressed pity for the horses that were ploughing in a steep field. "Surely," I remarked, "if they have much of that to do, it will soon wear them out." "Oh no!" was his reply, "the horses that plough on the level wear out sooner than those that are put to the hilly lands; you see they are always using the same set of muscles." The easier job was the more trying work: it was a severer test of the animal. Perhaps in that may be found the explanation why the flats and fens of human life are such an ordeal; they keep the burden, as it were, upon the same set of spiritual muscles continually.'

It is not strange that when great occasions arise the man to fit the occasion should so frequently arrive along with it, as if by magic. It must be so: for it is less difficult to fit a great occasion than a small one, and more people can do it.

'The highest form of martyrdom,' as Mark

<sup>1</sup> J. K. Graham, *Anno Domini*, 156.

Rutherford so wisely says, 'is not dying for a cause, it is not even living for the sake of a cause, but living without one, merely because it is your duty to live. If you are called upon to testify to a great truth it is easy to sing in flames. . . . The saints whom I would canonise are not martyrs to a cause, but those who have none.'

There is a song, familiar to us all, in which these lines occur:

'You'll tak' the high road, an' I'll tak' the low  
road,  
And I'll be in Scotland afore ye.'

Now, some say that these words are an allegory, and that they speak of the 'Land o' the Leal.' If that be so, then they speak God's truth. For the low road to heaven, the road that runs through the valley of humiliation and the plains of penitence and the wilderness of trivial occupation, is a shorter and a surer way to that blessed land than the high road of ambitious and uncertain service.<sup>2</sup>

#### FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

##### The Reward of Well-doing.

'And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?'—2 S 9<sup>1</sup>.

The part that Samuel the prophet played after a point in Saul's career—not uniformly either a wise or a just part—was enough to convince Jonathan that, whether the prophet spoke by the mouth of the Lord or only by his own, his partisan zeal in the interests of David had made his father's cause impossible. But should we wonder if Jonathan had made a determined stand for his own personal rights and the fortunes of his house? Out of a notable and almost matchless friendship he took the opposite course, and held himself ready to decrease, that the man who had taken his place might increase.

Because of his devotion to his rival he made his position intolerable at the court of his father the king, and after a bitterly chequered experience, while as yet the sun of his years was at its meridian, he fell on Gilboa, bravely doing his duty in what he knew was a lost cause. Whether or not he recognized a higher will in the fortunes of David, there is nothing in history more worthy to receive the homage of all time than the part which this man played in this ancient drama of a friendship which was without variableness or shadow of turning.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 160.

'And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?' We are glad to read this. Without question David was a man of fine spiritual perception, and he had a deep religious nature; but, even allowing for his day and his position, he had the defects of his qualities in a very pronounced form. We are the better, therefore, for knowing of his gratitude for a friendship which gave all for nothing, and that he showed it through one whom he could easily have overlooked.

This is the explanation of Mephibosheth at the royal table. This is the meaning of that rapid transition from Lo-debar to kings' houses. There had been a father who had not always looked to his own things, who had lived above, and away from, miserable aims that began and ended with himself. And because he had done good, hoping for nothing in return, among other things his afflicted, helpless, lonely son had come so far nearer to his own. 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days.' 'Give a portion to seven, also to eight, for thou knowest not what shall come after thee on the earth.'

With this incident in mind, let us take three things for consideration.

1. *The reward of doing good.*—Many people doubt, or they affect to doubt, whether there is such a thing in our human relations one to another as disinterested goodness; or if there be, which is hard to believe, to expect gratitude in return for doing good is to reveal ourselves either as very simple people or as decidedly too good for a world like this, with such natures as ours. Whatever may be said about rewards, it is a fact that the blessings of the Bible are always poured on right-doing. In the Beatitudes of Jesus there is not a single blessing pronounced on merely social pre-eminence and influence. Someone has very truly remarked that all the persons referred to in these golden sayings might be extinguished to-morrow, and the world of social importance would not, on the side of its importance, be conscious of any loss. And there is gratitude. How little we know about the source of our own riches! Some of us may be, many of us are, reaping to-day harvests which our fathers sowed in fields which seemed to promise so little of the fruits of gratitude. 'Years ago,' says Dr. Ambrose Shepherd,<sup>1</sup> 'a youth applied for a place in one of the great ironworks in the north of

<sup>1</sup> Ambrose Shepherd, *Sermons*, 128.

England. To his surprise, he received almost by return of post a kind note from the head of the firm asking him to call at his private residence. "Your father," said the gentleman to the lad when he called, "was ever too busy helping others to do much for himself. I cannot say how much I owe to the start he gave me, and to his counsel in the earlier stages of my business career; and for his sake it now depends upon yourself to what you will rise with us." 'Give, and it shall be given you.' This is no impersonal word, said of some impersonal force. Jesus has taught us that God is our Father, and we rob the name of its meaning when we think of Him as so fettered by what we are pleased to call 'the general laws of His administration' as to be unable to keep His word and fulfil His promises. We must give to get; and no man does an unselfish thing and fails of the reward there is in the thing itself. 'Give, and it shall be given you.' The promise may be fulfilled in the reflex influence of unselfishness, in what has been finely called, 'the joy of doing good' or it may come back to us in kind, either in our outward fortunes or to some one closely bound up with our life.

2. *There is a good that is greater than reward.*—We have to admit that we do not always come to our own in this matter of gratitude. The Gospel lesson for to-day is the cleansing of the ten lepers. And it was after that cleansing that our Lord said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?' Need we marvel if the experience of the servant in the matter of thanks is not very different from that of his Lord? Ingratitude is such a common fault. It is always breaking hearts. And yet it was for the men's sakes, because of what it augured in them, that the look of sadness spread over the Saviour's face, and He said, 'Where are the nine?'

In our work for others we must learn to do without gratitude. We do not know the secret of service until we have learned to do without it. It is to doing good we are called, not to thanks for doing it. And we are of no real use to God or man until, if not the joy, yet the imperatives of service swallow up the pain of the self-sacrifice we make, and convert our dependence upon thanks into the springs of a higher satisfaction.

3. *There is a good that is independent of reward.*—To do good hoping for nothing in return is not to say there is no return. What return can be more or greater than this: 'That ye may be the children

of your Father which is in heaven'? 'God Almighty knows His mind about me,' said David Livingstone, 'and I am not going to trouble about that. His will is final, and good as it is final; and it is my business to find out by obedience what that mind is, and make it my own.' We should be less concerned to know that God is on our side. It is enough if we can be sure that we are on the side of God. Do not let us ask that our work should seem as well as be. Let us but have a good conscience over it, and be content even to see it fail—knowing that that is part of God's way of making it succeed.

Whosoever takes God's side, in so far as he works loyally for God, in so far as he works steadfastly without impatience for premature results, in so far as he works joyously in the liberty of the Spirit and not as the slave of his toil, for him victory in all things is set fast and secure. If we are saved ourselves, we are saved to serve; and nothing will prevail with men to-day but the love of an unselfish service, for that in us is the love of Christ, which constraineth. We may not see the result to-day, nor yet to-morrow; but we shall see that it was every day and all the way as we look back upon it out of the white radiance of eternity.<sup>1</sup>

Cast your bread upon the waters, far and wide  
your treasure strew;  
Scatter it with willing fingers, shout for joy to  
see it go;  
You may think it lost for ever; but, as sure as  
God is true,  
In this life, and in the other, it will yet return to  
you.

#### FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

##### Neutrality.

'He that is not with me is against me.'—Mt 12<sup>30</sup>.

Our Lord stood almost alone against all the religious, learned, and ruling classes of His nation; but, though standing thus alone, He made the tremendous claim: 'He that is not with me is against me.' In completest contrast with these words stands the claim of Socrates, the wisest of all the Greeks. Far from declaring himself the possessor of any final or even partial form of wisdom, he maintained that the point in which he excelled all other teachers was just this, that in the field of truth he knew his own ignorance and was conscious

<sup>1</sup> Ambrose Shepherd, *Sermons*, 124.

of his own limitations. And yet this young Prophet of Galilee, who never wrote a book, who taught only for three years, and by His teaching and life alienated the so-called wise and learned men of His own nation, who won only a few converts, and finally died a malefactor's death, used no words of idle assumption when He said: 'He that is not with me is against me.' History has shown in unmistakable terms the truth of these words. His life and teaching, as they reach ever wider and wider circles down the ages, have been steadily forcing individuals and nations alike to take thought and to take sides either for or against Him.

All that met Christ unconsciously fell into one of three classes. The first was composed of those that accepted and loved Him; the second, of those that rejected and hated Him; and the third, of those that neither loved nor hated Him, but took up an attitude of neutrality or indifference towards Him.

Such a division is at first sight an obvious and apparently a justifiable one, but is it a true one? Are there really three classes? When man is brought face to face with such claims, Christ declares that it is not. 'He that is not with me is against me,' He said.

1. The classes of His own day took sides. The record of Christ's short ministry of three years is at the same time a record of the growing hostility of His countrymen against Him. The priestly and learned classes early took sides against Him. This hostility was due to the radical antagonism existing between their character and teaching, and those of our Lord. Their character we know. Their teaching was essentially dogmatic. Christ, on the other hand, appealed to the conscience of His hearers and never required a blind acceptance of His words.

On the defection of the ruling and learned classes, there still remained the masses (especially in Galilee) that were attracted by His teaching. Amongst these there were two types easy to distinguish. The first was represented by the peasants of Galilee. These Galilean peasants were intensely patriotic; they were full of national prejudices, but were on the whole moral and religious, and formed the best and soundest part of the nation. They cherished ardent expectations of the Messiah, and accordingly welcomed the young Prophet with the wildest enthusiasm. At last they sought by force to make Him their king. Now, had our Lord lent Himself

to their Messianic aspirations, He could easily have made Himself the master of all Palestine. But He refused to do so.

With a word He could have won the masses to His side. But He would not speak that word. And when, notwithstanding His refusal to become their king, some of the same multitudes still followed Him, He turned and set forth His claims in such severe terms that they forsook Him forthwith, and only a bewildered few still clung fast to their allegiance.

But Christ drew faithful disciples not only from the sturdy peasant class of Galilee. He found them also amongst the publicans and sinners—classes that philosophers had regarded as hopeless, and popular opinion had branded with infamy, and by its merciless attitude had hardened into a temper of callousness and despair. By His wondrous sympathy and His faith in the goodness still latent within them, He lifted them out of their despair and sin, and quickened them with the power of a new life. Here also sides were taken for and against Him in all those who came under His immediate influence.

2. This necessity of taking sides for or against Christ becomes still more inevitable where individuals and not classes are dealt with in the Gospels. There we find every man put to the test at his weakest point, and not a single jot of Christ's exclusive claim to supremacy is toned down or forgone, whoever the individual may be. Christ wants no disciple who has not counted the cost. Every one is tried exactly where, owing to his character, he is sure to feel Christ's service a hardship, exactly where sin is most attractive and conscience is most asleep. To the man who is adjourning the day of decision to a more convenient season, He says: 'Let the dead bury their dead, but come thou, follow me'; to the man who is covetous, and whose chief desire is set on riches: 'Sell all that thou hast, and come, follow me'; to the impure man: 'Whoso looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already with her in his heart'; to the unforgiving: 'If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you'; to the proud and self-satisfied: 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven'; to the mass of commonplace folk belonging to all classes, who study first, and chiefly and always, their own interest and their

own case, but cloak their selfishness under the fashionable respectabilities of the day, He declares: 'Whosoever saveth his life—taketh the line of least resistance or any other form of self-indulgence or self-satisfaction—the same shall lose it.'

3. Is neutrality possible to-day? We all know that it is a matter of complete indifference to most of us whether certain laws of science are facts or not. Unless it is our specific duty to study these laws, we can adopt an attitude of absolute neutrality towards such conclusions of science as Einstein's doctrine of the relativity of knowledge, or the theory of the Röntgen rays, and a hundred others, and be not one whit the better or one whit the worse by adopting such a neutral attitude.

But in regard to the claims of the moral and spiritual worlds, neutrality is impossible. And why? Just because these claims bear directly on and shape our conduct, whether we will or no, for good or evil. Hence, if they are true, they are of vital importance, and if we adopt a neutral attitude towards them, such neutrality amounts to a rejection of them; for we cannot stand still, morally or spiritually. If we are neutral, we are drifting, and drifting inevitably towards an attitude of indifference and spiritual death, or of active opposition. Professor James rightly maintains this very truth in his interesting work, *The Will to Believe*.

With the exception of a minority, that constitutionally are mentally or morally incapable or have made themselves such, all men are fitted to judge between the claims of right and wrong in some degree; and, when confronted with two alternative courses of conduct, to decide which is the higher and which the lower. But, not only are men fitted to decide for or against a certain line of action, they are bound by the essential nature of the spiritual and moral laws to come to a decision. For belief and doubt affect our conduct and affect it vitally, and herein enters the claim of Christ: 'He that is not with me is against me.' Hence if in such a case a man should say: I will adopt an attitude of neutrality, or I will come to a decision at a more convenient season, such a man by so doing has already decided against the moral or religious claim at issue.

James defines the religious man as one who believes 'in the existence of some kind of an unseen order in which the riddles of the natural order may be found explained.' He maintains

that the will to believe helps to create the facts, a result which is unattainable without such belief. Hence we should approach the claims of religion with the will to believe.

It is quite true, as we know from our everyday experience, that faith in a fact does help to create the fact. By trusting in another man's good faith, we may beget that very virtue in him. By owning that we are responsible beings and acting accordingly, we become more conscientious. Thus faith in a fact helps to create the fact, but—only so far as the fact is dependent on our own personal action. James, by omitting this limitation, seems in his essay to imply that our faith in the unseen world without us does in some way create this unseen world. But the will to believe cannot create that which was in existence before the act of belief, and is, and will be in existence after it, whether we will to believe or no.

And yet in respect of this spiritual world, the will to believe can render invaluable service. It cannot create that world, but it can create evidence attesting the reality of that world, and day by day can contribute fresh evidence. Faith in God finds its own verification through the influence it exerts on life and character.

The practical results of a belief provide evidence by which its truth or falsehood may be tested. By

its fruits ye shall know of what character it is. Thus, though the will to believe cannot create truth that is independent of us, it can create evidence of truth that did not before exist. Hence St. Paul writes to his disciples, 'Ye are our epistles'—that is, epistles of the Lord—'known and read of all men.'

So we cannot halt between two opinions of vital importance. If the ever-accumulating evidence of Christian lives attests the reality of the spiritual world, then neutrality is impossible and wrong; for it amounts to a decision against the claims of Christ. There are thus no neutrals in this never-ending strife between Christ and the claims of the material life. Instinctively or deliberately, here, there, and everywhere, the consciences of men are enrolling themselves and cannot help enrolling themselves on this side or on that. It is the inevitable law of this struggle that not a single, solitary soul escapes this moral and spiritual conscription, and such is the greatness of this strife that the whole universe is divided into two camps—for Christ or against Him—and even the most distant stars fight, and must fight, in their courses against those that reject Him. 'He that is not with me is against me.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Charles, *The Adventure into the Unknown*, 272.

## God's Purpose as Revealed in Jesus Christ.

### A PRELIMINARY QUESTION.

BY THE REVEREND ALFRED E. GARVIE, D.D., PRINCIPAL OF NEW COLLEGE, LONDON.

THE criticism of Harnack's *What is Christianity?* in Loisy's *The Gospel and the Church* has not only the immediate historical interest of presenting the contrast between Protestant Liberalism and Roman Catholic Modernism; it raises a more general and permanent issue: Is the distance, in time and space, with all the differences which this distance may involve, so great that Christ's mode of apprehending reality, intellectually, morally, and religiously cannot be ours, and must we acquiesce in an evolution which leaves little, if any, resemblance between His Christianity and ours? Would we not be at home at all in the

presence of the historical Jesus? Would He Himself feel an exile among the best Christians of to-day? The dogmatic interpretation of the Scriptures erred in treating the Bible as a placeless and dateless communication of Divine truth; and we do not need to-day to be warned of, or guarded against, the errors and failures of that interpretation. Is not the danger of what claims to be the *historical* method that for it the temporal and local form hides a permanent and universal content which each age and each land can still apprehend? If we misrepresent Jesus in thinking Him as like ourselves, do we not also miss His meaning and