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In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

How many Notes has your Piano?[1]

'Hearing they hear not.'—Mt 13^{13}.

HAVE you good ears? Rather, you say. Why, only last night when we were having a scrap in the bedroom, in the very midst of all the row we both heard Dad's foot out in the passage; and when he came in, we were both fast asleep, as sound as sound could be. At least he thought so! Did he? Not a bit of it. Dad's a good sort, and he just let you off, that's all. His ears mayn't be as quick as yours, but they are good enough to know that boys as fast asleep as you seemed couldn't have been shouting and yelling and stampeding all over the place as you were doing one second before. Still your ears are better than his, and there are other people who have quicker ears than yours. You can hear easily what you have to shout all over again for Grannie, and there are folk who hear what for you isn't there at all. Come and have a try. Put your ear down to the road there. Do you hear nothing? What! Nothing at all! A Red Indian would catch the throb of hoofs, or the humming of a motor far away. But there isn't a sound, you say! No, not to you, but there would be to him. But hearing, you don't hear. Lay your head sideways on the grass. Well, what is there to report? Nothing! But a real country boy, you know, could follow the worms tunnelling away down underneath, and you catch not a rustle.

Ears, I think, are like pianos. The farther you go toward one end of them, the higher and higher gets the sound, and then you come to the wood, and that is the finish there; and toward the other end the sounds get deeper and deeper, till you reach the wood again, and there's no more. But there are far higher notes and far deeper notes than the piano plays, only it can't sound them. Do you understand? All pianos, I suppose, are the same length, but our ears are not. I don't mean that a donkey hears the most, but that some ears have more notes in them, so to say, than others. You can perhaps pick up sounds too shrill, too deep, for me to catch at all. And there are insects too high in their call for anybody's ear to follow, while the whale's voice is said to be too low. So, you see, heaps of things are always sounding round about us and we never hear them. Hearing, we don't hear. Perhaps it doesn't matter much; and yet perhaps it does. There may be songs far lovelier really than the nightingale's, or things still more awful than the growl of the thunder, and we never know.

Certainly there are lots of people who never hear the finest and most glorious thing in the whole world, never hear God's voice. Yet God keeps speaking to us. In one place Paul thinks it must be because they are born quite deaf; but here we are told that it is not so, that they can hear quite well what interests them—the football results and wireless and the rest of it—but their ears have no notes that can pick up God's voice at all. And surely that is a dreadful pity. Fancy listening to God! I had a brother who grew to be a fine football player in his day. And once when he was very wee he went to see a match, and came home all excitement, because the greatest Rugby man in Scotland in those times had spoken to him. 'What did he say to you?' asked my father. And the boy answered proudly, 'Stand back to the touch-line, you young fool!' It wasn't very much; but his hero, of whom he kept dreaming, had spoken to him sure enough. God wouldn't speak to us like that at all, but He *would* speak if we would hear Him. And I remember meeting a Prime Minister once in an Edinburgh drawing-room long ago. He did not say much, seemed a little bored indeed. But there it is—I have had a talk with a Prime Minister. But you might talk with God, might listen to Him every day! How interesting, how exciting, how just splendid! What heaps He knows, and how much He can help us! And things are sometimes a bit difficult and horrid, aren't they? When Dad's there to tell us what to do, it isn't so bad; but when we are alone! But we are never alone. And God always will help us if we can hear Him. In the dark some of you little ones get scared. But there would be no need, if you could hear God close beside you, taking care of you. And sometimes we make such a mess of things, and we are so ashamed. How lovely it would be if we could hear God saying, not in words or sounds, but you know how I mean, 'Well, little one, we must do better next time,' not one bit cross or crabbed, but gentle and kind.

[1] By the Reverend A. J. Gossip, M.A., Aberdeen.

What a pity if we are losing it all; if hearing, we hear nothing of all that! I think we must get over that somehow. 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak,' said a wise man long ago; 'I am going to train my ears to listen to Him, every day and all the day. I am not to allow myself lose any longer far the best and the most glorious thing there is to hear.' Don't you think we should do that too?

The Little Pine Tree.[1]

'Watch ye, stand fast.'—1 Co 16[13].

By the gate that led into the heart of the ancient wood a little pine tree was growing. He was not very tall. You would not have noticed him at all, unless you stooped to pick some of the foxgloves that towered above him, and laughed because they were taller than a pine tree.

He did not quite like it always. It was not pleasant to be a pine tree and to have foxgloves looking down upon you. But the old pine trees, all dignified and straight, tried to cheer him.

'Never mind the foxgloves,' they said, 'you will be here when they are gone, and some day you will be so tall that they will not be able to see your head without breaking their backs. Just keep growing and who knows what will become of you one day. It may be that they will make you the mast of a tall ship, and you will go to all the far places of the world, or perhaps they will make you a pole to carry telephone wires, and all day long you will listen to what men say to one another; or perhaps they will paint you white and use you just to carry one of the great flags of which men are so proud—who knows. Only remember, there is just one thing that matters—you must grow straight. For only that which is straight is strong.'

On sleepy summer afternoons when the foxgloves' bells were ringing sleepy slumber songs, and the bees were droning in their drowsy ways, the little pine tree would dream of being the mast of a tall ship, and journeying across the ocean and seeing the far lands, or of carrying all day long the messages men send to one another, and he would wake up to find himself saying: 'I must grow straight.'

The great storm winds overheard and laughed to themselves. 'Let us bend him,' they said, 'let us make a crooked tree of him, that the pines may be ashamed of him and men shall find him useless.' And the storm winds laughed in their hearts, and thought that with so small a tree, they could do whatever they willed.

So when the winter came, and the trees were bare, so that the little pine tree had no shelter, the great winds blew with all their might, and tried to bend him to their will and make him crooked. Often the little pine tree had to bow before them, but as soon as they had passed, he whipped himself back again, crying: 'I must grow straight, for only that which is straight is strong.' And when the storm winds came they found him just as straight as before.

'We did not blow long enough,' the storm winds said, so day after day they blew in one direction, and bent the little pine tree over until his back was one great pain, and every fibre ached. At long last the storm winds wearied and there was a calm. Then slowly and very painfully the little pine tree began to straighten himself again. It was very slow, very slow indeed, for the fibres had been twisted this way and that by the winds. But he persevered, little by little, and at last he stood straight and tall again.

The storm winds were angry that the little pine tree proved himself so much stronger than they were, so they came back again, and tore a branch from a tall tree, and threw it on him, so that the weight of it bent him to the ground.

They laughed aloud as they passed by, for the pine tree was small, and the branch was heavy, and they thought he would never free himself from it. 'Now,' they said, 'we shall see whether he will grow straight.'

The little pine tree was almost in despair, for try as he would, he could not free himself from the branch that weighed him down. He heaved and strained, strained and twisted, twisted and heaved, and at last he moved it a little, and then a little more, and little by little he got free; little by little he straightened up. 'I must grow straight,' he said, 'for only that which is straight is strong.'

And he found it even as the old pine trees had said to him. He was stronger for every fight he fought with the storm winds, and every time he kept straight he grew stronger.

. . . . . .

Many years after, the little pine tree had grown so tall and strong that men made of him a mast for a tall ship that journeyed over the world of the seven

[1] By the Reverend Wm. J. May, Gosport.

seas, and the branches he carried now were heavy yards, and his leaves were threshing, white sails.

Once more the storm winds came. 'We could not bend him in the woodlands,' they said, 'but we will break him now upon the seas.'

The winds laughed in their glee to think that now they had the pine tree at their mercy, and shrieked and howled, and cried of all they would do to the pine tree that would grow straight, until men upon the deck of the ship held their breath for fear. Hurriedly they furled the beating sails that the winds tried to tear from the yards, carefully looked to see that every rope was fast, and overhead the storm winds mocked them, and howled again.

They lashed the white-maned horses of the sea into fury, until they fell upon the ship, and threatened to devour her, now tossing her as though she were a ball they threw from hand to hand, now rolling her from side to side, as if eager to overturn her, and all the time they tore and strained the tall pine mast, bent and twisted it this way and that, until the pine tree cried aloud in his pain.

Down on the deck men looked up through the dark at the straining mast. 'Will the mast stand?' they said to one another. 'If the mast goes, we can never save the ship. If the storm carries away the mast—we are lost.'

And the little pine tree remembered the lesson of the woodlands: 'I must grow straight,' so that every time there was a lull, he straightened again, and settled himself for the next squall.

By and by the winds had exhausted their strength. They roared in their fury because they were defeated, but after an angry squall or two they died away. Men breathed freely once more, sails were set, and the good ship went on her way. 'It was that mast that saved us,' they said to each other; but they did not know that the mast was strong, strong enough to weather the storm and save the ship, because as a little pine tree in the woodlands he had grown strong by growing straight.

The storm winds beat him
  This way and that;
Twisted him and tore him,
  Almost beat him flat.
That plucky pine tree
  Growing by the gate,
Kept repeating to himself,
  'I must grow straight.'

Evil men will tempt you
  Down evil ways;
Laugh at you and tease you,
  Tell you evil pays.
Learn to answer wisely:—
  'This I calculate;
Only one thing matters,
  I must go straight.'

The Christian Year.

SEPTUAGESIMA.

Temperance.

'And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.'—1 Co 9.[25]

The self-restraint, the obedience to law, the sacrifice of pleasure for an end, the unbroken perseverance, the mastery of self, were the powers which earned, more even than the attained palm, the approval and honour of philosophic Greece. And these were all embodied in one virtue, the virtue of temperance, the virtue which in all the spheres of human effort, physical, moral, artistic, and intellectual, was among the wiser Greeks the greatest. And, because of the obedience given to it, it happened that the Greeks became, while they obeyed it, the masters of the world in all the arts of life and in the art of living.

With this thought they had filled the ancient society; and when its influence decayed, that society broke to pieces, and its arts fell headlong into corruption. But still enough of the old teaching remained in St. Paul's time to seize on his mind, searching into all that was good in pagan life; enough remained to make him select that element of temperance out of paganism for absorption into Christianity; enough remained to give his comparison weight among his audience. Again and again, and especially in this passage, he claims temperance as a Christian virtue; and so it is. But, in one sense, it stands alone. It is not only a virtue in itself; it is also the guard and girdle—as Ruskin calls it—of all the other virtues. It is, as it were, the Cestus which clasps together the full drapery of each virtue and prevents it from flying to the winds of either extreme; which keeps its folds together; binds it into grave harmonies; retains it in its place; fits it tightly to the figure of each act; and makes the virtue itself, by such noble restraint of its forms, beautiful in the eyes of men.

Every virtue needs this virtue, as every robe needs its girdle.

It was right of St. Paul to claim it as Christian, for it was the ruler of the life of Jesus. We see its power in the silent thirty years of Nazareth. The thought of His mission burned within Him. Youth and all its emotions, ideas, and all their excitement urged Him forth. Day by day the passion grew. But, stronger than all was the resolute self-restraint, the clear-eyed self-control which kept Him back from moving out of His simple village life, until He felt fitted for the strife, until the right hour struck upon the dial of time.

It is a great lesson to our life in this hasty, ill-regulated time. It speaks gravely to our intemperate desire to fling ourselves, in the raw youthfulness of twenty years, into the whirl of life, where, because we have had no quiet and formative time within, we lose individuality in a few years, and become only one of the spindles that whirl in the manufactory of modern society. It was otherwise with Jesus Christ. Not till He knew what He was, not till His ideas and their form were clearly grasped, did He come forth to live openly in the sight of men. And when He came, it was His self-restraint, and the resolution to develop His ideas temperately that were tempted. 'Be quick,' said the voice of the Jewish world, which He interpreted as the voice of the devil—'Seize on your kingdom at once, snatch your day!' And He answered 'No' to all. With the negative He accepted the temperate life, the life of the noiseless worker whose voice was not heard in the streets; the career of one who kept at bay immoderate desires, display, force, fame, all wild excitement. If He should inherit the earth it would be through meekness; if He should make the Kingdom, it would be through humbleness of spirit; if He should be master of the human heart, it would be through the self-restraint of love. Temperate in all the work of life, self-controlled, bound in every action, every speech, by the rule of His ideas, sacrificing everything to them—He lived in self-mastery. Therefore He mastered men and won an immortal end. 'It is finished,' was a word in which the triumph of this temperance was concentrated and declared.

It was owing to temperance that certain deep impressions have been made upon the world by the life of Jesus—the impressions of *unity*, *intensity*, *power*, and *peace*.

1. Jesus raised *unity* into the dominant principle of the temperate life. It was to be lived, not only for the purpose of being beautiful, or in harmony according to the Greek ideal, not only for self-development or self-power—but chiefly to reveal what was the life which would make other men happy. Its only true motive was the love of the human race. And this should be our motive; not self-training, not striving for the mastery in order to develop or save oneself, but temperance in all things in order to be able to live in love of men, in order to save others. Without that aim the moral life ends in selfishness, the temperate life in pride. With that aim it ends in self-forgetfulness and in humility. And it is this aim which will alone secure that the impression made by the life will be one—and permanent. If while we live our moral life we are thinking of ourselves, we give the world a divided impression—an impression of moral temperance, but also an impression of self-righteousness.

It is different when the temperate life springs from love. It has then one motive; and that motive is so powerful, and so all-embracing, that it alone remains, one individual influence, on the hearts of men. Love catches hold of them. They feel, as they look, as if the sunlight that makes all things beautiful, was pouring into them from this attractive life. They say, 'This was a brother; he did not stand apart; my sin and failure did not make him shrink from me, but drew him closer to my side. He gave himself for all he met, he lived, he suffered, he bore all sorrows and conquered all temptations, he controlled his whole life, for the sake of giving some happiness and peace to men, women and children who were poor and sad and ill at ease, and troubled with sin. He did not care whether the world thought him good or bad, he cared only to do all things for Love. For that he sacrificed even the good repute of the moral and the religious world. We see only one thing in him—one Divine and beautiful thing by which all his life is harmonized—unbroken unity of Love.'

2. The second impression made was *intensity*. Men think there is no room for passion in the temperate life; and were it so, it would be unfortunate, because all fine work needs intensity of feeling. But it is not so. There is no need to limit or restrain that love of others which is the root of the temperate life. The more of this love the better. There is satiety of all things which belong to love

of self; there is none in our love of others. Were that possible, God Himself, who loves for ever, might be afflicted with satiety.

3. The third impression was *power*. The practice of temperance for the sake of love does not lessen, but increases intensity. There is a false passion in violence; and it is doomed to exhaustion. But the passion which is never allowed by temperance to pass beyond the point at which it consumes itself is always retained at white heat. It retains power, and in its temperance is hid its power.

4. Lastly, it is this consistent government, this subordination, by temperance, of all the powers of our nature within their just limits, so that each has its value for the sake of the whole being, and all are directed by one will to one end, the healing of mankind as the child of God—it is this which brings *peace* into life, that peace for which we crave so bitterly, and most bitterly when our self-indulgence has brought us peacelessness.

Peace will only be ours when we have mastered self-desires for the sake of love; when, in temperate government of the soul by One Law of Love, we have won the self-forgetfulness of Jesus Christ. Then the soul—having unity in its diversity, having passion subdued to whiteness of flame by self-control, having power because all its qualities radiate to one point where burns the Love of God for man—His child—has peace within, deep as the seas of eternity. The aim of life is One; and the impression made by life is One. We are not only at peace. We bring peace. We have sown it; it is our harvest. Temperate in all things, we have striven for victory, and victory is attained.[1]

SEXAGESIMA.

The many Mansions of the Father's House.

'In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.'—Jn 14^2.

Having secured the faith of the disciples, Jesus gave the *promise of a heavenly home*, which was meant and fitted to allay the trouble of heart felt by them. The promise is accompanied by a two-fold pledge, the pledge of *His significant silence* and the pledge of *His designed departure*.

1. *The promise of the heavenly home.*—As regards the promise of the heavenly home, two questions call for an answer. What does Jesus mean by 'my Father's house'? and what are 'the many mansions'? The Greek phrase is not used elsewhere; but in Lk 2^{49} the more probable rendering of the indefinite ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρός is 'in my Father's house.' The temple is described as the house of the Lord in Ps 23^6. In Ps 90^1 it is said of the Lord, 'Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.' If we follow the suggestion of the first passage from the Psalms, we shall describe the Father's house as 'the heavenly antitype of the temple, to which Jesus had formerly applied this name.' Earth in this case will not be included in, but by contrast with heaven excluded from, the Father's house. If we are guided as to the meaning of the phrase by the second passage, we shall think of the Father's house as constituted by God's presence; and so earth will be included as well as heaven. For Jesus, probably the local distinction of earth and heaven did not exist; and, when in the prayer He taught His disciples, He described God as in heaven, or bade them pray for the fulfilment of God's will on earth as in heaven, He had in view a contrast of state. Wherever God is known to be, wherever His nearness is felt with trust and gladness, wherever His favour is enjoyed and His will is done, there is heaven. Throughout the whole of His farewell discourse God is thought of as present and not distant, as revealing and communicating Himself to faith and love, and so the world too is included in the Father's house.

If, then, we take the Father's house as embracing the whole universe because of God's presence in it, we shall be led to another view of the phrase 'many mansions.' In v.[10] Jesus thus describes His relation to the Father: 'Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works.' In view of the use of the word μένων in the last clause, we may give the first clause the meaning, the Father is the Son's *mansion* or abode, and the Son is the Father's *mansion* or abode. In v.[23], again, we read: 'If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode (μονήν) with him.' The man who loves and obeys the Son will be the *mansion* or abode of both Father and Son. Again, in ch. 15^{1-10}, the disciple is represented as having his abode in, and as himself being the abode of, the Master. To be conscious of God's presence about us as our abode, and of God's presence in ourselves

[1] S. A. Brooke, *The Kingship of Love*, 129 ff.

as God's abode, is to dwell in one of the mansions of the Father's house. Not in heaven as contrasted with earth are many mansions, for here on earth God is man's and man is God's mansion.

If this is the meaning of the two phrases 'my Father's house' and 'many mansions,' what did Jesus mean by His assurance at this time to His disciples? Was He thinking of earth exclusively, and was His promise to His disciples this, that while in their sensible companionship with Him they had realized God's presence within and without, and so had been in one of the mansions, yet His departure from them would be followed by such a spiritual fellowship with Him that God's presence would still be with them, and thus they would be still in the Father's house, if in another mansion? This thought is entirely and certainly true.

But this is not all that the promise means.

Jesus is here casting the light of His revelation on the dark mystery of death. Christian thought has not been mistaken in finding here the assurance that beyond death the Father's love reaches, and keeps His children safe and happy. The fact which filled the minds of the disciples was Jesus' departure from them by death. Before they could assign any meaning to a promise of a spiritual instead of a sensible fellowship with Him by His Spirit, they must be assured that death would not and could not end all, that He their Master would live and work in God after His death as He had done hitherto. The assurance of Jesus does not refer in the first clause, although it does in the last, primarily to the disciples, but to Himself. He is assuring them that for Him there is another mansion in the Father's house after His departure from them. In His earthly life He has had His abode in God; He is, in His departure from them in His death, passing into another abode for heavenly life.

Is this foresight of God's dealing with Himself in death unintelligible and incredible, even as rooted in and springing out of His insight into His relation to God as Son to Father? Surely not. While in relation to the context the assurance refers primarily to Jesus Himself, yet the reference is not exclusive. It was His vocation to bring men into relation with God as Father; and He was not likely to claim for Himself a privilege that He would withhold from others. While for the immediate situation He must assure His disciples that His own death meant only passing into another mansion of the Father's house, yet that assurance included the promise, stated more explicitly in the last clause of this verse, and in the next verse, that for them too, when death came, it would be only a change of one mansion for another.

2. *The pledges of the heavenly home.*—From this promise we may pass to the pledges given. The A.V. and the R.V. suggest two distinct pledges, as the only difference between them is the insertion in the R.V. of the conjunction *for* between the two parts of the sentence; the designed departure is thus given as the reason for the significant silence: and yet each may still be regarded as a distinct pledge.

To what does the significant silence refer? Jesus had been revealing God's Fatherhood, His universal and constant bounty to, care over, and grace towards men. Such a love could not be confined to the present life; such a relation could not be ended by death. Because God is Father, it is a necessary and even legitimate inference that there are many mansions in His house. This view finds confirmation in Jesus' argument against the Sadducees: 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living' (Mt 22^{32}); that God has fellowship with men is a guarantee of human immortality. Did God's love not warrant such a hope, He who revealed that love would have indicated this limitation; He would not have suffered men to deceive themselves by the very truth He had taught.

But the promise of the heavenly home is pledged not only by His significant silence, but also by His designed departure. He had been constantly assuring the disciples that His death was no accident, but a necessity according to the Divine purpose. He must complete His ministry among and unto men by giving His life a ransom for many (Mt 20^{28}). He was offering His life as the sacrifice of the new covenant between God and man (26^{28}); it was expedient for them that He should go, for His departure was the condition of the Spirit's presence with them (Jn 16^{7}); there could be for them another mansion in the Father's house only as He prepared it for them. The work of Christ is a unity, and therefore we must regard all these objects of the death of Christ as intimately and inseparably related to one another.

Whatever theory we may hold of the Atonement, the common testimony of the New Testament is that His sacrifice was the condition of man's

salvation. While God's eternal disposition of love towards mankind was not changed by the death of Jesus, the historical dispensation of Grace was constituted in that death.

And the disciples must themselves be prepared for the place being prepared for them. In the earthly companionship they had not yet been made fit and worthy to pass from the earthly to the heavenly mansion of the Father's house. Their relation to Jesus must be developed and completed in their spiritual communion, and that stage of development would have been delayed and hindered by His visible presence.

If Christ be the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, the significance and value of His person and work cannot be confined to earth and time. The Epistle to the Hebrews has much to say of His Heavenly Intercession. He Himself did mean something when He described to His disciples His continual ministry in the unseen as the preparation of a place for them. While we must abstain from the idle indulgence of our imagination, and many Christian hymns have probably gone beyond the bounds of serious thought and sober feeling in descriptions of heaven, yet we may venture to believe that this preparation of a place for us means that the future life will be ordered perfectly by the saving grace, and the sacrificial love of the Lord who died for us. If we may follow the guidance of an inspired utterance such as 1 Jn 3^2, 'We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is,' detaching it from its immediate reference to the Second Advent, we are led to the hope that the preparation of a place for us means a still fuller and clearer manifestation of God in Christ in the heavenly home than was possible in the earthly; and that this will have as its twofold consequence a more immediate and intimate communion, and a greater and a growing resemblance to the Saviour and Lord so revealed to us.[1]

QUINQUAGESIMA.

The Rainbow.

'I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.'—Gn 9^{13}.

A thought of mercy, an emotion of hope was induced—perhaps everywhere, and certainly among the old Israelites—by the rainbow in the midst of storm. The contrast of its delicate brightness with the black fury of cloud behind it, and its opportune arrival just as the storm breaks up, seemed like a signal of hope and a promise of the merciful beneficence that dwelt in the heavens despite all tempest. That radiant arch filled men with delight and admiration even in the midst of all the discomfort and peril of savage weather. It restored their spirits, as daybreak does to a sleepless sufferer, or to shipwrecked outcasts upon the sea. Any one can be cheerful with the return of light; but here was not light only, but colour most gorgeous and most tender, woven by superhuman wizardry, and curved with exquisite grace and vast breadth of power from horizon to horizon. A world with so stupendously beautiful an object in it might surely be trusted—an object born out of the very bosom of the storm itself. What could it indicate, this triumph of magical light over grim darkness, save the merciful goodwill of the Eternal Power? 'When I bring a cloud over the earth, my bow shall be seen in the cloud; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.' Thus it seemed to their hearts that God spake.

And even we sophisticated people of to-day must, I think, be similarly touched if we let our imaginations dwell for a little on this marvel of the rainbow. When science has done all it can to explain its origin, the thing still remains as surprising as any magic and lovelier than any deliberate art. It is next to impossible to look at its radiant grace and not incline to believe it the work of a Mind that is careful for beauty; no wild and savage power bent upon destruction, but a calm and dexterous power bent upon construction, determined to draw forward and exalt our human spirits by flashes of unearthly beauty. Keats, in his *Lamia*, complains that rationalistic philosophy dispels the sense of the supernatural:

There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
Unweave a rainbow.

But such is not the deepest philosophy. You may explain the whole process of the refraction of

[1] A. E. Garvie, *The Master's Comfort and Hope*, 49 ff.

light, the prismatic action of the falling raindrops, and the geometrical laws that govern the shape of the bow; but still the heart replies: 'from worlds not quickened by the sun a portion of the gift is won.' For this thing has communications to make with the emotions as well as with the analysing intellect. We are as sure that joy and confidence flow from it as that certain laws of physics govern its appearing. It reveals a world of spiritual values as certainly as the spectroscope discovers new substances or the telescope new stars. It is what it looks to be—a bridge between heaven and earth.

Let us have courage to trust this world, then—a world flashing with rainbows amidst its clouds and glooms, physical and spiritual wonders standing out of the most black and bitter circumstances to dazzle us with revelation of the grace enshrined at the heart of things. Let the magic rainbow be to us, as to old Israel, a symbol of God's covenant with humanity. This brilliant ethereal creature born of the marriage of light and water; this fairy tapestry hung in heaven; this sudden elusive apparition which our hearts leap to behold, is a sign from the Almighty, a promise of the ultimate beatitude of life.[1]

It was just this inner spiritual meaning of Nature that God was teaching Noah here. Noah had seen the rainbow many a time before. He had admired it, very likely, for the beauty of its colours. But, henceforth, it is to be more to him than a natural phenomenon, he is to see more in it than the radiant beauty of its colours. Henceforward the rainbow is to have for him a spiritual meaning; it is to carry his thought up to God; it is to be the sign and symbol of a new covenant between God and the earth.

But the rainbow in the cloud suggests more than the sacramental nature of the world in which we live. It is suggestive of God's mercy and care even in the dark experiences of life.

1. *The rainbow in the cloud of sin and guilt.*—Without entering upon any critical questions in connexion with the story of the Deluge, it is enough that Scripture represents it as God's doom upon monstrous wickedness and sin. The story of the Deluge, in a word, preaches those two stern and solemn truths that are woven into the very fabric of Scripture—that the human race is a sinful race, and that the wages of sin is death.

[1] L. Johnson, *The Legends of Israel*, 29.

Now that dark and gloomy and threatening cloud of sin is still in our sky—a cloud full of lightnings and thunders and bodeful of storm and tempest. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none that doeth good, no not one. We are all of us shut up under the law of sin and death. But, thank God, I can see His bow in the cloud! The rainbow in the physical world results from the shining of the sun upon the dark rain-cloud. And so to-day the sunshine of God's great love falling upon the black cloud of human sin, creates the rainbow of mercy.

'Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'—that is the cloud; 'Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord'—that is the rainbow. 'I am carnal, sold under sin'—that is the cloud; 'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin'—that is the rainbow. What God did in the wealth of His love in view of human sin was to give His only-begotten Son, and as the result of what Jesus did on the cross, mercy is made possible for every sinner. Christ crucified is the rainbow. He is God's pledge of mercy to a guilty world. 'There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.' The threatening and menacing cloud is in the sky of every one of us. Have we all seen the rainbow? We are all of us under the law of sin and death. Have we found mercy in the cross of Christ?

There are two noticeable features of the rainbow: (1) First of all, it seems to unite heaven and earth. Its ends are on the earth, its arch is in the sky. And so Jesus Christ, God's rainbow, has united God and man together. He has bridged the gulf that separated them. He has reconciled us to God by the blood of His cross, having slain the enmity thereby. (2) And, secondly, the rainbow seems to embrace the world. Between its arms it gathers all the earth that we can see. And in this it is but a type of the all-embracing love of Christ and mercy of God. 'There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea.'

2. *The rainbow in sorrow.*—Sorrow comes to all of us in turn. But if we look, there is always a bow in it. Samuel Rutherford was transported from his beloved Anwoth into exile in Aberdeen. It was a heavy trial. But this is how he wrote to the parishioners from whom he had been snatched: 'Why should I draw back when God

driveth His furrow through my soul? He purposeth a crop.' He had seen the rainbow. Here it is: 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.'

Here is another man into whose sky the dark and heavy clouds of sore temptation have sailed. He finds himself in some Pergamum or other where Satan's throne is. It is a ceaseless and grim fight with him from day to day, for honour and life. But even in that cloud I see God's bow. Here it is: 'God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation open up a way of escape'; and again this, 'I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which cometh upon all the earth to try them that dwell therein.' Whatever the cloud, there is always the bow in the shape of this blessed and beautiful assurance, 'All things work together for good to them that love God.'

3. *The rainbow in judgment.*—'We shall all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,' says Paul, 'that each one may receive the thing done in the body according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.' 'According to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad'—the words strike fear to our soul. For we have all of us done things we ought not to have done, and left undone things we ought to have done.

But Paul's picture is not quite complete. We turn to John for the completion of the picture. Paul leaves us shuddering before the Great White Throne. John, by the touch he adds, gives us boldness in the day of judgment. Here it is: 'And there was a rainbow round about the throne.' The great White Throne does not stand for truth merely; in it mercy and truth are met together: it does not stand for bare and sheer righteousness merely; in it righteousness and peace have kissed each other. There is a rainbow round about the throne. God's mercy will surround us. Our Judge will prove a pitiful and merciful Saviour. He will 'blot out, as a thick cloud, our transgressions and, as a cloud, our sins,' and, remembering only our feeble love for Himself, our feeble efforts at goodness, our poor and unworthy attempts at service, He will say, 'Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

The rainbow in the cloud—have we seen it? There is only one way to see it, and that is to see God in Christ. He is God's 'bow' to the world—God's pledge and promise of mercy and love to the world.[1]

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

The Stir which comes with Hope.

'And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself.'—1 Jn 3^3.

As we get older, life, from the point of view of religion, becomes much simpler, becomes indeed a very simple thing. We begin to see that 'one thing only is needful'—and this, that we each have some honest and direct communion with Christ which controls us; some dear and private love which keeps our heart soft and open to the voices which beckon us towards the eternal world of the good.

As we get older, we see very plainly that the one thing we need to be afraid of is not so much that we shall fall into grievous sins, but rather that we shall fall away from the living God, that we shall lose a certain tenderness of the soul, a certain freshness of view, a certain fine liability to pain and joy with regard to Christ, such as we knew in our youth in other matters, in those matters which were at that time the most urgent and precious. The one thing we come to be afraid of is not that we shall break through the decencies of life, but only this—that we shall get *past feeling*, and end at best in a certain monotonous correctness, having lost from the world of our soul the thrill of the dawn and the pathos of the twilight, the awe and majesty of the immeasurable sea, the glancing misgivings of our spirit like the dreadful glory of waves. The effect of life which is most to be dreaded is that we become stale.

It would be a great matter, therefore, if at a time like this we could come upon some thought, some vision of reality, of God, which might have the effect of sending our blood more strongly through our veins—something which would have the effect upon us of making us rise; something which would stir us as we can remember ourselves having been stirred, in some 'crowded hour of glorious life,' when something dawned upon us, making new heavens and a new earth.

Deeply considered, these words of St. John are well fitted to bring to all of us a new interest in ourselves, to let loose within us unsuspected wells of living water. And further, they convey but *one*

[1] J. D. Jones, *The Hope of the Gospel*, 74 ff.

thought, they have that simplicity which as we get older we come to desire the more in our spiritual directions.

The point the Apostle has come to is this: 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God': that is to say, 'How generous of God, to call people like us His children!' Yet such we are. The world—those who are out of the secret—do not know us for children of God. Indeed, we should never have claimed such a degree for ourselves. We seem to ourselves in many things far indeed from being God's children. And yet there is that now within us which at least makes it not ridiculous in us to call ourselves such.

That is our condition just now: we are, by the calling of God, in God's idea of us, His children—His children *de jure*, His children potentially, through the insight and charity of His love. And here is the point: it is not yet manifest what we shall be: it is not yet manifest what we shall be when we have become everything which, according to God's generous way of thinking, we have it in us to become. But we know that one day we shall see God—one day when these trembling lights by which we live give place to the light which is now inaccessible yet full of glory. That is our hope, says St. John, speaking to people like ourselves, who perhaps, as we could believe, thought the words too good, too holy for folk like them. That is our hope: and, he adds, 'Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure.'

When we come to think of it, there is nothing which so immediately lifts us above ourselves as just a hope. St. Paul says, 'We are saved by hope.' It is quite true. When all is said, the one instrument which Jesus used to save men was this—He helped them to hope.

Recall just now any time in your life when some hope, when some event, which was likely to emancipate you, to deliver you it may be from suspense or fear—recall a time when some such hope dawned for you and came near. Do you not remember that it has this wonderful effect upon you—it brought a new spiritual quality into your life? It laid a new strain upon you, it made a new demand upon you, which was not really a demand at all, for you were ready to comply with it. It was a time when—although you might not have so described it—you were very near to God. In short, that hope, whatever it was, simply because it was a hope, had something of the influence which St. John here describes: 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself.'

You will further see why it is that every high hope has this so deep, so beautiful, and so easy influence—the very gift of cleansing us—when you consider what really happens to us when such a hope breaks on us. It really puts a new honour upon our human nature, which compels us to treat ourselves with a new reverence. Or, to put it in other words, hope is a divine guest whom we count ourselves happy to be asked to honour and serve.

All these things, which are true of hope on any level, find their purest expression in the case of such a hope as is here set before us. The hope of seeing Christ, the hope that one day we shall dwell in the presence of God—that is a hope which, in the measure that we realize its greatness and glory, must deliver us from all monotony, and fill each day and hour with a certain private strength, as a gentle wind will stir and enliven trees. And how much we need this inner stirring and exultation let us each humbly confess.

Jesus Christ took this way to touch the hearts of people in His day. He gave them hope. He made an opening for them one by one, in the dead wall of human and inevitable circumstance. He let in the air. He gave them a name, an idea of themselves, which made them kings. Indeed, there is a scripture which says that very thing—'He hath made us to be kings . . . unto God.'

What is it that underlies all the ritual of the Old Testament, and such ritual as the rite of baptism, for example, in the New Testament? What is the unquenchable idea that finds its utterance in washings and fastings, in severities, in abstinence, in the whiteness of the linen of sacred things—what is it but the precious instinct to do honour, in personal cleanness and orderliness, to that new idea of ourselves which in one way or another has come to us? It is the instinct to try to be worthy of the love that has been shown us. It is the imperious demand which we make upon ourselves to follow the highest when we truly see it. 'Every man who hath a great hope purifieth himself.'[1]

[1] J. A. Hutton, *There They Crucified Him*, 233 ff.