

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

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

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

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

Two Funny Little Fellows, and what they can become.¹

'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.'—Ro 13¹⁴.

OF course you know what tadpoles are, those funny little creatures that grow up into frogs, though they are not one bit like frogs; so wee, and so wriggly, and all tail. Nothing could be less like a frog; and yet into frogs they grow, if you let them alone. And you are a kind of tadpole too! You are fairly wee, and certainly you are wriggly (do you ever sit still at all?), and you are not always going to be what you are, will grow up into something else quite different, are doing so every day. Once on a time you were a baby, just a soft little lump; though don't you tell Mother I called Baby that, or there will be trouble for some one. You couldn't walk, not even the staggery way your baby manages by now, had to be carried everywhere; you couldn't speak, could only cry; and you did it unashamed, for anything and everything and nothing at all. But now you are a great huge lassie who can help with the little ones; can run like a hare and beat the boys; are not a bit like what you used to be. Couldn't speak! Do you ever stop talking nowadays? And you would never dream of crying—get up from a spill and laugh about it; and even if your knee is cut, tie a hanky round it, and play on. You are not a baby any longer; you are a girl, or a boy. And soon you will have left that, too, behind, and have grown up into something else. That is what tadpoles do, if you leave them alone. But the wise men can do all kinds of queer things with them. You couldn't; and, if you tried, you would kill them. But they can. They tell us that they can take the tail bit of one and join it on to the head bit of another; and it, or is it they, lives, or is it live, on quite happily. That would be rather fine, wouldn't it, if you could do that with yourself; could go about picking up the best bits of other people. You are pretty clumsy at football, and Tommie Brown can shoot so straight and hard; well, let us take his feet, that will make a good foundation to begin with; and as Johnnie Smith leaves all the others far behind in every race, we'll have his legs; and Donald Something sits at the

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

head of the class day after day, and does sums as easy as look at them, while you get so tied up and puzzled; we must get his head; and Peter Someone-else has such clever hands at drawing, while you keep rubbing out and rubbing out, till you have rubbed right through the paper; and the master says, 'Yes, that is not a bad football, but why has it got toothache?' when you thought that you had drawn a cat and two kittens! If you could build yourself up, a bit here and a bit there—ah, well! I don't think that would do, really. It would be so confusing; you would never be sure whether you were yourself or somebody else; and Mother would never know whether she was darning your stockings, or Johnnie Smith's, washing your hair, or Donald Somebody's. And in any case she would like her own stupid tousley boy better than any other; and so would God. If He had wanted a laddie with Donald Somebody's head and Peter Someone-else's hands He could have made him; but He wants you. Better let the tadpoles alone.

But then there is another thing that these wise men can do with them; they can keep them from growing up for years and years and years. The other tadpoles that started with them become frogs; are quite sedate and prim and never want to play at all; but they keep tadpoles still, wee and wriggly and all tail. You wouldn't like that at all; you long to grow up; to be able to sit up as long as you like every night, and not to be hustled off to bed. But Mother is not so sure. Did you never hear her saying, 'I wish they wouldn't grow up so fast, they will soon all be away'? Don't you let her keep you a tadpole! Don't you be molly-coddled and made soft! It is all right that you should be petted when you are wee, but you're too big for that; it's only a baby that cries when it doesn't get all that it wants, and you are past that now. No, no! you must grow up; the tadpole must become a frog; and it is silly to keep them from it. Let them alone, and all tadpoles do grow frogs. It doesn't look very exciting. Yet all tadpoles just long for it; that is what makes them so wriggly; they are so eager till it really happens that they can't keep still. And you sometimes lie in bed and dream of what you are going to be—a tramway-driver or a motor-man, or a great football player, or a batsman like Hobbs who has

got one hundred and five centuries now ; well, all tadpoles dream of growing into frogs, like that, think that would be far more exciting than knocking balls about, or driving motors.

There is something far more splendid and exciting you might be than any of the things you've thought of yet. A caterpillar, you know, can become a butterfly, and some of them grow into just the common black-and-white ones that are apt to be about the currant bushes ; but some become red admirals, lovely things, beautifully worked and coloured. And you can grow up into something bigger and better and far more wonderful than you have ever dared to think. A wise Frenchman said that you and I are the tadpoles of archangels : that we can become these splendid creatures of God, with their glistening wings and their noble lives. That's wonderful ; but we can do better even than that ! For we can put on the Lord Jesus Christ, can grow up like Him, can gain His ways. And you know what He was like ; how gloriously brave and unselfish and kind ; how every one in trouble ran to Him, and He always found some way for them. And you too can become like that. Nothing could be less like Him than we are now, so cross and grumpy. Ah ! but the crawling caterpillar isn't like a butterfly ; and yet it is one by and by, and a tadpole couldn't well be more different from a frog, and yet into a frog it grows. And you can become like Jesus Christ. Isn't that splendid ? If I were you, every night when I say my prayers, I would tell God, ' Yes, this is better, oh, far better ! than the tramway-driver or the batsman ; please, give me this.' And He will do it. It may take some time, a long time it may be ; and yet it will come, if you ask earnestly ; and it's worth waiting for, to be like Jesus Christ.

The Foot that Stands.¹

' I went down to the potter's house ; and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.'—Jer 18³.

This passage tells how a prophet watched a potter working with the clay on his wheel. He watched the shapeless lump of clay spinning round, and under the potter's hand rising up into the shape of a cup. Suddenly it collapsed. The potter stopped his wheel, crushed the cup back into a lump again and made out of it another vessel.

Then an idea came to him, a ' word of the Lord,'

¹ By the Reverend Stuart Robertson, M.A., Glasgow.

he says ; and it was this, that what the potter did to the clay, God was doing to His people, making them over again after they had failed in His hand.

That is how ' the word of the Lord ' came to people : not by a voice that all could hear, but through the eyes that could see and minds that could understand what they saw, and gather the gold of God's truth from crevices of common everyday things.

That is how ' words of God ' still come. Here is one that came the other day to a lady who, like the prophet Jeremiah, had gone down to the house of the potter.

It was not in the East, where they sit at work, but in an English village. The potter stood at his work, and drove the wheel with his foot. When he had finished a work and was preparing another, she said, ' Your foot must get very tired driving the wheel ? ' ' No,' he said, ' it isn't the foot that works that is tired : it's the foot that stands.'

That was ' a word of the Lord ' to that lady, and when I read it, it was a word of the Lord to me, and I want to pass it on so that it may be a word of the Lord to you. It is a word that sings itself into a kind of lilt. Make it one of your songs :

' It isn't the foot that works that tires ;
It's the foot that's standing still.'

Here we are at the wheel of life, trying to make the clay of our own character into something that will hold and keep the joy and goodness of life.

We have two sides to our nature, like the two feet of the potter—our body and our soul. I suppose a sensible potter learns to work with his left foot as well as his right, and gives them turn about at the treadle, so that both grow strong together, and the strong foot is not held back and hindered by the weak. It's no use being one-sided. It's no use having one leg like Samson's, if the other is a spindle-shank. It's no use having one leg with a calf like the fatted calf, if the other is like one of Pharaoh's lean kine. It's no use being able on the one side to run like Eric Liddell, if the other side can hardly hobble. For the two sides have to go together : their pace will be the pace of the slower side, their strength the strength of the weaker.

These things sound absurd ; but they are just what is happening to many people in terms of their body and their soul.

One side is very busy ; the other gets too little to do. We all have plenty to do on the one side, men at their work and business, housewives in their homes, boys and girls with lessons and games and hobbies. But the other side, the side of worship and prayer and serving God and reading His word—that side is underworked. And because the soul is underworked, the soul is tired ; and because the soul is tired, the body tires too.

The world is full of tired folk. They come to the end of the week, they tell you, tired out, too tired to go to church. The reason why they are so tired is not because they have overworked their body, it is because they are underworking their soul. It is tired because it has nothing to do. It's left to loaf about the corners of life, and loafing is more exhausting than any work can ever be.

The remedy for the boy or girl that is tired after Saturday's football or hockey is not to lie in bed on Sunday morning, but to get up and go to church and give their soul a chance.

If you're fagged with the week's lessons, the remedy is not to stop thinking, but to think about something else. Go to Sunday school or Bible class and let your mind think on the things of God. Then you will be refreshed for Monday.

Tired bodies and worried, overworked minds will find their healing in worshipping and praising God.

All life will gain strength as the soul is strong, and it can't be strong if it be left standing idle.

'It isn't the foot that works that tires,
It's the foot that's standing still.'

The Christian Year.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

In Quest of Tranquillity.

'Oh that I had wings like a dove ! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.'—Ps 55⁶.

The probability is that tranquillity of mind is even less common than an observer might be disposed to think. There are a great many who obviously are unhappy ; and when we add those who, though joyless at heart, are too proud to show it, or too well-bred not to keep up an apparent flow of spirits, we may be sure that there is a very widespread demand for the secret of peace. As a fact, the conditions of human life are such that man may seem to be predestined to unrest. Our natural desires are many and exorbitant, and only

a few of them can be gratified as they propose, or even gratified at all. We have a conscience which makes us uncomfortable, and even torments us if we defy it ; and our lives are full of habits or actions which amount to a defiance of conscience. Our affections are fixed on possessions, or on kindred and friends, that are hostages for our happiness, and we hold them all by a more or less precarious tie. We are travelling into an unknown future, in which it is certain that we shall be smitten, bruised, and impoverished by the forces of change and decay, and that in it there awaits us the inevitable event which, it may be with merciful suddenness, it may be after a period of weakness and agony, will carry us away from the light of the sun and from most of the things which have made for our happiness.

The subject is not one which has been overlooked. The work of the world goes on because the world has a working theory as to the secret of peace. Every great religion that has gained a footing among men has prescribed some treatment of the malady. The urgency of the need was observed by Him who knew what is in man, and much of Christ's teaching circled round rest and peace. Let us glance briefly at some of the other famous specifics, and then consider the provisions which are made for dealing with the evil in the Christian gospel.

1. To begin with, the world has its working theory as to the secret of rest. It is that, if we are miserable, it is because we have not enough of this world's goods, or that we have too much of its evils. If he made his fortune, one thinks ; another, if he were famous ; another, if he had power, and so on, he would then be within sight of the sovereign good.

At the opposite extreme from the workaday theory is a prescription which, fanatical and absurd as it seems to us, has played a great part in religious history. The advice given is that man, instead of seeking peace in the acquisition of worldly goods, should seek it by renouncing and despising them. It is a doctrine which has had a strong attraction for the people of India. It was illustrated by the great renunciation of Buddha. He was born and grew up in a court, he was the heir to a throne, he married, and was blessed with the love of wife and child ; then one day, when he chanced to look on sickness and death, he became conscious of the wretchedness of human

existence, turned his back upon the kingship and the sweet home life, joined himself to the saintly sages of the land, and learned their prescription for a victorious and tranquil life. The prescription which they gave was to make his home in a cave, to procure the barest necessities of life by begging, to fast to the verge of starvation, and to afflict the body with additional tortures.

There has always been a grain of sense even in the wildest extravagances of enthusiasm, and there was a substratum of reason in the ascetic mode of life. It rested on the just observation that there is a keen satisfaction in self-denial which is not yielded by self-indulgence, in particular that the source of a great deal of the worst of human misery is due to the rebellion of the body, and that nothing is more needful than to make sure that what was intended for a slave has not gained the upper hand. But as experience proved that many who were most in earnest in this way of life were not even then at peace, and as, moreover, common sense effectively protested that there is ample scope for self-denial in labours which are useful to the world, without having recourse to self-inflicted torments which are of no benefit to society, the remedy fell into discredit in Europe with the Protestant Reformation.

Mention may be made next of the prescription of the Stoics. At the beginning of our era there were many men of great moral earnestness, Greeks and Romans, who claimed to possess in a signal degree the blessing of serenity of mind, especially under the strokes of adversity. How did they teach men to attain to it? We open the pages of Epictetus and we find the ideas expounded in convenient compass. The things which happen in our life, he says, are of two kinds: those which are due to our own voluntary action, and those which are governed, in whole or in part, by forces that are beyond our control. The goods of life, similarly, are of two kinds: those which, because they are in our power, we can be sure of getting; and those which, being outside our control, we cannot be sure of getting or retaining. The general prescription is that we should limit our desires—confining them to those things which are within our power, and leaving out of account those things which depend upon others.

From this general attitude we may certainly learn some practical wisdom. We do well to remember the parable of the Feast, and to behave

as decently in the struggle for the good things of this world, as we should behave at a dinner-party among our friends. It is also useful to distinguish between the things which are, and those which are not, in our own power, and to cultivate the spirit of uncomplaining submission to the inevitable and irreversible dispensations of Providence. But it is not easy to endure as the Stoic recommended without having access to richer sources of comfort than were supplied by his general view of the universe.

2. It was then a much-discussed as well as an ancient and widespread malady which Christ promised to cure when He said, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' In His proposed treatment there was a combination of remedies new and old. But even the old appear in a new setting, and with new elements of healing and consolation.

(1) There is a strain of the teaching of Jesus which does not contain much more than the advice of the Stoic sages to cut down the demands of the self. The great text in which Christ promises rest, when read along with its context, suggests that the reason why so many are restless is that they do not possess the meekness and lowliness which they could learn from His own example.

(2) The old and the new also blend, though with a much larger element of the new, in the teaching of our Lord that the chief source of man's unrest is his general sinful condition, and that the secret of rest is deliverance from sin. It is only in God, and in doing the will of God, that the soul finds true rest, and much of human striving is at bottom an attempt to find partial substitutes for God. This would appear to be the ultimate explanation of the craving for stimulants of various kinds, physical or mental; they at least give a temporary feeling that the soul has found more abundant life and tasted of heaven. It cannot, however, be said that it was a wholly new discovery that sin is the seat of the evil. The really new element in the gospel of Christ is its announcement of the way of deliverance from sin.

(3) It is a great part of Christ's gift of peace that He enables us to believe in God as the Father in heaven. Buddha preached peace by deliverance from sin, and made some way in teaching men to eradicate their selfish desires; but the soul cannot have true peace if his word was the last word on our little life: 'As ye have no Father in heaven

to take care of you, see that ye love one another.' For those who do not find God in it, the world has no doubt many glories, as it has many privileges and adventures, but it is also a thing of terror. The menacing and destroying forces of time have us at their mercy. We are condemned to the gradual forfeiture of most things that we value, and in the last resort we are seemingly doomed to extinction. It makes a difference which is almost immeasurable to our outlook on this universe, if we believe in the God whom Christ revealed as the Father, the God who knows each of us, loves and pities us, and who possesses the infinite power and the infinite wisdom which ensure that He will make His loving purposes effective, and that all the hostile powers of earth and time are unable to do any real and deadly hurt either to His cause or to His children.

(4) Lastly, there is a deeper and more mystical side. Peace takes possession of the mind in two ways. Sometimes it enters in the wake of ideas, as the result of learning some new or important fact or adopting a fresh conviction. Sometimes also it penetrates the soul in a way of which we cannot easily give a rational explanation. It is a common experience that there are persons the mere contact with whom is restful; their spirit seems to mingle with our spirit and transmit to it some of its own repose. It is a distinctive Christian experience that a similar peace enters the soul in conscious union and communion with the risen and glorified Christ. He Himself spoke of it in words which implied that His peace was not so much the result of believing certain facts and accepting certain doctrines, as the result of the contact of the receptive soul with His own greater personality and His own abounding life. There is an abiding in Him which is the condition of the benediction, 'My peace I give unto you.'¹

ROGATION SUNDAY.

The Help of God.

'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'—Mt 7.

1. *God's Help.*—Observe how Holy Scripture never destroys the reasonableness and proportion of truth, how it acknowledges and honours the human personality even when, as so often, it is

¹ W. P. Paterson, *In the Day of the Ordeal*, 229.

offering us the grace of God without measure. Observe, too, how in the midst of the very richest promise there is always a reminder to us men and women that we have our part. 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' So spake Jesus. At the first hearing of the words they mean that God is waiting to give us the very thing we need. And that is, indeed, their meaning. But when we read again we perceive that this generosity of God towards us hangs upon a condition—a condition which we alone can fulfil. It is when we ask and seek and knock, it is when our soul is tender and gentle and entreating, that the great and beautiful things reach us from God. So here: 'I will help you,' saith the Lord. The meaning is not 'I will do this for you' in the sense in which we might say to some one, 'You sit there and watch me do this for you.' Still less do the words mean, 'Go you away and amuse yourself with other things, and when you come back you will find everything made good for you.' No; the words mean what they say: 'I will help you'; 'We shall do it together.' Now this is the only kind of help we should look for from God, for when God helps us it is always part of His purpose, and the greater part, to make us better; it is always to give us the victory over some personal weakness or fault. In fact, when God helps us—and He is always helping us—it is to enable us to accept gladly that holy and beautiful way of meeting what we have to meet, or doing what we have to do. But it is no part of God's intention to do things for us, we meanwhile remaining idle or even hostile. It is His part so to work upon us by the pressure of events and by the pressure of His spirit upon our personal moods that there may come upon us a strong and secret willingness to take the holy way, the way which we know Christ would have taken in our circumstances.

2. *The Purpose of Life.*—For the purpose of life is not that we get our own way. It would be nearer the truth to say that the purpose of life is that we shall not get our own way until, indeed, our own way is the way of unselfish love. The purpose of life is that we become conformed to the likeness of the Son of man. And this likeness is not something which is put on as we might put a mask upon our face, hiding our features, which remain the same. This likeness is something which we ourselves are to become, the happy sign

in our face and in our voice that we have found a happy basis for our life, and are living on the bread and wine of God. We cannot claim that God has really helped us if we have merely had our own way. We cannot claim that God has helped us if all that has happened is that certain things which we had set our minds on have at last come within our reach. It would be nearer the truth to say that God had helped us when, after having set our hearts upon certain things, we should see them pass for ever beyond our reach, and yet to our own blessed amazement find that we are not at all bitter or envious.

I can make all that quite plain by the help of an illustration which, like all my best illustrations, is not my own. When two teams contend in a game, say, of football, the object is not to put the ball through the goal in any circumstances; still less is the object to put the ball through the goal at a time when there is no one about to hinder you. For in that case—if, I mean to say, the one object in the game were to put the ball in goal—the best way would be for some one to rise through the night when everybody was asleep and put it there! No, the object in the game is that in the midst of forces which contend the other way, we shall bring out of ourselves such resources of ingenuity and endurance that in the actual field of battle we shall put the ball in goal, and this not as a thing of any value in itself, but as the accepted proof to ourselves and to the world that we are the better men, that 'He who is with us is greater than all that is against us.' It would be an easy thing, but most foolish, for a mother to spare her child and to spare herself many an anxious moment in the days when the child is learning to walk. Instead of allowing the child to set out upon his unsteady limbs on the day when Nature signifies that she is ready, a mother might carry her child across the room and place him down at the other side. But the mother's object and the child's ambition are not that he shall arrive at the other side of the room, but that he shall walk to the other side of the room. It is not the result by itself which is of value. It is the process, and the result only as the crown of the process.

3. *The Way in which God helps us.*—We have the authority of Jesus for believing that we shall never be far wrong in our thoughts about our Father in heaven if we keep close to all that is natural and instinctive in the relations between a father and

his child, still more in the relations between a mother and her child. All that a true mother will do for her child our Heavenly Father will do for us one by one. And everything that a true mother does for her child has, in her view and intention, one result, and that to help her child. She knows that she will have failed if she has, beyond a certain point, spared him from a certain element of rigour, for in that case she has really left him unprotected for the later tests of life. And therefore she lets him, as an infant, try his limbs and find his way to walk erectly, she remaining meanwhile not far off to set him swiftly on his feet, to smooth away the pain of falling and the fear of setting out again. She will applaud every little triumph on the way to proper manhood, and give her own encouraging interpretation of the little misadventures by the way. As the Bible says: 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I be unto you.'

'Fear not; I will help you.' That is the very voice of God as Jesus has made God known to us. Let us take these words with us and let them go on meaning to us what they will go on to mean. For they will come to mean that God will help us towards becoming better people. He will not be a party to our own indolence, of course. He will not go with us if we are going the wrong way, unless to trouble us even as He harassed Balaam long ago when Balaam set out to do something which none better than Balaam knew was wrong. But if there is anything lying before any one of us which we have to go through, or if there is something which seems to be our portion against which we at certain times vainly cry out, and yet it is of such a kind that at other times we know that if we could only accept it heartily and kiss the cross we should come upon a state of blessedness in which all the bitterness would be lost; if there is anything of such a kind in front of us, or upon us, or pursuing us, and if with regard to it we can lift up our face to God without shame, then this promise is for us in particular, and it simply remains with us to see whether God is not as good as His word.

'Fear not; I will help thee,' saith the Lord. 'I will help thee.' That is to say, are you ready to begin, or, what is sometimes harder, to begin again? In that case you are not alone.¹

¹ J. A. Hutton, *On Accepting Ourselves*, 117.

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY.

The Manner of God's dwelling with us.

'Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them.'—Rev 21³.

The writer describes the manner of God's dwelling with us as a tabernacling. The idea would have rich historic associations for a Jew, but to us it might suggest only a veiled and temporary dwelling; temple would convey more to our minds. Yet criticism may help us to an idea implicit in this word which the writer himself perhaps hardly recognized. The real tabernacle of the Hebrews was not that elaborate and mystic building made familiar to us by the description elaborated in Exodus and Leviticus. Scholars believe that the real original structure is described for us in a fragment of Exodus (33⁷⁻¹¹); there, it is nothing more than a simple soldier's tent pitched outside the camp, where any one might go to commune face to face with God. This might suggest to us that God's dwelling with us is simple and wonderfully familiar; His tent pitched alongside ours in the hard campaign. At any rate, the author is quite explicit in this when he passes beyond the symbolism. God Himself is to abide among His people, 'familiar, condescending, patient, free.' It is the clearest proclamation of God's presence with us that the Bible gives, and it is promised that as this is realized all sorrow, pain, and death shall pass away.

This thought has been recovered by our own age. It has been practically lost for centuries.

The evolution of thought concerning God, both in Greek and Hebrew circles, had the effect of removing Him to an awful distance from this world and the ways of men. In earlier days it had been otherwise. In ancient Greece every glade and hill, streams and the sounding sea, were peopled with deities. And there is sufficient evidence in the Hebrew Bible that once Syria and Arabia were covered with sacred spots where gods had revealed themselves to men. The way in which this was conceived was crude, and the worship with which it was accompanied was often unethical and licentious. But the reforms in thought and practice which attenuated God into an idea, or relegated Him to a distant sphere, though necessary, were accomplished with distinct loss. The Platonic conception of God must strike all save philosophers as very shadowy and abstract; the gods were slain by philosophical

thought. The consciousness of sin which came to the Jews after the Exile made it necessary to mark off everything in man and the world from contact with the awful holiness of God. Soon men feared to take His name upon their lips. The Jehovah of national and personal experience gave place to Lord or God, the abstract idea of Deity, and this was eventually replaced, for reverential reasons, by the impersonal term 'Heaven.' Even the homely speech of Jesus has been toned down to accord with this tendency. Mark's 'Kingdom of God' becomes in Matthew, 'Kingdom of Heaven.' The simple appellation of Father used by Jesus must receive the formal addition 'which art in heaven.' Jesus never attacked this idea of God's distance, but all His thought and speech assume that God is present with us, implicated most deeply in the affairs of the world and dwelling in the hearts of men.

1. *It is God Himself who dwells with us.*—It is the infinite God, who is incomparable beauty, absolute truth, eternal love, whom to worship is the highest desire of man's being, the unfading attraction of his noblest loyalty and service. And this God most glorious, desired, and wonderful is said to be dwelling with us, near as the sea which flows in to fit all the sinuosities of the shore, so marvellously inward that He is nearer to us than our own souls, so penetrating in His light and warmth that down to the deepest recesses of our nature He radiates and heats.

Such a declaration would immediately arouse a definite denial from thousands who remain utterly unconscious of God at all, or, at least, of God dwelling with them in this wise. But it should not be the task of our religious teaching to accommodate itself to the average experience of the unexamined life; but to force men everywhere to look beyond that of which they are conscious. For by every necessity of nature, history, and experience, there is no explanation of man that does not demand that his spirit is in touch with an infinite spiritual personality, in which his life stands explained, and in conscious fellowship with which he alone can come to himself.

2. *But the fulness of meaning contained in this declaration is only to be realized in a religious way.*

We recognize how much more a man can become aware of by education, how much more comes into view by the shifting of his conscious horizon; but the highest revelation of all comes through a religious consciousness, for which these other things are but

the preparation. And by religious we mean two things.

First, it is the relation of ourselves to something higher. Of nothing do we remain more in ignorance, and yet nothing is more easily discoverable, than that we are continually in touch with a reality which surpasses our analysis or achievement. But the slightest moral experiment with this paradoxical reality of human thought and ideals shows that this is always higher than anything we ever become. It is truly transcendent, but—and this is the amazing thing—the transcendent is immanent. It is man's own self which is always conscious of something greater than himself. This relation to something greater than self is the most indisputable fact of man's inner life, although in most it is never recognized, and in many it is ignored or feared because of the perplexity and desire that would come upon them if this became a fact around which their whole inner life had to be lived. But it is just as man makes this higher within him the reality which he chooses to depend upon and the object of his continual aspiration, that it grows into religion, where the deepest intercourse, surrender, and communion lift him ever beyond himself and reveal the possibility of his unending growth.

But, second, it would not be religion if this higher reality, this dwelling of God with us, was of such a nature that it broke down our personality and triumphed over our will. We must be lifted to that higher by the attraction of its beauty and the reasonableness of its life. God must lift us by love, and by love alone. Otherwise we should fail of kinship with Him. The recognition of His presence with us, while it is that on which we depend for every breath we draw, will only come to us like the leading of light, like the lure of a whispering breeze, like the call of a little child. It needs therefore attention, expectation, the setting of the heart to watch, the willingness to be the higher that we know and the higher still; these things will reveal this mighty miracle to be about us.

3. It is thus that *God's dwelling with us will become manifest.*

Only this will draw us near to one another. Lying as it does at the basis of all life, it is the one secret that will unite us all. It means the discovery of such power that, in this realized presence of God, we shall be able to take away all tears, end all pain, and banish even death.

Do not let us turn aside from the truth because

we cannot feel it to be so. God will become visible as His dwelling in us becomes the joyful recognition of our whole life, the radiant testimony of our whole nature.¹

WHITSUNDAY.

Self-Reverence.

'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?'—1 Co 3¹⁶.

In one of the finest of Tennyson's early poems, 'Ænone,' he puts into the mouth of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, two lines which sum up the very essence of his message as to what gives to human life its nobleness and strength. These are the lines:

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.

In his keen study of mankind the poet saw that without these qualities no one can ever build up a strong or beautiful character. They are the foundation-stones of success even in a worldly sense; but, above all, they alone make a man's life a success in the highest sense, for they alone enable him to realize the best that is in him, and to perform his work with inward harmony, and with beneficent effect upon others.

Now, what is *Reverence*? For we will confine ourselves to that. It is the feeling of awe in presence of what is great, august, or sublime, of something that towers above us, and before which we prostrate ourselves. The object of our veneration may be of many different kinds. It may be the greatness of a famous nation, like ancient Greece or Rome, that for centuries has moulded the course of human history; or of a poet, like Shakespeare or Milton, who leaves upon us an overwhelming impression of intellectual power; or, again, of some heroic life of self-sacrifice that thrills our souls by its nobleness. But, in all cases, reverence is awaked in us by that which transcends us, which we cannot fully grasp or estimate, which stretches far beyond us into immeasurable heights. We feel humbled before it, and yet it uplifts us with the consciousness that we are in contact with something whose greatness draws us out of our petty selves into loftier regions of thought and emotion. When Ruskin was addressing the students of Oxford, he concluded one of his lectures

¹ W. E. Orchard, *Sermons on God, Christ, and Man*, 81.

with these memorable words: 'This I know, that in Reverence is the chief joy and power of life—Reverence for what is pure and bright in your own youth; for what is true and tried in the age of others; for all that is gracious among the living, great among the dead—and marvellous in the Powers that cannot die.'

1. What, then, is this real self which a man ought to reverence? It is his inner personality. He is conscious that he is not at liberty to do what he likes with his life, that it is given him on conditions. He is subject to authority, has in his breast a monitor which says, 'This is the way; walk thou in it.' Daniel Webster, the famous American statesman, was once asked, 'What is the greatest thought that ever entered into your mind?' He paused for a moment, then replied, 'The fact of my personal accountability to God.' That is the glory and mystery of human life; the deepest fact in it, which makes all men equal, prince and peasant, the most brilliant genius and the humblest labourer. Each of them has been put in charge of himself, and he has to answer for himself in the end.

And to every human soul God has granted the greatest of opportunities; has made it possible for us to take possession of a heritage as far transcending the chance of earthly place or power as the spiritual transcends the material.

The very thought that we are responsible for this soul of ours, charged as it is with such solemn issues, would over-balance and depress us, in view of the thousand temptations that may assail or destroy it, did we not know that in this fight to win our souls the Eternal Father is on our side. The whole life and death of Christ is not merely the triumph of a man over the powers of evil; it is the pledge that the might of the Divine is working for us, that the infinite resources of God's love and grace are at the disposal of every soul that claims them. 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world': the pages of the Gospels and the long annals of the Christian Church show how gloriously that promise has been fulfilled—show that in Him the weak have found strength, the sinful, forgiveness, and the weary, rest. If the soul within us was counted worthy of the sacrifice of the Son of God, then it is indeed a fit dwelling-place for the Divine Spirit, worthy, surely, of all our reverence.

2. What are some of the effects of this Self-reverence?

(1) It is *the great preservative against vice*—indeed, it is the lack of self-reverence which largely accounts for the sin and folly of the world. Very often men are drawn into temptation by an easy compliance with the society around them. They are led to drink, because others do so; they are content to sit acquiescent in a company where the conversation is foul or vulgar, because they do not want to be counted peculiar or narrow-minded. So they endure what they inwardly dislike. Why? Because they have no true self-respect.

(2) Self-reverence is not only the supreme safeguard against base actions, it is *the inspiration to an ever higher goodness*. For, if we are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwelleth in us, we do not seek guidance for the ordering of our life from traditional practices or the conventional standards of the world around us; we find it within us, in the living Spirit that is ever speaking in our consciences and hearts. It is this loyalty to their best selves which has been the source and spring of the noblest lives that earth has seen, not only of those whose names stand out on the page of history as martyrs and reformers and champions of freedom, but of the multitude which no man can number of unknown men and women who have striven, often at bitter cost to themselves, to carry the gospel to the heathen abroad, or to relieve the suffering or raise the fallen at home.

(3) Self-reverence *teaches us reverence for others*. 'Every man,' says the proverb, 'judges others by himself.' And there is truth in that. A man can only see with his own eyes; and if he does not discern the Divine greatness and mystery of his own soul, he is not likely to think very highly of other souls. It is the man who realizes the value of his own life as a gift of God, who recognizes the sacredness of every human life. And, for this very reason, he shrinks as by an instinct from doing aught that would minister to the lower side of their nature. If their character is tarnished, if the Divine likeness in them is defaced by sin, his whole relation to them will be animated by the desire to call forth the good that slumbers within them.¹

¹ D. W. Forrest, *Memoirs and Discourses*, 168.