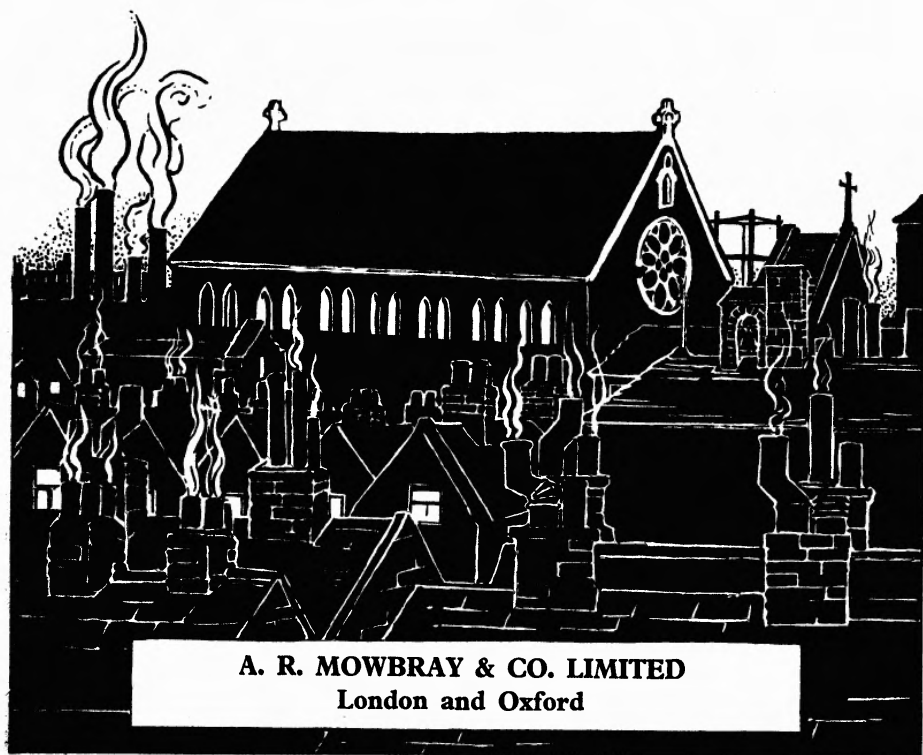


HAGGERSTON SERMONS

BY H.A.WILSON

WITH DRAWINGS BY
CLARE DAWSON



A. R. MOWBRAY & CO. LIMITED
London and Oxford

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Vicar of St. Augustine's

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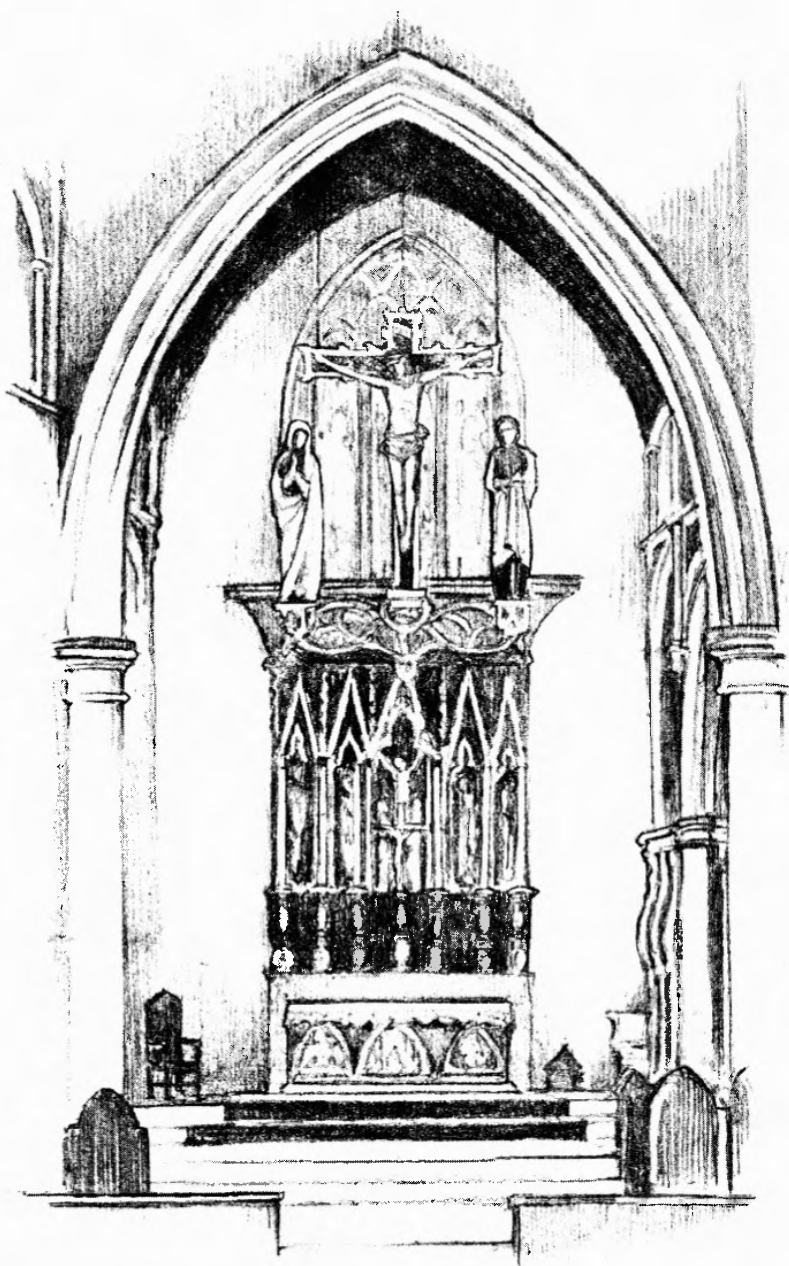
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FOREWORD

THE former gunner, who has recovered from the shock of finding himself my housekeeper and is now as versed in the strange habits, requirements, and phraseology of the High Church clergyman in general and the Haggerston variety in particular as he once was in the ways of the British soldier in France, gazed with an expression of utmost gloom at the pile of manuscript on my writing-desk. "Another book finished, Fox," I said; "fifty-two sermons." "Strewf," he replied; "is there nothin' to laugh at in all that?"

In East London sermons have their uses. At least they supply legitimate interludes for "a nice set-down," during which the mind can wander where it will and the body doze in greater comfort than when it is theoretically in an attitude of prayer; while there is always the possibility that the preacher will say something entertaining or *interestin'*. But, since pews are hard, sermons may on no account exceed five and twenty minutes; and should the manuscript be read, sleep, probably the reverse of silent, is likely to come quickly to bodies that are nearly always weary and heavy-laden. Politics are naturally considered out of place; and the man in the pulpit is not deemed to be playing fair should he hold forth on debatable subjects on which there can, of course, be no debate.

But if the preacher speaks clearly and naturally, without dropping his voice before the end of every other sentence or indulging in maddening mannerisms; does not apologize for himself, his presence, his subject, or his sermon ("He began," somebody once said, "by saying that he was unable to treat this great subject worthily and took three-quarters of an hour to prove the proposition"); does not allow himself to be disconcerted by audible comments from his listeners, such as "Good gracious" and "Did you ever?"; speaks, as a general rule, more in the particular than the general and introduces the personal touch now and then; can make people smile, without "trying to be funny"; and, more than all else, has been so obviously at pains to prepare his sermon that it is manifest that he is in the pulpit because he has something to say, rather than because he has to say something,—it is unlikely that in any other part of the world will he find a more sympathetic audience than in an East London church, while it is even possible that some of its component parts will remember a fraction of what he said. In any case he has this advantage over fellow-

preachers in more occidental rostra, he need never be in doubt as to whether those ranged before him compose an audience or merely a congregation ; for no cough is more shattering or expressive than that of an East Londoner who is bored with the sermon.

All the diatribes that follow have been inflicted upon the unfortunate people who worship in St. Augustine's. I thank them for their patience and powers of endurance, as well as for the fact that they have not coughed over-much.

I am grateful to Miss Dawson for her attractive drawings. And I am not without hope that Fox, and any others who may read this book, may find something to laugh at.

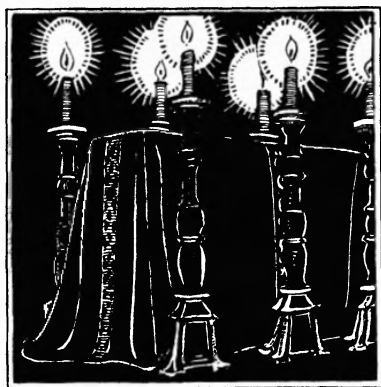
H. A. WILSON

ST. AUGUSTINE'S CLERGY HOUSE
YORKTON STREET, HACKNEY ROAD
LONDON, E.2

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R.I.P.

HEBREWS 9, 27. *Once to die, and after this the judgment.*

I KINGS 19, 12. *A still small voice.*

THE vicar of St. Augustine's, Haggerston, is dead. He died on such-and-such a date, probably the first of April or the fifth of November. The actual cause of decease is uncertain : it is said that a few days before he travelled on a tram which did not stop in the Hackney Road in order that the driver and conductor might take tea ; it is reported that at a recent sale in his parish-hall nothing was stolen and all who were present had paid for admission ; there is also a rumour, though this is even more difficult to believe, that a week or two before he preached an effective sermon : but it is not known whether these unusual phenomena were contributory causes of his demise. Nor is this important, for what really matters is that the reverend gentleman is indubitably dead—though it is possible that this is only important to him.

The *Hackney and Kingsland Gazette* has reported the fact in a paragraph of four lines. The “floral tributes” have included all the usual designs : The Chair, made of white flowers with “empty” tastefully inscribed in violets across the seat ; The Broken Pillar ; The Gates Ajar, depicting the portals of heaven standing open ; The Pillow of flowers bearing the words “At Rest” ; and The Gates Of Heaven with a white dove flying through (the said bird being supposed to represent the soul of the late lamented, though this theory scarcely agrees with that of the broken pillar). The next patrons of the living are already busy and are reported to be favouring a clergyman

who has a flowing moustache, half a dozen children, and Buchmanite tendencies ; for nobody paid serious attention to the repeated attempts to have the patronage altered until it was too late. And the undertaker is late for the funeral.

But what has happened to the principal of the piece? "To die must be an awfully big adventure." What has befallen the priest who has left the familiar tall thin body, gone away for good from his St. Augustine's and set out on the biggest adventure of all? In Advent it is well for priest and people to think of these things.

* * * *

The clear and unmistakable teaching of the Church and New Testament is that there will be two separate and distinct judgments of all who lived on earth ; the particular or personal, which takes place immediately after death ; the general or universal, on the last day when this world ends. "It is appointed unto men once to die," writes the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "and after this the judgment." "Each one of us," says St. Paul, "shall give account of himself to God."

At the first or particular judgment the individual soul is informed of the verdict which will be publicly proclaimed to the universe on the occasion of the second and final judgment. Whatever the verdict is—and you will remember that it can only be one of two—the soul concerned knows that it is absolutely just and fair. For his or her chief accuser at the particular judgment, the principal counsel for the prosecution, will be the still small voice of his or her own conscience.

* * * *

So when the time comes for you to kneel at the Mass of Burial of your parish-priest, or to pray during the night-watch for the soul of him whose body is in your and his St. Augustine's for the last time, you may make for yourself some such picture as this.

Up and away from the clergy-house bedroom, in that second when the priest ceased to breathe, moved the angel and his burden ; the angel who had once been sent to the font in a St. Michael's Church to guard through life and death the new child of God, and the priest who was still a priest, though he had died. The world below him lay like a star, spinning, dwindling, vanishing, gone. The planets above rushed down to meet him, spun by, and disappeared. All round him lay darkness, thick, close, almost tangible ; so that he was glad of the strong arms that held him, of the powerful wings that soared steadily upwards. Far above in the darkness he saw a faint

glow of light : with great speed it seemed to move towards him, though in reality it was he and his angel who travelled towards it : brighter, whiter, stronger, purer grew that light, until it swallowed up the darkness and the whole universe was full of the blinding, searching, inescapable majesty and brightness of God himself. The priest feared that light even more than he had feared the darkness : he clung to his angel and tried to hide : the angel smiled, put him down before the feet of God, left him.

The Lord God and the priest were alone together, at last. The moment had come for his particular personal judgment, at last. He had finished choosing ; the day of reckoning had come at last, as in his conscience he had always known that it must. The priest looked at God, for the first time : God looked at his priest, not for the first time—looked him through and through, gazed steadily at all he might and could have been and at what he was. And God said nothing.

But a still small voice spoke ; the voice of the priest's conscience as his eyes were held by the infinitely kind and absolutely just eyes of God, and in them the priest saw, for the first time, both himself as he really was and sin as it really is.

"I said Mass so many thousands of times. Sometimes my thoughts wandered : often my preparations and thanksgivings were cold and mechanical : scarcely ever did I fully realise what I was doing, who it was that I received and gave, and I could have realised : there were even mornings, I remember now, on which I was annoyed with the server, disappointed at the number of communicants, self-pitying because the Mass was long and I was tired. So many hundreds of times I received absolution ; on this, that, and the other occasion I continued to be the same sort of priest as I was before. My prayers and offices, both in public and private, were scarcely ever said as they should and could have been ; often they were very poor indeed, because I allowed my mind to wander and my body to hinder. As to the people in Haggerston over whom you, God, placed me to be their priest and shepherd and friend—so-and-so is still unconfirmed and he might have come to the sacraments if I had asked him once more, there are many lapsed communicants and I know now that in many cases I was to blame, often I have not visited as I should have done and made what then seemed good excuses, in my dealings with some I allowed myself to be an ordinary man instead of a priest. Sometimes I thought I had preached a good sermon and was proud of myself : I know it sounds ridiculous now. Often I was most conceited about my parish magazine, some books I wrote, and a parish-hall you allowed me to build. I used to value what people said or wrote about me. I used to pay attention when others were

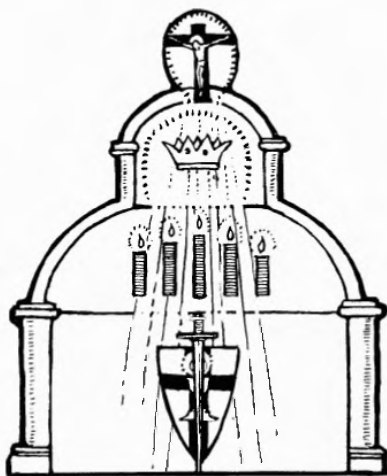
unkind or rude, still more when they spoke the truth about me. I could have, I know now that I should have, done this, that, and the other with all the opportunities that were given me, all the human kindnesses that were shown to me, all the blessings that you, God, showered upon me : I confess with misery that I have not done them."

So for a long time—if, on the other side of death, there was time, which there is not—the priest spoke. He was not interrupted : there was no sound but that of his own still small voice : the Lord God knew all that he was saying before it was said : but now the priest knew it too, which was good for him.

Then sentence was passed. At last God spoke. The scrupulously fair, absolutely just, and eternally unalterable verdict was pronounced. But only God, the priest, and his guardian angel knew what it was—at present.

* * * * *

It is good for priest and people to think of the particular judgment on Advent Sunday, and indeed on other days.



NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOURS

DANIEL 12, 10. *Many shall be purified, made white and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.*

LET us assume, for sake of argument, that the particular judgment of the reverend gentleman of whom we thought a week ago was favourable; that in the moment of time in which he departed this life, confronted his maker and really knew himself for what he was, it was also made known to him that he was judged worthy of eternal bliss in heaven. What, do you suppose, would have been his immediate reaction, the first thought that entered his mind? Surely, an overwhelming desire to leave the presence of God and, somehow, somewhere, be cleansed and mended of every stain and fault that he now knew marked his soul and made him unworthy of the award which had been so graciously bestowed upon him.

Certainly he had many times during his life on earth made use of the sacrament of penance. His first confession was made in the chapel of a public school near the Sussex Downs. Subsequently his god-mother, who took a serious view of the promises which she had made in his name at his baptism in the church of St. Michael and All Angels, Croydon, had taken him to St. Peter's, London Docks: there he had made many confessions to the old priest with the large nose and big heart who is as well-known and well-loved as any of the many

priests who have given their all to God and Wapping. In return for those confessions he had received a corresponding number of absolutions ; all of which were certainly valid and effective, each of which had cancelled and deleted the sins he had confessed.

But the effect of those sins was still present in his soul. A broken arm, though mended, is a weaker arm : lungs that have never known pneumonia are healthier than those which have been cured of it. Assuredly the priest had been many times absolved ; certainly those absolutions held good and were valid : but an innocent soul is nearer to God than a forgiven soul ; even pardoned sin leaves in its train weaknesses, imperfections, scars, infection.

Now that the priest knew both himself and God ; now that he had seen complete sinlessness, utter purity, absolute truth, and love unimpaired—and consequently knew sin in its true character—; there was one desire, and one desire alone, that possessed his whole soul, to be allowed to go away and be cleaned, mended, purged, purified of every stain, spot, trace of sin. Now that he really loved and longed for God, now that he knew with a peace of mind that passed all understanding that heaven would ultimately be his, that God and God's mother still loved and wished for him, all that he wanted was to be made fit for God. He did not care how much it would cost or how great the necessary pains might be ; for true love cares for none of these things and has no fear at all.

In other words, he desired purgatory. Therefore he got it ; in the next world, if not in this, you always get what, in this world, you have *really* wanted.

* * * * *

I suppose that your minds are as clear as they can be, until you too are among its temporary inhabitants, about this purgatory, this place or condition of purifying, which lies between earth and heaven, touches both and is neither ? I suppose that you agree that its existence accords, not only with the teaching of the Church, but also with your common sense and reason ?

Think what would be the result if there were no purgatory. In that case, beyond the death of the body would lie only heaven and hell. Heaven is the acknowledged state of perfection, with which are incompatible not only every kind of sin but also all trace of or inclination to sin ; hell is the admitted opposite, the perpetual condition of punishment, misery, separation from God. Call to mind any one you knew and admired, who has now passed from this life. She was a good soul, a gallant and faithful practising Christian. Quite so ; but was she absolutely perfect, completely free from every speck and spot

of imperfection, like our Lady, fit to be Christ's mother? You know that she was not : she could not have been, no one on earth could have been : "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Then, if there is no intermediate state between earth and heaven, no Hospital for Holy Souls, no purgatory, all your dear departed must be now in hell : and that, you will agree, is unthinkable.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise" : so said our Lord to the dying penitent thief. Do you suppose him to have been lying? But was that paradise heaven? No : he did not ascend to heaven until nearly seven weeks after Good Friday : "I am not yet ascended," he said on the first Easter morning. "Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit," writes St. Peter, "he went and preached unto the spirits in prison."

For myself I agree, as you might suppose, with Dr. Pusey : "I thank God that there is purgatory." Indeed I do not know what I should do if I thought for a moment that at the end of my small life here there was only heaven or hell, with no intermediate state between the two. Nor do I know what you would do. You are all good people, trying very hard to live Christian lives often under immense difficulties ; but you would be the first to admit, by virtue of that very Christianity of yours, that you are not perfect.

Thank God that there is purgatory, both for our dead and ourselves. Think of it in Advent ; for this is good for us, as indeed it is for them. Remember that only they are there who know now that they will one day be in heaven ; not the others ; that would be waste of time ; God never wastes. "Many shall be purified, made white and tried ; but the wicked shall do wickedly : and none of the wicked shall understand ; but the wise shall understand."

* * * * *

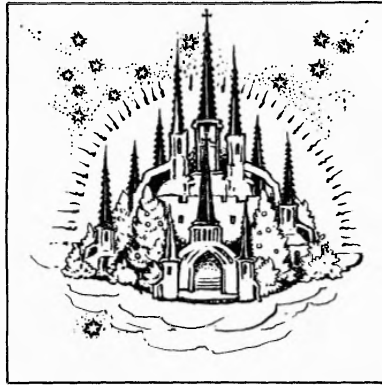
The Church is like a house in which are three floors, all of course under one roof. On the ground floor, near to the front-door of the font, are they who still toil and fight in the Church Militant here on earth. Upstairs on the first floor, under the same roof but behind a door that only opens inwards, is the Church Waiting, they whose day's work is done and who now do rest from their labours. At the top of the stairs—"a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven ; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending upon it"—is the second floor, up in the sunshine, the best part of the house, heaven, the Church Triumphant, still under the same roof. For there are not three Churches, but one Church ; and "I believe in the communion of saints."

It is a blessed law of this house that all who would reach the top floor must rest awhile on the middle floor, must sleep in God. A blessed law : for sweet sleep is the only fit end to long and weary day ; to sleep is to be safe from all temptations, cares, and worldly worries ; to sleep is to awake—your truest and best self, refreshed and rested, young again and vigorous in soul, seeing at last in the true light of morning all things as they really are.

Would you call the holy dead back to earth, even if you could? Would you dabble in black arts and play with forbidden spiritualism to summon them back downstairs to please and comfort you? Would you—even supposing that you could—beckon them back into temptation and anxiety, into sin and toil, into sickness and weariness, farther away from the haven of the top floor where they so long to be? Surely not ; if you really love them. For it is quite certain that they would not be elsewhere than where they now are, until a second time they hear the glad summons, “Friend, go up higher.” None has ever gone to purgatory who did not wish to go.

It is true that yet a little while and we do not see them ; but surely it is also true that they have not forgotten us, those “good companions” who have gone “slipping round the corner” but are still under the same roof. They are in no place whither the Lord Christ has not gone before : they have but followed in his footsteps, perhaps along the Way of Sorrows, and are now where he was on the first Holy Saturday : he will take care of them on our behalf as can none but he, and he will see to it that they do not forget us. They are with Christ : in the sacrament of his own devising Christ is with us : there is only one Christ : we and they are not very far apart—in Christ.

But we must see to it that we do not forget them. They are our “next door neighbours” : they need our prayers and Requiem Masses ; they need their memories to be kept fresh and fair in our loving hearts ; we who, under God, owe them almost everything, can help them on their journey as can none else save God and angels. Out of sight must never be out of mind for Christian next door neighbours.



HOME

REVELATION 21, 2. *And I John saw.*

WHEN I was in exile and working in the mines on that Aegean island I was already an old man ; but I was still he who had once leaned on a breast at supper and to whom on the following day had been entrusted the best of all mothers, still “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” And I John saw. I saw beyond the small Patmos shores, further than Domitian’s preposterous claims, beyond the fierce sufferings of the infant Church, further than the confines of space and time and finiteness. I John saw heaven.

I saw the holy city, so fair that I can only compare it to a bride on her wedding-morning. It seemed to be built of pure gold ; and its light shone through and lit up death. Its twelve gates reminded me of pearls ; an angel stood by each, though it was opened wide for all nations of the earth. It had no need of sun or moon or stars, for the glory of God and of the once-slain Lamb were its light ; and there is no night there. Through it flowed the pure river of eternal life ; and its golden streets were filled with the happy throngs of the redeemed, of every people and age and tongue. No temple is there ; for the Lord God and the Lamb are the temple. There God himself wipes away all tears from human eyes. In it are no more death or sorrow, no more crying or pain, no more temptation or sin ; consequently God’s servants serve him, seeing his face.

I John saw.

* * * * *

And I Christian see ; don't you ?

Because I am a Christian I see "through Jesus Christ our Lord" out and away from this little world and this small life. By virtue of the Church's teaching I see at least the outline of that high road of holy souls which men name purgatory, at least the contour of that way along which perhaps still travel some whom I have known and loved and along which—please God—my steps shall sound soon.

It is a toilsome and a painful way, a *Via Dolorosa*, a Sorrow Street. But it is also a glad way, a thoroughfare of only one-way traffic, a thronged main road, no *cul-de-sac* or dead-end. Pain must be the companion of all its travellers, for all purification involves pain, and all growth hurts : theirs is the pain of real sorrow for sin, of homesickness for heaven, of learning the hard lesson of complete surrender, of knowing that it is by their own fault alone that they are not yet in the haven where they would be. But theirs is no hopeless pain. Permeating, transfiguring, lighting every step along the long way is the sure knowledge that heaven will finally and irrevocably be theirs ; because of the result of their particular judgment they know now that the joy and peace of journey's end are bound to come.

Every moment brings the Father nearer to them. The light from the eternal city spreads ever more clearly across their path. Christ our Lord is with them and among them, bestowing grace and refreshment, healing and consolation on his suffering brothers and sisters. His mother has them always in her prayers. Healing angels minister to them.

At every moment there are some who pass with glad songs off the road, through the surrounding paradise-garden and the angel-guarded gates, into the city itself : grown at last unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. The gates of the new Jerusalem stand ever open wide : always, at this very moment, there are passing through them the spirits of just men made perfect, singing the eternal Alleluia, travelling-days done. Perhaps, we cannot yet know, among them have been already those whom we love so dearly and miss so sorely.

Sometimes, too—and often when life is a little sadder and grimmer, a trifle more perplexing and complicated, than usual—I Christian kneel, at Mass or near the tabernacle, before that small frail thing which by the divine will is the point in which God and man, nature and supernature, earth and heaven, touch, overlap, coincide. At such times even such an one as I begin to see further than purgatory, begin to see as John saw, begin to see heaven. I do not think that I ought to

become so obsessed with this temporary business of living and loving, of laughing and crying, that I have no thought for eternity : I am sure it would be wrong of me to be so busy looking back at the past, round at other people, or down at myself, that I had no time in which to look up.

I see the light of the eternal city shining, through the long way of purgatory and the dark gate of death, even into this unheavenly world ; I find it reflected in such mirrors as the eyes of children, the faces of religious, the souls of the pure and valiant, the hearts of mothers, penitents, and mourners—for the Lamb is the light thereof. I see its streets and roadways filled with all manner of mortals from every nation and walk of life ; all of them happy and friendly, since neither lies nor evil-speaking, malice nor distrust, can pass the pearl-gates with the sentry-angels. I find no blessed sacrament there ; there is no need : the blessed see God ; he is the temple. Through the city flows the river of eternal life, to refresh those who were weary and heavy-laden ; on its banks grows the never-dying, ever-bearing tree in whose shade rest all who were tired and heavy-hearted. I see there nobody old, for there is no old age : crooked, lame, and crippled are straight, young, and well : there are no lines or creases in any face, no grey hairs or bowed bodies, no deafness or failing hearts : the eyes of the blind are open, the tongues of the dumb do sing : “behold, I make all things new.” There God himself wipes away all human tears (do you remember running to your mother when you had hurt yourself or some one had been unkind, she took you in her arms, kissed you and wiped away your tears?—see God, who gave you your mother, taking you, new-come from earth and purgatory, into his arms and wiping away for all eternity every vestige of your widow’s, mourner’s, penitent’s tears). I see there no more death, sorrow, crying, pain : no more cancer or consumption, no more slums or sweating, no more broken bodies or breaking hearts, no more poverty or inequality, no more fear or temptation ; because I can find there no smallest trace of sin. There for ever I see the servants of God serving him, seeing his face ; for perfect freedom consists only in serving him.

* * * * *

Think in Advent, and at other times of the year, of sin and judgment, of purgatory and hell : but think too on every day in the year of heaven your home, waiting for you if you will have it.

I John saw. And I Christian see. Don’t you ?



A SMALL MATTER

ST. LUKE 2, 7. *She brought forth her first-born son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

AT last "the fulness of the time," precisely the right moment, has come. Every thing is ready. "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee." The first Advent is at hand.

As the short wintry day of December 24th is drawing to a close and beginning to pass into the historic holy night two travellers reach their three days' journey's end. Slowly they pass the fields in which Ruth once gleaned a harvest, David fought a giant, and now shepherds keep watch over their flocks by night. Weary and footsore they climb the last long hill to the little town; of them it might have been written as it was of Orpah and Ruth, "so they two went until they came to Bethlehem." Thankfully they accept the shelter of a draughty and dirty stable. They two, the selected and highly-favoured first human courtiers of the little King; Mary immaculate, spotless, virgin, all-holy; Joseph the gentleman, the guardian, most knightly of all chivalrous men who have sacrificed themselves to protect the weak and helpless.

Night falls. The world sinks wearily to sleep. Silent stars twinkle and shine. One light burns in a stable. Joseph has gone to the village to try to find a nurse. There is silence.

The silence is broken by the cry of a baby. That is all.

But the King has come; and Mother Mary smiles.

"When all things were in quiet silence and night in the midst of her swift course, the Almighty Word leaped down from heaven, out

of the royal throne." "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace." "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest." The majestic words roll across the ages like peals of thunder, sound like an angel-herald's trumpet-blasts; and each of them is true.

But this is how it happened. "She brought forth her first-born son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." It happened in the most extreme simplicity and plainness; it is recorded almost in words of one syllable—in order that any one and every one, little children, shepherds, old people, plain folk like you and me, may understand.

Christmas is the feast of simplicity, a "small" matter, a day of little things, the season of blessed little things.

The short wintry day of December 24th has drawn to its close; once again the holy night has come to East London.

At last the shops and public-houses are shut and the last tram runs. There are no stars, for the murk of Haggerston hangs heavy overhead. East London sinks wearily to sleep; that poor, sad, restless East London which, like so much of the rest of the world, cannot see God in small matters and little things.

When all things are in quiet silence and night in the midst of her swift course travellers come, tired working-men and weary working-women, pale-faced boys and girls, down an ill-kept ugly street where stands a horse-trough. They turn up a dingy passage past the bright figures of the Lady Mary and her son; enter a church which they love most dearly and which is now a blaze of light, warmth, welcome, a place—on this night of December 24th—of expectancy.

From the earliest morning hours St. Augustine's children of all ages have been working in their church, scrubbing, washing, cleaning, sweeping, dusting every nook and corner of the palace of the King; now all is ready for him. Candles gleam on high altar and flanking Christmas-trees: each saint's shrine and pedestal has fresh flowers, mostly bought from street-barrows and East London shops: every window-sill has its bouquet of lilies of the field: the crib is built, decorated, filled with all its accustomed figures but one. All day long priests have sat in confessionals, doing that which brings them more joy than almost anything else, giving absolution in the King's name to his loyal subjects. Each priest too has been careful to make his own confession on this day of days.

All is ready : in St. Augustine's too it is "the fulness of time."
"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee."

The organ-peals grow soft and cease. The well-known Christmas hymns have been sung as perhaps they only are in East London. There is silence.

At the altar stands a priest in white vestments, clean in shriven soul. Before him on that holy table are the plainest, simplest, smallest things on earth : bread, wine and—at the foot of the crucifix—the figure of a baby-boy on a silk cushion. Over the bread and wine, scarcely audibly, the priest whispers short and simple words of almost one syllable, "small" words so that you and he and I cannot fail to understand : "who, in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread : and, when he had given thanks, he brake it and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my Body which is given for you : do this in remembrance of me. Likewise after supper he took the cup ; and, when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this ; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins ; do this in remembrance of me."

That is all. The bell rings. There is silence. It is a small and simple matter, Holy Communion.

But once again the King has come to his loyal subjects. Once again the second person of the eternal and holy Trinity has "leaped down from heaven, out of the royal throne" into dear and dirty old Haggerston. "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take . . . eat . . . drink." Unto us, feeble Christians though we know ourselves to be, a child is born : unto us, disappointed and disappointing East Londoners though we assuredly are, a son is given : and Mother Mary, who is perhaps never far away when a priest gives her son to his and her children, smiles again.

The figure of the child is laid once more in the stable-manger. Blue incense-smoke curls through the miniature rafters ; ox and ass, straw and Christmas roses, babe and guardian, mother and shepherds are sprinkled with holy water ; kneeling priests, servers, choir, and people sing "O come, all ye faithful."

The midnight Mass is over : it is the feast of simplicity, a "small" matter, the celebration of little things, a consecration of blessed little things. For, like every Mass throughout the year, it is the extension of the Incarnation, the continuance into this our day of the first Christmas morning.

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You and I are among the small people of the world : I, a dull and ordinary parish-priest ; you, "the man in the street," his wife and children. We are of little account in the world's scheme of things, so many minute parts in the great machine, to be scrapped and thrown aside directly we are broken or worn out. Most men despise or pity us because we are poor Cockney East Londoners.

But you and I too are more blessed than many, for we know who and what the blessed sacrament is.

Let us see to it, then, that we keep Christmas well, for the sake of him who was once the "small and of no reputation" Bethlehem child and who to this day is for our sake the sacrament of the altar.

Whatever kind of year this has been for you ; however far, perhaps, your sorrows and great hardships have drawn you out of your love of the Lord Jesus (though none of them has drawn you, or ever can draw you, out of his love of you) ; you will, please, make your confession before the close of the twenty-fourth day ; you will, of your free will, make yourselves "small and of no reputation" by kneeling humbly before a priest of the little King and saying, "I confess." So will I. For, whatever may be true of others, you know that this is true of you ; that if you can make your Christmas confession and do not, you do not really love our Lord. You may like him, perhaps ; but liking is not loving. Certainly I know that this is true of myself.

Will you pardon me if I add this? Be kind and Christmas-peaceful at home. Let there be no quarrel with husband or wife, no scandal-mongering and back-biting of neighbours, no selfishness and cruelty—at least in Christmas week. Let there be extra gentleness and forbearance with children and old people, because of the King who was a child and loves the weary and heavy-laden. How blessed are you who have a child in your home on Christmas Day!

"Peace on earth ; good will toward men." The old words sound strange to-day in a Europe that seems full of suspicion, uneasiness, self-assertion, and misunderstanding. But you and I are Christians. Let us see to it that, at least in our hearts and in our homes, there is the peace of God.

The smallness of the holy host given to us in the holy night : the littleness of the Lord Christ, for love of little us. The simplicity of the tabernacle : merely a white light, still silk veil, few flowers—and he. The smallness of the monstrance, dwarfed by great church, towering reredos, tall candles : yet containing him. The simplicity of the crib : merely Mary, Joseph, shepherds, cattle,—and Jesus.

"Small matters." Yet he did once say, "Except ye become as little children . . ."



LITTLE AMONG THOUSANDS

MICAH 5, 2. *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands . . .*

SO, once again, because we cannot help ourselves, we begin to leave Christmas and go, more or less manfully, into a strange, uneasy, and rather frightening new year.

It has been a happy Christmas ; to those who are Christians in more than name it always is. Once again, or so it has seemed, we have watched Mary and Joseph and her unborn child journey to the small town on the hill. Once again the world has been too busy or too blind to pay them much attention or to offer any better shelter than a shed. Once again the old prophecy has come true : "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel ; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Once again—because we are simple Christians who like to live rather more in the past and future than in the present—at midnight altar, before monstrance, and by means of crib, we have been allowed to return at the year's end to the simplicity of God and his mother and there find peace.

Must we, who also are "little among thousands," now turn our backs on Bethlehem and forget that little town for another eleven months? Surely not : it can teach us much for our new year's journey, if we care to learn. For the altar is our Haggerston Bethlehem on every day of any year ; at it history continually repeats itself.

In the small town a few miles from Jerusalem the Son of God was found only by those who sought and looked for him : in East London or anywhere else the Son of God is to be found in the sacrament of the altar only by those who there seek and look for him. In the cattle-trough he hid himself in the form of an infant : to-day he hides himself in the form of host and consecrated chalice ; bread and wine are all that we can see, for all that we know their substances to have been changed. Bethlehem was a little place, not reckoned when they counted the thousands in Judah ; but out of it came to the world the God whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting : the world despises and ignores the Church's altars and takes no account of its tabernacles and their contents ; but communion is the principal way by which God comes to his people, and is "generally (that is, universally) necessary to salvation." On the first holy night and in the days that followed a man had need of a shepherd's faith or a Magian's selflessness if he would recognize Mary's son as God's Son : in the twentieth or any century he who would find the same Son as he goes to the altar, kneels before tabernacle or looks at full monstrance needs the same qualities—which now, as then, are to be had for the asking. Certainly there is a Bethlehem all the year through, in both Haggerston and every place where is an altar.

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Many years before Mary the virgin went to Bethlehem another mother gave birth to a son in that little town, and died in doing so. She was Rachel, the best-loved wife of Jacob. Her death was a great and long-remembered sorrow ; "I buried her there in the way of Ephrath, the same is Bethlehem," so he said years after when he himself lay dying. To Jacob, the world's pilgrim, the road to Bethlehem was a way of sorrow ; there he buried natural affection ; yet there he received his best-loved son Benjamin.

On our way to the altar there must be sorrow, the sorrow of true repentance : in each communion and at least once during every visit to the tabernacle we do well if we make a prayer for greater contrition. To the altar we should bring all that we most love on earth and there we must be prepared to leave it ; for as we kneel there we profess to give ourselves wholly to God, "here we offer and present unto thee ourselves, our souls and bodies." It was in the early hours of an Easter morning, when again all things were in quiet silence and night in the midst of her swift course, that I first began to learn that hard lesson ; I replaced in the tabernacle the sacrament which I had been unable to give to the one I love best and knelt there for a long time, trying to realize that she had died. In each approach to

the altar we must be poor in spirit ; that is, willing to give up everything, however good and fair it may be, to him whose earthly thrones all altars are and who is the author and lender of all things bright and beautiful. The road to Bethlehem must be for these pilgrims too a way of sorrow. But at its end the good God gives to us also more than we can ever lose—his Benjamin, the son of his right hand, Jesus our Lord ; and with him the only true consolation and comfort for all earthly tears and partings.

* * * *

To Bethlehem went Ruth the Moabitess, making a long journey from her own country ; there she met her bridegroom and became an ancestress of the child who was born there “in the fulness of time.” As we go to our House of Bread we are wise if we make a conscious effort to get out of the world for the half-hour of Mass. Cares and troubles, sins and sorrows, doubts and fears may well be left outside the closed west-door ; they will keep, and the work will not be less well done or the pleasure found less satisfying for the thirty minutes given to God before either has begun. Life nowadays is a grim enough matter ; many of us find that we can only live it with a modicum of courage because, now and then, we leave it for a while and kneel on that altar-step where heaven overflows into Haggerston and in the silence we can almost hear angels’ wings. For Ruth found her lover in Bethlehem, and so do we.

* * * *

Bethlehem too was the birthplace and home of David ; yet he had to leave it. We may not stay always in our House of Bread ; for throughout the new year God calls us to tasks and trials that are not unlike his. David went out to meet and rout Goliath. Each of us is called on every day to go out from the sanctuary into a world of sin and temptation, and there is none who does not know only too well his or her besetting sin, his or her particular giant who towers across the road of Christian progress : every day we are called to stand up and fight against sin, and every day, because of the invincible might of our communions, we are equipped to be as confident of ultimate victory as was the youngest son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, though the odds against us are even greater than they were against him.

Saul was possessed by an evil spirit ; but when David “took an harp and played with his hand, Saul was refreshed and well and the evil spirit departed from him.” Each of us knows by personal experience the spiritual refreshment and mental encouragement that

comes from contact with good people, for all who live in Haggerston know St. Saviour's Priory ; every communicant is intended to perform for all whom he or she comes across something of that which David did for Saul and the Sisters do for Haggerston, for every one in whom is the spirit of God does something to drive away evil spirits from others, though he or she may be quite unconscious of the fact. Evil and goodness are alike in one respect ; both are infectious. But David was persecuted by Saul and driven out of his quiet home as, in later years, a mother and her child were driven from the same Bethlehem into Egypt. So all citizens of present Bethlehems who love the altars of the Church are to expect and accept persecution just because they are communicants : jeers and ridicule or (what is harder to bear) cold indifference from those we love best and whom we long to have kneeling with us at the altar, temptations placed deliberately in our way, a critical watch kept on every moment of our lives, ever-wagging tongues that never cease to spread the glad news of our human failings, the official coldness and lack of encouragement to priests who teach us the true religion—we have known them in past years, we shall know them again in the near future. They are the communicant's share of the cross that was carried by him who was Mary's child at Bethlehem, the cross that is marked on every baptised child and emblazoned on the chasuble of every priest at the altar, the cross without which there could have been no blessed sacrament, the cross without which there can be no crown for any child of God. "Blessed are they that are persecuted" ; the words remain true. And David was called from Bethlehem to be king over God's people ; that is, to do the work for which God made him. We have not only sin to fight and trouble to bear, but also a work to do for God and humanity. To be engrossed in loving service of both God and the children of God is one of the greatest safeguards against falling into sin ; and "Save thou a soul and it shall save thine own."

They who received communion in this church on Christmas day were given cards as they left the building. On one side was a picture of a priest giving benediction from their own altar of the blessed sacrament, before which knelt not only a typical little crowd of the inhabitants of Haggerston but also the Bethlehem mother with her cradled holy child. Beneath was a view of the roofs of E.2. on Christmas night. "We have seen his star in the east," ran the inscription ; for the largest star shone over the church roof and the monstrance in the priest's hands was a copy of that star-shaped one given to their church by St. Augustine's mothers. On the other side the following words

were written by one who rejoices more and more as the years go by that he is a St. Augustine's priest: "In your Christmas communion I wish you the peace on earth that comes to those who know the Bethlehem child and his mother; and I pray that throughout the coming year he may bless you and she may pray for you, so that your love of the blessed sacrament may be even greater than it is now."

The understanding and consequent love of their earthly Bethlehem by many of those who live in Haggerston is already notable; I who am their parish priest pray that it may still increase and that you will remember that there should be sorrow on the way there, surrender of all to God there, union found there with Emmanuel "God with us," and a daily going out from there to fight and help the weak, to endure and to work—all in the strength and omnipotence of him who once for your sakes was helpless babe and who now for your sakes is silent sacrament. I would be grateful if you would pray the same for me.



CASPAR AND CHARLIE

NUMBERS 24, 15. *He took up his parable and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said and the man whose eyes are open hath said: he hath said, which heard the words of God and knew the knowledge of the most high, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance but having his eyes open: I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.*

ON the octave-day of the feast of the Epiphany, a few hours before the crib is dismantled and the figures of the wise men leave you for nearly another year, I submit for your possible delectation two fancies and one fact.

There was silence in the house of Caspar the Wise, for the master of the house was dying.

Along the corridors and through the spacious rooms slaves and servants moved silently and spoke in hushed tones. The flowers and trees in the beautiful garden slept in the scented Arabian night: there was no sound of any bird: the stars hung silent overhead. But the river that ran through the trees at the end of the garden seemed to be both sobbing and laughing to itself in the shadows; and from somewhere came a voice singing the old evening hymn of the followers of Zoroaster:

Hear us, O Mazda! Thou livest in truth and in heavenly gladness.
Cleanse us from falsehood and keep us from evil and bondage to badness.
Pour out the light and the joy of thy life on our darkness and sadness.

Shine on our gardens and fields,
 Shine on our working and weaving.
 Shine on the whole race of man,
 Believing and unbelieving.
 Shine on us now through the night,
 Shine on us now in thy might ;

The flame of our love and the song of our worship receiving.

A dim light shone through the drawn curtains of the upper room in which lay the master of the house awaiting the last sleep. It was a beautiful room. The floor was laid with tiles of dark blue : twisted silver pillars stood out against blue walls : the round-arched windows were hung with curtains of azure silk : the vaulted ceiling was studded with sapphires, so that it resembled the night-sky shimmering with stars. The effect of the room was designedly that of a quiet starlit night : for, as rooms so often do, it expressed the character and spirit of its owner. And he who lay still and scarcely breathing on the gorgeous bed was Caspar the Wise, Caspar the Astronomer, Caspar who—more than twenty years before—had followed a star half across the known world.

To the dying, they say, come pictures of the past with the clearness of the present. To the old man came again, as he waited for the greatest adventure of his venturesome life, a series of pictures which for the last twenty years had rarely been wholly out of his mind. The night when, in this same house, there had shone for him and Melchior and Balthazar that new star for which they had looked so long : the appalling journey through deserts and mountain-passes, through heat and bitter cold, through haunts of wild beasts and wilder men, but never deserted by that star : the arrival at Jerusalem, the awful disappointment at the total ignorance of a new-born king, the vanishing of the star : the direction to Bethlehem and the star's reappearance ; and, clearest of all, the picture of the little house and its holy family of three. The gracious lady with the young pure face and the eyes that looked as if they saw more than this world holds, the eyes that looked like stars : the gentle man in the background quietly guarding the one who was his and the one who was not his : the baby, asleep in the straw, his mouth twisted into a small smile : his gold and the others' myrrh and incense lying at the baby's feet—he could almost see it all again now and almost feel again the peace that glowed in his heart, more brightly than any star, on the long way home by a different route.

“And that was twenty years ago. How time flies!

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
 And I would do it again, but set down

This set down
 This : were we led all that way for
 Birth or Death ? There was a Birth, certainly,
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
 But had thought they were different ; this Birth was
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
 We returned to our places, these kingdoms,
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
 With an alien people clutching their gods.
 I shall be glad of another death.¹

I wonder what has happened to the baby king. No news have come from the southern country ; I wonder how he fares. When I saw him he did not look like a king ; but I, Caspar, still believe that he was and is King of all kings, God of the stars and this world and myself, the truth of the heavens and the light of all worlds, Wisdom itself.

What was it that the prophet said, he who had trouble with his donkey ? 'There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.' Yes : that was the reason why the three of us made the journey. What else did he say ? 'I shall see him, but not now : I shall behold him, but not nigh.' Ah !

I, Caspar, am dying. And I believe that I shall see him again, now. I am sure that I am about to behold him, nigh. Because once, more than twenty years ago, I followed the light."

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There was silence in the house of Charlie the Cockney, for the master of the house was dying.

In the front room children played quietly, because "farver's ill." His wife moved as silently as she could, up and down the creaking stairs, in and out the squeaking door. No trees or flowers graced the small back-yard ; no star shone through the scented East London murk ; but the cockerels fattening for Christmas made no sound in their cramped run, and somewhere down the court a voice chanted with unconscious irony Haggerston's evening hymn, "Little man, you've had a busy day."

A dim light shone through the thin curtains of the room upstairs in which lay the master of the house awaiting the last sleep and what happens after it. It was not a beautiful room. But the wooden floor was partly covered with one or two clean strips of drugget that stirred now and then in the perpetual draught : the one window had an often-mended curtain : the room contained neither dust nor dirt.

¹ T. S. Eliot, *The Journey of the Magi*.

Over the iron bedstead hung a plaster crucifix long yellow with age, behind it was a dried cross from Palm Sunday: a well-thumbed book of devotions lay open on the clean, patched counterpane, and the small metal crucifix at the end of a rosary rested in a thin worn hand: a picture of an altar hung over our Lady's image on the mantelshelf, by it was a photograph of a priest in cassock and biretta. As rooms so often do, it expressed the character and spirit of its owner. He who lay still and scarcely breathing beneath the thin blankets was a working-man who had had a hard life and met his share of the slings and arrows, but had held fast to the religion which he had found more than twenty years ago when he had followed the star of his conscience and so had discovered both God and the Mother of God.

To the dying, they say, come pictures of the past with the clearness of the present. To Charlie came, as he awaited the greatest adventure of all, pictures that were even more vivid than those of his confession, communion, and anointing that morning. His first confession, under the figure of the good shepherd with the black sheep, where Father Mackonochie once sat, made when he was only a nipper "an' didn't 'arf 'ave the breeze up": first communion, at the altar of the blessed sacrament on a Saturday morning with breakfast afterwards (with sausages) in the hall with the priest who had prepared him for the sacraments: the years in which, because of some girl, he had wandered away from religion and lost the star: that Good Friday, when he had returned to the sacraments and there had been neither upbraiding nor rebuke: and the subsequent years, during which he had done his best to say his daily prayers, serve at the altars of his church, keep to his confessions and communions, and be a decent Christian father and husband.

"And now its all over, or just beginning: that depends on what you mean by 'it.' I'm dying; I know it.

What was it that the shepherd said in the Bethlehem Play at St. Augustine's.

I shall see him, but not now;
I shall behold him, but not nigh.
Out of Jacob there shall come forth a star,
And a sceptre in Israel shall be raised high.

Ah!

I know I've not been much of a Christian; might have been worse, but might have been a sight better. But I believe that I shall see him, now: I am sure that I am about to behold him, nigh. Because I've tried to follow the light."

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Two fancies.

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One fact.

God is spirit. They who worship him must do so in spirit and in truth. But in the new heaven and in the new earth shall be the throne of God and of the Lamb : there his servants shall serve him and shall see his face.



FATHER AND SON

ST. LUKE 2, 49. *Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*

IT is a spring morning in Jerusalem ; the feast of the passover is in progress ; the year is A.D. 12 or thereabouts. High above Kedron valley shimmers in the warm sunlight the magnificent Temple.

What a wonderful place it must have been ! The site, including the open-air courts, precincts, porches, and surrounding walls, measured a square of about a thousand feet ; that is to say, in the vernacular, it would fill the area bounded by Great Cambridge Street, Pritchard's Row, the canal, and Hackney Road. It is said that in it more than two hundred thousand could worship at the same time. On this morning the great building is still full, for it is the third day of the passover ; but it is not so crowded as on the two previous days, on which it was compulsory for every one to be present. After these followed the "half-holydays," when it was permissible to be absent. Some have accordingly returned home ; but many have not begun their journeys to distant towns and villages.

On these half-holydays it was the custom that certain of the more elderly and learned rabbis should give, in two of what we should call chapels, a series of public lectures on religion ; and that, after each lecture they should invite questions from members of their audiences. There were two kinds of lectures, one for adults and the other for children ; the latter would be not unlike sessions of our own Greater Catechism, except that, as I have said, the instructor was both elderly and learned.

The children's lecture has just ended. Questions are being asked; principally by a lad of twelve who, to judge by his accent, is a country boy from the north. Many are looking at him; both because of the character of his questions and because of something else which seems to stir behind and look out of his fine eyes, though it is as yet vague, unformed, and indefinable. As he stands slim and straight before the courteous and interested old doctors of theology, the eyes in his brown open-air face almost look as though they can see God. Apparently he is alone, unlike the other boys and girls with proud parents in the background. Yet he does not seem to be lonely; he does not appear to miss his mother. Presumably if you can see God you do not miss even your mother.

There is a movement among the grown-up listeners at the back of the chapel. A man and a woman push their way through. The woman has been crying, her eye-lids are red: the man, who is considerably older, looks anxious. The woman sees the boy of twelve; you can hear her sigh of relief, it is a wonderful thing to see her smile. "O, son!" she cries as she hurries to him, "where have you been? What have you been doing? I thought I had lost you. Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." "But, mother," he answers, "don't *you* know that I must be doing God's work? Wist *ye* not that I must be about my Father's business?" (There is a mild rebuke in his reply. The courtesy-title of father as applied to the kindly man by her side is not strictly accurate, as the three of them are well aware.)

The boy's question has been on the lips of thousands of his followers during the intervening nineteen centuries.

So you are going to be ordained. What in the world for? You have brains, you have been well-educated and are popular, you are well-off and have already a good deal of influence, the world's at your feet. You tell me you are going to be a parson, a fool of a fellow in a dog-collar and absurd clothes, an object of ridicule to nearly half the world and of pity to most of the rest. Forgive me if I ask you—why?

You wish to enter St. Martha's Convent in order that you may find out if you are meant to be a nun; you ask permission of me, your mother. I should not dream of refusing it, because I love you and want you to be happy. But you can not expect me to understand you. As you know, you will be well-off when I die. As you also know, you are good-looking, and there is more than one young man who would marry you now if you wished. You also have a will of

your own, like the creature-comforts, and love children. I wish you would tell me why you want to go to this convent.

As you know, my dear, I live opposite a church. You will find it difficult to believe me when I tell you that every morning of the week one of the priests opens the gate at the end of the passage at a quarter past six. Then the bell is rung (which, incidentally, always wakes me; though I invariably go to sleep again) and they have a service. At half-past six! On weekdays! Often with only two or three at it! Do you know why?

I say, Gert; there's a question I've been wanting to ask you for some time. Why aren't you like the rest of us girls at the factory? You're so prim and proper: you don't lark about like we do when the forewoman's not looking: you don't seem to care twopence about the boys: you've never got a really good story to tell (not what I call good; you know the sort I mean). I know you're a good girl; we all know you go to church; nobody minds that in the least. But Sunday only comes once a week; you might be a bit more like the rest of us. Why aren't you?

Have another drink, old man. This one's on me. Go on, do. Just for once. You always knock off quicker than any one else. Just for once have one over the eight. You won't? Why not?

You know Father So-and-so, the vicar of the big church down the road. There are the most extraordinary rumours flying about. You know he is over fifty, got plenty of work where he is and doing it really well; fine man, most popular, good preacher, and his church always full. Well, they say he is leaving it all to go out to Africa as a missionary. Can you understand it?

Why are educated young women hospital-nurses—to be at every one's beck and call; work for generally ungrateful patients until they nearly drop, then go on working and keep smiling all the time; at a salary of some £40 a year? Why do good parents, who can't afford it, not refuse to have children; and give them all they have, including health and often life itself? Why do daughters forsake all the lawful joys and happinesses of life and spend their best years caring for querulous and ungrateful parents? Why do Christian school-teachers do far more than they need for the boys and girls in their charge, out of school-hours? Why are hard-working men and women scout-masters, guide-captains, "brown owls," and the like, in their scanty leisure-time? How is it that apparently quite ordinary people can face and endure with utmost cheerfulness a long and painful illness, and meet death unafraid?

Why? asks the world.

The answer that it receives from each and all is another question that was first asked in a large temple by a serious small boy of twelve : "Wist ye not, don't you understand, that I must be, that I cannot rest unless I am, about my Father's business?"

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If I were to ask you : Why do you make your confession? Why do you receive communion? Why do you come to church every morning on your way to work to say your morning prayers? Why do you spend so long a time every evening on your knees before the tabernacle, when you must be tired out after your day's work? Why are you the sort of mother or father that you are? Why are you an old lady who is not gossiping, complaining, and scandal-mongering like nearly every one else in your street? And why do you give so much loving service to both this church in Haggerston and the Church abroad?

Would you be able to reply with another question, the same that the boy of twelve put to his mother : "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" I hope that you would.

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If you were to ask me both why I am a priest and why I am one in Haggerston, I hope that I too should honestly be able to answer in the same way.



MOTHER

ST. JOHN 2, 1. *And the mother of Jesus was there.*

“JESUS increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” That is all. Except for the incident at Jerusalem when he was twelve, that is all we are told about the first thirty years of the only perfect human life. Child, boy, youth, man; in accordance with the laws of nature he “increased in wisdom and stature,” he grew “in favour with God and man,” while his mother “kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” We are told no more than that.

But I do not think that I am irreverent if I try to lift the veil that hangs over those thirty years, provided that I do not try to lift it too high. Nor do I find it difficult to do so; for I too had a good home and a godfearing mother.

Nazareth. Dark mountains: green grass-covered rolling hills: fields with wild flowers—lily, larkspur, dogrose, anemone: vineyards on terraced hill-sides: trees and birds’ nests (“I think that I shall never see A poem lovely as a tree: A tree whose hungry mouth is press’d Against the earth’s sweet flowing breast: A tree who looks at God all day And lifts her leafy arms to pray: A tree which may in summer wear A nest of robins in her hair: Upon whose bosom snow has lain, Who intimately lives with rain. Poems are made by fools like me; But only God could make a tree.”) Clinging to the foot-hills among the trees a small town. Nazareth; meaning in Hebrew, a branch; “the place of trees.”

An unimportant place. Narrow and uneven streets; small insanitary houses; few shops; village-well; synagogue; children playing in the streets; country folk in bright dresses going about their small concerns; sparrows, known to God, valued by man at two for a farthing; old people sitting at cottage-doors. Nazareth; with the hills and country-side crowding in at its doors, the place of which one asked whether anything good could come from it, the home for thirty years of Jesus and Mary.

In one of its streets the cottage of Joseph the carpenter. The door is open, for it is a sunny evening: inside some one is singing for sheer joy, the joy that only a mother knows; singing, as she rocks her baby to sleep, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." You know what is the first thing that a baby sees: it is the face of his mother and the reflection in her eyes, as she stoops over him, of his own face. I wonder how old was Mary's son when he first recognized that blessed face, when he first smiled at sight of her and saw himself in her eyes, when he first said "Mother." Not very old, I think: for always, night and day, "the mother of Jesus was there."

Weeks and months pass, the child grows: he has had more than one birthday. Do you find it difficult to picture the small boy kneeling at bed-time at his mother's knees, learning from her to say his first prayers, feeling safe with his mother's arms around him? I do not: but perhaps I am more fortunate than some, for I can remember kneeling so and feeling secure by reason of my mother's arms around me—and her name too was Mary.

As we make pictures for ourselves of that quiet holy home at Nazareth, the pattern for all Christian homes, may we not think without irreverence of Mary teaching her little son to walk and not cry when he fell and hurt himself, to clean his teeth and be tidy: of the day when he grew out of baby-clothes and for the first time went to school (surely she took him on that first day and, when he came out, surely "the mother of Jesus was there" by the school-door): of his boyish joy at watching the shavings fly as Joseph worked at the carpenter's bench: of the little lad going shopping with mother, or to the well to draw water (what a great day it was when he carried the pail home without spilling a drop!): of the games he played in the streets with other boys and girls?

Surely we may draw for ourselves such pictures as we kneel before the tabernacle in a silence like that of the Nazareth years; for he who is now and there very man as well as very God, was once very human babe and boy who "increased in wisdom and stature."

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Now he is over twelve ; a serious lad.

The development of a boy's mind is gradual and unseen, like sap rising in a young tree in the spring ; but sometimes there are crises in that development which may be unknown to the older people who surround him. He was different when the three of them returned home after the exciting passover-week in Jerusalem. Just as dear and loving ; but his mother noticed a change—mothers do notice these things, good mothers. But she said nothing about his "Father's business" : she kept it all in her heart and prayers—mothers do, good mothers.

Perhaps now he liked to take long walks by himself : up above the world along the rolling downs, watching the sun rise to light the world, seeing it set into the swift Eastern night, standing still and slim and upright against the skyline to say the prayers his mother taught him to the Father who made the round red sun. Perhaps at times he would stand in some quiet lane far from Nazareth and watch his Father's flowers and birds and beasts ; grow to love them ; feel that his Father knew all about each one of them and loved them too. It comes out so clearly afterwards in his parables that God sees the silly sheep losing itself and himself goes out to find it, that God feeds the birds which toil and spin not, that God makes the wild flowers fairer than the glory of Solomon : did he who spoke those parables first learn them when he was a country boy at home ?

But more and more clearly in those quiet years, as time passed and the boy became a man, grew in his mind the outlines of the picture and vision of his mission in life : with greater and at last with complete certainty he knew what was the Father's business that he must be about. Until one day, none knows how or when or where, he knew who he was, why he was in the world and what the world would do to him.

And all the time, throughout the thirty years and the three that followed, he had at the back of him his home and his mother. The humble cottage in the village-street was ready and waiting for him whenever he should go to it ; there he knew that he would always be welcome, made happy, at ease, at home ; for always "the mother of Jesus was there."

Then, when he was thirty, came again "the fulness of time." After many years a prophet had come again to the land ; up and down the countryside rang the Baptist's message, "The kingdom is at hand." Even quiet Nazareth was stirred ; its inhabitants journeyed seventy miles to see and hear the strange man from the deserts.

In a cottage up a back-street Jesus of Nazareth knew his call. One day he kissed his mother good-bye, left home and went to John to be baptised. For the son it was the end of the thirty years of waiting; but the mother still must wait: that is the vocation of mothers, good mothers.

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Three years later, at about three on a Friday afternoon, "there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother."

It is good to think that the first sight the baby Jesus saw at home at Nazareth was his own face reflected in his mother's eyes; and that he may have carried this first memory with him throughout his life.

It is better to know—since "he bowed his head and gave up the ghost" "and the mother of Jesus was there"—that the last thing the crucified Jesus saw was his mother's eyes looking up at him and in them the reflection of his crucifix shining in their brave depths; and that he may have carried this last memory with him through death.

* * * * *

Haggerston children, who have your mothers still on earth with you, love them greatly. The Lord Christ who loves his mother to all eternity has a great love for sons and daughters who are not so modern as to despise or apologise for their parents, who are not ashamed of loving their mothers.

Haggerston mothers—working-mothers like his, in little poor houses like that at Nazareth, wives too of working-men—do not weary of your many labours to make your houses *homes* for the children he has given you, never (for any reason) stint your mother's love. The Lord Christ is for ever a mother's son and by his side still "the mother of Jesus is there." In the glory and splendour of heaven you may be sure that neither he nor she has forgotten the Nazareth home where he once "increased in wisdom and stature" and she "kept all things in her heart." You may be equally sure that he has a special love for all good mothers; especially, perhaps, for those who on earth are poor and brave like his.



STRAIGHT STREET

ACTS 9, 11. *Go into the street which is called Straight.*

STEPHEN'S audience rose as one man, fell bellowing upon him, ran him out of the city, and then and there stoned him to death.

The murder took place outside the gate of Jerusalem through which entered the main road from Damascus. The deacon died kneeling; his last words were a prayer for his assassins, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"; his face, it is written, was "as it had been the face of an angel." Behind the crowd, watching and approving of what was happening, stood a young man who had been a maker of tents but was then an influential member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. His name was Saul. He was a sincere and devout Jew, who was convinced that the Messiah had not yet come to earth, that the dead man Jesus was a dangerous impostor, and that this new heresy named "The Way" (the title of "Christianity" had not yet been invented) must be destroyed at all costs. The stone-throwers took off their long flowing cloaks in order that they might make good aim; Saul stood behind them, the heap of clothes at his feet, facing the victim; he heard Stephen's last words, he saw the beautiful face bashed and battered into red pulp; he smiled and licked his lips.

Some two years later, having, as he thought, stamped out the Church in Jerusalem, Saul, still "being exceedingly mad against the disciples" and "breathing in"—or, as we should say, living in an atmosphere of—"threatening and slaughter," decided to deal next with the considerable number of followers of The Way who were inhabitants of the important city of Damascus. He obtained credentials from the

authorities at Jerusalem and set out on his hundred and fifty miles' journey to the north. At its outset he would, of course, pass the scene of the murder two years before. Did he recall the words of the dying man's prayer? Did he seem to see again "the face as it had been the face of an angel"?

The journey was almost at an end. It was nearly noon of January the twenty-fifth, the usual hour for siesta and rest. But Damascus was already in sight and Saul was eager to finish the journey. Then, at the eleventh hour, God acted. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity"; may your extremity and mine, our eleventh hour, our last moments of life, be his opportunities!

Suddenly, like lightning, there flashed upon the travellers a dazzling light, far brighter than that of the blazing mid-day sun. All fell to the ground; but in that momentary flash Saul caught sight of a human form in whose hands and feet were scars, above whose heart was the mark of a healed wound. The sight blinded him. He had seen the glory of the ascended, risen, triumphant Christ the King.

After his surrender the proud Pharisee and infuriated persecutor had to be led by the hand into Damascus. He was taken to a house in "the street which is called Straight," and remained in the darkness of total blindness for three days and nights. It may be that he then saw again young Stephen's fair face and heard once more the words of his last prayer.

Then came one whose name means "The Lord is gracious," Ananias; and Saul become Paul the Apostle, Paul the Missionary, Paul the Martyr, Paul the Saint of London City.

There are two among many lessons which January the twenty-fifth may teach us, if we will. Somebody has written—I forget who, but I think St. Augustine: "If Stephen had not prayed, Paul would never have been given to the Church." Whether that is true or not, of course we are unable to know; though it is certain that there never was a more unlikely Christian than Saul the persecuting Pharisee. Sometimes I grow so weary of making my intercessions; they seem so useless. So-and-so who used to be a faithful altar-server; now I only see him occasionally, going down the street past the church with his head turned away from it and me—Mrs. Someone Else, who was a regular communicant and whom now I never see at the altar—that good fellow in Such-and-Such Street, who is a kind husband and father, but will not have anything to do with religion—those boys and girls who were such dear Catholic children, but for whom the years of growing-up have been too much—

Such-an-one living in open sin and drawing many away from God. I have prayed for them many times, God knows that I have ; but nothing has happened. I expect the reason lies in the character of my prayers for them ; at any rate I know that it is not God who is to blame, for I am very sure that whoever they are and however far away they may have wandered, he loves them still. But I do grow weary, at times, of my intercessions. Don't you? Then let us remember Stephen and Saul, and pray on.

With the silk tabernacle-curtains his shrine, with the white light his Epiphany star, with the humble form of the Host his veil, here in our Haggerston is King Christ of the Damascus Road. Nothing has ever been impossible to him, not even Saul the murderer. All eternity for more than one fellow-farer upon The Way may well depend upon the persistency and perseverance of your intercessions and mine. I wonder what Stephen and Paul had to say to each other when they met in heaven ; I can guess what the latter said. "Let us not be weary in well-doing," Paul once wrote : it may well be that, if you and I reach heaven and meet there one who says to us what perhaps Paul said to Stephen : "I wish to thank you for your prayers ; it is due to them that I am here"—we shall realize that there is no "better-doing" for other people than intercession.

For ourselves in this, or any other new year, the question asked by Saul in the moment of his conversion : "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" We are the little ordinary people of The Way ; a fairly feeble and ineffective parish-priest, only a Haggerston working-man, merely a moderately poor and generally weary East End mother, an old lady, a boy or school-girl, a bedridden invalid—but, with all our faults, lovers of the Lord Christ. "Jesus, what do you want *me* to do for you?" Is not the answer the same as that which was given to Saul, "Live in Straight Street"?

To be straight and sincere in our religion, especially in our confessions ; to be honest and genuine in every department of our lives ; to ring true in the hearing of God and man ; to be capable of bearing inspection by any one at any moment ; in short, to be Christians *always*—is it not that which Christ our Lord requires of plain folk like you and me? To live in Straight Street : it sounds so simple, but it is so hard ; indeed, for some of us it means making a move. But if only we can succeed, in this or any other new year, in dying in Straight Street, the blindness will fall from our eyes too—for still "the Lord is gracious" ; and we shall see the Christ whom Saul and Stephen saw, the king in his glory. For, to make a play upon the word, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life."



ALBERT

ST. LUKE 8, 5. *A sower went out to sow.*

SOME eighty years ago there lived in Stoke Newington a doctor who had a wealthy friend ; both were devout Christians. London was spreading rapidly eastwards ; suburbs were being included in the city, hundreds of new houses were being built. The doctor, Robert Brett, was inspired with the wish to supply the new areas with churches, in order that in these new fields might be sown that seed which is the Word of God ; his friend, Richard Foster, caught his enthusiasm and was chiefly responsible for financing what was known as the Haggerston Church Scheme.

The two laymen built St. Matthias', Stoke Newington ; St. Saviour's, Hoxton ; St. Michael's, Shoreditch ; St. Faith's, Stoke Newington ; and in Haggerston St. Columba's, St. Chad's, St. Stephen's, and St. Augustine's. For the Master Sower requires that men buy fields for him before he sows. Yet Christians neglect foreign missions and so-called Catholic priests disapprove of them ; which is strange. And most of those who now inhabit Stoke Newington, Hoxton, and Haggerston have never heard of Brett and Foster ; which also is strange.

Accordingly "a sower went out to sow" in that Haggerston field of God of which the four boundaries are Goldsmiths' Row, Hackney Road, Great Cambridge Street, and a not very salubrious canal. Had you seen him in those days you might have noticed old scars in

the palms of his hands, a wound in either foot, a mark above his heart : but in all probability you would only have seen his labourers. Hervey, Dent, Mother Kate, Nelson Burrows, Edward Burrows, Robinson, among many ; always poor, often unwell, generally overworked, usually unhonoured and unsung (when Nelson Burrows resigned his living after thirty years he did not receive from his superiors one word of thanks or recognition, nor were any of them able to be present at the funeral of either him or Mother Kate) : often tired, sometimes imposed upon, frequently disappointed, but somehow always happy and smiling, somehow always sowing up and down the grey furrows of York Street, Dove Row, Tuilerie Street (in which are no Frenchmen), Talavera Place, and the like.

Perhaps there were in St. Augustine's congregation four boys known respectively as Alf, Oris, Edwin, and Elbert. On their young hearts fell the seed.

Alfred was never interested. He heard the gospel preached ; knew there were such terms as Incarnation, Redemption, Atonement, and Sacrifice, but never had a notion what they meant ; was aware that people went to confession and communion ; but was merely uninterested. More than one of the sowers invited him to confirmation-instructions (though they had less alarming names), but he could not be bothered ; consequently he was never confirmed—not because he objected, but simply because he did not know what it was all about and it was far too much “fag” to find out. Invertebrate, gutless, jelly-fishy : usually to be found at the corner of the street, propping up the lamp-post, with his hands in his pockets and a scrounged cigarette drooping from his weak mouth. Of course he soon drifted away ; there was nothing to prevent him. “When any one heareth the word and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside.” You find Alfred in the other version of to-day's gospel.

More might be said for Horace, but not much more. He was a nice lad, but shallow ; no depth of character ; little courage ; content to drift with the stream and slop along ; no root in himself. Confirmed, because most of his mates were ; made his confession, once, for the same reason, though it was not a full one ; driven to communion three or four times a year by his mother and his scout-master ; an altar-server for a while, but only on Sundays (simply could not get

up on week-days), and even then unreliable; always meaning to say his prayers, but never succeeding; often intending to receive communion, but generally over-sleeping; would volunteer to do a thing and afterwards say with a smile, "Sorry, I forgot"; late at school, late at work, nine days out of ten. In short, one of those who "mean well" and stop at that. Came a time when he got chipped in the workshop about going to church, and one of his girls wanted to be taken out on Sunday mornings. So, gradually, he fell away. A pity. Nice fellow; "meant well"; just another of those who nearly break priests' hearts. "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; but when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, at once he is offended."

* * * *

Edwin was, even as a youngster, a smart lad; cute, quick in the uptake, with plenty of brains and push; always keen on getting on, keen on money. By no means content to spend life "standing at the corner of the street"; on the contrary he soon left the choir, for delivering Sunday-papers was a better job. Did well at school; one of his priests got him into an office in the city (for which he said, "Ta"), where he was popular and successful and in which he soon learned to despise his parents and have no time for church. Angelina, his flash girl, was a lively lady who liked to be taken to dances and the dogs. Betted with some success and finally won a considerable prize in the Irish Sweep, which was the end of him so far as God and St. Augustine's were concerned. "Went away," not in the least "sorrowful, for he had great possessions"; and always put them first, before the giver. Too clever by half was Edwin, much too clever for God. "And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up and choked it."

* * * *

Remained honest, steady, good old Albert. At no time was there anything very thrilling or exciting about him; he was never brilliant, never much to look at. But he is the salt of the earth, a Catholic Cockney working-man: in other words, one of the finest persons in the world and the stuff of which are made the saints in heaven. This is how he became so.

When he was a boy in the Catechism he took the trouble to write analyses. When he became a server he listened to sermons. When he grew to manhood he read and thought. But, above all, he prayed, even as a little chap. "He that heareth the word and understandeth

it" : it is the understanding which germinates the seed and it is prayer more than anything else which enables a man to know and begin to understand God. Albert is now a faithful and steady husband, a father who loves his children ; a man who is respected by fellow-workmen and employer ; one who is of more value both to Holy Church and to his St. Augustine's than much gold, for he is steel—tried, true, trusted. Of course he is regular and frequent in his use of the sacraments, without which none knows better than he that he could not be what he is : the priest at the altar at eight o'clock on Sundays knows that Albert is kneeling behind him, even if he does not hear his cough ; on the first Saturday evening in the month you will find him in church to make his confession ; at some time on any evening he is to be seen on his knees before the tabernacle, paying his daily visit and saying his night-prayers ; it is almost unknown for him to fail on his week-day serving-morning.

But he would be both surprised and confused if he knew how wide was his influence or what his priests think of him.

"And he that receiveth the seed into good ground is he that heareth the word and understandeth it."

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The bored, the shallow, the cute, and the good ; the blasé, the fickle, the cynic, and the saint ; still they grow together in the field which Brett and Foster bought many years ago ; still they thrive side by side—"until the harvest." Then the lord of the harvest will say to the reapers, "Gather together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them ; but gather the wheat into my barn." "Now the reapers are the angels."

Should you wish to know who are the Alberts, the good seed, the wheat of God's Haggerston harvest, look in a mirror—some of you.

"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."



EIGHTY PRAYERS

ST. JAMES 4, 2. *Ye have not, because ye ask not.*

BLESS me, father ; for I have sinned.”
“The Lord be in thy heart and on thy lips that thou mayest humbly and faithfully confess thy sins to the glory of Almighty God and the salvation of thine own soul.”

“I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary ever-virgin, to blessed Michael the archangel, to the holy apostles Peter and Paul, to all the saints, and to you, father, that since my last confession a month ago—when I received absolution and did my penance—I have committed the following sins. Well, father ; I am sorry to say that everything seems to have gone wrong, and I cannot make out the reason. I have had rows at home and quarrelled with my best friend. I’ve lost my temper badly with the children. I have been swearing and getting angry over such stupid things ; sworn at the kettle because it wouldn’t boil, at the cat because it got in the way, at the baby because it cried, at the dog because it barked—as though they could help it. My thoughts have been all wrong ; sometimes impure, often unkind and bitter ; I have allowed things to rankle in my mind. I have been pitying myself because I am not better off and because my health is not like that of others. My communions have been cold and mechanical, without the joy they used to bring. On many mornings I have said no prayers ; often I have been so tired at nights that what prayers I did say seemed to me quite worthless. Even in this confession, though I have made careful preparation, I can feel no

sorrow worth speaking about. In fact I have had a wretched month ; and, for the life of me, I cannot discover the reason. Father, can you tell me why I am like this and what is wrong with me?"

Could you? Suppose that you were a priest sitting in a confessional, a penitent came to you and made a confession like that and asked you that question ; could you put your finger on the cause of the trouble?

If you are a priest hearing confessions you must give an answer. None can cure a malady of the body if the cause is unknown ; it is so with the soul. You must answer at once, often without any warning, frequently without knowing who the penitent is. (In passing, has it ever occurred to you how difficult it is to hear confessions, how terrifying is the responsibility of giving counsel and advice that may affect the penitent for eternity? If it has, you will keep your confessor regularly in your prayers and will never fail to ask for him the Holy Spirit's guidance before you rise from your knees and go to kneel in the confessional.)

* * * *

Lent is upon us : once more "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by" on his way to Jerusalem and we, who are not so blind as he who once begged by the roadside, see and know him. What shall we make of this Lent? During the coming forty days what will you and I endeavour to do and not do for love of the crucified?

Fast a little and give alms? Yes. Hear a course of sermons? That will at least do us no harm. Make an extra communion once a week? That will do us much good. Try to bring some one else to church ; read our bibles ; speak the truth for forty days and not swear once? Excellent.

I will tell you of one good thing that each of us, however old or young, could do this Lent ; a thing that is, at least to me, more difficult than any of those and consequently well worth doing ; a thing that would be of untold value to countless others and of the greatest benefit to ourselves : it is, to pray eighty times—morning and evening for the forty consecutive days—during Lent. (You will notice that I said "pray," not "say prayers.")

* * * *

I wonder whether that penitent might be you or I.

Has everything gone flat and dull? Are you fed up : a nuisance to yourself and the many who love you? Do you find yourself losing your temper over silly and trivial matters? Are you being defeated by life's many difficulties? Are you self-pitying, self-centred, sulky, cross, and disagreeable at home and everywhere else? Have your

communions grown cold, slack, almost boring? Do you make your confessions with little or no sorrow and contrition?

Do you wonder at times why it is like this, when it never used to be? Could you tell me the cause?

If you were to ask me, I should ask you one question, Do you pray daily? (No, I did not say "say prayers.")

I believe that is the cause of the malady with many. Put the prayers right and everything else will come right too; I promise you. "Ye have not, because ye ask not."

I want you to give it a trial, not for a day or two, but for a little under six weeks, for forty consecutive days and nights; not because I ask you, but because Christ our Lord, whom you love so well and who loves you better, wants you to be both a happier and more useful Christian in a world that is none too happy or sure of itself.

* * * * *

Is it difficult to find people to pray for? I think not.

One day last week I sat for an hour in the sunshine on the sea-front of a large town, watching people pass to and fro. They seemed to me mostly disillusioned and disappointed elderly men or tired and weary middle-aged women. All were well-dressed and bore an outward expression of considerable courage, until you looked at their eyes; then you saw great sadness.

A few days ago I went, as I like to do when I can, to a cemetery in South London in order that I might see whether one grave was clean and tidy and that I might say some prayers by the stone cross at its head. Near to it was a new grave covered with still living flowers: by it stood a young woman in black with two small children at her side: tears were pouring down her face. Far and wide stretched rows and rows of headstones, crosses, broken marble pillars: some of the graves beneath them were cared for; most were neglected, overgrown, dirty, forgotten, looking as though none ever stood by them to say a prayer. I looked into the cold and forbidding cemetery-chapel in which was no altar for a priest to say a Mass of Requiem for the thousands of dead around him.

Is it really difficult to find subjects for daily intercession?

There was a monk who had a great reputation for his life of prayer. To him went a visitor who, to his surprise, found in the cell the newspapers of the day. "But, father, you surely do not read the daily papers?" "Certainly, my son; they are my daily intercession-books." You and I read the papers: is it really difficult to find people to pray for?

If you are unable to think of any one for whom to say a daily

prayer, there is at least the priest who is speaking to you at this moment. For a variety of reasons into which I need not enter, he needs much prayer and it would be appropriate if most of it was made by those who worship here.

* * * *

As regards yourself and your own needs. Suppose that on forty days, forty mornings and forty evenings on and from Ash Wednesday, having made your self-examination, thanksgiving, and intercessions, you were to kneel still, silent, unpraying : eyes closed or looking at crucifix or tabernacle : hands clasped and touching nothing earthly : mind still, unworrying, turned towards God. Suppose that each morning and each evening throughout Lent, for a few minutes you were to give God a chance to talk to you, perhaps for a change.

When Easter comes, would you not thus know God even better than you do now?

Would not that be a well-spent Lent?

* * * *

“Christian, dost thou hear them, How they speak thee fair?
‘Always fast and vigil? Always watch and prayer?’ ” Certainly you and I hear them, those jeering East Londoners who sneer at us because we are church-goers and try to keep Lent.

“Christian, answer boldly, ‘While I breathe, I pray.’ ” Let that be your answer and mine this Lent : better prayers than ever before : eighty of them, for love of God and for love of his Haggerston.

*



WHAT SHALL I DO WITH HIM ?

ST. MATTHEW 27, 22. *Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ ?*

IN all the pages of literature it is difficult to find a more dramatic instance of what is known as the irony of fate than in the account of what happened in the early hours of the morning of the first Good Friday. By the irony of fate I mean the shaping of events so that they become the exact opposite of what human policy has planned and plotted ; or, if you like, the moving of the finger of God.

The moving finger writes ; and having writ
 Moves on ; nor all thy piety nor wit
 Shall lure it back to cancel half a line ;
 Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.¹

Consider the irony of the situation. Pilate claimed complete autocracy : “Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee and have power to release thee?” was his haughty and arrogant question to the bound Christ who refused to speak to him : yet the autocrat was compelled to do what he had not the slightest intention of doing, and that by a people he flouted, despised, and treated as dirt beneath his feet. Pilate knew that the prisoner was innocent : “I find in him no fault at all,” he proclaimed publicly : yet he ordered him to be scourged and sentenced him to death. Pilate maintained that he was guiltless of the death, he washed his hands in melodramatic

¹ Edward Fitzgerald, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*.

exhibition of neutrality ; yet it is the judgment of history that it was his hand which really nailed Christ to the cross : twenty centuries after the event every Christian child is taught to say as part of his or her belief, “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” Pilate believed himself to be captain of his soul ; but everybody knew then, as everybody knows now, that he did not dare to obey his conscience.

The climax of this ironical situation came when Pilate—who had not the smallest intention of becoming involved in Christ’s trial, who was resolute in his determination to remain neutral and neither for nor against the prisoner, who did all in his power to avoid his duty and evade his responsibility—found that he could not escape Christ, was brought at last face to face with the inevitable, unavoidable, inescapable Jesus. He tried to refer the case back to the Jewish courts : they refused to accept it and returned the prisoner without thanks. He despatched the man to Herod : Herod played with him for an hour and sent him back. He thought that scourging would satisfy his accusers, but found that it only whetted their appetites. He played his last card and lost the last trick when he tried to set him free in place of Barabbas and only succeeded in raising a cry like that of wolves who have tasted blood.

So, finally, there was wrung from the lips of the Roman soldier who was a coward, the man whose job it was to administer justice and was afraid to do so, the question which is eternal : “What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? I cannot get away from him. He is inescapable. What *am* I to do with him? Take him away. He will not go. He haunts me. What *shall* I do with Christ?”

Once more it is Lent. Once again, because Christ loves and longs for you and me, the Church brings before us Gethsemane, Judas, Peter, Cock-crowing, Caiaphas, Pilate, Pillar of Scourging, *Via Dolorosa*, Veronica, Mother of Sorrows, Golgotha, Dismas, Longinus, Mary of Magdala, John, Joseph’s Tomb. Is there any one here who has been trying to run away from Christ and finds that he or she cannot? I wonder. Any one who, despite all that she or he can do, is brought once again face to face with the inescapable Jesus? I wonder.

I fled him, down the nights and down the days ;
 I fled him, down the arches of the years ;
 I fled him, down the labyrinthine ways
 Of my own mind ; and in the mist of tears
 I hid from him, and under running laughter.

Up vistaed hopes, I sped ;
 And shot, precipitated,
 Adown Titanic glooms of chasméd fears,
 From those strong feet that followed after.
 But with unhurrying chase,
 And unperturbéd pace,
 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
 They beat—and a voice beat
 More instant than the feet—
 “All things betray thee, who betrayest me.”¹

Is it you, child of God, who hears those feet, in whose conscience rings that voice? Do you too say, “What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? I have tried to escape from him, to forget him, to lose him; but I cannot. He has come again. He will not let me go. He haunts me. He is inescapable. What *am* I to do with Jesus?”

It is possible that I do not know your trouble. It may be that for years you have avoided confirmation, because you are afraid of making your first confession; and that you are still afraid. Perhaps, for one reason or another, you have not made your confession for many years: and it is indeed hard to return in middle age (nobody in Haggerston is really old, of course) to that sacrament which is so humiliating. It may be that your trouble lies at home: husband, wife, or parents ridicule your religion, you have grown so weary of the constant quarrels and the incessant sarcasm that you have let things slide and only come to church on Sunday evenings. Perhaps it is your adolescence—“growing pains,” as children call it—that hinders you from giving to God the whole of what you know that he wants from you; and, as a result, the mists of doubt and indifference have settled on your love of him and made it so much colder than when you were a child. It may be that some one, whom you once loved dearly, has played the Judas and betrayed your love; you feel that you cannot forgive him or her. Or perhaps it is some secret and undiscovered sin—secret, that is, to all but God and you—which is forcing you to try to drive God out of your life.

Whatever it may be, I know—and you, child of God, know too—that you cannot get away from the Lord Jesus: it is not possible for you to lose him: he will not let you go: he is inescapable: he stands before you now on the threshold of Lent, looking at you as once he looked at Pilate, saying little as he said little then, but asking much,

¹ Francis Thompson, *The Hound of Heaven*.

as he always asks. He is the inevitable and inescapable Christ of the crown of thorns and the crucifix.

What shall I do now with Jesus which is called Christ : what will you : during this Lent, which may be our last Lent on earth, our last chance?

For, mark this, both you and I and every Christian *must* do something with him : that is fact. Neither Pilate, nor you, nor I, nor any person who has once met Christ, can be neutral. It is not possible for us to wash our hands of God.

What shall I do with him?



THE FINEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD

ST. MATTHEW 27, 19. *When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.*

IT has been well said that the test of a religion is the strength of the appeal which it makes to women. For woman is born to be a mother; hers is the greatest of all human privileges and responsibilities, the giving of life, the bearing of children; and the penalty of the misuse of this power falls most heavily on woman, "it is"—and always has been—"the woman who pays." Woman can rise higher and fall lower than any man. It is also generally true to say that woman is the more chaste and pure of the sexes, woman is more capable of bearing pain, and woman can rise to greater heights of self-sacrifice and devotion than man. And it is a fact that woman has always responded quickly and passionately to a religion that teaches holiness.

Consequently it is not surprising that when Christ came with his humility and gentleness, his uncompromising opposition to sin, his shining purity, his sympathy with weakness, his love of children, his unfailing chivalry, and finally his wonderful cross, womanhood fell at his feet in worship and adoration. Nor is it surprising that he who was, and is for eternity, a mother's son should raise woman to her feet and, for the first time in history, place her on her proper level in God's world.

Mary of Magdala, the Samaritan woman by the well, the mother of James and John, the unknown women who brought their babies for his blessing, Peter's mother-in-law, the crying women by the

Jerusalem gate, Veronica,—each and all of them, up to his blessed mother, loved him in his days on earth with a loyalty and devotion which were unique. So far as we know, no woman cried, “Crucify! His blood be on us and on our children,” on that Friday morning: that was man’s work. On the hill of death the so-called weaker sex outnumbered the other by four to one when there came the real test of standing by the cross, unashamed friends of the crucified. It was a woman who went first to the holy sepulchre on the third day.

So it has been ever since. It is, generally speaking, the women of England, of the world, who enter Religion and give God all that they have. It is the woman at home who, more than any other, makes or mars that home. It was our mothers who gave us all. It is women at St. Saviour’s Priory who, more than any other, have made and still make this corner of East London what it is.

* * * * *

The incident of Pilate’s wife Procula is capable of—and, indeed, is generally given—a different interpretation to that which I now suggest to you. To me it always seems to shine out of the sordid story of man’s cruelty, vindictiveness, savagery, and murder like a star on a black night. I will tell you why I think so.

“When Pilate was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.” Behind those words it seems neither far-fetched nor fanciful to read some such story as this.

* * * * *

Procula loved Pilate, because she went with him to Jerusalem. A Roman governor was forbidden to take his wife with him on foreign service: an exception to that rule could only be granted by the highest authority. In the corrupt and immoral condition of the empire as it then was, husbands were generally only too glad to be removed from their wives, and wives were not at all unwilling to be left free in a gay and rotten Rome. But Pontius and Procula were still in love with each other: Caesar granted permission for the law to be broken: she was glad to live with her husband in an alien and unfriendly land, he was pleased to have his wife at his side.

Procula knew the man from Nazareth. How she knew him, or how much of him she knew, we cannot tell: but her sure woman’s instinct told her that this carpenter was a gentleman, one who was pure and honest, “a just man.” At any rate she knew him sufficiently well to dream about him.

But Procula had that greatest of all the sorrows of women, which was the more bitter because, by reason of her loyalty and wifely duty and love "that endureth all things," she must hide it. She knew that her husband was growing into a bad man. Her man was becoming that which was unthinkable to Romans—a coward, one who tampered with justice, an abuser of his power. Her Pontius, her husband, was beginning to be afraid of the Jews!

So, in the early hours of the Friday morning, she summoned her courage and did a very gallant and risky thing: she sent a message to the governor, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man." To try to influence the mind of the judge while he was in court was, properly, a punishable offence, even although the offender was the judge's wife. But Procula, who still loved the Pilate of her youth, was making one last appeal: she knew the horror of the crime he was about to commit and did all in her power to prevent it.

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It was useless. Pilate received her message; smiled; "these women and their dreams." Perhaps Procula cried when she heard that the death-sentence had been passed; cried for the just man from Nazareth, cried for the death of the respect she once held for her husband. Perhaps, also, husband and wife dined together as usual on that Friday evening, when the crowds and the carrion-crows had left Skull Hill and the Jews in the city were once more quiet. "Well, my dear," said he, as he took his seat, "I am sorry that I could not do as you asked; it was quite out of the question. But I assure you that I was not to blame; in fact, as you may have heard, I publicly washed my hands of the whole affair. In any case, that is the end of—what was it you called him?—the just man. A little wine, my dear? It will do you good; make you sleep better; mustn't have these silly dreams, you know."

But as he spoke, a little too fast for one with a quiet conscience, I do not think that he looked at her, and I am sure that she did not look at him.

* * * * *

As I think of Procula, look around me at the world to-day, and hear confessions, I know who I think are the finest and bravest of the whole fine company of Christian women.

They are not those who have good and godfearing husbands and children who rise up and call their mothers blessed, though perhaps they are the most enviable. They are not the world's nuns, though it is probable that they are the happiest. They are not the very poor;

though His Majesty who, as St. Teresa says, greatly loveth courageous hearts is well aware that you have to search far to find more pluck and heroism than that of East London working-women. Nor are they even the world's widows or the brave single ladies who hide their loneliness and lack of what they were meant for under the genial and generous cloak of aunt-hood and the lady bountiful.

I think that the finest woman in the world is she who is a practising Catholic, with all that that comprehensive term implies ; is married to one who sneers at and despises all forms of religion ; and persists in both her Christian duties and her loyalty to him. Such an one, I mean (in Haggerston you need not seek far to find her), who has to teach her children to say their prayers while their father is not at home, to go to communion before he is awake, to sneak out of the house to make their confessions, and "not to grow up like dad" ; who has long since learned to wait until her husband is asleep before she kneels for her own prayers, who dare not tell him that she goes to confession, who kneels on the altar-step alone and without the man she loves. She, I mean, who must watch her man's character slowly deteriorate and see him go step by step down the easy hill in spite of all that she can do ; yet still loves him, with the love of her whole being which is only a woman's to give ; never complains, is far too loyal and true to talk about him to any one else ; and loves him, is faithful to her marriage vows in spite of all provocation, to the very end.

The wife who walks gallantly through life with a sad and breaking heart, but with a smile on her face, in her eyes the light of a Christian woman's soul and on her tongue the speech of one who loves both Mary and her son : the woman who, on nearly every morning of her long married life, goes down on her knees to take up for one day more her secret cross of sorrow and shame (and you cannot pick up any cross unless you do first go on your knees) : the wife and mother who, every day and all day for nearly a lifetime, denies herself for the sake of Jesus Christ,—she, I think, is the bravest and the finest woman in the world.

Moreover, I believe that some one else thinks so too ; "the just man" of whom Procula once dreamed.



WORSE THAN DEATH

ST. MATTHEW 27, 25. *Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us and on our children.*

THERE was once a man who talked too much. In order that he might realise the gravity of this sin his confessor set him the following penance: "To-morrow," said he, "take with you throughout the day this bag of feathers; whenever you speak, put a feather by the roadside; and come to see me in the evening." The man appeared in the evening and returned the empty bag. "To-morrow," said the priest, "go and pick up the feathers." On the morrow there were none to be found.

Words are terrible, frightening things. We speak so easily; we speak so often; we are always talking; the words pour from our lips; we never know how far our words may go or what their effect will be, for good or ill, perhaps long after we have passed and the glib tongue is silent perforce. Like feathers our words float round and round our little world, with changed accents, altered meanings, unintended emphasis, unmeant significance. Truly, though "speech may be silvern," more often than not "silence is golden." Wisely wrote St. James, when he named the tongue "an unruly evil that defileth the whole body and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." Well did Solomon say, apparently with some feeling, "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop than with a brawling woman in a wide house." Truly spoke the son of Sirach, "There be three things that mine heart feareth: the slander of a city,

the gathering together of an unruly multitude, a false accusation. All these are worse than death."

Up from the blinded, maddened mob packed into the open spaces round the palace, clinging to tree-tops, peering from windows and balconies and flat house-roofs—the mob that had been so lashed and goaded by the words of its leaders that it resembled a man shaking with uncontrollable rage, a beast of prey licking its lips in anticipation—rose in hoarse and passionate roar the most terrible words ever spoken. As one man the thousands screamed: their words broke like a seventh wave over a white balcony on which stood two men, looking down at them; one with his hands in a basin of water, fat, soft, white, afraid; the other with his hands bound, fearless, still—"His blood be on us and on our children."

Well! It was: and is. The Jews got what they asked for on that Friday morning.

During the siege of Jerusalem there were five hundred crucifixions a day "outside the city wall"; the victims were Jews. To this day, as throughout the intervening centuries, the Jew—despite his fine intellect, his power of government, his gifts of speech and music, his subtilty of thought, his financial ability—is persecuted, despised, isolated, and insulted as has been no other race in history. He seems to carry, from century to century and from land to land, an awful burden. He is haunted, weighed down, branded by The Blood that is on him and his children. He is The Wandering Jew.

A prince without a sword,
A ruler without a throne;
Israel follows his quest.
In every land a guest,
Of many lands a lord;
In no land King is he.¹

It is an awful thing to throw out a challenge to God. He has a way of accepting it and taking the challenger at his or her word.

There are worse things than death.

Pilate is no more. But his question remains, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" ; it must still be answered. To this day humanity must make choice between Christ and Barabbas. Pray God that none in Haggerston choose as did those in the precincts

¹ Rudyard Kipling, *The Song of the Fifth River*.

of Pilate's palace on Good Friday morning and voice their choice with "His blood be on us and on our children." For in sober truth it is in men's power to do so.

A man who, to gratify his lusts, drags a girl or woman into the mire, even if she has been in it before: one who, by word or example, destroys a child's bright flower of innocence: you, if your nagging tongue is merciless, sarcastic, bitter, and full of revenge: one who despises a mother's love and sneers at parents' sacrifice and devotion as old-fashioned and out of date: you, if you bet or gamble, drink or drug, so that your home is a comfortless barrack and your children are dirty, underfed, ill-clothed: you—and assuredly I—if we go to the confessional in order that our sins may be washed away in that same blood, and hold things back, make half-confessions: you—and certainly I—if we go to the altar to receive that blood in unforgiven mortal sin, if we leave the altar deliberately intending to sin again. Would you not say that they who have the minds to plan and do these things, have minds to prefer Barabbas and crucify Christ? I should. Do not such men and women, by their deeds and manner of life, cry to high heaven, "His blood be on us and on our children"? Of course they do.

Assuredly they too will get what they ask for—one day.

Words are terrible, frightening things.

* * * * *

But words can change their meaning and, by force of events, attain a new significance. When that cry of hate rose to the white balcony I suggest to you that it may have had another meaning for Jesus of Nazareth. I suggest that to him it may have sounded as sweet music.

"His blood: on us and on our children." Perhaps he remembered door-posts sprinkled with blood, so that the angel of death passed over those who lived behind them. Perhaps he thought of the lamb slain in acceptable sacrifice and of the high priest passing into the Holy of Holies, bearing the blood of atonement—and looked forward, only a few hours, to the offering of the one, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice which should make all men "at one" with his Father.

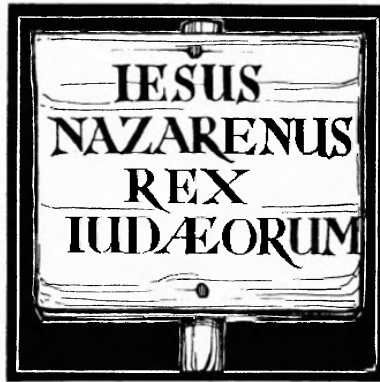
Perhaps, too, as he stood by Pilate, he also looked onward; saw East London working-men, priests, women, children, nuns—kneeling in confessionals, hearing the blessed words "and by his authority committed to me, I absolve," returning to the world of work and sorrow clean and shriven "having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"; saw mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, husbands, wives, and sweethearts kneeling side by side on a

green carpet (on a green hill?) before a table on which stood in the place of honour Pilate's old emblem of shame and hearing as they knelt, "The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life"; and saw youths and maidens keeping holy purity and bright untarnished faith in spite of great temptations, Christian homes in Haggerston fit for his own mother to live in, a great red house in Haggerston bearing on its wall and in the hearts of those who live there his cross standing in triumph on the world, and Haggerston people dying unafraid because they knew and loved the crucifix.

It may not be fanciful to suppose that the timeless Christ, in whose eyes past and future are the eternal present, knew in that moment of Good Friday time the millions who, in the days and centuries to come, would own him as their Lord and Saviour; pass manfully by virtue of his cross through tears, tribulations, and many trials; and come at length to the great white throne of God, singing, "Thou wast slain and thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." It is at least possible that the fierce cry, "His blood be on us and on our children," had in part a happy meaning for him whose blood it was.

But let us, who are communicants, at least in Lent set a watch over our speech and be more careful of our words. He who is the blessed sacrament wills to come to our souls by means of our powers of speech, our lips, tongues, mouths. Let us remember Holy Communion if and when we are tempted to use wrong, idle, or needless words.

It would also do us no harm if we too could learn to say, "There be three things that mine heart feareth: the slander of a city, the gathering together of an unruly multitude, a false accusation. All these are worse than death."



I.N.R.

ST. JOHN 19, 19. *Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth The King of the Jews.*

EVERY criminal condemned to crucifixion by Roman law was led in daylight through the streets of his city to the place of execution. In this procession he occupied the chief place, and was, nearly always, made to carry the smaller of the two beams that would form his cross. In front of him walked a herald carrying a pole to the top of which was fastened a white board. Written on this board in red letters and in the various languages spoken by the inhabitants of the city was a short description of the crime that he had committed and for which he had been sentenced to a death which was the most painful and the most shameful. At intervals along the route the herald read in a loud voice the red writing on the white board.

The place of execution being reached, which was generally outside the city walls but in as prominent a place as possible, the beams of the cross were fitted together and laid on the ground. To it the criminal was nailed or roped. Above his head the small white board was fastened to the cross. Then the whole structure was pulled upright by means of ropes passed over a temporary scaffolding: its base sank into the hole in the ground which had already been dug for it: the hole was filled in and the top-heavy cross was wedged in order that it might stand firm.

So Pilate took pen and wrote the crime, the titulum, the tabula, "the title." I.N.R.I. : IESUS NAZARENUS REX IUDÆORUM : Jesus the Nazarene King of the Jews. He wrote it in a mood

of sulkiness and anger with the Jewish priests, because they had forced him to change his mind and have a good deal to do with Jesus called Christ. He wrote it as a taunt and insult to the whole Jewish race. He wrote it in the three languages understood by all who would see the herald with the white board; in the different tongues spoken by all who travelled along the main road to Jerusalem, saw on a hilltop near the city three gallows, and turned aside to discover what crime had been perpetrated by him on the centre cross. And, with the characteristic obstinacy of a weak man, he refused to change the writing: "Don't write that," they said; "write that he *said* that he was king of the Jews." "What I have written," petulantly answered Pilate, "I have written," and wrote more truly than he knew.

I.N.R.; Jesus of Nazareth, King; *the* King. So he claimed to be.

He claimed to be the final authority. Whenever he spoke in the three years of his ministry—whether in synagogue, on the seashore, in the temple, on mountain-side, in private to his disciples—he claimed to be making the final and absolute revelation of God and the things of God: "Verily, verily, I say unto . . .": "It hath been said, but I say . . ."

He claimed complete mastery over his adherents, expected and exacted the closest loyalty and absolute obedience. "Follow me" was his first and last order: "Except a man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

His whole demeanour claimed the perfect holiness which alone can attract the allegiance of the religious-minded, though naturally—since he was a gentleman—this claim was scarcely ever put into words. In fact on only one occasion, when slander was spread about him, did he ask, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?"—and there was no answer.

Perhaps you have noticed that he never prayed with his disciples. We do not know how Jesus of Nazareth prayed, except in the garden of Gethsemane; for the prayers which are fitting for fallen human nature do not suit him. "After this manner, pray ye; Our Father . . . forgive us our trespasses"; but he was far above need of absolution.

He was in truth a born king. Throughout his ministry you will find, if you care to look for it, his claim to kingship hinted at more and more clearly in his teachings and parables as the three years pass. The whole point of the passion—its entire purpose and reason—is that he was and is the Messiah of his people, the king of a kingdom

as eternal and universal as it was and is spiritual. On the cross he is, to those who have eyes to see, the king reigning on his throne.

"Pilate saith unto Jesus, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest." Whereupon Pilate wrote on a board, I.N.R. : Jesus, King.

You and I—in spite of all our faults, fears, failures—own him so. He is our king.

I wonder when you first heard his claim to have complete authority over you, to expect absolute obedience, to do what he tells you no matter what the whole world says, to serve and give without ever counting the cost or necessarily receiving reward—yet.

When I was a small boy with a large head my mother took me to Mass on Sundays at the church of St. Michael and All Angels, Croydon (it was there that I was baptised and there that I said my first Mass, with my father as server and my parents the first to whom I ever gave the Host). I can remember now the sunlight slanting between Pearson's lovely pillars as we knelt together in the Lady Chapel and I can still see the illustrations in the old-fashioned blue-covered Children's Mass-Book *Hosanna*. I think that it was in one of the moments, when I knelt in that house of God by the side of her whose favourite brooch is now fastened to the base of the crucifix on St. Augustine's high altar, that I first became really conscious of Christ as a living person who was interested in me.

I know that the first time I knew him as the king who makes great demands but yet must be obeyed was when I made my first confession on a sunny Good Friday afternoon in the school chapel at Hurst in Sussex.

I can still remember the "feel" of the small chapel at Ely when I made my retreat before my ordination and, late one night, tried to the best of my ability to give myself to that king "to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and obey"—but not "till death us do part."

When did you first own him king?

Did you first see his majesty in and through one of his fine East London priests, who gave to him and to you all that they had—Father Wainright, Father Massiah, the brothers Burrows, Father Robinson, or the brothers Harry and Richard Wilson? Was it in the mirror of a Priory Sister that you first caught sight of King Christ looking at you and looking for you, saying little to you but asking much of you?

Or did it come, that claim to your whole allegiance, through no human agent but by the blessed sacrament? There was, perhaps, a moment when you were kneeling alone before the tabernacle, not praying, silent, receptive, with your mind's door open, listening: perhaps it was in the act of receiving communion, as you knelt with folded hands, closed eyes, humble and shriven soul, having received the Host and awaiting the Precious Blood: there came into your mind a thought, an inspiration, a good resolve that was never there before—and you obeyed. In other words, the king made a demand of the loyal subject of his that you are and that I wish I was: and you took another step on and up in the not so long a road to that journey's end which is life's beginning.

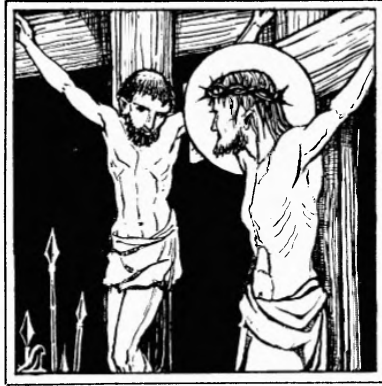
In any case, he is our king; you and I are trying to be his loyal subjects. (I could say so much about that, but I think there is no need.)

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To-day is Mid-Lent Sunday.

Most of us, perhaps all of us, have been trying this Lent to be better Christians. Let us try even a little harder during these coming days of Passiontide, Palm Sunday, the Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday—to receive communion, to hear Mass, to make good prayers, to spend a few minutes each day before a crucifix, to be a little kinder, to fall into our besetting sin not once, to make in the Holy Week the best and bravest confession of the year. In other words, let us do what Pilate did: write I.N.R.—not on a board for all to see, but on our hearts for I.N. alone to see.

For this, and this alone, is all that really matters both in this life and through the eternity to come—Jesus of Nazareth, King; yours, mine.



THOU . . . WITH ME

ST. LUKE 23, 43. *Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

THERE was once a small boy who was taken to London to see the funeral of King Edward VII. He was immensely impressed, as any boy would be, with all that he saw and heard: the soldiers, muffled bands, silent crowds, kings and princes of other lands, masses of flowers, gorgeous coffin. But that night, to his mother's surprise, he refused to say his prayers. "You see, mummy, God hasn't time to listen to me to-night; he's much too busy unpacking the king."

Has there not come to you at times more or less the same thought as that which was in the boy's mind? There has to me.

On this day last year I was in a hospital-bed. Opposite me lay a man who had undergone a serious operation and was dying: in the bed by the ward-door lay a courageous Scotsman who went to his maker a few days later. Throughout the day and nearly all the night I knew that many were coming and going through the hospital's ever-open doors: day and night nurses in many wards were always busy: there was great activity in the silent operating-theatres: people were dying, people were recovering, people were crying over still forms on white beds, people were laughing as they took their loved ones home again from hospital. And always the endless streams of traffic roared and rattled by the open window above my head. "Does God really know about this unimportant East London priest

lying idle in Holy Week?" I asked myself during one long day; (of course it was stupid of me to do so; but strange thoughts come when you are lonely, not too well, disappointed, and suddenly put on one side); "Isn't God much too busy over far more important people and things to have time to attend to a moderately dull clergyman and his trivial fears and cares about his little St. Augustine's and still smaller self?"

The same thought has come to me at other times. It came once, I remember, as you and I were making our annual pilgrimage on a Sunday afternoon in October through the City of London Cemetery at Ilford to sing vespers at the graves of the Priory Sisters. "There must have been thousands of funerals here," I thought: "this place of trees, flower-beds, well-kept roads, and polite if illiterate requests to 'keep off the verge,' must contain 'the remains,' as we say, of thousands of human beings. Does God really know each one of them?" It comes to me now and then, that same question, as I pass over London Bridge and see its pavements black with the thousands going to or from their work in the city; as I sit in a stand at Highbury and look at the rising oval tiers of seventy thousand faces. It came when I stood alone on the monkey island above the bridge of a steamer in the Indian Ocean and around me seemed nothing but sea and above me nothing but stars. It came when I stood in a cemetery at Passchendaele, surrounded so far as eye could see by row upon row, rank upon rank, of uniform white headstones marking the resting-places of thousands of men.

Is it possible that God knows each one of us, knows every individual in the world's millions? Does he really know you and me, intimately, personally, one by one? Is it possible?

* * * * *

Nor should I be surprised if the same question had come to your minds too.

Here is a choirboy; sitting where hundreds of choirboys have sat before him, just as bored with the sermon as were they; on the same threshold of life, soon to plunge into the waves of this troublesome world and sink or swim like the many who have gone before him. Does God know that boy now, as intimately as his mother does, by name?

Here is an anxious mother; worried about her children, troubled because her husband is out of work. Here is a hospital nurse or sister; with her ward, patients, to-morrow's work, her own future, still quite naturally at the back of her mind as she comes to church. Here is somebody old and poor, some one lonely and sad, another

very happy, a fourth always unwell. Here is a penitent kneeling again in the confessional and saying for the hundredth time, "I confess." Here is a child; come to church alone, without mother or father, as no child should have to do; having not the faintest idea what the priest in the enormous spectacles and the fairly white garment is talking about. And here is a priest; standing where so many have stood before him, where so many will stand and preach long after he is quite forgotten.

In this grievous sea of roofs, chimneys, streets, and courts that is named Haggerston; in this maelstrom of sin, joy, pain, laughter, courage, cruelty, religion, and godlessness that men call London; in this great world; in the universe with its myriad other worlds; in "the majority," the great majority which has played its piece and for which the footlights have faded and the final curtain has fallen—in all this is it possible that God can know you and you and me, individually, one by one?

* * * * *

In the cross of Christ, as always, I find my answer.

"He said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

You appreciate the context? He on the centre cross is racked by physical pain; scourged, nailed, bleeding, bruised, consumed with thirst, faint from lack of food and loss of sleep. He is tormented by mental agony; soon he will be forsaken by the Father, now he is deserted by nearly all his friends; he can see his mother in greatest sorrow; on his cheek still burns the traitor's kiss. Completely alone, he bears on his shoulders the sin of the whole universe, past, present, future; alone he is wrestling against principalities and powers, against Satan and all the hosts of darkness.

There calls faintly to him one solitary human voice; "Lord, remember me."

At once he answers; he who on that cross is God; he who there is—if I may say so without any intention of irreverence—immensely busy. "Thou," he says; "with me."

That is my answer, and yours, as to whether God knows individuals. "Thou: in paradise: to-day: with me."

* * * * *

A man, he asked, has a hundred sheep and loses one. Does he not at once leave the ninety-nine and go to look for the one? Of course; "and I," he says, "am more than man; I am God."

Are not two sparrows, he asked, sold for a farthing? Yet, says he, not one sparrow is forgotten before God. And, adds he, "You are of more value than many sparrows."

If a woman, he asked, has ten coins and loses one; will she not sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds that one? "And I," he says, "am more than man; I am God."

Listen to a great orchestra. Perhaps to you, certainly to me, the parts played by many of the instrumentalists are unrecognisable. I might imagine that, if some minor instrument ceased or one performer were to play a wrong note, it would not matter much in the great volume of sound. But the great conductor, the Toscanini, would notice it at once. If a man—then, surely, still more God—will know immediately whether I play my part in humanity's orchestra; even if—as assuredly is the case in this instance—it is only that of very second fiddle.

* * * * *

The good shepherd calleth his sheep by name.

I cannot understand *how* God can know me, personally, individually; but I am very sure that he *does*.

In fact I am quite certain that it is still as it was soon after nine on Good Friday morning, "Thou . . . with me."

Because, you see, God is Love. Which explains it, if you think it out.



VERY GOOD

ST. JOHN 19, 30. *It is finished.*

GENESIS 1, 31. *God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.*

IN God's history-book of this world there are accounts of two Good Fridays.

God said, Let the earth bring forth every living creature after his kind, cattle and creeping thing, bird and beast: it was so: and God saw that it was good. Day and night; heaven and earth and seven seas; grass and fruit-trees; sun and moon and stars; whales and winged fowls; flowers and flame and forests,—all began to be at the divine command. God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; let him have dominion over fish and fowl and all the earth: so God created man in his own image, male and female; and God blessed him. Finally, God made man: in part of earth, his body formed from the ground's dust, he too having kinship with Mother Earth: but he alone of all creation receiving a soul, endowed with the divine and unquenchable spark of celestial fire that links him for ever with God and angels:—man the climax in creation's ascending scale: man the best and most beautiful thing made in that first week, however long the week may have been: man the image, the replica, the reflection of God himself: man the apex up to which all creation had led.

Thus the heavens and the worlds were completed. God looked

round on all that he had made ; “It is finished,” “It is very good.” The evening and the morning were the sixth day. It was a Good Friday.

It was nearly three on the afternoon before another seventh sabbath Saturday. From his high wooden throne on a green hill incarnate God—smeared with blood, bearing four wounds and shortly to receive a fifth, crowned with thorns, placarded white and red against a black sky—looked round upon his work of creation’s restoration and redemption. Behold, it was very good : *Consummatum est*, it is completed : *Τετέλεσται*, it has been perfected. “It is finished,” God’s long task since man’s first sin, his whole plan to buy back mankind. All the dreams and visions of Old Testament prophets ; every expectation of the people of the Jews ; all the longings for Messiah ; every type and foreshadowing in the Jewish Church ; all the long and weary building of the everlasting bridge that shall once again link up God and what was made in his likeness,—it is all done.

The desire of all nations has come. Once again on the sixth day of the week, the best Good Friday, it can again be said that God saw all that he had done and, behold, it was very good. And God rested on the seventh day, the Holy Saturday.

Once more we come to the end of another Lent, with its many brave endeavours and perhaps more sad failures. We begin another Holy Week, approach one more Good Friday—and draw a little closer to the day on which we too must look back over our life on earth and say, “It is finished.”

Both in regard to your keeping of Holy Week and all that you do in it for love of the crucified—your communions and Easter confession, your prayers and watchings on Maundy Thursday, your Good Friday—; and in regard to the moment of your particular judgment, when, having left this world, all that you did and did not do in this life is spread before the eyes of both God and yourself : let me remind you of one vital fact.

The touchstone of everything, the scales in which all will ultimately be weighed, the standard by which all your concerns will be appraised and valued on the day which has been your last earthly day, is that which now hangs before your eyes, the holy cross. That is the bridge between God and Man, which was completed by the death and resurrection of the God-Man and which is the only road to God : that is the new Jacob’s ladder set up to heaven on earth, God stands above

it, angels ascend and descend upon it, and up its cruciform steps each of us must go, if he or she would reach heaven : on that ladder is the form of Christ our Lord, it is only through him that we shall find the way, for still he says, "I am the way." For every mother's son and every mother's daughter the saying is true, "No cross : no crown."

When you and I lie dying—in the Holy Week it is good for us to think of our own ends, which will be the beginning of eternity somewhere or other (and there is only one alternative to heaven)—; still more when we face God on the other side ; we shall know that only the things which we did for God and the people of God were "very good." They alone will endure in the fire of God which in that day "shall try every man's work of what sort it is." They alone will prove to be gold, silver, jewels. All the rest will be wood, hay, stubble. Nothing that is unable to stand the test of the cross, nothing that is incompatible with the crucifix, will be of any use when this little life is over.

* * * * *

Consequently I counsel you during this great week—will your next Holy Week be spent on earth?—to make time to kneel here each day beneath the rood, to look up at, and listen to, the crucified. Try, as you do so, to bring to him your life as it is at this moment : of course he knows it, but by doing so you show him that you know it, which is well. Take to him as he hangs there looking down at you every detail of any and every ordinary day : work, home, friendships, pastimes, the books you read, the pictures you go to, your plans for your children, the trouble with your husband or wife, the joys and aches and pains of soul as well as body, your conversations, your secret thoughts, your ambitions, and your fears—all that is concerned with you. Weigh it all by the balance of Christ's cross ; put it all up there alongside the long and short wooden beams that carry the human form ; test each detail one by one whether it agrees with the crucifix, for there is nothing too trivial and nothing too great for a Christian to carry there. Then let your Easter confession be, if necessary very comprehensive, in any case "very good."

Thus, because of this Holy Week, when the time comes for you to say, "It is finished," when you too look round on the completed picture of your earthly life as you yourself have painted it, when you also reach your Good Friday and Holy Saturday, you too may whisper in trust and confidence as you close your eyes, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." And—later on—the Lord God may be able to say of you too, "Behold, it is very good."



SMILES

ST. LUKE 24, 34. *The Lord is risen indeed.*

I KNOW a grave in the green turf of a cemetery on a hill. Below it the trains of a main line out of London hurry ceaselessly to and fro ; above it stands a gaunt prison in which they hang living men ; near it are tennis-courts, playing-fields, homes, and children playing in gardens. There, one day in Easter Week, because I was and am her son, I laid the body of her who, under God, gave me life and health, straight limbs, and a modicum of brains, and whom I love more than any other.

You know a grave at Ilford, Chingford, Abney Park, Bow.

At their heads stand stones bearing names and words that you and I know by heart ; on their mounds this Easter evening nod bright spring flowers ; for at least on Easter Sunday—if at no other time of the year—we see to it that those hallowed strips of earth, in which we laid what our dear ones left behind when they set out to Journey's End, are clean, tidy, beautiful with flowers.

We cried when first we walked to those new graves, behind the still forms of father, mother, child, and brother, sister, sweetheart, friend.

But we Christians cry no longer, though, as the long years pass, we miss and love him and her not one whit the less.

We smile. How can we?

Whither Europe in these precarious days? What will be the outcome of all this mutual suspicion, this race in armaments, this universal distrust, this living on the edge of a volcano which has once in our lifetime been in eruption?

Will the peacemakers prevail; or will Europe too run violently down steep places and perish in the waters? Unimportant citizens like you and me cannot know; we can but pray.

Yet, as Christians, whatever happens to Europe, we shall still smile. How can we?

What of the England that we love so well? Are we at ease about her? Surely not. The apparently increasing hostility to Catholicism; the growing laxity of moral standards; the almost universal restlessness and search for pleasure; gambling, unemployment, birth control, slums; the dying of Sunday observance; the breaking up of family life,—these and much else trouble—and should indeed trouble—those of us who think at all and love the fair land of England.

Yet we Christians smile to-day. How can we?

I have just come from a house in Holms Street in which an old Christian lady lies in great pain. Wherever I go I find pain in one form or another: cancer, consumption, children with warped bodies and crooked minds, old folk with failing hearts and weary bodies, the bitter tears of the one who has been left behind and whose light of life seems to have gone out, the anguish of man or woman lashed and scourged by evil tongues and baseless rumour, the loneliness of the blind, the hopelessness of dying heathen, the utter weariness of those worn out in mind or body, the poisoned minds of little children: pain is always round me. One day, perhaps soon, it will touch me too.

Yet, being a Christian, I can look at pain and smile; though my heart aches for those who bear it and my mind is filled with the vain question "Why?" I hope too and pray, that if the good God wills that I should be wrapped round with pain, I shall still be able to smile. How can I?

I too must die. The shadowed valleys must know me too as I grope my way along their unknown tracks. I too must say good-bye to all with whom I am familiar and at home, and set out all alone, so far as humans are concerned, on the long last journey.

"Aren't you afraid of death?" Of course; because I am a human being. "Then surely you can't smile at that?" Of course; because I am a Christian.

How can you? How can you smile in a world and a life like these?

Late in the afternoon three days ago—Sunday, Saturday, Friday—they lowered the great cross and laid it on the ground. Nails were drawn out, one by one; ropes unloosed. The dead body with new

wound in left side was washed, anointed, clothed in winding-sheet : sightless eyes were closed. Down the small hill—as green as a hill at Wandsworth or Chingford—they carried him, those few friends of his ; into the vault of his new grave. There they left him, behind sealed stone door, guarded by soldiers.

The grey dawn was streaking the sky when they went again three days later—Friday, Saturday, Sunday—to the grave in the garden. The soldiers had gone : smiling angels took their place. The round door was rolled aside : from it dangled in the morning breeze Pilate's snapped seals. The interior of the cold, damp vault was bright and warm with a light not of this earth. In that light they saw—the Greek word means “gazed with eyes that nearly started from their heads for wonder”—Friday's stained linen strips and the handkerchief wrapped round his head, folded carefully and laid on one side as things of which the need had ceased. But they saw nothing and nobody else, except angels here and there. There was no corpse ; no dead Jesus where they had laid him.

It was an *empty* grave on Easter morning. It is that which makes all the difference in the whole wide world ; all the difference to pain and perplexity, to tears and death ; all the difference to eternity.

On five different occasions on that glorious Sunday they saw him, those first few friends of his ; and many times in the nearly six weeks that followed. He was the same Lord Jesus : wounds in hands, feet, side ; thorn-scratches across his forehead ; the same familiar voice and smile, the same wonderful eyes. Real, true, no ghost : “handle me, touch me, eat with me and be sure ; a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have.”

The same Jesus ; but different. Because now and to eternity, “risen indeed” ; now and for ever the conqueror of sin, the comforter of all who cry and are in pain, the killer of death.

That is the Lord Jesus who is your Jesus for eternity, whatever happens, if you will have him ; as he is mine.

“The Lord is risen indeed.”

This is the foundation of the Church ; this the inscription on the banners of her armies as they march out to conquer the world ; this the sure strength and stay of every Christian heart, be it never so humble, never so harassed or heavy-laden. This is humanity's guarantee that Right is stronger than Might, and Light than the powers of Night.

“The Lord is risen indeed.”

Of course I laugh for joy of heart. So do you.



FOUNDATION

THE APOSTLES' CREED. *I believe . . . the third day he rose again from the dead.*

IS Christianity true? Many ask the question, as many have asked it for nineteen hundred years. You would answer, Yes.

But suppose that this were followed by a second question, as no doubt it has been in your experience; How do you know? What proof have you that it is true?

How do you know that Joseph was not the father of Mary's child? How do you know that the boy Jesus was the son of God? What proof have you of the Virgin-Birth and the Incarnation?

How do you know that Christ died on the cross, really died? Many have said that he did not.

How do you know that he returned to life after his burial?

How do you know that he ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father, Almighty?

You were not there. What proof have you that all this—and consequently the religion that he founded—is true?

Would you answer, Because I read it in the bible? But how do you know that that is true? Would you reply, Because the priests of my church have taught me so, because mother says so? That is nothing like enough.

Then, would you reply, Because I use the sacraments of Christ's Church and feel that they do me good? But a bishop of your own Church of England has labelled them as magic and superstition.

I repeat: How do you know that the infant at the font is made

heir of heaven? That bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ? That the sacrament of penance really conveys forgiveness of sin? That the whole gospel-story is not a clever forgery? Where is your proof?

You *must* be able to answer : your religion must be first-hand, a thing of which you yourself are personally convinced, to which you would remain true though the whole world turned atheist. Sooner or later the devil will say to you, "I see that you have fallen again. I am not surprised. Are you really to blame? How do you know that it is possible for you to overcome the temptations I send you? How do you know your religion is not a pack of lies? *Did* Christ die and rise from the dead? *Can* God help you? I do not believe that he can." You must be able to answer, "But I know that Christianity is true. I have the proof. Get thee behind me, Satan"; or your faith will collapse like a house built on sands of sentiment rather than on the rock of reason. It will not be the first to do so.

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"The third day he rose again" : that is your proof, the only proof you need. The deserted tomb and the empty grave-clothes of Easter morning ; the round stone rolled away and no corpse in the Arimathæan's garden : that is the hub that holds every part of the wheel together ; that is the foundation of the whole structure of the only true religion. "The third day he rose again from the dead" ; that is your test and touchstone.

* * * * *

A Frenchman invented a new religion. It seemed to him a good one, but he could not find any to agree with him. He asked a friend why his new religion had no followers. The friend replied, "It certainly sounds very beautiful and indeed it is original. But it has one serious failing. There is no means of proving that it is true. However, you can easily put this right. Foretell your own resurrection : die and be buried : return to life at the precise moment when you said that you would do so : let many people see you : and go on telling us the same things that you tell us now. Then you will find plenty of people to adopt your new religion."

This, as you know, is exactly what Jesus of Nazareth did. He deliberately made his resurrection the test of his new religion.

During the weeks and months that preceded the day of his death he repeatedly foretold his return to life at a given moment : "We go up to Jerusalem : all things written concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished : he shall be delivered to the Gentiles : they shall scourge him and put him to death. The third day he shall rise again."

He said this so frequently and so publicly that it reached the ears of his enemies. After his death they went to Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch."

Yet, on the third morning, what do you find? Certain facts that remain historic, even if you do not believe in the resurrection.

Somehow or other the round stone, that formed the doorway of the tomb and was too heavy for three women to move, is rolled back out of the way. Pilate's official seals are broken. Inside the grave are shroud and linen bands, empty. Strange rumours begin to spread, in Jerusalem of all places, the locality which was most hostile. As a result the sentries of the sepulchre go to their superiors, "shewing them all things that were done. So the elders took counsel and gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept." (A thin tale. Who would believe soldiers who slept at their post?) "So they took the money and did as they were told: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day."

* * * * *

In course of time four theories were evolved to deny the resurrection. It may be worth while to consider them.

The first was that to which I have already referred. The suggestion was at once made by the Jewish authorities and circulated widely in the lifetime of the apostles that the disciples did in fact break into the grave, steal the dead body and say that he had returned to life. This is obviously impossible to believe. Had it happened, sooner or later the true facts would have leaked out. The early Church made great demands, its adherents met with considerable suffering and persecution: had it depended on what each of its principals knew to be untrue, it must have collapsed almost immediately. Peter, John, James were not the sort of people to countenance so monstrous a lie for a considerable number of years: nor would a man undergo martyrdom for a falsehood.

Another suggestion was that Joseph of Arimathaea caused the corpse to be secretly removed and buried it elsewhere. This would mean that a party of men (one alone could not have moved the round stone) went out of Jerusalem during the night—since it was scarcely

dawn when Mary Magdalene found the stone rolled aside—, necessarily carrying lights: why did the sentries at the city-gate, always locked and guarded at night, neither notice nor report them? Having reached and opened the grave—and where was its “watch”?—they would have first had to take off the grave-clothes and then re-arrange them with the burial-spices carefully re-inserted. After which the presumably naked body must have been carried somewhere and re-buried. All this would have taken at least two hours of hard work; a main road ran close to Joseph’s garden; yet not a soul saw or heard them at their task.

Seven weeks later the disciples were back in Jerusalem, publicly announcing on every possible occasion that “the Lord is risen indeed.” The whole city rang with the news. Jerusalem was not then a large place: if Jesus had been buried elsewhere at the instigation of Joseph, surely the Jews would by then have discovered the grave. Why, then, did they not immediately reply to the disciples that what they said must be untrue, since in such and such a place he was buried?

If there had been a new grave, would it not have been the one place to which his disciples, friends, and mother would have gone repeatedly, to say their prayers and venerate the relics of Jesus of Nazareth? Was Mary the sort of mother to leave her son’s resting-place neglected, untidy, unvisited? In the years that followed would not the shrine of Jesus Christ have been the one place to which his followers would have made innumerable pilgrimages?

If he had been buried elsewhere both foes and friends would have found the place soon enough.

A third theory was that the authorities, Jewish or Roman, themselves removed the body in order to prevent such veneration. In that case they knew where it was buried, yet bribed the garden-sentries to tell a highly improbable tale. The disciples maintained that the risen Lord had talked, walked, eaten with them; by so doing they converted many; yet neither Jew nor Roman took the obvious step of coming forward and saying that the resurrection was impossible, since they could show every one where he was buried.

There remains one other suggestion, “made in Germany,” that our Lord did not really die on the cross, but fainted and recovered in the coolness of the sepulchre. This is incredible if one remembers the seriousness of the wounds, the tearing of hands and feet, the piercing of the heart; to say nothing of the enveloping and tightly-drawn grave-clothes, the weight of the spices they contained and the necessity of the round stone being rolled back by one weak man. Would any one, bleeding from five untended wounds, lying on a cold stone slab on an April night with none to nurse him, be likely to recover?

If he had, what effect on the disciples would have been caused by some one half dead, creeping about weak and ill, needing treatment and careful nursing ; and ultimately dying like all men ? Surely such an one, love and admire him though they might, could not have changed their sorrow into joy or their previous timidity into obvious courage and confidence.

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“If Christ be not raised,” writes St. Paul, “your faith is vain.” Of course.

“But now is Christ risen from the dead” ; you and I sing Easter Alleluias ; our faith, built on the foundation of the round rolled stone of old Joseph’s old-world garden, is true ; it cannot be otherwise.



LIGHT

EXODUS 13, 21. *A pillar of fire, to give them light.*

FOR forty years those primitive people known as the Children of Israel and the Chosen Race—later to become Jews of Palestine, of whom should be born Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary as well as of God—travelled in the Great Desert which lay between Egypt, from which they had been rescued, and Canaan, their promised land. It is recorded that throughout these years the Lord God “went before them ; by day, in a pillar of cloud, to lead the way ; by night, in a pillar of fire, to give them light. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night.” In consequence, after many vicissitudes, they reached the promised land.

From early days—it is referred to in a manuscript dated 384—it has been an Easter custom of the Church to set up in the sanctuary, near to the chief or high altar, one great candle called the Paschal or Easter Candle. This is placed in position on Holy Saturday and remains until Ascension Day ; forty days, like the number of years in which “he took not away the pillar by day or night.” It stands in a special candlestick that is used at no other time of the year and is often adorned with flowers and white ribbon. Its form of blessing on Holy Saturday refers to the two nights on which Israel came out of Egypt and the house of Jacob from among a strange people and Christ rose from the dead, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel. At its blessing there are inserted into it, in the form of a cross, five grains of incense (usually encased in gilded wood) as reminders of the

five wounds in hands, feet, and side of the risen Lord : for not even on her happiest days can the Church forget or lose sight of the crucifix.

There, then, it stands, our Paschal Candle. Strong, slim, white, pure ; pointing upwards ; firm, unwavering, uncompromising ; in the place where it is worth while to stand, the sanctuary and holy place of God ; bearing the five stigmata, the sign of the wounds and the holy cross ; crowned with steady flame in which it slowly spends its pure clean body in giving men light.

"Here am I, Lord God," the Paschal Candle seems to say ; "ready, alert, as near to you in your own sacrament as I can be, content to give my life and burn myself away in your silent service, rejoicing to be a pillar of fire to give men light in the dark world's night."

I wish that I were more like it ; don't you ?

I wish that I too were so strong and straight, so steady and firm, that many of the sad people of East London could rely and lean on me, be the better and the nearer to God because of me. You remember how it is written of Peter and John that people "took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" : I have been a communicant for many years, I have said thousands of Masses—but I am pretty certain that the ordinary man in the street can take no such knowledge of me. I wish that he could.

I wish that my faith were firm, unwavering, pure, and single-minded like the light of that candle ; so that my prayers did not suffer when I am out of sorts ; so that I was as religious on Mondays as on Sundays, among heathen as among Christians ; so that I paid no attention to what people say of me, but went steadily on in face of jeers and disappointments ; so that the light of Christ shone out of my life as it does from the Paschal Candle.

I wish that I were content to give my whole life and to burn up all I am and have and hope to be, in that service of God which is unknown to and unappreciated by the world and which has been the characteristic of some East London priests whom you and I have known.

I wish that I too could say :

Yea, through life, death, through sorrow and through sinning,

He shall suffice me, for he hath sufficed.

Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning :

Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.¹

¹ F. W. H. Myers, *St. Paul*.

Above all I wish that I had grounds for hoping that some day, when I too after many vicissitudes have reached the promised land, one Haggerston person (I think that I would be content with one) would come to me and say, "Thank you. I am in heaven largely because of you. For in my dark days on that sad old star, during the times when I was broken-hearted, doubting my religion and in sin, it was you who kept me near to God. You were a pillar of fire to give me light." Truly it would more than compensate for all the wearinesses and failures, the despondency and loneliness and misunderstandings, the vast difficulty of "sticking things with a grin"; to have been a light to light one lost soul home and, in so doing, to have saved oneself.

* * * * *

Strong and straight. Unwavering and uncompromising. Clean and pure. Content to spend and be spent in the service of God and his people. A light of Christ. A pillar of fire, to give men light.

I wish that I were like a Paschal Candle; don't you?

Yet I can be if, like it, I carry the cross of Christ; so can you But only so.



GEORGE

2 TIMOTHY 2, 3. *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

IT seems to be due to King Richard I—the Lion-hearted, though he had another and less complimentary nickname—that England adopted as her patron St. George, whose feast is kept on April 23rd ; for the king in his crusades heard the eight or nine hundred years' old tale of his adventures and brought it home with him.

Whether this is the case or not—it is immaterial—St. George stands as the type of Christian English manhood. His name is synonymous with courage, chivalrous protection of the weak, purity, and the power to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He represents an Englishman at his best ; that is, as a gentleman. To Christians of this country he is also the true Christian soldier, who is rewarded for victory in one battle by being sent into a harder fight, in which he wins martyrdom and gains as military decorations a cross and a crown.

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His story may be as follows.

A young Christian soldier, he came in his travels to a city named Silene, in a marsh outside which lived a dragon which terrified the inhabitants. More than once they had sent small armies to kill it, but without success : (I should point out that this was in the year 285). So it was decided that two sheep should be provided each day to satisfy the beast's appetite and keep it quiet. All went well while the sheep

lasted ; but in due course the supply ceased. The situation became serious : the wretched citizens had no other course than to give the dragon their children. Every morning lots were drawn and a small boy or girl was sent crying out of the city, to act as a substitute for mutton.

But one day the lot fell on the only daughter of the king and queen. Silene seems to have been the home of genuine Socialism, for neither the child's parents nor any one else thought for a moment of letting her off ; and you may be sure that the dragon would prefer a princess to, say, the daughter of a crossing-sweeper. Accordingly the girl put on her best clothes—I don't know why ! It seems to have been the somewhat wasteful custom—and went out to the marshes to meet her fate.

At this moment up rode young George, looking very manly in his shining armour and on his fine horse. He asked the young lady why she was crying : she told him and begged him to fly for his life. "Not so," quoth he ; "God forbid that I should fly. I will lift my hand against the loathly thing ; and will deliver thee through the power of Jesus Christ."

Out from the swamp crawled the dragon, licking his lips at the prospect of double rations ; or, as we might say, not only a joint but also "afters." But George, after making the sign of the cross and calling on the name of Jesus Christ, overcame the beast after a lengthy battle ; bound it with the princess's girdle (it was as well that she was not the crossing-sweeper's daughter, for probably her girdle would not have stood the strain) ; and led it in triumph into the city, saying to all and sundry, "Fear not. Only believe in God, through whose might I have conquered your adversary. And be baptised." Every one was baptised : George slew the dragon : he gave to the local poor all the royal gifts presented to him ; and went his way without marrying the princess, as of course he would have done in an ordinary story.

The populace of the next city to which he went were in a similar state of panic, though from a different cause. (Life in "the good old days" certainly seems to have been the reverse of dull and uneventful.) The emperor Diocletian's Edict had just arrived : copies were pinned to the doors of the principal buildings and posted in prominent positions in the market-square : crowds of frightened Christians read it. It proclaimed immediate and violent death to all who persisted in worshipping Christ and, as a result, refused to offer sacrifice to the gods of the Roman empire.

George dismounted, read the thing, pulled it down, tore it in pieces and trampled it underfoot. In "the good old days" you did

not treat the emperor like that and get off with a fine or a few days at Wormwood Scrubs. George was at once arrested, imprisoned, severely tortured, and beheaded.

Such in brief may be the story of England's patron saint; chosen in the days when she was well-named "Merrie" and stood for the highest ideals of Christian manhood—scorn of earthly rewards, conquest of evil, liberation from heathenism, chivalry and courtesy to the opposite sex, and the winning of the greatest of victories by means of the breaking of self. St. George is the English gentleman who endures hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

They who are trying to be good Christian gentlemen, the men and boys who worship here, have given to their church at their own cost a window in honour of St. George. In a few moments I am to bless it for them.

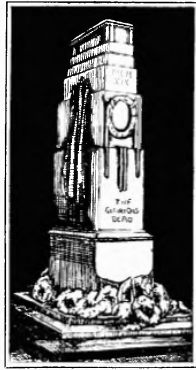
In it you will see, when once again the sun shines on the just and the others, the saint standing, slightly dishevelled after the battle, over the conquered dragon: his sword is drawn, since he is still ready to fight against sin: whether by accident or design, his face seems to me to resemble that of King Edward the Eighth. On the sword's scabbard are the letters I H S, the divine monogram, the first three letters of the Greek word IHSOUS. Above his red martyr's halo are the words, "I will deliver thee through the power of Jesus Christ." In the background is the walled city with its castle; Silene gives place to Windsor and St. George's Chapel, the flag of England flying from the castle-keep. The princess, in royal robes, has seen the fight and lifts joyful hands to her parents who watch anxiously from the safety of the top of the wall. Behind the dragon is a rose bush, on which grow the red roses of England and St. George. On the saint's shield is his own device of a red cross on a white background: in the centre of that cross is an emblem well known in Haggerston, St. Saviour's Priory badge of the cross standing on the world. Red roses are embroidered on the soldier's surcoat. The black and yellow dragon lies vanquished at his feet, with a knot tied in his tail as a token of defeat.

At the top of the window is the symbol of the Holy Trinity. Beneath is a map of England, coloured green not by accident (you know Blake's hymn about the green and pleasant land): set up on that land is a crucifix, Christ with his arms outstretched in full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of England as well as all the world. In the border are, naturally, the words "St. George, patron of England, pray for us": equally naturally, there is only one place-name on the green map, E.2.

The foot of the window is a picture of High Mass at our own high altar at the moment of elevation of the consecrated host. It is St. George's Day: therefore red roses are on the altar and the vestments of the three sacred ministers are those prescribed for a martyr's Mass. If you look closely you will see that the top of the altar-crucifix, with its title I.N.R.I., reaches up to and touches the dragon's twisted tail: this could teach you more than one lesson.

* * * *

When you have looked at your new window I ask you to walk up the south aisle and kneel before the tabernacle to say a prayer for St. Augustine's men and boys; that they too may not be soft, unchivalrous, cowardly, or impure—but Christian gentlemen unashamed, enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Thus, aided by your prayers, may they too reach St. George in the greener and more pleasant land.



WELL KNOWN

2 CORINTHIANS 6, 9. *As unknown and yet well known; as dying and, behold, we live.*

THE stars are shining bright above the camps,
 The bugle-calls float skyward faintly clear ;
 Over the hills the mist-veiled motor lamps
 Dwindle and disappear.

The notes of day's goodbye arise and blend
 With the low murmurous hum from tree and sod ;
 And swell into that question at the end
 They ask each night of God—

Whether the dead within the burial ground
 Will ever overthrow their crosses grey
 And rise triumphant from each lowly mound
 To greet the dawning day ;

Whether the eyes which battle sealed in sleep
 Will open to reveille once again ;
 And forms, once mangled, into rapture leap,
 Forgetful of their pain.

But still the stars above the camp shine on,
 Giving no answer for our sorrow's ease ;
 And one more day with the Last Post has gone,
 Dying upon the breeze.¹

On the Sunday afternoon before I began to travel back from South Australia to the only place in which I always want to live (and

¹ *Verses of a V.A.D.*

you know where that is) I went for a long walk. I went along the quiet lane beneath the gum-trees; by the dusty track between the raided paddocks with their flocks of merino sheep; up the hill by the herd of a hundred rams, the black bull, and the stamping wild-eyed stallions; through a valley to a certain fallen tree which previous investigation had shown to be free of ants. There I lit my pipe and sat in sunshine. Behind me lay the slopes of Mount Barker with many trees full of bright-hued parrots and rosellas, butcher-birds, and laughing jacks which chuckle like fat old men in East London: before me rolled the still waves of wide green pastures, rising and falling to the blue slopes of Mount Lofty far away toward the sea: above me curved an unclouded sky: around me fell sunshine. Apart from the calls of birds and sheep no sound reached me: no trams rolled down the road, there was no call of toffee-apples for sale, no church bell rang to summon the Catechism, there was not even an echo of "It ain't goin' to rine no mo-er"—I wished there was.

I read two books which I had taken with me. In one were the pathetic verses I have quoted, written in France by a modern young woman who was an admitted agnostic. In the other were these fine and different words of John Buchan in his history of the last war:

No great thing is achieved without a price; and on the Somme fell the very flower of our race, the straightest of limb, the keenest of brain, the most eager of spirit. In such a mourning each man thinks first of his friends. Each of us has seen his crowded circle become like the stalls of a theatre at an unpopular play. Each has found the world of time strangely empty and eternity strangely thronged. To look back upon the gallant procession of those who offered their all and had their gift accepted, is to know exultation as well as sorrow. The young men who died almost before they had gazed on the world, the makers and doers who left their tasks unfinished, were greater in their deaths than in their lives. They builded better than they knew; for the sum of their imperfections was made perfect, and out of loss they won for their country and mankind an enduring gain. Their memory will abide, so long as men are found to set honour before ease, and a nation lives not for its ledgers alone but for some purpose of virtue.

I put the books in my pocket, knocked out my cold pipe and began my return-walk to Sunday afternoon tea by the log fire in the rectory. As I walked pictures formed in my mind.

I saw again the crowded cemeteries near the Menin Gate of Ypres and read the words carved on so many of the stones that stand there, "An unknown British soldier: known unto God."

I remembered the letter which the boy had written and which, I doubt not, his parents still keep and read.

I am writing this letter to you just before going into action at dawn.

I am about to take part in the biggest battle that has yet been fought in France. I never felt more confident or cheerful in my life and would not miss the attack for anything on earth. My idea in writing this is in case I am one of the "costs" and get killed. I do not expect to be, but such things have happened and are always possible. It is impossible to fear death out here when one is no longer an individual, but a member of a regiment of an army. To be killed means nothing to me ; it is only you who suffer, you who really pay the cost. I have been looking at the stars and thinking what an immense distance they are away. What an insignificant thing the loss of, say, forty years of life is compared with them! It scarcely seems worth talking about. Well, goodbye, you darlings ! Try not to worry about it : and remember that we shall meet again quite soon. This letter is only going to be posted if——. Lots of love. From your loving son "Qui procul hinc, Ante diem perii, Sed miles, Sed pro patria," "Who died far away before dawn, But as a soldier of and for his country."

Again I stood in an old night-nursery on the opposite side of the world to South Australia. I had been hearing the last of the Easter confessions when my tall deacon hurried into the church, waited until I was disengaged, told me I was "wanted on the telephone and it's bad news I am afraid." Through South London my taxi hurried, but was too late. An hour before Easter Day began, in the room in which two of the four of us were born, she who gave us life and a mother's love went on the journey which our Lord made on the first Good Friday : and I, her priest-son, could not give her the last sacraments.

Again I stood in this and that small Haggerston room. Near me a Priory Sister held a crucifix before closing eyes, while I repeated familiar prayers. From the bed rose a last sigh. The Sister said, "He has gone, father" ; "She is at rest."

Again I stood in Whitehall on November 11th. I had been to Westminster Hospital to see some one who was ill—my nun-sister, in point of fact—; and took the opportunity to be for the first time near the Cenotaph during the two minutes' silence. I was extremely impressed. Immense crowds had gathered : I could get no nearer than Parliament Square : for a couple of minutes it was easy to imagine England a Catholic country, praying for the dead, really praying. At twenty minutes to eleven I got into conversation with two men standing by me : we chatted about old days—the early morning leave-train from Victoria, air-raids in France and on London, the arrival of that awful telegram, the day when the *Hampshire* went down : one of the three spoke about the Ypres Salient, another of Suvla Bay, the third of Cromarty and Invergordon when the *Natal* blew up and the light cruisers were nearly mined in before Jutland. Then Big Ben sounded : in the stillness memories stirred and some tears fell. As

we began to move away one of the men said to me, "Do you believe in life after death ; that they are all still alive ?" "Of course," said I. "Roman Catholic?" asked he. "Church of England," said I. "Yours must be a wonderful religion," said he.

* * * * *

"Unknown British soldiers ; known unto God," I said to myself as the roof of the hospitable rectory came into view through the trees ; "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God and no torment shall touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died ; their departure was accounted to be their hurt and their journeying away from us to be their ruin. But they are in peace. As unknown and yet well known ; as dying and, behold, we live. Known unto God.

And swell into that question at the end
They ask each night of God—

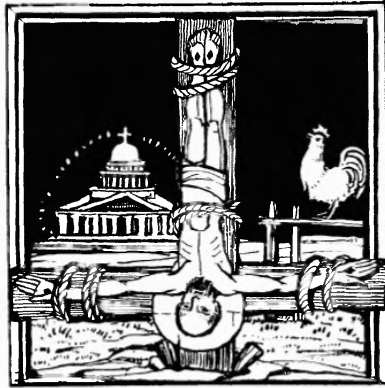
Whether the dead within the burial ground
Will ever overthrow their crosses grey
And rise triumphant from each lowly mound
To greet the dawning day.

So must always ask the sad souls who know not God ; and must always answer,

But still the stars above the camp shine on,
Giving no answer for our sorrow's ease ;
And one more day with the Last Post has gone,
Dying upon the breeze."

* * * * *

"Yours must be a wonderful religion."
It is.



FAILURE

ST. MATTHEW 10, 2. *Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; the first, Simon, who is called Peter.*

THERE is only one real failure : it is to give up trying." Let me attempt to paint you an Easter picture in illustration of that true saying.

"What is that to us? See thou to that," they said in their cold supercilious way; "You have made a mistake? You have betrayed innocence? That is your concern. We have paid you." The temple door slammed. Out into the night fled the apostle; out into despair; out into the only real failure, the giving up of trying. Along the strong bough of the gnarled old tree that stooped over the jagged rock he climbed; as he climbed he unwound the long girdle that held his flowing garment. It was the girdle in which he had carried thirty silver pieces, now lying on the marble floor of the temple.

He tied one end round the bough : wound the other end round his neck. Then he jumped; the man who had given up trying, the man who had really failed. Round and round he swung in the light of the passover moon, until the girdle broke and he fell dead on to the upturned point of the rock beneath.

"But look here," said the garrulous woman by the fire, who must talk and talk and talk until a man scarcely knew what he answered ;

"surely you are mistaken, not to put it more crudely. Surely you were with this Jesus!"

"No, no, no. I swear I wasn't."

A cock crew. The Lord turned and looked.

The palace door slammed. Out into the cold dawn fled the apostle, away and down the silent streets; but not into the only real failure, not into despair, not into the giving up of trying. For it is written that he, Peter, "wept bitterly." It is also written that "a broken and contrite heart" God has never yet despised.

So, because of those bitter Good Friday tears, comes the glad sequel. It comes inevitably; for Easter follows Passiontide both for Christ our Lord and for all who follow him along Sorrow Street by the Way of the Cross. Friday is never the end, even though it is a Good Friday.

Sin-ridden and God-disowning Jerusalem is left behind, with its stained scourging-pillar, its reddened green hill, its empty holy sepulchre. They are back again in the familiar and homely north, those first few friends of his; one of them is Peter. Back in green Galilee, with its homely villages, rolling downs, quiet fields, birds and beasts and flowers: back in green Galilee with its blue inland sea. Man made the cities; but God made the country-side.

"I'm going fishing again," said Peter; "I never could keep still for long. Now I must do something. I am going to fish all night. How can I sleep?" "We will come with you," said some of them.

They were out all night; under the peaceful stars, on the bosom of that ancient healer of tired human bodies and weary human minds, the sea. The dawn came, Nature's daily picture of the resurrection; a dawn on which it did not matter how many cocks crew. Their boat was near the shore. "Look!" John said to Peter; "some one is standing on the beach. He is looking at us. He is looking at you, Peter." On the shingle a small fire had been made; its blue smoke curled up against the background of the dark green hills. By it stood he whom the fishermen loved better than any other in heaven above, earth beneath, or on waters that cover the earth.

"Look!" whispered John; "it is the Lord!"

"I know," said Peter the apostle, who had wept bitterly and not failed.

"This man was also with him." "Woman, I know him not."

"Thou art also of them." "Man, I am not."

"Of a truth this fellow was also with him; for he is a Galilaean."

"Man, I know not what thou sayest."

The public and as yet uncanceled denials had been three in number. Consequently there are now three separate offers of the absolution given to all who cry and go on trying. Peter's quick mind understands why the gentle question is asked three times.

"Simon, son of Jonas" (the old name is used until the restoration has been made); "lovest thou me? Feed, provide with food, my lambs."

"Simon, son of Jonas; lovest thou me? Feed, care for, my sheep."

"Simon, son of Jonas; lovest thou me? Feed, take charge of, be a second good shepherd to, my sheep."

Do you remember what else the Lord of Easter said to his Peter by the small fire on that early morning? Do you remember the words that follow the account of the restoration and absolution of the apostle who had not really failed? "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me."

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The fire of Rome broke out on July 19th, A.D. 64; some thirty years after that Easter-tide morning by the Sea of Galilee. Half the city was destroyed. Thanks to Nero the Christians were held responsible.

So began the first great persecution of the Church. Hundreds of men, women, boys, and girls were put to death. Many were crucified: some were sewn into the skins of wild beasts and hunted to death by dogs to provide "a Roman holiday": others were wrapped in canvas soaked in tar and pitch, fastened to posts in the Emperor's gardens, set on fire to serve as living torches while the Emperor and his friends danced in the glow. Warrants were issued for the arrest of Apostle Paul and Apostle Peter.

Both were condemned to death. Both were imprisoned together, those greatest of missionary bishops to Jews and non-Jews. They died on the same day, June 29th, A.D. 65. Paul, being a Roman citizen, was granted a gentleman's death, that of the sword. Peter, being no Roman, died on a cross in Nero's circus; at his urgent request, head downwards, since he thought that those three denials made him unfit to die in the same manner as his Lord.

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Can you picture that little old man in his ridiculous position, upside down, on his cross on that June morning?

Can you see him glad to be going into the eternal presence of his beloved?

Don't you think that in his last earthly moments he saw, not Rome or the packed circles of the circus-seats, but the shore of his native Galilee sea on a spring morning when somebody said, "Follow me: feed my sheep: when thou shalt be old, another shall gird thee"?

Do you find it difficult to reconcile the matchless courage of the missionary's life and the high devotion of the martyr's death with the craven heart and the lying tongue of the man by the fire in the Jerusalem palace on that distant Friday?

Surely not. "There is only one real failure: it is to give up trying."



WHO ?

PSALM 24, 3. *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.*

UP and away from this temporary and temporal world we Christians turn our eyes with great joy in Ascensiontide. Dirt; sweating, unceasing and unappreciated toil; poverty; pain of body and anguish of soul; separation from those we love; noise; old age; sin, remorse, temptation; the world's cruelty and selfishness; evil's cunning and great power; loneliness; tears; unhappiness at home; personal dissatisfaction; the secret pain, the weary body, the faltering soul,—what a relief it is to turn our backs on them all, even if only for a few hours; be once again in friendly Bethany; look away from this no-continuing city; stand with our Lady and the eleven on the hill-top, stedfastly gazing—by means of sacrament and liturgy, through prayer and meditation—into that eternal city which is named heaven! There we see, if we will but take pains to be quiet and prayerful, how this life leads up to and finds its consummation and crown in the city of God; how the human body which each of us knows so well drops at last its chrysalis of corruption and soars upwards; how every child born into this world was created for one purpose only, to be finally changed and transfigured into an inhabitant of heaven, to finish one day this restless and toilsome journey in the endless peace and rest of the unveiled presence of God. Let us be at pains to look up in Ascensiontide; not round at other people, still less down at ourselves; taking our stand with the mother and the saints

“gazing up” : where our treasure is, there should our hearts be also—and not only in Ascensiontide.

* * * * *

As we look up, old questions will form themselves in our minds too. Who will go to heaven? Who will follow Christ on the journey which began on that Thursday in Bethany? What kind of people will ascend into the hill of the Lord and finally stand in his holy place? The proud and selfish; the unloving and impure; the bitter-tongued; the earth-bound? Surely not. We do not need St. John to tell us that “there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth.” Who, then? “He that hath clean hands,” says the psalmist; “he that hath a pure heart.”

When a mortal stands at heaven’s gates and seeks admission, what will be required of him or her, what kind of passport must he or she present? Riches; popularity; success; fame and honour in that small and unimportant star called Earth? Not on your life. Must he or she have been clever or a member of the working-class or one of the Upper Ten or a member of any particular race or class? Not a bit of it. It will not even be considered essential that he or she should have belonged to the Church of England or have been a member of the British Empire. Whoever and whatever the soul outside the angel-guarded gate may have been on earth, if he or she is to obtain entry he or she must be clean-handed and pure-hearted: at least that was the opinion of David the Psalmist, and we have no information that the standard has since been lowered.

In another of his songs the same king enlarges his definition of the good-hearted and decent-handed. It is the 15th psalm, frequently known as the Definition of a Gentleman—or Lady. It may be worth while to translate its biblical version into terms of twentieth-century East London.

* * * * *

“Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?” Who shall go to heaven? What is a real Christian nowadays?

“He that walketh uprightly.” Well, of course! The straight, the reliable, those who ring true. Naturally “the shuffers,” the untrustworthy, those who never look you in the face, the shifty-eyed, the “too clever by half,” “the wangers,” would be out of place on the holy hill: they would be so bored, having nobody to diddle or double-cross.

“And worketh righteousness”: which I take to mean, among

much else, doing an honest eight hours' work for an eight hours' pay. There are employees who would not steal postage-stamps or help themselves to money from the till, but do cheerfully steal their employer's time at every opportunity ; who slack when the foreman is not standing over them or the forewoman has retired for another cup of tea ; who are always late at work and seem to have no conscience about it. But such are not Christian ladies and gentlemen. There is point in the anecdote of the servant-girl who was confirmed and consequently swept *under* mats.

"And speaketh the truth in his heart." That is, thinks the truth about every one he knows, even those he dislikes and who dislike him ; and takes pains to discover, so far as he can, what is the truth. Most of us are far too ready to believe what we should like to be true about those who are so incredibly short-sighted as to have a lower opinion of our noble selves than that which is naturally held by Yours Truly.

"He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour" ; which, I think, needs little explanation. In that place to which can enter "nothing that worketh abomination or maketh a lie" there can be not one gossiping, scandal-mongering, mordant, ever-wagging tongue ; not the faintest echo of "My dear ! Have you heard the latest about so-and-so ? Of course, I don't know whether there 's a word of truth in it ; but they do say . . ." It is possible that kind speech will constitute the greater part of the peace of heaven : it is certain that its opposite is responsible for nine-tenths of the miseries of this sinful world in general and of Haggerston in particular.

"Nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour." In other words, both the fundamental principle of English law, that every one is innocent until he is proved guilty ; and one of the fundamental principles of Christianity that, even when guilt is proved, one pays more attention to one's own "beams" than to another's "motes," since "there, but for the grace of God, goes" whatever your name may be.

"In whose eyes a vile person is contemned." In whose sight the crooked-minded, the tellers of salacious tales, the dirty in speech, the "cheap and nasty," are despised and avoided like the pitch they are.

"But he honoureth them that fear the Lord." Being a Christian gentleman—or lady, he takes care that his and her friends are also Christians ; since goodness as well as evil is as infectious as measles.

"He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." Which means that a Christian's word, like an Englishman's, is his bond even though it is not to his advantage : he or she cannot engage in dishonest selling, even though the Friday reward is high ; he or she does not

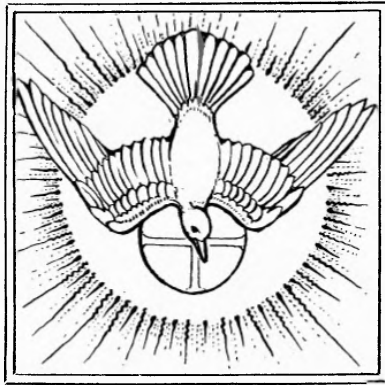
work for such firms as—perhaps I had better not name them, perhaps there is no need for me to do so.

“He that putteth not out his money to usury”; he does not bet, invest, or risk in any way a sum of money, however small, the whole of which he could not afford to lose without in the least degree injuring his wife, children, other dependants or himself; she does not put money on the dogs or buy part of a ticket for the Irish Sweep and go to the Priory for food or clothes for the children; he does not put his shirt on that “snip” for the 2.30 and call at the clergy-house for “a night’s lodgin, farver: I’m a good Cafflic like you and ’ave a job to go to ter-morrer: straight, I ’ave.”

“Nor taketh reward against the innocent.” Neither does he underpay those who work for him; nor does he make a living out of slum property—or stolen goods, dishonest work, or cheating his employer. Neither is he a bad example to children, his own or another’s; nor is he cruel to animals. And he does not run another man down to get his job.

“He that doeth these things shall never be removed,” concludes David the king. Pray God that neither you nor I nor any St. Augustine’s person may ever be removed and blotted out of the Lamb’s book of life. We hear so much of the difficulty experienced by the rich in reaching heaven and we read so often of God’s love of the poor that it is easy to get into the way of thinking that, because we are East Londoners, we are therefore sure of eternal salvation. That is far from being the case. “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required”; certainly in Haggerston “the poor have the gospel preached to them,” perhaps more so than they who live in Mayfair.

Pray in Ascensiontide that you and I may one day be found up to standard, clean of hand and pure of heart, Christian gentlemen and Christ’s ladies fit to ascend into the hill of the Lord and rise up in his holy place.



PEACE

GALATIANS 5, 22. *But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . peace.*

AFTER St. Paul has given a list of the works of the flesh, which, as he says, are manifest and obvious, he continues: "But the fruit of the Spirit (the growth and blossom borne by all who listen to and are led by God the Holy Spirit, though such growth and blossom is not necessarily obvious or manifest) is love, joy, peace . . ."

The fruit of the Spirit is peace: peace on earth; peace here and now, in this our day; peace in your hearts and in mine.

On a July night in 1923 two men talked in a room in a Westminster clergy-house. One was a bishop; the other a very junior curate. Two hours before, the bishop had addressed to an immense audience that filled to capacity the Royal Albert Hall words that are still remembered and quoted, though the tongue that spoke them has long laid silent in an East African grave: "Now go out into the highways and hedges. Go out and look for Jesus: in the ragged, in the naked, in the oppressed and sweated, in those who have lost hope, in those who are struggling to make good. Look for Jesus. And when you see him, gird yourselves with his towel and try to wash their feet."

They were talking about vocation, the bishop and the curate. The former said, "You see, it is never the intention of God that men and women should be unhappy. Therefore an unailing test of vocation—whether it be to the religious life or to the priesthood, to

serve the Church overseas or to marry Eliza Snatchpiece, to be a doctor, a nurse, a teacher, or what you will—is whether you yourself are happy in that undertaking. I do not say, whether the world counts you happy. The world may think you the maddest and most wretched of mortals because you are a nun, a poor man's priest in a slum-parish, a school-teacher, or the husband of Eliza S. But you and I know that nine times out of ten the opinion of the world is wrong, and that ten times out of ten what it thinks and says is wholly unimportant. I do, however, maintain that one of the surest tests of vocation is whether you yourself are happy."

As said the first and greatest of missionary bishops, "the fruit of the Spirit is peace."

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London was almost hidden by a black November fog, King's Cross an echoing, murky, lamplit travesty of day, as the train moved and began to carry her into a dark and ominous unknown. Nature seemed in tune with her thoughts, if fogs are natural. She was travelling to the north of England in order that she might test her vocation to the religious life; she was neither very old, nor very confident, nor very happy. For some years she had tried her hand at this profession and at that. But, though some brought her success, none gave her peace: always "a still small voice" had told her, "No: this is not for you: nor is that." Frequently during the following four years in the convent she expected the voice to speak again the same words. But it did not. Consequently she struggled on: against a rapidly-increasing physical disability, against the cold and unlovely surroundings of a mining district, against homesickness and loneliness, against the devil as she had never known him before: for the trials and temptations of novices are greater than those that come to small and ordinary Christians like you and me. Now she is a professed Sister, a bride of Christ: now she is as happy as each of her days is long, immensely busy, capable, reliable, strong in soul for many to lean upon.

"She has found her feet," you and I might say. "She has found her vocation," God does say. He adds, "The fruit of the Spirit is peace."

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The liner warped out of Tilbury Docks, swung into the river, turned her nose to the sea. Two leaned over the stern-rail, looking at the pall that hung in the sky and was the unlovely roof of London City. As the ship began to slip over the edge of the world the priest

said to his friend, the naval commander : "Well. There goes London for a while : and with it my parish. Yet, you know, if I thought I was leaving it for ever I think my heart would break. Let's go and have a drink." "I know," said the sailor ; "yet, if you stay there, you will break your body. But I envy you : you are one of the few happy people in the world, who have got what they want : and, after all, hearts are more important than health. Certainly : what's yours?"

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For years he had known that he should make his confession : but he could not bring himself to do so because of one great sin, of which the very memory made him hot with shame : and he had never been one to do things by halves. "How can I say *that* to a human being? The Church of England doesn't teach that you must go to confession. Surely God will forgive me if I kneel by my bedside and tell him that I am sorry. Why should a priest come between my soul and God?"—he had played with all the old, specious, and plausible excuses (perhaps you know them) and had tried to quieten his conscience with each in turn. But there was no peace : the small voice persisted "You know what you ought to do" ; he could not silence it.

For nearly half an hour he walked up and down in the rain outside the church, trying to screw up courage to enter : he whose reputation for pluck was notorious on the football-field and elsewhere. Then he opened the door and went in. He knelt in a pew at the back. Slowly his mind grew more quiet : by degrees the atmosphere of worship, prayer, and penitence calmed him : he thought that courage flowed towards him from an altar on which was a silk tabernacle-veil and above which hung a single white light.

Then he rose to his feet, crossed the aisle and knelt beneath a small crucifix in a confessional. He moistened his lips and began : "I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary ever-virgin, to all the saints, and to you, father, that . . ." ; said it all ; and said that one thing first.

You should have seen his face as he left the church. You should see and know him now. The fruit of the Spirit . . .

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"You are quite happy, father?" I asked the old priest, before I left him in the back-bedroom of which the window overlooked an East London garden and the yard of a charabanc-garage. "Yes, father," he replied, with the old gay twinkle in his eyes : "I have had

nearly fifty happy years in Haggerston ; if I could live them all over again, I would not change one of them.” The fruit of the Spirit . . .

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There was once, a long time ago, a good man who wished to know what to do : so he climbed a mountain, lived in a cave and waited for God to tell him. Came a great and strong wind, which rent the mountains and broke the very rocks in pieces : but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind an earthquake : but it held him not. After the earthquake a fire : but he was not in it. Then a still small voice. Elijah knew what he must do : and did it.

So it is still. “And his that gentle voice we hear, Soft as the breath of even, That checks each fault, that calms each fear, And speaks of heaven” : the gentle voice of God the Holy Spirit, the quiet words of conscience.

You are listening and obeying, are you not? You are doing what conscience bids you, whatever it may be, whatever any one else may say? I pray to God that you are : for the fruit of the Spirit is peace—peace on earth and, therefore, good will towards men ; peace of mind, man’s most valuable possession ; peace, which holds so lightly and loosely to all that the world values and can offer that it is able to lay it all aside at any moment and without a shadow of regret ; peace to fold your hands when the good God wills and go to him like a tired child returning home and awake in the peace that passes understanding and enfolds for ever those who heard the voice of God and obeyed.



A PRIEST'S TEMPTATIONS

ST. JOHN 20, 21 and 22. *Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.*

IT is not quite accurate to describe the feast of Pentecost as the birthday of the Church. Certainly on that fiftieth day after Easter Sunday which we commemorated a week ago God the Holy Spirit descended like mighty wind and flickering fire upon the infant Church, in order that he might invigorate, cleanse, purify, and endow her; in order that he might take up his abode in her to be, so long as there is a Church militant here in earth (in other words, so long as there is time), her life and sanctification, her protection and sure shield—so that she will never fail, be persecution never so fierce or the world's hostility never so violent. But that was, so to say, the baptism of the baby Church of Christ; for she was in existence before the first Whitsunday.

She was born on what is to Christians the most glorious of all days, the day on which Christ her head conquered death and rose from the grave. On the evening of the first Easter Sunday, when he suddenly appeared in a barred and bolted room, he said to his disciples, "As my Father hath sent me, so I now send you, out into the whole wide world"; and gave them the Holy Ghost.

That was the birthday of the Church: and that was the first ordination.

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Have you ever been present at an ordination? To the thoughtful Christian it is a most encouraging occasion.

If you had visited this morning almost any of our cathedrals you would have found in progress the service called *The Form and Manner of Ordering of Priests*. It is printed nearly at the end of your prayer-book; it might well be read once a year by every communicant as well as by every priest. The special collect, epistle, and gospel of the Mass are followed by the bishop's solemn exhortation to and warning of those who are about to be ordained: publicly he asks them eight serious questions, to each of which they must make public answer: with great solemnity both he, those to be ordained, and the whole congregation invoke and call down the third person of the Holy Trinity. He lays his hands on each young head and speaks the grave words that remind you of the Easter evening upper room: "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven: and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God and of his holy sacraments." The new priests begin their priesthood by receiving the sacrament of the Priest of priests, Christ himself.

So, once again, there step forward into the places of those who have laid aside their earthly lives (but not their priesthood: "thou art a priest for ever") men in the prime of life, who have been tried and not found wanting. Once again the ranks of the glorious Catholic priesthood are closed, complete, set in militant array.

So it will always be, since not even the gates of hell can ever prevail against the Church of God: until there dawns the day on which Church Militant, priests and people, all this little world, are swept up into the pageant that greets Christ the King, come for the second and last time visibly to this part of his kingdom.

Never, whatever happens, will the priesthood fail.

That is what I mean when I say that, to the thoughtful Christian, an ordination is a most encouraging occasion.

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So this evening those young men ordained this morning are going out into their priestly lives: some of them full of hope, some full of confidence, some full of great plans and high aspirations: all of them "priests for ever." Theirs is to be a strange life: unique, as you would suppose; full of joys that come to the followers of no other profession; full of temptations too.

You have been told more than once, perhaps you have yourselves

caught glimpses of, the happinesses and privileges of a priest. Have you ever thought of his temptations?

Think of three of them to-night, if it pleases you.

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Pride. Whether he is a priest in a city, a country town, or a village; whether his work lies in the mission-field, a public school, or a convent; whatever kind of a priest he is you may be sure that, throughout his ministry, he will be subjected to the most insidious and deadly of all temptations—the temptation to be proud. He will be tempted to be proud of his church, the number of communicants and penitents, any piece of work he is allowed to accomplish for the benefit of his people; perhaps even, God forgive him, of his preaching, his voice, the way he says Mass, his personal appearance. He will be tempted to be autocratic; quick-tempered; impatient with the slow and the late, the indifferent and the absent; on his dignity when asked to do dull and perhaps unpriestly things (if anything is “unpriestly” to a *servus servorum Dei*); resentful of criticism. For of necessity he is placed on something of a pedestal: often he is looked up to by his people; sometimes, God help him, he is surrounded by adoring females and emasculated males who hang their heads and whisper, “Yes, father” and, “No, father” and, “O, father, what a wonderful priest you are” (which may be even worse for him than it is for them). In any case no light is fiercer than that which beats on every vicarage and clergy-house.

I suppose that every priest knows how hard it is to be humble. I think that the commonest sin to which all priests admit when they make their confessions is that which caused angels to be exiled from heaven, pride.

Perhaps you, who are possibly not unacquainted with the same temptation, will remember this when you are saying your prayers for the priesthood in general or a priest in particular. It is true that the prayers of his people have much to do with the making or marring of a priest, blissfully unconscious of them though he may, and perhaps should, be.

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Idleness. This too is a priest's temptation; especially, perhaps, as he grows old or is not in good health, and the glory of the vision of ordination-morning fades into the dull realisation of things as they are. For a priest has no foreman; he does not have to “clock on” every morning; he is not paid by results. He can do just as much work as he chooses; and, within generous limits, just as little. Much

is often said about the poverty of the clergy and most of it is true ; but it is also true that a priest can have the "cushiest" and softest of jobs, if he likes.

Believe me, it is not easy not to preach an old sermon ; especially if you have good grounds for believing that nobody will be any the wiser, or, if they are, will mind in the least, provided that it is short. It is not easy to make yourself work all the morning, when you know that nobody knows whether you do or not, and the armchair and *The Times* crossword-puzzle invite you with silent enticement. It is not easy to make yourself get up to say a weekday Mass when, for one reason or another, you have been out of your bed for more than half the night and know that the only congregation will be your server. It is not easy to go visiting up and down the same old streets every afternoon, knowing that more than half the inhabitants do not mind whether they see you or not and that the majority of the rest would definitely rather not. It is not easy to be as punctual in keeping your appointments at the altar, the confessional, or elsewhere, as any other professional man has to be (or get "the sack") and as of course you ought to be (if only because you cannot get "the sack"). And truly it is often very, very hard for a priest—especially, perhaps, an East London priest—not to give up hope, grow bitter and disappointed, cease to try, and let things take their course.

So there is another subject for your prayers, as you think of those young men who went out from the cathedrals this morning, priests of the Church of God for all their lives and after ; as you think of, and pray for, all priests, including your own.

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One other trouble. I suppose that every priest realises, often almost with despair, the pooriness of his own spiritual life ; at any rate I know one who does, and see him every morning as I shave.

The glory fades ; the gold tarnishes ; the hopes and determinations and wonderful visions dwindle and disappear. The years pass ; the distant morning in the old cathedral is almost forgotten ; every day and every year seem to bring the priest more and more work and less and less ability (and perhaps less zeal) to do it. It may be that in consequence his private prayers grow cold and careless ; perhaps his own confessions become infrequent, mechanical, insufficiently prepared ; possibly, from long familiarity, his preparation for and thanksgiving after Mass are merely formal and meaningless ; perhaps his daily offices and meditations are crowded out more often than not ; he may be deluded into believing that he has no time for serious reading, no time to make his own retreat. The arches of the years are

bringing to him the awful temptation to fold his hands and let his own soul grow old and cold. There are few sadder sights than that of a stagnant priest, than that of a priest with a lukewarm soul.

Pray often, good Christians, for the Catholic priesthood and for at least one St. Augustine's priest; that in all that they are bound to do for the souls of others they may not lose their own. Have a heart: remember both that every priest is a human being and that every time you receive absolution your confessor adds "and pray for me."

* * * *

Think on the evening of Trinity Sunday of the trials and tribulations, the difficulties and temptations, that assuredly await those who were ordained this morning. Think too, at any time of the year, of all priests, for none of whom is it easier to be a good Christian than it is for you and for many of whom it is harder. And of your charity pray for us words in the oldest and best prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil."



GOD WITH US

ST. MATTHEW I, 23. *Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*

AT one moment all was as it had ever been. The stars shone, the night-breeze blew, out in the fields a sheep-dog barked, the last light in the inn went out, the village street lay silent. Another day had ended. All was still, quiet, usual.

Certainly a light burned in an out-house behind the inn ; but that was not strange, late-comers were often thus accommodated when the hostel was full. At one moment, if you had looked through the open stable door you would have seen nothing unusual : only straw, cattle food, oxen, a young girl about to become a mother.

At one moment Mary was virgin and nothing more. At one moment the universe lay separate and distinct from God ; God had never become one of his creation, never come unto his own. All was as it had ever been, at one moment.

Then, in the next moment, it happened. "When all things were in quiet silence and night in the midst of her swift course, the Almighty Word leaped down from heaven, out of the royal throne." Suddenly the second person of the holy Trinity became as God had never been before. The eternal Son clothed himself in the humanity prepared for him by the Holy Ghost and the virgin Mary. "And the Word was made flesh." "And was made Man."

Then all was as it had never been before. No more did creation stand separate from Creator, or man apart from Maker. Now, in the Bethlehem, the House of Bread ; now and for ever it was Emmanuel, God with us. And the holy virgin was mother too, Mother of God.

But the stars still drifted across the sky, the dawn-breeze blew, a cock crew, morning came as it had ever done before. Mankind woke and went forth to labour until the evening. The world rolled placidly on.

None but the mother knew. None but a Joseph, four or five shepherds, wise men in a distant country, perhaps an ox and an ass, certainly millions of angels.

All was as it had ever been. For centuries the world had been seeking God, searching for Messiah. On a truss of straw he lay; small, round, human babe. The stable door stood open for any passing shepherd or man who was wise. And almost all the world—all but, say, half a dozen—hurried by, still looking for God, as usual.

It was nearly three on a Friday on the summit of a low green hill; and all was as it had ever been, at one moment. God in one place, sinful mankind in another: between the two a great gulf fixed: therefore mankind miserable and lost.

Then, in the next moment, it happened. The figure on the centre cross sighed: "It is finished. Father, into thy hands . . ." and died with a strange shout of triumph. In that second of Good Friday time all was changed and became as it had never been before. At last the Father had found one among the sons of men who was wholly acceptable; at last a human life had been lived in perfect obedience and offered up in spotless sacrifice; therefore, at last the great gulf was bridged.

Never any more could it be God in one place and mankind in another. For ever and ever God and Man were and are "at one." It was the making of the at-one-ment, the Atonement.

But none but the mother knew. None but he who had leaned on a breast at supper, another Joseph, a Magdalene, a soldier, a former thief, perhaps a robin, certainly millions of angels.

All was as it had ever been. The whole world was seeking God, expecting Messiah. High and lifted up he hung, "evidently set forth." The title over him was written in each of the civilised tongues; he had fulfilled every prophecy; he had moved openly among men and loved them as only God can love. Along the high road to keep the passover, past the very foot of the small green hill, hurried the world with its sad set face. Almost all humanity—all but, say, half a dozen—still looked for God, as usual.

At one moment it is all commonplace, ordinary.

There have been provided six of the commonest things on earth:

a table, a plate, a cup, on the plate bread, in the cup wine, before the table a man. Candles are alight; white cloth covers the table; outside, the sun shines, a tram goes down the street, the factory siren blows, London hurries off to work. It is all just as usual

Then, in the next moment, it has happened. The man at the altar whispers short, almost peremptory, words. At once he kneels in worship. For in his hands is God: Emmanuel made "with us" by those whispered words. Suddenly the second person of the holy Trinity, the God-Man and the Man-God, at the bidding of a creature has clothed himself with the form of the holy host. That which was but bread has become God: for "This is my body, my blood: I am the living bread." There are many definitions of the Blessed Sacrament: the best is, as you might suppose, his own—"I."

Here, then, in our days and our England, are Bethlehem, Calvary, and the window-sill of heaven. Here, on our altar, given into your keeping and into mine, are the body once broken and the blood once shed. Here, beneath the one white light above the tabernacle, is he who was once in time and is beyond all time both Son of God and Mary's child. Here in the monstrance is Emmanuel, God with us. That is heaven: for heaven must be where God is.

So much he loves us that for our sakes he becomes the small and fragile host; in order that it may become the point in which God and man, nature and super-nature, heaven and Haggerston, God and you and I, touch, overlap, coincide.

But the unconscious altar-candles flicker on, the flowers do not bow their heads, the sun does not veil its face. Another tram comes down the street; the dog in the back-garden still barks; the world rolls placidly on. None but a handful knows; a few of the faithful at Mass, perhaps only a server, but millions of angels.

All is as it has ever been. Still the world looks for God and seeks him everywhere; in philanthropy, in art, in a lover's eyes, in music and spiritism and under the green trees; in a thousand things both ancient and modern. The church bell rings: the door stands open for any passing wayfarer or one who is wise. And here waits God, quiet, silent, patient, in the unbroken stillness of the sacrament of his own devising.

Yet almost all the world goes hurrying by; still searching, still failing to find; as usual.

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But you have found him; so have I.
We know Emmanuel, God with us.
Thank God.



AFTER THE FIRE

I KINGS 19, 15. *And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way.*

YOU would not suppose that Queen Jezebel would take sitting down either the exposure of her pet religion or the subsequent slaughter by Elijah of her four hundred and fifty priests of Baal. Indeed she was not that sort of a queen, as the prophet quickly discovered. Early on the morning after the fires of the God of Abraham had fallen on Mount Carmel and burned both sacrifice, altar, stones, and surrounding water a message was brought to the man of God: "The queen says, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if by this time to-morrow I have not made your life like that of each of my four hundred and fifty." Elijah's courage failed: he turned tail and fled for his life.

Hour after hour he ran, through the day and night, in complete panic: alone, hunted, keeping clear of houses and villages, scarcely daring to sleep—until he reached the only safe place, the desert. There—spent, weary, physically and mentally exhausted—he fell down under a bush of broom and gave up the struggle. Most leaders of men know the reaction that follows a time of great nervous and mental stress: the day before Elijah had been alone against four hundred and fifty and had emerged the victor; now the reaction had set in and he was paying the price. "I can do no more, Lord God," he moaned as he lay in the patch of shade alone in the great desert; "I have done my best: now I am finished." The chronicle adds that he, the invincible and confident conqueror of Mount Carmel, there and then begged that he might be allowed to die.

Can you sympathise with him? I can. I too have known the violent temptation to give up, to abandon the struggle. I too have said on my knees in the quiet chapel where is the tabernacle, on my knees in that odd-shaped room up in the clergy-house roof in which I try to sleep, "God, I simply can't go on any more. Nobody cares. I'm always making mistakes and falling into the same temptations. I try to do this, that, and the other for Haggerston; Haggerston merely grins and says, We've heard that tale before. Take me away, God; or let me die. I tell you I can do no more; I'm finished." Have you ever said such words? I know that some of you have. It may be that some of you are thinking them now:

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As Elijah lay under the bush in that utter despair in which, as some of us know, even the power of prayer is taken away, a hand touched him. He started in terror to his feet; had Jezebel's hangman found him? He swung round. It was an angel who stood smiling in the sunshine. "Arise and eat: the journey is too great." He looked where the angel pointed and saw on the small fire, which as a wise traveller he had lit to scare away the night-prowlers of the desert, a small round cake of bread and, standing by it, a jug of water. He ate and drank. Then he travelled on to God, in the strength of that heaven-provided meal; though the journey lasted nearly six weeks.

"Take, eat. Drink, child, of this. For the journey to God and heaven is too great for you to make alone." So speaks the Church to you and me and all weary pilgrims through the glaring and lonely desert of life. We look to where the Church points, where a priest at an altar stands with uplifted and not empty hand, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God." We see a small round disc of what but a moment ago was but bread, a chalice in which were only wine and water. Do we eat and drink as we are bidden; are we as frequent and regular communicants as we know that we should and could be? It is only so, only in the strength of the heaven-provided food, that you and I can hope to travel any distance on the long road to God and God's heaven—let alone reach its end. It is significant that the gospel of the Sunday after the octave of Corpus Christi is the parable of the great supper and of the invited guests who made excuses for their absence. If you and I could be frequent communicants and are not, we are in greater danger than any that threatened Elijah.

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At length the weary and despondent prophet reached the mountain on which God had once appeared to Moses. In a cold and lonely

cave, high up on the bleak face of Horeb, came to him what is described as "the word of God." "What are you doing here, Elijah?" asked that word; "Why have you run away and left your post? You, of all men, to show the white feather and request for yourself that you may die! What have you to say for yourself?" "Lord God," answered the tried and harassed man—had you seen and heard him you would have found it difficult to recognise the valiant and confident soldier of God on that other mountain, Carmel—: "Lord God, you do not understand! The whole land has gone to the devil: all your prophets have been slain with the sword: I, even I only, am left; and I had this message from Jezebel. What could I do but fly for my life?" "Go out of the cave, Elijah," commanded the word: "climb to the mountain-top and be alone with God. Hear what he has to say to you. Hear what God always says to his servants, if they leave their posts without orders."

Thousands of feet above the world, on the crest where snow lies in summer and where in winter the mists and blizzards breed, in the place where great storms and the thunder are born, stood one lonely man, alone with the Lord God.

Came a tempest of wind, which tore the mountain-side and splintered the crashing boulders; "but the Lord was not in the wind." After the wind an earthquake; but it held him not. After the earthquake a fire: but he was not there. God does not speak as man speaks, with vehemence and much advertisement, with noise and strident insistence: you will never hear the voice of God through a loud-speaker.

"After the fire, a still small voice." "And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle"; and stood in fear and trembling. For he knew that he was in the presence of God.

Again came the quiet question, "Why are you here?" Again it received the pitiful and pathetic answer.

Then God spoke. He said what Elijah knew that his conscience had been saying for weeks. "You must go back, my servant; back to your post. You must go now. Go, return on thy way."

He went. Back to duty: back to Jezebel.

Is there any one here who has run away and left the post of duty? One who has grown so tired of fighting against the old temptation, which still comes as strongly as ever after all these years, that he or she has recently decided to abandon the struggle and give way? Somebody so unutterably weary of working for unappreciative others

that he or she feels it impossible to continue and is turning, beginning to run away? One so tired of trying to pray that he or she has given up trying? Some one so dazed and battered with the attempt to keep holy purity in foul surroundings that that person feels that he or she can fight and resist no longer? One so weary of wearing that valiant mask over a breaking heart that he or she is deciding to-night that it must be taken off? Somebody who, for one reason or another, is so sick of the whole of this tragic business of living that in his or her heart is the half-formed wish that death would come and end it all?

Is there anybody like that here? Any one who has lost heart and courage, has given it up and is running away? I wonder.

If there is—listen, Christian! Listen to the still small voice of your own conscience, that never-failing voice of God which has never led you astray and never will.

What does it say? You must be quiet, prayerful, at peace, if you would hear it: it is to this day still and small. Listen!

“Go, return on thy way. Go back again for yet a little while: back to the old job, the old battle against temptation, the old brave fight to hide your tears behind a grin; back to your post and your duty, wherever and whatever they may be. Go, return on thy way.

For, “His Majesty greatly loveth courageous souls.”

And, “On the last parade God will not inspect us for medals, but for scars; and not scars in the back.”

“Go, return on thy way.”



JOHN BROWN

ST. LUKE 15, 18 and 19. *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

IF you continue to read that chapter of St. Luke beyond the part of it which forms to-day's gospel you find the third consecutive parable illustrating the Fatherhood of God, that of the prodigal son. Let us transpose the familiar tale into an East London key.

The text may then read: "I confess t' Almigh-y Gord, ter blessed Mary ever-virgin, ter orl the syntns an' ter you, farver (gi'e us a sip o' wa-er, me froat's that droy: fanks), that since me lawst confeshun abart for-y years agow I've done these 'ere sins."

The prodigal will be, perhaps, Brown J. Residence: such-and-such a number in So-and-so Court, E.2 (country house: Wormwood Scrubbs). Seven children, including twins: aspidistra in front-room window: "garden," bit of gas-soaked earth at the back where pigeons are kept: wireless in kitchen, no licence. Recreations: Clapton Orient Football Club, Darts, Hackney Wick Dog Stadium, and the Irish Sweep. Literature: the *Daily Herald* and the *People*. Club: any house with a licence. Occupations: various, mostly anonymous.

For long he has dwelt in "a far country," not wholly by his own fault: there are such things as Means Tests and Public Assistance Committees; there is truth in the saying that "it is almost impossible to be out of work for a length of time, and keep your soul."

But now the prodigal is returning.

The door of East London is Aldgate. Here enters the City East London's one really noble street, the Whitechapel Road and the Mile End Road; the old Roman highway which runs to-day, as it ran centuries ago, straight into the heart of London from the Roman camp at Colchester. Along that ancient road may be found to this day, by those who know where to look for them, yards of old coaching-inns, horse-stables, hay-wains, and—within a mile of Aldgate—a dairy with cows. In that road, too, stands East London's hospital of a thousand beds.

It is night in that hospital: three in the morning, the small hour when vitality is at its lowest and the tide of life is apt to ebb fast. The first market-carts are clattering along the broad old road which could tell so many tales. Mother London stirs and stretches herself for another day of prosperity and adversity, of toil and leisure, of luck and muck, of the sweat of birth and the sweat of death.

In this particular ward it has been a fairly quiet night: only one would-be suicide admitted, by whose bed sits a policeman lest he should have the audacity to die without permission; no drunks; only the normal number of accidents. For once the night-nurses have had a fairly easy spell. Only Number Ten, a man named John Brown, is on the danger-list, "on the gate." He has lain still, gazing at the ceiling: "No fanks, nuss; I don't want nuffink." Now, at about three, he has called her: "Nurse; do sumfink for me, will yer?" "Yes, old man; of course. What is it?"

For hours he has lain awake, thinking of many things. His number is up and he knows it: nearly always they know it. The years that have gone flicker before his weary mind. "Mother Kate: she used to call me one of her boys. Saint Augustyne's: years since I went inside: wonder what the old place is like now: like to be back there again. Bloody fool I've been: no more use than two pennorth o' halfpence. God! I'd like to get back again: back into peace: back to absolution and communion: back home. Things look different when a bloke's snuffing out. Wonder if I could get back. Nurse, nurse; I wants yer; do sumfink for me, will yer?" He has a strange dignity; the dignity of the dying poor; almost the dignity of one who died poor on a middle cross of three.

In the gaunt clergy-house the telephone rings and rings again: the priest has had a long day, the sleep which comes before dawn is heavy. At length: "Yes." "Is that Bishopsgate 5187? St. Augustine's? Oh. This is the London Hospital speaking. There is a patient here; name of Brown, John. He is very ill and is unlikely to live until morning. He is asking for a St. Augustine's priest.

Do you know him?" "No; never heard of him." "Will you come?" "Yes, of course."

Along the quiet streets walks the cassocked and cloaked figure, the cold air waking him. He does not carry the blessed sacrament; for he knows that this is reserved in the London Hospital. Contrary to popular supposition he meets neither thieves nor policemen walking in pairs; the only cat-burglar he sees has four legs and fur. Warner Place, Squirries Street, Vallance Road are washed, silent, keeping their secrets.

Round the bed screens are set. By it sits the priest, with purple stole across his shoulders. Near him is a table on which are set white cloth, lit candles, brass crucifix (The London is ready for all emergencies and this is no unusual occurrence). At the foot of the crucifix lies that which is the small, round, white warrant of the earthly presence of him who was once sick unto death and once spoke of a shepherd leaving ninety-nine to seek and find one.

From the pillows comes a difficult whisper in the husky tones of most hard-living Cockneys. "I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary ever-virgin, to all the saints and to you, father, (give me a sip of water, my throat's so dry: thank you), that since my last confession about forty years ago I have committed these sins." ["I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee."]

Then: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences: and by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins." ["But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."]

And: "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life." ["Bring forth the best robe and put it on him: put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet: bring hither the fatted calf and kill it: let us eat and be merry."]

Finally: "Go forth, Christian soul, from this world: in the name of God the Father, who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ, who suffered for thee; in the name of the Holy Ghost, poured out upon thee. Angels lead thee into paradise; and mayest thou, with Lazarus once poor, have everlasting rest."

Right hand clasps right hand; East Londoners always shake hands, both in life and death, for they trust one another. Before the closing eyes the priest holds the small crucifix which he always wears and which has been returned to him from more than one mortuary.

The last earthly words heard by the dying man are "the sweetest carol ever sung ; Jesus, Jesus, Jesus."

* * * * *

So "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave" ; at Bow or Chingford or Tottenham. But "his soul goes marching on." On and up along the quiet but busy one-way thoroughfares of purgatory ; on through the spacious fields of that paradise-garden where once walked a saviour and a penitent thief in the peace of the first Holy Saturday. John, penitent ; John, beginning to grow and recover lost ground ; John being trained, purged, cleansed. For home? Yes. For the fulfilment of his destiny? Yes. For heaven? Yes. For the Father? Ah ; that is the point of the parable. "This my son was dead and is alive again : was lost and is found." John Brown, "this my son."

* * * * *

But the priest knew none of these things, though he hoped them. He merely walked back through the cold streets, said his Mass, made his breakfast, and went on with the next job. That is what he is for. However, he may know them one day.



NOW AND THEN

ROMANS 8, 18. *I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

SO wrote St. Paul many years ago in a long letter of which part is the epistle for this week : so read I the other day as I said Mass in the chapel where the blessed sacrament is, that is to say where is Paul's Christ, your Christ, my Christ. Then I went into the sufferings of this present time ; for it is one of the more than one daily duties of a parish-priest both to be in and of the present pains of others besides himself and to look beyond them, to see for himself and to demonstrate to others the glory which shall be revealed shining out of those present sufferings into these present days ; to look and point from Now into Then.

I was told of an old East London priest—as usual overworked, underpaid, housed in an out-of-date comfortless vicarage several times too large and (because a Catholic) cold-shouldered by his superiors—broken at last. He was saying Mass, he whose devotion to the most holy sacrament is notorious ; came a long pause ; then, with anxious face and worried eyes, he turned from the altar and said in a loud strained voice to the startled congregation, “Where am I? What am I doing?” It was anaemia of the brain. I remembered Father Harry Wilson of St. Augustine's, Stepney, to whom came the beginning of the end when he had to ask his server whether or not he had said the prayer of consecration.

I visited a priest of under fifty years of age sent home from the

mission-field so crippled with rheumatoid arthritis that, in one of his earlier attacks, he could only finish the Mass on his knees.

I heard of an old lady who has been blind for many years. Three days ago she was informed that she had cancer and that there was no hope of cure. As she told this to her priest she added, with a smile, "And, father, at first the news was quite a shock to me"—*at first!*

My letters told me of a woman about to undergo the seventeenth operation on her nose in three years, and of a wife and mother who had visited her husband in an asylum, both are Catholics, both love each other, and he is convinced that he is damned to all eternity.

I went to see in that blessed place, The Hostel of God at Clapham, a working-woman who owed almost all in this world and much of that in the world to come to St. Augustine's, Haggerston, and St. Saviour's Priory. She was dying of cancer. The day before I had left with her my small silver crucifix on which are engraved the words "*In hoc vince*. In this, conquer." Her first words to me were, "Your crucifix has told me all I wanted to know."

Then I read again what St. Paul wrote; and I thought, "Well! God alone knows and God alone can picture or describe the glory which shall be revealed in them, if it is really true that their sufferings in this present time are incapable of comparison with it."

That night I had a dream.

At last the day of the operation had come. He was glad that the time of waiting was over; though in his heart of hearts he knew, as very often they do know, that the operation would be of no avail and the sands were running out.

Screens stood round his bed. On the marble-topped cupboard by his bedside lay a white cloth on which stood a brass crucifix and two small lighted candles. A bell sounded in the corridor, silence fell upon the ward, the night-sister came first through the screens and genuflected as the priest with his burden passed her. Confession was made, communion given: the priest left him. There came upon him a sense of peace that he had never known before. It seemed to him that over against the green screen at his feet he saw for a moment a face that smiled, for all that its forehead bore faint scars that might have been made by thorns many years ago, and that he could just hear a voice say, "Not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be."

Then they drew aside the screens and the usual cleaning of the ward began. The ward-maid dropped her broom: the cross old fellow in the opposite bed grumbled as two smiling nurses washed him:

the paper-boy arrived: the pub-keeper in the next bed had his breakfast: the buses just outside the window roared round and round the square: London's great clock chimed. Everything this morning was just as usual; just as usual on this morning which was for him so different to all other mornings.

After a while two young men in white wheeled a white trolley to his bedside. Gently they lifted him on to it: he lay there comfortable and warm, covered with blankets and with soft woollen socks on his feet. There was a pin-prick in his arm, as the nurse gave him an injection: she smiled at him and chatted cheerfully although she looked tired after her night's work: she was only a girl, young enough to be his daughter, but she possessed the gentleness and patience, the self-lessness, which are the prerogative of all good women, but which seem to be bestowed in larger quantities on those who give their lives to the service of humanity; such as mothers, nuns, and hospital-nurses.

The merciful drug took effect. He grew sleepy: things and sounds seemed far away: were the buses still running? But his right hand could feel the outline of a small crucifix which he grasped firmly. He realized that the trolley was moving; that the Ward Sister walked by his side, holding his left hand and wearing a kind of white overall and something white over her head; that the lift was going down. Then he slept.

It was late that night when he opened his heavy eyes. He knew that his body was in pain; but the pain was far away and held in check by some means outside himself, his body seemed to belong to some one else. The Ward Sister was still with him, though now she did not wear the white overall. Her firm, cool, gentle hand lay on his forehead: for a moment he thought that he was a small boy in the white cot at home and that his mother had come in as usual to say good-night: then he remembered that it could not be so. "It's all over, old man," Sister was saying; "and," with a check in her voice, "it will soon be all over." A blessing she was, that Sister; she had told him the truth, when he asked her the day before; and, being like her a Catholic, he had wanted to know the truth. He did not think that he would ever forget that Sister, anywhere.

The priest had come back to him again, though now he was dressed as usual in his black cassock. What was he saying? "Go forth, Christian soul . . . may angels lead thee into . . . the face of Jesus Christ appear to thee kind and joyful . . . and may thy habitation to-day be in . . ." So it had really come to that. Well: he had done all in his power to be ready. And he could still feel the outline of the small crucifix in the palm of his right hand.

Over and beyond the face of the silent house-doctor at the foot of his bed he saw again the face that is kind and joyful. Again he seemed to hear, quite clearly now (for the traffic appeared to have ceased), "of this present time are not worthy to be compared." Then he smiled at the Sister : and really slept.

* * * * *

In all the sufferings of this present time among which you and I live and move and have our being—and God knows that you see as much of them as I, some of you more—can you also begin to see now, in this our day, the glory which shall one day be revealed to the whole of heaven? I can.

The glory of a life spent wholly in the service of others, that looks for no human reward and assuredly does not get it : the glory of great pain of body or mind borne steadily and manfully, just from hour to hour and day to day and year to year, with never a complaint or murmur, laid moment by moment at the feet of him who was lifted up to bear all pain : the glory of going on and on, when the heart is weary, the head is heavy, every nerve is frayed, and the whole body rebels and screams that it can go no further : the glory of giving without once even beginning to count the cost, in a world that only exists to get and rarely dreams of anything but pounds and pence : the glory of being known to be a Christian in a heathen workshop, an indifferent home, and a derisive world : the glory of dying with every sin confessed and absolved, with Christ in his sacrament as intimate as he was with his mother when she carried him next her heart to Bethlehem all those years ago—the glory of dying with no trace of fear and the crucifix held fast, in the faith of the undivided Church—the glory of dying as well as living, a Catholic.

Surely you too can look from Now into Then. Surely you too can begin to see the glory which shall be revealed, please God in us, shining through the sufferings of this present time.



NEVERTHELESS

ST. LUKE 5, 5. *Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.*

SHOULD it fall to your lot to preach the Sunday sermon, you begin to prepare it, if you are wise, on the preceding Monday morning. For you cannot foresee what bolts from the blue will descend upon you during the intervening half-dozen days, you are not one of those gifted beings who can speak for twenty minutes at a moment's notice, and you are so old-fashioned as to consider it merely rude to inflict upon your audience a discourse that is unprepared.

If you are not only wise but also fortunate, the homily in question is finished before you go to bed on Monday night.

Last Monday I was both.

* * * * *

Haggerston's customary morning murmurings rose to and through my open windows. The Hackney Road roared like a not so distant sea. Down our street came the gentleman with the wonderful voice, chanting his usual morning anthem, "Noo kippers : penny-a-pair." Two ladies met beneath my windows and conversation began on its well-worn lines : "An' she sez to me : so I ups and sez to 'er." Workmen in the timber-yard opposite threw beams and planks about. There was a dog-fight. And the butcher opposite the horse-trough besought all and sundry to Buy, Buy, Buy.

But as I read the gospel for to-day I found my sermon :
“Nevertheless.”

You remember the context.

The scene is the beautiful heart-shaped inland Sea of Galilee, thirteen miles in length, seven miles broad across the centre of the heart. At intervals on its shores stand towers and villages with flat roofs, white walls, narrow streets. Behind them rise hills and mountains, some green, some brown and barren, with Mount Hermon, the mountain of the transfiguration, highest of all. From these peaks and hill-tops descend on the sea the sudden and violent storms which make dangerous the staple industry of the inhabitants of the district. This is fishing. The Jews eat quantities of fish ; it is, in these days on earth of Jesus of Nazareth, their favourite food. It is recorded that a contemporary Rabbi gave a dinner at which the guests were provided with more than a hundred different kinds of fish : six hundred thousand casks of sardines are said to have been sent every week south to Jerusalem : and one of the gates in the walls of the capital was called Fish Gate. Moreover, since the days of Joshua fishing in the Sea of Galilee has been free to all.

Last night the two drifters belonging to the local firm of Simon, James, John, and Co. put to sea : but the partners had no luck. Throughout the night they cast their nets this side and that : up and down, across and over the sea they sailed and drifted : when the morning sun laid a pink finger on the snows of Hermon they had caught nothing. So they returned to land.

They were too tired to notice a crowd gathered on the shore. They hauled their boats up and began to clean their nets.

Now in that crowd was a man who had travelled north to find these fishermen, Simon, James, and John. His name was, and is, Jesus of Nazareth.

He wished to preach a sermon to the people and had no pulpit. He walked across and asked Simon to lend him his boat. Simon looked at him, not for the first time : he looked at Simon, not for the last time. Simon pushed the boat out, anchored her and she became a pulpit for the Son of God.

“Now when he had left speaking,” writes the doctor-evangelist, “he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught. Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing : nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.”

Thus Simon the fisherman began to be Peter the Prince of

Apostles, Peter the Rock. Because he did what Jesus Christ asked him to do ; because he said, "Nevertheless."

* * * *

The gospel appointed for each Sunday of the year has at least one message to Christians from Christ himself. Nearly every Sunday's gospel contains actual words of our Lord : if we are sufficiently patient and interested, you and I can, without much difficulty, adapt those words to our own soul's needs and legitimately consider them as spoken by Christ our Lord to ourselves. This is yet another reason for following the gospel at Mass in our prayer-books, instead of merely listening to it.

I wonder whether this week's message to some of us is "Nevertheless."

* * * *

Is the Lord, for example, asking you to be confirmed? "What, an old codger like me, a woman at my time of life! What in the world would the neighbours say? What would my wife, my husband, say? What would they say at *The Nag's Head*? O, let them say ; nevertheless, at thy word, Jesus, I will."

"No. I have never made my confession. My parents did not hold with it and I have always said that I would never make it. I am getting on now—shan't tell you how old, but I won't see fifty again : how can I possibly make my first confession now? In any case, I don't know how to do it. It's all very well for you to talk : you don't know how difficult it is for somebody who is, well, middle-aged, to make his or her first confession." Yet the Lord Christ looks, asks, waits ; and you know it. Can't you say, "Nevertheless ; in spite of all the difficulties, in spite of my upbringing and age and pride ; at thy word I will"? Can't you say that? You do not know how happy you would be ; you do not know how happy he would be.

I know that you have done more than your share to make up that quarrel. I know that you are the injured party and have been really badly used. I know that it is contrary to human nature—as people say, "asking too much of you"—to expect you to renew the attempts to heal the breach and once again to go three-quarters of the way towards the making of peace. But I also know that you are a Christian and a communicant. Consequently, I believe that if you would make your confession and communion and then kneel for a long time before the tabernacle, you would then be able to say to Jesus Christ, "Very well. Since it is you who asks : notwithstanding, in spite of everything, nevertheless, I will."

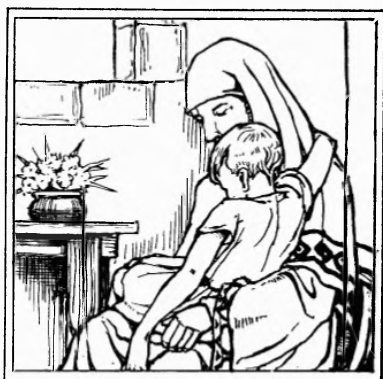
Return to the sacrament of penance after all these years. Give up that dishonest work you hate so much. Abandon that boy or girl who is keeping you from God. Stop that secret sin of which nobody knows, save God and you. Give up betting on the dogs. Stop the drink. Face the pain and illness, instead of trying to run away. Give up that man, that woman. Cease to be querulous, self-pitying, self-complaining. "If I do; how the world will chatter and sneer and wag its bitter tongue; how the folk at home will laugh and shrug their shoulders; how I shall have to fight and go on fighting; and I am so tired!"

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"Nevertheless. In spite of everything and come what may. At thy word, Jesus my Lord, I will. I swear I will."

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Do you see what I mean? I think that you do.



THE GREAT WOMAN

2 KINGS 4, 8. *It fell on a day that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman.*

A SCORCHED and sun-baked land : rolling sweeps of bare high hills : blue unclouded sky : blazing sunlight : blue inland sea : olive-streets : lizards : camels : goats. North Palestine.

A village of white houses, with flat roofs and shuttered windows : surrounded by high white walls to keep out bandits and wild beasts : the wall-gate shut at sun-down. Shunem.

A white dusty road winding to it, like a white ribbon thrown carelessly on the floor of the brown sun-soaked valley.

In one of the houses built into the wall lived a man and his wife. I cannot tell you their names ; but I know who was master of the house, and it was not the man. (This is by no means the last recorded instance of this phenomenon.) In fact, the lady had a nickname by which the village always called her : a nickname is, more often than not, the highest compliment. She was known as The Great Woman. She was a good woman ; at the same time nothing happened in the village of which she was unaware. Also, she had a great and secret sorrow.

One day she saw two strangers walking along the white ribbon-road. They came from the direction of Endor, a village in which once lived a witch (though that is another story). As they drew near she realised that one was "the man of God," Elisha the friar ; the other his servant Gehazi. With true Oriental hospitality she hurried downstairs, met them as they passed her house, invited them in to rest and refresh ; for she was "the great woman" of Shunem, it must

be her house that they visited. She said, "Please come again, when you pass this way." They accepted her invitation.

It fell on an evening that she said to her man, "Husband : I have an idea." He said nothing ; he had long since discovered that this was the wisest thing to say. "I perceive," she continued, by no means disconcerted by the customary silence, "that this is an holy man of God who continues to come here. You know that small spare-room upstairs, the one on the wall with a window looking out over the country. We never use it, for we have no child. Let us make it a room for the man of God and call it the prophet's chamber : so that, when he wishes, he may sleep under our roof. We will put a bed there, a table, a stool to sit on, a candlestick in case he likes to read in bed, a pot of garden-flowers on the sill." Her husband made no reply ; his philosophy had long been "anything for a quiet life," a creed which has since been adopted by quite a number of similarly-placed males.

So on his next visit Elisha stayed for a night.

On the following morning he said to his servant, "Call this Shunammite." She came and stood before him ; one does not sit unbidden in the presence of a man of God. "Lady," said Elisha, "you are very kind to me. Is there anything that I can do for you? Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I will gladly give you. May I speak for you to the king or the prime minister?" "Thank you," she replied ; "I dwell among mine own people. I am content." She left the room with some dignity, for she was a great woman : but she still had her secret sorrow.

"What can we do for her?" Elisha asked Gehazi. "Master," replied the servant, "she has no child." "Thank you : please call her back."

"Lady," said the man of God when his hostess had returned to the small room on the wall and closed its door behind her, "I know your sorrow. The good God shall turn it into joy. You will be a mother ; you shall have a son to love and kiss." "Ah, my lord!" answered the great woman, with tears in her eyes, "you must not lie to me."

But Elisha did not lie. Her son was born ; sorrow left her for a time ; laughter filled the white house on the wall, the laughter of a child, the laughter of a mother ; the house had become a home.

It was eight years later that the blow fell. The boy loved going out with his father to the corn-fields and watching the reapers : one day he wore no hat and not even his mother noticed it. "Daddy," he said, "my head, my head" ; and fainted. His father grunted,

"Carry him to his mother"; for he was ever a man of few words. In the cool white house the boy sat on his mother's knees, her arms around him, his aching head next her heart. At noon he died.

Indeed she was a great woman. Tearless and silent she rose to her feet, carried the little body up to the prophet's chamber, laid it on the holy man's bed, shut and locked the door, put on her hat, went out to the harvest-field. "Quick!" she called to her husband; "I want a couple of donkeys and one of the men to go with me. I am going to the man of God." "What for?" he asked. "Don't talk," she answered; "it shall be well." She saddled the donkey herself. She said to the farm-hand, "Ride as fast as you can. Do not draw rein because I am an old woman. If I cannot keep pace with you I will tell you." Away they rode through the afternoon heat along the ribbon-road to Mount Carmel on the coast, thirty miles away. Her husband watched them go, scratched his head, wondered if the small boy was better, went on reaping.

Hours later Elisha on the mountain-side saw two riders approaching across the plain. "That is the great woman from Shunem," he said to Gehazi; "run to meet her, ask if all is well with her, her husband and the small boy." "Thank you, Gehazi," she answered; "it is well. I seek your master."

Hot, tired, white with dust, the sad but great old mother rode up to the man of God and dismounted. Then she broke down. She fell at the prophet's feet and sobbed her heart out. "O, man of God! Did I ever ask for the boy? Did I not say, Do not deceive me? Better to be childless than a mother who has lost her only child. O, man of God!"

Elisha turned abruptly to his servant. "Take my staff. Run to the white house on the wall. Speak to no man on the way. Lay my staff on the child's face. We will follow." Through the night Gehazi ran; behind him rode the mother and God's man. There was no need for them to hurry. None knows of what they spoke as they journeyed beneath the stars and the soft dark sky; the sorrows of mourners and the words God speaks to them are often unrevealed. In the dawn Gehazi met them and shook his head: "The child is not awaked; there is neither voice nor hearing."

They reached the house on the wall, through which now rang no boy's laughter; the house that was no longer a home. Elisha went upstairs. The great woman waited in a room below, on her knees. She heard the door of the prophet's chamber opened; she heard it shut and latched. Then the house was silent again.

After a time she heard Elisha come out and walk hurriedly backwards and forwards in the room over her head, as if he was in great

stress. Again she heard him go up to the room on the wall. Again the door was shut and silence fell.

Then the door opened : she went up and in. The man of God, spent and weary, smiled at her and said, "Lady, take back your son." The great woman knelt at his feet, while the morning sunlight streamed through the flowers on the window-sill. She walked to the bed and kissed her boy : he smiled at her as though he was glad to return home after a long journey. She took him in her arms and went downstairs, saying nothing ; for there was nothing that she could say.

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That is the story of the only woman in the bible who is named Great.

If you were to ask me the reason why she was so called I should answer : because she was a good wife who wished to be a mother ; because she was kind to strangers ; because she was self-controlled ; but, principally, because she put God and the things of God before everything else, even her sorrows.

❧



NO MORE SEA

REVELATION 21, 1. *I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.*

SOME of us have had our holidays : for some, myself included, they are to come : while others are now in more salubrious surroundings than are compatible with scent-works, fried-fish shops, and gas-holders. But to all of us summer holidays mean, I suppose, more than anything else, the sea : certainly they do to me.

Before much more water has flowed under London Bridge (or much more beer in *Dirty Dick's*) I hope to be on a great ship at which no postman calls, on which are neither telephones nor front-door bells, where nobody wants a pension-paper signed or a letter written to the Hospital Sunday Fund for false teeth, on which all but two have never heard of St. Augustine's, Haggerston, and where nobody ever wants sermons to be preached. For a fortnight, by day and by night, all round me will be the sea.

I wonder if any of you know the thrill of leaving port. There is no fuss and scarcely any noise : nobody blows whistles or waves flags, or if they do you neither hear nor see them : no luggage-carriers clatter on dingy platforms : there are no dirty tunnels. Suddenly you realise that the ship has come to life. A faint tremor moves along the deck beneath your feet, there is a little movement inside cabin-walls, a pulse begins to beat in every corner of the vast structure of steel and wood. The ship's heart is beating, the turbines have started, the propellers

are moving. You look over the side: quay, cranes, tiny humans fluttering minute handkerchiefs seem to be sliding away from you. Tugs are cast off. Soon you begin to feel the sea, like a mother nursing her baby, rocking your house of twenty thousand tons gently to and fro, lifting and lowering her, caressing her. Almost before you can appreciate it Dover has passed; so have Beachy Head, St. Catharine's Point, The Lizard, Wolf Light. England has gone over the horizon. There is nothing but sea.

Sometimes you clamber into the bows and watch the steel brown cut-water pushing its relentless way through the great waves, up the green hills and down the long blue valleys, while the spindrift flies this way and that and porpoises play "last across" like children in East London streets. Sometimes you go aft, lean over the throbbing, swaying stern (what the small boy in *Punch* called "the palins at the blunt end") and watch the boiling wake trail away like a white road that leads over ever-moving mountains and valleys to England, home, and—well, Haggerston. Sometimes, if you are in favour with the powers that be, you climb at night to the small dark platform above the bridge (they do not mean to be personal when they call it the monkey island): while fellow-passengers dance far below to jazz and grow hot and even thirstier, you are content to stand in the dark with the stars as sufficient companions and the black foremast ahead of you swaying like an immense cross heading a procession across the world. But wherever you go and whatever you do, all day and all night, wrapping you round and cleansing you from stale thoughts and stupid worries, is that old enchantress, the sea.

* * * * *

If, for one reason or another, it is not possible for you to have such a holiday—indeed I wish that you could, though, if you will pardon me for saying so, on another ship than mine!—yet to the majority of you too summer holidays are incomplete without the sea. It is not for nothing that we sing, or used to, "O! I do like to be beside the seaside." Brighton, Margate, Southend, Seaford have for all right-minded people another attraction besides the pierrots, promenade, and pier. We all love the sea: perhaps none more so than they who live in East London.

* * * * *

Then do you wonder—I used to, when I was small, dug sand-castles at Dymchurch and wanted to bathe three times a day and paddle the rest of the time—what St. John meant when, in his account of his vision of the new heaven and the new earth, he wrote, "And there was

no more sea"? I remember that these words used to make me sad, until I knew what they meant : whereas now they make me happy.

The Jews were not a seafaring race ; in fact they hated the sea. To them it was the outward and visible sign of the chaos and disorder out of which God had made the ordered beauty of the land. If you look at a map of the coast-line of their country Palestine, you will see that it is rough and rugged with very few harbours : the land and the sea look as if they are hostile and antagonistic to each other. To the Jew the land is ordered, trained, tamed, always the same ; the sea is disorderly, unreliable, smooth one day and rough the next, uncontrollable, inconsistent. God leading the Israelites through the Red Sea was to the Jews the picture of salvation, rescue from disaster.

St. John, when he wrote his revelation of heaven, was an old man, banished to exile in a small island hundreds of miles from home. He was homesick, lonely, miserable in his tired old age. His prison-door was the sea : it was the sea that kept him from home and loved ones ; the sea was his gaoler, separating him from the warm and friendly world, cutting him off, keeping him apart. As he sat in his solitary hut and wrote, his ears were filled with the noise of waves and the cries of sea-birds : wherever he looked he saw nothing but the separating and impassable sea.

So he wrote of the life that is to come, "And there is no more separation."

When next you sit by what the sentimental poet calls for some reason that I have never been able to discover, "the sad sea waves" ; when, perhaps, you try to stand on a cliff-head, great winds roar and vast rollers crash and thunder at your feet ; when next you read of a ship being smashed to matchwood by the relentless sea ; when you hear of people being drowned,—think, if you wish, of the calm and peace of heaven, where there is no more soul-destroying labour and no more wanton destruction ; think of heaven's orderliness and consequent beauty, in place of strikes and wars, violence and revolution, hatred and murder. But also say to yourself, "And in heaven there is no more separation."

You with your loved ones who went home before you ; I with mine. Each of us with our Lady, "Star of the Sea." All of us for ever with God.

No more possibility of leaving them again, for eternity. Home, sweet home ; with her and him who make home, without whom home is now such a mockery. Never any more partings, good-byes, tears of farewell.

No more separation : no more sea.



SUMMER HOLIDAYS

GENESIS 2, 15. *The Lord God took the man and put him into the garden.*

SUMMER holidays!

To do just what you like and when you like, in the country. How heavenly it is.

* * * * *

Walk along a green and shady country lane : by yourself (at least that is my preference, though opinions may differ) : dawdle along, looking at and listening to the things in God's garden. Stand under an old tree that was middle-aged before ever there was a St. Augustine's in Haggerston, watch the rooks coming and going and try to understand what it is that they are so troubled about (more than likely it is yourself). Sit so still that a gull from the sea a mile or more away alights in your field, looks suspiciously this way and that, is finally convinced that he is alone, and so unburies from his own very special hiding-place the ancient remains of a dead rat on which he dines with vast relish. Be so patient that a lamb will eat a lump of sugar from your hand or a calf with great eyes will lick your palm with rough and slobbering tongue, as they will if you will be sufficiently patient. Pick the wild flowers, not wastefully or wantonly and never by the roots, but one by one to see how many different kinds you can find in your lane ; and do so reverently and politely, aware that you are in somebody else's garden and that the owner, who ever loved the lilies of the field, has his eye on you.

The first morning of the holiday, when you go down to the sea for the first swim. Half the world is still asleep ; but "Day's at the morn, Morning's at seven, The hill-side's dew-pearled, The lark's on the wing, The snail's on the thorn, God's in his heaven, All's right with the world." For the first time you feel the sand warm between your toes ; and for the first time you rejoice in the feel of the good salt sea all round you, buoying you up, cleansing and strengthening your whole frame, while the small waves laugh and the warm sun kisses your wet head. Then out you come, fresh, alert, wide awake, hungry for breakfast as you never are at home ; braced, renewed, re-created once more after the eleven months of bricks and mortar and swimming-baths.

Have you ever seen the sun set in the sea ; while you lie full length on the edge of a white cliff, the grass beneath you still warm from the summer's day and its scent of thyme, camomile, clover, and lady's slipper far more suggestive of heaven than a fish-shop in the Hackney Road or scorched grass in Victoria Park ? The day's heat fades : the waves far below are old gold, then pink, then orange-tipped as they dance across the long road to the setting sun : the gulls half-way down the cliff's side glide and soar more slowly, as though they too were weary at the end of the long day : but the rabbits are just waking up. The sun sinks : nearer and nearer it falls to the silent sea. Now it has touched (you had far better be alone ; otherwise some fool is sure to ask you if you heard the hiss) : it is going : there is only half a red sun now. Curiously, the last fragment looks for a second like a triangle. Now it has gone. The orange, pink, crimson, and vermillion fade slowly from the sky. The evening star twinkles.

You go to sleep. Perhaps, if you are both lucky and wise, in a cottage room which has an undulating floor and low ceiling and the cupboards of which smell of lavender ; with the latticed window wide open, so that you can smell the garden, hear the sparrows in the thatch a few feet above your head and the rooks in the elms across the lane, see a star or two winking at you and listen to the distant murmur of the never-silent sea.

It is probable that, as you close your eyes, you think with little regret of trams in the Hackney Road, the dog from next door which always makes such a noise at this time of night, So-and-so's wireless which is sure to be still braying jazz, the boys and girls who are probably shrieking and shouting up and down your street, and the smell of asphalt and humanity which is certainly pouring through your window at home. Perhaps you sigh with gratitude and say

to yourself, "The Lord God took the man and put him into the garden."

* * * * *

Summer holidays.

We Christians spend them as happy Christians : we do not leave our Christianity behind, when the Lord God takes us out of the streets, the din and the dirt, in order that he may put us for a week or two into his garden.

Those wretched girls and women who under-dress and do their best to behave as no animal would and as no decent man wants them to : the silly immodest females who disgrace their sex and are unworthy of the fair name of woman. The vapouring youths with greased heads, spotted faces, weak mouths with apparently everlasting "fags" drooping from them ; who giggle and gape and wink and nudge and look as if they never wash their feet, still less go into the sea on a cold morning before breakfast. The sodden and stupid old women of both sexes whose one idea of a holiday is to drive in a charabanc from one dismal public-house to another.

Of course we St. Augustine's people are not like them. We are decent ; we have some common sense ; and we are Christians.

But when we are on holiday do we go to Mass on Sundays and days of obligation (for example, August 15th)? Do we receive communion as regularly and as carefully as when we are at home? The church is not St. Augustine's and it is further away : moreover, the landlady is often resentful about our getting up early and being late for breakfast ; she is also apt to be tiresome about the Friday fish. But Sunday is the Lord's Day wherever we may be : the Mass is the only Lord's Service in existence : we are still the Lord's children : Friday is Friday all the world over, memento of Good Friday : and it is the Lord God who gives us the holiday, puts us into his garden.

Do we say our morning and evening prayers on summer holidays? It is often not easy to do so, if you are staying in a hostel and sleeping with a number of strangers : it is often not easy to go down on your knees by the bedside, when your face burns because you know that most of the others are looking at you and smiling. Not easy : but a good test of courage and Christian sincerity.

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I hope that you will all have summer holidays that are full of happiness, because in and through them you find very near at hand the God who still walks in his earthly gardens. I hope that they will indeed be heavenly days : since they are, to all who have eyes to

see, shadows cast before of the long and lovely holidays that never end and of which each is a holy day ; when temptations will have ceased and all that is silly or ugly or cruel will have been swept away ; when there are no more dirt, disease, tears, weary bodies, or breaking hearts ; but only eternal re-creation, refreshment, peace, and growth to perfection—holy holidays following on the day on which the Lord God took this priest, this man or woman, this Priory Sister or Haggerston child, and put him or her into his best garden of Paradise.



BUT

ACTS 12, 5. *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*

THE Bible is so inspired and so condensed that there is food for thought and meditation in almost every word of it. From the account of the event which the Church commemorates on August 1st I choose for my text one word, But.

August 1st, 44.

The young Church is already beginning to experience persecution. A few days ago the Jewish King Herod Agrippa the First laid violent hands on one of the "big three" of the apostles, the three who, you remember, once managed a fishing concern, Simon, James, John, and Co. It was James who was arrested: a sword flashed and he went to heaven.

"Because he saw that this pleased the Jews, Herod proceeded further to take Peter also." "Now I have two of the three," thinks the king; "and now I have the ringleader. This will put a stop to The Way." However, this is where the But comes in.

Pay a visit to the condemned cell to-night. There is Peter; two others are with him, soldiers, both chained to him. Another soldier is on guard outside the locked and bolted cell-door: a fourth stands by the locked door at the end of the corridor. The four, the quaternion, are relieved every so often during the night. For at sunrise to-morrow there is to be another public execution. The trusty sword

shall sing again ; Peter's head shall fall into the same red basket which caught the head of James ; and Peter's soul can go where it pleases.

Peter knows it. Yet look at him in his cell, chained to warders, a few hours before his execution. Do you see what he is doing? He has taken off his cloak and sandals, unloosed his girdle, said his night-prayers ; and is asleep. For he is a different Peter to the impetuous, nervy, hasty man we used to know. Since that early morning soon after Easter Day when he stood on the shore of Galilee, since the morning of Pentecost, he has changed almost out of knowledge. Now he is wholly, body as well as soul, the property of Jesus of Nazareth : nothing earthly matters a scrap now, not even a sword. He is sleeping peacefully ; though he is probably the only Christian in Jerusalem to do so.

But even in those days "the best-laid plans of mice and men gang aft a-gley" ; for King Christ has other plans for Peter than those of King Herod Agrippa the First.

Suddenly the dark cell is flooded with light : a fourth now stands there, who has entered by no door : an angel. He shakes Peter, smites him on the side : you know how much it takes to wake you at 2 a.m., I do. "Get up, Peter : be quick!" The chains fall from his wrists and feet ; but the warders pay no attention—strange! but this is a strange night. "Put on your clothes and sandals : now follow me." The iron door of the cell swings silently open ; so does the door at the end of the corridor ; nobody is about ; the prison-gates stand wide open. Angel and apostle walk down the street ; then the former returns to heaven, or sets out on another earthly errand for his master.

Peter, still a little dazed by the rapidity with which things have happened, goes to a certain house. "Good! Lights are burning. They have not gone to bed. I think I know what they are doing." He knocks at the front door. Somebody comes downstairs and listens : you did not open front doors in the middle of the night without considerable precaution, if you were a Christian and Herod Agrippa was king. "Who is there?" she asks. "Peter," comes the answer. She runs upstairs and tells the others. They laugh. "My dear Rhoda," they say, "you're mad ; you've been sitting up too late ; it can't possibly be." But she persists, and the knocking continues. So they come down to the door with her and look into the street. And there was no execution when the sun rose.

Why not? Because of the But.

"Peter therefore was kept in prison : BUT prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." "James murdered : Peter arrested and to die to-morrow : surely that is the end of the Church" ;

that was not what Jerusalem Christians said to each other on that thirty-first of July. What they did say was, "Now we must pray like anything: pray by night and pray by day: pray without ceasing. We will meet in John Mark's house and will keep a continuous watch of intercession. We must all take part. Yes, young Rhoda, you can come too."

It must have been a fine thing to be a Christian in the days of Herod Agrippa the First, even if life was short and not particularly gay; when the But of the Church's prayers was stronger than bolts and bars, perhaps not for the first and assuredly not for the last time.

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If only you and I could realise a little more clearly than perhaps we do the enormous power of our prayers, how much more faithfully we would persevere with them and how much more happy would be both ourselves and those for whom we pray.

Sister Marjorie of St. Saviour's Priory has died; her soul goes marching on and you and I miss her at every turn. BUT I believe that she still has us in her prayers and I think that those prayers are even more powerful than when she was on earth, because already there are beginning to happen in Haggerston miracles that she wished to happen and that are in their way as great as that of Peter's release from prison.

Life for those they left behind is not easy: BUT it is not so difficult as we expected. Because Mrs. Crowson, Mrs. Thorn, Jeannie Howard, Father Burrows, Sister Agatha, and the rest of those who worshipped here and are now in God's nearer presence are praying their powerful prayers a little way—only a little way—out of sight.

Up and down our East London streets moves Satan, on these summer nights you can nearly see him and often hear him; temptations come to you and me and it is no easier, as the years pass, to be a good Christian; it is hard not to give way to weariness, illness, poverty, old age: BUT in our streets live Christian men and women who can never leave their beds, yet who can and do "pray without ceasing" for you and me; BUT day in, day out, sometimes all the night through, a Sister or two kneels before the tabernacle in the Priory Chapel and lays all Haggerston at Christ's feet. For myself, I do not care to think what sort of a priest I should be were it not for those BUTS.

"I am so tired after the day's wash." BUT before I get into bed I must say my intercessions; for I don't know what might happen to those who need my prayers if I did not.

“I’m going on my holiday.” BUT I will not take a holiday from my prayers, for the same reason.

“I’ve had a long day at work.” BUT I will go into church on my way home and pay my daily visit to the blessed sacrament, for I am always coming across people who seem to need a prayer or two.

“It is an effort to get up and go to Mass.” BUT I will do so : for that is the best of all intercession-services and there is no telling what miracles even I might bring about with the holy sacrifice as my lever and instrument.

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Indeed there is much meaning in one word of three letters, if we look for it. Almost as much as there is power for good in one short and unselfish prayer ; but not quite as much.



FIVE, TWO, ONE

ST. MATTHEW 25, 15. *Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability.*

THE second lesson on Thursday evening contained the story of the talents, our Lord's parable about the responsibility of life. It may be summarised thus :

(1) God has put each of us into this world in order that we may do something ; that is, to help him to pull this poor old world straight. (A man who had died asked our Lord what plans he had made to spread the gospel throughout the world. Our Lord replied, "I have entrusted that to human beings." "But suppose they fail you?" asked the man. "I have made no other arrangements," was the answer.)

(2) For this purpose he has given to every one of us a varying number of what we still call "talents."

(3) One day he will ask each of us, "Well, child! What have you done with my gifts? How have you used my talents, with which I entrusted you? Tell me how much better is the world because you lived in it."

The lord of the manor is going abroad for an indefinite period. The cabin-trunks were despatched yesterday : the Rolls-Royce is at the door : the park-gates are open : the master is leaving in a few moments.

He is standing in the entrance hall behind a table covered

with green baize, on which are arranged a number of piles of money varying in height. Facing him are all who are employed on the estate or in the great house: the butler and the boots, the bailiff and the junior stable-boy, the personal secretary and the fourth under-housemaid. Each is called in turn to the green table. To each are given coins, talents. Some receive much, some less, some little. But the point is this; each man, each boy, each woman, each girl is given exactly the right amount, according to his or her several ability. For this employer knows intimately all who work for him.

As he hands the coins, the master says to each, "This is not your salary. It is not yours at all: it remains mine. While I am away I wish you to use this money: you are not to spend it on yourself, you are not to put it in the bank. I want you to trade with it: I want you to make as much more money with it as you can. Now I am going away: and I shall not tell you when I will return. But I warn you here and now that, when I do return, I shall require you to give me an account of what you have done with my property during my absence."

Of each the master asks, "You are quite certain that you understand?" Each replies, "Yes, sir. I understand."

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"That," says the lord of heaven and earth to you and me, "is a picture of what I mean your life to be. Do you understand?"

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Look at God's counting-table in the world to-day, the world as we know it. Some get much, some less, some little of the "talents."

He is endowed with the power to govern: he has a clever, active, agile mind: he is given outstanding business ability: he can compose music, paint, write verse: he is able to teach: he is given the priesthood: he has health and a commanding presence: he is endowed with fatherhood.

She becomes a Queen Victoria, a Florence Nightingale, a St. Joan, a Mary Scharlieb, an Elizabeth Browning, a Sarah Bernhardt, a Clara Butt, a Mother Kate; and she is a sempstress, a factory-hand, a clerk, a mother of many in an East London back-street, one who lies for years on a bed of suffering, an obscure nun "the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

But—and this is one of the two points—each has talents according to his or her several ability: for truly God knows all about his employees, and Mrs. Snatchpiece in Talavera Place is no more capable

of being Queen of England, whatever the *Daily Herald* may say, than Queen Mary could cook Mr. Snatchpiece's kipper as he likes it or cope with him when he comes home from *The Nag's Head* on Saturday nights.

The other point is this. Nobody's gifts or talents are the property of him or her : they belong to the owner, who lent them in trust with the stipulation that they should be used on his behalf. Some day—and, for all we know, some day soon—tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief must meet again the lord of the manor at the counting-table. On that day God at the bar of judgement may say :—

Mary Snooks ; to you I gave beauty and health, a straight body and a nimble wit. Were the boys in your street, the men you met, better Christians because of you?

Eliza Jane ; I gave you children ; are they now god-fearing men and women because of the motherhood that I bestowed on you? Why not, Eliza Jane?

To you, child, I sent a cross of great and long pain. Do you know of any one who is braver as he or she remembers you and recalls the way you accepted and carried that cross?

You I made a priest. How did you use your priesthood? For your own advancement or ease or glorification? How many were converted, not by your sermons, the way you sang Mass, or the cut of your vestments, but by your manner of life? How many are thankful for your ministry?

You were a working-man, like the carpenter of Nazareth. I lent you strength, capability, the power to work. What do those who were your mates think of you now? Can you name to me one fellow working-man who is a Christian, thanks to you? Why not?

To you I lent the blessed sacrament, my mother's prayers, St. Augustine's church, the Priory Sisters, the power to pray, knowledge of the confessional, a right belief about the saints and the blessed dead. Did you "trade with" with those talents and use them to increase the population of heaven ; or did you keep them secret, hidden, reserved for the exclusive use and benefit of your small soul? Did you help the Church's foreign missions? Why not?

"The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods. Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one ; to

every man according to his several ability.” But you notice that the talents remain his, not theirs.

What a difference it makes if we look at life as God sees it ; if we realise that it is a time of trustee-ship of talents, a period of stewardship of the goods of God ! It disposes once and for all of the fallacy, “I’m all right. I’m not afraid to die. I have no need of sacraments. I ain’t done no ’arm to nobody. I’ve always lived a quiet life and kept myself to myself. I don’t think God can have much against me.” As though the boss came to see a building his men were erecting ; found one of his labourers sitting idle on the scaffolding ; and heard him say, “I’m all right. I ain’t doin’ no ’arm to nobody. I’m not dropping bricks on the people in the street.”

“Well done, good and faithful servant : thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” May The Master be able to speak thus to us too, when pay-day comes !



CONVERSATION PIECE

ST. LUKE 18, 10. *Into the temple to pray.*

YOU know how, when you are—humanly speaking—alone in church, you sometimes hear the seats and roof creak and crack for no apparent reason and notice other small sounds which make it difficult to believe that the building is lifeless.

The other evening I was kneeling at the back of the church trying to say some prayers. For some reason the prayers would not come. Perhaps I had not quite succeeded in shutting out of my mind the noises of East London: perhaps my stupid body was tired or mildly out of sorts (how lovely it will be in the next life to be a soul unhindered by a thick head, a tired heart, or a feeble “tummy”!) So I gave up trying, knelt still with my eyes on the tabernacle and waited for the gift of prayer to come; for it always does come if one is sufficiently patient.

Suddenly I seemed to know what the things in church were speaking about.

Apparently I had arrived in the middle of a somewhat heated conversation; for the first thing I heard was the pulpit saying to the seats in the nave, “Of course I realise that it is not your fault. You are made of Oregon pine and have every right to make the best of it, even if you are American. Personally, I am English: and nothing will persuade me that anything is as good as oak. Hearts of oak are our ships; three cheers for the red, white, and blue; buy British—and all that. I flatter myself that I am the finest thing in St. Augustine’s.”

"That, of course, is utter nonsense, all wood-rot," remarked the panelling at the west end. "As a matter of fact England's wooden ships were not made of oak at all: they were built of teak. So am I, and I'm proud of it. I read the other day in a piece of newspaper wrapped round some fried fish which some one left behind when she came to be churched, that they have recently found in India teak which is known to be over two thousand years old and is in a state of perfect preservation. I shall be standing here long after you have been eaten by dry-rot or bugs, you—you acorn!"

"Say, kid, I guess you sure have spilt a bibful," said the seats; "and think what we have to put up with. You, pulpit, only have to support some one for half an hour or less twice a week and a thinnish priest at that. Think of what we have to endure. Some of St. Augustine's congregation are no light-weights, we can assure you; and the children kick us about and scratch their names on us. Yet we go uncomplainingly on, with only an occasional grunt or groan. Any church can do without a pulpit; but there must be seats, at least in this country."

From which I concluded that the pulpit had been giving himself airs, not for the first time, and was consequently more unpopular than usual.

Then one of the new stained-glass windows joined in. "In point of fact," she remarked, "beauty is what matters more than anything; and I, if you will pardon me for saying so, am simply charming. Somebody was looking at me the other day when I heard him say, 'What a beautiful church this is!' And as I remarked to one of the plain windows on the north side, 'My dear! Anybody could see through you.'"

"And what I said," replied the window through which can be seen the backs of the houses in Dunloe Street; "what I said was, 'Thank God for that! I believe that windows are meant to be seen through and should let in light and sunshine.'"

"And," interjected an altar flower, "I have always heard that nature is better than art."

"You are all very young, children." It was St. Bartholomew's altar who was speaking; he felt rather pleased with himself because of his new rose carpet. "When you are as old as I am you will realise that an honourable old age counts for more than anything else. Now I was being both useful and ornamental before any of you were born. It is my great age which gives an air of respectability to this place. I am by far the most important person here, because I am the oldest."

"Quite so," chimed in the sanctus bell by the high altar, who had

also lived in the small church by the gas-works in the days when there was no St. Augustine's; "old age all the time."

"But," asked the font, "what about me? Every church must have me; 'two only, as generally necessary to salvation,' you know, and one is baptism. Stained glass and teak panels, rose carpets and sacring bells, are all very nice and beautiful; but no one can say they are essential. I am indispensable; and have you noticed my new white coat?"

"'ear, 'ear," shouted a number of small voices from the kneelers, who seemed to represent the democratic section of the community, "dahn with lucksheries; proid o' plice to the hessenshuls, strike me."

"I seem to remember," remarked the catechism corner, "something about receiving the kingdom as a little child."

"And," added our Lady's image in a gentle tone, "the scattering of the proud and the putting down of the mighty."

I noticed that, during all this wrangling, the rood said nothing, which is generally its way; and that the chapel of the holy souls was also silent—perhaps because it is new, perhaps for other reasons.

Then the organ spoke. He cleared his diapason, took a deep breath, opened his swell-box and spoke in a deep voice which commanded every one's attention. "Children, children! This is all very stupid and unseemly. I appeal to Father Wilson's confessional; not because it is Father Wilson's, but because Father Mackonochie used to sit there and many other wise priests have heard confessions there for such a number of years."

The old piece of furniture—which is dark with age and through whose lattice, as through a window in heaven, have poured many thousands of pitiful and brave confessions and have streamed many floods of the corresponding tides of absolution—spoke gently and calmly, as is nearly always his custom. "God," said he, "giveth grace to the humble and resisteth the proud. Humility is the perfume of saints in heaven and earth. A humble and contrite heart has never been despised. If you knew all that I know, but of which I shall never speak, you would realise that the cause and root of almost every sin is pride and that the hall-mark of saintliness in heaven above or Haggerston beneath is humility. What says my friend the lectern?"

"This," came the answer, as the pages of the holy book were turned: "At that time came the disciples to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him and set him in the midst of them.'"

"Two men," quoted from to-day's gospel the image of our Lady which lives in the porch, sees all who come and go, and possibly ponders many things, "went up into the temple, went up the passage to

St. Augustine's church. One prayed thus with himself, 'Well! Thank God I can honestly say I'm a cut above most people here. Regular communicant, churchgoer every Sunday evening, something in the bag every time it comes round, member of the free will offering fund, decently dressed, in a good job. No need for me to go to confession. My God, I'm glad I'm not like that bloke over there.' And the other man would not lift up so much as his eyes to the altar until he had knelt in the confessional and prayed, 'God be merciful to me, the sinner.' "

"And," read on the lectern, "I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

"Hush!" said the door, "somebody's coming."

Everything was quiet again when the door opened and some one came in to pay his evening visit to the tabernacle. But I thought I saw a smile on the face of the small gold angel with the red hair, who kneels on a bracket in the lady-chapel and looks towards the blessed sacrament all day and all night; though I may have been mistaken.

In any case, I had found something to pray about; as, I hope, have you.



M. R.

ST. LUKE I, 28. *Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.*

ON the Sunday following August 15th, in the octave of the feast of the Assumption or Taking up to heaven of the blessed virgin Mary, it may be well to recall the old beliefs and traditions concerning the life of our Lady from the first Easter morning to the day of her death.

St. Ambrose, writing in the fourth century, says that it was then believed that on his resurrection-morning our Lord visited his mother before any one else. This does not seem difficult to believe even in the twentieth century. His last thoughts on the cross were of her: then as now "a man's best friend is his mother": on his morning of victory he might naturally be expected to think first of the sorrow of her whom he loved more than any other. "Early in the morning she was praying, Thou didst promise, my dear son, to rise again on the third day: before yesterday was the day of darkness and bitterness: behold, this is the third day. As she said these words, her son and Lord came to his mother: bade her be comforted and weep no more: talked long with her, though none but angels and they two know of what they talked: kissed her and went to find Mary of Magdala in the garden."

She is shown by most painters standing with the apostles forty days later on the Mount of the Ascension outside Bethany. As her son visibly ascended to heaven it is said that "she prayed, My son, leave me not long after thee: remember me when thou comest into

thy kingdom"—words that she had heard when standing beneath his cross. As he went up his last look was at her uplifted face.

It is clear that she was present in the Jerusalem house on the day of Pentecost and that upon her too descended the Holy Spirit. "These all," says the author of the Acts of the Apostles, "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all in one place." Thus, with sound as of the winds of heaven and sight as of the fires of God, came again to her he of whom an archangel once said, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee. . . .

During the eleven years that followed it is said that she lived for a time in a small house on the slopes of Mount Carmel and that she was in Ephesus with John the Beloved to whose protection she had been entrusted on an afternoon which, for all their joy, neither was able to forget. There are strong traditions, neither of which seem in the least difficult to believe, that the old priest often celebrated Holy Communion and gave to her the sacrament of the body she had once nursed and laid in a grave and that the other apostles frequently visited her on their return from missionary-journeys. It is said that her chief joy lay in visiting again certain well-known places, such as the inn-stable at Bethlehem, the ford across Jordan where the other John once baptised, a carpenter's shop in Nazareth, a garden at the foot of a green hill outside Jerusalem; but that she liked best to kneel alone on the summit of that hill in which were still three holes and earthquake-fissures and below which was still an empty grave with grass growing over the threshold and a round door leaning against its side. It would seem unnatural to suppose her doing otherwise. There is, too, a touching legend that on the first Christmas night there was one shepherd who remained in the fields when his friends went to Bethlehem. On their return with news of what and whom they had seen, he wished that he had gone to the stable with them; and lived to a great age, always longing for a glimpse of the face he had failed to see. Some years after the ascension, St. Mary and St. John travelled on Christmas night the six miles' journey to the place of the holy birth. In the old stable they found an aged countryman, who told them of his long search for the son of God. There and then John baptised him and Mother Mary blessed him.

It fell on a day, some eleven years after the crucifixion, she being in her sixtieth year,—I quote a very old writing—, that the mother of Christ was weary of heart and wept for longing to see her son again. To her came once more the angel Gabriel, with the words, "Hail, Mary, blessed by him who hath given salvation to Israel. I bring

thee a palm plucked in paradise, which is to be carried before thee in the day of thy death. For in three days thy soul shall leave thy body and thou shalt find thy son who awaits thee." Mary asked that the apostles might be with her when she died and that no evil spirit should have power over her; to which the angel answered, "Fear not, Mary; hast thou not bruised his head?" and departed from her. Mary prepared her bed and waited until the hour should come. Each apostle, with one exception, reached her house in time: to John she gave the palm, asking him to carry it before her at her burial: before them she knelt and prayed. At the third hour of the night in a month named after the emperor Augustus, Peter standing at the head of the bed and John at its foot, a mighty sound filled the little house and the Lord Christ appeared with many singing angels. He said to his mother, "Arise, my love, my fair one; and come away." She answered, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. My heart is ready." As she passed the apostles prayed, "O most prudent virgin, remember us when thou comest into thy glory."

Three holy women made ready to wash and clothe in a white shroud her dead body: for it is not said that she did not die. But a glory of light surrounded it; so that, although they touched it, none saw unclothed the pure limbs of the mother of God. The apostles laid it on a bier: John walked ahead, carrying the palm: Peter sang the 114th psalm, "When Israel came out of Egypt." The body was laid in a tomb in Gethsemane, the Garden of the Olive-Press and the Agony. There were present all the apostles but one; together with Dionysius the Areopagite, Timothy, Mary Salome, Mary Cleophas, Mary Magdalene, and Martha. On the third day the Lord Christ "assumed," "took up," into heaven the body which had given him human birth, and the mother was once again, body and soul, with her son, never again to be separated from him.

But slow Thomas once more was absent. Others told him of these things: once again he must see if he were to believe. He desired the grave to be opened: no body was in it.

This tradition of the Church does not seem difficult to accept; for there is in the Holy Land no more a grave of Mary to which the faithful may make pilgrimage than there is a burial-place of her son.

In common with Catholics throughout the world, you and I love to kneel before her image; burn our penny candles in her honour; say for those we love who are still on earth, for those we love who are not on earth, and for ourselves, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners"; and pray after our communions with her son, "Hail, holy queen, mother of mercy: hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children

of Eve ; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us ; and after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary."

It seems to us too that we do not ask in vain ; for we too, like St. John, are of the opinion that if you love her whom Jesus loves it is possible that you are not so very wrong, and that if you do not it is possible that you are not so very right.



INTRODUCING SARAH POMEGRANATE

PSALM 37, 25. *I have been young, and now am old.*

ONCE upon a time I had an old friend whose name may, or may not, have been Sarah Pomegranate. I used to call on her fairly often, partly because she was so kind as to say that she liked me to do so, but principally because half an hour with her did me more good than the majority of my common experiences. A year or so ago she and I had a series of conversations which were spread over two or three months and of which the subject was Old Age. I wish to repeat to you at intervals on Sunday evenings as much as I can remember of them: I know that she would have no objection to my doing so, although I am not able to ask her permission (I need not say that I was not hearing her confessions). My reason for doing so is that I know some of you to be as advanced in years as was old Mrs. Pomegranate: it is, therefore, likely that you experience the same difficulties of old age as did she: it is even possible that I may be able to give you some of the help and encouragement in this connection which she was so generous as to say that I was able to afford her.

* * * * *

The conversations in question began on an afternoon on which I had not intended to call on her: but no sooner had I reached Bill's bed in the hospital than the house-surgeon entered the ward and I was courteously and properly removed, Mrs. Snatchpiece had gone to the pictures with Mrs. Slapdash, and there was no response to my hammerings on Miss Shovealfpenny's door (probably because she

thought I had come for the rent). So having half an hour to spare, I turned in under the three brass balls, walked up to the end of Paradise Alley and knocked twice on the door of the house next but one to that which used to display a finely-antlered stag's head in which was only one eye. I soon heard Sarah walk slowly down the creaking stairs.

"Well, father," she said; "this *is* a nice surprise and *no* mistake. Funny thing, I was a-thinkin' of you only a few minutes ago. I was having my usual cup of tea after dinner and there was a stranger in the cup it was a long one so I knoo it was a man (aren't I an old silly?) and when I puts it on me 'and it comes off first time on the other one so that told me the stranger was comin' to-day and when I pinched it it was 'ard so I knoo 'e would be good-lookin' and I says to meself I says Now I wonder if it's Father Wilson. And then I says Sally, me gal, you ain't 'arf a poor old fool: 'e's no stranger and ain't the tealeaf said he was going to be good-looking? Anyhow, here you are and I am so very pleased to see you for there's a whole heap I want to talk to you about. Jest one minute while I gets me breff: us old 'uns do run on so." She then hiccupped loudly and apologised, "excuse me risin'."

I followed her along the passage with its half-dozen doormats that always remind me of stepping-stones and its pictures of *The Sinking Of The Titanic*, *Queen Victoria*, and *The Stag At Bay*; up the familiar dark staircase, avoiding the customary zinc pail and broom; into the neat and spotless room on the first floor that looked on to "the garden" and the gas-works.

She passed a quite unnecessary duster over the windsor chair and, while she made me a cup of fresh tea, I sat and looked again at the four walls of her home. Crucifix over her feather-bed, with her guild-medal hanging from one arm by its scarlet ribbon and coloured print of St. Anne underneath: framed enlargement of the late Mr. P. on one wall, with bunches of little Pomegranates encircling it: over her wash-stand faded photographs of Mother Kate, Sister Florence, and "Mister Edward": tidy pile of books on the bamboo table by her bedside, with her bible and *Catholic Prayers* on the top, both dropping to pieces from many years' hard use: clean results of last Monday's wash on a line near the ceiling, among them garments at whose purpose I could only guess: on the mantel-shelf her rent-book, picture post-cards of Southend Pier and Buxted Church, clock, candlestick: on her little dresser a few cups, plates, jars, a tea-caddy illustrating the late Lord Kitchener: in the window the usual green and yellow aspidistra. But, so far as I could see, no trace of dust or cobweb or East London dirt.

“ Well, old lady,” I asked, as I drank her excellent tea and ate one of my favourite kind of biscuit which she always kept for me ;
“ well, how are you getting on ? ”

And this is what she said.

* * * * *

It seems to me that old age is not a very easy affair. When I was your age, I thought things would be easier when I grew old ; but they are not. I have noticed that there are many books written and sermons preached for children, young men, and young women ; but I never hear or read anything intended for us old folk and our special difficulties and trials.

Take me as an example.

I say my prayers every morning and night. But I get tired so easily that I constantly find myself falling asleep in the middle of them : and at other times my old mind goes wandering off to all kinds of people and things and happenings. It seems to me that as I grow older and come nearer to the day when I shall go to God, my prayers ought to be improving ; but they are not and I am worried about it. Also, my rheumatism is so bad, especially on rainy days, that it is impossible for me to kneel : does it matter if I sit for my prayers ? Do you know anything that will help an old woman in her prayers ?

Again : my confessions. I belong to St. Anne's Guild ; but even if I did not I should wish to make my confession “ at least five times a year.” But, so often, I have hardly anything to say to the priest. I live a quiet life, keep myself to myself, do not get the temptations I used to. My confessions seem to me poor things. You hear them, father : I wish you would tell me what you think of them.

And I am not too happy about my communions. As you know, I try to make them twice a week, on Sunday at nine and on Wednesday or Saturday at nine-thirty : for it seems to me that having no work to do and, as I say, getting so near to the day when the good Lord will call me to the place where there is no need of sacraments, I should be unwise not to use every opportunity of getting to know him now in his as well as my holy communion. But I am so deaf that I hear little of the Mass : I cannot kneel all the five-and-twenty minutes : and my silly mind will keep on wandering this way and that. I wish you would help me about my communions.

There are other things too. I am often so tired and I suppose that is the reason why things seem to try me far more than they did. The children playing in the street ; babies crying downstairs ; wireless next door ; the man who comes down the alley at ten every night

shouting about dog-winners and always wakes me. Life's little trials: I used to laugh at them, if I noticed them at all; now they seem to get on my nerves and at times I could scream. Also, I have lost so many friends lately. I often feel very lonely and sad, as I sit here by myself. I seem useless, left behind, out in the cold; the young people are kind, but they don't understand and I know they think me old-fashioned and a bit of a nuisance. Mrs. Crowson used to cheer me up and encourage me by her pluck and refusal to give way to old age: so did old Mrs. Brown, Sister Beatrice, Fred Snow, and Sarah Dalton with her blindness. They have passed on: I am lonely and dispirited without them: and now Sister Marjorie has gone too, I miss her at every moment of the day. And I miss my work: I used to love it, it took me out of myself, I was proud of it, I could do a good day's work; now I have had to give it all up, for I am slow and stiff and the doctor says I must go slow. My hand has lost its skill and my eye its quickness. I am laid aside, with nothing much to do but watch the younger women doing my old job: it is hard not to be envious and critical of them. Sometimes, too, I find myself growing covetous and grasping, cross and impatient: I never used to be like that; everybody said I was always so cheerful, they don't say it now. I feel myself a drag on others, such as my children and grand-children: sort of old-fashioned, a back number, out-of-date, if you know what I mean. I am growing self-centred, self-pitying, always thinking about myself; largely because I have nothing else to do.

The other day I happened to read the bit of newspaper my fish was wrapped in. On it was printed this piece of poetry.

Let me grow lovely, growing old :
So many fine things do.
Laces and ivory and gold
And silks need not be new ;
And there is healing in old trees ;
Old streets a glamour hold.
Why may not I, as well as these,
Grow lovely, growing old ?

I wish I could. Instead, father (though I would not say so to any one but you), I am rather a worried old woman who wants your help. I wonder if you have anything special to say to us old folk about old age.

* * * * *

Next Sunday evening I will begin to tell you what I said.



THE LAST MILE

ST. JOHN II, 28. *The Master is come and calleth for thee.*

“I AM an old woman, father,” said Sarah Pomegranate. “For more years than I care to think of I have been trying to be a good Christian, and God above me knows that I am trying still. I want to live a good and useful old woman and, when my time comes, to die a good and Christian death. But, as I have told you, I’m not too happy about a number of things: I thought that life would be easier when I came to old age, and I find that it isn’t. Can you help an old woman about her soul? Will you tell me something about old age?”

“Yes, my dear,” I answered; “I will try.” This is what I said.

I think that it helps a great deal if we are clear as to what we mean by life; at the moment, I mean merely life on earth. Of course Christians like you and me, who are so old-fashioned as to read our bibles, know that life on earth is actually only the prelude to real life, merely the overture before the curtain rings up and the play begins. But let us think of life as most people think of it, the term of time allotted to us in this world. How would you, a Christian, explain its purpose? What are you and I here for? Why are we? What is life?

One summer evening a number of years ago I went on a journey from Haggerston to a small island called St. Agnes, about thirty miles

from Land's End. It was a long and not very pleasant journey. I had little sleep throughout the night, for the train stopped frequently at stations where it seemed that the local inhabitants were throwing at one another most of the milk-cans and mailbags in the west country; people wandered about the train all night, people with loud voices and enormous feet; the carriage creaked and squeaked, jumped and jarred, like a thing possessed. When I finally emerged on to Penzance platform I was a very bleary-eyed, cross, and dirty clergyman. And the passage in the small ship was not much more pleasant. The weather was cold and squally; by the time we had left the lee of the land and passed the moaning Runnelstone buoy we were pitching badly; off the Wolf Lighthouse a gentleman sitting by my side, whom I had never seen before and certainly do not wish to see again, was sick all over me, and it was clear that he had breakfasted principally on tomatoes. From St. Mary's Island to St. Agnes I crossed in a small launch over a couple of miles of most unpleasant sea. As we drew near to the white-sanded bay which was the end of my journey—a bay with a small stone jetty, one white house, a roof of sky as blue as its floor of clear water, and a background of grass-grown cliff—I put my head over the top of the canvas dodger and, between the stinging showers of spray, saw (as throughout the hot night I knew that I should see) some one standing on the sand. She was waving her handkerchief; as the dinghy's nose ran gently up on to the shore, I saw her smile and heard her speak. It was my mother, waiting for me: I did not give another thought to the journey.

That is what life is, Sarah; a long and often wearisome journey, but a journey to a definite end which, if we wish, is an end of infinite happiness. Of course you can define life in other ways. You can describe it as an apprenticeship of service, in which each of us is at liberty to select his or her master; there are many competitors for our apprenticeship, but you and I, at any rate, have discovered the only service which brings perfect freedom. Or you may with equal accuracy define life as a time for work and say quite correctly that until our last day on earth, however old we may be, you and I are meant to be working in one way or another for God and our fellow-creatures; that is a fact which we might talk about on another afternoon. But don't you think, my dear, that the simplest description of life, the picture that is easiest to understand, is that of a journey? "I came from God to go to God": so I learned from my mother, didn't you?

A journey, old lady; in your case of long duration and many stages, the last of which you have now reached. Think of old age in that way; then you will expect, and cease to be worried about,

weariness of soul and body. It has been a long and none too easy journey ; of course you are footsore and weary, of course the muscles and nerves of body and (so to say) of soul ache from over-use, of course you are tired. You should take that into account and adapt yourself to it ; you must be patient, my dear, with your old body and soul. It is the last stage of a long journey ; and the last mile is always the longest, isn't it ?

But you are a Christian ; and to the Christian the last mile is also the happiest. You see, Sarah, you know that you are nearly home now. The loving welcome of those from whom you have been parted for so long is only just round the corner ; soon you will be seeing again the happy faces of those for whom you have looked these many years and this time there will be no more partings ; soon you will be looking at the glorious faces of those who are so well-known to you but whom you have never yet seen, the face of Jesus Christ, the faces of his mother and the saints, of the angels and your guardian angel ; rest and peace, refreshment and recreation (which means re-making) for weary body and tired soul are not far away now, my dear. "Be the day weary and be the day long, At length it ringeth to evensong" ; can't you at times almost hear the evensong bells ?

I wonder if you know Dürer's picture of *The Wandering Jew* ; at least I think it is Dürer's. For thousands of years the Jew, you remember, was condemned to walk up and down the world until the Christ whom he insulted on Good Friday came again at the second advent. In the picture the end of the world has come : banks of black clouds are gathering, heaven's trumpets blow, lightning flickers and flashes from one end of the universe to the other, the world is whirling to destruction. But the tired old Jew pays no attention to any of these things. He is sitting on a bank by the side of a road ; a smile is on his face ; he is taking off his shoes. He has come to the end of his journey.

I do not suggest, Sally, that you are a wandering Jewess ! But I do suggest that the end of your journey, the place on life's long road at which you may sit down and take off your shoes, is only just round the corner. Of course old age has its own special trials and difficulties, as has every stage of life ; but it seems to me that they are eased and softened by the knowledge which only the old can have. Work is nearly finished ; the journey is almost done ; home in heaven is very near ; soon you will know the welcome of God and God's people, whom you know now are waiting for you ; soon will come that most wonderful meeting with your own dear ones who went home before you, whom you thought you had lost and then discover that you had never lost at all (and what a lot you will have

to say to them, won't you?—almost as much as they will have to say to you).

* * * * *

That is the first thing I say to you. Look forward and upward ; not back at the past, not round at other people, not too much down at yourself. Look forward, old lady. It can be only a little way now ; only just round the corner.

Some time before you go to bed will you read the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth verses of the eleventh chapter of St. John's gospel?

Are you quite ready, Sarah, if the corner came to-night? Suppose that it were in the silence of this very night that the angel came to you in your little bed ; secretly, so that none else in the house knew until the morning ; and said quietly, so that none else but you could hear, "The Master is come and calleth for thee" ; would you too "arise quickly and come unto him," without any waiting to put things straight, with no regrets and no looking back?

Quite ready, my friend? Good prayers said on that last evening, though you were so weary and though you did not know that it was the last evening? No wretched quarrel with any one ; no nursing of a grievance or cherishing of an insult, no unwillingness to forgive? Bills all paid? Everything in apple-pie order ; the room of your soul as clean and spotless as this room? No unforgiven sin, since you knew that there would probably be no time to find a priest when the Master came and called for you? Communion made on that last morning? Perhaps the last visit to the tabernacle in dear old St. Augustine's paid on the last evening, though you were so tired and though again you did not know that it was the last evening?

Quite ready, Sarah ; now?

* * * * *

"I'm none too sure of that, father," she said, with a little smile. "Could you look in another day and have a chat about that?"

"I would love to, my dear," said I ; "and I would like to tell you about one or two people whom I have known—Father Edward Burrows, Father Leary, Father Richard Wilson, and a certain nun—who were ready."



WEDDING GARMENTS

ST. MATTHEW 24, 44. *Therefore be ye also ready.*

“**W**HEN you was here the other day, father,” said old Mrs. Pomegranate, “you was tellin’ me that what us old folks ought ter to be tryin’ to do was not so much a-lookin’ back over what ’s past an’ a-fillin’ of our minds with useless regrets that things ain’t as they used ter be an’ so makin’ ourselves self-pityin’ bundles o’ misery no more use to no-one than twopennorth o’ ’alfpence or a sick ’eadache on a Sunday mornin’; but lookin’ forward to the end o’ the journey, which must be so near, an’ tryin’ to count up our blessin’s instead of our grievances. An’ I’m sure I’m much obliged to you fer puttin’ sich thoughts into me ’ead. Then you said that, seein’ as ’ow the journey was almost over, it was most important for us to be quite ready; like the lady in the bible what you read to me about, ready to rise up quickly and go to ’im, whensoever the Master does come and calleth for us.

Now ’ere’s a funny cohincidence. I wasn’t able to go to Mass las’ Sunday. You see, I went ter the party what you give in the ’all on Sa-urday night; an’ I don’t mind tellin’ you I didn’t arf enjoy meself. It was lovely to see so many o’ the old-uns a-dancin’ like two-year-olds, though I bet some o’ them was stiff in the jynts the nex’ mornin’; an’ I loved ter see all them communicant children mixin’ with them, with the crucifix on the gallery-wall a-lookin’ down on us all. As fer that photygrarf wot Mister Snow tried to take, well p’raps it’s as well it didn’t come art; fer we all ’ad our marves open an’ our eyes starin’ an’ I know I was all of a tremble waitin’ fer

the flash o' light. And benediction at the end o' the par-y was a sight I still can't get out o' me mind: I never thought I'd live to see a great church like ours full of Christians of all ages on a Sa-urday night in East London, on their knees to worship an' love the dear Lord in 'is 'oly sacryment. It were a proper lovely evenin'.

Howsoever, as I was sayin', I don't know whether it was all them cakes I ate, or the general hexcitement, or the late howers, or a mix-up o' the lot; the fac' remains that I was none too well the nex' mornin' an' 'ad ter keep ter me bed all day. But I got me prayer-book an' I read frough the collick, hepistol, an' gospel, like I always do o' Sundays. It was the twentieth Sunday arter Trinity; an' it was a funny thing but they was nearly all about what you was sayin', about bein' ready. 'O Almighty and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul,' that's 'ow the collick begun; an' the gospel 'ad the story o' the man 'oo went to the feast which the king made fer 'is son's weddin' an' warnt ready, wasn't properly dressed, 'ad not on a weddin'-garment,' an' so naturally got bumped off as they say at the picters.

Now you was sayin' that you'd tell me o' some o' your friends what were ready when the Master come an' called fer them. Will you, please?"

"Certainly, my dear," said I who had sat still while the torrent flowed; for both in the confessional and outside it I have long since learned that "Blessed are they who listen." "I will try to tell you of one or two whom it has been my good fortune to know, who were certainly clothed in the wedding-garments of readiness of soul and body when the king came to see his guests. It has done me all the good in the world to have known them; and I am sure that it helps ordinary Christians like you and me to remember the people of God with whom we have been in contact. For the days of saints on earth are by no means over."

In a small back room of an East London house a priest lay dying. They who were privileged to enter it during his long illness, and certainly I as for six months I took him communion nearly every day, felt as though we were in a different world to that of Victoria Park, Cambridge Heath, and Bush's Scent-works when we crossed its threshold. Personally I have never thought that heaven is a distant place "above the clear blue sky," for I have known places where the next world and this one overlap and coincide; that small room was one of them, for all that its window looked on to a typical East London

garden, the back of a public-house, and the yard of a charabanc-garage. For he who lay there during so many weary months was daily, and often more than half through the nights, identifying himself with another who was once bound by nails in hands and feet to an even harder deathbed; and it was to him that the old priest offered his pain and exhaustion, on behalf of certain folk who then worshipped in the Haggerston churches of St. Stephen and St. Augustine. I think I have told you that I possess the small silver crucifix which somebody gave him when he became vicar of St. Stephen's; it hangs in my writing desk at the clergy-house. Behind the figure three words are cut into the cross, *In hoc vince*, "In this, conquer." I try to remember them when life is more difficult than usual.

I had given him holy unction: daily he received communion: frequently it was my privilege to hear his confession. Then, one Friday night, journey's end came suddenly near. "I wish, father," he said in a difficult whisper, as I knelt by his side in the shaded room while the charabanc-engines raced outside; "I wish to make my last confession." He did so. A few hours later, about two in the morning, the gallant priest and gentleman, who had served the king and his subjects for nearly half a century in the not very thrilling streets and courts of Haggerston, passed from weariness, sickness, pain, and old age into the unveiled and immediate presence of that king. (I remember that the second lesson at evensong on that day contained the words "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever.")

That afternoon his wife said to me, "I found this piece of paper in Edward's *Treasury of Devotion*: I think you had better see it." It was the pencilled list which he had used when making his confession the night before, written with obvious difficulty when he was all but dead.

It seems to me, Sarah, that that is what is meant by being ready in body and soul.

* * * *

The Sister in the London convent (not St. Saviour's Priory) had been unwell for some weeks and her heart had been weak for years. Accordingly, when she went to the Reverend Mother one hot evening last summer and asked permission to be absent from vespers, it was readily given. "You are not ill, Sister?" "I do not think so, Mother, thank you. No more so than usual. But I am very tired."

After vespers they found her on her bed. Her soul had passed to her bridegroom; her body lay at rest, with the right hand on her office-book, which was open at vespers of that day.

That, I think, is what is meant by having on the wedding-garment.

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The old vicar of St. Augustine's, Kilburn, had always been scrupulously tidy, neat, methodical, for cleanliness is really next to godliness, and a neat and tidy body is an outward and visible sign of the inward grace of an orderly and methodical soul. It was his custom to make at the beginning of each day a list of what he had to do: the people to whom he must write and whom he intended to visit, those to whom he should telephone and those who wished to call on him, the hours in church when he was due to hear confessions, and so on—the engagements during the coming day of a busy parish-priest. It was also his habit to cross the engagements off the list as they were fulfilled.

When he left Kilburn he continued this custom of the daily list, though he had ceased to be a parish-priest. One morning he telephoned to one of his many former assistant-priests. (Incidentally you can know what sort of a priest he was by realizing the important posts now held by those who were once his curates; an incumbent is known by his clergy.) Probably the conversation included cricket; for I know that he, like me, was a great admirer of Mr. J. B. Hobbs, and a Test Match was then in progress in Australia. Before he rang off he mentioned that, as he was going out that afternoon, he was then going to spend the hour before lunch in his oratory, saying his prayers and office, that all might be done first. He fell dead on his way from the oratory to the dining-room. On his writing-desk lay a list of what he had to do on that morning; each item was crossed out. The last one, "Ring up so-and-so," was crossed out too.

Ready.

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It was some forty years after Father Richard Wilson had been told that, if he worked in East London, he could not expect to live for more than six months, that his health finally gave way and he was sent with his one lung into the country, away from his beloved Red House, Commercial Road, and St. Augustine's, Stepney. Six months later, after the doctor had come and gone as usual, he said to his hostess, "If I ask a question, will you tell me the truth?" "Of course I will, uncle," she replied. "Am I going to get well?" "No." "Then, will you do something for me?" "Yes, my dear. Anything you ask." "Take me back to St. Augustine's. I want to die among my own people." She did,

A day or two later one of his people brought me a message from him, saying that he was home again and would like to see me when I had time. I went at once to the clergy house in Settles Street. The maid who looked through the little window in the dark hall was sorry that it would not be possible for me to see him that day, for he was so ill that the doctor had given orders that he was to see nobody. I replied that I also was sorry, but he had asked for me and I must see him. The maid found his nurse, who said the same. So did I. The nurse looked at me; and I looked at her. Then she said that she would allow me to see him for one minute.

Indeed he was very ill. But in his eyes was the same old merry twinkle that many of us had known for years and that some of us have not yet forgotten, the twinkle of a wise priest who had often looked on the seamy side of life but had never lost the gaiety of the vision granted to all troubadours of heaven. "How did you manage to get up here?" he asked. I said, "Oh, I don't know. I just kept on saying that I wasn't going away until I had seen you." "Ah!" he laughed, "ours is a wonderful family," for he always liked his little joke.

A day or two after he had gone to his rest. Some weeks later Father Asher visited the firm which makes the stone crosses for the graves at Plaistow of St. Augustine's people, in order that he might order Father Richard's cross. He found that Father Richard had not only ordered and paid for it, but had also given instructions as to the inscription to be engraved upon it. This consisted of two words only: "Richard. Priest."

The humility of the wedding-garment.

This is what a Jew wrote about him:

"Father Dick," as he was affectionately called by Jew and Christian alike, and who died on 10th inst., was one of those rare men whose religious life proved them to be greater than any sectarian denomination. An English Catholic in name, he was so filled with the spirit of lovingkindness, that all who knew him saw in him a reflection of God, the Father of all human creatures. The Jewish population of St. George's and Whitechapel, even the most foreign and the most orthodox, just loved him. We all felt that we could trust him, and that all the good he was ever eager to do for any who came to him in distress was done with no ulterior motive, but just grandly and gloriously, for the sheer joy of helping and of doing good. He respected another man's religious rites and practices, as even those of the same denomination seldom do. Typical of his broad and human outlook was the fact that when Jews during the air-raids took refuge in his church on a Friday evening, he had prepared for them the Sabbath candles and Sabbath "challa." Five minutes' talk with him made one feel a better man. He beamed on one with overflowing love, giving hope and strength and comfort by his own faith

and his own strength. How many men and women who have entered his "White House" in Settles Street, destitute, forlorn, and hopeless, have after many months of loving care been reinstated into society as self-respecting citizens? To see him pour out his grand spiritual love on the very lowest, almost bestial, specimens of humanity, who staggered through the ever open doors of his house, was a vision which those who saw can never forget, and by and in which they can never fail to have profited and to rejoice. Every one felt humbled in his presence, and every one felt uplifted. I have met none who loved his fellow creatures as he knew how to love them. He lived the life of a Christian saint. The sinner was his brother or his sister, the outcast his special treasure, and the little child his chief delight. Bubbling over with fun, he had a radiating smile and a laughing twinkle of his eye. How we all loved him, and how happy did our love make him!

I write as I come back from the crowded service at St. Augustine's, where many a Jew and Jewess had given up their mid-day luncheon hour to pay their last sorrowing respects to him, who, though of another religious creed, had taught all who knew him the beauty of holiness.¹

I could tell you, Sarah, of many others whom I have been so fortunate as to know and to whom I have been allowed to give the sacraments in their last moments here; working-men and working-mothers, boys and girls, little children, who were ready in their wedding-garments when the call came. You too could tell me of others whom you have known. But I am due in church at six to hear confessions; and a priest has no more right to be late in the confessional than at the altar.

"Will you come round another day, father," asked the old lady, "an' talk to me abart me communions an' me prayers an' me confessions? Fer I'd like to be ready when my time comes; like your cousin an' Father Leary an' that Sister an' dear Mister Edward. Ready both in body and soul, a-wearin' of me weddin'-garment."

"Yes, my dear," said I.

¹ *The Jewish Guardian*, May 20, 1927.



COMPASSED ABOUT

I CORINTHIANS 12, 20. *Now are they many members, yet but one body.*

WHEN I next sat in Mrs. Pomegranate's room it was the eve of All Saints' Day and, in accordance with the simpler laws of mathematics, two days before All Souls' Day. This explains the turn taken by the one-sided conversation, after there had been negotiated the usual preliminaries concerning the weather, the old lady's cough, the goings-on of the people next door, what Mrs. Snooks said to Mrs. Snatchpiece last Saturday night in *The Nag's Head* and what the latter lady did to the former when she got her outside, and so on.

After one or other, or sometimes all three, of my alarm-clocks have woken me I always shave, Sarah, however early the hour may be. Perhaps one day I shall become lazy and grow a beard—for there are some faces which it is an act of kindness to the civilised world to conceal as far as possible. But that time has not come yet: between ourselves, I did once try to grow a moustache for a bet with another man, but the result bore so striking a resemblance to an aged toothbrush of different-coloured bristles that I removed it with haste and lost the bet. So I continue to shave; for I have never yet been able to stand or understand a priest who goes to the altar to say Mass with a dirty and scrubby chin. Priests may be poor, but it costs little to be clean.

I use a safety-razor and so am able to do something else at the

same time. This is to glance at the pink quarterly periodical called *The Orient*, which, as you know, is published by the Sisters of St. Saviour's Priory. It contains a series of quotations and sayings for the current three months, entitled Sunday Sheaves and Week-day Gleanings. I always read the one for the day, turn it over in my mind while I scrape my harmless though necessary chin, and frequently take it with me (I don't mean the chin) both to the altar and into the new day. This morning's I repeat to you, for it seems to me to be particularly appropriate for an old lady on the days of All Saints and All Souls. It was written by John Keble. "You think no one cares for you, while Apostles, Patriarchs, Prophets, Martyrs care for you : they are leaning down, as it were to watch you : they are 'a cloud of witnesses' beholding you : they long for your company. You think you are left alone and helpless : while the air is full of angels and heaven is full of prayers for you."

You have asked me to talk to you about holy communion ; I will try to do so this afternoon. I will begin to talk about the communions which an old Christian makes in his or her beloved St. Augustine's at this time of the year ; that is, on All Saints' Day or All Souls' Day or in November, when he or she while kneeling at the altar naturally murmurs "And I believe in the communion of saints." At some other time I will talk to you about communion at home, when you are ill and the priest brings the blessed sacrament to your house.

* * * *

Well ; you put the kettle on the hob, so that when you return it may be ready to make the best cup of tea in the whole day, the first ; you wrap your old coat warmly round your older body and have another look in the glass to see that your hat is just so ; you open and close the door and set off to church. Of course you are in plenty of time for Mass, as you naturally do not like to be rude to Jesus Christ and arrive late for his service : St. Augustine's bell has not yet begun its five-minute ring. The Hackney Road is full of people hurrying to work ; every 'bus and tram that travels Citywards is crowded, many young men on bicycles pedal with haste in the direction of Shoreditch, both pavements are thronged. You know none of these people ; the probability is that not one of them knows you. As a matter of fact out there you don't count, Sarah ; in the hurrying world you are just one unit of humanity, one among London's millions, one insignificant cog in the vast and mad machine ; so am I. Outside the small circle of our friends and acquaintances—and the circle becomes so very small as we grow old—you and I are strangers in the huge city, almost aliens in the busy rushing crowds ; you are only another old woman, I am

merely another blank blank parson ; neither of us counts one scrap or matters a brass farthing.

Then you turn by a horse-trough and toddle down Yorkton Street. You pass under a swinging sign of your patron saint and up a dingy and draughty passage probably littered with the remnants of yesterday's wedding, the husks of monkeynuts eaten by the children who played in the church porch last night, and a greasy newspaper containing the remains of somebody's fish and chips. You pass Mother Kate's figure of our Lord, push open the swing-door, and enter the house of God. The door swings to behind you : it shuts out the muffled roar of the world, that often sounds like an anxious lost multitude always running in search for God and never finding him. You dip your finger in the black marble basin by the door and with the holy water trace upon yourself the holy sign, as you bow your rheumatically right knee to the ground in honour and recognition of him who dwells near the one white light.

Immediately you begin to find yourself becoming peaceful, restful, prayerful, quiet in mind, unworrying. For, you see, old lady : outside it is all rush and tear ; everything is feverish and meaningless, aimless and purposeless ; every moment consists of an endless, pointless, inexplicable, unsatisfying scramble : but here, in the Church of God, is meaning, purpose, direction, aim ; here is God who is the only reality (think these words over sometime, when you are alone) ; and here, in St. Augustine's, are men and women (yes, and children too) who know exactly both what they want and how to get it, people who want God and know where and how to find him. You want him too, Sarah ; so do I. Of course we are happier in church than anywhere else, until we are in heaven.

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The server moves quietly about the sanctuary. He is unhurried, dignified ; he knows exactly what to do ; he is quite unlike the hurrying hundreds outside. He uncovers the altar, places in position the three framed copies of ordered prayers, puts the sacring-bell where he can reach it when he wants it, lights the candles. Meanwhile you and I who have come to Mass wait silently. Silently, Sarah. In the world outside we are so accustomed to din and noise, so used to being shouted at on every side, so compelled—in the scramble to live—to be pushing and self-assertive, that we are in danger of forgetting that God seldom shouts, that he still says, "Be still : and know that I am God," and that if we are to hear him we must ourselves be quiet. So we Christians, who cannot live without God, try not to talk

to any one as we get up and as we come to church on communion mornings, we rise in plenty of time so that we do not have to rush into God's presence, and as we wait for Mass to begin we neither whisper to one another nor look about nor fidget nor turn the pages of our books. "Let all mortal flesh keep silence; Christ our Lord to earth descendeth." "Be still; and know that I am God."

The priest has come to the altar, the server kneels at his side; they are saying the preparation; "I will go unto the altar of God, Even the God of my joy and gladness." It is obvious that both know exactly what they are about to do.

The Mass has begun; the old conservative, unchangeable Mass that reaches back through an ever-changing and weather-cock world to the scene that changed the world and brings the green hill outside Jerusalem on a Friday long ago to this twentieth-century morning; the Mass that will always happen every morning on the million altars of the Church, independent of sinful celebrant or scanty congregation or heedless world, so long as there is time; the Mass that is unique and singular, unlike anything else on earth; the Mass that alone is set and ordered, clear-cut and definite; the Mass that is meant to bring you and me, Sarah, and all the world to Reality, to Fact, to Eternal Sameness—in other words, to God.

Here, at Mass in old St. Augustine's on this cold morning, are, say, seven of us. You, Sarah; an old lady, bowed down with years and troubles, many sorrows and several fears. The working-man who is serving and has always the East Londoner's dread of unemployment. The woman kneeling in the half light by our Lady's image, with her eyes full of unshed tears. The Priory Sister, who assuredly has her own troubles as well as her wonderful joys. The young girl kneeling by the side of her sweetheart; they have just become engaged and naturally wish to tell our Lord and receive communion together. Myself, a priest who finds it desperately hard even to begin to be a good priest.

What are we, the seven of us, in the tearing world outside the closed west doors? Just so many units; so many cogs in the vast machine, to be used and scrapped when we are worn out; seven bits of matter, that is all. But what are we here, at Mass within these walls that are saturated with more than sixty years of worship and prayer and contrition, in this strong house of God where heaven and earth meet and overlap? Here we are welcome members of the family of God: here we are not solitary units, but living and essential parts of Christ's Body. Here you, Sarah, are no longer a tired and useless old woman; but you are the child of God, sharing in the actual life of the personal God who made you and admits you by the

Mass to the communion of saints, to the divine family, to the everlasting home of light and warmth and love and no loneliness at all. Here you are *the* child, for whom the Body was broken and the Blood was shed. Here you are *the* child whom the Lord Jesus loves as though you were the only child he ever had. Here, at Mass, you are in your native country; very near to the mother who is your mother, since you are her son's child. Here are angels, for King Christ is never unattended. Here you are in the glad company of the saints of every age and land; and here you are nearer to your loved dead than you can ever be until you meet them in heaven, for they are with Christ, Christ is here, and there is but one Christ. "You think no one cares for you, while Apostles, Patriarchs, Prophets, Martyrs care for you: they are leaning down, as it were to watch you: they are 'a cloud of witnesses' beholding you: they long for your company. You think you are left alone and helpless: while the air is full of angels and heaven is full of prayers for you." Here, at Mass, you are at home, my dear; here, at Mass, you are safe.

Low at thine altar, Lord most high,
 I claim the ancient right
 To lay my battered harness by
 And trust thy sacred might:
 The foes who follow on the track
 My feet in fear have trod,
 Hold from thy silent threshold back,
 Give sanctuary, O God.

Wounded and weary to the death
 I pass thy temple doors,
 Behind me murder pants for breath,
 The hum of battle roars:
 But where the peaceful candles shine
 And drowsy censers nod,
 Here, in the stillness of thy shrine,
 Give sanctuary, O God.

Within the shelter of thy walls
 The tumult fades away,
 The wonder of thy presence falls
 About our hearts who pray;
 Faint in the distance dies the din
 Of legions iron-shod;
 From vengeance at the heels of sin
 Give sanctuary, O God.

* * * * *

Then the priest turns. Before your eyes he holds that small, white, holiest thing on earth. You hear him say . . . ; to you, old Sarah, he comes ; to you he gives. . . . But perhaps we had better think of that another time. Good-bye, my dear. Shall we meet at the altar to-morrow?



YESTERDAY, TO-DAY, AND TO-MORROW

ST. JOHN I, 29. *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

“LAS’ night, father,” said old Sarah Pomegranate, “I didn’t arf ’ave a wunnerful dream. I expect wot caused it was that, as I lay in bed a-waitin’ ter go to sleep, I was a-thinkin’ o’ wot you said las’ time you come ter see me, wot you said abart the ’oly Mass. I remembered one sentence in pertickler: ’ow each one o’ we Christians is *the* child fer whom Christ’s body was broke, *the* child fer whom ’is precious blood was shed, *the* child whom the Lord Jesus loves an’ loves an’ goes on a-lovin’ just as tho’ ’e never ’ad no other child. An’, you see that crucifix on the wall over the foot o’ me bed? I ’angs it there because, at night, that ’s where the light from the street-lamp falls on the wall; an’ I likes to keep me eyes on that crucifix, as I lay in bed a-waitin’ fer sleep. D’you think me a silly old woman, father?”

“Not a bit, my dear,” said I. “I always wear a small silver crucifix round my neck; and over the head of my bed is a crucifix which one of my godmothers gave me when I was baptised. I often look at it when I can’t sleep. I don’t think any of us can see too much of the crucifix, do you?”

“’Sright,” said she, “would you like to ’ear me dream?”

“Very much,” said I.

I dreamed that I was walking along a street. It was not at all like our streets; much rougher, paved with cobble-stones, no pavements, the gutter running down the middle. The houses along the street were unlike any I had seen before, they looked foreign and strange. But I felt so ill and tired and old that I did not pay much attention to anything. It seemed to me that I had to get somewhere, though I did not know where; and that I had not a long time in which to get there, for I knew that I was dying.

Do you know what it is, father, to be walking in a street; and to feel so sick and faint, that you think you will never get home before you are ill; and all you want to do is just to sit down and die? ("Yes, Sarah," said I; "I have known that.") Well, that is what I felt like; giddy, ill, very old, very tired. Yet I knew that I must go on; for I was quite sure that if I allowed myself to die before I reached somewhere, I did not know where, I should be unhappy for a very long time. So I struggled on.

In that street I passed a woman looking at a handkerchief, on which were bloodstains that made the picture of a face; I saw a shoemaker, standing looking down the street in the direction in which I was going, muttering to himself, "He said, You will wait until I return"; I passed a group of women standing in an archway and one said to the others, "He said, But weep for yourselves and your children. What do you think he meant?"

It was then, as I went through the arch, that I saw the end of the journey which I must reach before I allowed myself to die. It was the top of a low hill. Grass grew on it; a slippery path wound up it, trodden by many feet; on the sky-line stood three crosses, of which two were empty and one was not.

The afternoon sun shone on the full cross: it reminded me of my crucifix in the lamplight. I knew that I must reach it, because he who hung there was waiting for me.

I went on. It was only a short way, just "outside a city wall"; but it was all I could do to get there, and I climbed the slippery path on my hands and knees. There was a gap in the low stone wall round the flat top of the hill; I went through it; then I fell at the foot of the middle cross. St. Mary Magdalene moved to one side, to give me room: our Lady smiled, as though she had been waiting for me and was glad to see me: St. John did not seem to notice me, for he was looking up at the cross and had an arm round Mary. My two old hands held tight to the sticky wood, the red and sticky wood of the cross; and I looked up into the face of Jesus Christ. At that moment I heard a voice say, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"; it seemed to me, father, that it was you

who said those words and that you were standing at an altar in St. Augustine's, waiting to give holy communion. I did not feel ill any longer. I did not mind if I did die there, beholding the Lamb of God.

Then I woke up.

"O, father! I do wish that I'd lived nineteen 'undred years ago; that I 'ad seen Jesus Christ just wunce: that I could 'ave gorn ter the green 'ill outside Jerusalem. I do wish that it 'adn't all 'appened so many 'undreds o' years ago, an' then been over. Don't you?"

"No, old lady," said I, "because it did not all happen once a long time ago; it is not all over."

"Wotever do yer mean?" asked she.

"I will try to tell you," answered I.

The church bell has ceased to ring; the altar candles are alight; the vested priest stands at the altar, saying and doing what he is ordered to say and do; on the altar are chalice and paten; the server is ready to give the priest the required bread and wine; you and I kneel in the pews; the Mass has begun. What is that? What is the Mass?

Do you remember that, a few moments before he died, our Lord spoke three words? Do you remember that he did not utter them as you would have expected a dying man to do, gasping for breath, in a faint and scarcely audible whisper? It is written that he said them "in a loud voice"; he shouted them, so that they sounded like the call of a great trumpet sounding, in notes that would echo round and round the world so long as there is time, the news of a stupendous victory. "It is finished," he shouted; which does not mean "It is done, ended, brought to a full stop, all over"; but means "*Consummatum est*, Τετέλεισται, it has been completed, it is perfect, nothing is lacking, the purpose is achieved."

Dame Clara Butt makes a gramophone-record of *Abide with me*: before it is released for sale it is played to the company's experts and perhaps to the singer herself: they hear it and say, "That is good; it is almost perfect; you can hear every word and note of the lovely song; you can even hear the singer drawing her breath; that is a fine record; it is finished." They do not mean that the song is over and will never be heard again; they mean exactly the opposite. They mean that, for years and years to come, the song will delight

thousands all over the world, perhaps long after the singer herself is dead, by means of the perfected and finished gramophone-record. That is what our Lord said just before three on the first Good Friday ; not, "It is done, over, brought to an end" ; but, "My task is perfected, complete, consummated, brought to perfection, and its results will last for ever and ever."

What was the completed task ; what was finished ? The offering of himself on the cross for the salvation and redeeming (buying back from pawn) of the entire human race. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me," including old Sarah, living in Haggerston nineteen hundred years later, who as yet has never seen me. "He ever liveth to make intercession for *us*," now, in this our time. The passion, the crucifixion, the death on the old green hill are not, in the mind of the holy Trinity on heaven's throne, certain historical events which happened once some nineteen hundred years ago and were then over and done with, finished. "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever." There is no time in heaven ; the crucifix is still present in the mind of God ; the perfect offering is still being made ; if I may say so without irreverence, the record is still being played. The eternal Son is still pleading before the Father the full, perfect, finished, and sufficient sacrifice of his body once in time broken and his blood once shed, on behalf of old Sarah Pomegranate ; the eternal Father is accepting both that sacrifice and Sarah, through Jesus Christ her Lord. It is not written, "Behold the Lamb of God, which did once upon a time take away the sin of the world as it then was" ; it is written, "Behold the Lamb of God, which now, in this our day, *taketh* away the sin of the world."

In my room at the clergy house is a square, polished, wooden box. I press down a switch in the wall and the room is filled with the sounds of a symphony concert at the Queen's Hall, a speech made by the Duke of Gloucester in Australia, or a football match in Glasgow. The ether is already filled with the music, the words, and the shouting of the crowd ; but they can only reach me if I have a wireless-instrument and if I tune it in to the right wave-length. In the courts of heaven the accomplished and finished act of my rescue and redemption is, at every moment of every day and night, being offered on my behalf to the Father by the Son. That is always happening, whatever may be my attitude towards it ; for the body was broken on the cross and the blood was poured out on the small green hill for me, just as much as for any one and every one else. But that sacrifice is made accessible to me, in dirty old Haggerston all these centuries after ; all its benefits, safety, protection, and salvation are made available to me—and to you, Sarah, my dear—by the Mass.

That is what the Mass was principally instituted for; "for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ and of the benefits which we receive thereby." The Mass is, if I may so put it, the wireless-instrument by means of which all who wish may tune in, not only to the hill of Calvary, but also to heaven and to what is happening in heaven at this moment as the result of what happened on that hill.

So, you see, it is really and truly not all over; it is really and truly still happening. Though they who wish to feel, experience, take part in it, must have the wireless-instrument and must tune it in to the right wave-length: in other words, they must be at Mass.

At Mass I am in the upper room, on the green hill, in heaven, and in Haggerston, "beholding the Lamb of God, which *takes away* . . ." I do hope that you understand me; it is not easy to put such things into words.

¶ *At this point the spate of platitudes poured upon the luckless Sarah was mercifully interrupted.*



ANGELS

2 KINGS 6, 16. *Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*

IN days when the world was younger and certainly neither less happy nor less wise than it is now, Christian people not only believed in angels but also did not think it incredible that they should be among the inhabitants of this world.

At night, when they laid their heads on their pillows, they felt safer for thinking that the angels whom Jacob saw as he lay down to sleep with his head on that extremely uncomfortable pillow still watched over the sleep of those who had knelt by bedsides and commended their souls to God. When they had shown some act of kindness or charity to people less fortunate than themselves it passed through their minds that they too might some day "entertain angels unawares." When they were in sudden bodily danger or were confronted without warning by a violent temptation or onslaught of the evil one, it used to comfort them to believe that, if only they could see into the invisible world, they would know that the hosts of heaven, with horses and chariots as of fire, are still camped around God's people to fight for and defend them, as they were in the days when Elisha had a servant who was frightened. When they went to church and knelt on altar-steps to receive communion they would remind themselves that every Christian church is one of heaven's gates, crowded, like heaven itself, with bands of blessed spirits; so that they meant what they said when they sang, "Therefore

with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify thy glorious name." "Whenever the Eucharist is celebrated," wrote one who lived in those days, St. Chrysostom, "angels stand by the priest, the whole choir resounds with celestial praises, and the place about the altar is filled with them, in honour of him who is laid thereon."

I wish that a number of people whom I know and for whom I am responsible had more of that old faith which might be described by some as childish, and by others as childlike and consequently "of the kingdom of heaven."

They, for example, who—like the celebrated lady who lived in what must have been a most uncomfortable house—have "so many children that they don't know what to do" and sometimes lose patience with them, sometimes forget to be careful of what is said and done before children, sometimes take no interest in their religion, sometimes even knock them about ("Come 'ere, yer little devil: I won't 'arf pay yer"—so I heard from my open window the other day). I would like them really to believe our Lord's words about the children's angels who always behold his Father's face, and about the only fit thing to put round the necks of those who teach sin to children.

Those who have grown careless about the practice of their religion: the girls for whom the glamour and excitement of growing up and having a boy have been too much, who have lost their childhood's faith, whom confessional and altar see no more: the boys who were once faithful altar-servers and good choristers but whom the world and the devil have drawn away from their first love, whom this cursed unemployment has made restless, bitter, and hopeless, for whom the fact of being the only Christian in the workshop has been too difficult, who cannot stand the ridicule of the other fellows in the street. I do not mean that they have ceased to believe in God, for I do not think that they have: but I wish that they believed in St. Michael and the rest.

That priest whom, alas, I know only too well, and whose face I see in a mirror every morning—though not at other times of the day, if I can help it; whose thoughts *will* wander as he says Mass; who is disappointed that there are not larger congregations in his church; who is quite often fussed and worried by the thought of all that he has to do; who is sometimes troubled about the future of himself and his church; who even, incredibly, finds the preaching of sermons difficult. I wish that he had a surer faith in, say, Tobit's angel who said, "I will go with thee: I know the way well."

The plucky person kneeling in my confessional and finding it so difficult to admit that sin of impurity that it is unconfessed ; such-and-such an old lady, lonely and frail, more than a little afraid of death ; so-and-so awaiting a serious operation and naturally feeling frightened and apprehensive ; some one else who finds it so hard to pray ; such an one who has heard God's call to this or that and has not yet found the courage to obey ; the hard-working East London nurses, school-teachers, parents whom I am proud to call my friends ; the East London priests who are so often depressed, lonely, and disappointed ; he and she who are up against great temptation and are beginning to slip and fail ; those mourners ; those parents so sad about their children. With my whole heart I wish that their eyes too could be opened like Gehazi's, so that they could see the horses and chariots of the holy angels, protecting and guarding the people of God : that I too could realise that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

* * * * *

I suppose that the real reason why we cannot see angels is that we are such earth-bound creatures.

If you took a child into bright sunshine and told him that there were stars shining in the sky he might disbelieve you, because he could not see them. Perhaps it is the glare and glamour of this world that obscures and dims our sight of the holy spirits. Why is it that babies smile, apparently at nothing ? Why do the eyes of the dying so often look as though they can see more than and further than they who stand by the bedside : why does what they seem to see nearly always make them look happy ? I wonder whether they who have not yet learned to focus their sight to this world's glare and they who are leaving this world's glamour can see "they that be with us." I should not be surprised.

* * * * *

In a small shop in Holborn a few days ago I found these verses :

The tombstone was there, not yet inscribed
To tell others aught of the man who died :
So an angel was sent to write on it
The inscription that seemed to him to be fit.

"Who can tell me of him that has died?"
And the dead man's friend at once replied,
"Full often enough I have heard it said
That nought but good should be said of the dead :

But as you have asked me what to say,
Well, this is true :—He had a way
Of trying always to fight for right,
Yet never seeming to win that fight.
He always meant to do so well,
But somehow or other he always fell.
All his life 'twas the same old tale
Of trying—and trying only to fail !”

And the angel wrote, “A saint here lies.”
For a saint is merely a sinner who tries ;
And the man who fails and tries once more
Is nearer to God than he was before.

Even if we cannot yet see the angels like “stars of the morning, so gloriously bright” ; we can try to be like Baruch’s stars “which shined in their watches and were glad : when God called them, they said, Here we be : they shined with gladness unto him that made them.” We can remember that “A saint is merely a sinner who tries ; And the man who fails and tries once more Is nearer to God than he was before.” We can determine to go manfully on until, beyond the racket and glare of this world, we reach the real home of both angels and ourselves : to which may their and our king take us, in the strong arms of them “that be with us,” as soon as may be.



BUT BUILD NO HOUSE

ON the road from Agra to Jaipur stand the ruins of a mosque built many years ago by one of the wisest Mogul emperors of India. It is a beautiful building of white marble, blue enamelled roofs, and soft red sandstone pillars which can be carved almost as easily as wood. On the marble tomb of the emperor's son are inscribed the words which I take for my text on this anniversary of the dedication to God of this beautiful church of yours and mine; "The world is a bridge. Pass over it; but build no house upon it"; which a Christian would translate by the familiar sentence, "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

It was about two o'clock on a July night in the Red Sea. Both window and door of my cabin were open to full extent; the electric fan above my head revolved at its highest speed; but it was too hot to sleep. I slipped an elegant blue cotton dressing-gown over my equally elegant and similarly cotton pink pyjamas and went on deck to find a breeze; though neither heat nor sleeplessness worried me, since I was travelling home from Australia to England, Haggerston, St. Augustine's, and you. For an hour or more I sat in a deck-chair with my feet on the ship's rail and a cigarette in my mouth. The sky was dark, soft, mysterious; great stars shone like jewels; now and then waves raised their heads to look at me and appeared to be unimpressed by the spectacle; occasionally the mast-head lights of

an outward-bound ship went swaying by. But I scarcely saw them, for I sat and thought about this place.

I was returning to the only place in which I wish to live and die. I began to picture myself back in the old familiar spot, doing once more the old familiar things. I imagined my alarm-clocks fulfilling their consecutive functions: the orange newspaper-van passing the house as usual at six in the morning; myself unlocking iron gates and opening the church, vesting beneath the two white boards on which are the names of the many priests who morning by morning for more than sixty years did the same, standing once again before the altar with the tabernacle, again saying Mass in your and my St. Augustine's. In my mind's eye were East London pictures overlapping and running into one another: our altar of the holy souls, a dance in the hall, children swinging on ropes round a lamp-post, a Priory Sister hurrying along a street with a parcel under an arm, benediction on a Wednesday night, the telephone in the clergy-house, a number six omnibus, myself hearing confessions, myself writing letters to the Hospital Sunday Fund concerning new teeth for old ladies, the Greater Catechism, St. Michael's Guild-Room on a Tuesday evening, Victoria Park, tea at a house in Holms Street, the view from my bedroom-window at two in the morning, myself taking communion to a certain lady on a Thursday morning, clubs in the hall, High Mass on Sundays, night-prayers before the tabernacle at the end of any day. Then I began to make plans as to what I would do when I was safely returned to this best of all places: how I would try to visit more frequently, what course of instructions I would give the Greater Catechism, this and that innovation for the Bethlehem Play, what the new vestries would look like, how the magazine might be made more interesting, how I could get into touch with this and that Christian who had been neglecting the sacraments—and so on.

At that moment I heard steps on the darkened deck. One of the officers of the middle watch was making his customary round of the ship. "A penny for them, padre," he said as he reached me. "On this occasion," I replied, "they are worth more than that." We chatted awhile about the current Test Match. Then I returned to bed. I picked up a book to read myself to sleep; it opened at a description of that mosque at Fatehpur-Sikri; from the printed page there leaped at me, as though an angel knew my recent thoughts and was compelling me to read, "The world is a bridge. Pass over it; but build no house upon it."

* * * * *

"Am I too fond of St. Augustine's, too proud of what has happened there in the last ten years, too much in love with East London in general and Haggerston in particular?" I began to ask myself as I lay on the small white bed in the hot white cabin on that July night. "If I were not allowed to return there, should I be resentful, morose, self-pitying? Would my religion suffer? Should I be as enthusiastic and painstaking a priest if I were not a St. Augustine's priest? I wonder." "But surely," I thought as I waited for sleep, "if that were the case I should be house-building on the world's bridge; I should be making my continuing city here instead of hereafter; I should be in danger of loving St. Augustine's more than God." "I must be careful about that," I determined as at last my eyes began to close; "I must make a self-examination on that point, before I go again to St. Peter's, London Docks, to make my confession; for that would be arrant foolishness as well as great sin."

* * * * *

You are not building houses on the bridge, are you?

Suppose that your darling only child died, your wife or husband played loose with marriage-vows and left you, your sweetheart proved false, the doctor told you that you had six months to live; would you then still love God just as much as you do on this happy night?

Could you watch the person whom you love more than any other die very slowly of a long and painful disease; could you lose your sight, now, without any warning; could you hear the call to abandon all that the world rightly holds dear—the love of good man or woman, home, the hope of children, possessions, even perhaps your own name and identity—and follow that call into the priesthood or the religious life; and do those things, not only with a complete lack of self-consciousness or self-pity, but also with an even greater love of God than you have at this moment?

You are not trying to make of this St. Augustine's a house on the world's bridge, are you? You do not say—I pray to God that you do not—"I will make my confession to Father X, but not to Father Y"; or, "Now that I have moved to Sidcup, Eltham, Becontree, Chingford, or elsewhere I will no longer make my communion, because I do not like the church or the priest as much as the old place in Haggerston"? The loving service that you perform so generously and splendidly for this church and the people of this place; you are not giving it primarily for St. Augustine's or any human being, are you?

* * * * *

Do I love God more than any one or anything, more than this beautiful house of his? Do you? How can we make sure? I will tell you, though I think that you know.

In the monstrance on the high altar in a few moments; year in, year out, in the tabernacle beneath the white light in our quiet chapel; is the most holy sacrament—that small, white, fragile, and most holy thing which, by the will of God, is the point in which earth and heaven, nature and supernature, Christ and Haggerston, touch and overlap and coincide; the blessed host which is, in all places, God. What do I think of that sacrament? How do I react towards, what is the value that I set upon, the tabernacle and monstrance and their contents? That is the acid and unfailing test of the measure of my love of God. It is by asking myself those questions and by answering them honestly that I can discover both how much and how little I love him, and whether I am in danger of loving him less than others.

For example. When things go wrong; you are so tired, so sad, so ill, that you feel that you cannot go on any longer and that all you want to do is to put your head on somebody's shoulder and cry; does it occur to you to come to this ever-open church of yours, kneel in that peaceful chapel, put your head on the Good Shepherd's shoulder and cry? But why not? Is not that one of the many reasons for which he is there?

When things go right, you are so happy that you scarcely know how to contain yourself, your first instinct is to hurry out and tell your friends; does it occur to you to come here, kneel there, tell your best friend first and say, "Thank you, Jesus"? But surely that is another of the many reasons for which he is there.

For years you have been receiving communion so many times a month; what is the real reason why you do not receive it more frequently, perhaps daily, at any rate three or four times a week? Have you ever taken the pains to think out the reasons which keep you from daily communion? But surely that is the principal reason for which he is there.

Do you, who live so near to this church, for whom religion is made so much easier than it is for many, whom the good God has so greatly blessed, pay a daily visit to the tabernacle? Yet you could.

You see what I mean by these questions: I know that you do.

May the Lord God, truly and indeed present in his most blessed sacrament, bless this night both this fair house of his; all who once worshipped here and are passed to the land where sacraments cease in his unhidden presence; and us, both priests and people, who know

and love almost every stone of this dear church. May he bless us this night so powerfully and graciously that each one of us may pass over the bridge and build no house upon it ; that we may love him in his sacrament far more than we love any St. Augustine's ; and so, one day, love him as this day and for eternity—whatever manner of men or women we make ourselves, however far perhaps we have wandered away from him—he loves us.



AN OLD WOMAN'S FIRST COMMUNION

I CORINTHIANS II, 26. *As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

ST. JOHN II, 28. *The Master is come, and calleth for thee.*

I WANT to talk to you to-day, Sarah, about the communions of the old; and I give you as a sort of text for the subject the words "Till he come" and "The Master is come."

Once upon a time there was an old lady, as you may read in the fifth chapter of St. Mark's gospel, who had been very ill for twelve years and had spent all her money on doctors without any good result. Then she heard of Jesus of Nazareth and decided to go to him; (you reminded me of her, Sarah, when you told me about your dream the last time I came to see you). You might have said that she could scarcely have chosen a more unsuitable day. He had been away, across the sea, and was returning this morning: he was at the height of his popularity: an enormous crowd awaited him: on its fringe stood the old lady with the pinched nose, thin neck, white face, and hand against her left side. His ship arrived; its bows ran gently up on to the silver sand and he stepped out, along a plank and up the beach. Hundreds surged round him, he was the centre of a scene of great enthusiasm, everybody pushed and jostled in the attempt to be near him; at the back of the crowd stood the bewildered and breathless woman, who could not even see him.

There was a disturbance. A well-dressed man ran down the

sands to meet him ; he was in great distress. "It is Jairus, one of the rulers of our synagogue. Make way for Jairus." He reached Jesus and flung himself at his feet. "Master. It is my daughter. She is dying. Come quickly." Of course the Master went ; and the old woman watched him go.

Over the sand-dunes, through the hot and narrow streets, hurried Jesus of Nazareth to the girl's bedside. The crowd hurried too ; and, still far away from him, the old woman, with the grey and sweating face and the pain in her heart, tried to run.

The street narrowed. The excited crowd became wedged between the high walls. It was all the disciples could do to clear a way for the Master. He could scarcely move. Suddenly he stood still, turned, asked, "Who touched me?" (A strange question to ask ; but he of Nazareth often asks questions that are surprising and sometimes disconcerting.)

Kneeling at his feet in the dusty road, oblivious to the surrounding din and noise, was an old woman. Her thin dress was torn, one sandal was missing, her lined old face was wet, a damp wisp of grey hair hung across one eye, the pulse in her thin neck was beating fast. She never knew how she reached him ; perhaps some eddy in the crowd had caught her and swept her towards him, and she had made one last supreme effort to reach his side. But that did not matter now ; nothing mattered now ; for she had found him, she had reached Jesus. Her rough old hands—gnarled and scarred by years of work and years of washing clothes and years of a mother's love—held him tight and refused to let him go.

In the centre of the great crowd were the Son of God and the sick woman, alone. Into her tired eyes looked the eyes of the son of Mary. Her soul and the soul of Jesus met. God and the old woman were in communion with each other : it was her first communion. Then he smiled ; "Daughter ; thy faith hath made thee whole, well, strong again. Go into peace."

That is a bible-picture of each holy communion that you make, Sarah. Now let me give you one or two simple bits of advice about those communions.

When you go to Mass to receive communion never allow yourself to be worried by anything. For example, don't get fussed if you can't hear what is said by the priest at the altar. You see, he must not shout the words of the service ; in fact you would be the last person to wish him to preach the Mass as though it were a sermon that he himself had written. When he is at the altar the priest ought to be

impersonal, anonymous, almost a machine : as he stands there, doing that for which he was primarily ordained, he is not Father Wilson or Father Wallace or Father A.B.C. or Father X.Y.Z. : he is just "priest," doing all in his power to sink his own personality, perpetually on his guard lest he should obtrude himself between those who have come to Mass and Christ our Lord who is the Mass. "He who draws aside the veil between God and the people of God, and hides himself in its folds" ; that is one of the best definitions of a good priest, especially of a priest at the altar. You have been hearing Mass for so many years, my dear, that I expect you almost know it by heart. Don't be worried if you can't hear the priest ; don't be troubled if you can't see your book or follow the epistle and gospel. You know what is happening : you know that, at the consecration, God and you will be together : that is all that matters.

Of course it doesn't matter in the least if you are unable to kneel. Do you think the good Lord does not know how tired you are, all about your rheumatics, for how many years you have been working and slaving for others until you have nearly worn yourself out ? Of course he knows ; and he loves you for it, bless you. He is, for ever and ever, a mother's son : son of one who is now queen of heaven, and also son of one who was once a poor, hardworking, peasant woman : he knows all about mothers—and all about grannies too.

How often would I advise you to receive communion ? That is an easy question to answer. Every day, if you can. Perhaps you could not do so in the past, when you went out to work and also had to manage all the household : but it is different now that you have only yourself to look after. You are so fortunate (I often wonder whether St. Augustine's people realise how fortunate they are) : your church is just round the corner and there are many Masses at all sorts of hours of the morning. At least I should make my communion, if I were you, on Sunday and one week-day. I don't think we can have too much of Jesus Christ, do you ? Especially when we are growing old. There is only one thing to keep us from frequent communion : that is mortal sin, and you and I know how to get rid of that. Communion is not for saints ; they are in heaven, where there are no more sacraments. Communion is for sinners who want to be saints. I make my communion every morning : God knows that I am no saint, though he also knows that I would like to be one some day.

As for the small difficulties about the necessary fast before communion ; the coming out on damp and foggy mornings ; the weariness of your old body, which becomes such a nuisance if you give way to it ; the nasty remarks neighbours make about only going

to church for what you can get—and so on. Are they not all like the crowd the old lady in the bible-story had to push her way through, in order to reach our Lord? And of course you and I go to communion for what we can get; though I would rather say, for whom we can get.

Do not allow yourself, my dear, to be kept from communion by anything or anybody. All our religion is a matter of heart, first: love, first: faith and hope, yes—"but the greatest of these is love." In communion, so long as your heart and love of the Lord Christ are right, nothing else matters over-much. Every good communion is another cord to bind us to Jesus himself: when you and I come to die, when the mists of the shadowed valley close round us and we can make no more communions, we shall need every one of those cords. And a missed communion is one communion less for all eternity. "Give us this day our daily bread"; you know what those words mean to a communicant.

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And let me give you, as a sort of text for every communion until the last one, those words I quoted a few moments ago: "Till he come" and "The Master is come." You are an old lady: you know that the end of the journey cannot be very far away: therefore try to make each communion as though you were quite sure that it was going to be the last one. Good prayers said before; no unforgiven sin on your conscience; no quarrel with anybody; no debts unpaid; no needless chattering on communion-morning; reaching the church in plenty of time for the Mass, if you can; in short, as I said a week or two ago, quite ready in soul and body. During the Mass, not caring or troubling yourself about any one in church or the priest at the altar; just thinking of Jesus Christ alone—as it were, pushing your way towards him through your wandering thoughts and the world's noise and the troubles of your body, like that other old woman in the crowd. Then going to the altar; kneeling there or standing, it does not matter (only one thing matters, that you are there); looking, as the old and the young can look, into the face of Jesus himself; and so taking him himself to you yourself. Thus, once again, history repeats itself: God and an old woman are in communion with each other, alone together in the world's crowd: and the old woman is you, Sarah.

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When I was a small boy about to leave home to go to a public

school my father wrote out for me some simple verses which I still often say as I make my preparation for Mass.

Lord, for to-morrow and its needs
I do not pray :
Keep me, my God, from stain of sin,
Just for to-day.

Let me both diligently work
And duly pray :
Let me be kind in word and deed,
Just for to-day.

Let me be slow to do my will,
Prompt to obey :
Help me to mortify my flesh,
Just for to-day.

Let me no wrong or idle word
Unthinking say :
Set thou a seal upon my lips,
Just for to-day.

Let me in season, Lord, be grave,
In season gay :
Let me be faithful to thy grace,
Just for to-day.

And if to-day my tide of life
Should ebb away :
Give me thy sacraments divine,
Sweet Lord, to-day.

So for to-morrow and its needs
I do not pray :
But keep me, guide me, love me, Lord,
Just for to-day.

I also remember the day when he gave me threepence because I could say by heart the 23rd psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd : therefore can I lack nothing. He shall feed me . . . and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil . . . Thou shalt prepare a table before me . . . And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

"He shall feed me : just for to-day : till he come : the Master is come and calleth for thee." Wouldn't it be lovely if, on the morning of that day, you had received him in communion? Well ; why shouldn't it be so?



AN OLD MAN'S PRAYERS

GENESIS 16, 13. *Thou God seest me.*

THE clock, a birthday present to his wife, struck ten. He finished his last game of patience, drank another cup of tea, let the dog out into the garden for a final run round, smoked one more cigarette, satisfied himself that the fire was safe, went upstairs to bed.

The old house was quiet and full of memories. The maids had retired and were probably asleep: his elder daughter, who had kept house for him since his wife died, was out—she was a Guide Commissioner and her evenings were generally occupied: his other children lived away from home, one a nun working in the poorer quarters of a seaside-town, one a schoolmaster, one a priest. The old day-nursery—with the dolls' house he had made for them, their school prizes in the bookcase, school and Oxford groups on the walls—was rarely used now: no small children were sleeping now in the night-nursery (he or their mother had always looked at them on their way to bed, but had never kissed them unless they were awake). To-night the house seemed asleep, dreaming of many things sad and glad but never to return. So dreamed he, as, all alone, he walked slowly upstairs, turned out the light on the landing and entered the room in which his wife had died.

By the bedside stood a green wooden prayer-desk; it too was old, for he had made it for her many years ago. Above it hung three things: a crucifix; a picture of the sixth Station of the Cross, Veronica wiping our Lord's face, the memorial which he had placed to her in the church in which the children had been baptised, the

eldest had said his first Mass, her funeral-service had been held, and at the altars of which he still served ; and a photograph of a stone cross in a cemetery, beneath which most of his heart lay buried. He lit the two candles that stood on the desk's shelf : there was no other light in the room as he knelt to make his evening prayers. He still knelt straight and erect, for all that he had passed the threescore years and ten and was tired at the end of the day's work. Round him lay the silent and familiar home ; in the hall downstairs a clock struck the half-hour, through the night came the whistle of an engine as it neared the station, the night mail to Berlin rose from the aerodrome a mile away and roared overhead. But he did not hear them. He was saying his night-prayers.

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen." So he began ; as without haste or hurry he made upon himself the holy sign.

Then he knelt still and unpraying for a minute or so. It had never seemed to him quite polite to rush chattering into the presence of God, like a wireless-instrument suddenly switched on. In the quiet room of memories he made a conscious effort to remove from his mind the cares and worries of the past day, even the old sorrow which never really left him ; and tried to place himself in the presence of God. "Thou God seest me" ; those were the words that usually came to his mind, words first said by a slave-woman many hundreds of years ago. "Thou God, in all thy majesty and omnipotence, in thy spotless purity and unbounded love, in thy serene peace and calm, seest me, an old and rather lonely man, with many failings but much love of thee : seest me now, here, in this second of time : thou, Lord God—and me."

After which ; still, as it were, holding on to God's hand and, like Jacob, refusing to let him go ; he began to pray. "Our Father" ; slowly and deliberately, almost with hesitation, as though he scarcely knew it and were saying it for the first time. "Hail, Mary" ; with equal thoughtfulness, recollection, seriousness.

Then, quite deliberately and in no sense with a wandering mind, he called up the past day and made it flicker through his thoughts as a series of pictures on a cinema-screen. He was about to enter that state which is the nearest to death : for nine hours or so he would be unconscious, sleeping soundly. He could not allow himself to become so with even the smallest and most venial sin on his conscience and unconfessed, not if "thou God seest me." So, as he saw the past day and looked at the crucifix, he said, "I confess to Almighty God that during this day I have said this and that which would have been better unsaid : there is this thought which came to me as a temptation and

which I did not turn out of my mind quite as quickly as I should and could have done : and there was that opportunity which I did allow to slip by. I am sorry, God. Thou God seest me : do thou, God, also forgive me."

So, still with his eyes on the small plaster figure in the candlelight (for he had long since found that he needed no books of devotion full of other people's prayers) he passed to his intercessions. For the J.O.Y that results from all good prayer is caused by placing Jesus, God, first : Others next : Yourself last. There were once four men who had a sick friend ; they lowered him through a house-roof to the feet of Christ. That is intercession at its best : the taking of our friends and loved ones to the feet through which once nails were driven, laying them down at the base of the crucifix above our prayer-desk or upon the altar, not dictating to the owner of those feet, leaving our dear ones and all their needs to him who is perfect wisdom as well as complete love. "My priest-son ; the daughter in religion ; my baby boy the schoolmaster ; she who lives at home to care for her old father. My own dear wife. Such an one who is ill. So-and-so whom I believe to be in temptation. The priests of my church. The servants in my house. Those with whom I work. This, that, and the other of whom I have read in to-day's papers and whose names were mentioned in to-night's news ; for it may be that they have few or none to pray for them. These departed this life, whose anniversaries are to-day. And, once again, my own dear wife. I take them all out of my heart and lay them, God, at your feet."

Finally for himself he prayed, quite slowly and simply (one returns to simplicity when one is old) : "Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord : and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. Blessed Jesus, support us all the day long : until the shadows lengthen, the evening comes, the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over and our work is done : then, in thy mercy, grant us safe lodging, holy rest, and peace at the last. Be present, merciful God, to protect us through the silent hours of this night ; so that we who are fatigued by the changes and chances of this fleeting world may repose upon thine eternal changelessness."

But every night he passed on to "Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost for all things, including that grave beneath the stone cross and my loneliness and my old age." And always he ended in the same way : "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. Jesu, mercy : Mary, pray. Thou God still seest me."

Then he made again the same holy sign : "And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all. Amen."

After which he rose from his knees and wound up his gold watch at about a quarter to eleven.

* * * * *

The prayers of those in old age, Sarah.

I want to talk to you about your prayers, if I may, the next time I come to see you. But I fear it will not be until the week after next.



O.H.M.S.

ST. MATTHEW 2, 11. *When they had opened their treasures they presented unto him . . . gold.*

I PRAY you not to think that it is the season of full moon or that I have suddenly become raving mad. I do realize that it is not the feast of the Epiphany, but the last Sunday in October.

This, as you know, is the Sunday which the Church keeps as the feast of Christ the King, the day on which she lays special emphasis on the royalty and sovereignty of Christ our Lord. To-day we are bidden to remember that the familiar Jesus of Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Calvary who is so well-known to us in his holy sacrament of the altar is King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Sovereign Ruler of heaven, purgatory, earth, and all their inhabitants, Emperor of you and me ; that one day he will return to this earth in majesty, power, and greatest glory ; that of his rule, dominion, and kingdom there shall be no end.

As I try to picture him so, my mind runs back to the day on which the first human beings owned him king, those three wise men who knelt before him in a poor little house at Bethlehem and gave him gold ; because that has always been the sign of sovereignty ("Gold a royal child proclaimeth"), because that was the costliest and most precious gift that they could make him. Thinking of them and their

king, I remember that in these present days the servants of the same king make him the same offering, present unto him gold.

For instance.

Some whom you and I are privileged to know are not only happy and content, but also count it the highest privilege, to abandon everything in the world that is dear to the heart of a woman—the love of a good man, the hope of children to call them by that sweetest of human names Mother, their own parents and homes, pleasant clothes, a little comfort in old age, independence and liberty, even their very names—in order that they may live (not stay for a few months until they are tired of it!) until they die in St. Saviour's Priory. For whom? For fairly dull folk like you and me? Yes, partly, thank God who alone knows what we should be like or what we would do without them. But that is not the chief reason for which they are where and what they are; and it is good for us to remember it. The Sisters are at our constant service, always at our beck and call, only because the king to whom they belong, His Majesty to whom they have given themselves, body and soul, is graciously pleased to lend them to us. They do not belong to us: they belong to Christ the King. They have presented unto him the gold of their whole lives and of all they have and hope to be: he has accepted those offerings and is using those generous and willing gifts in part for us lucky folk of Haggerston. The Sisters are not *our* servants; they are the servants of the king. That is the reason why they are so happy: you never see a miserable servant of that king, not a real servant.

There is too the Catholic priesthood. What a marvellous thing it is that never once throughout the nineteen centuries since a few years after men knelt in Bethlehem before the baby-king, despite all the world's jeers and sneers and worse, has the priesthood failed! Entirely normal, well-educated, and sane young men continue to be, not only happy and content, but also highly privileged in their estimation to be allowed to enter a profession in which (for those who have a proper sense of the priesthood) there will probably be no "prospects," in which they must always be at everybody's command and at the mercy of any tongue that cares to wag, for which for many years they will probably be paid less than omnibus-drivers and be despised for all their years by nearly half the world and ridiculed by most of the rest, and during which they may be required to

live and die in a comfortless barrack of a clergy-house. Of them many have offered the king their very best, their life's gold : perhaps health ; often wife and children ; sometimes love of parents ; frequently loss of friends. Those offerings too have been accepted, not by the world, but by the world's king : he does not hesitate to take them at their word and, in lonely mission-station, in unresponsive country-parish, in depressing slum, uses them up in the service of his people.

In many humble vicarages, gaunt clergy-houses, and lonely mission-stations, as well as in the world's monasteries and convents, are outposts of the eternal kingdom served by those who are "on his majesty's service."

But the king's servants who offer gold are by no manner of means confined to the ranks of the religious and the priesthood.

To make your confession and thus tell another human being—a priest you do not know or, what is harder, one you know well—secrets that no one could possibly discover, of which the very memory fills you with shame ; to leave a well-paid job, in days of unemployment like these, because you know that you are earning in a wrong way ; to keep yourself, year in and year out, pure and unspotted by the world despite great temptations at work, at home, and in your own mind ; to be known by all your friends and acquaintances, by *all* of them, as a practising Catholic ; to have the courage to make your first confession and present yourself for confirmation when you are past the forties, your husband does not approve, and your children are already communicants ; to break with a person of whom you are fond because you know that your religion and his or her company are incompatible and cannot agree ; to humble your pride and go *all* the way, not half of it, to make up a quarrel that was none of your seeking ; to be content and proud to be one of the king's "hidden servants"—say, a hospital-nurse who rarely receives thanks or appreciation, a daughter who gives her best years to a querulous parent, a mother who spends her all, including health, on a husband and children who accept it as their due ; to be unwell for years and let nobody suspect it ; to be bedridden year after year and remain brave and cheerful, smiling when any one is in the room, holding back the tears until you are alone with your crucifix, then offering your pains and weariness to him of the nailed and outstretched arms on behalf of other people ; to lay the light of your life in his or her grave and go gallantly on with life, with a grin on your face and a crack in your heart,—such, in the eyes of his majesty, are offerings of the finest gold ; stamped with the

hall mark of the king's own sign, self crossed out, the letter "i" with a line drawn through it, the cross.

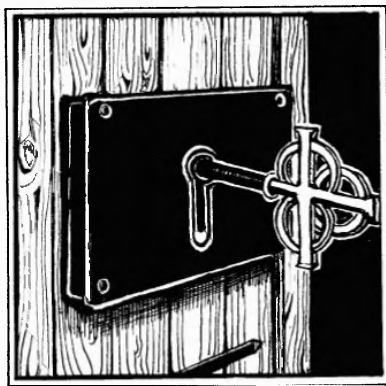
Truly there are millions whom the world considers insignificant and ordinary known by the king as among his finest and most loyal subjects; Christian men and women, Christian boys and girls, who kneel every day of their lives and present unto him who was once the babe of Bethlehem and is now the king of glory gifts of gold that cost them more than words can express and are often paid for by tears—for, as a great German¹ said, "Nothing great can be accomplished without passion."

* * * * *

It is only he, who once sat on Mary's knee and whose eyes perhaps twinkled with delight at the sight of the wise men's gold, who knows that the love and sacrifice and golden gifts made to him by the world's faithful laity are among the most precious jewels in his crown.

But I, who am so fortunate as to be the parish-priest of a few of them, know that, if at any time I should be so foolish as to begin to doubt the king, or so stupid as to give heed to the world's opinion that his kingdom is of no account and his subjects few and far between, I have only to go round the corner of the street and look at a red brick building that displays the cross standing upon the world, or sit in church to hear confessions, or say Mass and give communion, or visit certain houses not a hundred miles from the Whiston Street Gas-works, or think of a certain novice at East Grinstead, to be convinced that there are very many On His Majesty's Service, very many loyal subjects of Christ the King, still very many wise people of the east who in these days present unto him gold.

¹ Hegel.



THE ROOM AND THE KEY

ST. LUKE II, 1. *It came to pass that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray. He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father.*

IT was one of those November afternoons when East London looks its worst. It was beginning to rain when I opened the iron gates at the end of the church passage at a few minutes past six (a dilapidated mattress was propped against them: I do not know why it was there or whence it had come: I have long since ceased to wonder at things which happen at night in our street). The rain had continued throughout the morning: not a blustering and storming rain that excites you and makes you wish to walk for miles along wet country lanes under falling leaves and tossing trees; but a hopeless, sooty, dreary dribble of a rain that makes you think of cemeteries, weeping willows, wet feet, and colds in the head. Great Cambridge Street, The Cat Park, Dove Row, and Talavera Place were alike—grey, sodden, swimming in greasy mud. People who live on the other side of Charing Cross think that East London is a romantic and exciting place, full of life and colour and movement: you and I know better.

So again I went to see Sally Pomegranate. If and when I am depressed I always get out of the chill, gaunt clergy-house as quickly as I can and go and find either some children or one of the old ladies who live in the parish. The cubs or brownies in the hall: two or three small girls sitting on the stone seat in the church porch with their backs against the wall that is warmed by the chimney from the boilers, their dolls arranged on the red-tiled floor for a school-lesson: a fat

boy from one of the houses across the road, rising six but perched precariously on the spiked summit of one of the afore-mentioned gates singing "It won't be a stylish marriage": St. Michael's children in their guild-room with dolls' houses and "In and art the winder": Janetann and her cat, Joan and her father's gold-fish,—in the company of such I never fail to forget both weather and my stupid self. But the children were still at school; so, as I say, I went to see Mrs. Pomegranate.

Some weeks before she had asked me to help her about her private prayers. This afternoon I tried to do so.

* * * *

I read wise words the other day, written, I think, by Bishop Walter Carey: "Pray when you are young and strong and you will escape those temptations which label themselves guides to heaven and happiness but really lead to disillusionment and hell: pray in middle age and you will never be middle-aged in soul: pray in old age, and you will sing songs until the evening closes and you are swept into the brighter dawn." Certainly, Sarah, I will talk to you about your prayers: but you will forgive me if what I say is even more beside the point than usual, for I know very little about the difficulties old people find in this connection and nobody knows better than I—except God—both what poor things are my prayers and what good and powerful things yours are. That is the reason why I give you first the true and lovely words, "Pray in old age, and you will sing songs until the evening closes and you are swept into the brighter dawn."

* * * *

I take it, my dear, that you are quite clear as to what prayer is: that it is not necessarily asking, thanking, or saying any words. Personally I think that the best of its many definitions is "Lifting up myself to God"; I myself deliberately transferring all that constitutes myself from what is earthly, finite, and passing into the unchanging presence of God. To do this is not easy, at least for me: the mistake made by so many who wish to pray is that they think it is easy. Any one can "say prayers"; so can a parrot or a gramophone. But to pray, to "lift up self to God" is, to my mind, the hardest thing a Christian has to do.

Yet it is possible for every one of us. All sorts and conditions of people, circumstances, and things can and do cross my daily life, come into contact with me, affect me in one way or another—people who are unkind, cruel circumstances (like poverty, unemployment, noise), things that are hard (sorrow, pain, weariness of old age). But

there is, because of the way in which the good God has made me, in the innermost part of myself—like the keep in a castle, almost like a tabernacle on an altar—one small room into which nothing and nobody can enter, unless I give it leave. It is a room into which I can go whenever I like to make the effort to reach it—I repeat that it needs an effort—the door of which I can lock against the whole wide world. It is the room in which I can be alone with God. The key of its door is prayer.

There is no one on earth who cannot pray, if he or she really wishes to do so and will take the trouble. Praying has nothing to do with brains, long words, or clever minds: perhaps the best human prayers are made by children and the very old. Anybody can—provided that he or she is not in mortal sin—rise up from Haggerston bedroom, St. Augustine's church, crowded omnibus, noisy factory, sickbed, or steaming wash-tub and find God. People say, "I can't pray"; it is untrue. It may be true that they have wrong ideas of what prayer is, that they will not take the necessary trouble, that they refuse to go to confession (so that the threshold of the little room is choked with weeds and worse, when of course the door will not open): it may also be true that when they say, "I can't" what they mean is, "I won't." Every practising Christian *can* pray.

But that, my dear, you know as well as I; or better.

* * * * *

As regards what we say in the "speaking-part" of our prayer-time—thanksgivings, intercessions, petitions for ourselves, self-examination, acts of contrition, and the like—I am sure that the simpler we are the better.

You remember that a disciple who was in difficulties about his prayers asked our Lord to help him; the reply was, "When you pray, say, Our Father." In the Lord's Prayer are fifty-eight words; only eleven of them have more than one syllable. I wish that many of my friends who are troubled about their prayers would do what that disciple did, go to our Lord and ask him to teach him how to pray. I know from my own experience that if we will only get on to our knees, if possible before a tabernacle, and wait with open minds and still bodies, our Lord does teach us, and we find ourselves praying almost before we realise it. I believe that he says to us too, "When you pray, be simple, say Our Father." I think that many give up trying to pray because they do not know how to express themselves, and that others do so because they think that they ought to use prayers out of books and naturally grow tired of them. Children do not use dictionaries when they speak to their parents. Two monks

planted olive-trees in the monastery-garden : one tree grew, the other died. He whose tree failed asked the other, "I prayed God to send my tree rain, sunshine, frost : he did : but it died. What did you ask for?" The other answered, "I left it to God : only asked him to send what was best." The older I grow, the more confessions I hear, and the more I struggle with my own prayers, the surer I am that the best prayers are those made in our own simple, natural language, in which we just take to God the needs of others and ourselves and "leave it to God." I need not add that the best prayer is still our Lord's.

I remember an old priest telling me, as he lay dying, that his pain and weariness were so great that he had much difficulty with his prayers and that they had come to consist of the Lord's Prayer said once. He added that it often took him an hour to say, since his mind wandered so often that he had to keep on beginning again. I have no doubt that that one Paternoster, finally said slowly and carefully straight through, was of more value and greater power than an hour's worth of prayers written in books by other people.

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May I go on talking about prayer another day, Sarah? There are one or two more things I would like to say.

Goodbye, my dear. Put the key in the door to-night : and remember me when you are in the little room. I need all the prayers I can get. Bless you.



TOUT PASSE, TOUT LASSE

ISAIAH 46, 4. *Even to your old age I am he: even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made and I will bear: even I will carry and will deliver you.*

“YOU remember, Sarah, that old man whose evening prayers I described to you three weeks ago? As a matter of fact he is not at all old in spirit, although he has passed threescore years and ten; he is my father and, being a Cockney myself and proud of it, I often call him ‘my old man.’ He was talking to me a day or two ago about you and asked me to give you these verses, as he thought you might like them. I do not know who wrote them, though they are signed J.D. They are called *Growing Old*.

A little more tired at the close of day,
 A little less anxious to have our way,
 A little less anxious to scold and blame,
 A little more care for a brother's name.
 And so we are nearing the journey's end,
 Where time and eternity meet and blend.

A little less care for gain or gold,
 A little more zest for the days of old,
 A broader view and a saner mind,
 A little more love for all mankind.
 And so we are faring down the way
 That leads to the gates of a better day.

A little more love for the friends of youth,
 A little more zeal for established truth,
 A little more charity in our views,
 A little less thirst for the latest news.
 And so we are folding our tents away
 And passing in silence at close of day.

A little more leisure to sit and dream,
 A little more real the things unseen,
 A little nearer to those ahead,
 With visions of those long loved and dead.
 And so we are going where all must go
 To the place the living may never know.

A little more laughter, a few more tears,
 And we shall have told the increasing years,
 The book is closed and the prayers are said,
 And we are part of the countless dead.
 Thrice happy, then, if some soul can say
 "I live because he has passed my way."

"Now ain't that lovely?" sighed the old lady who, being a real East Londoner, has a passion for the melancholy in general and funerals in particular. "Will you thank your 'old man' for me? And speakin' o' your relations, I once knoo a pawnbroker o' the same name: an' my daughter who lives at Spitalfields has a friend in Ponder's End who's walkin' out with a feller named Wilson—nice young chap 'e is too, trainin' to be a hundertaker. I s'pose they ain't relatives o' yours?"

"Not that I know of," I answered: "but you never know. Mine is a common name: not rare and distinguished like yours." "Give over," she replied; "you are a *one*! Though us Pomeygranites are a bit proud o' ourselves. 'A rare and refreshin' fruit,' my old man used to say when 'e'd 'ad 'is fill o' 'ops an' some one asked 'im what 'is name meant. But you was a-goin' to tell me some more abart me prayers."

One of our chief difficulties in "lifting up self to God" is our bodies, which can hinder and hold us down if we are not careful. For example, if I kneel by my bedside and my hands are not folded together or holding a crucifix, my fingers are probably touching the counterpane or blanket or fiddling with a button on my "nightie": consequently I am thinking of them, since my fingers must convey to my brain the thoughts of what they touch. If I loll over my bedside, the odds are that I shall soon grow sleepy: I am less likely to do

so if I kneel upright or even say my prayers standing. When I hear Mass and the supreme prayer-moments come at the consecration, it will be surprising if I pray should my eyes be not closed or fixed upon my book of devotions : for probably I shall be thinking of Mrs. So-and-so's odd hat, somebody else's new dress, the fidgeting child, or even the priest at the altar—since they are in my line of vision and my eyes are bound to send to my mind photographs of what they see. As prayer is so difficult, we are wise and not fussy if, before we begin the adventure, we take care to put our bodies right so that they will not hinder us. A reverent body is an outward and visible sign of a prayerful soul.

But this does not mean that an old lady like you, Sarah, may not say your prayers when you are sitting in your armchair or even, if you are very tired, in bed. Our Lord still says, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden"; he knows all about weary bodies and failing hearts. One of the best praying-people in Haggerston has not left her bed for many years; she lives in Yorkton Street and is a working-woman like yourself.

And I should not be too worried about wandering thoughts in your prayer-time, my dear. Bodies and faculties will wear out and you are not so young as you were. If you find your old mind wandering off and thinking about this and that, just start again. Remember the priest I told you about last week and his Lord's Prayer. Our Father is a loving father : he knows and understands his children.

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But, as I have said, the best prayer often contains no words at all. It consists of "lifting up self to God" : kneeling or, if you are old or ill, sitting or lying so still and patient that gradually earthly sounds and sights dwindle and vanish : you forget your little room, the ticking clock, the church, the street-noises : you find God and know that you have found him : you and he are alone together in the room of your soul, with its door locked by your prayer-key. There is, I think, no human joy like that. As the French say, *Tout passe, tout lasse*, "Everything grows old and weary, everything passes"; but God remains, always the same, and he is yours; "Even to your old age I am he : even to hoar grey hairs will I carry you : I have made and I will bear : even I will carry and will deliver you." "Underneath are the everlasting arms" : you can almost feel them, bearing and carrying you.

If we who try to pray would use half our daily prayer-time in saying nothing at all, instead of spending the whole of it in talking,

we should be better Christians and consequently happier people. God has so much that he wishes to say to us : with the best intentions in the world, so many of us talk and talk and go on talking : the result is that, more often than not, he cannot "get a word in edgeways," for he is far too polite to interrupt.

In the same way, the best human intercessions are often wordless. They are made by men and women in great pain, on weary sickbeds, lying awake for long hours, sitting lonely in old age—the world's Christian sufferers. Moment by moment, hour by hour, day in and night out, they deliberately take their sufferings and offer them to him who was once nailed on behalf of this or that person, this church or that parish, this place or that country. None but God and angels know the power of such intercessions, which are truly made on crosses.

But, Sally my dear, you know far more about prayer than I could teach you or than I think I shall ever learn myself. I am sorry to have talked at such length and to have wearied you with such obvious platitudes, though I did warn you at the beginning.

St. Augustine's is only what it is because its people are praying people. I know that you and many others are always, not only lifting, but also holding many up to God. Sometimes in the early mornings, sometimes late at night, I can almost feel the prayers of those who are still on earth and of those who once worshipped in our dear church, surrounding and soaking it in an atmosphere that is not of this world ; and I know at least one St. Augustine's priest who would be even more useless than he is, if it were not for the prayers of people like you, old lady.

So all I would really say is, go on being what you are now, a good Christian whose prayers help a far greater number than you will ever know until you reach heaven.

Let nothing disturb thee, nothing surprise thee.

Everything passes.

God does not change.

Whoso holds fast to God shall want for nothing.

God alone sufficeth.¹

"*Tout passe, tout lasse* : change and decay in all around I see : even to your old age I am he : I have made and I will bear : God alone sufficeth." "Pray in old age ; and you will sing songs until the evening closes and you are swept into the brighter dawn." On that morning say a prayer for me, Sally.

¹ Written in her breviary by St. Teresa.



CONFITEOR

ST. LUKE 18, 13. *God be merciful to me a sinner.*

“**H**EXCUSE me askin’ you, father: when did you make your first confeshun?” “I was a lucky child, Sarah. I had Christian parents who sent me to one of the public schools where religion is taught as well as Latin and Greek; Woodard Schools, they are called. The one I went to is in Sussex, near the South Downs, nine miles north of Brighton. I was prepared for confirmation when I was fifteen by the school-chaplain, who explained the sacrament of penance to me and—wisely, as I think—left me to decide for myself whether I would make use of it. I knew what my mother and father wished me to do, without asking them; for they had made their confessions for many years and we children knew it. I knew also what the chaplain wanted me to do, as well as what my own conscience said about it. I can remember to this day the sunshine pouring in through the windows of the school chapel and the distant sounds of a football-match in the North Field as, for the first time in my life, I knelt by a priest, told him my sins and received God’s absolution. I can also remember as though it were yesterday the joy and sense of lightness of soul which filled me for days after.

Years later, when I too had become a priest and was allowed to hear confessions, an elderly lady was walking up the passage from Great Peter Street to the west door of St. Matthew’s Church, Westminster, when to her horror a small boy ran out of the church and turned a series of cart-wheels down the passage. When she told him that this was no fit and proper manner in which to leave the house of

God, he answered 'But, miss, I've just made my first confession : and I don't 'arf feel 'appy.' As I remember that afternoon in Hurst Chapel I know exactly how that boy felt. When did you make your first confession, Sarah?"

"Long afore you was born. It was to Father Edward Burrows—we weren't so 'igh Church in those days, we used to call 'im Mister Edward : though I don't know as it matters much, do it?" "Not a bit," I said ; "a rose by any other name . . ." "'Sright. But, like you, I remembers it now. I don't fink I've ever felt quite so 'appy as I did when I come art o' Saint Augustyne's arter me first confeshun : though I don't know wot Sister Alice would a' said if she'd caught me turnin' cart-wheels dahn the street. I wish you'd gi' me a bit of 'elp abaht me confeshuns, father. As you know I makes 'em regular : but they seems to me poor fings. Often I've 'ardly anyfink ter say, for I lives a quiet sort o' life and don't get the tempashuns I used ter. An' I never feel nowadays all 'appy an' joyful-like, as I used ter arter me absolushun. An' more often than not, I don't *feel* real sorry ; though I says I am. I'm a bit worried about 'em : gi' me some 'elp abaht me confeshuns in old age, father ; will yer?"

"I'll try, my dear."

I can quite understand that when your time for confession comes you find that you have nothing particular to confess. I do not mean that you are self-satisfied or that you have taken no pains with your self-examination ; but I mean that, although you know that your life has been—like that of every one of us—very far from what it ought to have been and from what you now wish it had been, you have in the past confessed and received absolution for every sin and you cannot now put your finger on any definite thing and say "this and this and this I have done or left undone since my last confession." For I know it is true that you live a quiet life and that the temptations of youth and middle age generally cease to trouble those who are old.

At such times what I should do if I were you, Sarah, would be to thank God with my whole heart. I do not believe it is impossible for old people like you who live in grace, frequently receive communion, and try to say their prayers to live without sin for weeks at a time : to disbelieve that would be, to my mind, to doubt the power of God and the grace of the sacraments. If your self-examination has shown you that you have nothing to confess, I should, as I say, thank God, renew your sorrow for sins that have been absolved and pray for grace

to persevere in the good way. Then I should simply say in my confession that I have nothing particular to mention, though I am trying to deepen my penitence and humility by kneeling once again in the confessional, for I am well aware that I am not at all the sort of person I might have been. Your actual words might be, perhaps : "Since my last confession I do not know of any sin that I have committed, for which I thank God. But I wish to confess again the many failures of my past life and to renew in particular my sorrow for such favourite sins as being impatient in my old age, letting my mind wander in my prayer-time and at communion, losing my temper, letting trivial matters get on my nerves, being jealous of younger people, allowing myself to feel lonely and out in the cold, becoming self-pitying and self-centred."

* * * *

But I think your real difficulty is that you do not now *feel* the old joy and thrill of absolution, that—more often than not—you do not now *feel* the sorrow and contrition which you used to experience. That is a source of trouble to many good Christians; indeed, I suppose, to nearly all of us who have been making our confessions for a number of years. The novelty has worn off; the thought of confessing no longer fills us with apprehension; most of us are such feeble Christians that we have to go on admitting the same failures and falls and have become almost accustomed to them; we have heard the words of absolution so often that they no longer seem almost too wonderful to be true. We make our confessions, say our penances and formal acts of thanksgiving, and go away with a real purpose to do better; but we are conscious of no deep emotion caused by our sins, no rapturous joy at their forgiveness. We do not *feel* sorry: and we think that we ought to.

Yet we need not allow this to trouble or distress us unduly. There is all the difference in the world between feeling sorry and being sorry: to *feel* sorrow is no necessary part of repentance or condition of absolution, though of course to *be* sorry is.

Feelings, sentiment, emotions, are too unreliable for any wise Christian to trust. If I have a cold in the head, am so weary that I can scarcely keep my eyes open, am so sad that I could cry my eyes out, the probability is that I shall feel no joy in my prayers; but this is no legitimate excuse for not saying them. Speaking personally, in ninety-nine communions out of a hundred I feel no smallest indication of our Lord's presence; but this is not to say that I am therefore to stay away from the altar. In regard to both communion and every

department of our religion God has never once said, "You simply must *feel* this." What he has often said and still says, is, "You simply must *do* this." When you and I stand before our Lord a few moments after our deaths I do not think we shall feel very comfortable if the only excuse that we can bring forward for lack of prayer or absence from the altar is that we "did not feel like it." I suppose that prayers said, communions made, and other religious duties faithfully and obediently performed on those many days when there was neither sentiment nor emotion to help us, when we quite certainly "did not feel like it," are of greater value in the opinion of God than those made on days when we felt pious and good and God seemed very near. When all is said, what matters is what God thinks of whatever it is that we are doing, not what we feel about it; just as it will not be what we felt, but what we did, that will decide matters when this short life is over.

This applies, of course, to our confessions. I have made my self-examination carefully and unhurriedly; I have prayed for contrition and a sense of sorrow; I am determined not to commit these sins again. I am kneeling in the confessional, saying to God through his priest, "I confess." I cannot do any more. I am being obedient. It is not my fault if I do not feel sorry. What matters is that I am, at this moment, being sorry. God does not say, "Feel this," but, "Do this"; well, I am doing it! The motto that is written under my family crest is *Facta non verba*, "Deeds not words": it applies to the matter we are talking about.

* * * * *

Do not worry too much about your confessions, old lady.

As I said to you about your prayers, go on making them as you have done these many years, simply and naturally. Do your best to remember everything that has been wrong or "second-best" since the last time, not forgetting the sins of omission. Make each confession as though you knew that it was your last: when that last one is being made, I expect that you and I will be able to do very little in our weakness and, perhaps, pain; how happy we shall be if there is little to do, if all has been done already, if there is nothing to trouble conscience, if we have left nothing to say at the last which we should not like to die without saying! Ask God to give you the gift of sorrow and, if it is his will, to allow you to feel that you have it: but do not be troubled if that is not his will. Go away from each absolution with the strong determination that, by the grace of God, you will never commit those sins again. Then leave the whole

matter to him : God knows that you have done your best, he wants no more than that and he loves you for it.

There was a wise and devout priest named Dr. Pusey. He said this prayer every day, "O my God, make me all that I might have been. Give me all the love I might have had, if I had never sinned." Say those words when you are preparing for confession and praying for sorrow : "Make me all that I might have been."

Good-night, my dear. Bless you.



LITTLE MAN'S GUEST

ST. LUKE 19, 3-5. *He sought to see Jesus and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. He ran before and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place he looked up and saw him; and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house.*

SARAH Pomegranate only made one communion in her house in Paradise Alley: it was her last. Throughout the winter I had repeatedly tried to persuade her to allow me to bring the blessed sacrament to her; but she had all the fine courage and refusal to admit defeat that are characteristic of East London mothers and "grannies." Wet or fine, fair or foggy, she insisted on struggling round to Mass in her beloved Saint Augustyne's: "I don't know fer 'ow much longer I'll be able to look at me church," she used to say: "an' I likes to be where I was when I was a child, where I was married, where me children was christened, and where I've spent so many 'appy howers. I likes to 'ear Mass at the altar wot used to be in our little church in Boston Street when me an' so many o' those whose names are writ up on the panels in the chapel o' the 'oly souls was boys and girls together an' Father Hervey an' Mother Kate looked arter us all." Every Sunday at 9.0 and every Wednesday at 9.30 I saw her, neat and tidy in her old-fashioned black coat and stringed bonnet; twice a week I gave her communion; after Mass she and other old ladies toddled round to the Priory for "a nice cup o' tea"; and as the winter passed she grew slowly more feeble and tired. I was not surprised when my night-bell rang in the early hours of a bitter morning

and the Sister shivering outside the gates said, "It's Mrs. Pomegranate, father. She is conscious, but going fast. She wants you to bring her the blessed sacrament."

I went into church, opened the tabernacle, put the Host into my silver pyx, placed the pyx in the small white silk bag that Mrs. Brinkley gave me at Christmas because of the communions I had taken to her every Thursday morning for many years, hung the bag round my neck and clasped it in my left hand, wrapped my long cloak round me and went out into the cold night. The Hackney Road was strangely empty; the three brass balls over the entrance to Paradise Alley creaked drearily in the wind; only a long lean London cat lurked in the draughty court and spat at me as I passed. It was strange to walk over the stepping-stone doormats in the familiar passage at this hour of night: I was vaguely conscious that *The Sinking of the Titanic*, *Queen Victoria*, and *The Stag At Bay* hung in their honoured places on the wall: the dark little staircase creaked as usual and I knew by heart where the zinc pail and broom were standing.

The well-known room was much as usual. Crucifix above the head of the old lady's feather-bed, with St. Anne's guild-medal hanging by its scarlet ribbon from one arm; framed enlargement of the features of the late Mr. P. on one wall, with bunches of little Pomegranates encircling it; over the wash-stand faded photographs of Mother Kate and Sister Florence; clean results of last Monday's wash on a line near the ceiling; rent-book, picture post-cards of Southend Pier and Buxted Church, clock, candlestick on the mantel-shelf; on the small dresser a few cups, plates, jars, tea-caddy illustrating the late Lord Kitchener; green and yellow aspidistra in the window.

But now old Sarah was propped up in bed, breathing with difficulty. The Sister knelt by her side, holding a crucifix before her eyes and saying over and over again, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." The bamboo table by the bedside was covered with a white cloth, on which stood a crucifix and two small lighted candles. On it I placed that which I had brought. The old lady turned her head; looked at what I was doing; smiled. I said, as I had said to her before: "The Master is come and calleth for thee." "Yes, father," she whispered, "I'm that glad." I gave her communion; said the commendatory prayers; blessed her; sat by her side and waited, holding her hand. It was as the first daylight struggled through the "lace" curtain across the window and past the weary aspidistra that she gave a small sigh and went to sleep. A few minutes before, I had again given her a blessing: she heard me and I saw her lips move: I stooped and heard her say part of the prayer I had taught her a few days before, "make me all that I might have been."

As I returned along the Hackney Road, now beginning to recover its daily din, I reflected that none knew better than I her confessor that yet another gallant East Londoner had been found ready in her wedding-garment when her king and master came and called for her. As I said Mass a few hours later and asked prayers for Sarah's soul—that she might soon be “made all that she might have been”—I gave thanks, by no means for the first time, for St. Augustine's Church and St. Saviour's Priory and what they had done and were doing for East Londoners. During the morning I recalled our last conversation of a few days before when by a coincidence—if there are such things as coincidences, of which I am doubtful—she had asked me to tell her what happened when a priest took communion to a person ill in bed.

As you know, I had said, the blessed sacrament is perpetually reserved—which means, kept—in the tabernacle in the church. When you receive communion at Mass you are given the Body and the Blood of Christ, the Host and that which is in the chalice, that which was a few moments before merely bread and that which was only wine. In the tabernacle only the first is reserved, only the Body of Christ, the Host: it is neither convenient nor seemly to reserve the Precious Blood for the obvious reason that the outward form of wine evaporates and in time grows stale. Consequently they who receive communion from the tabernacle only receive the Host; as the phrase goes, they make communion “in one kind.” But this does not mean that they have not made proper communions or have only, as it were, received “half-communions.” Our Lord is wholly and truly present in both “kinds” of the sacrament. As the old hymn, written more than seven hundred years ago, puts it:

When the sacrament is broken,
Doubt not in each severed token,
Hallowed by the word once spoken,
Resteth all the true content:
Nought the precious gift divideth,
Breaking but the sign betideth,
He himself the same abideth,
Nothing of his fullness spent.¹

(In passing, it is well to remember this should it happen that a priest at the altar handles the chalice incorrectly and accidentally fails to give you the Precious Blood.) You also know that the chief reason

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas.

for which the blessed sacrament is reserved is that communion may be available for the faithful in an emergency at any hour of the day or night ; and that the normal rule of fasting is not binding on those who are in danger of death.

When communion is to be given to one who is unable to leave the house and hear Mass, this is what happens. A table is made ready by the person's bed ; one of the good Sisters does this for our people, though of course it can be done by any one. The table should be covered with a clean white cloth and have on it crucifix, two lighted candles, corporal (the square piece of linen that has been blessed and is only used for the "Corpus Christi," "The Body of Christ"), a bowl of water and a small piece of linen called a purificator for the priest's use, flowers if you like, but nothing else. The priest arrives, wearing cotta and white stole : round his neck is hung, in a small white bag, a pyx—that is a silver or gold round box, rather like a watch with no face or works, used for carrying the Host. He places this on your table, hears your confession (the Sister having left the room), gives you absolution, says the prayer of humble access out of the Mass (you know, "We do not presume to come to thy table . . ."), gives you communion, says the collect of the feast of Corpus Christi, blesses you, and goes. As you made your preparation before he arrived, if you are well enough ; so you make your usual thanksgiving for communion directly he has gone, even before that delicious first cup of tea. That is all : it is quite simple : the things of God always are simple, like the people of God.

As I walk through Haggerston streets in early mornings taking our Lord to those who need him there is nearly always the same picture in my mind. It is of a morning rather more than nineteen hundred years ago : Jesus of Nazareth is to "pass that way" : hundreds are waiting for him : at the moment he is the hero of the hour, he has recently given sight to a man blind from birth. In the crowd is a man named Zacchaeus, who also wants to see him : but he is so small that he cannot see over the tall men in front. So he climbs a tree. "When Jesus came to the place he looked up and saw him ; and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste and come down ; for to-day I must abide at thy house." The little man's guest was the Son of God.

I, a dull and ordinary priest, am allowed to take Christ in his own sacrament out of the church, along the streets, through the crowds of East Londoners hurrying to work, to the little house of one who needs him. You, Sarah, or any one else you like ; a little old lady, a sick child, a dying priest or nun, a working-man who is a Christian—but, in the world's eyes, a person who is little of stature, unimportant,

and insignificant ; are permitted to act as hostess or host of the blessed Host, the Son of God. "To-day," he says, "I must abide at thy house." God is your guest.

So, you know, he likes to be. He still loves "little" people. He is glad when they ask him into their houses. But he will be more glad when he invites them into his home, the heaven in which are many mansions. So will they.