

always look as though they would stand the wear and tear of ages; but put them on a boy's feet and see what they will look like in a month's time! I am really afraid that Christian was deceived in this particular. Paul says nothing about the everlasting wear of which the shoes are capable; and the sisters of the Palace Beautiful seem to have said nothing about it. I fancy Christian jumped too hastily to this conclusion, misled by the excellent appearance and sturdy make of the boots before him. My experience is that the shoes do wear out. The most 'gracious, heavenly, and excellent spirit' must be kept in repair. I know of no virtue, however attractive, and of no grace, however beautiful, that will not wear thin unless it is constantly attended to. My good friend, Master Gurnall, for all his hundred and fifty pages does not touch upon this point; but I venture to advise my readers that they will be wise to accept Christian's so confident declaration with a certain amount of caution. The statement that 'these shoes will not wear out' savours rather too much of the spirit of advertisement; and we have learned from painful experience that the language of an advertisement is not always to be interpreted literally.

One other thing these boots of mine seem to say to me as they look mutely up at me from the

centre of the hearthrug. Have they no history, these shoes of mine? Whence came they? And at this point we suddenly invade the realm of tragedy. The voice of Abel's blood cried to God from the ground; and the voice of blood calls to me from my very boots. Was it a seal cruelly done to death upon a northern ice floe, or a kangaroo shot down in the very flush of life as it bounded through the Australian bush, or a kid looking up at its slaughterer with terrified, pitiful eyes? What was it that gave up the life so dear to it that I might be softly and comfortably shod? And so every step that I take is a step that has been made possible to me by the shedding of innocent blood. All the highways and byways that I tread have been sanctified by sacrifice. The very boots on the hearthrug are whispering something about redemption. And most certainly this is true of the shoes of which the apostle wrote, the shoes that the pilgrims saw at the Palace Beautiful, the shoes that trudge their weary way through Master Gurnall's hundred and fifty packed pages. These shoes could never have been placed at our disposal apart from the shedding of most sacred blood. My feet may be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; but, if so, it is only because the sacrifice unspeakable has already been made.

The Third Chapter of Daniel.

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It is astonishing to those who are testing for the first time the value of the process, how immensely the inspired Book of Daniel gains for the highest purposes of the preacher if he frankly accepts the (practically) unanimous verdict of scientific criticism as to its date and character. Internal evidence—strong, consistent, cumulative—fixes the date at 165 B.C. (within a year or two), and classifies the stories of the first six chapters as being (from a literary point of view) historical novels—founded upon fact, but fact very freely handled.

When one comes to think the matter out there is of course no sufficient reason why the Holy Spirit of inspiration should not have chosen the historical novel as a vehicle of revelation. It is with *character* and with *principles of action* that the

Divine Revelation is first of all concerned—and these are often just the subjects which are, in matters of this life, best handled in a really good historical novel. We know that the Holy Spirit 'spake by the prophets,' but we are only now learning that He spake by the prophets with a freedom which is all His own, and not under the parrot and pedantic limitations which we had wanted to prescribe to Him. It is the unexpected which happens in Scripture, as in ordinary life—and for the same underlying reason. Habitually we draw conclusions from far too narrow a range of past experience, and therefore our forecasts of the future are pretty sure to be wrong. Habitually we strive to apply the prosaic and doctrinaire standards of our modern and Western education to the

Truth of God—and are shocked to find it something very different from what we expected. But wisdom is bound to be justified of all her children.

Let us note some points in which this splendid chapter becomes more splendid still under the light of modern criticism.

I. KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

He is by far the most interesting, and the most conspicuous, personage in the book. As we think of the book as a whole, it is *he* who dominates it—not Darius the Mede—not the swift and puissant Alexander of Macedon—nor the dull resistless legions of Rome who have already at the battle of Magnesia in the year 200 B.C. overthrown the greatest power of all the East. This is so plainly stated in the second chapter as to be unmistakable. The image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dreams 'whose brightness was excellent, and the form thereof terrible,' portended the fourfold succession of world empires which were to follow one another across the stage of history. Of these the Babylonian, represented by Nebuchadnezzar, and embodied (so to speak) in him, was the golden crown, the front and flower of the whole. They who came after—however great—were inferior to him, as silver is inferior to gold, as brass is inferior to silver, as iron is inferior to brass. 'Thou art that head of gold,' cried Daniel to the great king Nebuchadnezzar. Now these would certainly be the words of flattery, of a somewhat false and fulsome flattery, if they had been historically the words of the prophet to the king of Babylon. In the cold light of history the Babylonian empire appears almost insignificant as compared with the Medo-Persian which succeeded it: still more so as compared with the really vast dominion of Alexander. It is not the rôle of God's prophets to flatter kings, and to feed their pride with falsities—least of all was it Daniel's. But in the thoughts and feelings of the later Jews the figure of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, loomed up vast and portentous, matchless for honour and glory. As they looked back through the years, the centuries, he was a far more impressive, more spectacular, figure than 'Darius,' or Alexander, or any other. There was about him a sombre magnificence; there was, for all his pride and cruelty and heathenism, a certain largeness of heart and greatness of mind; above all, there was a certain reserve of mystery,—

which put him far above the rest. He had fought a duel *à outrance* with the God of heaven, and had gone under; but even in his fall he was vastly more interesting—was, in fact, greater—than any king of Persia or of Greece. The picture of the great King Nebuchadnezzar, as drawn in the early chapters of Daniel, is wonderfully impressive, wonderfully useful for purposes of teaching—but we can recognize it as real and true only when we understand that this was how he looked in the eyes of the Jews centuries after he actually lived.

II. THE THREE WORTHIES OF CHAPTER III.

According to St. Paul (2 Tim 3¹⁶), the primary purpose of *any* inspired scripture lies in its application to our present circumstances, trials, conflicts, dangers as Christian people. If good people must accept this chapter as *history*, then they are immediately (and hopelessly) involved in endless 'questions' about psalteries and a hundred other things. In truth, the details are clearly legendary, reflecting the ideas and even the vocabulary of a much later date. Accept *that*, and the story is lifted out of the reach of controversy, and becomes at once one of the most splendid of all parables. In its own times (the second century B.C.) it was a 'midrash' of the highest value for the encouragement of those who had to face the Hellenic 'kultur' of Antioch; in our days, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is of no less, and of far more permanent, value for the encouragement of all who have to oppose the spirit of the age.

Look at it from this point of view.

It was an image of *gold* which the great king set up in the plain of Dura for all men to worship. It is an image of *gold* which the Prince of this world sets up for worship in every country where the servants of God are called upon to dwell. 'Ye cannot serve God *and* mammon,' says our Lord—and when we think about it, the saying is as surprisingly modern as His mention of banks, and of the interest which they pay on deposits (Lk 19²⁸), and other such things not generally supposed to have existed then. The truth is—as recognized in the New Testament—that the love of money had gone as deep, and had given rise to almost as many devices, then as it has now. The mere fact that our Lord familiarly used a proper name like 'mammon' as a synonym for material wealth is enough to prove that. Mammon is a god, and calls for service (*religious* service, wor-

ship), even as God does. Hence covetousness is spoken of in the Epistles as *idolatry*: it is not merely something like idolatry, or as bad as idolatry: it *is* idolatry (Col 3^b). If that image of gold in the plain of Dura had any name, it was for the Jews, as it is for us, 'Mammon.'

Observe the three persuasions, the three great and mighty influences, brought to bear on these men, to induce them to bow down. 1. The influence of *example*, 'all the peoples, the nations, the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image.' Everybody did it—at anyrate, everybody in the plain of Dura, as far as they could see. There must indeed have been myriads of Zoroastrians and others in the empire who would have scorned that idol—but they did not count because they were not there. So there are multitudes who regard not mammon to-day—but they are inconspicuous. What everybody (that you can see) does *must* be right. It is the hardest thing in the world to be singular. It is easier to face a hungry lion or a German machine-gun than the charge of taking a different line from your neighbours, your equals, your pals, in the little world to which you belong. Opinion and practice—opinion which seemed universal, practice which passed unquestioned—were brought to bear.

2. Where example *might* perhaps have failed, the influence of *art* reinforced it. 'The cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick' made perhaps what would be in *our* ears only an intolerable noise. But it represented the highest effort of musical art then known. It appealed to *them*, and when the great volume of sound waxed louder and more loud; when it took on that note of urgent appeal which we recognize so well in some concerted music,—then, if they had resisted before, they could resist no longer. They just *had* to fall down and worship like the rest—even if they despised the image in their inmost hearts.

Art is of necessity the ally and the handmaid of wealth. It cannot help being so because it is expensive, and because it is essentially indifferent to all distinctions of right and wrong. It seems to many a sort of treason to say so; but so it is in point of fact. Art reached its highest level in Europe precisely in that land and that age (Italy of the Renaissance) in which vice was most rampant and most unashamed. Art can be trained

to serve Christ, no doubt; but even so has to be jealously guarded, lest it overlay religion with selfishness and luxury.

3. If any still held out (and we know that a very few *did*) there was one more influence brought to bear. It was the crude and ugly one of terror. There was—out of sight, no doubt, and behind the scenes—a certain burning fiery furnace for such as *would* not fall down and worship. The furnace is still there. It does not burn so brightly now—at least in civilized countries—and it is kept still more out of sight. But the world still has its punishments for such as will not at any price serve mammon. It knows how to make them suffer, through poverty, through contempt, or even by penalties more direct. It is enough to say that the fear of these things is very real, and calls for the highest sort of courage to cast it out.

But if the trial be great, greater is the reward of such as overcome. 'Come forth, ye servants of the most high God, come forth and come hither.' So cried the great king in the inspired story, as he stood outside the fiery furnace and looked in. So he cried, not because he wanted to, but because he *had* to—because the God of heaven had been too much for him, and made him say these words, in spite of all his rage and fury. They are indeed, in the very truest sense, the words of the most high God Himself. So He cries to all His servants in all lands, in all ages, who have stood the test and endured the trial, and have been faithful to the end, 'Come forth, and come hither.' 'Come *forth*, ye good and faithful servants; forth of the fire that could not daunt you, and therefore could not harm you; forth of the heaviness which possessed you by reason of manifold temptations; forth of all the stress and strain, all the opposition and obloquy, all the discouragement and disaster, of your earthly trial. Come forth, and come hither; to me who am myself your exceeding great reward; to that eternal home prepared for you since the foundation of the world; to that supreme reward reserved on high for them that overcome.' 'Come forth, and come hither'—it is, in all the Christian scriptures, in all the experience of the saints, the voice of the Son of God, of Him that is unchangeably faithful and true, to all His servants everywhere who have suffered, and endured, and played the man, and done valiantly for faith and righteousness.