

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

I.

November Mists.

'There went up a mist from the earth.'—Gn 2^d.

If every person in church this morning were asked to write down the name of the month they disliked most, I feel sure that November would top the list. Can you boys and girls guess why?

It is because there is something about this month of November that makes a great many people feel out of sorts. You don't like it, I know—that is, unless you chance to have your birthday in it. The weather, you say, is neither one thing nor another. It is not sunny, very rarely frosty; it is, in fact, oftenest misty, and you hate mist. You feel that there is no world on a misty morning.

The other day I read a story of a North American Indian. He had never learnt to read or write; he was a splendid fellow all the same. One night he sat smoking in a cabin which belonged to an Englishman. 'That picture!' he said all of a sudden, pointing to a coloured print which had been torn from a magazine and stuck up on the wall. 'What does it mean?' (It was a picture of Robinson Crusoe.) 'The man leans his head on his hand,' he continued; 'he sits there always. He is unhappy. Why? I do not understand. That picture is all end. It has no beginning. Explain to me.'

The Indian had eyes like you, boys and girls—eyes that loved just to look round on the whole world, and take everything in. The world has been a great series of pictures to you. You remember the spring days, the flowers, your summer holidays, the wild fruit, the harvest, the time of the nuts. Now, in November you can't see anything. It is mist, mist everywhere.

Mist has a bad reputation all round, yet it does seem as if it sometimes tried to make up for things. It not only decorates the grass in the fields and by the hedgerows, but it hovers about the closes of the city, seeking out the spiders' webs and hanging little pearly drops upon them, so that some poor little girl cries, 'How lovely!'

Still you say you *cannot* like it. Now, let me tell you a secret about some grown-up people. They speak little about the matter: they think about it. 'There is no world to be seen on a misty day.' That was what I accused you of saying. Fathers and mothers, and lonely people who are tired or sick, often feel in misty weather that even *heaven* has disappeared. They cannot see it.

Now, there have been people who preached about mist. And they were not always ministers. Many of them were artists. One artist preacher said something like this: 'Every morning before sunrise the valley was filled with mist. What patience was wanted in order to see. The sun had not risen. I knew the grass in the field was green, but unless I gazed and gazed for a long time I could not even catch the wonderful twilight shade of green which had a peculiar beauty.' That artist preached patience, didn't he? Another, a teacher of painting, said to one of his pupils, 'Don't bring me pictures of gorgeous sunsets, or of any merely pretty things; the merest beginner can appreciate these. Go and try to see the beauty there may be in mist, and let me have your thoughts about it.'

And listen to a little sermon by a poet:

Man, do you measure life by its joys or its ills
Judge by the mist or the sunshine upon the hills?

Is it measureless mist or sunshine your heart
that fills?

The mist that will flee away with its mirk and
its chills—

Or the sunshine eternal of God's eternal hills.

Patience too. He thinks of the poor, sad, grown-up people who say to themselves that the mist hides heaven, and God. My boys and girls, many grown-up people do have patience, and with God's help you may learn to have it too. You will pray to Him about it, won't you?

Here is a little verse by George MacDonald:

But while sad thoughts together creep,

Like bees too cold to sting,

God's children, in their beds asleep,

Are dreaming of the spring.

That means patience and hope too.

II.

Children of the South Wind.

'The south wind blew softly.'—Ac 27¹³.

To-day we are going to have a talk about South-wind people. Now, of course, the South wind is the exact opposite of the North wind, and so, as you might expect, South-wind people are in many ways the exact opposite of North-wind people.

When we speak of a South wind, we generally think of a soft, gentle breeze. It brings to our mind summer, and flowers, and new-mown grass, just as the North wind recalls to us frost, and snow, and storms.

So the children of the South wind are the quiet, gentle, easy-going people, and they are to be found more among the girls than among the boys.

Now we could not get along without our South-wind people any more than we could without our North-wind friends. They are very soothing and they are very lovable, and it is among them that you must look for the peacemakers of the world.

But the South-wind people are not perfect any more than the North-wind people, and their defects are more likely to spoil their lives than are those of the children belonging to any other wind.

Now the great danger of the South-wind people lies in their softness. They are too yielding, too easily led. Things which would just create opposition in a North-wind person and warn him to don all his armour easily gain the victory over them. They don't like to say 'no'; they don't like to make a fuss; they don't like to be unpopular; and so they give in to temptation rather than make a stand.

I know that there are some gentle people who are much more determined and much more difficult to move than are the noisy people, but I am not thinking of them to-day. I am thinking of the easy-going people who allow themselves to drift rather than make an effort to resist.

And then the children of the South wind are a little, just a little, inclined to laziness. It is a way South winds have. You know that when the South wind begins to blow, a sleepy, lazy feeling comes over us. We want to close our books, and go out to the garden, or into the country to drink in the soft, sweet breezes.

And so South-wind people are rather self-indul-

gent, and fond of ease. They are a little wanting in backbone; they won't stick in; they are lacking in perseverance; and the result is, that people who have much less ability easily pass them in the race of life. Don't you think it is a pity they should be defeated just for the want of a little effort to rouse themselves? Don't you think it is a pity that all their splendid talent should be lost to the world?

For it is from among our South-wind people that we get so many of our poets and our painters. Just because of their dreaminess they can see things that those of us with ordinary, everyday eyes cannot see.

Oh, South-wind people, don't waste your lives! Don't throw away your gifts! If you only will, you can make the world more beautiful for us than the children of any other wind that blows; for you come from the land of sunshine, and you can cause the flowers to blossom, and the little birds to sing.

In the Book of Job we have a picture of the South wind at its worst. It is a picture of a sirocco—the terrible sultry wind which comes from the burning desert, and silences and stills everything before it. The sky is like brass; not a leaf stirs; the birds hide in the thickest shades, and the flocks and herds take shelter in caves. The hot, dry breath of the air seems to burn and scorch to the very bone. And that is a picture too of what South-wind people may become. They may fritter away their lives till they come to nothingness and desolation. All the joy, and beauty, and life may depart from them.

But in the Song of Songs there is another picture—a picture of the South wind blowing upon a garden and filling the air with the scent of sweet spices. And that is a picture of the South wind at its best.

Boys and girls of the South wind, Jesus can make your lives fragrant. It is He alone who can save you from the dangers of your natures. He can make you strong and brave, just as He can smooth away the rough corners of the North-wind people. Some of the South-wind people have become the noblest of men and women. And what He has done before, He can do again. He can turn your softness into firmness, your weakness into strength, your flaws into beauty. Boys and girls of the South wind, won't you give Him a chance?

III.

Just Weights.

'Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. A perfect and just weight shalt thou have; a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.'—Dt 25¹³⁻¹⁵.

The work of exploring the ancient cities of Palestine or Babylon is most interesting. There may be nothing to show where the city stood but a large mound or mounds. The houses have fallen and crumbled to dust. The walls have fallen also. Only the large stones of the foundations are left in their place, covered with the ruins, and gradually buried in the dust and sand blown over them, and covered in time with grass and vegetation, or standing in bare heaps. But when the explorer comes with his spade and tools, and carefully opens up this mound, what wonderful things he finds. He can trace the city of thousands of years ago, and tell you where the walls stood, and where the streets, what kind of houses the people had, what race they belonged to, and how they lived. He finds in the houses of these people, so long dead, broken crockery, and he will tell you how it was made, and where. He finds tools of bronze or iron, and he can tell from these the time at which the city flourished. He may dig deeper still, and find tools or weapons of stone which show that still farther back an older race lived on the same spot, and died away, and was succeeded by the people whose remains were found above theirs. There are traces of their altars and high places, and he will tell you what their religion was, and who were their gods. You may imagine yourself going through the street of the living town, and seeing the workmen at work. Here was the potter's workshop, where he made his clay pots and bowls. Here was the carpenter, and here the worker in stone, and here the goldsmith.

Now those who have excavated can tell you a curious thing about this goldsmith. He was found to have had two drawers full of little stone weights. When these were examined, one lot was found to be too light, the other lot was too heavy. Why? Because the heavy weights were used in buying that he might get more than he ought to get, and the light weights were used in selling, that he might

give less than he should give.¹ I wonder if people suspected him of such tricks, but could not prove it? One might think that as his false weights have lain hidden for thousands of years, his sin would never be found out, yet there it is. This kind of dishonesty is very old. It was in use when the Book of Deuteronomy was written. It was necessary to put this law into it: 'Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. A perfect and just weight shalt thou have; a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.'

In these days we have inspectors of weights and measures, whose business it is to see that they are all exactly the same as a fixed standard, and anybody who uses false weights may be punished, so that when we ask for a pound of tea or sugar, we can be sure that we shall always get the same quantity.

But it is not only the grocer who weighs things. We are all weighing and measuring things in one way or another. When we read some story of cruelty and wrong, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and indignation rises in our hearts, we are weighing the people who did those things and finding them bad weight. In this way we weigh everybody we have to do with, when we meet some one we admire and would like to copy, or when we dislike some one else and call him mean and selfish.

Now, since we cannot help weighing and judging people, it is of the greatest importance that our weights should be right. The grocer's weights are kept right by a certain standard fixed by the Government. Who can fix the standard of what is right and wrong? Only God. And no one but God can judge anybody quite justly, for He alone knows all their motives and reasons, and how sometimes when they meant good it seemed to turn out wrong. When we weigh actions and people and judge whether they are right or wrong, we must try our weights by the standard; that is, we must consider how God sees them, and we must be very careful, since we cannot see into the heart, lest we should call good what God calls bad, or bad what He calls good. We must have a perfect and just weight, or as near it as we can get, in our ignorance of people's real motives.

¹ R. A. S. Macalister, *A History of Civilization in Palestine*, 44.

The second thing to remember is that we must not have two sets of weights. What is wrong is wrong, whether in ourselves or in others. It is so very easy to see excuses for ourselves. Our faults never seem quite so bad as theirs. We 'did not mean it,' or it was 'only this' or 'only that.' We are apt to weigh their sins with one weight and our own with another. But that will not do. Nor will it do to weigh ourselves with them, and say, 'Well, I am not so bad as that girl anyhow.' God's standard weight is always the same, and the same for everybody. Nor must we have two sets of weights for the people we like, and the people we dislike. You will find in reading the newspapers that people on one side in politics will refuse to believe any wrong of the leaders of their party, while everybody on the opposite side is suspected of all kinds of dishonest motives, and wrong purposes. You will find people belonging to one church who cannot believe in the real goodness of people belonging to any other. That is not right either. Goodness is goodness, and you must admit it wherever you see it, even in those you don't like, and badness is badness in your dearest friend. If you shut your eyes to that, do you know what you are doing? You are spoiling your standard weight.

When weights have been long in use they are apt to get lighter from wear, and they must be tested from time to time. In the same way our standards of right and wrong are apt to get spoiled. They change so gradually that we are not conscious of it, until we suddenly find ourselves doing something which would once have seemed impossible. The boy who steals his master's money would once have been indignant if he had been suspected of it. He began by doing something which was not quite straight, a mere trifle it seemed, and then another and another, each a little further away from the perfect measure, and before he realized it he was a criminal. You know boys and girls who can't 'play the game,' who will cheat at marbles, or start before the signal in a race, or crib a translation, or copy a sum. These are not little things. The boy or girl who is not straight and true even in play is beginning life with a false standard which will grow worse and worse until it will allow them to do anything. You know children who will tell just as much of a story as will give a wrong impression, or who will change the truth a little in the telling. They will soon tell lies, and when they grow up no

one will be able to trust their word or their sincerity. You cannot with safety go even a little bit out of the path of truth and honesty.

Here are two things to remember then—a perfect weight, and only one weight, for yourself as well as everybody else.

Said the boy as he read, 'I too will be bold,
I will fight for the truth and its glory!'
He went to the playground, and soon had told
A very cowardly story!

Said the girl as she read, 'That was grand, I
declare!

What a true, what a lovely, sweet soul!'
In half-an-hour she went up the stair,
Looking as black as a coal!

'The mean little wretch, I wish I could fling
This book at his head!' said another;
Then he went and did the same ugly thing
To his own little trusting brother!

Alas for him who sees a thing grand
And does not fit himself to it!
But the meanest act, on sea or on land,
Is to find a fault, and then do it!¹

IV.

Eighteen addresses to children by the Rev. Robert Harvie, M.A., have been published by Mr. Allenson under the title of *The King's Uniform* (1s. net). We quote one of them:

'A1.'

'Strength and beauty.'—Ps 96⁸.

We are all interested just now in ships and shipping (besides the ships of our Navy), and one fact about these is instructive.

A large register is kept of all British and foreign ships, and in this book each ship is described in two ways.

The hull (*i.e.* its body or frame) is denoted by a letter. If it is in first-class condition, the letter is A. If it is not so good, some other letter is used.

The other things about a ship—its anchors and cables, its stores and furniture—are denoted by a number. If these are first rate, the number is 1.

¹ G. MacDonald, *Poetical Works*, ii. 181.

If they are inferior, it may be 2, or 3, or another number.

If, therefore, a ship is in the best condition—its hull perfect, and its supplies and fittings in excellent order—the ship is put in Class A1.

Now we have been speaking to-day about Christ. His character was perfect. It was not weakened by sinning, so His strength was the very greatest. His love was also perfect. His devotion to others was the highest. That is His beauty. We may therefore say of Jesus, with all reverence, that He alone, in all the world, is always put in Class A1.

Let me tell you here a story of the war. Two of our soldiers, badly wounded, lay beside a dying German. 'What would I not give for a drink,' said one Briton to the other. The German understood, for our word 'drink' is very like theirs—only they spell it with a 't.' The soldier who told the story said, 'The German kept saying "Here"—pointing to his side.' Our men thought he wanted lifting up, so after a while one of them managed to raise himself and give him a pull. Then he discovered that the man was lying on his water-bottle, and this he held to the dying man's lips. But the German refused it, saying, 'No, not me—I die—you drink.' He did die, and our men gave him a proper burial. They put up a sort of headstone, and they fastened to it a piece of paper on which was written the inscription 'A1.'

'Paper was scarce,' said the soldier, 'but we wanted to put up something.' These were brave men. If they had met a few hours before, they would have matched their strength against each other. But it is good for us to remember incidents like this, which prove that there is another side even to war—a side of it in which brave men of all nations rival each other in sympathy and courtesy and generosity.

Christ teaches us, both by His words and His example, to be brave and strong, though we are to use our strength only for the noblest ends.

He teaches us also to be gentle and kind and thoughtful for others. That is beauty of character. And that noblest strength and perfect beauty we see in Christ Himself, especially in the day of the Cross, when He gave Himself up to die for the sins of the whole world.

The soldiers' inscription over the grave in France means that the German's act was Christ-like. For that he stands, with Christ, in Class A1.

The Little Dark Church.

Mr. George Hare Leonard, Professor of Modern History in the University of Bristol, has published through the Student Christian Movement (93 Chancery Lane, W.C.) some papers which he read to students of his University last session, under the title of *They Also Serve* (8d. net). They have their motive in the War, but they are not the conventional effort at vindication or of consolation, now both so familiar. There is throughout a sense of things that must be conserved, though it may be hard to hold them in the rending of ties and the sundering of fellowships. But we shall best explain the book by quoting its sketch of the Little Dark Church.

'There is a little dark church in Munich. I do not know its name—perhaps I never knew it. It is not one of the sights of the city; I do not know that it finds any place in the little red books that the tourists carry with them as they go their conscientious rounds. It is in one of the big streets, but I am not sure that it shows any façade at all to the passer-by. You just turn aside out of the sunshine, and in at a door; and, if I remember rightly, down a step or two, and you are in the little, dark, nameless church, out of the noise of the city, out of the glare of the day.

'And there I found myself one August morning, standing awkwardly, as we English Protestants do in foreign churches, and yet feeling the peace and the healing of the little dark sanctuary, hidden away behind the houses and shops of the noisy street outside. But to-day all memories of what it was like—of nave, and aisle, and pillar, and altar, and roof—have disappeared. For me it is the little, unnamed, dark church, where for a moment on that happy, restless holiday there came a pause, and a hush, and an episode—the memory of which stirs and moves me still.

'After all, what is it of which I make so much? Only this—the swinging open of the door, letting in, for a moment, the light of the street; and out of the busy world, following us into the darkness, a boy! Only this—a slip of a lad of fifteen or sixteen in the little dark church, with a tradesman's basket on his arm! But there, in that homely place, he fell on his knees, with his basket on the floor at his side; and there, in the remembered presence of God—I felt that!—he said his

prayers! I thought of the errand boys I knew in England—well, we have other ways here, I know—and then I thought of myself, as I stood there in the shadow, and I knew, suddenly, that the little dark church was indeed the house of God, the gate of heaven.

‘In the old Pinacothek, in the little room where the early Flemish pictures hang, my heart had stretched back through the centuries to the old painter, with his love for the little ferns, and the flowers in the crannied wall, and the humblest of God’s creatures, that “stilly seizeth on the herb appointed for her food”; and now, in the little dark church, the barriers of country and religion and class, and all the pitiful things that keep men apart, were swept away, and I knew that our spirits touched—his and mine. “Behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven,” and we two waited together by the lowest of the stairs!

‘They were not long prayers that he said. Soon he rose from his knees and was gone, with his basket on his arm, swinging open the door that let in the light from the sunny street, and in a moment I, too, was once more out of the little dark church, moving along the busy ways, amongst all the wonderful sights and sounds of Munich on that sunny summer day. I never saw him again; I shall never see him again. I do not know his name, I cannot even remember what he was like—indeed, I hardly saw his face—but there before me still is the kneeling figure of a working lad lost in prayer, with the tradesman’s basket by his side—a vision of a German boy in a little humble church, far away, waiting in the darkness and the stillness upon God!

‘That is all my story, or that would be all my story, only to-day, with the world at war, I ask myself what has become of that boy whom I saw so many years ago in Munich at his prayers in the little dark church. Long since he became a man, I suppose, and now, if he lives, he must be fighting, I imagine, in one of the armies of the enemy, and it is our business, if we can, to shoot him down.

‘That is the tragedy of war. And as I think of him, I think, too, of the forty thousand German students in the trenches all bidden, as some of you have been reading, to be humble-minded and “to free themselves from hatred.” Perhaps you remember the very phrases about “splendid William Booth,” and Florence Nightingale, “the

saint, with her conquering love of humanity,” which sprang from the “highest English womanly kultur”; and Arnold Toynbee, Ruskin and Carlyle, “souls in whom the greatness and goodness of England were incorporate.” You remember how these students were urged to think of the beaten foe in France, of “souls and families cast down”; bidden to put themselves “in the place of these people in whose country is the enemy, who have suffered, and been sacrificed,” as they think, “in vain.”

‘We have heard so much of the flood of hate that it is well for us to remember that there is another current running amongst the men at the front who come from the universities of Germany. “It may be our duty to fight, it is never our duty to hate.” “Hatred disorganizes, love disciplines.” “Purification from hate is often easier on the field than at home;” but that there must be this purification, those who write for the students are clear. These are the messages sent to the trenches; and while men there are taught to recall “the better England,” the great nation with its “noble traditions” that can never die, our thoughts stretch forth—not without love even now—to the better Germany we have known—and know.

‘For some of these students were our own familiar friends. “We took sweet counsel together, and walked into the house of God in company.” Between us a cloud has come—grave “misunderstandings,” and in these late days of ordered outrage the division has gone deep indeed. But it is for us to remember always that the students and the general mass of men in Germany do not know—sometimes we wonder whether they will ever know—how they have been led astray and deceived by the leaders in whom they put so blind a trust, and whom they have been schooled so methodically to obey.

‘These men, so near to us, give their lives willingly for Germany, as we give ours for England, and if we fight well—we English and Germans—as in this strange tangle in which we are involved, we believe we must—love, as we have learnt it in the school of Christ—may falter, but can never fail. “Let death seize upon them!”—so the old savage words stand in the primitive psalm—but the curse that follows is wholly alien to our minds as we think of the awful duty that is ours. We shoot them down if we can, because, as we believe, there is no other way. And they—these students, whose

hearts we know, whose aspirations and whose highest hopes are the same as ours—shoot us down, taught “to kill from love of country, not from hatred of the foe.”

“Taught to *kill!*” I get the words down—not easily—but I want them for myself in black and white. I must see clearly what it all means—this “killing” and this “shooting down.” I cannot play with words and phrases now . . . this butchery! . . . this killing and this shooting down! I must get for myself this vision of the “great Ocean of Darkness and Death.”

‘Words come back to me to-day, words used by one of our poets here when he was left face to face with the *ordinary* mysteries of life and death—the passionate cry of a disquieted soul:

“If this is as it ought to be,
My God, I leave it unto Thee!”

It is said, I know, by some thinkers at home and abroad that this welter of blood and death does indeed belong to the scheme of the universe. “God will see to it,” said Treitschke, “that war always recurs as a drastic medicine for the human race.” God will see to it that from time to time men go out to kill and shoot one another down! . . . I cannot recognize their God. I believe in the Father of all men, and in the “Ocean of Light and Love,” which is greater than the Ocean of Darkness and Death, and looking into the darkness I grow at last content to leave it all with One in whom is no darkness at all.

‘But God, in His turn, leaves it again with us. It is for us, if we know His will, to work out the salvation of the world, so labouring—and so living—that the nations shall not learn war any more.

‘Meanwhile, let us remember, there are worse things than blood and death. For us still, I believe, though the tide may run low, it is a spiritual struggle; and the life of the body is as nothing to the life of the soul. In the fine letter M. Sabatier wrote to the President of the International Society of Franciscan Studies at Assisi, he finds his country (*la France actuelle*) fulfilling her ideal and her destiny. War now is her *vocation*. “Et si elle doit mourir à la tâche, qu’importe, si elle a fait *son œuvre?*” And many in England

have heard the call, and if they die, can it matter so much if their work is done?

‘Our enemies, too, have their ideals, ideals—some of them—deadly, we believe, to the interests of all the world; but for the mass of men in Germany, mistaught, misled, and daily misinformed, it is a war in which they are ready to lay down their lives for the dear love of the Fatherland, which inspires them every one, and many certainly believe in a “world-mission” which we ought at least to try to *understand*. “Could we pray for victory,” they ask, “if it would bring ruin to other nations? . . . We give our lives for Germany in the certainty that the day of victory will be the day of salvation for humanity.” “A world-war at the time of a world-mission will leave behind a *world-task*. It is possible for a nation to be ruined by success. Our future and our effect on the world depend on the spirit in which you return, and on what we have become meanwhile in God’s school.” These are the words of hope and warning—read over and over again, we must believe, by many in the trenches who contend for a high if wholly mistaken ideal.

‘The men of the German universities, like ourselves, are in “God’s school.” We must fight as things are—let us see it clearly!—and shoot one another down; but I believe we students of the old friendship in some deep sense will understand one another through all the misunderstanding because of the things we have seen and heard together, and our hands have handled of the word of life; and putting away all wrath, and malice, and evil-speaking, fight, if it must be, and work, and *wait*, for the peace and healing of the new day that is, by God’s grace, to dawn not only on a new Germany, but on a new England, a new France, a new Europe, and a new world.

‘Thinking of the German students I have known here in England in the old days, when we came very near to one another, I have wandered in thought far away from the little dark church. But once again I see the doors swing open, and out of the sunny streets comes a boy with a tradesman’s basket on his arm. And once again I join him in his prayers.’