

evidence is there that God has made a revelation of Himself to man, and that that self-revelation constitutes religion? In regard to Christianity Mr. TEMPLE is very emphatic. In particular, he says, Christianity is either sheer illusion or else it is the self-revelation of God. What right has he to say that? What evidence does he offer?

The evidence that he offers is by no means great in amount. Nor, with the exception of one emphatic fact, is it very arresting. The truth is, Mr. TEMPLE makes no attempt to make it arresting. He seems to think that it is quite possible to have too much evidence. 'If evidence were complete and cogent,' he says, 'faith would become dependent upon intellectual proof and intellectual apprehension of the proof. It would thus lose a great deal of its spiritual quality and value.'

Too many items of evidence are, in any case,

unnecessary. For there is one undeniable fact, and it is sufficient. It is the fact of love.

Whatever may be true of the love of man for man, it is certainly true of the love of man for God, that man never loves God until God first loves man. 'We love,' says St. John, 'because he first loved us.' 'We cannot will to love God if we do not love Him; and if we do, there is no need to will, except for a deepening of the love. The issue lies with Him, not with us. At His own time He will call out from our hearts the response to His own love by the full manifestation of it in its irresistible power. So far as we have felt it, we prepare ourselves for a fuller response; so far as we trust those who tell us of it, we prepare ourselves to respond when the time shall come. But in the end the work is His. The work is His; yet we are not abolished or absorbed. It is our hearts that love, but it is His love that draws our hearts to Him. "The love of Christ constraineth us." "We love, because He first loved us."'

The Meanings and Teachings of the Present Visitation.

BY THE REV. H. J. WOTHERSPOON, M.A., D.D., EDINBURGH.

THERE has been criticism of the word *Visitation* as used in the deliverance of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in appointing a special Commission of the Church upon the moral and spiritual issues of the war, as though it implied some peculiar bitterness in the Divine attitude to those involved in present dealings. But the word is really perfectly neutral. In the Old Testament God may be invoked to visit the heathen and their iniquity (Ps 59⁵), or to visit His vine, Israel, and to cause His face to shine upon it (Ps 80¹⁴). In the New Testament the day of Israel's visitation, which it did not know, is the day of the Son of Man and of His offered salvation.

I.

The General Assembly speaks of this which has come upon the world as a visitation—and the

word implies *God*. We believe in a moral universe, in which things do not happen without purpose; we believe in a rational universe, in which things do not happen without meaning; we believe in a spiritual universe, in which man is always face to face with God's justice and God's love. There is nothing without God; the most impious of all scepticisms is that which says, *The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil*. There is a visitation; this catastrophe has roots in the past; it has a history; and Heaven has purposes through it. The scene of its evolution has been the human heart, and the history of it is a history of human alternatives and choices—of human hesitations and determinations—of human beliefs and disbeliefs. Therefore God is everywhere in this history, for God is in contact with the human heart in every determination

and at every decision. He gives grace to resist evil—He enables to the good will: or His Spirit is grieved and no longer pleads: or His Spirit is taken away, and man is allowed to rush to his ruin. *Who shall persuade Ahab that he may go up to Ramoth-Gilead and fall? And there came forth a spirit, and said, I will persuade him . . . I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.* There is perhaps in this drama also of to-day a moment of which it may again be said, *and God hardened the heart of a monarch so that he would not*; and perhaps a moment of vast grace and pity when He forgave our people many provocations and granted us to dare imminent destruction in order to stand or fall for the thing that is right. God was in all that—because God is busy at the heart of man, and only His grace at any time saves us from self-destruction. Let us then begin from this: there is a Divine visitation, and it has meanings and teachings.

Among these we may distinguish meanings as to the past, the Divine criticism of the ways which have brought our civilization to this bankruptcy; and meanings as to the future, the Divine call henceforth to seek the Kingdom of Heaven and its justice. Our friends across the Border seem right in having chosen for their National Mission two headings—of Repentance and of Hope. We have first to understand, if we can, the past; for if we can see there the roots of present disaster, we will know where and how to seek the better future. As men who have lost the way stop and consider how they have come and where they left the path, in order that they may find and return to it, so must we do.

We must try to take wide views and long views. This cataclysm of Western civilization did not take place because of Britain or for the sake of Britain. We are not at war by ourselves, nor did war begin from us. The focus of the tornado is not within our frontier. We imagine ourselves as at the centre of the universe and think of the world as something that revolves round our homes. We talk of God as if He regulates His providence by our conduct and for our interest; it is not Germany alone which postulates a tribal God. Whereas God is the God of the whole earth, and Christ died for mankind. There are men beyond the mountains, and nations beyond the narrow seas, for whom also God has a care. For a world war we must seek world causes.

And again, we think of ourselves who happen to be alive to-day, as if even our own history began with this present generation or was to end with it. We forget our fathers, and that God *visits* the sins of the fathers upon the children, and also that He loves the children for the fathers' sakes. Or we take still shorter views and persist in thinking mainly of where we British stood in August two years ago, as if in that consisted on its moral side the whole question. So we speak of 'our good conscience in this war'—your conscience and mine, that is, in August 1914:—when God is visiting the world of men and reckoning with it for the outcome of a cycle of generations. We have a good conscience as to our position in that momentary conjunction out of which the Great War blazed—and thank God for that; but now and for the true meanings and teachings of the event our good conscience has become a snare to us; on the strength of it we maintain a foolish self-righteousness and ask of what we have to repent.

We British after all are but part of a larger whole, sharing that humanity in which God was incarnated; we are but part of Christendom, that family of evangelized nations which once was conscious of its solidarity under the blessed sceptre of the Christ; we are but part of that Europe in which it has seemed for so long that the world's hope was centred. If we are to understand the meanings of the war as a Divine visitation, we must try to forget our own importance to ourselves, and we must ask what may be God's meaning in it for mankind, for Europe, for Christendom.

Further we, on whom the ends of the world are come, are only the last to live of a series of generations—we summarize a long past; and Heaven has a long memory; it forgets nothing; and there is much in our national past which we would fain forget and would fain have forgotten by others and by the Judge of nations; but now it rises from its grave and meets us. The exactness and faithfulness of retributions which have appeared in these last two years is enough to convince an atheist. I suggest that in seeking the meanings of this visitation, we should not be content to remember only the last decade or thereby, nor be content to talk of our good conscience in the momentary crisis of August 1914. The era draws to an end, and Heaven deals with the resultant, not of a year or two bygone, nor of

this generation only which happens just now to be alive and is required to answer—but with the resultant of that era which in us and in our contemporaries expresses itself thus, as we see the world to-day. *In whatsoever things I find you, in them will I judge you.*

For there are days of judgment—days when the harvest of the earth is ripe and the sickle is thrust in: days of reckoning—days of the Lord, when He comes suddenly, and there is weeping and gnashing of teeth: one such supreme day at the last perhaps, but meanwhile from time to time, as epoch after epoch is accomplished, many such days,¹ and such days as this. Then there is judgment; not yet on the souls of men—Christ still says, *I judge no man*; Christ still intercedes for men. But certainly, judgment upon the facts. Always here in our present is the outcome of our past; here is the end of our ways; now God lets us see what we have been making of our world. Because the present as an outcome of the past is always in strict moral connexion with the past. Nothing happens but what, if things pursue their natural course, was bound to happen. We have reached the logical conclusion of the ways in which our civilization has been developing—we have reached a day of judgment and are brought to God's bar—we and the rest. We for our part, as we find ourselves there, may plead somewhat; and the Judge, it may be thought, has allowed our plea. We may plead that we have judged ourselves and therefore should not be judged; and it is, in part at least, true—our British habit of severity in self-criticism may now have its value before Heaven. We may plead repentances; late repentances some of them, but let us thank God that they are in evidence for us. We may plead amendments of our way. We may even plead that, at least as a leaven leavening the lump, the spirit of the Kingdom is deeply wrought into our life, so that we cannot, if we would, hate, and do not revenge, and do readily forgive. We can plead that, if not in everything and, alas! not as between man and man (for that is 'business'), yet at least in the wider international relations, we have loved righteousness and have hated iniquity—that at least of recent times and at least as a public power we have tried to be just and

¹ This was written before I had read Mr. MacLennan's article in a recent review, and notwithstanding the coincidence of language, I let it stand.

to do good; and we may plead (it is a valuable commendation) that for these things our fellow-men have thought kindly of us and in our day of need have wished us well. We had those pleas, and Heaven has admitted them. Have we not obtained mercy? have we not been allowed to save our soul alive? are we not permitted to suffer for faith and honour?

Nevertheless it is for us also a day of judgment. For it is our age and our world, its system and its standards, which are judged; and we are of an age and of its system; we have shared in the drift of the world away from God; we have shared in its pursuit of false aims. We have not been foremost in the march towards the outer darkness; our instinct has been for the light; we have followed into the shadows with misgiving and hesitation, with pause and spasmodic return. But we followed. As an empire among empires, as a nation among existing nations, *measuring ourselves* (as the Apostle says) *by ourselves and comparing ourselves among ourselves*, we have whereof to boast; *but not before God*. On the whole view, our British culture may be thought the best thing of the sort that exists to embody hope for the earth—nevertheless, by the rule of the Kingdom of Heaven, it is a poor and guilty thing. Yet for what it is, we have found mercy. When the awful challenge of God arrested the world's march and separated the nations, right hand and left, as a shepherd divides sheep and goats, we were chosen and not rejected; we received grace to draw back from the dreary procession and to range ourselves with the armies of God. For we also had been in the way with the rest; it is the mercy of God—it is the grace of God that has saved us, if we are to be saved: God, and not we ourselves.

If, therefore, we ask of the meanings of this visitation, we may think that we are met first by a meaning as to our whole Western system of life—our 'Christian civilization' and its degree of truth to the Divine thought for us. God may mean that the world cannot be managed as we have been managing the world; that the way of Christ is the only way by which men can dwell together upon the face of the earth; and that now, when as never before, distance being abolished and men close packed, it has become a question of *dwelling together*, this need of adopting the way of Christ in all relations has become urgent. Our material

progress has outrun our spiritual progress, and has broken down—because it has not been true to the truth; Christ being the Truth, and therefore the only Way and the only Life.

II.

If, however, we venture on more detailed analysis, the Divine meaning may be very differently read—say, for Germany; and say, for ourselves. For the alliance of Central Europe, the visitation may mean that wrath of God which is manifested when mercy finds (in the immediate sense) no remedy; it may mean the abandonment of the nations concerned, to be filled with their own devices; it may mean permission to them to show the world what evil is, when evil is free to be itself; it may mean that God will allow the world to have a demonstration of the nature of its own principles of action—of the realization of its own ideals when carried to their logical conclusion. Here is the end, when Christ's bands are broken and His cords are cast off.

For us and for those whom God has given to stand with us, it may mean the opposite—it may mean Election: *I have loved thee, saith the Lord.* It may mean God's severity to that which He loves. It may mean that God will have us see our sins and be saved from them—that God will reveal to us the Cross, as Christ held it before the sons of Zebedee, and asked them, *Are ye able?* and that to us also power is given to answer, *We are able.* The answer is one which has been already given in our name by many of ours; and we who remain are of the same blood with those who have fallen in Flanders or at Gallipoli; it may be that in the more difficult battlefields at home and in the coming peace we also may have grace given us to meet our Lord's question as gallantly. James fell by the sword—John lived for the 'white martyrdom' of service; both drank of Christ's Cup and both were baptized with Christ's Baptism. Even so our lads have died—and we live to save our country on its own beloved soil. God means us to save it. This may be the Divine intention for us by the war; 'its significance' at all events must be very different for those who suffer because they oppose God, and for those who suffer for righteousness' sake. We may be enduring chastisement as of sons, yet be glorious as fighting in the cause of God.

We may dare to see ourselves thus, as God's

instruments, exalted and enriched in our suffering and earning great rewards in the fruit of it; yet this very thing may cast us down lowly before God in the sense of a terrible unworthiness to be His instrument—we sinners to judge and smite our fellow-sinners. 'There but for the grace of God goes John Newton': we have admired what Germany was—we have been its docile discipleship; and but for the mercy of God, there go we. And we may feel the awful necessity to purge ourselves, because God has laid on us the pitiful office of executing judgment.

Or, again, we may see in our own case the tremendous problem which meets us in so many directions—not only the problem of Election, but also that of the consequences of being elected. Let it be that in truth our British race has qualities and ways which fit it as no other seems fitted, to build on earth's fields a kingdom in some measure symbolic of the Kingdom of Heaven—a kingdom of liberty and justice, brotherhood and peace—then we bring upon ourselves the word of Election, *You only have I known of all the families of the earth* (or perhaps, you as none other): *therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities.* In that case there is the tremendous question—for us tremendous—of our responsibilities as a world power, and of our use of them. In that case there is the still nearer question of our national and social conditions: we may then be the servant who knew his Lord's will and did not do it; and what if we be *beaten with many stripes?*

It may also be borne in upon us that in this narrower relation we may have to find something of God's meaning in relation to our lagging behind His grace and our opportunity. For the time, we should be in matters of social well-being the world's teachers—yet in much we have failed even to learn lessons which neighbouring nations have to teach us. It is not that we have not advanced—it is not that this generation is not in ways better than recent generations; but it is perhaps that we hesitate and linger and will not do the things that we know, and that among the signs of the times we may read this message, *If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.* The war has let us see God's finger laid upon our unhealed sores one by one; on our slavery to liquor and its system—we, a nation in pawn to a trade; on the white slave traffic; on our class divisions, and our incapacity so much as to understand,

one class another; and on our worship of money—God has made us burn our money before Him five million a day, as the idol furniture was burned before the Apostle at Ephesus; on the mad partizanship of our politics; on the empty cradle and its hideous explanation; on the unsocial nature of our society and its bitterness of spirit—one remembers Pope's line, 'And each but hates his neighbour as himself.' The war has shown us our profound need of a Christian Reformation.

But simultaneously it has demonstrated the enormous spiritual resources which exist among us to accomplish such a reformation: the same heroism, the same sacrifice, which for the war have flashed out like a sword suddenly drawn in sunlight—could they not have been evoked sooner to win our country from domestic shame? *We are able*; but we have been unready, egotistic, faithless, slothful, afraid. And Heaven will not bear it, because Heaven has loved us; we must arise and follow Christ.

And there is the question of the meaning of the visitation for the Church. The present writer does not venture to say more of this than to indicate that that question also exists. Looking abroad upon our islands one might possibly be driven to ask what Church there is. One sees a system for

the provision of Christian ordinances to those who desire them. One sees a system which 'represents a phase of the national life'—a phase, that is, of the world. One sees something which is so closely identified with the natural society that, as Canon Scott-Holland has said, there is difficulty in assigning to it any independent responsibility. It has been defined as 'the nation in its spiritual aspect'—scarcely a satisfactory description of the *Civitas Dei*. No doubt the Church is more to many of its members, and in the knowledge of God is much more than any of these things. But we are speaking of Divine meanings as to our corporate life: what does the world know of the Church as a social witness, a corporate conscience? Where do we see that which Christ has *founded upon a rock*? Does the Church even make clear to the world which in its own judgment is the rock and which is sand?

The meaning of the visitation for us who are 'put in trust of the Gospel'? No doubt that question also lies in our way: and who is to answer it? One can feel sure of at least one thing, that it is vain for men to say to others, *Go to—repent*. Each must say, *I repent*. *We have gone astray like sheep that are lost: O God, seek Thy servants: for we do not forget Thy commandments.*

Proverbs of Oriental Wisdom.

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IN Syria and Egypt there are numerous proverbial sayings current among the people. Various causes contribute to their popularity and influence. Their name in Arabic is *Amthâl*, 'similitudes,' and much of their arresting charm arises from this discovered resemblance between external nature and inward experience. They have the dignity of antiquity, a new proverb savouring of impertinence. The form is often of such brevity as to give to those who understand all that is implied a place among the enlightened. The proverb has not unfrequently a touch of hyperbole, which, however, does not affect it as a statement of truth, to the Oriental mind. Its literary grace and balance of sound give it an oracular value and appeal to a people who are stylists in everything. Finally, the rhymed construction in which it is often cast makes it easily

remembered and quoted. The subject-matter in most cases refers to the practical conduct of life, and the proverb rightly assumes that every man is deeply interested in himself and his own welfare, and will follow the path of wisdom when it is pointed out. It was to this love of the concrete and pictorial among Orientals that Christ appealed in His parables. It was the inadequacy, in the hour of temptation, of these ethical ideals, without the compelling power of a great motive, that led St. Paul to compare such wisdom with the gospel way according to which Divine power rests upon and transforms human weakness. Hence the challenge, 'Where is the wise? Where is the disputer of this world?' Inasmuch as the determining fact, the power to accept and carry out such precepts, was regarded as something resident in the hearer