

him to be—had he never compromised with his faculties or grieved the spirit of God! At least, we are "faithful failures"! But even so, if we are indeed *faithful* failures, in the hours or moments when we raise our heads—and these as truly belong to our record as those other hours when we suspect our wings and fall to the earth like stricken birds—we protest that, though we have failed, the race will not fail. The little thing we did will not in every case fall by the wayside to be trodden under foot of man. "These all died in faith"! These all seemed to fail! But a faithful soul is never so forsaken of God that he uses such hopeless words. For, now and since Christ also suffered, if a faithful soul seems to himself to be forsaken, he knows how to behave himself and where to turn! In that same hour we may sit down with Christ in heavenly places who, under some final necessity, which *He* never interpreted as chill or casual, nevertheless seemed for a moment to be utterly forsaken.

III.

No! We can see an honourable way by which the human race, now that it has heard the word of Christ, might for a generation or for a century, bear without bitterness His silence! I am ready for such a prospect if God sees no other way.

The prospect which shook for an instant the soul of our Lord was not *that*; the prospect which shook Him was at once *graver* than that and yet *less grave*. It was *less grave*, because it could never come about *by the express will of God*: it could never therefore be *final*. But it was a *graver* possibility than anything which is merely natural to man: for it would be the result, were it to happen, of *man's unwillingness to be guided by even such voices from God as he acknowledged*; it would be due to *man's subtle and even diabolical use of his intelligence or his self-interest to corrupt such conscience as he once had*. If the thing from which our Lord shuddered (as we must believe) ever happens, it will have been not because the light had failed, but because, after years and generations in which in all sorts of ways we had tampered with the light, we had at length proceeded to all lengths,—had come to hate the light, then to smash it or blow it out, and finally to persuade ourselves that we are much more at ease without it; less irritated, less put out of countenance.

IV.

There has never been much great preaching in the world. There have, however, been periods of great "listening," periods of such poignancy, of such tenderness, of such fear and hope, that even those who did not think that they "had ears to hear" suddenly found that such ears they had indeed with hearts to match!

It would indeed be a sinister sign if some such symptoms of an approaching Shadow of God were not even now discernible. There are such signs: and the main task of preaching or of any other honourable treatment of life is that those who so presume to teach should be equal to the expectations and necessities of the day.

Serious people in our day will not take it amiss if those who are their

BETTER A LIVING DOG THAN A DEAD LION!

THAT is good Scripture; though I do not forget many a saying from the same source which favours the alternative. This is not to encourage the disposition, for which we are only too ready to accept reasons—the disposition to agree that most matters are dubious, and not worth fighting for. I may return to that way of dealing with life; for, indeed, it is the open door by which we all seem inclined in these days to pass out into an a-moral nonentity.

What I wish to confess (for myself) is that this is a great time in which to be alive. Presently, another wind may blow over my spirit, and, like Jonah (and for reasons subtly related to his reasons) I shall be angry, and, like Jonah, think I do well to be angry. Meanwhile I must, though in the midst of a world of contrary things, confess that it would only be indolence or a love of creature comforts which would have the times greatly different.

ALIVE AND KICKING

IT was a favourite gambit of G. K. Chesterton's in his earlier days, and even to the end, to take a phrase which had been familiar to us all, and to show us that because of the very familiarity we had all missed the deep wisdom of it. The phrase must at one time have been appreciated for the jolt that it gave to those who first read it or heard it. But time, which the Greeks called "Death," had worn away the edges and excess, so that the two contrasted words which had once sounded paradoxical, had lost something to each other and had become smooth.

Such a phrase is the phrase "Alive and kicking." Probably it was of a tiny child of her own that a fond mother, in answer to an inquiry, replied "Alive?"—he (or she) is "Alive and Kicking." In the case of a tiny child, the free and incalculable raising and thrusting of its limbs is very properly regarded as a proof as it is the display of sound organic health:

I present this point, which so far as I am aware has not yet been made use of in a sermon—I present it to my fellow preachers to be used by them without fee or acknowledgment the

next time they feel called upon to discourse upon the deep saying of Jesus: "Except ye have the mind of a little child. . ."

THE MIND OF A CHILD

FOR myself, I never for one moment supposed that what the Master was requiring of His adult followers was that they remain "children." He asked of men, the highest exercise of the heart and mind and conscience—He asked Faith! And how can they be said to have Faith who have no sense of the darkness and abyss from which only Faith delivers us?

It was late in my own life of reflection that it occurred to me that what Jesus asked us and besought us never to lose—that liability which is so poignant in a child's equipment—the liability to be *hurt*! The liability to be even overwhelmed by some small misadventure such as the world mocks us for heeding! There is no heaven—for there is no conscious desire for such a just and understanding order—for those who have become *hard-bitten*!

It was still later; it was in fact only at this moment that this further insight into what may be deduced, occurred to me; that a child is never more truly and happily a child than when it kicks and chortles!

SHADES OF THE PRISON HOUSE

"SHADES of the prison house begin to close upon the growing boy." So Wordsworth wistfully observes, and proceeds to suggest that life wears us all down, so that what was once a vision splendid fades away. And fades into the light of common day." It may be a rude paraphrase of Wordsworth on this very matter, to say that as life proceeds and has its way with us (whereas we ought to have our way with it), we lose the primitive instinct to *kick*! Now whatever to the contrary we may say about life, we cannot deny that it bristles with things which any proper person itches to kick!

To Emerson's question therefore, "Shall a man live merely to wear out his boots?" I reply, "Yes, sir, he shall, so be it he wear his boots out at the toe!" It is by *that*, that, in the end of the days, according to authentic Scripture, we are all of us to be judged!

(Continued from column 1)

ministers in things pertaining to God treat them respectfully—that is to say, seriously. Christ came into the world not to provide a way of escape from life as by evasion. This indeed was the very fear which, in the words which haunt me, He declared, was His final fear, His *only* fear. Christ came into the world to save us—from the fear of life, and especially of life considered as a field of duty, in which the good way costs something, as it has always cost something, at times costing everything. He, as His greatest exponent put it, "with every trial will provide a way of escape, so that we may"—not evade it, but—"bear it."

It is by evasions which we proceed to justify, that souls grow hard and reach the stage which was described as "Being past feeling." It was this condition which Father Damien realised had already come to him in the flesh when, though boiling water had fallen upon his

feet, he felt no pain! So far, he realised, he was already dead.

V.

Of the several occasions on which I have seen Niagara, I recall two. In the one case, I came suddenly upon the Fall and it rather disappointed me! On the other occasion I began on the level of Lake Ontario, and proceeded towards the Fall by the Gorge. First I heard nothing. Later the waters seem to come on urged by some mighty impulse. Then the air rumbled with a sort of thunder. This deepened, hardened, became something impending and to be feared. At length—there was the Fall! There was Niagara!

Having, on this frail barque of such insight as God has given me, borne up through the Gorge, I stand again with you, before the tremendous thing itself:

When the Son of Man cometh, Shall He find faith on the earth?

J. A. H.

HEELS AND TOES

GOD has presented us with a field or pitch, on which, on the whole, as I now see with perfect lucidity, the state of our boots provides the final criterion of a just judgment! We may go out at the toes, or we may go down at the heels. We may *kick* and leave our footmark on the sands of time; or we may make for a chair, for a lounge, and there reclining lean heavily upon our heels; and, if such conveniences are not immediately at hand, we lose taste for life itself and ask religious writers how they propose to "justify God's ways to man!"

Allow me to recall two corroborations of the thesis, That we are here in this world, to *kick* to the glory of God.

The one I recall from Sinclair Lewis's "It Can't Happen Here"; the other from a profound study of the collapse of the Roman Republic, by Phyllis Bentley: "Freedom! Farewell!"

"IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE"

THE title itself is the very temptation or snare and particular strategy of the Devil of our time. For the Devil is the opportunist *par excellence*. He is the best illustration of the French proverb that only by "changing" does a thing remain "ever the same." "It Can't Happen Here!" What can't happen here? Why, what has happened! And what is proceeding apace!

The *It* of Sinclair Lewis's story was something which indeed is incredible—the collapse of civil and human freedom in America! In the United States! In the Land of the Brave and the Home of the Free!

It happened also in the most credible, because the most gradual, way! It happened indeed by Universal Assent. Or if *assent* be too strong and not quite fair, we must insist that *It* happened with the acquiescence and under the unseeing yet wide-open eyes of the "smartest" people in the world!

Well, *It* happened! Old Doremus, an editor in Vermont (of all places to be caught napping!)—Doremus had been thrown into a concentration camp.

Of course, the dictatorship did not last long, just as I can imagine *ourselves* also being caught asleep, but I will believe that in our case also we should awake with a start.

Doremus was released. Whereupon he dealt severely with himself. Now, when in doubt, blame yourself! Anything which has become *national* was at one stage *personal* and even acutely personal. If there is anything in the national temper which you deplore or which you fear, there was a day when you played your part; a day when you had your chance and did not take it. This "passing the buck," this shifting of responsibility, is a disposition which, if we do not repel it, may yet destroy the free peoples who now precariously cling to the Western edges of the world!

Doremus came out of the depths of his conscience with this accusation against himself. "There were a hundred occasions when I should have kicked!" he said, "and I did not!"

FREEDOM! FAREWELL!

MISS BENTLEY'S study of a decisive stage of Roman History concludes with the precisely identical confession of personal guilt by one of the great Roman figures! He held his peace when he should have spoken! "By your words ye shall be justified and by your words ye shall be condemned." Thus, a famous promise or threat in the Holy Scriptures. But, even as in another description of the Final Assizes, we are told that what may damn a man is not *what* he had done while he had opportunity, but *what* he had *not* done ("Inasmuch as ye did it

not"),—may it not equally be true that the words which will confront us in the last day will be, not the idle, harsh, malicious words which we had uttered; but the words which we did *not* utter, suppressing that Spirit which more than mere wisdom is the good providence of this world?

A TRUMPET HAS SOUNDED!

Karl Barth on the Church and the Political Problem of our day.

WORDS fail me to do justice to the deep and altogether decisive impression which this small book* has made upon me. If, after many years of self-expression in this and other columns, there are thoughtful people, Christian ministers, teachers, those who variously help to form the contemporary mind,—if there are any such who might take guidance from me on such matters, I would urge upon them the quite immeasurable value of this latest work by Barth now published in English.

I shall say nothing more than has been most truthfully written beneath the title and on the cover: "The Church ceases to be the Church if it shirks the Political Problems of Totalitarianism."

That is the burden from the first word to the last.

For myself, I read it with such zest and excitement that I had to read it again, this time marking on the margin, or underlining the text as I have not done with such energy for many a day.

Barth does not spare any of us. He does not spare himself. But this is all to the good; for of recent years "religion" has disastrously flattered us all. But what space I have, I give to Karl Barth; knowing that there are many who will have the hearing ear.

The Church cannot speak in a merely meditative and discursive measure in the actualisation of her confession. . . . The Church has to speak decisively with Yes or No, has to call white white and black black when the hour strikes and the occasion is here to do this in the act of witnessing to Jesus Christ. It will not always be here. It may pass. It may still be in the future. But woe to the Church if, when the hour and occasion comes, she is silent, or merely meditates and discusses, or just falls back into a bare recitation.

THE ACTUALISATION OF CONFESSION

THERE are words in Barth which require pondering. They are not obscure; we are simply not accustomed to them. Take the phrase "The actualisation of the Church's confession." By "actualisation" Barth means simply the process or the action by which we make *actual* and bring out into an effective relation to some conflicting or threatening condition of the world and of men's minds what the essential witness of the Church of Christ always has been and is now.

He is meaning the responsibility for "discerning the signs of the times," which our Lord rebuked the religious leaders of His day for neglecting or suppressing.

It is because of this neglect that the Church herself suffers in her spirit; because by such shrinking and acquiescence she deprives herself of that spiritual resource and refreshment which God can give only when for the sake of Christ we hazard ourselves!

I know of no more moving, more humble, more deeply concerned appeal than this great man makes upon all who will read his short message, in the closing paragraph, beginning:

"But how shall the unity of the Church be made secure in the face of this threat?"

WATCHMAN.

* Hodder and Stoughton. 1s.