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The Perennial Classic

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NOTES and COMMENT

The Perennial Classic

We are told by those competent to know, that there has been a consoling revival among all religious groups of the Christian persuasion in the reading of the New Testament. Perhaps this is due to the various new editions that have appeared in recent times, or it may be that many of the more serious minded are realizing the emptiness which much of the "you can find peace" literature leaves in the soul. But I am convinced that even more would make meditative use of the New Testament, were it not for the fact that their literary tastes have been perverted by the well-nigh juvenile style which many of our dailies and weeklies affect. This, coupled with the mania for picture presentation, has stifled both the desire and the initiative for sustained pursuit of the more profound writings of a spiritual nature.

It is admitted by scholars that, apart from its divine inspiration, the New Testament, and particularly the Gospels, have no equals in simplicity, finesse, restrained beauty and integrity. To those accustomed to the overdescriptive, to the piling up of irrelevant details, to the sensational news coverage, the New Testament must make dry reading indeed.

Imagine how a modern reporter would have "covered" the events of Bethlehem! A lurid description of the cave, the indelicate probing into the lives of Mary and Joseph, the whys and wherefores of the Saviour being born in such a condition, what were the plans for the future of the Infant, what did the shepherds think of all this, perhaps with a frantic trip to old Herod's court for an interview as to his reflections on the matter; but

the Evangelist simply tells us: "and she brought forth her first born son and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger." The rest is left for our reverent pondering. An even more striking example of literary self-control is the Evangelists' handling of the crucifixion. St. John alone records ever so briefly the consuming thirst which afflicted those who were hung on a cross, and none of them gives so much as a hint as to what a pitiful sight Jesus must have presented as His life ebbed away on that gibbet.

So long as men reflect upon and write of the unfathomable love and humility which are expressed in the act of the Incarnation, none will be able to approach in depth or in conciseness the phrase of Paul, "He emptied himself." And how better express the conflicting emotions which swirled in the hearts of the Apostles, when Christ appeared to them on Easter Sunday night than in Luke's words, "but while they yet believed not, and wondered for joy"!

There is nothing dazzling or flamboyant in the Sacred Text. Its intent is to be gathered from slow and reflective reading. It contains treasures old and new, but these are only discovered in all their richness by persevering and steady mental and spiritual digging. But such are its rewards of consolation, of replenished stores of the spirit, of inspiration to heed Christ's invitation, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are burdened," that the wonder is, so many leave unopened the pages of the Sacred Word.

So long as we feed ourselves on the husks of the tabloids, the comics and the "pulp," we can never hope to relish the nourishing fare of Holy Writ. When Matthew gave us his summary of the Sermon on the Mount, when Luke recorded the parable of the Prodigal Son, when John preserved the Saviour's discourse during the Last Supper, when Paul dictated his panegyric on Charity, the Holy Spirit, who guided these writers, had a much greater public in mind than they realized.

It was not only the Jewish merchants in Alexandria or the silversmith of Corinth or the guard in the Imperial Household who were to profit from their words; it was the farmer in Dakota, the teacher in London, the doctor in Shanghai, the miner in Kimberley, the scientist at Brookhaven, the student in Manila, who were to be the heirs of the glad tidings of the New Dispensation.

The same problems and perplexities which confronted the Roman wife and her family and which tormented the youth of Apos-

tolic times are pressing upon us of another century; our facile way of overcoming time and space problems has not lessened one whit the heavy pressure of the flesh on the spirit; and so it is that we have close at hand a *vademecum* which is literally a gift of God to man, His Love letter to the human race, the Sacred Scriptures.

If we read them with patience, with docility, with a humble seeking spirit, we shall discover that nothing in the ancient or modern secular literature can so pleasantly quench our thirst for truth and love; we shall then begin to understand what Christ meant, when He told the woman at the Samaritan well, "but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst forever. But the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting."

JAMES W. BURKE

The Poor Children

Those who have been thinking about the problem of Religious Instruction in the Public Schools will be intrigued by the following statement.

The present administration of the... Law may be fairly characterized as a system on a very large scale for changing the religion of the Catholic poor who come under its operation. Thousands are thus lost to the Church and the religion of their fathers. In fact, we would ask, was any child ever known to have been through one of these... schools... and to have come out a Catholic? We sincerely confess we doubt it. Where every facility is given under the present system the children fall away when they come out... What must happen where no facilities whatever are afforded, or where... an hour in the week, or even less, is all that is at the priest's disposal to counteract the whole tone of the life the child leads and of the education it receives?

We beg our readers' attention to the fact that of the two thousand three hundred children in the... schools only nine ever see a priest... The trouble that the clergy have had to go through has been very great indeed in order to obtain access to this small number. And when they have succeeded in getting all the requisite formalities accomplished what good can they hope to do under the present system? In the majority of cases the children never assist at Mass, never hear a sermon, or enter