

in mankind to turn symbols into images and fetiches, and to elevate what was meant merely to convey an idea into an object of worship. In the Catacomb at Rome the grief of Christians expressed itself in a very innocent way by the use of the emblems of faith and hope. At present the use of emblems to catch the eyes of children is merely a system of object teaching, such as God planned for Israel in the furniture of the Tabernacle. It will be well for us all to remember that the emblems sanctioned in the New Testament were not mere ornaments, but were living forms: the lamb, the dove, or things in actual use, the lamp, the armor; so, to-day, the living emblem, "the child set in our midst" is the central object in every group of disciples to teach what is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Do not let our anniversaries get so clogged with ornaments that we forget the larger symbolism of actual life which teaches us through every living form and work of God, and consecrates our daily bread and water to signify the deepest blessings of God's grace.

If the question of expense forbids the preparation of a floral design, the cheapest expedient, and by no means the least entertaining, will be a good blackboard design drawn before the children's eyes by a competent hand.

There are many ways of celebrating Christmas which are not adapted to the church building. A Christmas-tree is best erected in the parish building, if there be one, and all exercises of a semi-secular character or mirth-provoking nature must be excluded from the church building. It will be often questioned whether prizes shall be given or not; if given at all, they should be awarded for the highest objects in the school, excellence in studies and regularity in attendance at church and school, never for separately attending school. Gifts as of free grace and not as prizes are costly unless they be merely mementoes of a happy occasion. If some rich patron wishes to give a competent should be carefully selected by a wholesome reading committee. None but one of the books should ever go out in the name of the Sunday-school. And very few individuals are discreet enough to be left to decide on the character of a large number of books, and if discreet enough, still fewer are so patient as to make thorough examination of a large quantity of gift books. Better and cheaper will it be for the book giver to select three or four good books and then give all children of suitable age, the same volume. This will reduce the labor of selecting and satisfy the demand for impartiality.

The cheapest and not the least prized gift, is in the shape of a tastefully printed and bound copy of the programme which may be infinitely varied as to illustration and embellishment.

There are mission schools where the gifts may be any useful article, which poor children lack. But in this charity field there is also ample room for tact and taste in planning to meet the simple wants of the least of the Christ Child's little ones. Much giving fails to win the gratitude it looks for by omitting to add the tender graces of refinement and consideration in selecting its favors.

It is hoped that these suggestions will be helpful to rectors, superintendents and scholars, and that those whose experience has enriched them with better ideas will send the results of their wisdom to us by letter, so that if we reach another season we may have new words to add for the benefit of the schools.

Great Judge, to Thee our prayers we pour,  
In deep abasement bending.  
O shield us through that last dread hour,  
Thy wondrous love extending:  
May we, in this our trial day,  
With faithful hearts Thy Word obey,  
And thus prepare to meet Thee. Amen.

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

It is one of the dangers of human life, amid its keen and varied interests, to lose sight of one or other of the standing and primary realities by which it is surrounded and which cannot be forgotten without loss or risk. The utilitarian forgets that there is such a thing as poetry and passion, and the mere sense of what is beautiful. The practical man cannot think how so much time is spent on literary training or abstract speculation; the thinker, absorbed in a great philosophy, wonders at the fascination of politics or commerce. Yet all these things belong equally to the great facts of the world, whether we remember them or not; they don't depend on our observing them; they go on and work and tell upon the world; and it is we who are the losers, if we are too busy or too narrow or too blind to take account of them. And so, whether we forget it or no, whether we appreciate it or no, the kingdom of God, the Gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ, with all their wonders, exist; exist, not in books or theories, but in fact—exist, not in word, but in power—exist, prior to all views and speculations about them—exist, really and widely and inexhaustibly, animating and governing human life—exist, after the long testing of time and experience, after the fiercest hostility and the most merciless criticism—exist, after enduring everything that undermines and kills ideas and institutions—exist, as really, I do not say as worthily, but as really, as they did at first, in that which is their true seat—the convictions and the affections of the souls of men.

If that which is best in us is not to be maimed and cramped, we have need to take full account of this as much as of the facts of nature and society. We shall be living, if we do not, in an imaginary and unreal world. We must meet the Kingdom of God. We find it here and we must meet it either as friend or foe; for it is a practical thing; and however much we may dispute—and while we are disputing, we are born and are dying—men, sin and sinners need but too deeply all that can be for, and for us.

In this world, which is often done for the startling contrast to what we in its reality so often see and imagine in our dreams, high practical actions of our rush in the hurry and distraction of the Sphinx; it through life, comes to us like those who requires an answer, and, alas! how many give the wrong one! But we must give an answer. In such a thing as the claims of the Kingdom of God, we must make our choice and abide it. In all practical matters, in the domain of politics, in the conduct and critical turning-points of life, there are things which cannot be open questions. No one has a right to expect that to those who believe at all in the Kingdom of God it should be, however questioned, to them an open question. They cannot look at it simply as a matter for argument. Their whole being must be revolutionized for them to contemplate steadily the possibility of the Kingdom of God turning out a mistake or an untruth. If we, who believe in it, are wrong, it is little what the consequences will be to ourselves; for our mistake will mean a final and fatal sentence passed on all that we know of human intelligence, and, what is more, on the moral capacities of mankind. But it is not we only who must make the venture.

If, then, you find yourself dealing with the claims of the Kingdom of God and sitting in judgment upon them, recognize what you are questioning. Recognize that you are judging the greatest spiritual and moral force in the world. And, at least, take care that you know what Christianity is before you judge it. Take

it all in, not partially or by suppositions; take it all in, all that such life and reality imply such living power, living you know not how, and reaching you know not whither, but certainly living and working; take it all in, and all that would not be, if all this were not. And if you don't know it and cannot know it, as only it can be known, own to yourself that you don't know it, and be as modest and careful as all men ought to be about what they don't know. Leave it alone, if you are not prepared to be serious; leave it alone, if you are not prepared for what such inquiry involves of steadiness, of time, of thoroughness, of sacrifice; leave it alone, if you are not prepared to deal with it as the great and tremendous reality that it is. It is not the love of being right which makes the love of truth; it is the desire to be right, planted in the heart of sincerity, of patience, of purity, of unselfishness, of humility; in a character which shrinks from indolence and negligence, which shrinks from that blinding and deadly enemy of all truth, the habit of insolence and scorn.

But on us, to whom the Kingdom of God is no dream or supposition, but the most solid of certainties, who could not, if we would, shake off the conviction and the consciousness of its existence and power, what a responsibility rests! Christianity, it is said everywhere, is not a thesis, or a system, or a school of thought, but a life answering to great certainties around us and within us. What a responsibility for being as good as our word, in sincerity, in courage, in loyalty to our King! What a note it will be against our generation if it ever shall be said that it was one in which Christians had not the moral fibre to understand and value all that they had in Christianity, and can hope for nowhere else—in which, with all that they knew, with all their experiences, they had not the courage to face the difficulties of choice, which are the common difficulties of all men—in which they gave it up, with all its powers for righteousness and all its hopes for man, cowering before the ominous aspects and prophecies of the hour. Ours is really no new and strange trial, though it seems so to us; in every age the faith and patience of the saints have had to endure the perpetual contrast between things seen and things not seen. It was this contrast which made St. John write, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." It was this contrast which drew that burst from St. Paul, alone, against the thought and opinion of the world of his time, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." May we not, loaded as we are by God's gifts, "enriched in all utterance and all knowledge," be weak and poor followers of such great examples! "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded."—Dean Church.

## THE CHRISTMAS LETTER MISSION.

The Christmas Letter Mission was started in England about fifteen years ago, and has grown from a very small beginning to be so widely extended that on last Christmas and New Year's Day there were over 500,000 letters distributed in England alone, while in the United States the last year's distribution amounted to nearly 40,000. The object is to distribute at Christmas through hospitals, prisons, homes and other institutions as well as to individuals, printed letters suitable for each, enclosed with Christmas cards in envelopes bearing these words: "A Christmas Letter for You." These letters are written for "all sorts and conditions of men," in German, French, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish, English, Italian and Chinese, and are so arranged for distribution as to ensure the greatest possible variety.