

THE WANTOKNOW SERIES ~  
"VICTORY-MILLION" EDITION

JACK WANTOKNOW

COME TO TEA WITH ME

CURIOSITY JOE

WORLD OVER SCHOOL

CURIOSITY CLUB

SOLOMON GOES TO SCHOOL

# SOLOMON GOES TO SCHOOL

by  
*MONTAGUE  
GOODMAN*

JILL WANTS TO KNOW

DOUBTING THOMASINA

JENNIFER KNOWALL

CORRIE AND CO.

THESE GIRLS I KNEW

WE ALL WENT SAILING

PATERNOSTER



LONDON:  
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

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<i>First Published</i>	<i>March, 1946</i>
SECOND EDITION	<i>June, 1947</i>
<i>Second Impression</i>	<i>January, 1948</i>
<i>Third Impression</i>	<i>July, 1953</i>
<i>Fourth Impression</i>	<i>June, 1954</i>
<i>Fifth Impression</i>	<i>February, 1956</i>
<i>Sixth Impression</i>	<i>June, 1958</i>

*Made and Printed in Great Britain  
for The Paternoster Press 11 Great  
James Street Bedford Row London  
W.C.1 by Wyman & Sons Limited  
London Reading and Fakenham*

## PREFACE

DEAR CURIOSITY JOE,

You will soon be leaving Staplehurst and I shall have no more to write about you and your friends as schoolboys. So this must be good-bye to you all. What happy memories you will carry with you into the Manhood chapter of your life ! If I have added to the pleasantness of such memories for you, you have done the same and more for me ; if you have learned from Solomon, Solomon, too, has learned much from you. So, you see, the obligation is mutual ! And since thousands of boys in real life (and not a few girls, too) have had the benefit of our experiences and talks together, we may be happy to feel that the record of these has not been altogether in vain.

I could hardly feel more regretful at parting with you all if you, too, had been real boys and not the product of my heart and brain ! Perhaps I shall discover (from the same source) something in your subsequent careers worthy of record at some future time. Who knows ? For the present, at all events, it must be farewell.

Your affectionate,

UNCLE SOLOMON

*Shepherd's Mead,  
Carter's Hill,  
Sevenoaks, Kent.*

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## I. SOLOMON GOES TO SCHOOL

“**T**HE Rev. Dr. Theodore Spokes to see you, sir !”

“Dr. Spokes? Why, yes, of course, the schoolmaster. Come in, doctor ; very glad to see you,” said I as my visitor was ushered into my study. “Why, we haven’t met since your first rather unexpected call upon me before the summer holidays.”

“An occasion I am by no means likely to forget, I assure you,” replied he, “anticipated with distaste, the memory of it is one of unalloyed pleasure.”

“A pleasure reciprocated not only by myself,” said I, “but by every boy who was present on that now historic occasion. Why, they’ve never ceased talking of it or singing your praises—respectfully, of course.”

“Hm ! respectfully, no doubt. ‘Good old Poker,’ eh, Mr. Solomon ?” whereat we both laughed heartily.

I must here inform such of my readers as may be unacquainted with the records of “The Curiosity Club” that Dr. Theodore Spokes was the eminent headmaster of a certain public school to be known in this story as “Staplehurst,” which was attended by a crowd of my very particular boy friends. My adopted nephew (at least he adopted *me* as “Uncle”), Curiosity Joe, who lives with me in the absence in Africa of his missionary father, Jack Wantoknow, goes to the school and recently formed a club of his friends and schoolmates. The doings of this Club, or more particularly its effect on certain of the boys attending it, attracted the attention of the school authorities as fully recorded elsewhere, and it was by reason of this that I first made the acquaintance of the headmaster, Dr. Spokes. Now we can resume.

A cup of tea by the study fire made for easy conversation, which I soon perceived to be genial enough, if the style of my visitor was at first a trifle pedagogic.

“It is in view of the very unusual circumstances of my

last visit to you, my good sir, that I have done myself the honour of calling upon you this afternoon," remarked Dr. Spokes, sitting very upright in an armchair by the fire and touching lightly the finger-tips of his right hand with those of his left. "To tell you the truth, I have pondered much the remarks of some of the boys that I was permitted to overhear, remarks which, though crude in expression and somewhat ingenuous in character, were certainly among the most extraordinary I have ever heard from the lips of school-boys. I confess I was unaware that the immature mind of adolescent youth could be capable of such depths of appreciation of religious experience, coupled with so complete an absence of religious affectation. I am profoundly impressed, my dear sir, profoundly."

"I am most interested to hear you say so, doctor, and, if I may be so bold to add, both relieved and gratified," I said, wondering greatly what was to follow.

"So profoundly impressed," resumed the Head, after a thoughtful pause, "that I have come for the purpose of making a proposition to you, my good sir, of a somewhat unusual kind."

"I am, of course, quite at a loss, Dr. Spokes, to guess the nature of your proposition or indeed of how I can be of any possible service to you, beyond a friendly interest in your boys of a completely unofficial character out of school hours."

"My dear good sir," replied the Doctor, "you can indeed, if you can be persuaded, do far more than that. Great as your influence has undoubtedly been, it has been necessarily restricted to such boys of my school as have been disposed or persuaded to attend the occasional meetings of The Curiosity Club (as I think it is called). Now, what I consider greatly to be desired and what I have come for the express purpose of proposing is that that beneficial influence should be extended *to the whole of Staplehurst School!*"

Here Dr. Spokes sat back in his chair and fixed a steady eye on me without another word for a full two minutes. On my part I regarded him in much perplexity, not unmingled with astonishment, and waited as patiently as I could for further enlightenment.

At length he resumed. He had risen from his chair and

was standing with his back to the fire to give, I suppose, added weight and impressiveness to his next remarks.

"My dear sir—I had almost said my dear friend," he began.

"Do, doctor, by all means," I interjected.

"Thank you, my dear friend, I am honoured indeed. To be explicit, it has been my practice to devote the last period every Friday afternoon to some general subject not necessarily of a strictly scholastic character as a fitting climax to the week's school work. Now if you, my friend, could be persuaded to consider a proposition which I am fully conscious would make a somewhat bold demand upon your time and energies, it is that you should occupy this period for a few successive weeks in addressing the whole assembled school (save perhaps the lowest form boys) on topics similar to those you have employed to such good effect upon the members of the Curiosity Club. What say you to that?"

Having delivered himself thus oracularly of his mission, Dr. Spokes resumed his seat and relaxed into a really genial smile of benevolence as he regarded the obvious surprise and uncertainty depicted on my features. Then I spoke.

"You have indeed done me a great honour in making such a request, doctor, but you will not expect an immediate response, I am sure. There are serious considerations to be faced in coming to a decision, as you will appreciate. To be quite candid, you may possibly not approve of all I may say. My views may be considered in some respects in conflict with modern scholarship and you may regret having invited me. On the other hand, without freedom to express my true convictions, I could not contemplate the task for a moment."

"My dear friend, I have considered the matter from every angle, not, I confess, without making careful inquiries from those who are fortunate in knowing you more intimately than I, and I have every confidence in giving you the utmost freedom in all respects subject only to this, that should it appear expedient from my point of view that the talks should be discontinued, I should be at liberty to notify you to that effect without my action being taken amiss. I may say at once that I do not for a moment anticipate this eventuality. But take time, dear sir, take time. There are three weeks

before term begins, and a note from you (I hope an acquiescent one) will be sufficient for me. Good-bye, my friend, and thank you heartily for your hospitable welcome."

And so the interview ended, leaving me a little overwhelmed and, as old John Bunyan used to say, "tossed up and down in my mind," as to the decision I should make.

A few minutes later the door of the study burst open, and two excited boys came boisterously in upon me. Some of you have met them before, but for the benefit of those who have not made their acquaintance let me introduce them as my "nephew," Joe Wantoknow, known by all and sundry as "Curiosity Joe," from his insatiable inquisitiveness on all subjects, and his bosom friend Michael Smart, alias "The Shrimp," so-called as being somewhat small and wiry for his age. I may say (though perhaps I am unduly biased) that I consider them two first-rate specimens of British boyhood from every point of view. I have known them from childhood to their present sixteen or seventeen years of age.

"Now then, uncle, tell us what's it all about?" cried Joe as the boys flung themselves on the hearthrug and began devouring what was left over from my tea-party.

"That's a bit difficult till I know what particular 'it' you have in mind," I replied.

"You tell him, Shrimp," said Joe.

"Well, you know, Solomon"—(I may explain here that in our boy circle we all suffer from familiar or nicknames of one kind or other; mine is Solomon)—"we've just met old Poker coming away from your door. The old boy seemed full of beans about something and was most affable."

"Yes," added Joe. "He stopped, and shook hands with us and wanted to know how we had enjoyed Camp."

"And then, just as he trotted off," said Michael, "he turned to Curiosity and said, 'Mind you get your uncle to say yes,' and off he went, smiling all over his face.

"I say, you simply must tell us what he's been asking you for. I suppose it's something about Joe, isn't it? Does he want him as a pupil teacher or something? Come on, Solomon dear, don't keep us guessing."

“ Well, it’s nothing about Joe or you or anybody else. It’s about *me*.”

“ Whatever can the old boy want with you, uncle ? ”

“ Only this. *He thinks I ought to go to school !* ”

“ Uncle ! Solomon go to school ! What nonsense ! ”

“ Nonsense or not, that is what your revered Headmaster proposes, and that’s all you’re going to know for the present.”

And with that they had to be content.

## II. SOLOMON MAKES HIS BOW

“ EGO TALK ” THE FIRST

*Ego Sum—I am*

IT was Friday at the end of the first week of term at Staplehurst School, and I awoke frankly nervous. For that afternoon I was to make my first appearance (would it be my last?) before the assembled school and talk to them in compliance with the Headmaster's behest. It was an ordeal from which I shrank. There are no such relentless critics as schoolboys, and though I had many friends among them in the members of the Curiosity Club, I was quite unknown to the majority who were not likely to welcome the intrusion of a stranger. Moreover, I was to “ talk religion ” to them, the most unpopular of themes to the average schoolboy (though it ought to be most thrilling), and I must overcome much initial prejudice and even latent hostility. I began to wish I had not accepted the job and that there was some way out of it. But there was none, and I must face the music and do my best.

The secret had been well kept and there was some curiosity as to what was the “ somewhat unusual topic ” the Head had selected for the closing weekly period this term. The lecturer's name had not been announced, but he was “ a gentleman known and respected by not a few members of the School,” and there had been some speculation as to his identity.

It was not until I walked (nervously enough!) on to the platform of the School Assembly Hall in company with the Headmaster that even Curiosity Joe himself realized that I was the unhappy man! I shall not soon forget the looks on the faces of my boy friends in the audience as the school rose to receive us. Astonishment mingled with signs of pleasure were general with a twinkle of mischievous anticipation in some eyes and a glance of nervous apprehension in those of others who were quick to recognize the implications of the occasion.

When all were seated the Head rose and spoke thus : " For a considerable time I have been increasingly concerned with regard to certain aspects of our school life. In many—I may say in most—respects the school has prospered greatly. Thanks to my very efficient staff" (here he bowed to the masters present), " the school work has been excellent and the attainments in scholarships and examination honours have been outstanding. In the realm of sport our achievements have surpassed all previous records, due in great part to the first-rate leadership of the School Captain and certain other notable athletes of whom we are proud." Here the school burst into applause. " But," resumed the speaker, " life is not comprised of scholarship and sport. There is something deeper and more fundamental, something of far greater importance for the well-being of the school as a whole and every member of it, and this has been in the past, I fear, largely conspicuous by its absence. Until recently I have been at a loss how to deal with the matter. The valued services of the School Chaplain" (here the Padre sitting on the platform blushed) " have not been without their effect, and I trust my own efforts in Divinity Class have served a certain purpose. But I have felt the whole subject of religion has called for a new approach and perhaps from an angle and in an atmosphere different from that of the school chapel and its services and sermons, important as those are and will always remain. Certain recent events to which my attention has been drawn, at first with concern but now with much approval, have indicated to my mind a possible means of making that fresh approach, and I have, in consultation with the Chaplain and others, ventured to request the gentleman mainly responsible for those events, to pay us a visit and address the school on this and later occasions on a topic upon which he has proved himself so well qualified to speak. I understand that our speaker now present is well known to many of you under a somewhat curious sobriquet, and at his desire I introduce him to you with great pleasure as—Mr. Solomon."

The Head sat down and amid applause hearty on the part of my friends and respectful from the rest, I rose and made my bow. Two hundred pairs of eyes were fixed on me and as many ears were alert to listen to what might

or more probably might not prove to be the wisdom of Solomon.

After addressing a few suitable remarks to the Chair in acknowledgment of my introduction, I turned to my boy audience and said :

“ I recognize that this is going to be as hard a job as I’ve ever tackled and one that I’m very much afraid won’t add to my popularity here. I had a letter recently from a boy who quite bluntly adjured me not to preach at him because, said he, ‘ I hate being preached at.’ Of course, I replied that I, too, much hated this when I was a boy, adding, ‘ it makes one feel so uncomfortable, doesn’t it ? ’ Now, as I’m most anxious we should feel comfortable together I must set out on the difficult experiment of talking religion without preaching. And as I am a visitor to your school you will, I hope, as good hosts, do your best to make me feel at home by not leaving me to do all the talking. I know it’ll be all very unconventional, but why not ? You’ll have to forget the presence of your venerable Head and his staff—a bit of an effort for me as well as you !—but if we succeed we shall enjoy ourselves all the more, shan’t we ? (A voice : ‘ Yes, sir ! ’ and much laughter.) Right ! You’ve begun to talk already ! But remember I’m Solomon, not Sir ! Now we can begin.

“ My talks are going to be practical, of course, and they’re going to be personal. Martin Luther defined Christianity as a religion of the personal pronoun, and religion to be any use at all must be that. So for that reason and to give them a slightly classical flavour, I am going to call them Ego Talks—and the particular ‘ Ego ’ I want to interest is the one who is sitting on your particular seat at the present moment.

“ This afternoon’s Talk, then, shall be entitled ‘ *Ego Sum.* ’ Could someone oblige me with the present indicative tense of the verb ‘ to be ’ in Latin ?—a junior boy preferred ; no doubt the seniors have forgotten it long since ! ”

A small boy with a very cheeky face and a squeaking voice stood up and recited “ *Sum ; es ; est ; sumus ; estis ; sunt !* ” which was greeted with applause.

“ Thank you, ” I resumed. “ I think that is more or less correct, barring the pronunciation ! We’ll begin with *Sum*—‘ I am ’—a very simple word, but of so much importance

that you can't get very far with Latin or any other language without it. And certainly the same thing is true as regards life in general. Until a boy has grasped the fact that he *is*, and its tremendous import, he is not likely to be much good for anything. Of course, as a youngster you did not think so, but then you didn't think much at all! But now you are no longer children in a prep school and the mark that you have left all that behind is what psychologists would term 'consciousness of personality,' the awakening of the mind to the fact of your existence and to something of its significance: the grasping of the tremendous truth *ego sum*, 'I am,' and the equally tremendous truth *homo sum*, 'I am a man'! As Job said four millenniums ago, 'A man, as I am,' and as Paul said two thousand years later, 'I became a man'.

"That is your heritage; that is why you were born. You were brought into the world by the will of God because He wanted another man. That is why He preserved you through infancy and childhood. Millions die young, but you have survived until now you find yourself on the threshold of your heritage, a man! And being a man you have a man's high privileges; you are born to high estate, though perhaps this has not fully dawned upon you yet. It is told of Queen Victoria that when she was a little girl her governess set her to draw her own family tree, and in this way she discovered that she was born to be a Queen, and she set herself to conduct her life accordingly. And now perhaps you can tell me what you think you are good for, anyway. In other words, what's the use of you now you are, or soon will be, a man? Any ideas?"

Three boys in different parts of the Hall stood up simultaneously and began to speak. "Not all at once," I cried; "you with the freckles first," and a tall youth with an intelligent smile began:

"Well, Mr. Solomon, I don't imagine anybody knows, but I think if I don't get into mischief and play the game I ought to have a good time and that will satisfy me."

"And what about you?" I said, pointing to another who stood up.

"Well, I'm all for business; my father says there's nothing like money, and I agree with him."

“And you?” to the third sturdy youngster of about fifteen with plenty of confidence.

“I find life rather a lark! Why worry? A short life and a merry one, I say; after all, you’ll be a long time dead!”

This last remark was greeted with general laughter, and it was evident that the speaker was popular. Then they settled down to hear my comments.

“Very interesting,” I said dryly, “but perhaps a trifle unintelligent! A good time—money—a lark—and then a long time dead! And is that really all God made you for? Hardly worth His while, I should think. But suppose He made you for something more important. Suppose it was because He wanted a man friend? Suppose He gave you god-like functions that none of the lower creatures possesses—powers of will and independent action and choice and affection, ability to know and understand God for the express purpose that you might keep company with Him? God can’t make a friend of an ox or even a lion, but He can and often has of a man and *that is why He made you*. You are a man, that you may be a man of God and co-operate with Him in this world, and then in the world to come for all eternity. A long time dead, indeed! An eternity of life awaits you if you prove a real man. All else is like playing with toys—gold and silver toys if you like, but still toys—and having larks in the nursery. Such folks never grow into men at all, and they miss all the high and holy privileges of real manhood.

“Yes, it’s a *tremendous* thing to be a man and it may be a *terrible* thing, too. You see, you can’t have it both ways. Privilege involves responsibility and knowledge creates conscience. To know is to owe, and the trouble about being a man is that the consequences may be awful indeed, and you can’t escape them. Even if the Bible didn’t tell us so, we know there must be a judgment-day because we are men. There’s no judgment-day for cattle, but it’s inevitable for men! God just *must* hold us responsible for what we do because we are free to do as we please. And that is why we are all possessed of that uncomfortable faculty of conscience, which is simply self-judgment, a relentless critic who shadows us wherever we go and watches all we do and tells us what he thinks of us; who is the very essence of our human

nature and without whom we should be no better than the beasts that perish.

“Let me tell you the story of William Wilson. It is one of Edgar Allan Poe’s famous *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, probably the most thrilling stories ever written. Get them from your school library and read them, but not in bed, or you’ll dream! William Wilson was the son of wealthy parents and was born with great expectations. When he went as a small boy to his preparatory school he was surprised to find that another William Wilson had arrived on the self-same day. What surprised him more was that this other William Wilson, though quite unrelated to him, was singularly like him in appearance, height and almost every other particular. Moreover, he discovered that they were of the same age and kept their birthdays on the same day.

“Now, this other William Wilson from the very outset showed a marked interest in our William and a strong desire to make friends with him, to which at first William made no objection, since he was a singularly pleasant fellow. But there was one thing strange about this boy that William Wilson was quick to notice, and that puzzled him not a little. Owing possibly to some physical defect or for some other cause he never spoke but in the smallest whisper, and yet even as a whisper it was almost exactly the voice of William Wilson himself. Moreover, it was a whisper that William Wilson could not fail to hear, and he heard it at most inconvenient moments. Whenever he contemplated any wrong or mean or unworthy action, his strange namesake would almost inevitably be close at hand whispering! And what he whispered was always right and said in such a friendly way that it was hard to quarrel with him openly; yet William Wilson resented increasingly what he considered his unwarrantable interference and sought to avoid him all he could. In fact, he was glad when the time came for him to escape from the school and go, as he did, to Eton. He was now a grown youth and being handsome and well-to-do he soon became a boon companion of a fast set in the school and quickly grew wild and dissipated. He had almost forgotten the existence of the other William, though he had heard that by a strange coincidence he had left the preparatory school on the same day he himself had done. One night

about the end of his career at Eton he invited a small party of the most dissolute students to a secret carousal in his study and there, late at night, they drank and played wildly. A knocking at the door at midnight suddenly startled William, and on opening it he saw dimly in the darkness a figure strangely like himself and clad as he was, who seized him by his arm, and with a shaking uplifted finger uttered in a well-remembered whisper, ' *William Wilson!* ' and straightway was gone ! ”

“ The shock sobered William, and for a time was not without effect, but at Oxford, whither he proceeded shortly after, he went from bad to worse, till one night, just as he had achieved the ruin of a fellow-student by cheating at play, suddenly the door flew open and there again stood William Wilson the second, who with the same terrible whisper exposed the fraud and disappeared. And so the story goes on, the same mysterious figure shadowing William as he roamed the gayest and most wicked resorts in Europe and from whom he fled from city to city, but always fled in vain ; the same figure so like himself and yet so fatally unlike, following him everywhere, warning and thwarting him in every evil and shameful project, until at last in a frenzy of wrath and exasperation one night during some wild revelry in Rome, being again encountered by him, he drew his sword and stabbed him to death, only to discover too late that he had killed HIMSELF !

“ And so you, as a man, remember that what makes you such is your secret conscience, your *alter ego*. Stifle it and you stifle your manhood, kill it and you cease to be a man ! But listen to it and give it heed, and though it shows you relentlessly your evil self (it told Job he was ' vile ' and Paul he was ' the chief of sinners ' ), it will make you cry :

*Oh, for a man to arise in me,  
That the man I am may cease to be !*

Time is speeding onward ; you have passed infancy and childhood, and with many of you boyhood is yielding place to manhood pressing upon you. It is high time to take heed to the whisper that you all know so well and that none of us can ever completely escape.

*When as a child I laughed and wept,  
 When as a boy I played and talked,  
 When I became a full-grown man,  
 As older still I daily grew,  
 Soon I shall find in travelling on,  
 O Christ, wilt Thou have saved me then?*

TIME CREPT.  
 TIME WALKED.  
 TIME RAN.  
 TIME FLEW.  
 TIME GONE.  
 AMEN!

\* \* \* \* \*

And so ended my first "Ego" talk at Staplehurst School, and I resumed my seat. There was no applause, but a great stillness in the audience. Then the Head turned to me and said, "Thank you," and we left the platform together in silence.

As I walked home I wondered—and I prayed. Then I felt a friendly squeeze upon my arm and Curiosity Joe was walking beside me with a strange light in his eyes, but without uttering a word he entered the house and sat quietly down to tea by the fireside.

### III. " EGO TALK " THE SECOND

#### " EGO PUTAVI " " I THOUGHT "

I WANT to begin my talk this afternoon† by a vote of thanks—a vote of thanks to my audience for paying me the compliment of taking me seriously. I've had so many communications from boys present at last week's talk challenging what I said and raising questions as to what I meant that I am satisfied at any rate to have set some of you *thinking*. That will form a sufficient introduction of my " Ego " Talk to-day, which I am calling " *EGO PUTAVI*," signifying, as you all know, " I thought." (I include the redundant " Ego " for personal emphasis.) This follows naturally from the fact that you are, as I said last week, a Man, for the peculiar mark of Man is that he is a thinking creature, *Homo sapiens* and in consequence *Homo putans*. Of course, that's what brings you here to school ; there would be no point in your coming if you couldn't think !

But your thinking began long before schooldays. You started thinking almost from your cradle, but your thoughts were childish and often ridiculous. You looked up the chimney for Father Christmas and thought there was a Man in the Moon ! But when you became " a man " you put away childish things and thought as a man. And you are rightly proud of doing so. You form your own conclusions rather than accept those of other people, you are very jealous of your right to hold your personal opinion and to think what you like, oblivious at times of the fact that man has no more right to think what he likes on certain subjects than he has

† *An enterprising member of The Curiosity Club, proud of a newly acquired efficiency in the art of shorthand, has rendered me a real service by taking down verbatim my Talks, and I propose to gratify him by embodying in the ensuing chapters a transcript of his notes, so that my readers may share my " Ego Talks " with the boys of Staplehurst School who heard them. Here is the first of those so reported.*

to do what he likes on certain others. In both cases he is likely to find himself in trouble—some men have even found themselves in jail!

Now I propose to do all the talking this afternoon, and I want to give you five reasons why those thoughts of yours are not the reliable guide you'd like to think them, but on the contrary may lead you seriously and even disastrously wrong; in fact that, to quote a somewhat blunt remark of the Psalmist, “He that trusts in his own heart” (i.e. his private opinions) “is a fool.” Which reminds me that when I was a young man and very confident of my own opinions as against those of my wise old father, he would say to me, “My son, young men *think* old men are fools, but old men *know* young men are!” which was no doubt very good for me, though at the time I may not have thought it too polite!

Listen, then, to my five reasons and judge for yourself whether that epithet is or is not justified. First, then, a man's thoughts are not reliable because *they are not certainly right*. This follows from the fact that men don't all think alike on almost any subject. To quote a well-known tag from Terence, “*Quot homines tot sententiae*”—“there are as many opinions as there are men”—and all the opinions cannot be equally right since they often contradict one another. Some must be wrong, and if so, why not yours? As Oliver Cromwell wrote to his opponents on one occasion: “I beseech you, gentlemen, think it possible you may be mistaken!” But how hard that is and how much easier to think the other fellow wrong! But if I may be wrong after all I shall be a fool to be over-confident that I'm right. That's reason No. 1, and, I suggest, a pretty cogent one.

And here is No. 2—*A man's thoughts are seldom constant*; our views on any subject are always liable to change. What I think to-day I may not think to-morrow, and since this is so, I can never be sure that I'm right now since I may not think so next year! And even if mine happens to be the majority view, that is no help since majorities are notoriously wrong. All the world thought for centuries that the sun revolved round the earth, and when Galileo asserted otherwise he was imprisoned for heresy. Yet he was right and all

the rest wrong. Thus men's views change (and not always in the right direction), which is reason No. 2 against being too sure.

Reason 3 closely resembles it. It is that *man's thoughts are never really final*. That should be obvious from the fact that knowledge is never complete. Man is always left groping for more light. There is infinitely more he does not know than what he thinks he does. One added new fact (and they're always turning up) may upset and even reverse the conclusions men have held for centuries. Every scholar's library is a salutary reminder of this ; the books you will purchase for your studies later on will possibly be out of date and worthless by the time you have taken your degree. As the Bible says, man is "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge" (i.e. the final knowledge) "of the truth." It is always "I think," never "I know." There is always a note of interrogation lurking behind man's thoughts and the greater the scholarship the larger and more insistent the question-mark.

Here again is a fourth reason to view those opinions of yours with caution. It is that *man's thoughts are rarely unbiased*. By that I mean they are liable to be swayed by emotion or passion. We are all very prone to think what we prefer to think, which is sometimes nowadays called "wishful thinking." How often do you hear folk say "I like to think so and so"—as if our likes and dislikes can affect the truth or otherwise of a proposition. Yet unpleasant truth is always unpalatable and liable to be rejected on that score alone. And again the bias may be caused by fear of public opinion. The average person is generally loth to go against the stream and thus incur a measure of unpopularity. As someone once said, a schoolboy would generally far rather be thought wicked by his fellows than peculiar ! And so he adjusts his views to popular opinion and persuades himself that they are his own and that he really thinks so.

My fifth reason will shock you, I fear. It is that man's thoughts are wrong *because he himself is wrong* and therefore hopelessly incapable of forming right judgments on almost anything, least of all on the things that matter most in life. Indeed his moral thoughts prove no more reliable than his

material views. It's not a safe thing, in consequence, to do as you think right, for you may be thinking very wrong indeed! That first great persecutor of the Christian church, Saul of Tarsus, while haling men and women to prison and to death, tells us he did it because *he verily thought he ought!* Indeed, the most unspeakable crimes against humanity have been committed from perfectly and even fanatically sincere wrong thinking. King Philip II of Spain, who was largely responsible for the horrors of the Inquisition, with its unnamable tortures, was the most religious man in Europe, and the notorious blood-bath of St. Bartholemew in France in 1572 was celebrated by a Te Deum in St. Peter's at Rome! No, when men are left to their unaided thinking they invariably think wrong. Indeed it may be said that the first right thought a man has is that he is wrong! "I thought on my ways *and turned,*" said the Psalmist, and when you begin to think like that there's some hope.

But then comes the real problem, which way shall I turn? If my thoughts are so unreliable where shall I look for guidance? And this brings me to the real point of my talk this afternoon. *God has not left men to their own thoughts.* He knows that, left to himself, man will certainly go astray—"The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vanity" and that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually." In consequence he needs other thoughts than his own if he is to go right and seeing that other men's thoughts are just as unreliable as his own, he must look elsewhere to know true thinking. And this is what the Psalmist tells us he did—"I thought on my ways and turned my feet *unto Thy testimonies.*"

That is, he turned from *his* thoughts to *God's*. For God has made known His thoughts in His Word, and in order to be right I must adjust my thinking to God's. Otherwise I must certainly be wrong, because God's thoughts are not my thoughts on any subject, and if His thoughts and mine don't agree one of us must be wrong, and it's not likely to be God! But if I receive His testimony rather than my thoughts I shall "set my seal to this, that God is true," and I shall be right.

And this brings me to my final observation this afternoon, which is the most surprising of all. It is that all too often

*men prefer their own wrong thoughts to God's right ones!* This, of course, is plainly indicated by the books they prefer to read, those written by men, to that written by God. How many of you here have ever set out to read the Bible as you would read any other book to ascertain the Author's thoughts on the subject in hand? How many of you, I wonder, *ever read it at all*, except perhaps as a school lesson-book and that under compulsion? I wonder why this is? It can't be because it's *not generally accessible*, for it is the one book that every bookseller has in stock for sale at a price within the reach of the poorest. You probably have more than one copy in your home which has long awaited your perusal. And it can't be because it is obscure and *not generally known*, for it is far and away the world's best seller and every year creates a new record (and that by millions) in its circulation. Its readers are a goodly company of every nation and a thousand different languages the wide world over. Nor can it honestly be said to be because the Bible is *not interesting*, for it is full of the most thrilling stories of adventure and daring and pathos the world has ever heard. Stories of hair-breadth escapes, stories of giants and ghosts, of lions and serpents, of shipwrecks and earthquakes and miraculous deliverances, and, best of all, of love and devotion and self-sacrifice even unto death sufficient to move the hardest heart to tears. Yet how very many never read it all their lives! Can it be, I wonder, because *they are afraid of it?* Because it may disturb their thoughts and even attack their consciences?

When I was in Canada a few years ago I heard of a Society which provided Bibles for all the bedrooms in all the hotels in the whole country. Many stories are told of the books so placed. In one hotel the manager was rung for by a gentleman guest at midnight and asked what that Book was doing in his room. "Why, sir," replied the manager, "it's only a Bible." "Only a Bible!" roared the guest. "Take it out of my room—I can't sleep with it!" Yes, it will disturb your thoughts, I've no doubt, but it will help you to think the thoughts you should and to amend your way in consequence. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word."

To conclude my talk I throw out a challenge to you. Why shouldn't you get your Bible off the top shelf and dust it, with a view to beginning reading it to-day? And if any of you want to know how to set about it ask me and I'll put you in the way of it with pleasure.

## IV. "EGO TALK" THE THIRD

"EGO CREDO" "I BELIEVE"

**S**HORTLY after my last Friday's Talk I received a letter which I propose now to read to you. I cannot obtain the writer's permission to do so as he does not sign his true name. He also addresses me in a manner for which I have only myself to blame. Here is his letter :

"DEAR SOLOMON,

"You really are the limit ! You tell us we ought to think and then you say we've no right to think what we like and that if we do our thoughts will be wrong ! What in the world are we to think of that ? And then you urge us to read the Bible and I suppose swallow it whole without thinking. I wonder why we were supplied with brains. They appear to be altogether superfluous. Do you think I'm going to swallow such talk ? I *don't* think !

Yours rebelliously,

"NON CREDO."

Now whatever you and I may think of that very outspoken epistle, I for my part can at least thank "Non Credo" for supplying me with a capital preface to my Ego Talk to-day, which happens to be entitled *Ego Credo*—"I believe."

What do you think is the chief trouble with the human race ? Something pretty serious is the matter, or we should not have spent our time and money and brains for the purpose of murdering one another wholesale as we have been doing. I think the trouble can be stated in just four words : *men don't believe God*. Indeed this is really the worst thing about man. It is far more serious than any crimes he commits, for it is the root of them all. All sin is the direct outcome of unbelief. That's how we are told it began, when Mother Eve believed the serpent's lie rather than God's truth, and that's how it's gone on ever since. When you

cheat at school and lie and swear and do other unseemly things knowing them to be wrong, you do them because you don't believe. If you believed you certainly wouldn't do them. You are just an unbeliever. And curiously enough men are not only unbelievers, but *are rather proud than otherwise of it*. Perhaps you have noticed that it is always easier to avow yourself an unbeliever, of which you ought to be ashamed, than a believer, of which you ought to be proud. The letter I read to you is a case in point. The writer seems prouder to sign himself “ Non Credo ” than to reveal his true name of which possibly he may not have cause to be proud at all.

Another curious thing about men is not only are they unbelievers and proud of it, but *they have extraordinary confidence in their unbelief*. They appear to think they have only to avow unbelief in an unwelcome truth and immediately it ceases to be true ! Like the visitor to the Zoo who saw a giraffe for the first time and after staring incredulously at it for a time, ejaculated, “ I don't believe it ! ” and turned away to look at something else. But the giraffe was still there ! And truth remains unchanged whether you and I believe it or not. It is well to remember this, for to disbelieve some truths may be dangerous in the extreme. What would you think of a man walking on the cliffs of Dover in a sea mist who, on being warned by the coastguard that he was heading straight for the precipice at the cliff-edge, replied airily, “ Oh, I don't believe in precipices, I gave that up ever since I was a child ! ” ? Such a man, if he persisted, would soon believe quite definitely in them, only *too late* ! It has been well said that every infidel becomes a believer *just one minute after he is dead*, only to rue his unbelief for all eternity.

Now you can't read your Bible, and especially the Gospels, without being impressed with the extraordinary emphasis which is placed on believing. The word in one of its forms recurs on an average twice on every page of the New Testament, which means between 700 and 800 times. One of the reasons for this undoubtedly is that believing is by far and away the most important thing a man can do. Indeed it is the one thing that determines the sort of man he will be. *For a man inevitably tends to become what he believes.* A

man who believes chiefly in sport becomes mainly a sportsman. A man who believes first and foremost in money becomes an avaricious money-lover. One who believes in pleasure as the principal thing becomes a mere pleasure-seeker and a man who really believes in God becomes godly. And as this is what God desires of us most of all, He rests His way of saving us solely and entirely on faith. Indeed there's only one way for an unbeliever to get right with God, and that is by becoming a believer. In other words, "*Non Credo*" must somehow manage to become "*Credo*."

This brings me to his letter, for I am quite sure he is sitting with what patience he can muster awaiting the answer to it. And first I want to say something to him and the rest of you about "swallowing." You know in your nursery days you were told this was a very bad thing for the digestion! And it is just as bad for your spiritual digestion, too. Believing things because you suppose you ought to is not believing them at all. You may stand and say "I believe" every Sunday of your life in church and yet never once believe. Mere acquiescence is not faith and never saved anyone yet. It is what the Bible somewhere calls "dead faith," and dead things produce nothing good and soon become repulsive to the senses. No, swallowing the Bible is not faith nor anything like it.

Then I want to say a word about thinking. Of course, *Non Credo* must think unless he wants to grow up a duffer. Wise old King Solomon reminds us that "God hath no pleasure in fools" and He gave us brains that we might use them. But it takes something more than thinking to make a believer, though many people, I fear, see no difference, and when they say "I believe," they mean little if anything more than "I think." But God doesn't ask us for our opinions, but for our faith. When Jesus met the blind man whose eyes He had opened and asked him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" He was not seeking the views of an illiterate beggar on an abstruse theological proposition, which would have been little short of ridiculous. He did not inquire what the man *thought*, but what he *believed*, which was an altogether different matter, and when the beggar cried "Lord, I believe!" he proved the reality of his faith by falling down and worshipping Him, which has always

been the final evidence of believing as distinct from mere opinions.

Now “in conclusion,” as the preachers say, I’ll tell you a story. It happened very early in the public life of Jesus. A nobleman had a son whom he loved, and one day the boy took sick and the doctors gave him up. In his despair the father, taking the advice of friends, set off as a last hope to find the new prophet who, he heard, had effected some remarkable cures. He found Him at last at Cana and begged Him to come to Capernaum and heal his boy. The answer he got was a curious one; it was to this effect: “You’ve asked Me to come, but you don’t really believe in Me and won’t until you’ve seen the miracle. You want to *see* before you *believe!*” And when the poor distraught parent urged Him nevertheless to come without delay, what do you think Jesus said? Just this: “Go along home, your son is healed!” It was His way of challenging faith; it was as though He said: “Can you believe without seeing? If so, you’ll be as satisfied with My word as if you saw your son healed before your eyes,” and the nobleman *was* satisfied, absolutely and completely satisfied, and he proved it in a striking way. You and I would have hurried home *to see if it were really so* and by doing so would have shown that we only half believed. Not so the nobleman. He remained in Cana overnight, perhaps listening to the wonderful new Teacher, and it was not till next day that he set out for home and his servants met him with the good news, and so his faith was vindicated and confirmed.

So faith is neither “swallowing” on the one hand nor “thinking” on the other, but putting one’s confidence deliberately and completely in the word of another and then acting in all respects *as if what he says is true*. And in the case of a Christian that Other is Christ. Is He not worthy of your confidence? And if you believe Him and act accordingly you will find, as did the nobleman in the story and as have millions since, that your faith has been well placed. In other words you will discover that you have become a Christian.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the main gates of the school as I emerged I found a group of three boys, none of whom was known to me. They

had, however, obviously been waiting for me, and as I approached one of them raising his cap, stepped forward and said, "Good afternoon, Mr. Solomon. May we speak to you?"

"By all means," I replied, smiling and holding out my hand, "if you don't mind omitting the Mister! Will you walk my way?"

As we walked along together I noted a group of my old friends, including Curiosity Joe, the Shrimp and both the famous twins Dum and Dee, standing near but clearly refraining from intervening, and I greatly admired their tact.

"Well," said I, "what can Solomon do for you fellows?" To which the one who had first accosted me replied, "Well, Sir—Solomon—as a matter of fact I'm 'Non Credo,' and I want to apologise for my letter if I may. My true name is Guy Redmond and these are my friends, Geoffrey Stokes and Bill Page (generally known as 'Buttons' for short). We rather like you and thought we'd introduce ourselves if we might. But we don't believe all you tell us all the same, and don't pretend to be Christians or Pi or anything like that."

"Capital!" said I "and I like you all the better for your candour. Now, you three 'Non Credos', how about a cup of tea with me and a chat over the fire, 'without prejudice on either side' as the lawyers say?"

"Oh, thanks awfully, but haven't we rather invited ourselves sir?"

"By no means, or if you have you're doubly welcome! Come along in!" And in they came.

## V. AN UNBELIEVERS' TEA PARTY

TEA had come to an end. Necessarily so, for my three unexpected guests had eaten all there was! They had indeed made themselves thoroughly at home and it had been a jolly time for them and me.

"And now, Non Credo," said I, as we gathered round the fire, "how do you like being an unbeliever?"

"Frankly, not too much, Solomon," replied Guy, pulling a half-wry, half-comical face. "You see, it doesn't get you anywhere."

"No, you can't get very thrilled with mere negatives, I agree," said I, "but if you *don't* believe, you don't, so that's that. Perhaps you'd prefer to talk about cricket. I noticed you wearing a First Eleven cap, so *that* at least has got you somewhere, and you can't expect everything, can you? Let the Pi's be pious, and you be content to be a good sport, eh?"

"I sometimes wish I could, but somehow even cricket doesn't quite satisfy a fellow, and again, you can't play cricket all your life, can you?"

"And then again," interposed Bill Page, "some fellows are good at both. There's Rusty Thornton, for instance; he's Pi enough and the best bat the school has had for years."

"Yes, Buttons," I replied, "some people are certainly good at both. C. T. Studd, the famous missionary, was an all-England cricketer in his day."

"That's just what I mean about cricket, it has its day," said Guy; "when you've finished with it, where are you?"

"That certainly is one of the difficulties about most things, isn't it? They come to an end. Now, Studd's main interest in life lasted out to his final gasp—and beyond; but then he was a believer and got a wonderful 'kick' out of it and an unbeliever lacks that advantage, his interest always being on the wane, like the moon after the full, until it goes out altogether!"

“What do you mean, sir, by ‘on the wane’? Surely there are lots of interests in life all through, aren’t there?” It was my third guest, Geoffrey Stokes, who spoke. He was a quiet boy with thoughtful eyes, and this was his first remark. I felt a good deal drawn to him and was glad of a chance of addressing him personally.

“Quite right, Geoffrey, there are, but the trouble is they *all* wane sooner or later and none of them leaves us really satisfied. But, of course, they’re the best an unbeliever can hope for, so he’d better make the most of them while they last. So seeing that you’re three unbelievers, my advice to you is to get the most you can out of things while they last, because they won’t last long, while we Pi’s enjoy the lasting things and enjoy them more the older we get! I think you’ll agree on reflection that we have the best of it. Frankly, I’m sorry you can’t enjoy them with us, but then unfortunately you can’t believe, so it’s no use talking any more, is it? After all, it’s no more than Jesus Himself warned us it would be, and He’s never been wrong yet.”

“What was it He said, Solomon?” asked Guy. “I’m afraid I haven’t read the Bible much of late.”

“No, unbelievers seldom do—which accounts for a good deal,” I replied. “You don’t know about the Two Ways, then?”

“I do,” said Geoffrey Stokes. “My mother’s pious, you know, and she showed me a picture about it. One was a broad way and the other narrow, and one led to hell and the other to heaven. Isn’t that it?”

“Yes, that’s something like it, though it’s not quite what Jesus said. But to explain would be too much like a sermon, and not being Pi, you would not care for that.”

“Yes, we would,” said Buttons, “from you, Solomon. Please go ahead.”

“Well, this is what Jesus said: ‘Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.’ You see, He divided life into just two ways that men take, one a broad way and the other a narrow one. That’s the only description He gave them. He didn’t say that one was good and the other bad,

or even that one was better than the other, however true that may be—He just said one way was a broad way and that most people went through life that way, and the other was narrow and that few people discovered it, let alone travelled it. But what He did emphasise was *where the two ways ended*, which is after all the only really important matter about a road. A traveller is not much concerned about the character of his road though, of course, he prefers a pleasant one. What really matters to him is where it will land him at last.”

“But if one ends in hell and the other in heaven, Solomon, one must be bad and the other good!” interjected Guy.

“But Jesus didn’t say that those were their destinations, though we may well believe it. What He did say was that one (the broad road) ended in ‘destruction’ and the narrow road led to ‘life,’ which is not quite the same thing. He wasn’t talking about good or bad people, and He wasn’t talking about heaven or hell.”

“What was He talking about then, Solomon?” asked Bill Page.

“Nothing more nor less than what we’ve been discussing just now, Buttons—the two ways people take to get the best out of life and the consequence in each case. Let me explain by an imaginary case. Here is a boy, let’s call him by the name he went by with his set at college, ‘Sportsman Dick.’ Now, Sportsman Dick comes of a good and wealthy family. He has been educated at Eton and is now about to pass out after three highly enjoyable years at Oxford. All the world is before him—life is indeed a broad and attractive road. The ball is at his feet—a thousand interests are open to him—he has hosts of friends, good health, good looks, and ample means.”

“Lucky fellow!” remarked Buttons with a grin.

“Lucky, indeed!” I replied. “If anyone can get the best out of life, surely our friend Sportsman Dick is the man. And he certainly seemed to do so as he entered with zest into one sport and another, with all manner of social and other occupations which kept him busy and interested all his time. Until gradually he began to make certain disquieting discoveries.

“To begin with he discovered that he was getting older,

a discovery we all make in course of time, and that in consequence some of the more strenuous activities, boxing and rugger, for example, had to go. Then business interests cut into many social activities and altogether life became much more restricted in many ways. Friends, too, dropped off and relatives, including a much-loved mother, passed away. His health became not so good and his strength began to wane. In fact he discovered that the broad way of life *was not nearly so broad now as it was at first*, and was diminishing steadily as he progressed, as were also his powers of enjoyment. Indeed, life was by no means so sunny and gay, and Sportsman Dick did not smile so much as once he did, and at times looked positively glum. His hair was turning grey and he grew stiff with rheumatism, and his once healthy appetite departed, leaving him with but little zest for the pleasures of the table. At last he found the broad way of life had diminished funnelwise until it was little more than bed and fireside day in, day out, and finished, sadly enough, *no wider than the grave*; and so the word of Jesus was justified for it 'ended in destruction'—destruction of all life had meant for him, destruction of body, destruction of—"

"But isn't that so with *every* life, Solomon? We can't avoid that, can we?" asked Guy Redmond.

"Not quite the same, Guy, for there is another way which Jesus said ended differently. May I tell you of that, or have you unbelievers had enough of my sermonising?"

"No, go on, please, Solomon; you're not sermonising, or if you are, we like the sermon!" It was Geoffrey Stokes who spoke for all three of my guests, so I could not but proceed, which truly I was more than glad to do.

"Very well, now for the narrow way. Let us follow young Godleigh-Wright as he enters it and pursues its course. He, too, was one of the lucky ones in almost identical circumstances with Sportsman Dick. The broad way (the Bible calls it 'the course of this world'), lay before him and he was looking forward eagerly to entering upon it, when he, too, made a discovery. A man of God met him at a holiday camp for schoolboys and drew his attention to a strait gate leading to a narrow way of the existence of which he had no idea (or a very hazy one at least) before. He urged him to knock and enter, which young Godleigh-Wright at last

one evening decided to do. The door was opened to him and he found himself face to face with One Who pointed him along a narrow way, upon which forthwith he gladly set out. His many friends of the broad way loudly protested, assuring him that such a narrow course would ruin his prospects and rob him of all his fun. Yet he persevered, and as he did so he made certain further discoveries that encouraged him greatly."

Again it was Geoffrey Stokes who spoke. "I very much want to know what those discoveries were."

"I think I can tell you in a few words," I replied. "Young Godleigh-Wright discovered that the further he went upon the narrow way, the fuller and richer and happier life upon the road became. That instead of life waning with years, it was like the dawn that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. He found himself busy, apart from the ordinary calls of his business avocation, with all manner of happy service for the One he had met at the gate, service which ripened and expanded with growing experience and which filled him increasingly with joy and satisfaction. He found also that in place of a diminishing circle of friends, the company of those on the narrow way who were his happy companions in pilgrimage, was a constantly increasing one with whom he enjoyed sweet fellowship such as no broad road travellers ever tasted. In fact, as the broad way had proved to Sportsman Dick funnel-shaped in a *diminishing* sense, so Godleigh-Wright, now no longer young, found the narrow way also funnel-shaped, but in an *expanding* sense, until at last it broadened out as wide as all eternity and he entered into the joy of his Lord.

"A great way indeed. I think Jesus must have sighed sadly when He added 'and few there be that find it.' But, alas! it can only be entered by faith, and no unbeliever ever found it yet."

There was a pause and no one spoke. The boys sat very still, looking into the fire, and I sat watching them. Presently I said, "But it's too bad of me talking to you like this; I almost forgot that you were unbelievers."

Guy Redmond looked me full in the face and said, "But I'm not so sure that we are, that is, speaking for myself."

“No,” said Geoffrey Stokes, “I think a man of God has met us and pointed out a strait gate and a narrow way.”

“And I for one,” said Bill Page, “am feeling very inclined to knock !”

The rest of the story of this unbelievers' tea-party must be left for the boys themselves to tell on a future occasion. Suffice it to say it ended quite other than it began, and that both host and guests were very happy when at length we parted.

## VI. "EGO TALK" THE FOURTH

"Ego Volo" "I Will"

"WILT thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?" I suppose most of you will have that important question put to you at some not too distant date. You will have come to church resplendent in a completely new rig-out with a large white carnation in your buttonhole (and palpitations in your heart), and you will have come by appointment with a certain charming girl of your choice expressly for the purpose of answering this very personal inquiry in the presence of all your friends and relatives. And they will all listen for your reply, which must be as plain and explicit as the question. It will just consist of two little words: "I will," and when you have uttered these words you will be married for life, and if you don't utter them *you will never be married at all!* For marriage is not a matter of sentiment or emotion (still less of passion), nor is it effected by coercion or constraint. It is wholly the act of the free and independent will of the two persons concerned, without which it cannot take place. But do not be alarmed! I am not proposing a talk on love, courtship, and marriage this afternoon; I am merely using the marriage vow by way of introducing my fourth "Ego Talk" to you, which I am calling "*Ego volo*"—"I will."

For undoubtedly of all the remarkable things about this strange ego of ours, this "I" that marks each of us out as a separate entity from all the rest of the world, none is more so than this, that *I have a will of my own*. Not only am I endowed with the power to think ("*homo putans*"), but I have also the power to will ("*homo volens*") whereby I can translate my thought into independent action. I can say "I will" or "I will not," and direct my course accordingly, often in the face of the opposition of those who wish me to act otherwise. I may also, if I am strong enough, impose my will on my fellow men and force them to obey me, as Adolf Hitler did to 70,000,000 Germans and a large part

of Europe in addition. Such is the astonishing power of the human will. More wonderful still, I may even say "I will" or "I will *not*" to my Maker, God Himself, and shape my eternal destiny in consequence.

What a tremendous thing this *volò* is! It is indeed the peculiar characteristic of man in distinction from all God's earthly creatures. Moreover, it is a feature upon which God sets a peculiar value as in some sense the most important part of a man. True, He can and does at times interfere and restrain it for His own purposes, but otherwise He allows us to take our own course and reap the consequences, whether sweet or bitter, according to our choice. Not that God doesn't care; on the contrary, He cares so much that He cannot leave us alone; as your mother would who sees you taking a wrong or foolish course, He warns and pleads with us and indeed does everything short of *forcing our will*, which would, of course, rob us of our essential manhood.

There is nothing about which we are commonly more tenacious than this will of ours. We want our own way, not because it is a good way or a bad way, but just because it is *our way*. "I want to do what I like," said a boy to me once. "I don't see why I should surrender my will to Jesus Christ or to anybody else." And this is the same with all of us. "*All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way,*" is as true a statement as anything else in the Bible, and so we all set out to *do what we like*, only, alas! to discover often too late that *we don't like what we do!* Of course, anyone with any brains at all ought to see that it's sheer madness to set out on the voyage of life in utter ignorance of its character (which is the case with all of us at the beginning) without any other guide than our own wills. It is as mad as for a shipowner to sail the Ægean Archipelago in the dark without a pilot because he *will* be master of his own ship. He won't be master of it long!

Yet this will is ours and must remain so. No pilot can come aboard our ship without our voluntary consent and invitation, however obviously we may be heading for the rocks and shipwreck. But then again, no self-respecting pilot will come aboard except he has full command and control, which means that the will of the owner must be completely subjected to his or to the course to be taken. He will not

undertake partial control or come aboard on terms.

Three men tried making terms with Jesus Christ, but met with little encouragement from Him. Each of them said, in effect, "I will—but." Let me introduce them to you; it may be you will recognise a direct descendant of one or more of them in this school. They have all of them a wondrous progeny, and I discern members of their families in most places I visit.

There was no doubt that they were all very much attracted to Christ. They had never heard any Teacher like Him, nor any way of life so desirable as that He portrayed. He Himself, too, was so wonderful and His life so beautiful in every way that they felt a great desire to follow Him wherever He went and to be included in the number of His disciples, and each of them approached the Master with that aim in view.

And now to bring the stories of them up to date, let me clothe them with a modern dress and give them names appropriate to the present day.

The first we will call James Jameson. He is a young man fresh from college about to enter his father's banking establishment. One day (never mind how or where) Jim meets Jesus Christ. He is charmed and allured by His Person and teaching, and kneeling down to Him says enthusiastically, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest!" and he really meant it, or thought he did. But the Lord has an uncanny way of reading a person's true and hidden character—He knows us better than we know ourselves. So looking him steadily in the face, He said, "Do you know, Jim, I've nowhere to sleep to-night?" Our friend James pauses and shows considerable embarrassment at this surprising remark of the Master. Here was a situation he had by no means bargained for. He had avowed himself willing to follow anywhere, but if it meant a roofless night with nowhere to lay one's head, this was another matter; could he say "I will" to this? On consideration, he found he couldn't, and he didn't, and that was the end of that young man's shortlived discipleship.

And here is another promising disciple. Let's call him David Davidson. Davidson is a friend of Jameson's and was with him at his interview with Jesus. He was not

dismayed or deterred by the prospect of a hard life if he became a disciple. He was indeed rather surprised that James should have been so easily discouraged after expressing such admiration for the Master and such desire to follow Him anywhere. He would show that he was made of sterner stuff! "Lord," said he, "I *will* follow Thee." That sounded fine, and he meant it, but then he added something that made all the difference. "I will follow Thee—*but not yet!*" It would be very difficult just now; he had an old father at home and to make a change there would upset him, and in fact be altogether inconvenient. Later on, when father had died, it would be much easier and then he would have come into his patrimony and be better off. He wanted to wait a bit, in fact till "a more convenient season." So we hear no more of young David Davidson; he just wasn't *willing* any more than his friend Jim.

Standing by was another. He was a most attractive youth of the very popular type, with a host of friends about him. His name we will call John Johnson. He, too, was enamoured of Jesus and had come for the same purpose as the others of offering his discipleship to Him. Jack had made up his mind, or thought he had; he was willing though it might mean hardship. He was willing *now* without reservation of any kind. Here was a disciple indeed! And then came the fatal *but*, and all was spoilt. What was the trouble with our friend John? Well, there were those friends of his; he hoped his following Jesus wouldn't upset them! It would be very awkward if they gave him the cold shoulder; he knew they had no use for Jesus and was afraid they might think him a bit peculiar if he avowed himself a disciple. He must keep on good terms with them if at all possible. Might he go and see them about it? And Jesus said, "He that putteth his hand to the plough and looketh back is not fit for the kingdom of heaven." Remember Lot's wife! She had friends in Sodom and looked back with fatal results. You can't have friends in Sodom if you want to be the friend of Jesus. "Must I give up all my friends now I am a Christian?" asked a boy who had recently been converted. "Don't you worry," I replied, "they'll see to that!" And they did. No you can't follow Christ on *terms*; your will must be wholehearted and without reservation, or else you

are not really willing at all. That is why so many would-be disciples come to nothing. If He is not Lord of all, then He is not Lord at all. Which shall it be—“ all ”? or “ not at all ”? “ He that forsaketh not all that he hath, he *cannot* be My disciple.” -

I resumed my seat and the Headmaster rose, as I thought to dismiss the school. Instead he addressed them as follows :

“ This morning I received a deputation of prefects. They lodged a complaint against our Lecturer with which I fully sympathise.”

At this remark I showed some not unnatural apprehension, to the amusement of my audience, who grinned broadly. The Head resumed.

“ Their complaint is that he talks too much ! Not that his lectures are too long, nor are they uninteresting—far from it—but, they said, ‘ He doesn’t give us a chance ! ’ Well, suppose we invite Solomon to tea as he is wont to do to many of you, and then you may bombard him to your heart’s content ! ”

General cheers followed this suggestion, during which, the Head looked at me, saying, “ To-morrow ? ” and I nodded smiling acquiescence—whereat renewed cheers.

“ Very well, then,” said the Head, “ to-morrow, at my house the three senior forms will entertain Solomon to tea. Now you may go ! ”

## VII. SOLOMON UNDER FIRE

**I**T really was a first-class spread, and everyone helped themselves as they stood chatting and laughing in the spacious drawing-room of the Headmaster's house. As for Dr. Spokes, he was geniality itself, making everyone feel at home and at ease, and introducing one and another to me with appropriate comments. "This is Todgers, Solomon, the school poet, wit, and editor of the magazine, and this fellow is Crompton, who holds the school record for the mile—and well he ought; just look at his legs!" At which poor Crompton became very self-conscious and blushed like a girl. And so it went on and we all enjoyed ourselves. Presently the Head remarked, "Duty must be done, and I'm due in my study, so I must leave you to it. But here's Solomon, like Daniel in the lions' den, ready to be devoured piecemeal, though I expect he'll succeed in stopping the lions' mouths! You've got an hour to tackle him in, after which the school bell will ring for call-over. Good-bye, all of you."

"Good-bye, sir, and thanks awfully for the tea!" came from many quarters, and he was gone.

"Now, Solomon, we've got you!" cried a red-headed prefect of giant proportions, appropriately called Hulks (his real name was Foulkes), and without ceremony he and two others, scarcely less formidable, had me by the arms and led me to a corner where was a tuffet. "Sit down there on the stool of repentance and get ready to answer questions! And no hedging, mind! We want straight answers and we shan't be happy till we get them!"

In another minute thirty or forty boys had seated themselves mostly on cushions on the floor or any other unconventional vantage-point, ready for the attack.

"Well," said Foulkes, "first of all we think you're too cocksure about everything."

"That's hardly a question," I retorted, "but you're

perfectly welcome to think so if you like. As a matter of fact I *am* jolly sure about some things, and I'm glad—it must be horrid to live (and especially to die) in a constant state of doubt. Besides, I don't like insulting anyone, least of all my Maker ! ”

“ Now you're talking in riddles, Solomon,” remarked the boy named Todgers above-mentioned. “ Who's asking you to insult whom ? ”

“ That's simple,” I replied. “ This Book says ‘ He that believeth not God *hath made Him a liar,*’ and to call anyone that is just as big an insult as you can offer. I prefer to take Him at His word, and that's what makes me sure, because after all God is not *likely* to say what's not true, is He ? ”

“ But everyone knows to-day that the Bible isn't all true, so where are we ? ” asked a youth from the back of the room.

“ But God says,” I replied, “ His word *is* true from the beginning (which means from Genesis to Revelation) and that the words of the Lord are pure words like silver purified seven times. If God says that and everyone else says different, well, *I* say, with David of old, ‘ Let God be true and every man a liar ! ’ I'd sooner insult Mr. Everyman than God ! ”

“ Then there's another thing, Solomon,” chimed in another boy ; “ it does not always pay to be a Christian. I know an awfully pious man whose house was wrecked in an air raid and he has been a cripple ever since. I don't call that fair, anyway ! If that's what God does, what's the good of serving Him ? ”

“ Yes,” said another, “ and I've no doubt he prayed to be kept safe and yet he wasn't. I think God let him down badly ! ”

“ And I know an awful blackguard of a man who curses and scoffs at religion, and he not only came through the war safely without a scratch, but he made a fortune out of it. How about that ? ” The speaker was a big lout of a lad with something of a sneer on his not too open face.

“ Yes, it does seem a bit puzzling, I admit,” I answered ; “ it almost looks as if it doesn't pay to serve God after all. But suppose it doesn't, what then ? ”

“ Leave Him out and have a good time, I say,” called out one bold youth, to which another echoed, “ Hear, hear ! ”

“Certainly,” I replied, “if all you serve Him for is what you can get out of it. But it strikes me as a bit shoddy, you know! Like telling Father and Mum that you’ll only fall into line at home provided they let you do as you like and give you lots of pocket money? You wouldn’t be very popular as a son on those terms. To serve God for what you can get isn’t serving Him at all, but just serving your own interests, which is all a good many people do. That’s the mistake Satan made about Job.”

“Satan! Who’s he?” interjected the sour-faced boy (his name, I discovered later, was Turpin, though he was more often addressed as Turnip).

“Don’t you know him?” said I. “I’m surprised, for he knows you well enough; but you’ll meet him yet, I don’t doubt! Well, Satan jeered at godly Job and asked God, ‘Does Job serve God for nought?’ For Job was rich and prosperous and all went well with him. ‘Very well,’ said God, ‘try him and see!’ And calamity fell on poor Job as a bolt from the blue, and in twenty-four hours he was a completely ruined man, like your pious friend in the air raid, and with all his family killed into the bargain. Of course Job didn’t like it, and didn’t understand it, but his piety stood the test all right. ‘Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?’ said he. ‘The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!’ Rather more noble than bargaining with God for a good time, don’t you think?”

“Rather rotten of God to treat him like that, though—he didn’t deserve it,” remarked a thoughtful lad close by me.

“That’s what his three friends couldn’t understand about it. They were sure God rewarded the good and punished the bad, and the conclusion they drew was that Job secretly must be a very bad man indeed. But if it comes to deserving, how much do you think *you* deserve? You are certainly having a better time, better food, better homes, health, clothes, school and sport than tens of thousands of other boys in the world. What have you done to deserve it? And what return have you made to God for it? To take all the good things and not even to say thank you is definitely shoddy conduct, isn’t it? And some of you have done worse—you’ve actually turned a cold shoulder on the Bene-

factor who gave you them. An urchin in the gutter would behave better than that ! ”

Nobody had a reply to this, and it looked as if the shaft had got home in several quarters. I followed it up. “ May I tell you one of my yarns ? ” There was a murmur of assent, so I went on. “ The story comes from America, and as I heard it some years ago I am not sure of all the details. But it is something like this. A certain poor widow woman had an only son of whom she was devotedly fond. She had no means beyond what she could earn with her needle, but she worked all day and far into every night, determined to do her utmost for her boy, who was a bright lad and full of promise. At length, by dint of much labour and infinite self-denial, she was able to secure him a college education and finally bade him farewell with pride as he set off for his University career. To maintain him there meant work and toil unceasingly, but she did it, though it meant privation and often hunger for her. As for the boy, he prospered and shone in both scholarship and sport. He became very popular and the centre of a set of gay companions. He was, however, very sensitive as to his humble origin and maintained complete silence with regard to his circumstances and connexions, even talking of his fine prospects with little regard to the truth.

“ Meanwhile his widowed mother, too, was not without her own secret ambition. It was that one day she might visit her boy and gaze with pride upon him enjoying the fruits of her toil. She said nothing to him, but put every dollar she could spare to pay the expense of the journey, which was long and costly. At length the money was secured, and, clad in her rusty widow’s garments which were all she had, she set forth one day and in due course reached the university campus. Trembling with excitement, she walked through the beautiful grounds surrounded by the noble college buildings, looking eagerly to catch sight of her boy. At length she saw him. He was approaching, surrounded by a merry crowd of fellow students. How noble he looked in his flannels and college colours and how gay and animated as he came along ! With her heart throbbing with pride and joy the dear old lady advanced towards him with outstretched arms and a loving smile of welcome. Then he saw

her—he hesitated, flushed red to the roots of his hair and then, looking straight before him, walked on, leaving his mother standing unacknowledged and abashed behind him.

“ ‘That funny old dear seemed to know you, old man,’ remarked one of his chums.

“ ‘Yes,’ the villain replied, ‘she was our old washer-woman at home,’ and promptly changed the subject. His mother turned her steps wearily to the station once more and made her way broken-hearted to her lonely home.”

I finished, and there was a pause. Then a voice at the back said softly, “What a cad !”

“Yes,” I replied quietly ; “and to turn my back on One Who died for me would make me a worse cad still !”

Then there was silence in the room. It was disturbed a minute or so later by the clanging of the call-over bell and everyone rose to go.

I shook a number of hands in the gathering dusk, and some had an unusual grip in them, accompanied by a quiet “Thank you, Solomon.”

## VIII. "EGO TALK" THE FIFTH

### "EGO POSSUM" "I CAN"

I NEVER could understand a boy thinking it either "dull" or "tame" to be a Christian, and yet I know that is the honest opinion of not a few of you this afternoon.

You may, of course, have been unfortunate in the specimens you've met, or more probably you have proved a little dull of apprehension concerning them. A man once threw away a priceless diamond as a worthless pebble for sheer want of appreciation of its true value. Perhaps you have been making much the same mistake. For as a matter of fact a Christian is *the most remarkable creature on earth*. He is really nothing less than a walking miracle, and the more you know of him the more you have cause to wonder. In this he resembles his Master, though in an infinitely less degree. For Jesus was just *miracle all through*. Everything He did and everything He said was wonderful, yet He was to all appearance the most ordinary of men, a poor Galilean peasant. But everyone who knew Him marvelled and the more they knew Him, the more they marvelled.

And so it is with a Christian if he is a real one. He is something quite unique among men. He is nothing less than a super-man, though to all appearance quite the reverse, for he displays powers that no one but a Christian ever had or could have, and he displays them as though they were natural to him. In fact he is a man who *can* while other men *can't*. He says "*Ego possum*," "I can," while all around him cry "*Non possumus*," "We can't!"

Let me tell you some of the things a Christian can and a non-Christian can't accomplish, and then judge for yourselves which of the two has the better of it.

First, then, a Christian can *believe the incredible*. He can and does, and that quite honestly and sincerely, believe things that to the ordinary intellectual person are completely unbelievable—and, moreover, things that before he became

a Christian were equally unbelievable to him. For the truth is, there is much in Christianity that is on the face of it quite incredible, and this is true of all the major facts upon which the Christian faith is founded. The virgin birth of Jesus, His marvellous miracles, His atoning death on the cross, His resurrection, His ascension in the clouds to Heaven and His promised return in the same manner are all matters which many intelligent men find they can't believe. They are so strange as to be incredible; indeed, I sometimes wonder if anyone but a Christian ever did really believe them. But a Christian finds he can and does with all his soul and to his greatest joy and satisfaction, and that although the intellectual difficulties they present remain unsolved. He believes the unbelievable, he has achieved the miracle of faith; he can and does believe; he has become a man of faith in a world of unbelief. That's the first remarkable thing about a Christian in which I suggest he has an immense advantage over the rest of men.

Then he can and does *see the invisible*. As Paul puts it, "We look not on the things that are seen, but on the things that are not seen," and it was said of Moses, "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Now you will agree it takes a superman to do that. Of course we can do much to assist our natural sight. With the help of the microscope and the telescope we can see many things that were quite invisible to our forefathers and with the aid of television who knows by how much more human sight will be extended? But however it may be, all that it will see will be "visible things". But the Christian super-man sees invisible things!—for he sees with other eyes. Natural eyes see natural things and never anything else, but the Christian has eyes that see things that no human eye ever saw. The eyes of his heart have been enlightened and faith has become to him the evidence (i.e. the seeing) of things not seen. Don't you wish you could see like that? A lady once said to the great artist J. M. W. Turner, "You know, Mr. Turner, I don't see your colours in nature." To which he replied, "And don't you wish you could, Madam?" And when you meet a Christian who is obviously living with Heaven in view, who sees his Lord ever with him, "a living bright reality," who beholds in a glass the glory of the Lord so

truly that he begins to reflect it in his face and character, then *don't you wish you could see like that?*

And then again a Christian can *know the unknowable*. That sounds more paradoxical than ever, and yet Paul once prayed for the Christians of his day that they might “ know the love of Christ *which passes knowledge*.” And no one but a Christian ever achieved this, for there are limits beyond which human knowledge can never go, there are things that are and always will be unknowable to man. The achievements of human research in the last hundred years have been so astounding as to leave one wondering what discoveries are yet to come. For we are only on the fringe of things in the realm of knowledge. And yet when we have learned all, there are things quite unknowable to any but a Christian and these are the most important things of all.

For instance, what sinful boy wouldn't like to know for certain that his sins were forgiven?

“ But you can't—not until the Judgment Day.” It was the disagreeable Turpin who interjected the remark.

“ I quite agree,” I answered, “ *you* can't, but a Christian *can* and does. He knows he has been forgiven all of them, for ever, and that fills him with a joy and confidence that other men don't possess.

“ Then, again, suppose you knew for certain you were going to Heaven.”

“ Ah, but, Solomon, that's not possible ; we cannot even be sure there is a heaven to go to. Nobody has come back to tell us ! ”

I didn't know the speaker, but he looked a nice intelligent lad.

“ Of course not,” I said ; “ nobody can know such an impossible thing, that is, nobody but a Christian ! And he not only knows Heaven *is*, but also that his name is written there. And that on no less authority than Jesus, Who came from there and told His followers to rejoice, ‘ for,’ said He, ‘ your names are written in heaven ! ’ And they certainly wouldn't rejoice if they weren't quite sure ! And there are heaps of other unknowable things a Christian knows. He knows he has eternal life. He knows that he is a son of God and that God really loves him. He knows that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor

things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate him from that love. He *knows* this and the knowledge is his most precious possession. Who wouldn't be a Christian if it involves the ability to achieve such a knowledge ! For to all other men it is for ever unknowable. What a super-man he is indeed ! He can believe the incredible, he can see the invisible and he can know the unknowable !

But I haven't finished yet. There's something more wonderful still. A Christian man can *do the impossible*. He can ! I have it on the authority of Paul himself who made the discovery in his own experience and proclaimed it as an astonishing fact : " I can *do all things* through Christ Who strengtheneth me." The promise given by our Lord was no less than that : " Nothing shall be impossible to you," and Paul and every true believer since has found it so. He can and does things quite impossible to any but a believer, and there is no limit to his ability. He does not have to say concerning any Christian experience, " I wish I could, but I can't." For he can *do all things*. Whatever he knows he ought to be and do, that he can be and do without any doubt about it ; and the secret of his astonishing ability lies not in himself at all, but entirely *through Christ, Who strengthens him*. In himself he can't, in Christ he can. This is the secret that makes him a super-man among men ; it is the power of Christ that rests upon him just as the power of God rested upon Samson and made him invincible in his day.

Now because this is really so there is no such thing in the contemplation of God as a Christian who *can't*. The Bible simply doesn't recognise the existence of a defeated believer. It assures him that he can and because he can it expects him to rise to his ability. The Bible is just a challenge to the Christian to do impossible things. This was the method of Jesus with men. He challenged a man with a withered arm to stretch it forth—impossible ! But the man did it—through Christ. He bade an impotent man who had been prostrated for thirty-eight years to take up his bed and walk. Again impossible, but he did it—through Christ. He met an unclean leper one day and said to him, " Be clean ! " How could he ? But he *was* clean that moment—through Christ. And so the same challenge to the impossible comes to every

believer, and he likewise finds he can—through Christ. He is bidden, “*Be strong!*” and the weak believer answers, “I can, through Christ,” and overcomes the Devil with power not his own. He is told to “Be glad!” and in spite of everything to make an ordinary man depressed and miserable, he finds he can, through Christ, and is able to rejoice always, regardless of circumstances.

And he is exhorted to “*be of good courage,*” and however great a coward he may be at heart and however afraid he may naturally be of those about him, he stands his ground and faces the sneers and jibes of godless men and feels a courage in his breast which was never there before. To his surprise and joy, he finds he can—through Christ.

Isn't it a great thing to be a Christian? Why should he be ashamed who is possessed of such ability? No one ever need be ashamed of power. That is why Paul could say, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for *it is the power of God.*” I can understand some people being ashamed of *their* religion, for it doesn't give them the strength of a mouse! But a Christian, a real believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, is a man who has every reason to be proud. For he is a man who *can*—a man with the power of God upon him. And that's within the reach of any boy who has been listening to me this afternoon.

## IX. "EGO TALK" THE SIXTH

" OPORTET MIHI " " I MUST "

ONE Friday morning as I was considering my sixth Ego Talk to the boys of Staplehurst School due to be given that afternoon, the following note arrived from the Headmaster, Dr. Spokes :

" DEAR FRIEND,

" It is with unfeigned regret that I apologise for my unavoidable absence from your lecture this afternoon. I am called urgently to meet the School Governors in London to discuss with them the advisability of closing the School for a time in view of the continued menace of the flying bombs, more than one of which has, as you know, fallen in its vicinity with disastrous results.

" My absence to-day may, however, be perhaps providential, since it will leave you the more free in your approach to the boys at what may prove your last Talk with them for a time. To add to this freedom I have directed that none of the masters should be present at the lecture. I trust you are enabled to use the occasion as you well know how.

" With sincere esteem,

" Believe me,

" Yours most sincerely,

" THEODORE SPOKES "

Now the receipt of this note came as a genuine relief to me, for while the presence and support of the Headmaster and staff had been of the greatest value in commending me to the School, yet their continued presence had somewhat hindered that sense of friendly intimacy between myself and the boys which I felt so important if my talks were to advance beyond the stage of school lectures and prove of lasting effect upon my hearers.

The difference was indeed immediately noticeable as I faced my audience that afternoon, not only in the friendly

warmth of the applause, but in the unrestrained attitude of attention with which they settled to listen. Here is my talk and afterwards you shall hear what happened :

Things in life are of greatly varying importance. Some are trivial and incidental, and some are so vital as to be absolutely necessary to our true existence. We call these latter “ essentials ” and recognise that they supersede all else in first-class importance.

The unfortunate thing, however, is that there is considerable divergence of opinion as to precisely what those super-important things are. We need our sense of values adjusted and this should happen as we advance in years and experience. Things that seem all-important to a schoolboy become of no significance whatever later in life.

Yet there are certain things which may be called *permanent essentials*, things which allow of no debate and which are not matters of taste or opinion. These are things we *must* do, whether we like or not, which we can only fail to do at our peril, things which must supersede all lesser matters, and to which everything else must of necessity give way.

This is true of the least and of the greatest of us, of the King and of his bootboy alike. And wonderful to relate, it was true even of Jesus Christ Himself. We read, “ Even Christ pleased, not Himself.” He did certain things because He knew He must even if He died (as indeed He did) in the doing of them. I want to tell you this afternoon three of those things that Jesus said *must* be done by Him and when I’ve told you these I think you’ll see with me something of the reason and, what is more, something of the same urge they place upon you and me.

The first happened when He was a schoolboy. You remember how His Mother found Him after a three days’ search sitting in the Temple talking to the famous Doctors of the Law gathered round Him. He explained His conduct thus, “ Wist ye not that I *must* be about my Father’s business ? ” Life had taken for Him a character of grave responsibility to His Father, God. It could not be spent in the mere pursuit of His own interests and still less of His own amusement. He had to find out God’s will and to do it at all costs. That was the first great impelling *must* that was awakened in Him. And no boy here is of much account until he wakes

up to a similar urge. "I simply *must* get my colours! I *must* win that scholarship!" you say. Perhaps so, but this I know, you *must* do the will of God or you will perish.

Then when manhood came He spoke again and more explicitly of that solemn responsibility to do His Father's business and of what that business would mean for Him. He was talking with a Ruler who had come to visit Him in the quiet of the night for an intimate talk with Him about essential matters. Nicodemus never forgot that talk. He was never the same man afterwards, for Jesus told him the gospel changes people. It turns them inside out and makes new men of them. And Nicodemus, though good and religious, needed to be made not a better man, but a new one, and this could only be done at the cost of the terrible *must* of Calvary. You remember the story? Moses had lifted up a serpent of brass on a pole in the wilderness, and every Israelite bitten by the fiery serpents who looked in faith to *that* serpent *lived*, while those who refused to look died, whatever other remedy they tried.

"Even so," said Jesus to Nicodemus, "*must* the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life." There was no other way. The wages of sin is death and Jesus *must* die, "the just for the unjust" if sinners were to live. *And He died because He must.* It was the urge of love for us sinners that made Him go to Calvary though the way lay through the agony of Gethsemane. You and I owe Him everything that He did not shrink from all the shame and darkness of the Cross, that He might save us. Have you thought what necessity your sin laid upon Him? If we men had not sinned there would have been no such "*must*" for Jesus! Is it nothing to you that He died for you?

I paused for a moment and was conscious of a curious stillness that had fallen on the crowd of boys before me. It was something quite other than I had noted at any of my previous Talks. It was not that they were merely interested. Indeed, I had not set out to interest them this afternoon. I knew that I was nearer "preaching" than I had dared to be on any former occasion. Yet each boy seemed to be listening for himself as never before. It was as though Jesus "lifted up" on Calvary was drawing them with

magnetic power as He Himself had foretold He would, and I resumed my talk, speaking quietly and almost intimately, praying meantime for the right words to meet the occasion.

Do you remember (I resumed) a third person to whom Jesus addressed the words “ I must,” besides His Mother and Nicodemus ? This was a very different individual from Nicodemus the Pharisee. For he was a “ publican,” a man to whom the Romans farmed out the job of tax-collecting, a man outside the pale of Jewish society. He was a sinner and notorious as such in the city of Jericho where he lived. He wasn’t much to look at either, being quite a little bit of a chap like our friend the Shrimp over there ! And because he was lost in a crowd he climbed a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus, and he got more than he expected ; for Jesus, passing under the tree, looked up and saw him, and, to his astonishment, addressed him by his name ! But what he said to him astonished Zacchæus (for such was his name) far more. And this is what he heard : “ Zacchæus, make haste and come down, for to-day I *must* abide at thy house ! ”

The crowd who heard it were amazed enough, saying, “ He has gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner ! ” But none was more so than the sinner himself ; he could hardly believe his ears. For Jesus had said, “ I *must* ” ; He would brook no refusal, He was demanding that He should be taken home as a guest and a friend. He simply must not be denied. He gave Zacchæus no choice in the matter. He had selected Zacchæus as the one man who *must* receive Him that day as surely as later He selected Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, and the reason He gave the crowd was just this : that “ The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost,” and the most lost man of them all was the little, mean, crooked publican perched up in the tree. And if Jesus stood here this afternoon I am sure He would point to the meanest, crookedest, vilest boy in the hall and say to him, “ I *must* abide at your house ! ” and I am equally sure He would say the same additional words, “ make haste ! ” Zacchæus little knew the need there was of immediate action on his part. He didn’t know that Jesus was on His way to die in Jerusalem, that this was not only his first but also his last chance to receive Him. What a good

thing he made haste and came down quickly and received Him joyfully! To have deferred the matter would have proved fatal to his soul. How grateful he must ever afterwards have been to Jesus for His peremptory "*I must!*" that day.

Has it ever occurred to you that last calls are seldom labelled as such? Who knows that this may be the last call of Christ to someone here? Perhaps He is saying to you now: "make haste!—I must!" What will you do about it? Put it off (as you've perhaps done before) till another occasion? *Suppose you never have another!* Why not come down from your tree of pride and receive Jesus joyfully this afternoon? Are you willing?

I had not intended to press the matter farther, and indeed I had no need, for hardly had I put the question than a big fifth-form boy rose and said, "Yes, Solomon, I'm willing!" only to be followed by another and another from every part of the hall. I don't know how many in all openly "came down and received Him" that memorable afternoon. It was beyond anything I had experienced and though sober and real to a degree, yet who could avoid emotions being deeply stirred? Indeed there were to be noted here and there boys quite unashamedly displaying unwonted signs of tears while the Pi's of the Curiosity Club were aglow with joy! There was, of course, nothing to do but pray, and this I did, while all heads were bowed, and then the crowd dispersed from the hall, and I made ready to go quietly home. Not so the Club members—the last I saw of them was gathering the "wounded birds" into a classroom for an informal praise meeting of the Curiosity Club.

I myself was not allowed to escape easily. At the School gate I was accosted by the fifth-form boy who had first spoken up after my appeal. His name was Stoddart, and he was quite a well-known tough in the school. He came up to me and held out his hand. "Solomon," he said, "you've done it!" "Well," I replied, taking his hand, "I think it's *you* that have done it—and Someone else!"

"Yes, I know," said he, "but I can't start thanking you. I haven't the words—I never felt like this before in my life!" and the tears shone in his eyes. "And these are my pals and they just feel the same, don't you, chaps?"

“ Yes,” said one of the group of six or eight, “ but we’re all upside down and want things explained a bit.”

Of course, it ended in the inevitable invitation, “ Come to tea with me,” and we were soon gathered round my table at home talking together while we refreshed ourselves with tea and cakes.

How that pleasant tea-party was abruptly terminated shall be told in the next and final chapter of this story.

## X. THE LAST CALL

“AND now there’s only Monty to rope in, and it won’t be easy,” said Stoddart as we sat by the fireside after tea.

“And who is Monty?” I asked.

“Oh, you wouldn’t know him, Solomon; he’s Archie Montrose and is one of our little crowd. None of us would ever come to the Club meetings, you know; we thought them beneath us. Of course, we didn’t understand as we do now.”

“No,” said another boy, “Monty’s a tough customer. He looked quite wild after the lecture this afternoon and went off on his own without speaking to us.”

“The last I saw of him,” said a third, “he was being accosted by Curiosity Joe, but I didn’t see what happened.”

Just then we all looked up, for two ominous sounds reached our ears. One was the familiar air-raid warning siren, and the other, almost immediately following it, the far more ominous sound of an approaching flying bomb in the far distance. Instinctively we looked skyward.

“There’s the doodle-bug!” cried one of my guests.

“My word, look at its flaming tail!” cried another.

“And it’s heading this way,” said I, “and now the flame’s gone out—quick, lads, down you go!” There was, indeed, not a moment to lose, and we had no sooner gone to ground under the tea-table than the crash came. With an earth-quaking roar the explosion shattered the windows and brought down the ceiling, while the house rocked like a ship at sea. It was all over in a few seconds, and we were on our feet, all happily safe and sound without a scratch, though covered with white plaster and enveloped in a cloud of dust.

“My! that was a near one!” said Stoddart. “I wonder where it fell!”

He had barely spoken when there was a beating at the front door and a terrified voice was crying, “Solomon,

Solomon! Come quick, the School's down, Solomon!" Rushing to the door, I found the Shrimp white-faced and sobbing. He laid hold of me as though to pull me into the street. "Come on, quick, quick! It's Curiosity Joe and the rest of them in the place, and they can't get out. Oh, *do* hurry, Solomon!"

I needed no second bidding and we ran the few short streets to the School.

What a sight met our gaze! The whole pile was a mass of ruins and rubble, while fires were burning fiercely, making it difficult of approach.

As soon as I appeared on the scene one of the masters of the School came hurrying to me in a state of greatest alarm. I knew him as one of the newer members of the staff lately down from Oxford, where he had distinguished himself both in scholarship and sport. He was in fact a Rugger Blue. He had shown much sympathetic interest in my lectures in contrast to some of the older masters. He had recently been appointed Air-Raid Warden for the School, in charge of the Rescue Party, and felt his responsibility keenly. Pale and trembling, he pointed to a corner of the building not wholly destroyed and said:

"They're in there, in the fifth-form room, quite a lot of them, and there's no getting them out. The roof's down on them, I fear, and see how the wind is blowing the flames in that direction. There's not a moment to be lost, and the awful thing is we can't get at them anyhow. I've sent for help to break in the wall, but it'll take too long—it's terrible to think of our utter helplessness. Poor lads! What can I do? I can only find one small hole, and that's too narrow for me to get through."

"But not for me!" cried the Shrimp, who was still, pulling nervously at my coat in the greatest agitation. "Oh, thank God I'm small! Give me an axe or something, quick, and let me go. I can squeeze in there all right, and I *must*, I *must*!"

The Warden looked at me and I at him doubtfully. But the decision was not left with us, for the intrepid lad had gone, and before we could prevent him he was writhing and wriggling his slim body through the opening. He did not at first succeed and emerged scratched and bleeding,

to try again. This time he was successful, and we waited breathlessly—a big crowd by now—to see the end.

A great silence fell upon all who watched, broken only by the roar of the encroaching fire as the flames leapt higher and higher and drew nearer and nearer the imprisoned boys. Then came the sound of blows of an axe within. Blow upon blow was repeated and we outside could but imagine the struggle in progress in the ruined building. And as we watched we prayed, some of us as never before, while the cruel, hungry flames came closer and closer and the smoke and heat forced us back. At last—and not a moment too soon—our prayers were answered and victory came. A rumbling sound of cracking and falling beams within was followed by a breach in the wall and a gap appeared through which emerged one by one a number of dazed and shaken and thoroughly frightened boys.

Among them was Joe, who, seeing me, ran up crying, “There are two more inside, Uncle, and one of them’s Mike: I’m afraid, oh, I’m afraid they’re badly hurt!”

It was now possible to get in and a stretcher party did so without delay, returning a few moments later carrying their sad burdens, while we watched in silent sympathy.

Next moment, with a great crash, the building that had held the boys captive collapsed to the ground and burst into flames. They had been rescued in the nick of time.



It was the following afternoon when I was sent for to the hospital. I took Curiosity Joe with me, and we were soon standing between two beds, on one of which lay Mike, the Shrimp, looking pale and weak and quite exhausted, while on the other lay the very boy we had discussed over the tea-table, Archie Montrose.

“Only a few minutes,” said the Matron. “They are both in a grave condition and I fear the worst.”

It was very moving to watch the meeting of the two bosom friends, Joe and Mike. Neither said much as they grasped hands. “You saved us, Mike, old chap,” said Joe.

“Some advantage in being a Shrimp,” returned the other with a wan smile.

Meanwhile, I bent down to talk with Montrose. "Monty," said I, "your friends send you their love."

The boy opened his eyes in recognition of me. "Solomon," he whispered, "I'm glad you've come; I asked them to send for you." There was a pause. Then, "I've something to tell you."

"Yes, Monty," I replied gently, "I'm listening."

"Solomon, it was the last call." I bent lower to listen, for his voice grew fainter. "It was the last call—but I heeded it—I came down quickly—just in time. It was Curiosity Joe did it." A longer pause. Then—"I came down quickly—and received Him—joyfully!" And with a smile he turned over on his side and was gone.

It was some months before the Shrimp was on his feet again. Happily he made a good recovery at last, though for long it was doubtful. He had cut away some timber to make an exit for his friends and in doing so had brought a beam down upon himself with nearly fatal results.

And now it only remains for me to record that the Curiosity Club continued to flourish with a greatly enhanced membership, not the least effective of the number being Stoddart and his little crowd who met me around, and afterwards *under*, my tea-table on that memorable afternoon of my last Ego Talk at Staplehurst School.

**PATERNOSTER**

