

THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER.

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THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER.

“MEN, munitions, and money—these are the things that matter,” so thought and said one of the foremost of Britain’s generals, and for the object in view he was right, as these are the essentials for winning a war.

“Nothing matters in heaven or earth until we win the war” was the utterance of another public man at a recent public meeting.

The latter statement was, no doubt, a rhetorical exaggeration, but nevertheless we deem it of the utmost importance that we should get some idea as to what are the things that really do matter, and what are the things which are of

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secondary importance. It is obvious our answer to any such enquiry will depend upon our "terms of reference"; the "things that matter" for winning a war are very different from the "things that matter" for winning a football match, and the essentials for building a hospital are entirely different from the requirements for amputating the leg of a wounded soldier in that hospital. But in all departments of life it is of the utmost importance to have a right perspective; a vast amount of energy is wasted owing to the lack of such perspective on the part of those who are at the head of affairs, whether it be in the case of public matters or of private concerns. The stoppage of wastage is one of the greatest problems which has been brought into the front line

of importance during the present crisis, when the world's resources are being taxed to their utmost and a general shortage of almost every form of commodity is facing the civilised world.

In small things, as well as in big, the question is constantly cropping up as to what are the things or actions which really matter in order to secure success. Countless examples could be quoted, but if we take for instance the manufacture of steel, there is at almost every stage of its production something that "matters," something that makes the difference between indifferent and good steel, something on which the lives of thousands of people may depend at a later date when that steel forms part of a steel-clad steamer with its immense

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human freight. Go where we will, in the daily life of each one of us there is something which makes the difference between good, bad, and indifferent work ; and our endeavour is to find what are the things that really matter in causing that difference.

But let us take a wider view, let us leave the region of what is small and petty—although important in its way—and ask ourselves the question, “ What are the things that really matter for the genuine welfare of man ? ” Broadly speaking, what is for the welfare of man in general, will be for the welfare of each individual, and we shall not be far wrong, therefore, if the question resolves itself into the query, “ What are the things that really matter for *my* genuine welfare ? ” It is

quite possible to deal with this question without any implication of selfishness, even if it does involve a certain degree of self-occupation.

Every individual is conscious of being connected with the lower creation by the possession of a body subject to an infinite number of weaknesses, which finally gain the upper hand and terminate his existence on earth ; he is also conscious of having " something " of a higher order which, although not tangible or visible, yet produces very definite tangible results ; he may vaguely think of this " something " merely as mind, or as soul or spirit, or all three, but there is no need for this vagueness even if it be difficult to give a precise definition of the terms used.

This booklet starts with the recog-

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recognition of the fact that man is not merely a clever animal, but that he is a responsible being who must give account of his actions to God, and that he has a soul which must live for ever.

Any plans for man's welfare which do not take these facts into consideration are hopelessly shortsighted and cannot be of real service to man.

Great hopes have been placed on the power of education to improve the world, but the most advanced "culture" which a nation can produce has been shown to be but a veneer, covering all the original depravity of the human heart. Education is essential in modern life, but it cannot provide that which really matters for the vital and eternal welfare of man.

The socialist seeks to find a solution in the levelling up or down of all men and human resources, but he leaves out of account the vital fact of individual human ambition which will make absolute equality impossible. It is well also to remind the socialist that on the first occasion when there were two men of equal status on the earth, the one killed the other; and events such as those that are happening in Russia make it evident that history repeats itself.

If we wish honestly to inquire into the question before us, we shall go hopelessly astray unless we first face facts as they really are. Let us not shirk doing this, but look these facts square in the face.

Unpalatable though it may be, we cannot ignore the first great fact,

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namely, that

DEATH IS HERE.

Men give to death many nicknames ; young men in the trenches have perhaps invented more nicknames than ever before, but the nickname is used because the real name and what it involves are uncongenial ; yet calling death by other names will not get rid of its ravages ; nor will the nickname be any comfort when the individual has to face the grim reality itself.

What really matters is to know why death is here and whether there is anything that can undo the work of death. This brings us to the second great fact, namely, that

SIN IS HERE.

Philosophic questions as to the origin of sin may be of interest, but whatever the origin of sin is,

one point at least that is certain it that it has reached the heart of the reader and writer, and only a small modicum of honesty is necessary to make a man acknowledge that it is not natural for him to do always what is right. A tendency to wrong-doing is felt in a smaller or greater degree by all. Outward wrong-doing may to some extent be dealt with by the laws of a civilised country, but the majority of decent-living people do not come much in conflict with the criminal law of the land. Are they therefore sinless? The suggestion hardly needs contradiction, because death takes its toll of the respectable citizen as well as of the debauched outcast from society.

Death is here because sin is here, and all have sinned. The thing

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that matters is to recognise that we have sinned *AGAINST GOD* and not merely against our fellow men. Death is the wages of sin, and it is the utmost folly to ignore this fact. No cure can be implicitly relied on for a specific disease unless the nature of the disease is known, and no scheme for the welfare of man can be of use which does not recognise that the root cause of man's present condition is sin.

Before we deal with the remedy, however, there is a further fact that we dare not ignore. Men may have a vague feeling with regard to their accountability to God, but the vagueness gives place to absolute definiteness when we accept the third great fact, namely, that *every one must give account of himself* to God, and it is of the utmost impor-

tance to be clear on this vital subject.

It is surely one of the things that matter that we should know in what way we shall be brought to account, and what the character is of the God to whom we are accountable ; and here, too, we need not be at a loss as to learning that character, for God Himself has been pleased to make it known to man.

There are three outstanding features in connection with God's character to which attention must be drawn as being amongst the most important of the things that matter. First :—

GOD IS HOLY.

There is no denying the fact that to large numbers of men the idea of holiness is repulsive. Young men are chaffed and twitted with being

“ holy ” or “ pious ” if they make any definite profession of positive Christianity ; but the fact remains that God is holy and hates sin. God cannot give up His character to suit man. He would not be God if He did. The second fact is that

GOD IS RIGHTEOUS.

He is true to Himself, and He cannot make an error of judgment in His dealings. Moreover, He must punish sin, for sin is a blot on God's fair creation, and He must vindicate Himself. If God were to pass by sin and let man do what he likes without taking note of it, it would be a sign of weakness, unworthy of God. Slipshod justice might suit many men, but it is unthinkable in connection with a holy and righteous God.

The third great fact is that
GOD IS LOVE.

Love is God's nature, and all His actions flow from His nature. The question is often raised, how can God punish men if He loves them? but the answer is found in every household, where no one thinks it inconsistent with a parent's love that he should punish his erring child though he loves him most fondly. But there is this difference, that the infinite wisdom of God makes it impossible for Him to make a mistake in His dealings with man, whereas the human parent often errs.

Recognising the fact that God is holy and righteous and that He is love, it surely matters to know how each one of us individually will have to do with Him, and here it is well

to face the fact that God has something to say to us *now*.

He has taken pains to make known His mind and has clearly indicated what the proper attitude of man is toward Him *now*. That attitude is most aptly stated in one short expression, namely, "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." God now commands all men to repent, and if such a command has come from the One who is supreme over all, surely it is one of the things that matter most that there should be immediate compliance with that command, and that

MAN SHOULD REPENT.

Repentance does not suit the natural pride of man, but is the only possible right attitude for every man to adopt in the presence

of a holy God against whom he has sinned. Sin is momentarily pleasurable to the natural man, but when once the soul gets into the presence of a holy God the horribleness of sin becomes felt, and even the outwardly decent-living, respectable man feels that he has to a large extent been doing his own will, without inquiry whether he is doing the will of God, and for the creature to act apart from God is sin, for "sin is lawlessness," that is, doing one's own will without reference to God.

In repenting *now* man gives account of himself to God and admits that he is hopelessly lost and unfit for His holy presence; but there would be very little encouragement to repent unless he knew that the God against whom He had sinned had some means whereby He could

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meet his case and make it possible for him, a guilty sinner, to be forgiven and cleared from his guilt, so that not only the lost sinner could rejoice in being brought into the new position thus created, but *God* could rejoice in the recovery of the individual who had been lost.

God's love has provided the means whereby this can be brought about, and it is one of the things that matter most that we should receive the benefit of the

WORK OF REDEMPTION.

If sin is here, and it is ; if death is the penalty of sin, and it is ; then God could not consistently relieve man of the penalty, unless His righteous claims with regard to sin had been met, and the amazing truth is brought to light in the gospel that God has Himself under-

taken to meet the claims. In the person of His Son He came down to this scene of sin, and the Son of God undertook to bear the penalty of death, although death had no claim upon Him personally. The judgment of sin was borne by Christ on the cross, and His resurrection is the proof that the work of redemption is complete.

The question that matters most of all for man is whether Christ is dead or risen. If He is still dead, Christianity is a farce, no better than any heathen religion. If He is risen, it is evident on the one hand that the penalty of sin has been borne and the work of redemption has become available for all those who need it, and on the other hand, that for those who do not avail themselves of the remedy, there

remains no means of getting rid of their sins and the penalty attached. They will be bound to give account of themselves to God when summoned before Him, and will find that the neglect to take advantage of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus involves an entrance into eternal judgment.

But Christ *is* risen, and no man can afford to ignore this fact. His rejection by the civilised world of nineteen centuries ago has stamped the world-system as absolutely opposed to God, and the world stands guilty to-day of the murder of God's Son. It is to Him, the risen and ascended One, that God has committed all matters of judgment. Every reader of this booklet must have to do with Him. Let each one of us, therefore, face the fact

that there is

SALVATION IN NO OTHER.

Endless schemes for the betterment of man have been tried and are being tried, but many of them give attention to what may be regarded merely as the outward amenities of life and ignore altogether the essential facts that matter. What scheme can succeed which ignores the fact that man is a ruined sinner, that the world passes away and the lust thereof, and that only what Christ has done can meet the ruin and build up something new which will last for ever ?

Schemes of social improvement are serviceable in their way, and in fact necessary in the modern complicated state of society, but they usually break down at some weak spot. Education is beneficial and

essential in this day of competition among individuals and nations ; but neither one nor the other can touch the vital issues upon which depend the eternal welfare of man. because they cannot remove the moral distance between God and man. Riches are useful, but cannot procure either real happiness on earth or entrance into heaven.

The products of centuries of civilisation in Europe are being devastated at the present moment, but not one particle of that which Christ has built has been touched, or can be touched. All that He gives is in direct connection with Himself, and neither war, pestilence, or famine can touch One who is risen from the dead.

Empires are tottering, that which the natural man holds dearest is

crumbling up, but the true Christian knows that what he values most cannot be taken away, even if the most terrible catastrophe were to overtake the country in which he lives. He may even have to experience gross or refined persecution for conscience sake, but he has learnt to distinguish the things that matter from those that do not, and he knows that the light affliction he may have to endure for a moment, is working for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

When Christ was here the organised world was against Him ; to-day the same world, covered, may be, with a veneer of a different quality and colour, is against the true Christian, but the apparent victory of the world is short-lived ; what really matters is who will win in the

end. Time is on the side of the Christian; Christ is waiting patiently for the day of His public vindication, and the Christian waits too. Meanwhile he may apparently have to go to the wall, but it does not matter; in a few years the tables will be turned, and the man who learned to reckon as God reckons, and to take the long view, can afford to be temporarily misunderstood and even shunned as a fanatic or crank, because he has the inward consciousness that he has taken into account the things that matter in the long run, and not merely those that appear for the moment to "pay" best.

Surely it matters much that if God has spoken we should give attention to what He says, and while human theories and philoso-

phies vary from generation to generation, while one succeeding school of thought demolishes the tenets of its predecessors, the unchanging word of God remains the same.

All attempts to make that word fit in with the varying opinions of the day, are as futile as trying to make a square peg fit one day into a round hole, and the next day into a triangular one. That word reveals the things that matter, that word gives certainty instead of doubt, sunlight instead of misty darkness, peace instead of restless anxiety, deep-rooted pleasure and joy in place of shallow and frivolous amusement.

Man is busy building up, or seeking to retain, empires, but the best will pass away as they have done in

the past. God has established a kingdom which cannot be moved either in time or eternity. Entrance into that kingdom is by the narrow door of conversion, which involves repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and those who enter that kingdom will be Christ's companions for eternity.

We spoke at the beginning of this booklet of wastage of the world's resources. Will the reader pause for a moment and in thought place himself at the point which he must one day reach, with but a step between himself and eternity. Will his thought then be : " My life has been spent, my energies exhausted, on things that do not matter ; my life has been a wasted life because I can take none of the results of my labours with me into the

next world," or will his joyous feeling be then, as it may be now, "Through God's infinite mercy I am leaving the scene of things that matter very little, I have learnt the secret of things that matter eternally, and I am able to take with me things that will abide for ever."

This is open to every one, for God has no favourites, His desire is that all should get the benefit of the work of Christ. No one can afford to be indifferent to Christ, because either now or hereafter he must have to do with Him. To come into contact with Him now means salvation, to neglect Him and what He has done means eternal ruin.

At a moment in the world's history when a terrific conflict is engaging the attention of all men, we would appeal to every one who

reads these lines not to let the terrible happenings which engross so much attention, and the momentous earthly issues which are at stake, so blind the eyes and befog the vision as to make him lose sight of still more momentous issues—those issues upon which the soul's eternal welfare depends. To lose one's nearest relatives is heart-rending, to lose wealth or health is intensely sorrowful, but to lose one's soul involves sorrow beyond any description, for that loss is an eternal loss.

Surely at a time when everything that the natural man values most is in danger of being lost, God would have us reflect on the question as to whether we possess anything which will last for eternity. But even if nothing we loved naturally

were lost, and we gained the whole world, what would that amount to ? for “ The world passeth away, and the lust thereof : but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Let us finally rehearse some of the things that matter most, and present them as a brief history of a soul that has learnt them.

Becoming alive to the fact that death is here as the penalty of sin, and that he deserves that penalty at the hand of a holy and righteous God, he turns to the God against whom he has sinned and confesses that he is a sinner undeserving of mercy and yet desirous of receiving it. He finds that God in His love is more ready to bestow mercy than he is to receive it, and that Christ has been offered a ransom for his sins ; that at the cross He exhausted

the judgment which the repentant sinner deserved, and that in resurrection He has become a living Saviour.

The appreciation of the truth of Christ's death and resurrection brings peace to his soul, and he finds that God has not only forgiven him, but brought him into positive favour and has fitted him to be one of Christ's companions for ever. Moreover, he finds that God has sealed him with His holy Spirit, and that Spirit now enables him to walk, not according to his former desires as a man in the flesh, but as one who is able to do the will of God and to act in a way that pleases God.

Instead of being a servant of sin he becomes a servant of righteousness and finds that he forms a part of a redeemed company which

shares Christ's present rejection, but also His glory in a future day. His thoughts are brought into subjection to Christ and he occupies himself with the things which matter, those things which will abide when the best which this world can offer has passed away. He takes up his daily duties in a new light, he does them well, as doing them to the glory of God, although intrinsically they may belong only to the things which matter less and which will pass away, while in his leisure moments he devotes himself more definitely to the interests of Christ upon the earth, for he knows that these are the things that really matter.

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“ By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and

so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned ” (Rom. v. 12).

“ Jesus our Lord . . . who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification ” (Rom. iv. 25).

“ Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace [favour] wherein we stand ” (Rom. v. 1, 2).

“ Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear ” (Heb. xii. 28).