

The God of the Crisis
and His Christ

OR

THE DIE IS CAST



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"But I ——"—Psalm ii., 6.

This Psalm was written in a time of storm, and to-day we read it again with the noise of the waves and the tumult of the nations in our ears. Never has a generation participated in a more intensely colorful, breath-taking parade of events! Half an hour before dawn on the morning of September 1, 1939, German troops invaded Poland from five widely separated points, and the German Air Force set out on a methodical programme of destroying Polish bases. Without an ultimatum or declaration of war, Hitler plunged Europe into war to redress what he said was "an intolerable situation." A year ago, anybody who would have foretold the situation as it now exists would have been howled down as irresponsible. But we have seen the fall of five nations since the outbreak of war, which in itself was not inexplicable; but the rapidity of France's collapse after the penetration of the Stenay Gap by German tanks was entirely unexpected, and is still one of the largely unexplained tragedies of modern history. The after-math of that collapse is all too clear. At the beginning of the second year of war, the British Empire stands alone, supported only by token armies of the submerged peoples. Yet the Empire is facing the second year with more grim determination than ever to fight against bad faith, crime, and hate. It is upon a world of tumultuous rage and vain imagination that the Divine interruption of my text breaks in, "But I." It is a Divine interruption. Kings and peoples are imagining vain things and hurling vain defiance against the Lord and against His anointed.

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FROM THE BOOKS OF C. M. HUMSDANE

They are taking counsel together. They are saying: "Let us break their bands asunder; let us cast away their cords from us. "But I" a great voice says, It is not one of them who speaks; they turn to see who it is that speaks with them, and they find that they are in the presence of God. "But I," He says. "You are laying your plans; you are shaping your policies; you are annexing territories here, and setting up puppet Governments there; 'But I' am not a puppet; 'But I' also have a policy; 'But I' have set My King upon Zion My holy mountain."

God is not an element that can be satisfactorily excluded from our considerations of the problem. He has to be reckoned with alike in private and public policies of the nations. Otherwise when the agenda is exhausted, and the cabinet about to rise, and the question is put more as a matter of form than because a reply is expected: "Any other business?" He steps forth from the unseen and says: "But I" You have forgotten Me. "But I" decline to be forgotten. You have considered your interest. What about Mine? There in your minute book is written, "Resolved, that we break their bands asunder and cast away their cords, 'But I' have set My King upon Zion, My holy mountain."

This Divine interruption of mere human plans, this eternal purpose pressing on unthwarted through the storm is the pivot upon which this poem by some old-world Browning turns. It is undoubtedly a Messianic Psalm. Whatever its immediate occasion, one like the Son of God moves through the burning fiery furnace of its thought. It may be justly taken, therefore, to remind us of the truth concerning Christ and His Gospel, that rise sheer above the calm and tempest of successive ages, as the white cliffs tower above the waves that break in whisper or in thunder at its feet.

There is but one King, one Dictator, and He is enthroned upon a hill that is beyond all other characteristics holy. A throne that is set upon any other hill than a hill that is holy must fall because

of want of solid and enduring foundation. Any King or Dictator who supposes himself to be final must of necessity become a tyrant, because final authority is inconsistent with limited wisdom and restricted power. Finality can only belong to completeness. "But I" is the final word upon everything. In an instant it shifts the scene from earth to heaven. It turns our gaze from the impotence of human rage and the vanity of human intentions to the omnipotence of the eternal Will. It removes the emphasis from man and lays it upon God.

The interruption has three stages. First, there is the vision of God, seated above the storm, but watching it and breaking in upon it, to remind men of great facts which no defiance can destroy.

Second, there is the voice of Christ, the anointed King, proclaiming the eternal purpose which shall surely be fulfilled.

And finally, there is the admonition of the poet, urging the kings and nations of the earth to recognise those facts, and to fall into line with that purpose, lest they perish in the way.

Across our questions, then, there breaks the vision and the voice of God. Too often we look out across the troubled scenes of life, and exclude from our survey the Throne of which the earth is the footstool. We do not include God in the event. But He includes Himself, and that act of Divine self-inclusion makes all the difference.

The presence of God in your field of vision revolutionises your outlook. We stand appalled before the turmoil of the world. Suddenly, out of the dim scud of wind and wave a great voice sounds. The clouds that lower are lifted. The horizons that cluster round the storm recede. Beyond and above the storm-zone we see the unmoved Throne of God. How small the waves have grown! What a whisper is their roaring! You may not be able to tell why the nations rage, or the peoples imagine a vain thing. Somehow, either your curiosity has lost its edge, or their rage its terror. God has come upon the scene,

and you are troubled and afraid no more. The Dice of God is cast.

Yet, just at first, the vision which the Psalmist sees does not strike one as especially consoling. It is the vision of a God who breaks into derisive laughter at the rage of men. "He that sitteth in the heavens laughs. The Lord hath them in derision."

I need scarcely say that this is only a partial revelation of the Divine emotion over the rebellion of man. This picture of God who laughs at the tumult of the peoples may be completed by the companion picture of the Christ who wept over the city. God pities men as well as laughs at them. How little our big talk about the extent of the Empire and the vastness of its resources must sound to Him. What a mere passing wave on the eternal sea, the war that drags its dreary length along must be. How vainly do the rebellious and threatening thoughts of man clash against the Throne of Christ, and with what pitiful eyes He must look down upon their puny wrath. Yet, we cannot properly repudiate the terrible side of revelation. That side is not to be dismissed as a mere crudity of men whose spiritual sight is dim. There is a twenty-third Psalm as well as the second. God in Christ spoke to men in wrath and vexed them in His sore displeasure, witness the twenty-third of Matthew and the scene in which He scourged the money changers through the Temple courts. The truth is, laughter and tears, pity and scorn, compassion and anger lie closer to each other than we sometimes suppose. I cannot linger on the point, although we may be sure that God appreciates the ironies of history as keenly as ourselves.

The point for us is this: Events which made the Psalmist tremble did not frighten God. He laughs, but there is no uneasiness in His laughter. He is angry, but he is not afraid. Indeed, it is not at root, a question of God's pity, or His scorn. It is the confusion—mental, moral, spiritual—into which the events of the time had flung this believer, and the entire absence of any such confusion from the heart

of God. It is the contrast between human outlook and the Divine, and then God stooping down to lift His servant up to where He stands, that he may look upon the scene from the eternal point of view. BE SURE OF THIS: WHATEVER ELSE GOD FEELS, OR DOES NOT FEEL, ABOUT EVENTS THAT CONFOUND US, HE IS NOT CONFOUNDED. The state of things may give Him concern, never alarm. When we are asking, half in doubt, Why do the nations rage? He is not in doubt. He breaks in upon the fears of faith, and the rage of rebellion, with the voice that silences them both: "But I"—but I have set My King upon My holy mountain."

Now what are we to suppose that mighty declaration means? Well, whatever its immediate meaning was, its lasting message is plain enough. God has enthroned His Son, who was made flesh, who died and rose again and has ascended up to where He was before. This is what God has done, and no one can undo His work and doings. Nations may rage, peoples may imagine vain things, rulers take counsel together, but none of these things alter the irrevocable fact. "You may take up what attitude you will; but I have set My King upon My holy mountain." I believe that the cure for the misgivings we are apt to feel in the presence of events which seems to contradict God's power and to delay the triumph of His truth, is to fall back upon the great facts of the Lordship of Christ, which are summed up in the Incarnation, and all that is involved in it—the atoning work, the resurrection power and the ascension glory of our Lord. The Cross is the central fact of human history; and the only way to peace of heart amid the turmoil of the ages, whether in action or in thought, is to set the Cross in its proper place and then to look upon the changes, and the revolutions of the world in their relations to the central events.

It is my habit every morning before beginning work in my study, is to read two things, my Bible and my newspaper, and I come to feel that they are not so unrelated as they seem, and I should lose

a great deal if I read one without the other. The Bible brings eternity into the paper's record of a day. The newspaper carries contemporary events into my meditation on the Word of God. Of this, at least, be sure: We have not learned to read the newspaper aright until we read it in the light of revelation, while on the other hand, our reading of the Bible is not what it ought to be, unless it helps us to see the Hand and hear the Voice of God in what is happening in the world from day to day.

The Cross may be described as God's one universal audible interruption of human life. Of course there are other interruptions. God is always interrupting us. But Christ is the supreme interruption, whose sound has gone into all the world. History has never been the same since the Incarnation interrupted it.

The END which God has in view is the universal Sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. The object of the Father from the first to the last is that the Son, the Lord Jesus shall fill All Things, and All Things shall be filled with Christ. Christianity is not a doctrine, not a truth, but the knowledge of a PERSON; it is knowing the LORD JESUS CHRIST. You cannot be educated into a Christian. Christianity is the knowledge within of a Person, knowing HIM as dwelling within us. GOD HAS SINGLED OUT A PERSON AND GATHERED INTO THAT PERSON ALL THE DIVINE PERFECTIONS, EVERYTHING IS INSEPARABLY BOUND UP WITH HIS SON, HE HAS PUT ALL FULNESS OF ETERNITY AND THE UNIVERSE INTO THAT PERSON AND BOUND UP ALL THE FULNESS IN HIM; NOT A FRAGMENT CAN BE HAD APART FROM HIM; THAT WHICH IS TO CHARACTERISE THE NEW CREATION IS IN HIM. THE PREDESTINED END OF GOD IS A FULL PRESENTATION OF HIM.

That is the related "Eternal Purpose" which God has purposed in Him. The first and main and all-inclusive truth is that Jesus Christ is the *raison d'être* of the universe. He is the explanation of its exist-

ence. Dismiss Him from the universe and the universe ceases to have a motive and also ceases to have its integrating power and intent; it would then fall to pieces. That is why "it was not possible that He should be holden of death." In Him all things hold together! Jesus Christ is essential and indispensable to the solidarity, continuation, and purpose of "all things."

He gives meaning to the Universe. He offers the solution of the life of man. He is the tonic note upon which all human tones are supported. He is the keystone of the Arch which locks together the entire life of man, and makes it a noble edifice.

He is the Head over the Church which is His Body, and in addition, far above all rule and authority, principality and power. He is now Universal Lord. It does not appear like it; everything would seem to contradict the fact; but we need to be given sight to see that the Kingship, the Lordship, the universal dominion of the Lord Jesus at this present time does not necessarily mean that all are enjoying that lordship, nor that for all within the universe is it a beneficent reign. But even if that be the case, it does not alter the fact. There are other things which also point to the fact in a very positive way.

Of course, our trouble is that we take such short views. We are children of a span of time, and that span of time is of such great importance with us that our view of things is so narrow. If we could but take a long view, and see things from God's standpoint, how different would be the result in our hearts. In saying that, we have in mind the widespread denial of the Kingship, the Lordship, the Sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This period of the world's history is called the day of His rejection, and there is a verse of a hymn that commences thus:—

"Our Lord is now rejected,
And by the world disowned."

But it is not so easy a matter to put the Lord Jesus aside. Men may reject, nations may reject,

they may seek to put Him out, deny Him a place, repudiate His rights, refuse to acknowledge His claims and His Lordship, but that does not get rid of Him. God has set His King upon His throne. Of the Son he has said, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Heb i. 8). Nothing can upset that. The attitude of men, the attitude of the world, cannot interfere with that, cannot depose the Lord Jesus. He is holding things in His own Sovereign hand, **that nothing can take His place.**

Look at history and see what has tried to take the place of the Lord Jesus in sovereignty; tried to do what only He could do; tried to bring about a state of things, to accomplish which it put into the power of power of the Son alone, and how far those efforts have succeeded. Anything which seeks to bring about a state of things which the Lord Jesus alone can establish is doomed. You see it repeated through history again and again. World dominion has been sought by one and another. Things which were ideals, magnificent conceptions for the world, have been attempted, and they have all failed, all broken down. Kingdoms and Empires, Despots, Dictators, Monarchs, have risen to a tremendous height, some of them having a great sway, but the empires have broken and passed, their reign has broken down. So you have these things coming and going all the way through history.

Read the book of Daniel again, and you will perceive the realm in which we are moving. There you have the prophetic unveiling of the world empires; Babylonia, the empire of the Medes and Persians, then that of the Greeks, and on to the great Roman empire; they all pass in review, and then pass away. The lesson of the book of Daniel is this, that there is **One** whom God has appointed to be universal Lord, and no one else can hold that place. Others go a long way, but they never gain that place, and so they must pass. We may yet see great powers coming into being, vast ranges of territory under one sway, but this will pass away.

The matter is held in the hands of the Lord

Jesus. All this endeavour is doomed from its birth to go so far, and then pass out. Christ alone can have world dominion. He alone can bring universal peace. He alone can bring prosperity to all nations. That is held in reserve for Him and His reign. Till then there will be fluctuations and variations in the world's fortunes, but it will pass.

The passing and break-down, this confusion, this deadlock is all because the course of things is in His hands, and He is holding it all unto Himself. He is King! He is Lord! It is a tremendous thing to recognise that the very course of the nations, the very history of this world, is held in the hands of the Lord Jesus unto His own destined end. God has for ever set His Son as the only one to be full, complete, and final Lord of the Universe, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, with a beneficent sway and reign over all the earth.

Peace and prosperity is locked up with Him, and He holds the destiny of nations unto that. Men may attempt it themselves, and go a long way to usurp His place, but the end is foreseen, foreshown. He must come whose right it is, and of **His kingdom there shall be no end.** It has commenced in heaven; it is already vested in Him and held in His Hands. That is how we must read our daily papers. That is how we shall be saved from the evil depression and despair that would creep into our hearts as we mark the state of things in the world to-day. All is being held by Him to a certain end. The meaning is that **nothing** can take the place of the Lord Jesus. So the fact to which this interruption calls our attention is this: That God has a kingdom, and that kingdom is eternal, on its throne there sits a King of His anointing; a King of righteousness and peace and truth and love, who is mighty to save. Of that fact the Incarnation is the historical expression, and in it we find the encouragement which faith requires amid the shifting scenes and recurring tumults of the years. Grip that grand fact, with both hands, and with all your mind and all your hearts

If it does not make history easy, it saves it from becoming to your eyes a starless night, in which you wander and are lost. Often and often, as you stand almost confounded by the spectacle of warring nations, and persistence of ancient wrongs, the question of the Psalmist, in some modern form, will rush to your lips. But if we set Christ at the core of our life and the centre of our thinking, then we shall not be moved, neither shall we stand in the dark nor be left in ignorance. For the Dice of God is thrown.

That is not all. Christ is not so much an end as a beginning. He is more of a root than a fruit. So the Divine interruption does not end with the bare declaration of the tremendous fact; but goes on, with no change of voice, but with unbroken continuity of purpose, to confirm the faith the fact creates, by showing it at work among the nations of the earth. "I will tell of a decree Jehovah said unto me, "Ask of Me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and for a possession the ends of the earth." I say it with all reverence, but if this second stage in this great vision were not here, the first would be no use. If the Incarnation were a sort of aloe bloom which exhausted the Divine nature from which it sprang, so that after the exhibition of that glorious fact God's interruption came to a full stop, then my confusion at the raging nations would be worse confounded, and my last estate—with faith created only to be destroyed—would be worse than the first. I need a God who not only sitteth on the circuit of the earth, and to whom its inhabitants are as grasshoppers, but who enters that circuit and works among His creatures for the accomplishment of His eternal Will.

And that is what is set before us here. We are told of a decree which speaks at least of a Divine intention to do this.

Away in the unseen world, we are told a royal proclamation was issued, it revealed that in the heart of God there was a purpose of redemption towards

the nations that were raging and the peoples who were imagining vain things.

And that decree was not something, up in the air. It was a step towards the execution of that purpose. "Thou art My son," so it ran. "This day have I appointed Thee. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for an inheritance, and for a possession the ends of the earth."

We need not pause to inquire whether Christ asked or not. We know by the most infallible of all proofs that He did; and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He began that very day to take the nations for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.

And since the day of Pentecost He has not ceased to move toward the completion of the work He then and there began.

Let the history of the Christian Church, or the wonderful story of the first century of modern missions give the reply. I know no study, not in spite of, but because of its apparent drawbacks, more creative of faith, and more destructive to unbelief, than the study of ecclesiastical history.

Nothing but a Divine purpose, which will not faint or fail till God's order be established, could have overcome the difficulties and risen from the defeats and accomplished the results which are recorded there. Let anyone who thinks the ark of God is in danger of foundering in the tempests of to-day, read for himself the stormy story of the past, and be encouraged in God.

There is a spirit of doubt abroad to-day. And voices come challenging our faith, Nazism with its evilness, Stalin with his godlessness; these try to blot out the Christ of God, and proclaim that Christ is a myth, the scriptures are a fable, Paradise is a dream, Calvary is a legend, redemption is a tale.

Yet, some say the prospects are gloomy; the Church is declining, its faith is weaker, its zeal is colder, its activity more mechanical, its service more formal than it used to be. Ravens are flapping their

dark wings, and croaking of evil, evil to come. Dark-browed prophets are looking at the horizon, and predicting stormy weather. The Gospel is about to depart, to be swept away with the rubbish of the 20th century. It has had a long race, but that race is nearly at an end. Its ravishing music has been heard for twenty centuries, but that music is to cease. But they have forgotten "But I" and the dice is cast. That God has appointed Christ to be the universal Ruler of the world. His Gospel has stood when kingdoms have fallen, it has lived while ancient dynasties and religions have been wrecked; it has written the name of Jehovah in the grey ashes of thrones, and now it has "the dew of youth upon its brow."

Let the Church grasp that vision firmly. Let it not live under the sway of the visible. Faith can hold on without statistics; for it goes beyond the material to the spiritual realm, and knows that the unseen God is achieving results which are unseen by men. Christ is on the road of universal empire. He is, and no one can retard His onward march.

The Christ that died on the CROSS shall also come in the CLOUDS. He is now seated upon His Father's throne, but there is a vacant throne awaiting an absent King. This throne is David's throne. The throne of the dynasty of the "House of David." The only legal heir in the universe to that throne is Christ, who now is at the right hand of God, the Sovereign Lord of the earth.

There is a strange spectacle in the earth to-day, both in heaven and on earth. In heaven there is a **throneless King**. On earth there is a **kingless throne**. The kingless throne awaits the throneless king, and so ere soon the **throneless King** will take the **kingless throne** and **rule**. In the meantime, Gentile governments are struggling to keep the ship of state off the reefs and the rocks. The ship is in a collapse. It has run on the rocks amidship. The Gentiles have surely demonstrated their inability as world rulers from Nebuchadnezzar down to the present-day rulers and

kings. There has been defeat, division, deterioration, degeneration and soon destruction. "The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom."

What will the coming of Christ to the world mean to this world? It will mean as one has said:

The Prophetic Word will be Verified,

The Sleeping Saints will be Unified,

The Believers will be Glorified,

Satan will be Classified,

Hell will be Stultified,

Creation will be Gratified,

Holy Spirit will be Vindified,

Christ will be Satisfied,

And God the Father will be Magnified.

Finally, notice how this interruption is completed in the admonition which adjures men to acknowledge these great facts, and so submit themselves to the all-conquering Christ. "Serve Jehovah with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His Wrath is kindled but a little. This admonition reaches us all, and bids us to put our life, more than ever on the line of the eternal Will.

Every man who yields in deeping submission to the authority of Christ helps to hasten His Coming, and the day He will possess His own.

Faith is a personal act, which through grace secures salvation for the man who exercises it. But there is something more in it than this. The faith of the obscurest man or woman in the world has a national value, and even universal influence. It is an addition to the spiritual elements in the national ideal, and to the redemptive forces that are at work upon the race.

It is a power that makes for righteousness, and so for blessing among men. No man can be a patriot, or a philanthropist, in the true sense, who has no faith in God, no sense of the unseen and eternal. It is through those who live by the faith of the Son of God, that men will be redeemed and the Redeemer come to see the travail of His soul.

This admonition also has a national aspect. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever," wrote St. John. That is true of nations as well as individuals. The only empire that will last until the Coming of Christ is that which fulfils the call of God. The only imperialism that is not fatal and foolish bluster is that which perceives a spiritual occasion in greatness given, and pursues it as the purpose of God. History clearly teaches that national calamities have moral causes, and that nations prosper or decay as they are true or false in their allegiance to God. Every intelligent student is aware that the order of events on the national down-grade runs as follows: First indifference, then godlessness, then luxury, then sensuality, then moral decay, then civil war, then conquest by the foreigner, and lastly, ignoble subjection to some cruel tyrant. The nation that dethrones God, **He** in due time will dethrone.

"Whatsoever a **nation** soweth, that shall it also reap." When nations break the law, they must be broken by the law. It is one thing to have **De Gratia** on our coins, but it is quite another thing to have the "grace of God" in the national heart and conscience. Let the British Empire do the right, and heaven will not forsake her, for national righteousness means national permanence. **Fiat justiti, ruat coelum**—"Let justice be done, though heaven should fall," for right must win the long-fought battle. God has given the people of our sea-grit isles so high a place among the nations, to carry out His purpose. He has given us almost boundless wealth, and free institutions, and the example of heroic ancestry, and the presence of good men and women in our midst. And above all, is it not for this that He has made us trustees of the Gospel of His grace for mankind, giving us His open Word, which we may read with no one to make us afraid, and the great evangel of the Eternal Love which we may preach in all its fulness and simplicity, with none to bid us hold our peace. I believe with every fibre and the whole passion of my being that it is.

Certain I am of this, if we disbelieve it and refuse God's call, to follow lower aims and sensual pleasures and material aggrandisement, we like the empires whose colossal ruins strew the pathway of the past, shall perish from the way. But if we believe it and accept it as a gift and calling of our God, then let us lift our heads for our redemption draweth nigh.

If the Empire will Kiss the Son, and acknowledge His Lordship, she will keep her diadem on her hoary brow, and sway the sceptre in the interest of truth and peace and pureness, and righteousness which is the pillar of the universe, will be the foundation of her throne, she will still be, the asylum of liberty to all who are oppressed; she shall still be, the advocate of the free and open Bible to all peoples that on earth do dwell; she shall still be, the great nursery of heroes and reformers who loved her duty better than life; she shall still be, the world's great missionary, showering her sweet benisons upon all nations; she shall still be, as she has been, the parade ground of saints and the camping ground of angels. And so shall we come to know something of the height and breadth, and length, of what God can do through men and nations that obey His voice. "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusteth in Thee; and blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." Yea, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

I wish to close with the quaint, but well expressed, and deeply felt prayer of old George Borrow in his contemporary book, "The Bible in Spain," which he uttered, while contemplating both his country's greatness and dangers.

"O England!" he cries, "long may it be ere the sun of thy glory sinketh beneath the wave of darkness! Though gloom and portentous clouds are now gathering rapidly around thee, still, may it please the Almighty to disperse them, and grant thee a futurity longer in duration and still brighter in renown than thy past! Or if thy doom be at hand, may that doom be a noble one, and worthy of her who has been styled the Old Queen of the waters!"

"May thou sink, if thou dost sink, amidst blood and flame, with a mighty noise causing more than one nation to participate in thy downfall! Of all fates, may it please the Lord to preserve thee from disgraceful and slow decay; becoming ere extinct, a scorn and mockery for those selfsame foes who, now, though they envy and abhor thee, still fear thee, nay, even against their will, honour and respect thee.

"Arouse thee, whilst yet there is time, and prepare thee for the combat of life and death! Cast from thee the foul scurf which now encrust thy robust limbs, which deadens their force, and makes them heavy and powerless. Cast from thee thy false philosophers, who would fain decry what, next to the love of God, has hitherto been deemed most sacred, the love of the mother land!

"Cast from thee thy false patriots, who under the pretext of redressing the wrongs of the poor and the weak, seek to promote internal discord, so that thou mayest become only terrible to thyself! And remove thee the false prophets, who have seen vanity and divined lies; who have daubed thy walls with untempered mortar, that it may fall; who see visions of peace where there is no peace; who have strengthened the hands of the wicked, and made the heart of the righteous sad. Oh, do this and fear not the result, for either shall thy end be a majestic and enviable one, or God shall perpetuate thy reign upon the waters, thou Old Queen!"

May Borrow's prayer be fulfilled in this our day.