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THE SCIENCE OF SYMBOL

By GODFREY BLOUNT

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**THE SCIENCE  
OF SYMBOLS**

# THE SCIENCE OF SYMBOLS

SETTING FORTH THE TRUE REASON FOR  
SYMBOLISM AND RITUAL, THEIR RELATION  
TO THE TEACHING OF CHRIST, AND THEIR  
NECESSARY ADOPTION BY ALL FORMS  
OF RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

By

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"For Our Country's Sake," etc.



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## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. This World and the Other . . . . .	7
II. Symbols and Rituals . . . . .	24
III. Spirit and Truth . . . . .	39
IV. Life, Light, and Love. . . . .	56
V. The "Catholic" Faith . . . . .	76
VI. The Reason of Ritual . . . . .	94
VII. Invocation . . . . .	109
VIII. Communion . . . . .	127
IX. Conclusion . . . . .	144

# THE SCIENCE OF SYMBOLS

## CHAPTER I

### THIS WORLD AND THE OTHER

**F**EW of us but feel, I think, that we live in times of strange movement and change. If, when we were younger and read and felt romance, we carried our imagination on from our books into our lives, it was not a real world that appealed to our sentiment, it was a false world which we created for the time to suit our convenience. We left this fictitious and imaginary world for the real and commonplace one with regret, and returned to it with ease, till the increasing sophistication of our surroundings and the necessity for that exercising of the mind in different directions, which we call education, brought a day in which we felt our fairyland was deliberately played out, and left it without remorse perhaps, but inevitably, for ever.

We have no right to quarrel with the change. Those delusions which are delightful in irresponsible childhood, would certainly become ridiculous or selfish to-day in responsible men and women. It is, however, worth considering whether the mental

condition not only of savages, with beliefs and customs we despise, but of more advanced periods of civilisation whose customs and arts we envy, have not been in some degree the continuation of the child's fairyland into the adult's circumstance. Has there always been in less sophisticated, but perhaps happier ages, that hiatus between the nursery and the market which has become so recognised a feature of our own times, and are we entirely justified in rudely breaking up the fair fabric of the child's fancy to substitute our grown-up ideals and cast-iron facts for his supple and plastic ones? Which are the true facts, his or ours? That is the question. Or, rather, should not education, which ought to treat of the relative importance of our different faculties and how they should be exercised, pay greater consideration to that side of life which, in spite of our modern commercial habits of thought and practice—but sadly maimed by them—still persists in building some sort of a fairyland in the heart of the "Workshop of the World," and some sort of a religion in the face of its ledgers and statistics?

How difficult it is to approach the subject as I should like, may be seen by the way in which such subjects are popularly handled. Our professors of religion even are all scientific. They judge from facts and not from feelings, or they treat feelings as mere facts, in a cold-blooded way, lest they should be thought guilty of emotionalism. I do not wish to infer that facts are to be neglected. I only wish to point out that no one can judge of the value of what his nature may be incapable of

or his training] has neglected. But even that does not sufficiently explain the injustice of the modern fashion.

There is a belief, I trust no longer a growing one, that all our traditions, ideals, and enthusiasms can be classified and catalogued, and their proper uses as satisfactorily stated and learnt, as the bones of our bodies or the bits of our bicycles; and while this belief prevails, it sterilises every attempt to approach this subject from a more natural, a more spontaneous, a more imaginative and less mechanical point of view.

It has been the tendency of the modern analytical or mechanical mind to subordinate and sacrifice the inner and more powerful impulses of the heart, to the outer and more superficial claims of material and intellectual interests. How true this is may be easily seen by our modern literature. I am still young enough to yield an occasional half-hour to the alluring shelves of the retail bookseller's shop, and the titles of the new volumes still fill me with a glow of anticipatory excitement. I am beginning to learn, however, that the practical value of the books, that is to say their suggestive value or power of incitement to idealism (which is surely the final value of all volumes) has, for me, at any rate, long been banished to their covers. I believe the people who write these books are well-meaning enough; they have every recognised right to treat of the subjects they have chosen; they are in a manner interested in them. They have equipped themselves with the best that has been written on the matter, but yet they are not interesting, they make no

personal appeal ; they do worse, they set a dead hand on the subject and effectually still other people's enthusiasm for it.

Let those who view with dismay the daily increasing number of new books pause before they condemn my apparent flippancy. Would you say that the duty of science is to correlate facts ? I would ask of what use are facts unless they tend to illustrate and advocate the laws of life. It has been said, not unwisely, that the best way to learn anything is to write a book about it, and surely this desire to know should involve a desire to teach, is a surplus of desire or energy which the possessor of it longs to let loose on the world. The press is the modern pulpit which no one has the right to occupy unless he can edify his congregation. But our books, are, I fear, the unconscious symbols of our state of mind. The literary world of to-day has either no purpose, or it has meandered off into a hopeless tangle of cross purposes. It has no foundational rock. Its roots are in the water or in the air and not in the soil of earnest faith and serious intention.

I have taken our literature as a type of all our modern activities because it is a convenient one to handle. We have, of course, exceptions in it. A novelist does occasionally persuade you that he is not writing fiction, a poet that he is in love, and a philosopher that he has something to say. Some professions are, I dare say, less involved in the general apathy than others, but in most of them the effort to transcend the limits of respectable orthodoxy is rewarded with martyrdom of some sort,

and no professional man dares to yield a more than half-hearted recognition of the enthusiastic and imaginative standpoint of the science of life.

It is difficult to be just in judging of this spirit of intolerant diffidence pervading modern society and robbing it of spiritual interest, difficult to be just and persuade you at the same time that it is neither a wise spirit nor a beautiful one. Society is hugging with all that fervour of self-preservation which it has characteristically taught itself to believe is a primitive instinct, something which is detrimental and not helpful to its real preservation. We are not yet, in this country at any rate, openly antagonistic to religion. We would still like to associate civilisation with Christianity. We still say that the ideal of the Christian religion is to realise Christ's Kingdom on Earth, which implies that we persist in believing that a state will be most Christian when it is most truly civilised, and that a civilisation will be best when it is most truly Christian ; but our conception of Christianity and civilisation are so vague, that this creed of ours is in danger of implying little more than a belief in some sort of co-operation between the commercial classes and the churches which they support.

Now, though most of us imagine that Christianity is incompatible with war and highway robbery ; and a few of us go so far as to include in their condemnation institutions like Government, public schools and private property, it seems to me that we miss the essential feature of Christianity, which does not bother about institutions at all, but gives gladly to Cæsar what is Cæsar's, and only busies

itself with the state of our mind, knowing that if all is right there, everything else will be right: that wars will be just, robbery admirable, Government protective, schools exemplary and private property the public advantage; that all these in fact will become symbols or rituals of the state of mind which the gospels inculcate, because however ideally perfect our world is likely to become, we shall still have to maintain the weak, to tax the wealthy, to educate the ignorant, and to give our lives a ransom for many.

Whatever conveys a definite thought or feeling becomes a symbol of that thought or feeling. A crown is a symbol of power, rags of impotence, a circle of infinity, a dove of spirituality, an eagle of inspiration, a vulture of voracity, a tiger of ferocity, a lion of dignity—of the British sort, a monkey of impudence, a pig of gluttony, a donkey of stubbornness; an oak is a symbol of permanence, a primrose of pertness, seaweed of vacillation, sands of instability, rocks of strength. The whole of nature is heraldic not only in its facts but in its moods. Spring is the symbol of new life, Autumn of decay; green is the hue of the former, yellow of the latter; gold of glory, red of passion, purple of death, blue of hope because the sky is blue, and the kingdom of the sky, whatever it means, is what we have been taught to hope for.

We cannot escape from this symbolism. In the commonest conversation the symbol of every word stands for what it symbolises. We talk of "Halcyon days," "flights of imagination," "depths

of despair." Men call babies, brats, and women, angels. Here we get into the realm of poetry, but poetry is only the inspired selection of symbolical epithets. We cannot indeed speak without using some analogy, for there is no such thing as a really accurate statement; we can only describe a thing by calling it names, by saying how like it is to something else. The roots of words are finally only mimetic, and scientific language but an ingenious device to check inquisitive and unanswerable questions. At bottom it is nothing but a mouthing accompaniment to the appropriate gesticulation of what we feel, and has only survived other methods of expression because it is more economical of force. And so, not only in the words with which we clothe or hide our thoughts, but with all the more tangible words in which we clothe ourselves and express our wants in public and private, the whole of our civilisation is nothing but a system of symbolic gesticulation, as arbitrary and conventional and mysterious to other consciousnesses as the "etiquette" of my horse or my dog is to me.

We have no knowledge, no certainty, further than that two added to two make four: all the rest is opinion or sentiment. We are all artists: we all paint pictures and write poems; we are obliged to do so whatever we do. I shudder when I remember how transparent my life is. The shy person is so because he is exceptionally sensitive, and instinctively feels how naked he is, what tell-tales all his actions are. He forgets how affected other people are and is afraid lest all the world should laugh at himself. Indeed, it is a perpetual



cause of wonder to me that the world does not pause in the middle of its buffoonery of business, to roar with laughter at the object it is making of itself. The native of South Africa struts about in a tall hat and a pair of stays, to the admiration of all his fellows ; but society with us does exactly the same, strapping its head and heart up in absurdest conventions, and grimacing throughout with all the gravity of a kitten at play.

I should like to sum up the foregoing remarks in the two following observations :

(1) We cannot avoid the use of symbols but are obliged to surround ourselves with them, because they are the natural outgrowth or expression of our feelings, and feelings have a great deal more to do with our life than any "knowledge" we possess.

(2) The tendency of the present day is to ignore this inevitable condition of things, and to try to base our life on knowledge and not on feelings, in doing which it only makes itself ridiculous and pitiable by the creation of false or ugly and misleading symbols, which cannot lead to any true civilisation, but rather tend to prevent it.

The moral to be drawn from these foregoing observations is that the aim of all true effort and education should be to excite and train our imagination, and of all true civilisation to give it public and private expression.

Though this may be called a Utopian standpoint, I shall still assert that our religion and our art should maintain the supremacy of the imagination, and that there can be no possible reconciliation between them and science or exact knowledge, but only the

harmony of a perpetual contrast or balance, and that the attempt in this present day to make their interests appear identical is ill judged, and can only bring the names of both religion and art into contempt. Not that religion itself is not the highest of all sciences, or that an artist will not paint a rose so well for knowing how many petals she has, but that no amount of knowledge will ever make an artist or a saint.

To many, I dare say, such a close identification of the interests of religion and art may appear fanciful. "What?" we might well exclaim "has the Royal Academy to do with the Church?" And truly their functions seem as wide as the poles. More is the pity, for if each was in touch with the great Reality which gave them both birth their functions would be almost indistinguishable. That unity of aim, the surest test of strength, which every human occupation should illustrate in its practice, is now so lacking in each of these that they both disclaim any connection with the other.

I wish to talk about religion because I believe that till we can reconcile it, not with historical fact nor with physical experience, but with those vast spheres of unexplored faculties which we call our feelings and our aspirations (whose very vagueness is a greater proof of our ignorance about them than evidence of their unreality), neither religion nor the art which I associate with it can make our lives wiser or better.

History itself is constituted of a perpetual contrast and conflict between the material and the imaginative points of view. We find this conflict

disguised in many ways not only in the struggle between church and state, poetry and science, but also as conflicting elements within every profession or specialised activity itself. Thus, as we have seen, we may find in literature one party treating its subject from an entirely faithful and fateful point of view as Herodotus and Carlyle treat history, and another party which shuns such emotional considerations except as facts to be treated like other facts from the ground of reliable information only. This is the popular standpoint of to-day, and it is strange that even when our modern fiction tries to be imaginative it must be so in a strictly scientific way.

Perhaps the instance of pictorial art illustrates my meaning best. Here the struggle between the idealists and the naturalists is more easily traceable. In so-called archaic work, we find a purely conventional treatment of the subject; that is to say, it is treated in a symbolical fashion, and to an extent which is almost incomprehensible to our modern habits of representation. The artist is only thinking of the moral of the story he wants to tell. How far he is also considering it from an æsthetic standpoint, I dare not guess, though I shrewdly suspect the ethical and æsthetic elements in art are at bottom identical, and that a thing is beautiful just so far as it is good and true. His conscious interest in his work is, however, the moral or symbolical one. It is his appeal to our imagination and our heart rather than to our intellect; and the further back we travel in the history of art, the less dependent on realistic representation and historical accuracy shall we find

the artists grow, till at last we get him frankly substituting the type for the antitype, the symbol for the person or fact, the imaginative formula for the historical event.

Christ and His disciples are pictured as a lamb and sheep. "What matter," thinks the artist, "since all my figures are shadows and unreal, if I draw the Saviour and His friends in the characters to which they are likened? Surely, if I do so, I shall be enforcing the truth He tries to teach." Yes! and strangely enough the lesson is less obvious in the degree in which the picture is historically accurate and realistically true. A black Madonna inspires a greater respect than a Raphael, the crudity of an archaic crucifixion than a Rubens, less because there is something fascinating in crudeness, and mystical in archaism, than that it is more difficult to give unearthly feelings with earthly accompaniments.

It is the great mistake of modern art to think that feeling is evoked by making things look real. Feeling is not evoked in that way. A child loves its ugliest, its most pathetic dolls, best. The object of Art should be to evoke imagination, not to display it. The value of Art is its moral value, and the moral value depends on its use of symbols of one kind or another. The knowledge of Nature and the conquest of technical difficulties, has made it more and more difficult for Art to render any assistance to the cause of Religion, because when the artist's first object is to produce a deceptive imitation of Nature his symbols must become vague and can only appeal, like Hawthorne's, to a general

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sentiment of eeriness, and seldom, if ever, to a definite feeling; so that in a sunset by Turner whose work is undeniably classical because it is conventionalised, it is difficult for the average person to say, however much he may feel stirred, where exactly the symbolism and the morality come in. It is there, however, for all the modern school of critics can say. It is there, in his consistent adoration of the Sun as the symbol of God and Source of life and strength.

But for one genius, who, like Turner, can master the increased technical requirements of the present day, and be a symbolist in spite of them, we lose the help of what a thousand lesser artists might do if the technical standard set before them was not so high, and the accepted symbols were more direct. We cannot help regretting that the general change and trend of Art has been to divert feeling from a definite or religious direction into an indefinite and secular one, because its effect has been to exclude the lesser artist from being innocently useful, while he struggles to attain a standard that only very few can reach, and, because in spite of all this sacrifice of the humble usefulness of the many to the fashionable pre-eminence of a few, hardly a priest in Christendom could be found to call the *Ulysses and Polyphemus* a sacred picture.

Without that natural recognition by the Church, which the artist should have a right to expect, the progress of symbolic science was bound to languish, till, with the exception of the more consciously intellectual work of Burne-Jones there is nothing in the sacred Art of the present day but

speechless idiotcy or woe-begone apathy, or the still more dangerous realism of the modern studio, and we find ourselves in this sad predicament, that the purely material aspect of our life has become the overwhelmingly prominent one, and has ousted the wish, and even the very belief, that we have the power to treat it as an imaginative or emotional affair. But is not this position, this way of looking at life from the unworldly, the imaginative, the symbolic point of view, the very heart of the Religion we profess? The Church, I said, should be the custodian of idealism, the defender of the very principles which I assert have been neglected, the patron of symbolism, the champion of a spiritual, that is to say of an imaginative, as opposed to a material existence. What does the Church teach: all the churches? In how many do we hear that their Founder came to prove that faith in the unseen was mightier than belief in the seen; that there were two sorts of lives, or rather that there was only one that was worthy of the name, which He came to amplify, and that this life was not only independent of material conditions but often opposed to them? Are not our clergy occupied rather with mistaking the outer for the inner, the material symbol for the spiritual fact, more with buying the two hundred pennyworths of bread for the hungry multitude than by feeding them with gratuitous miracles?

Miracles, indeed! who believes in miracles now, except in a literary and symbolical sense; or in Christ Himself except as a mythical character, or else as a sweet personality who went about trying

to help the poor ? It requires something more than a "sweet personality" to found a religion. Let us dismiss at once that view of spirituality which avoids the difficulty of dealing with the supernatural by treating it as merely poetical phraseology, a view which is more and more popular with the clergy. This is hardly taking a symbolical view of the function of Religion on their part ; it is taking a cowardly and ignorant one. As the mere echo of the current morality of Society let the Church pass, if she is willing to accept so degenerate a position ; but we would rather think of her as upholding in the face of all opposition, and exemplifying in her own conduct, that state of mind which persists in believing the sentimental and not the scientific side of things is the true one. "Consider," says Jesus, "the lilies of the field, how they grow ;" not in their proper genus and species, but with a careless improvidence ; "they toil not neither do they spin, and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them."

Everywhere He insists on the pre-eminent importance of humanity ; "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Institutions are only valuable as they answer men's needs. They are, therefore, symbols of our wants : ugly if our wants are ugly, beautiful if they are beautiful. "Ye are the salt of the Earth." What if the salt hath lost its savour ? "I am the True Vine, ye are the branches." "Give to Cæsar"—and Society—"what Cæsar and Society claim : respect for the law, public decency, military service, taxes, whatever the State asks for its proper up-keep,

but not your Life, your Soul, that you must give to God because it belongs to God."

I only quote such passages to show that Christianity advocates an imaginative view of things, which, however vivid and true for those who have come to recognise it, is to the world unreal, unpractical and unbusiness like. The world does not know any better, cannot in its materialistic condition be expected to know any better. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The world can never understand what spirituality means, because the world is not spiritual; it is only intellectual, and spirituality is not even a refined form of intellectuality. Its seat is not in the brain. The intellectual state of mind succeeds the instinctive and animal one, and in his pride of thought man makes strange pretensions of its power. "Again," to use Christ's language, we "return from the world to the Father," that is to say, we are promoted above the horizon of purely intellectual intelligence to a finer one, and are forced to use all our instincts and intellect for spiritual or imaginative ends. This ought to teach us how futile it is to expect spiritual results from intellectual people or political measures, and also how foolish it is to cast pearls before swine. No more moral stigma attaches to the naturally materialistic person who does not know any better, than to the cat hunting for mice. The blame is for those who pretend to be spiritual and are only dogmatic. "If ye were blind ye would have no sin: but now ye say We see: your sin remaineth." The sin is in trying to make spirituality an intellectual affair, in pigeon-holing it, saying it is fact instead of feeling,



retailing it as only part of Life instead of the whole of it. Ignorance is pardonable and inevitable : but hypocrisy, pretending to be spiritual when one is not, or saying this or that is spiritual when it is nothing of the kind, is the unpardonable lie.

It is only when we approach the question from this imaginative or Christian point of view, a point of view which as I say is diametrically opposed to the intellectual one, because it insists that faith is greater than knowledge, and poetry more important than prose, that we can realise the meaning of symbolism at all or see that facts are only important when they represent feelings ; are, so to speak, letters of the Word of God ; and that consequently nothing we do is of any use unless it is inspired by strong feeling or imagination, which is what St. Paul means by his pæan in praise of Charity. The aim of Christianity is to make us all Poets, Creators in the best sense of the word, believers in a rational basis of life, a rational destiny hidden from the worldly wise, revealed to the children of Life ; unpractical and Utopian to the former, but the only practical and practicable thing in the world to the latter.

How far this ideal has been attained can only, of course, be stated in a dogmatic, that is to say in a symbolical or approximate way, because no spiritual truth can possibly be stated in comprehensible terms to unspiritual people. Christianity, believing that this condition has been achieved by Jesus, sums up its belief in the dogma, the essential dogma, of the Divinity of Christ, that dogma which represents the Church's faith in His spiritual supre-

macy and confirms His own words : “ No one hath known the Father (fully) but the Son, and those to whom the Son hath (in proportion to their powers of insight) revealed Him.”

To-day, in our exclusive worship of the Body, and the bread that perisheth, our Religion has shrunk into superstition. We believe—those of us who have any belief at all—in the unattainable virtue of Christ, and but little in any attainable wisdom by His saints. How shall we regain our revelation, how convince ourselves of the reality of Faith and the truth of the Imagination ?

## CHAPTER II

### SYMBOLS AND RITUAL

A SYMBOL conveys a thought or feeling. We might say that a symbol's function is to suggest and remind. When our religion first began to feel the need of expression, it had to cope with the same difficulty as a revival of it has to-day : the difficulty of finding adequate words to express itself in. Since words are to most people only representative of facts it is not easy to convert them, either alone or in combination, into recognised representatives of new feelings : indeed, it is only after long association with facts or feelings that they become words or symbols at all. Christianity was, to people who wished to judge by immediate material success, a distinct failure ; as a communistic experiment it soon proved itself unworkable ; wolves crept into the fold ; the principle of having things in common involved jealousy and deceit ; but the partial failure of experiments does not affect the ultimate truth of principles, it only chastens them, and Christianity is still young. Though it did not succeed in converting the whole world it went far to stem the tide of rampant materialism of the day, and proved, if we may believe history and tradition (and tradition is difficult to separate

from history), in many cases the truth of the principles and ideas it inherited from its founder. It did more than this, it crystallised those principles and feelings into distinct dogmas and ceremonies. And it is in the possible interpretation, revival, alteration, and amplification of those dogmas and ceremonies, according to what greater insight we have gained into the meaning of the Master, that our interest in the future of the Church lies.

The Protestant schism, in its enthusiasm for simplicity of creed and purity of worship, rejects most of the traditional ritual, symbolism of gesture, and appeals to the senses which the Church had invented with greater or less understanding of its Founder's motives. Their abuse may have over-balanced their benefit in the would-be reformers' minds, but the inability to find fresh symbols to take the place of those they considered effete reflects on the final wisdom of their schism, and, at any rate, displays their ignorance of much that Christ's doctrine inevitably involves. some

Agnosticism, that ultimate goal of Protestantism, or protest against obedience to what it cannot understand, the goal into which its professors of the higher criticism are rapidly guiding the Church, though signally barren of all insight into the value, necessity and beauty of arbitrary human symbols, shows at least an increasing appreciation of Nature's symbolism, and does to that extent prove my contention that no one can be entirely devoid of the symbolic instinct or free from its influence, and that the reconstruction of ritual is logically possible on the grounds of reason as well as of faith.

So far as we are devotionally agnostic, if I may be allowed the paradox, we are returning to the simple idolatries of pantheism, which gave such a charm to heathen or pre-Christian ceremonial ; but we have not yet arrived at the point of seeing that Christianity, without necessarily ignoring the poetic symbolism of natural objects, introduced an artificial system of expressing what in some degree is inherent in all humanity—a Faith in the unknown and its peculiar relation to us ; and it is only the growth on the one hand of that utter insensitiveness to artistic impressions which the rationalising tendency within and without the Church inculcates, and, on the other hand, the blind idolatry of superstition which in every branch of religion turns symbols into fetishes, that prevents our returning to richer and therefore more civilised forms of worship.

It may be opposed that Jesus Himself did not advocate the use of ritual, and that His teaching relates purely to the individual conscience. Extremists would doubtless like to establish religion solely on this foundation, but putting aside the belief in miracles, without which, as I hope to show, no religion could ever, not even to-day, be instituted, much less in a time of greater credulity ; how could we expect a revolutionist in ethical matters, such as the founder of a religion must necessarily be, to arrange a ritual or system of symbolic worship ? That must grow naturally and deliberately out of subsequent experiences. All the founder himself can do is to assert a principle and suggest the direction in which he intends its expression to be carried out.

The Reformer's business is mainly with the individual, he comes to create an atmosphere, to form his public, to proclaim a new truth, to revive an old one. How his followers will express their belief in his doctrine is, to a great extent, a matter of convenience, of growth, almost of accident. This is clearly seen in the office of the Mass, which has grown from the traditional repetition of a few words to its present immense elaboration. It is as obviously unfair to disassociate the essential dogmas of the Christian Religion, so long as they are homogeneous, from the teaching of Jesus, as it is to credit Him with all the mistakes His misguided followers may have made. I say "while homogeneous." The Catholic Church must be universal or one. While it remains intact, confessedly the only Church or congregation of the Faithful, it cannot fail to represent its Founder. Hence it is absurd to say that anybody is a Christian who only does or believes what he thinks Christ meant to be done or believed. The term Christian was first coined to designate a certain number of people holding fixed ideas about a person they believed to be a God. Anybody who holds the same opinions and has been received by that society is a member of it, not otherwise. Community of belief is essential, I do not say to salvation, but to membership of the society and possession of the title. If anybody wishes to be considered a believer in Jesus in any other sense than that in which the Church pretends to believe, he must find some other name for his belief.

All schism from the original Church not only weakens it, but injures the influence of its Founder,

whose doctrine must not have an heretical or disputed interpretation: and, till dissensions came, the Catholic Church, however imperfect, was the Church of Christ because it embodied the principle of Unity or Harmony which Christ taught was so necessary to success, and became consequently the home of symbolism and ritual, because these also require universal acceptance.

The individuals who composed this Church had embraced a new theory of Life, and they set to work to elaborate their Founder's thought and to create a new language, formulas, and symbols for their new Faith. As that Faith centred round its Founder Himself, and involved mysteries connected with His life and death and subsequent manifestations, those symbols had to be new, while so far as they really succeeded in helping to express His thoughts, He is naturally responsible for them, and we, as His followers, should not only accept the traditional expressions of His disciples' belief in Him, but proceed, in accordance with that principle of evolution which is so characteristic of His teachings, to evolve fresh and ever fresh symbols of our adherence to His doctrine and delight in His life.

We must never allow ourselves to forget that the Christian Religion is primarily a gospel of Joy. It was so for many a year, nor could it have thriven unless it had been so. Careful reading of the New Testament will corroborate what the records of ancient art reveal, that the Cross, the central symbol of all religions, which was reinvested with fresh vigour by Christ, is a symbol of triumph over death

as well as a sacrifice to it. Could this triumphant and exhilarating aspect of it have retained its ascendancy over the morbid thought of personal and physical agony which has been so associated with it in later days, what a history might have been ours! Could the Church have retained the power to explain and prove the efficacy of the Cross as a sign of hope and joy instead of despondency and expiation, no schism or "reformation" would have interrupted its Catholic integrity. Could the Churches even now rediscover its more positive meaning and believe again in its truly magical power, they could once more become Catholic in a truer sense than ever, without any jealousy disturbing their peace.

That Jesus is supposed to have instituted certain rituals speaks volumes for His own and His immediate disciples' constructive genius. The Eucharist has been the type to succeeding ages of ritual, as the Cross has been of symbol. It has exerted the greatest suggestive influence conceivable. That similar rites and symbols may have been used elsewhere, and in earlier times, makes little difference the difficulty is less to create or to find the symbol, than to invest it with an authority and power in people's minds. We may define a ritual as the service or use of symbols. A symbol is dead till we ourselves invest it with power. Faith is the mental process of such investiture. We cannot, while we have no strong beliefs or faith, get advantage from any form of words or shape of thing. As soon as the great miracle has happened and we have crossed the Rubicon between unbelief and belief



our spirit cries for adequate words and forms to clothe our new feelings with.

It is the last stronghold of materialism, and the strongest perhaps, this modern want of imagination to understand the difference between the real idolatry which would imprison spirit in matter, and that instinctive poetry which is obliged to borrow some shape or other from this material world to wrap its meaning in. In refusing to do this, Protestantism has itself fallen into the idolatry it condemns. It has only changed the form of its idol and set up, instead of the visual and mortal one of matter, the well-nigh immortal and infinitely more tyrannical one of mind. If we have any faith we are bound to seek some symbol or medium or expression for it, if it is to become of practical use to us. And words are just as susceptible of abuse and far more difficult to get rid of than the more material furniture of worship. It is the idolatry of words, the failure to see that creeds are only another form of art, only poetical makeshifts, compromises of the uncompromisable, which should be translated delicately and symbolically, and not literally, that has brought religion into disrepute. The Reformation has, as yet, only commenced. When the Church has rejected all idolatry and accepted all symbols it will become Catholic again.

Let us reiterate what we mean by the words Faith, Symbol, Ritual; because they have got confused and unduly associated with theological ideas alone, and theology is not religion; only Life is religion. A symbol is an arbitrary token or sign of certain feelings or facts, and serves to recall

these feelings or facts. Ruskin in "The Stones of Venice" calls it "The setting forth of a great truth by an imperfect and inferior sign." A photograph is not a symbol, it is only a representation of a fact. A picture ought to be a symbol of feelings; it is generally, like a photograph, only a bad representation of a fact. There is all the difference in the world; and it is a fundamental principle of criticism, that we should not confuse photographs or pictures of facts, whether in words or notes or pigments, with symbols or pictures of feelings. There is little comparative intrinsic value in the former beyond animal insight and ingenious skill: the intrinsic value of a true picture or poem is, of course, incalculable, but curiously enough it is the former, the bad picture, and not the good one, that commands idolatrous respect. A cross is primarily a plus sign, a token of the fact that two added to two make four. It is also a sign of the crucifixion, and becomes through being so a symbol of the thoughts associated with the crucifixion, whether of joy or sorrow; but there is nothing sacred in the cross itself any more than there is in a Bible. Not till the cross is carved by somebody who knows what a cross means, or the book is written by a person who knows how little or how much words mean, can they become true or worshipful symbols.

A ritual refers to the manner of using symbols. It is in itself a symbol because it is an arbitrary expression of certain feelings. But though every ritual is a symbol, every symbol is not a ritual. Every ritual involves an action, a symbol need not.

The act of kneeling is a ritual: the posture of kneeling, and the picture of a person kneeling, are both symbols of prayer.

Every spontaneous action is a symbol of feeling; a ritual rather implies that the gesture has been stereotyped in order that it may be repeated at will and by many people at the same time. Its object is to reproduce certain feelings by the arbitrary, and not necessarily spontaneous performance of symbolical actions, actions, that is to say, originally associated with a spontaneous expression of those feelings. It is action confirmed or sanctified by custom. A cross is a symbol. To make the sign of the cross is a ritual, intended to associate the person who makes it with the feelings the symbol of the cross conveys. A person making the sign of the cross becomes a symbol of faith, whether he believes in its power or not. The whole force of ritual, the whole reason for it, is to create or encourage the religious feeling. It is never intended to take the place of that feeling. We may quarrel with certain symbols while they are supposed to represent ideas which we dislike, but not with the use of symbols, because, as we have seen, that would be to quarrel with conditions we cannot avoid. It would be like quarrelling with our clothes, or with the electric light because it was not sunshine.

The force or power of a ritual is necessarily also in proportion to the number of people who are influenced by it and share in its performance.

Faith itself is only a faculty or mental position. It is obviously unproductive till it finds fruit in some ritual or symbol. Prayer is a ritual. A

printed prayer may become a symbol or reminder of his faith to any one looking at or reading it. But a printed prayer or text cannot constitute a ritual. The Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments framed and glazed are symbols of certain ideas to all who can read them, and very vital symbols if they represent vital truths. When they are repeated or sung they become rituals whose potency depends, of course, on the amount of faith which is brought to bear on that performance. The framed text is not a high form of symbol. The finer symbol will naturally be a less mechanical expression. It will be a work of art, the direct outcome of a strong thought or emotion. All magic is in that. Born of intense feeling it reflects that feeling ever afterwards from itself, as an odour or atmosphere, to those who are susceptible to the feeling which gave it birth. And so we have several grades or degrees of symbols, dependent for their potency on the actual amount of feeling realised in their manufacture, and the true depth of the feeling they represent and can evoke.

We know that its dread of idolatry has induced Protestantism to shun any strong expression of feeling as a dangerous tendency. Hence its symbolism is of a mechanical and affected type. Based originally on the belief that nobody could ever doubt the truth of revelation, it regards any emotional appeal to the senses with suspicion, as untrustworthy and unnecessary. It consequently only favours that class of symbols which is purely intellectual. It avoids the arts. Pictures and statues and scents and colours and candles are

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an abomination to it, inside the church, unless in a very modified form when they are strictly labelled "for decorative purposes only"; but it rejoices in texts, for a text only appeals to the imagination through the intellect; one cannot possibly worship a text. The text is the lowest form of religious symbol; hardly a symbol at all in the truer sense, because it has no life in itself: it cannot appeal to the person who has not learnt to read.

I have been confining myself to religious symbolism because Religion must be the home of symbolism. Protestantism is full of symbols, but they are ugly and unconscious ones. "Forms of worship are essentially magical," says Louis Constant; "they operate of themselves the religious work, that is, the creative exaltations of the intuitions of faith and visions whether celestial or infernal. According to their greater or less morality they are a medicine or poison to the mind. Religions devoid of ceremonies are cold and inefficacious."\*

This criticism reflects especially on the services of Protestant churches, which are certainly very deficient in that poetry, magic, and suggestiveness which it is the function of a ritual to supply. We are frightened of the influence these things might have if we encouraged their use. We are afraid their fascination might run away with us. We have never shaken off the fear of witchcraft, and our northern imaginations picture more readily the buffooneries of a witches' sabbath and the terrors of eternal punishment than the miracles of the Saints and the joys of Heaven. Our fear

\* The Mysteries of Magic.

of the supernatural is akin to spiritual conceit, and we have mistaken isolated injunctions for general directions. Because we are told to pray in secret, we pray exclusively so. We are taught to believe that we have only to close our eyes to be in Heaven's antechamber. Heaven is not so easily scaled. We deceive ourselves and others. The Catholic Church is more modest. It gets what help it can, up that long ladder to the sky, from Art. What is Art? Art is the devotion of our imaginative powers to realise the Impossible, the Ideal. And that also is the duty of Religion. By excluding Art, Religion has committed both murder and suicide. It has slammed to the door of the sheepfold so that neither the sheep that are in can go out, nor those outside can go in, to find pasture. This "open door," this chance to "go in and out," is the necessary interaction between the life of contemplation and the life of practice: between the abstract and the concrete: between Heaven and Earth. It is the "door of the sheepfold." It is Christ.

We have, of course, to pay the penalty of this exclusion, and the Art which does not help us to realise religious truths also falls short of its own vocation. That, however, is at present outside the scope of our subject, except so far that the Church which rejects and is afraid of symbols is the enemy of Art. Religion ought to teach Art its *raison d'être*, and become again its proper patron, but the illogical poverty of our Protestantism has so warped our reason that we can hardly understand the nature of the true symbolism of devotional art. Catholicism is in much the same plight, for though a traditional

halo surrounds its ritual, its symbols are almost as rigid and mechanically impotent as the Bible Society's tracts in the railway waiting-room. I even doubt if we are capable of recognising a real symbol should we stumble across one. What we require is a vivid revival of spontaneity. Ruskin has told us that it is not less sensation that we want, but more; and Blake was never weary of saying the same thing; but these home truths shock our modesty. We have made a God in our own image, a God of proper self-respect and starched self-control, and we are obliged to worship the work of our own brains.

The tree must be judged by its fruit and symbols and ritual by the help they give us to become better men and women. Art, in its highest and best and finally its only sense, is the faculty of symbolising our better feelings, and Art must be made to realise its mission. If we grant that Art has this mission, this really religious duty, we must admit that the outward expression of religion, its symbols and ritual, is Art, and that the priest is the artist, and the artist, priest.

It is only a question, since symbols are inevitable, what our symbols are to consist of, and what they are to symbolise or mean. Few savages pay greater respect to their "stocks and stones" than the average Evangelical Christian does to his Bible—the actual volume he is in the habit of using. There is no more harm in the respect paid to the book than in that paid to the idol. A statue of the Madonna is a symbol, a reminder of the Madonna and all she stands for; a picture of a saint for the particular

victory or virtue the saint is associated with. The dead bones of a saint, a chip of the true Cross, a Holy Coat, are symbols or suggestions of the persons connected with these things and, therefore, of the virtues supposed to be inherent in these persons. It is of less importance whether the virtues are really inherent in the relics, or whether the stories are really true, than that they should be beautiful and helpful. The tale of St. Christopher is obviously impossible, mythical, miraculous, but it is none the less beautiful and truly helpful and suggestive. Nay! it seems to me that it is all the more so for that very reason.

The reverence paid to relics, to bits and bones and bodies and bibles, may be quite innocent, but is not a high form of worship, because they are seldom works of Art, and have not the inherent value which belongs to real works of Art. It is always well to have our currency cut out of good metal. Symbols are the currency of Religion, and Art is the precious metal they should be cast in. If they have not this stamp, they have at best only the literary or associative value of Protestant symbols. And if they are apt to degenerate into fetishes with superstitious people, it is owing to the fact that most people are as innately superstitious as the Athenians to whom St. Paul spoke on Mars' Hill, and prefer any symbols to none. But the pity consists, not in the undue reverence paid to such things, but that the Church does not supply beautiful, inherently educational or artistic symbols instead of poor and ugly ones.

The worship of a dead lion, may, however, be less



harmful than the worship of a live donkey. The whole question, I repeat is, whether what we really respect or worship, dead or alive, inside or outside our churches and chapels, is worth worshipping, and whether what we worship inside our churches is the same that we worship outside them.

## CHAPTER III

### SPIRIT AND TRUTH

**A** MORE plausible objection to the use of symbols seems to consist in their apparent contradiction of the words of Jesus : " God is a Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." But to translate this beautiful aphorism as directed indiscriminately against every external form of religion, or ritual of any kind, is to credit Jesus with the habit of confusing terms in the same slovenly manner as we are apt to do when we approach religious questions. And before we take this popular interpretation for granted, we must be certain that the use of symbols is really opposed to " spirit and truth," or we must approach the question from another point of view, and try to discover how worshipping " in spirit and in truth " may differ from any other sort of worship.

Many people, however, consider every conscious use of ritual an infringement of this law, forgetful that any organisation, sect, church, or body of believers, meeting to confess a common creed, do by that very action admit the necessity of symbols, however simple, and of ritual, however reduced to its most meagre formalities.

But it would be wrong to interpret these majestic

words of the Master in such a narrow sense. Jesus is representative of that supremely intellectual combination between Free thought and Reverence which marks, not by any means, all Saints, but certainly all great reformers. He probed those depths of anarchic introspection and philosophic doubt which afflict the minds of men at times when great changes are imminent. He realised the emptiness of earthly promise, the vanity of wealth, the futility of sensuous enjoyment, of intellectual pre-eminence or worldly power. These He put behind Him, but instead of seeing only the blankness of despair beyond, and the hopelessness of all effort or belief, instead of cringing before an unsolved and insoluble problem of life, or fleeing from it as an unanswerable and devouring Sphinx, He revealed it to us as a divine Father full of infinite pity, love, and succour. Where other men bowed, He rose erect; where others found death, He found life; where others saw the end of effort, He saw the beginning of it, the secret of all success, the revelation of all mysteries.

The necessity for an underlying faith in what we can never prove by our limited experience, but must always take for granted as well-intentioned to us, never deserted Him, and ought never to desert us. We who pretend to follow Him must accept His statement that God is true and not deceptive, that there is a Providence, a tangible communicative Providence and Law of Life instead of an accidental evolution and adaptation to environment. But neither was the obvious value of external help, or, as we can put it now, the use of symbols

of every degree, neglected or rejected by Him. He could not, as we have seen, deliberately initiate a religion based on Himself, while He was alive, but He laid the foundations for a future one, and Himself fulfilled and advocated the observance of the religious ritual of His day.

Instead of rejecting the use of symbols, it is just His constant use of them which separates Him so markedly from other reformers. His whole life, His whole conversation, was pre-eminently, exquisitely, and intentionally symbolical. It is, in fact, exactly round the question whether many of His related acts are true because they are so unusual, so improbable unless looked at as the deeds of an intensely poetical or symbolical nature, that the controversy concerning His claim to Divinity now rages. He was so eminently symbolical that He neglected philosophy for practice, and exposition for example. "The works which I do bear witness of Me," was what He said in explanation of His way of life. "My life is the symbol of My thought, My practice of My preaching," is what He seems to say. "If ye believe not My words, believe Me for the very works' sake which I do."

Indeed, the whole position of doing without external expression is too illogical to discuss. It has been aptly described as "crooning for the moon," and so far from Jesus' words being twisted to imply that all true worship must be solitary and silent, they insist on its being full of passion and reality. That is what He means by "Spirit and Truth."

He was no exaggerated ascetic. He was, on the

contrary, supremely susceptible to natural beauty. No one could have drawn our attention to the beauty of wild flowers like He has done. The sparrows had His sympathy, and if we do not find Him directly advocating humaneness in our relations to animals, it was more from the intense necessity of making men less animals themselves than from any poverty of appreciation of the claims of our dumb friends. It is not recorded of Him that He condemned the butchers and sportsmen of His day, but once, when His disciples shrank in disgust from the sight of a dead dog by the wayside, "See," He said, "pearls are not whiter than its teeth." Symbols are always necessary. Let us see that they are beautiful and true; that is to say, that they symbolise true and beautiful thoughts. If religion neglects their value, if the shepherd neglects his flock, they may become ugly and untrue, or, expelled from their proper occupation of helpful suggestiveness, they will leave religion impoverished by their absence, and sinking into the sphere of merely secular art, decay as we have seen our Art decay. Happily, society is more inherently vigorous than any form or dogma, ritual or creed, and the large truth which underlies all of these, that we must live by faith, and that we must learn to express it, will reappear in new forms and new rituals, and throw new and curious lights on long-forgotten facts.

The position of symbols in our future religious worship cannot be estimated before their relation to the whole of life, as well as to religious belief, is realised. Not that we can make a sceptic devout by showing him how inevitable their use is, but

that at any rate we can silence those who deny that God can be approached through their help. God, in His mercy, has given us many ways of approaching Him—Himself remains hidden. He is a Spirit invisible, unprovable, occult. But deny His creatures, and you deny their Creator, or leave Him without witnesses. "For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made."

The Puritan will doubtless acknowledge their witness, but assume that it is a passive one. "The earth," he will say, "is full of His majesty;" that is obvious to all, but when man would approach his God he must do so through his conscience only, which was given him for that purpose."

True! and the saints' desire is always to be so approaching God, to be constantly thus in His presence; but that is obviously a private privilege, not a public one, even if exercised in public; there must be some other privilege to share, some further object to gain, when two or three are gathered together for prayer. The public opportunity must be granted, either because the private is apt to be neglected, or because a chorus of praise is sweeter in God's ear than the solitary song, or because religion has a communal claim on us as well as an individual one.

This is an important point which involves the whole principle of symbol and ritual, for to the question, "Why do we go to the Church?" the natural answer, "Because it is easier to follow prayers than to originate them; because there is a

feeling of strength and pleasure in combination; because we believe in the doctrines of the Church," practically admits the value of a custom which becomes symbolic as soon as it grows conscious and organised. "To follow prayers rather than originate them," has been only further crystallised by the Catholic rosary and the Indian praying wheel; while these rituals or systems have the further advantage of eliminating the personality of the priest which must be an obstacle to that secrecy, that personal and private quality of prayer which the gospels rightly inculcate for its efficacy. But, even in Protestant communions, the reiteration of prayers accentuated by the monotony of the voice, only disguises but does not destroy the rhythm of the beads, and the revolutions of the wheel.

All these methods are only symbols of that pulse, vibration, or rhythm, which is the first expression of motion or life in all God's creatures, whether it is seen in the regular circulation of the blood, or in the alternate inspiration and expiration of the breath, or in any of the multitudinous phenomena of taking-in and giving-out of nature and life.

It would be easy to multiply instances to illustrate this musical Law, instances, which to that strange animal existence from which we are slowly emerging, carry no significance just because they are so regular, and appear so inevitable. It is usual to accept the succession of the seasons, of day and night, of peace and war, of love and hate, of Life and Death without question or comment, because their occurrence is common, while to wiser thought it is just because

they are so regular and so common, and appear so inevitable, that they become significant and full of revelation. But though it seems obvious that the object of religious worship is advanced by showing its relation to the rest of those regular laws that govern our lives, I shrink from incurring, on the one hand, the charge of mysticism, which, to some ears, such a simple correspondence might imply, and, on the other, the challenge to corroborate these views by clearer evidence, if I were to insist too closely on this principle of alternation and balance as affecting so serious a matter as our intercourse with the Deity.

And yet, what argument is there for the dogmas of religion itself, but that they epitomise in necessarily brief, and, therefore, in symbolical or poetical language the laws of life, which we are bound to acknowledge because we are helpless before them, and, being so, should learn to reverence and obey? He is the highest critic who is most conversant with those laws. As soon as our hearts and consciences confess God, the whole of nature rushes to prove His presence, and the very stones would cry out if we were silent. But in the ecstasy of such a temper we should hardly turn to a scientific handbook for definitions of our mood!

To draw a Protestant distinction between the symbolism of things and actions, and the symbolism of words; to admit the latter and reject with abhorrence the former, is absurd. Both are symbolical because everything which is not feeling or sensation is symbolical, is a compromise. Feelings are the only facts, and it is the object of symbols to stimu-



late feeling, that it may issue again in the fruit of thought and words and deeds. The crucifix is as indelibly pictured in the imagination of the most uncompromising Protestant Puritan, by his constantly dwelling on the death of Christ—and not only pictured but worshipped there—as it is by all the wicked images in the Church of Rome.

Nature, the World, the Universe, is the word of God, and we, if we believe Christ, are His body ; that is to say, God made manifest in Man. To exclude symbols, to refuse to say what we think and feel in any way but in words, is to limit the Incarnation. To refuse their sacredness is to stultify Christ. Not to accept the open means of approach to Him which God has given us, which He is constantly teaching us to accept by opening our eyes to the beauty of all natural things and sights and sounds, is a worse idolatry. It is the worship of our marred and narrow conception for the universal one. To attribute idolatry to the use of symbols is blasphemy, because it is opposing the Holy Spirit, which seeks for evolution, for greater and greater expression, in mental and material things.

Our sanity and freedom in religious matters is secured so long as it is guarded by the remembrance of the underlying truth that God is a Spirit, invisible, intangible, immaterial. The necessity for constantly repeating that truth, lest we should forget it, constitutes the paradox of ritual, of all public worship. The essence must ever be proclaimed by the examples, the general truth by the particular falsehood, the ideal perfection by the actual imperfection.

In the rhythmically enacted repetition of this truth we pass the gates of material and intellectual self-consciousness which tie us to ourselves, and realise that God is all-absorbing, all-entrancing, and all-sufficient. How can You, then, who are afraid of symbols, preach the abstract nature of God? Have you not rather materialised His Spirit by making Him Personal, by trying to emphasise His nature which you cannot know, instead of worshipping Him through His attributes which you may and do know. Do you not, by your dogmatic familiarity with His purposes, fall into the very idolatry you would condemn in others? Are you not dragging God down to our level, instead of lifting us up to His?

“God is a Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth.” That is a hard saying, for we can hardly believe that God intends our worship to be entirely a silent one. It is typical of our barbarism, of the little real significance that we pay to things, that we should unconsciously associate “Spirit and Truth” with abstraction and silence. Let us try to paraphrase the passage in some more human manner. God Himself is spirit, influence, the impalpable part of things, to us; but We, who are of the earth, must worship Him in spirit and in truth, that is to say, not only from His own side of divine thought and feeling, but from our own side of material reality. It is not the words themselves, if our interpretation be admitted, enjoin the use of symbols rather than their neglect, and teach us the principle of symbolism, the very principle of the Atonement, or

Harmony of the Divine and the Human, of "Spirit and Truth?"

Scientific language, exact, dogmatic language, can never be the language of worship, because it is the intention of scientific language to be literal, to say exactly what things are, and we cannot say exactly what God is; we can only talk about Him in a parabolic way, in the language of poetry and analogy.

God's truth is not literal, not scientific, not definable, not sensible, as we understand truth. It is above literalness, science, sense, definition. It is universal, poetical, emotional, abstract, non-sensical. It can only be suggested, hinted at, inferred. Wherever there is dogma other than this, there is limitation, and limitation is falsehood. But this is no argument for giving up our worship. It is an argument for giving up all attempt to worship God from that side only, which He claims as His own. God jealously claims all exact truth for Himself. If man attempts to use it, he ends in mere labyrinth of metaphysic and white-washed walls. That is not the worship that God demands. He is not the negation of physical and intellectual things, He is their fulfilment. How then can they be neglected by us, whose perfection also must come through their perfection? The whole of our experience cannot contain God. The universe in length and breadth, in height and depth, in fact and fancy, in mind and matter, is He. That is the solid Cross of our Faith. Not a wire-drawn reflection of our own intellectual narrowness, and failure to be all-wise, but an enthusiastic appeal to sight

beyond our vision, and to a fact we can never wholly grasp.

We have abandoned the "Idol" theory. It is not the idol that degrades. It is only what the idol stands for, the conception behind the idol, the idea which the idol symbolises. The idol is always innocent. It is our duty to raise the Idea, the Idol will follow suit.

We are all the victims of associations. Let us then make the best of what is inevitable. It is useless to kick against the pricks, against the overwhelming evidence of God. If Nature reminds us of God, then indeed is Nature the symbol of God. The Tree, the Stone, the Animal, the roughly hewn idol, image, or totem is only, in the mind of the savage, the imperfect, but selected symbol or reminder of his particular idea of "the power outside himself which makes for righteousness." It is not ours, perhaps, but what is ours? What nobler conception of the Deity can we give the savage than he already possesses? We have heard lately how much money it takes to induce one so-called savage to confess Christ, and we are sceptical of the genuineness of his conversion. We understand why that missionary in Madagascar was loth to allow his native converts to visit England, lest all he tried to teach them should be discredited by what they might see in this "Christian" country.

A nation's religion, our religion, is what really demands and obtains our respect and adherence; in other words, our worship. We call our civilisation a Christian one. What signs or symbols then have we, as a nation, to show for our practical

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Christianity? What are the visible things which are made, which testify to the invisible things of our Faith? Are they any other than the very material and tangible victories of modern science, its triumphs and inventions in mechanics and chemistry which have created the whole of our commercial life, the only life of our day, with its artificial system of huge industrial towns linked by railways across a depopulated country, festering nests of clustered factories, and monotonous slums, with their attendant taverns, theatres, and churches, hospitals, lunatic asylums, and residential suburbs? What sort of a God do we worship thus? for this is our worship, deny it who may. This is our life. This is our Truth. This is the very visible symbol of our respected and respectable Deity, the Love of Money.

The more we conquer matter, the less we really conquer spirit. While we flatter ourselves that we are enslaving Nature, Nature is really making slaves of us, and not that Nature which is the revelation of God (that were indeed a slavery worth enduring), but each boasted conquest which is a fresh symbol of our infatuate greed, and is made too often at the sacrifice of that other side of Nature which is undoubtedly a symbol of God.

I should like to speak in all modesty. I know that I am guilty of agreeing in practice to much that my heart condemns, that I help to swell the demand which creates the very supply I decry. Be it so. I am the slave of circumstance, as we all are, up to a certain extent. But only up to a certain extent of inevitableness; beyond that we are doing the Devil's

work, and not God's. As soon as we consciously help to create unnecessary demands, as soon, that is to say, as we are setting people to do work which it were better for them not to do, as soon, as in the present day of depopulated country and overcrowded towns, we are helping to still further overcrowd the town, and depopulate the country, we are inviting that condemnation on ourselves: "It must needs be that offences come, but woe to him by whom the offence cometh."

Let us keep to the symbolic point of view. What do these triumphs mean? What do we do these things for? I am supposing that we still pretend to believe that there is a God, that is to say, a realisable, spiritual presence, and a kingdom of heaven where that presence may be felt.

If we don't confess these things, let us honestly say so, and follow fashion to the top of our bent, so long as it amuses us. But if we do really believe in God and heaven, we may as well ask whether these material triumphs do actually quicken our appreciation of spiritual things, for it seems to me that the first condition of spirituality is, to put it in St. Paul's words, "In whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know also how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in everything and in all things have I learned the secret, both to be filled, and to be hungry, both to abound, and to be in want. I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." St. Paul knows how to be independent of physical conditions, by faith in the unseen, and in the power of his poverty. That is his secret. Ours to be independent—those at least who can afford

it—of physical conditions, by faith in the laws of mechanics, and in the power of our money.

I tried in the last chapter to show that the force of a symbol lay in its suggestion, in what associative thought we brought to bear on it ; in other words, on our power of imagination and will. I want to emphasise that position, because our modern inability to understand symbols, or to make use of them, is due to the fatalistic apathy which our disregard for any considerations but material ones has brought about in the life of the nation, to our indolent acquiescence in the belief that these considerations are permanent, and to our pride in middle-class supremacy, the supremacy of our shop-keepers and manufacturers.

This supremacy cannot become established. Manufacturing and shop-keeping are not the only, as certainly they are not the noblest powers in the world. The law of demand and supply is an inevitable one, but there are other demands and other supplies than commercial ones. The only permanent and final thing is God's will, and it is not God's will that middle-class and upper-class success and respectability and apathy should last for ever, but that it should die. Only the will which is born of strong feeling—strong sympathy—strong imagination—what we call God's will, has any lasting effect in the world. The other is a negative quality, the Devil's will to which the world is handed over for a season. Our life to-day has no imagination, no will in it. It is only a hotch-potch of lees and residues of wills and bankrupt imaginations. There is no longer any determination or hope or wish to *become*, there is only the

wish to *remain*; a hope that there may be no such thing as a God's will to disturb our comfortable opulence and *laissez-faire*.

"If a strong man armed keepeth his house, his goods are at peace, but if a stronger than he cometh, he taketh from him all those things wherein he trusted, and spoileth his house." This seemingly simple parable, so simple that we pass it by with a slight feeling of resentment that we should be asked to listen to so simple a truism, is not only an epitome of this great history of the conversion of Wishes into Wills; it is also our condemnation, the "mene, mene," of our civilisation, of our "house," and "strength," and "goods."

The greatest truths are hidden in the most innocent and obvious tales; are, it seems, most securely hidden in that way, lest "seeing we should see, and understand, and get converted, and live," for, if only our eyes—the "light of our bodies," the windows of our souls, were cleansed we should, perhaps, mend our ways, frustrate justice, and, as Blake puts it, "see everything as it is, infinite." We should see the earth, not as a commercial lucky-bag to be dived into, and exploited, for our exclusive benefit, but as the miraculous mother of life and bride of the sun, only to be reverently enjoyed by the humble, and inherited by the meek; and the Sun as that seer saw it, a choir of praising cherubim, and his rays as ladders between Heaven and Earth, with Angels ascending and descending.

The overcoming of the strong man by the stronger does not mean the conquest of Nature by Science, oh, Higher Critic; it means the conquest of the animal and instinctive Wish to lay up treasures on



earth by the divine will to be poor, and the establishment of the new faculty of Imaginative Faith in a force, a power beyond ourselves, and stronger than ourselves, for the old one of self-interest and self-gratification.

The difficulty of defining this new principle is what leads to wars and dogmatism, and priest-crafts of all sorts. How can we learn to define it since feelings are stronger than words? All we know is that we have with joy exchanged for it "the old man," of our personal wishes, individual ambition, and instincts. That which we would "put on" instead, is the Will of God. Call it what you like, Will, or Love, or Righteousness, or Imagination, they are all the same in this respect—that they are not as the other, a selfish "Wish," but opposed to it, and ready to recognise, and eager to fight for, a more sacred meaning, and a higher purpose in the world than making money out of it.

We adore God, but cannot define Him, we cannot materialise Him in any one symbol, therefore we worship Him in many, each one leading our prayer in a different direction to a different aspect of the great Truth. To reject symbols lest we should abuse them is to refuse a lift on a long road; the only danger is that we should assert that one cart can carry us the whole way. We cannot escape from idolatry in some form, the idolatry of putting the Infinite into finite limits, because if we reject the idolatry of Art, we fall into the equally binding idolatry of words and thoughts. Some idolatry, some symbolism is inevitable, let us see that it is the language of the heart, and not of the head that we confess.

We are so mechanical in these days, so hard-headed, so argumentative, so fond of debating. We cannot get rid of the idea that the only test of proficiency is the competitive examination. We must have exact answers to every possible question. To think clearly is our ambition. It is a false one. Clear thought is only possible in proportion to the poverty of the thought. The only thing we know for certain is that we don't know.

But it is quite different with feelings. We may have perfectly clear feelings, and the real object of education is to teach us what to love and what to hate. As soon, however, as we put our feelings into words, and say, "These are your gods, oh Israel, which brought you out of Egypt," we are abusing our education by confusing thought with feeling. We should rather say: "These words of mine are weak pictures of what I feel strongly. If they appeal to you let us rejoice together." Dogmatism is deplorable; but dogmas, or the efforts to express strong feelings are perpetually necessary, and true in a poetic sense, which is the only truth, for truth is not the ratification of result, but the ratification of method, it refers to means, not to ends.

Nobody knows, for knowledge is God, and nobody has seen God. Hence all really religious writings, dogmas, symbols, or rituals, are ecstatic, poetical, mystical, only true so far as they convey or echo the feelings which they try to express; and all attempts to define the *end*, the goal of our aspirations, must necessarily be beautifully absurd, as tentative and compromising as a sketch of the Sun.

## CHAPTER IV

### LIFE, LIGHT, AND LOVE

**R**EMEMBERING that no definition of sacred things must be taken in a literal sense, the most fundamental and comprehensive conception of God is St. John's triple one of: Life, Light, and Love.\* Life, alone, in the ideal way in which he uses it, would involve every other attribute or virtue, but if we add, as he does, the less abstract and consequently more popular ideas of Light and Love, which are, of course, only attributes or qualities of Life, we shall possess a "dogma" or "theory" about the nature of God which has apostolic confirmation, and is yet sufficiently wide and tolerant to be an offence to nobody.

Life and Light and Love. Motion, Vision, and Passion. The power to move, to see and be seen, and to feel. These three faculties in greater or less degree are inherent in every living thing, and are, therefore, inherent in their Creator. They are the intangible characteristics of all phenomena, remaining in their defiance of analysis the perpetual witnesses of the mystery in which we are wrapt, common to all.]

\* John i. 4; John xi. 25; 1 John i. 5; 1 John i. 2; 1 John iv. 8.

Nor is it, perhaps, stretching this dogma beyond its natural and legitimate limits, to point out the correspondence of these three qualities of the divine nature to the three elements in graphic act : outline, chiaroscuro and colour, because in the artist's hand, these three elements constitute in varying degrees those pictures, representations, symbols, or idols of things, about whose proper aim and use there is so much disagreement. Outline answers to Life, the more abstract unreal and symbolic element of existence and of art. Chiaroscuro answers to Light, an obvious enough analogy ; and Colour to Love or passion, which it has always stood for or for the absence of. The analogy is fanciful perhaps, but it is enough to show, what every true artist must feel, the possibility of a sacred resemblance between the processes of his own or every honourable and creative human work, and the work or Life of his and their Creator.

On such resemblances as these the greater dogmas—the fundamental ideas on which our religion is built, must depend, when finally its truth is arraigned at the bar of Reason where all things must be tried. And though some of us may regret the decline of faith from its abstract and primitive simplicity, we ought not to ignore, and must not forget the beauty, and, therefore, the truth (for beauty is truth) of the more contracted ideas and symbols into which it fell, for they also were full of Life and Light and Love. Still less should we, if we are capable ourselves of entering into the purer stream of spirituality, be intolerant of those who are less able to do so, who want the warm touch of a

mediator's hand to interpret for them the mysteries of existence, but should rather feel the responsibility of the artist who knows how empty the idol is, but has, nevertheless, to carve it into the best similitude of truth he can conceive.

While our World was young, while men's conceptions of geography were limited to the Mediterranean, and the world was a flat plane with the sun for a candle ; while Heaven was just above and Hell just below ; while miracles were patent, punishment instant, and rewards assured, what truer symbol for God the Father could there be than a patriarchal old man with a flowing beard, whose will was law to his trembling children and servants ! What truer symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven, the sphere of Hope, of Spirit, and of Peace, than the deep wells of the blue sky ! What happier symbol of the sacred spirit than the swift dove swooping sun-blessed, like a ray of light from those skies to the earth ! What truer type of that simplicity of character, that purity of heart which sees or conceives God, than " a Virgin unspotted ! "

The natural evolution of thought fastens the created symbol to the creative thought, and men learn to believe that God is really an old man, with an old man's natural want of sympathy with youthful extravagance and energy ; that Heaven is really that blue sky where it is always depicted to be ; that the Holy Ghost is a bird, that angels have wings and the devil claws. Indeed, all our modern rationalism means nothing more than a petty and unphilosophical revolt against this mistaken and materialistic but absolutely inevitable and innocent

translation of feelings into words and things ; petty, because it misses not only their beauty and value, but fails to supply their place with anything as beautiful or true.

We know now, or think we know, that the world is not flat. Our Olympus has been explored and its denizens evicted. The "triune Jehovah" as an anti-idolatrous newspaper calls Him in its desire for puritan simplicity, has fled as precipitately as Zeus. Sunshine is all this tyrant's favour was worth, thunder and lightning his wrath. What Justice, says the sceptic, lies in either, when they fall equally on just and unjust ? No one ever was or is materially the better or worse off for his belief or disbelief, and except that modern rationalism may have helped to demolish that bogey of eternal torture which has been a real trouble to many a tender-hearted boy and girl, and man and woman, nobody is the kinder or the better for his freedom from these otherwise innocent idols.

The symbols are not to blame except so far as they were inspired by narrowness of conception. God may be symbolised by an old man with a white beard, and Christ by a youthful and beautiful shepherd, but they must not be *represented* by these figures. Let us see then that our priests or artists have nobler ideas of sacred things than their symbols can convey, or their words express : in other words, let us look to effects before we judge of causes, to ends before we condemn means, to conduct before theology. For we have seen that a symbol is merely receptive and reproductive of the feelings associated with it, and whether those feelings are admirable

or the reverse, we know that they, however disguised, are the masters of all we do.

To-day we are expiating, as every civilisation is bound to expiate, the sin of real idolatry ; but this idolatry is not, only or chiefly, the sin of confusing the eternal in the ephemeral, of paying undue respect to the forms of sacred things instead of their spirit, of being "too superstitious" instead of too sceptical, but the far greater sin of limiting our worship, of not seeing that every man and beast, every flower and blade of grass, every lovely sight and simple custom is a living incarnation of the divine ; every pure thought that leads to noble deed a Madonna ; every creative act a Christ ; that every breath we breathe ought to be an inspiration and every meal we take a communion with God through His creatures of food and drink.

Our idolatry is not that we worship God wrongly, but that we worship ourselves instead : that we have put our own material gratification before everything else, and under the pretence of religion adore Mammon. This is the only idolatry that we need fear. It is the rampant one to-day throughout a world nominally Christian.

There is no great danger in Catholicism, none in Protestantism, so long as the material symbols of each are beautiful echoes of eternal truth. The danger lies in this, that our religion and its symbols are to be found in neither one Church nor in the other, but in the hideous and selfish lives we lead. Protestant and Catholic Churches alike seem incapable of insight, incapable of stemming the tide of our

degeneracy, tenfold more fatal because they say, "we see" and see not.

Our repentance can only consist in our humble return to a truer faith—that knowledge which, like the sun, centres in one resplendent source of Light and Life and Heat, and claims recognition and worship from all things which only exist by virtue of its gracious gifts. Nay! the Symbol of the Sun is valuable, because it is transient. "Heaven and Earth," says Christ, "shall pass away, but my words shall not pass." Conditions shall alter, symbols change, the sky may cease to be Heaven, this earth to be the only World, the bird's flight no longer the miracle it seemed. We made idols of these things, instead of symbols, and we did so because we lost sight of the facts of which they were only symbols, the great truth of spirituality, of the religion of the Heart; and Science following with lame foot, after Faith has passed, shall fasten relentlessly on our mistake, and torture us till we have paid the last farthing of the debt we owe to conscience, till we realise once more that God does not dwell exclusively in this temple or in that, but in everything that has life, and in nothing that has not life, that is not stirring and vivid. The actual temples are necessary, but woe to the worshipper who claims a monopoly of his God. Symbols, all symbols are sacred, but woe to the priest who does not see through the symbol to the sanctity. Sabbaths are necessary, but sabbaths were made for man and not man for the sabbath.

The Gospel of Jesus is great because though it deals with feelings and thoughts, it prefers the poetry



of parable to the prose of metaphysics. It persists in clothing itself in those simple idioms, and explaining itself by those simple examples of everyday occupations which everybody can understand.

That it is a mass of paradoxes is natural, because truth must be paradoxical, but the paradoxes only appear such to those who can and must solve them. The greatest paradox of all is the essence of the Gospel of Jesus. It is His identification of spirit and matter, the doctrine of the Incarnation, of God made man, the divine made human. The doctrine of the Atonement, of the Unity of the Father and Son, and every doctrine or dogma involves and illustrates some aspect or other of this great paradox; and when we have once grasped its meaning, the parables cease to be only riddles; they become literal examples of divine action as well, scientific prose as well as sacred poetry, human wisdom as well as divine truth.

When Jesus says, "I am the Light of the World" He does not only mean the inner light of Conscience; for the more one thinks the less reliable that light may become; but the blessed sunshine itself, the sacred symbol and channel of that Light which sage and simpleton equally acknowledge and delight in. That Light, surging through the air and identical with it, the air we breathe in alternate ebb and flow, that light permeating, surrounding, vivifying, transforming everything. ¶

"This glistening pearl; the leaven in those loaves set to rise; this tree ready to shoot out new leaves; the wine in that cup you will drink; this mustard seed smallest of things, are divine in their natural

use ; does not God shine *in* them as well as through ? These clouds, do they not close this day, as well as foretell the last of all ? This corn, does it not prove the truth of sacrifice as well as prophecy mine, because like me it must be bruised for your food, because I am it, and it is I ? This bread sown, grown, reaped, thrashed, ground, mixed, baked. This is I ; my Body : eating it, you eat me. This wine, crushed from the grape with the sun in it, fermented, inspiring, refreshing, is my blood. Drink it and you drink me. I am the way, the road you walk along : walk it then with a purpose. I am the field, the vineyard, you work in : work while it is day. I am the door, the gate you pass, the home you enter, the fire you stir. I am your father, your mother, your friend. I am the shepherd that cares for his sheep, the ploughman, the carpenter, the mason. I am the cripple, the prisoner, the beggar, the leper, the child, see me in them : the man of infinite sorrow and infinite joys, of infinite powers and hope.

“All these things I am one with. They are in me and I in them. I come from the sky in water and spirit, in sunshine and in rain. You, too, must be born again of these if you would be my true disciples. Get rid of your individual isolated lives which you lead apart from these. Spread yourselves out extensively as well as intensively, live more without as well as within, become more at one with the common source of things, the source of all Life, our obvious Father, and one with His manifold children in every kingdom. Pick up a stone and you will find me in it ; pull a bough and I am there. All your life can be significant and eternal, so. Verily

has the Kingdom of Heaven come to you, when he who can feel these truths, who knows and does these things, is walking in your midst."

To recognise the truth when it is told is a great step, for though "No truth was ever said so as to be understood which was not believed," the truth is stale when everybody believes it. We might almost say it is true, as a precious revelation is true, in proportion to the few who recognise it, so curiously does rarity enhance value; but to *do* the truth is a different thing and a further step than knowing it.

Wherein lies this Doing? What is the Will of the Father? What object has the sunshine and the Light and the Air—the Life flowing down to earth to take shape there, that we can consciously co-operate with? How are we to show God that we "believe in Him whom He has sent," believe His good news, understand it, feel it, realise it? What work are we to do, what fruit bear? "I am the vine, ye are the branches. Every branch that beareth not fruit is taken away and burnt, and every branch that is fruitful is pruned—educated, restrained, refined—that it may bear more fruit."

Truly, God's business is reproduction; evolution. Aye! even as the beasts and trees do. Is not marriage and the fruit of marriage sacred, as all healthy instincts are? More justifiable work it is difficult to do, so long as our offspring are faithful and obedient to their call. But we are more than animals, however instinctively beautiful; we are Christians, that is to say, we have been summoned to a higher calling in Christ Jesus. What method of reproduction are we to adopt in answer to that

calling, what fruit to bear in that kingdom of the sky, where there is no marrying or giving in marriage, but all mankind the bride and Christ the husband?

Idlers in the market-place, husbandmen in the vineyard, fishers in the sea, virgins wise and foolish. What fruit shall we bear to this spouse? What grain will you fill yourself with, prodigal son, tired of husks that only swine eat; what bank invest in, usurious servants; what leaven hide in your meal, prudent housewives? For the question is a very pertinent one to-day, and it is better to see how things stand, if Christ means us to do any sort of work, if His command is any other than a purely mental one, than to go on waiting in fond delusion of a perpetual twilight.

This is no cant appeal or revival cry. It is no question of whether you think your souls are saved. That is your own look out. The time is past for saving souls, here in this England of ours. There was some truth in this soul-saving, in being "right with God," when a man might go back to his plough and realise, as he had never realised before, that it was God's earth he was turning and not an American millionaire's, and that he was ploughing it for corn and not for profits: or to his brick-making or brick-laying, and know that he was building honest houses for honest people, or to his last, or goose, or loom, and feel that he was stitching honest leather or sewing or weaving honest cloth for honourable wear and work. But how can our souls be saved to-day when the poor bodies they inhabit are so hopelessly lost that here in England in this summer of 1905 there is an exhibition, forsooth, of cheap cottages to

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stimulate the possibility that Dives may be induced to allow Lazarus to live a little longer on the land—his, Dives' land, that is to say; without being so unremunerative to the master whom he feeds, clothes and shelters? What greater symbol could you have of a topsy-turvy poverty-stricken country than that? oh, noble Dives, grateful Lazarus! Men once walked or warred, made or traded *before God*, and the rascal was the exception, swiftly if possible to be converted or prevented from working mischief. There was some sense in Christ's simile then, "Ye are the branches." "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit." What other sort of fruit do you think your Lord meant, oh would-be beneficent middleman to the human race, than such work as this done with human hearts and hands for human need in the green fields and peaceful homes and under the pure sky of Heaven?

Or is it "our Politics, our Commerce, our Industries, our Philosophy, our Science, our Education and our Press," that are going to save us, as the clergy of the New Orthodoxy would fain make us believe? It would doubtless be the solution of many an inconvenient position, if we could shuffle off all personal responsibilities on to general ones, and regard Parliament as the executive of convocation, floating serenely into Paradise in some such apotheosis of Red-tape. But if these features of our civilisation were of vital value, symbols of a new growth of spiritual life, if we had real reverence for our politicians, our stock-brokers, our manufacturers, our thinkers, and our editors, instead of scorn of them as symbols of spiritual apathy and me-

material middle-class money-making, we might trust to their leadership without waiting for clerical advertisement. Unfortunately we have ceased to trust politicians and parsons alike; their partnership ceases to have any interest for us. It is only a phase of the worship of machinery which is constructed in the interests of its advocates.

This marriage of the Church and the State, our Church and our State, is the Devil's machinery for undoing us. We had better leave both alone, and begin building afresh.

There are only two realities for us all, call them spiritual or material as you will. They are the earth and the sky. Only by patient husbandry, by letting as much sky as possible into the earth, by prudent ploughing and digging, as every farmer knows how, shall our salvation be effected. Earth and Sky: Body and Soul: Matter and Spirit: Prose and Poetry: Faith and Inspiration. These two things alone have real existence, are true. Together they spell salvation. Deeper into the secret of existence it seems to me it is difficult, if possible, to penetrate, for all vitality, energy, life, must consist in the mingling of these two. Matter without spirit is, indeed, dead: of Spirit without matter we are incapable of thinking. Nobody has seen the Father or can see Him, alive, but our duty as Christians is to believe in Him, and as husbandmen in His vineyard to let as much of His Life and Light and Love into this earth on which we live, and of which our bodies are made, as possible. To spiritualise matter, to materialise spirit; to be, while we are in the world, the light of the world, the salt of the earth,

this is the work which the Father wishes us to do.

I will try and speak more definitely. THINGS are what we have to do and make. None of your politics and miraculous ledger-lore of modern commercial gambling, and high falutin gospel of "all for the best in this best of all possible worlds," but the Making of Something, the Building of Something, the Growing of Something: Some Thing not some Nothing as we have all been too used to making, fondly imagining our conjuring tricks were real because they brought us money. The thing must be real, must be creative, must be our Child, not a slave's bastard. We are to be its mother, its father must be God. What sort of a child dare we present to its Father? Shall we say to Him, "This, Lord, is the work of my hands: see this house I have (had) built for myself out of my investments in other people's needs, my fortune gotten from their greed! See how energetic I have been putting my talents out to interest! How many people (indirectly) I have helped to keep employed, making bleaching powder, and bichromate and lead glazes, and brown paper boots, and shoddy cloth, and shirts at a shilling a dozen. What fault of mine if men and women die in their doing in the fierce competition of getting them cheap enough to sell? Are not these the blessed, because inevitable, evidences of the Highest of Higher Criticisms, and the newest of New Testaments that all work is sacred, all wealth opportunity, and am not I, who have the money, justified in making the most of mine? Does not all this busy hive of labour, this unprecedented energy centre in and depend on me?"

Yes! truly. We are indeed eternally responsible for it all—the whole horror of it. The Law of Supply and Demand is rigid, but it is neither new nor confined to commercial relations. Jesus put it into very simple language when He said, “Ask and it shall be given you.” If you ask for good things they shall be given you, if for bad ones they too shall be forthcoming. Which have we been asking for, think you, Good or Bad? Jesus says, “Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and all these things shall be added to you.” We have been in such a hurry to get the additions that we have forgotten to ask for or get the Kingdom. We have asked for the Bad and got it. What is the Good Thing? There is only one Good Thing, one Good Work in the world: work of the sort that will make as many people as possible happy, and happy Now, not at some distant age in some Bellamy Utopia of mechanical urbanities, but work that will help them, and us, to lead simple and contented lives.

That is the only Christian work I know of. Whether it is practical or possible to-day I don't know. It's a sad look out for us if it isn't: for I do know this, that any other work but this one of making, and helping other people to make or do useful and necessary things, and nothing but useful and necessary things; not poisonous and dangerous and “labour-saving” things, but simple things for simple people, and becoming ourselves simple people with simple wants, is not God's work but the Devil's, however much we gloss it over with religious and economic and political and metaphysical compromises.



Whether our clergymen and our politicians and capitalists recognise this truth or not, whether they are conscious hypocrites and seducers, or merely blind leaders of the blind, is no business of ours. What I know is that all of us who live by others' slavery, or are working to perpetuate it, must cease doing so, as far as possible, and live by our own labour, or work to put an end to that slavery and do with as few things as possible that entail that labour. Till we do so we are responsible for every death in the squalid lodgings, streets, workhouses, and jails of our towns ; and not only for every death of the body, but for every death of the soul, and honour and dignity of man and woman lost in those labyrinths of crooked competition. I know that, directly or indirectly, our pleasure is paid for by these people's pain, our gain by their loss, our luxury by their want, and that while this remains "inevitable" we who pretend to accept the words of Christ, that "inasmuch as we do it to the poor ye do it unto Me" are not His disciples, but on the other hand, His persecutors and murderers.

The wealth of the world is infinite is it, and we are not to blame because we have won in the game of grab? Was there ever a poorer quibble? The wealth of the world is infinite for those who having much, shall get more, out of the work of those who having little shall, with due pressure, work for less. The words of Christ are a double-edged sword which cuts both ways, and when He promises increase to those that have, and rob the poor of what little they possess, He states a law of nature which applies to material and spiritual matters alike : only whereas

the gain in spiritual wealth may be accompanied with material poverty the gain in material wealth may prove a greater curse than blessing.

It is a strange science this of symbols or of correspondences ; for the correspondence is, as other reflections are, too often an inversion. There is a sea of crystal before the throne, a mirror in which truth is imaged for us who can only see it as in a glass darkly, and if we would read it we must remember the clue that the first shall be last and the last first. In this glass truth is reversed, the bottom becomes the top, the left the right ; goats may become sheep, devils angels, Capital and Labour may change places, and Dives, to eyes of insight, may figure in torment, and Lazarus nestle in Abraham's bosom. Our eyes, at birth, see all things upside down ; only as we grow less innocent do we begin to reverse the picture, so, in our rebirth to a greater innocence shall we learn to rectify the lenses of our soul.

There is one supreme symbol of God which we shall neglect, one eidolon of Him we shall fail to worship at our peril ; the Sun. The Sun and all the Sun means ; that light which makes all life possible, which makes the blood of trees green, and of animals red, the absence of which brings the pallor of death to both. The heat which expands the heart and makes the blood circulate, which intoxicates with joy and love, which draws the water from the sea and sprinkles the earth with beneficent rain. These are truths, you think, which we can remember well enough—in the town. No ! The end of knowledge is not to know, it is to feel. You cannot feel these truths in your towns, Oh England, nor worship

there the God your life denies ! You must forget them and him.

Do you dream He will miraculously continue to warm and wet the fields, to grow food for us who mock Him from the street, that God and His Son are mechanical automata wound up to go for ever and ever ? Do you observe how all the machinery of our modern life is based on the presumption that the great phenomena of nature are mechanical too ? In an age of machinery what God could we expect but a mechanical one ? The best of machines, however, require intelligent attention if they would work smoothly, and we may not yet understand, clever people though we are, all the laws that govern the working of the wheels of this great machine whose regularity we so gladly take for granted.

How reckless, how defiant we are ! Last year in my garden there was a plague of caterpillars, this year there is a plague of wasps. Last year my gooseberries suffered, this year my plums. I am wise after the event, but next year I shall be unprepared for a new pest ; my creatures, my children, or myself may be attacked ! If there is a hole in my roof the rain will come in and rot follow ; are there no flaws in our conduct for the vengeance of God to pursue as relentlessly, no closer connection between our conduct and plague and pestilence, aye, and flood and earthquake than in our godless confidence we suspect ? Cancer and consumption might suddenly increase their already terrible tale of wasted lives. Who can foretell, who explain their presence ? It is not only unscientific it is even bad taste to suggest any ethical cause for these scourges. We

resent being told that we lead immoral and unhealthy lives, and the doctor is a welcome successor to the priest when the priest is personal. We love a touch of magic in the treatment of our diseases and must never be told how they were incurred.

All physical failing, all pain and disease, is the result of Sin, of disobedience to the divine law. That is obviously the one, we might almost say the only rule of life. To reiterate that truth, to lead us back into the simplicity of nature, into the love of the Father, the perception of His rule, His what Jesus and every other law-giver tries to do. They would reveal to us what would be obvious, if we were not such wilful hypocrites, that the only possible healthy or eternal life is the life of simple creative energy inspired by Love. But to go back, or rather *on* to this, is so radical a change and would be so unsettling, that we dare not face it, and escape to quack remedies instead. We confirm and multiply our sin, the sin of sacrificing life—other people's lives, to our own imaginary pleasure, we lay the country waste as no pestilence or war ever did before, driving our prisoners into the towns. And then as we and they alike fall victims to the vengeance of a violated Nature, we seek a futile atonement in further sacrifice, and call on the abominations of the laboratory to cancel the iniquities of the factory. We are still degraded heathen ready for the easy expiation of our own crimes with others' innocence.

Life alone is sacred. Sin is the selfish sacrifice of life. Repentance is literally the return to the paths of Life. There is no other cure for Sin. See how Jesus identifies the moral sin with the physical

failure, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." "Arise and walk." "Go! and sin no more, lest a worse thing happen to thee."

In the same way as physical disease will follow negligence of the laws of life, so in obeying those laws, in leading and in helping others to lead simple and natural lives, will health and happiness follow us, and we shall find literal truth and new wisdom in the words of our Master when He says, "Work while it is day" in the light of God's golden sun, for in shutting that out we can only foster the white germs of disease and death.

The Sun then is the supreme symbol of God, and our highest practical worship and obedience is to live in His light, and work by His inspiration, letting as much physical sunshine as possible into other men's lives, and spiritual sunshine into their hearts. And the sin of our age is that men have learnt wisdom wrongly, and have come to believe that it does not matter what we do, so long as we think and talk and get on in the world; and that the sun, and the sunshine, and the air, and the rain, and the world on which they fall are physical phenomena only (as if such things could exist alone!) and have **nothing** whatever to do with God or Religion. While in truth there is no foundation in mind or morals alone for any religion, but only in the identity of what we feel to be spiritual with what we know to be fact.

The truth of this identity can only be proved by experience, by the testimony of those who live it to the happiness it brings. So few live it now, so few who could live it are allowed to, that the time

is ripe for proclaiming it afresh ; which is the duty, it seems to me, of all whose lot relieves them from the Egyptian slavery of to-day, who, seeing their fellow men making bricks without the straw of redeeming hope or imaginative purpose, can raise their hand in any way and point to a better land.

## CHAPTER V

### THE "CATHOLIC" FAITH

**I**T seems almost futile to try and persuade ourselves that the symbolic position is the key to the religious question, when we remember that, as a rule, we are either too freethinking to admit the need for a religion, or too satisfied with our religion to feel any need for alteration in its point of view. These two classes no doubt constitute the majority of society, and they are irreconcilable. Nothing can make either side tolerate or understand the other's standpoint. That is, no doubt, as it should be for the majority, but there are many who are too innately receptive to be either dogmatically religious, or dogmatically agnostic, and it is to these I appeal, these that I wish to reconcile, out of these that the New Church shall arise. To most of these the old tradition or superstition that we have to be "saved" still clings in some form or other, though the methods of the Methodists and the manners of the Salvation Army have not enhanced their respect for the doctrine.

What do we mean by "Salvation" ?

Let me clear the ground by first of all saying what I don't mean by "salvation," or don't only mean, because what everybody really feels is true, at any

rate for them, whether other people feel it true or not.

I don't mean this, or don't mean this only, that I have been convicted of sin, and accepted Jesus Christ as the propitiation for my sin, and felt a great relief and happiness in the change that has consequently taken place in my life, and that I am, therefore, obliged to persuade all my friends that they also want saving, and try to save them.

I may mean this, but this is not all I mean by "salvation." If you found some one taking poison with their pudding instead of sugar, you would naturally warn them, and when they stopped taking the poison I am sure they would feel much better, and believe for a long time that the only thing that was wanted to turn earth into Heaven was that people should everywhere leave off taking poison with their pudding. It is certainly quite true that this world would be much more like Heaven if everybody did leave off taking poison into their bodies and souls, and became respectable and moral members of society, but that is only part of the truth, and after all, a very small part. It is the necessary introduction to salvation, the beginning, but not the end, the Alpha, but not the Omega of the needful change.

The Leaders of Religious Revivals have always been faced with a great difficulty, the difficulty of knowing what to do with their converts, with those who have been persuaded that their old ways of thinking and acting were no longer satisfactory, or possible to return to. These converts are like scholars who have mastered the alphabet, but have



not yet learned to read. The book before them is still a mystery, the more tantalising because they can spell out the letters, but cannot pronounce the words. And their teachers, for one reason or another, either because they are only scholars themselves, and know very little more than their pupils, or because they thought the first step, the Alpha of salvation, was the only thing necessary to perfect knowledge, or because circumstances were, in one way or another, too strong for them, have felt a gap between the first exultation of their victory over sin, and the fruit of that victory; have felt and have tacitly confessed by their very insistence on it, what an inadequate way it was of celebrating their victory to be perpetually proclaiming it; so that to say we are saved when we have only taken the first step on the road to salvation, is premature, is, in fact, not at all in accordance with the truth of religion or the truth of science, because salvation means nothing if it does not mean that the aim of life has been attained, and the Kingdom of Heaven realised, whereas we know that only colossally wise people or colossally foolish ones could ever assert that they had attained the former, or realised the latter.

Jesus of Nazareth was, as far as our poor knowledge goes, the most colossally wise person the world has ever seen or dreamed of, so wise that people have been quite justified in founding a religion on what they supposed He taught, and on what they imagined He was; only, while it is easy to be enthusiastic about what we understand of His message, it is absurd to pretend to understand everything that Jesus said or did, because in that case we should

have to be prepared for a further revelation, and a greater than His. What we do understand however, of His message, we feel is quite enough, and quite difficult enough, to try and put into practice, and quite enough too, to whet the appetite for more; and we acknowledge our inferiority and His pre-eminence by calling His gospel a "Gospel of Perfection."

We are prepared, then, to approach this most important problem of religion in a somewhat more receptive manner than its recent professors have been accustomed to; and briefly, without wishing to appear wiser than our fathers, who, I dare say, saw further in some directions than we do, we must feel that our conception of Christianity, or, perhaps I should say, of the conduct that Christianity inculcates, should be considerably altered from what it used to be—say fifty years ago, if it is to be of practical use to our own generation.

I say "altered," not "widened." It is a different attitude towards the meaning of salvation that we shall have to take, and not a less earnest and concentrated one. A general slackness of dogma and tolerant attitude towards any opinion is not what thinking people are asking for when they express their dissatisfaction with orthodox theology. It will not strengthen religion to admit sceptics and atheists to her communion. Thinking people are dissatisfied with the formulas that were popular with our fathers, and are still popular in religious circles, not because they are rigid, but because they are ridiculous; they say, or would like to say, if they dared, that these formulas neither appeal to

our reason nor solve our difficulties, and that though they may carry a great deal of conviction and truth for some, if Christianity is, what Christ called it, a pearl of great price, the leaven that leavens the whole lump, then these formulas which we are so familiar with either do not fairly represent Christianity, or represent a very small part of it, or represent it in a way and in a language which is foreign to us, and which we do not understand.

And, of course, if thinking people are justified in holding this point of view, and all that the Church can do to remedy it is to slacken its hold on dogma, and try to put toleration as a principle in its place, there is an increasing danger of the whole of the Christianity we are accustomed to, with whatever real truth and influence for good it possesses, disappearing as a factor in the life of educated people; for it is impossible to accept some parts of it and refuse to accept others. The whole of Christianity must stand or fall together. There is no compromise between faith in the whole of it, and disbelief in the whole of it. Christianity is one thing, however many dogmas it contains. We may quarrel about the relative value of its different dogmas, but we must obviously agree as to what its fundamental truth is, and this truth constitutes the Catholic Faith, which, except a man believe in the way or manner of faith, he cannot be saved, meaning that all Christians ought to be certain about what Christ came for.

I am sure this position will be earnestly denied, but the recent history of our Church illustrates, in spite of constant returns to this "Catholic" faith,

a retreat from one ground of belief to another and more abstract one. This retreat may, at first, appear to those who take it to lead to a securer position, but the truth is that it escapes attack, not because it is impregnable, but because it is unimportant. To belong to a Church one is bound to take a definite position in the matter of creed, but in the recent advanced theological literature it is hard to discover any certainty of belief.

This attitude inside the Churches is only parallel to what is said about Religion outside the Churches. Speculation on the nature and value of Religion is becoming more and more independent of authoritative restrictions, so that while we hold that truth must be compatible with perfect mental freedom, we tremble at what may be the result of granting liberty of thought to those who have not deserved or earned it, and wonder how the rejection of dogmas which have ceased to inspire respect, merely because they have ceased to be understood, can in any way assist the Church to solve the problems of the present day.

It is strange that some people cannot remember that though it may sometimes be necessary to destroy in order to put a stop to flagrant abuse, destruction itself cannot be constructive. To construct or build requires faculties of an entirely different order, as well as materials to build with. The good-hearted but disingenuous anarchist imagines that he has only to overthrow monopolies to secure the millennium for all, but Christianity can only again become a living force when she rediscovers and reasserts the fundamental truth of the Christian

Religion, the Catholic and Essential doctrine of the Christian Gospels, the early faith of the Christian Church. If there is no such essential truth or doctrine, in the name of truth let us leave Christianity to die of its complications. If there is an essential truth or doctrine, in the name of truth or of Christ let us discover and apply it, and for the folly of undisciplined latitude as for the folly of a literal dogmatism, let us leave the dead to bury their dead !

Some day we shall wake to find that there is nothing between this full belief, or central faith, and no faith at all. Our real quest to-day should be, not to free ourselves from dogmas, but to find the one comprehensive and universal dogma on which all the others hang and without the knowledge of which all other dogmas are indeed redundant. Freedom from dogma which the agnostic tendency in the Church is trying to elevate into a first principle of religion, is not a dogma at all, and can never become one. The Fatherhood of God, the Divinity of Christ, the efficacy of the Atonement—these and similar statements are no true dogmas unless they imply very definite ideas about God and Christ and the Atonement ; unless, as I say, they involve the acceptance of a preliminary and greater dogma, or semblance of truth underlying these minor semblances. As vague propositions, as independent ideas which anybody may hold as loosely as he likes, they cannot keep any body of people together. Churches must be built on rocks, not on sand.

The old position of a literal and exclusive belief in the miraculous account of our Religion, and the

way it affects ourselves, a position apparently untenable by any deeply thinking person to-day, but which so few deeply thinking people have cared to repudiate, has a great advantage in spite of its unreason. It is an undoubted source of enthusiasm to those who can hold it, and without this enthusiasm no religion is possible.

On the other hand, the new position of scholarly research and scientific scepticism has a great disadvantage in spite of its reasonableness. No one can possibly be enthusiastic about it. It cannot possibly become a source of Faith and Vigour, because, as I say, breaking down is not building up. So that earnest but intelligent people who want to be enthusiastic without sacrificing their reason have found themselves in a dilemma between an instinctive acknowledgment that religion ought to be a matter of enthusiasm, and the apparently logical conclusion that enthusiasm is incompatible with reason, a conclusion derived from the fact that as soon as research succeeds in explaining away the miraculous element in religion, it seems to rob it of all that makes religion worth having: faith and enthusiasm and joyfulness, leaving them cold and hungry. An indecipherable papyrus, a book of travels, and a clever commentary, is, obviously, no compensation for the loss of those treasures which are beyond any power of purchase.

The rediscovery and reassertion of a central doctrine or fundamental truth and kernel of religion, would, I am sure, be an immense gain and relief to those earnest but intelligent people who stand between the old orthodox ultra-dogmatic, in-

tellectually untenable, but contentedly enthusiastic position, and the new broad-church, scientific and critical one ; because it would not only justify their intelligence, but would also evoke their enthusiasm. It would not supersede the old dogmas which they could not accept literally, it would explain and infuse new life into them. It would combine what is true in both schools of theology, and give us what we all want—a reasonable dogma, and a living Faith.

What then is this central doctrine of Christianity whose loss has taken the feeling of vitality out of our popular religion, the rediscovery of which is so necessary for its revival ?

Let us, with this object in view, study again the two positions into which the religious life of to-day is divided. The old position has Faith and delight in its Faith. The new has intelligence, and no comfort in its intelligence.

Must Faith be always lacking in intelligence, or can we ever regain an intelligent belief ? That is the sum of the question before us.

In the former case, to be intellectually awakened, is to be spiritually or imaginatively damned. In the latter case, religion will be a stronger force than it ever was.

Whatever the process may be by which we attain the faith that satisfies the soul, it is obviously not the immediate result of an intellectual, investigating, and scientific frame of mind. Peace was never dug out of a law court. The wisdom of God is foolishness with man, but that does not mean that only silly people are good. It means that clever people, intellectual people, learned people, rich people, are

not necessarily either good or happy. It means that there is a faculty outside the reasoning intellectual faculty, not opposed to it, but outside it, and different from it, a faculty which simple-minded people seem to have in greater measure than complex-minded people, a faculty which is capable of grasping certain ideas which the mere intellect is quite incapable of grasping. We may call this faculty Intuition, or Imagination, or Conscience; but whatever we call it, it is through the exercise of this faculty that we acquire Faith, or can realise truths which it is not lawful to utter, ἄρρητα ῥήματα, that is, truths which language has no words for, thoughts or feelings which we must find symbols for if we wish to communicate them.

This Faith is not so much, if at all, a belief based on scientifically verified data, however much those data may be accepted in trust on the word of a doctor or the word of a dean, but it is the confirmation which our conscience, imagination, or intuition *leaps to render* to a suggestion that appeals to it as true. Faith dwells as it were half-way between heaven and earth, between abstract truth and concrete proof; it partakes of both, but consists of neither. *We must rise out of ourselves to meet its light half way.* It is the marriage of matter to spirit; it is the mediator between God and the world. It is the Christ in our hearts.

Faith has, I repeat, a language of its own, the language of symbols, and can no more be expressed in intellectual terms than music can be resolved into mathematics. To read or write this language turns men into mystics, but mystics are not mad



men ; it is only they who cannot read or write this language who are mad, that is to say, maimed or deficient in the necessary faculty to perceive these truths. Christianity makes men mystics and ecstasies ; it separates them totally from worldly interests, and teaches them to become familiar with life from a more exalted standpoint than the scientific, intellectual, or material one.

It is because we have forgotten the language of faith that we turn angrily upon the symbols, forms and dogmas which constitute its necessarily incomplete outfit, and abuse them for not falling in with our enlightened criticisms, historical and other. It is the old antagonism between science and religion, or let us rather say, between science and art, for art is still popularly supposed to treat of the imagination, while religion has hastened to repudiate it. Words are the symbols of thoughts and things, but words do not make a poem, any more than a likeness makes a portrait, or the portrait a picture. It is the rhythm and the colour, the beauty and the joy which make up the work of Art. If we want to communicate a pleasant feeling, it can only be done in a rhythmical or coloury way. Religion is a feeling, is in fact feeling devoted to certain ends, and it can only be communicated through its proper media of art, or channels of delight.

A rigid symbol, that is to say, an arbitrary or geometrical one, such as the ordinary cross, or triangle, or I.H.S., or any of the modern church decorations into which none of the beautiful imperfections of Gothic or true Art are allowed to enter, can only evoke a feeling while it is arbitrarily asso-

ciated with that feeling, or connected by memory with it. A true symbol is a work of art as well. It not only stands for a set of feelings, but it embodies them, and becomes in itself a magical source of the feeling it represents.

This distinction is at the root of the whole question of the legitimacy of symbols. It is only when a symbol is rigid, and has no feeling in itself, or meets with no corresponding feeling in the spectator, that it can possibly become the source of undue reverence, because it can then be made to represent any ideas you please by reiterated and artificial association with them. Thus, as we have shown, the Cross itself, which was once a triumphant and joyful symbol, is now a sad one. But a true work of art cannot be mistaken to represent any other feelings than it obviously does. Milton's "L'Allegro" always must be light-hearted, the "Il Penseroso," reflective. Only faith and feeling can inspire faith and feeling. But it is preposterous that, while we know that we must not be critical if we want to enjoy a poem or picture, we should refuse to put ourselves in a like attitude towards the infinitely greater poem or picture of Life, and fail to see that Religion is not a science which deals with facts, but an Art which deals with the far greater realities of the Imagination and feelings. There are facts which cannot be dealt with scientifically, because they are outside the scope of science.

If faith is indeed the door of the sheepfold, then surely the manifestations of faith which accompany it : dogmas, symbols, signs, rituals, pictures, statues, music, scents, gestures, should become uniquely important in all forms of religious expression. In

order to understand them, and gain the advantage they offer, it is only necessary that we should cultivate sympathetic and responsive imaginations ; and any other education, as of the intellectual sort, is opposed to the clearer perception of the nature of faith.

To the uneducated but simple person these symbols are true because they appeal directly to his feelings, if he has any. To the educated and complex person they may not and probably will not be true, because the effect of his education has generally been to confuse his sensations with his intellect. To the really educated, and, therefore, really sensitive and simple person, they are true because they represent, stand for, or symbolise certain truths.

To take an example. The dogmatic expression "God is a Spirit" is true to the uneducated but simple person because "a spirit" means to him something unearthly, supernatural, and mysteriously unlike himself. To the half educated, and muddle-minded person it is untrue, because to say "God is a Spirit" is merely to define one incomprehensible thing by another equally incomprehensible. To the really educated and simple person it means that the world is not automatic, but is governed by an immaterial influence who will reveal Himself to us in the degree we believe in Him, and ask for His help, and desert us as we fail to do so.

The exact nature of this influence we cannot determine, save in what small degree we are conscious of sharing it, until we allow it the complete possession of our hearts. And it is this complete possession which, as Christians, we credit Jesus

alone with having attained, so that He has become the Author of our faith, the Founder of our Religion, and the perfect union or Atonement of God and man, the divine and human nature, heaven and earth.

And so with those three conceptions about the nature of God which St. John insists upon, God as Life, God as Light, and God as Love. To the unsophisticated and devotionally minded person, each of these phrases is a further tribute to the goodness of God whose existence he never doubts, and whose obscurity in consequence never troubles him.

To the half-educated person, they imply nothing, because he believes nothing. To every earnest and rightly intelligent person who is seeking after God, if haply he can find Him, these words are helpful, because they suggest that our knowledge of God is to be gained by reverent recognition of the mysteries of Life and Light, and sensation, in the world, and in every creature it contains.

Faith, therefore, involves something to have faith in, and what can faith, in itself an illogical, unscientific faculty, have for its object but something similar to itself, equally immaterial and unreal; to unredeemed sense a stumbling-block, to faithful people the only truth: Spirit or God. And the central truth or dogma of Christianity is the acceptance of this Faith through Jesus Christ, that is to say, as revealed by His miraculous life, and His still more miraculous resurrection. "For to this end Christ died and lived again that He might be Lord both of the dead and the living."

It may seem paradoxical to say so, but the essence of Christianity, of the Christianity of Christ, the

Faith held not in Him by others, but by Himself in regard to the whole of Life, is Free-thought of the boldest, most uncompromising kind. All Revelation, or making clear what was cloudy, comes as *freed* thought to those who can accept it, and is only Free-thought in the bad sense, to those who prefer darkness to light, or mist to sunshine. The Jews put Jesus to death undoubtedly on the charge of Free-thought; would He escape at the hands of the Church to-day? I fear not, for it appears to me that He held a far less certainty of knowledge in religious matters than the Church would consider consistent with orthodoxy.

The endeavour of Jesus was to reveal the unknown force of spirit as a fact we might depend on, but He never described this force in a definite, positive way. He says to us: "You don't know the Father, you only think you know Him. Listen to me, and I will tell you what He is as well as I can. He is not a person, an individual, a character like you and I. He is Nature, Fate, unrelenting Justice, a stern Jehovah, pitiful to His children as a Father, pitiless as a Father to His children's foes. He is as incomprehensible, as evasive, as air or water. He is impression, mood, spirit. You can only get to understand Him by becoming conscious of the great fact of spirit, by becoming spirit as far as possible yourselves." Still, I am afraid I shall be misunderstood if I say that we should make the same mistake as the Pharisees of Jesus' time made, if we think that we are wiser in knowing more about God than other people. The Son of God has indeed been revealed to us in Jesus, as the perfect,

the ideal man—and He has borne witness to the Father—to the fact of a spiritual power controlling the whole of life—but His mission, and ours as His followers, is not to know all about God, and His methods of ruling the universe, for we never can know or understand them, but only to believe and teach that they are so controlled by spiritual, and not by material powers; to give people a truer grasp of spirituality, to make them realise that there is a God, or, as the Bible puts it, that "God is true."

God is True. That is to say, the greatest, the only power in the universe is not matter, nor what we see apparently governs material things, our Politics, and our Commerce, and our Science, and our Education, our Pulpit and our Press, but something beyond these, something which shrinks from being identified in any way with these things, and which constantly contradicts them, and must always contradict them, because no one can tell whence this impalpable thing of air cometh, or whither it goeth. Our fault, mistake, or sin, is not in doing wicked things, but in thinking unspiritual thoughts, and in having unspiritual feelings. It consists in our blindness or insensitiveness to this wind, spirit, or influence, joined to our belief that the very opposite of this is true or is God: hard-headed material facts like statistics, and trains, and dividends, and committees, and machinery of all sorts, mental and physical; in mistaking the symbol, the transient thing, the type, for the eternal: the thing that dies for the thing that lives.

Not that we can neglect these things, but that

we must not depend on them. While we are in the world, we must be of the world, sons of men, conditioned by our environment, and Christ's work was never to teach us to forsake the world, but to redeem it, to put material considerations in a secondary and subordinate position to imaginative or spiritual ones; neither to be dominated by them, nor to despise them, but to look upon them as very important and significant witnesses, or evidences of spirit or mood, and to make them as far as possible temples of a Holy and not of a diabolical spirit.

That is why I say the symbolic position is the key to the whole question. So long as it is held, men have in the beauty of their lives and institutions a guarantee that they are in touch with Nature; that they are working the works of God; that they are Christians. So soon as they ignore this clue, so soon as they build big cities and live in West End Squares or East End slums, and wear hideous clothes, and travel in trains or motor-cars, and prefer hotels to homes, and machine-made things to hand-made ones, and smoke to sunshine; so soon in fact, as they live as we do now, there is nothing to tell them how far they have strayed away from the truth.

Religion becomes a set of opinions about things which have nothing to do with life, and they become more and more insensitive to the knowledge that the sense of beauty has been given us as a guide to conduct, till by good luck the outraged feelings of the more imaginative among us re-assert themselves by a reformation, or revival, of the forgotten facts, and the world is forcibly reminded that it cannot

insult eternal laws with impunity; or else, when deliberate and persistent disobedience to the laws of health in soul and body have culminated in plague and pestilence, and commercial greed has made war a constant and destructive factor in international life, when our civilisation has been fully purged or eliminated by the scourge of God or by the hand of man, the simplicity of a new barbarism may once more offer a kinder soil for the seed of sense.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE REASON OF RITUAL

**T**O all men and at all times, some revelation of God, that is to say, of the superiority of spiritual over material force, has been made, and men have learned and lived by Faith; but the fullest Revelation within our knowledge was reserved for Jesus, who, in the "fulness of time" and at the crisis of history, when the religions of the civilised world had ceased to be vital for it, was born or sent by His Creator, to demonstrate in an unprecedented and convincing manner His possession of this very faculty of faith which the world was in need of.

It is not our business, now, to stop and prove His pre-eminence to those who wish to justify their irreligion by calling it in question. There are none so deaf as those who will not hear, and if the internal evidence of the value of Christianity does not appeal to these, no mere argument can make Christians of them.

His Gospel can only appeal to people of imaginative temperament, a quality which is entirely lacking in the foes of Christ. And no wonder, since Christ's Gospel is in itself a claim for the recognition of the imagination as the soul's very essence, that those who have none of it should seek to discredit Him

and that the Philistines of to-day as those of His nation's earlier history should ponderously persecute the Children of Light.

In the person of Jesus the spiritual and the material were perfectly harmonised—not balanced, you can only balance things of known or limited quantity, but the potential amounts of spirituality or materiality in a man are quite unknown and unlimited. They were harmonised in the only way in which harmony is possible, namely, by the complete subjection of the Body to the Spirit. The result of this harmony in the person of Jesus was that mental emotion of joy or ecstasy which He called "The Kingdom of the Sky," joined to those therapeutic or miraculous powers which enabled Him to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, activity to the lame, revival to the dead, and pleasure to the poor.

But the possession of these gifts, magnificently displayed as they were on theory and practice, was insufficient by itself to bring about that object which we believe Jesus set Himself to effect ; the substitution, namely, of a religion of personal aspiration and self-denial for that system of cruel and vicarious sacrifice which, though only valued by the upper classes generally for its political uses, no doubt had, then as it has now among all classes, its earnest adherents, and bigoted and orthodox exponents.

Jesus had to fulfil two other conditions, besides that of preaching a philosophy of life, before He could *found a religion* ; He had, firstly, to initiate a new ritual in which His followers could participate and so make a distinct body or church of themselves ;

and He had, secondly, to identify Himself in some way with this ritual, to become indeed its very reason or rock. This ritual would, of course, have to be a ceremony suggestive of His particular philosophy, it would have to remind people of Him, to put them in the same state of mind which His presence inspired and His teaching inculcated ; and if this philosophy, this teaching, this state of mind was so new and so strong in men's experience that it could rise to be a religion instead of a mere philosophy, He would have to prove the truth of it, to carry His doctrine of Faith to the uttermost degree possible, *beyond the experience of men*, and, therefore, into the sphere of (to all except Himself) the supernatural and the super-ordinary.

Without this element of super-naturalism no religion, and certainly no ritual, is possible, because a religion must have an ideal ; something, that is to say, unattained and unattainable by the average man, and yet, with the help of God, actually attained and attainable by man.

The institution of the Christian ritual may, at first sight, seem somewhat insufficiently supported by Gospel evidence. Let us see what a ritual means. It is, obviously, an arbitrary ceremony, expressive or commemorative of certain ideas which affect a certain community, without which it ceases to be a community, or body of people holding anything in common. A religious rite or ritual would imply that a certain number of people held certain ideas in common about the nature of Life, and rules of conduct in conformity with those ideas. By the nature of the case Jesus could not do more than

suggest the lines of a future ritual, because the experiences on which that ritual was to be mainly built were necessarily incomplete till the last act of His life was fulfilled. While He was alive the ritual, as a ritual, was necessarily imperfect. After His Life was over, it would have to grow in accordance with His disciples' grip of their Master's meaning.

Christian philosophy is a philosophy of conduct. "If ye know these things happy are ye if ye do them." A Christian ritual, therefore, must give reasons for the sort of conduct it advocates. That is its first function, an intellectual one. It is the part that Protestant churches love to emphasise. The second function is imaginative or subjective. It has, as I say, to put people in the same state of mind which the Master's presence inspired or His teaching inculcated. It constitutes what we might call the mysteries of the faith. It is the supernatural part of the religious ceremony, and corresponds to the supernatural or super-ordinary achievements of its Founder. It deals with those things which St. Paul calls "unlawful," and which can, therefore, only be acted or symbolised. It finds its proper expression in the adroit use of such things as music, gesture, poetry, art, and incense. It is the appeal made by a combination of all the arts to their corresponding senses, in one sublime drama.

This second function of a ritual, which appeals to our senses as the first appeals to our reason, is intended to give or enhance certain feelings, to produce or create a certain atmosphere, which we may

call the miraculous atmosphere ; meaning by the term miraculous no more than very wonderful or worshipful. It is, if we may say so, an artificial method of initiating the faithful into the spiritual environment of Jesus ; and makes them, for the time, live His Life. It is offered as an exceptional reward to them, because it is only people of instinctive faith who are susceptible to the charm and power of art. Its reproduction is, of course, subject to laws, especially to the Law of Harmony. The Law of Harmony insists that the community of congregation should be of one mind, unanimous in desire. Jesus puts the law thus : " A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." There are, of course, other laws which regulate the conduct of a successful ritual, but this is the most important.

Nor need we debate how far what I have boldly called " artificial " methods are legitimate in reproducing the desired feelings. If the feelings reproduced are good ones, such as would be approved by Christ as typical of the spirit He wishes to infuse into His followers, the methods cannot be very far wrong. Granted that there is a function of ritual other than a purely intellectual one, surely the change from its slaughter-house character in the temple services of the time of Jesus, to the elaborate and dramatic service of the Mass, not to mention what such services might become with the conscious assistance of the best genius devoted to such a cause, is in itself a great and significant advance on the road of a true civilisation. What can be the object or the use of any art, if it is not a specialised form

of the personal charm of a great and unique presence? Such a character combines all the Arts. In His society men are eloquent, musical, artistic, ideal; their hearts beat quicker, their sympathies are sharper, their perceptions intensified. They are witty, but their wit is spontaneous and affectionate, not forced and satirical. The aromatic smoke of sweet gums swung in rhythmical cadence is peculiarly symbolical of the mental atmosphere of a society so acute and yet so kind. It intoxicates but it exalts. Perhaps, if we could see it in wiser justice, to call a thing artificial is the highest praise we can render to human effort. If this appears paradoxical, it is because we have abused our language as well as our manners.

For us, to-day, the question is less whether we are called upon to approve or condemn the increased adoption of artistic or artificial methods, in order to stimulate that desirable unanimity which is so important a feature in the success of any ritual, as whether we can understand at all the feelings produced in the society of Jesus and in those early meetings or *séances* which were designed to reproduce those feelings. Can we in these days of worldliness when ministers of religion point to Politics and the Press as legitimate spheres for religious expression, realise what ideas of *other-worldliness* or ecstasy dominated the Ecstatic disciple of Jesus, or dare to suggest whether such feelings, provocative of any tangible result, can be again produced?

I do not think it is impossible to discover the essential idea at the root of the ritual in early Christian worship; because the "magic" of those

mysteries, the wonderful psychic results they achieved, results jealously guarded as a monopoly by the church as she grew to power, and punished with virulent persecution and death if practised outside her strictest pale, are in these days of her impotence, no longer penal. Witchcraft of all sorts has become in these days a lucrative and fashionable business. As the church disclaims the miraculous element in religion, the world adopts it; and spiritualism, fortune-telling, faith healing and other forms of superstition, more or less claiming the patronage of Christ, are rife in society. These are the days of which it has been prophesied: "There is nothing hid which shall not be made known nor secret which shall not be disclosed." They are days, not necessarily fortunate for us in their revelation, but typical of the prevalent anarchy and reversal of the proper order of things, preceding a new climax in the world's history.

In the face of the fact that when the Church disclaims the miraculous element in her worship it is adopted and dangerously exploited by unauthorised persons, we can no longer avoid the conclusion that the second and main function of Christian ritual, as it has been of all religions, is indeed the production of some sort of supernatural phenomena.

Trance and prophecy have been common features in all religious rituals, and while the object of heathen mysteries has been the immoral invocation of gods, demi-gods, and shades of the dead, the aim and object of the Christian ritual has been and must become again the moral invocation of the spirit of Jesus and of Jesus only. All religions have dealt

in the supernatural. We might say that it is their business to do so; but the supernatural is by no means divine because it is uncommon; it may be, and very often is, diabolic. Jesus knew this, and deliberately set Himself to oppose the diabolic tendency in religion, to determine the legitimate extent and direct the energies of the science of the soul into healthy and useful directions. He felt what an influence and fascination the exhibition of psychical powers exerted, and resolved that they should be employed exclusively for the highest good, in the service of the Father, for the sake of humanity, and not for any personal purposes.

So long as the Church honestly professes a belief, if not in its own miraculous powers, at least in its Founder's, even though its explanation of those powers has become dogmatic or unreal and consequently incomprehensible to the normal intellect, so long the Church will make some sort of an appeal to the imagination of her hearers, and fulfil, however imperfectly, the correct function of a ritual; but as soon as she abandons this miraculous position and assumes, as I fear it is too generally assumed, that the power of Christianity lies solely in its inculcation of rules for conduct and not in its philosophy or in its mysteries, the Church ceases to be a Church in any magical sense and enters on its last and least cohesive stage, as an ethical society.

The object of Christian ritual, while Christian ritual was vital and had a definite object, was, we have said, the invocation of the spirit of Jesus. Why should Jesus be invoked? The answer to this question, which necessarily precedes the further



one of how the invocation is to take place, throws a good deal of light on passages in the New Testament which are in danger of losing force when taken as isolated texts, but begin to have new meanings if they are associated with a possible central scheme of thought in Jesus' own mind, of the formation of a new religious worship or future ritual in which His own presence was to take the most important part. Why should Jesus be invoked? The reason seems to me deeper than that usually assigned by the orthodox religious mind of the present day, which confines the idea of all spirituality to a feeling of moral obligation. Is there no further reason for the invocation of Jesus than that Jesus is good? It is the use of generalisations of this sort that has made our popular religion so intangible and unattractive as a philosophy, so unreal as an influence to the natures that desire the homeliness and attraction of reality, and, failing to get it, take inhospitable refuge in an agnostic position.

I have tried to show that the main object of Jesus' doctrine was to prove that "God is true," that is, *real*. God He also defined as Spirit, *Pneuma*, that is to say, Air, wind, atmosphere, mood, influence, feeling, Life. God could only be proved "true" or real by proving that these attributes or synonyms of His were not merely actual and powerful, but that they were also the most powerful, indeed, the only powerful factors in the world. Jesus had but one finally satisfactory method of convincing people that what He said was true, and that was by realising them in Himself, in giving instances of the highest supernatural powers conceivable, and identi-

fyng those powers with the faculties whose truth or divinity He wished to establish, and so becoming permanently Spirit, Ghost, Comforter, God, Light, Life, Spirit, Himself in the flesh or out of it.

This is what Jesus did or is supposed to have done, according to the Bible. Everybody must judge for himself whether the records contained in that Book are reliable, or how far they are the subtle or innocent concoctions by interested persons of a later date. I have no wish to discuss the position of the so-called "higher" criticism, but it seems to me that people who advocate the theory that the text of the New Testament is unreliable, must either suppose that the forgers had such a brilliant command of fiction as would put our modern novelists to shame, or they must show that the portions of the text they think unreliable, including, of course, the miraculous ones, have no organic intimacy with their context. They must undertake to prove one of these aspects, if they wish us to believe that what they themselves cannot understand is either mythological or interpolated.

Unfortunately for this attempt to treat religion scientifically, the Bible seldom exhibits the disjointed character that this theory would lead us to expect. It is on the other hand, singularly homogeneous. You cannot easily accept the account of a speech by Jesus and reject the miracle which accompanies it. The words, indeed, appear more often to be comments on the miracle than the miracle an accretion on the words. The argument resolves itself into the question whether the report of the words or the account of the miracle was con-

sidered the more important and published first. To me it seems that the miracle has the prior claim ; but a really higher criticism ought not to reject what it cannot understand, simply because it does not understand it, and then treat the mutilated remainder as a consistent whole. Should it not rather treat what is obscure with respect, as possibly modifying very considerably conclusions drawn without it, or as possibly offering a solution of a future difficulty, a problem our limited experience has not yet grasped as such ? To disregard accounts of events outside our own experience is to condemn Christianity to our own intellectual level ; but if Christ is all we believe Him to be, He has not only revealed what truth we already hold, but forestalled all the truth that we shall be gradually fitted to receive. This is my consolation for many passages that I cannot interpret, but for which I consequently hold a greater reverence, waiting for the occasion when their meaning and bearing may flash to lighten a riddle I cannot meet.

The miracles and the teaching of the New Testament are in fact too interwoven to be disassociated in their origin. You cannot accept one without accepting the other. Least of all can you build a religion on any mere doctrine of morality. "If ethics alone constituted religion Socrates was Christ." Jesus certainly phrases His philosophy in an uniquely comprehensible and beautiful manner. The vehicle He adopted is the best for the propagation of His message, but neither it nor the message itself makes Religion. It is the man, not the message nor the manner. The man and the miracles, the

wonderful things He did, which claim the worship of the world. "If you do not believe what I say, believe me," says Jesus, "for the very works' sake."

It would be as absurd to suppose He meant no more by these words than His devotion to preaching and His kindness to people who wanted His help, as to conclude that this also is an ingeniously interpolated passage to palm off the account of a pretended cure. If Christ had not performed His miracles, it is doubtful whether His Logia would have survived: many of them would certainly have lost their point.

That He did perform miracles seems borne out by such otherwise inexplicable statements as, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye would say to this sycamore-tree, Be thou rooted up, and be thou planted in the sea; and it would have obeyed you." "Only believe. All things are possible to him that believeth." "According to thy faith be it unto thee." "Oh ye of little faith wherefore do ye doubt?" "Whether is easier to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins. . . ."; or again in the account of the manufacture of that strange ointment of spittle and clay, or of His sensitiveness to the woman's touch of faith who had bribed the doctors in vain for twelve long years; when "Jesus perceiving that strength had gone out of him, turned him about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched me?'"

Indeed, the extraordinary *naïve* circumstances and originality of the conversations which in almost every instance accompany His "signs and wonders"

make the theory of their invention, or their application to invented miracles, wildly improbable.

Before anybody could assert that such passages as these were ingeniously inserted for deliberate ends, he would have to assume a cleverness on the forgers' part which would be wholly incompatible with that credulous innocence which we are so fond of attributing to every age but our own, as soon as it suits our argument to do so. What curiously interested motives could have induced a great genius of fiction to promote a false belief in Christ's resurrection and ascension, by inventing such sayings as "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit"; or, "I say unto you, It is needful that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I go, I will send Him unto you"; or, "I have power to lay down my Life and I have power to take it again"; or again, "A little while and ye shall not see me, and again a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father."

The miracles themselves appear to attest a progressive development of spiritual or imaginative control over physical conditions, over inanimate things, over the elements, over the vegetable and animal kingdom, finally, over disease, deformity, and death in those whose souls will meet His in a corresponding faith. Consciously or unconsciously the narrative of the Gospels, apparently so simple, prepares us for the climax of the whole of His Life's drama, the very object of His mission, and the supreme test of His theory of existence. This

was to show that the same miraculous power which He exerted over other people and things, that essence of life which He proclaimed as the final fact in Nature, as the life which is born in every living thing, without which no thing was or could exist; the life which we take with our first breath and lose with our last; that this indestructible, perpetually creative and constantly incarnate power He himself possessed in a supreme and hitherto unequalled degree of conscious command. He wished to show that He was so absorbed by this Spirit of Life, and so identified with it, that death itself, which appeared to all other men the inevitable end of life and all its associations, could not be the End for Him, and that though it might conditionise, it could never destroy the conscious continuity of His labour. It might kill Him, and yet He should not die. It might bury Him, and yet He should rise again.

Though it was this identification of Himself with the indestructible Spirit of Life itself which He implied by saying, "I and my Father are One," it is because He dared to test His claim to the uttermost by passing unscathed the ordeal of death, and not of a death self-inflicted; (other masters of the miraculous may, for all I know, have left and regained their bodies at will) but of a death inflicted by His executioners, under their own conditions; a public execution—of all deaths surely the one in which it would be most difficult to maintain the calm attitude necessary for success; because He was deserted by His friends and scoffed at by the crowd that only yesterday applauded Him, because He was exposed to the keenest torture and bitterest humilia-

tion, because He endured all this without quitting His belief for a moment in the unfailing support of that spiritual reality He had identified Himself with, and gave up the ghost of His free will before mortal pain could drag it from Him, gave it up to the safe keeping of His Father, to follow and claim it again, transfigured, redeemed, substantiated, while the world passed His body by for dead, and condemned it to the fate of all material: It is because, though seemingly yielding to Death, He used it only as the last gate to the fullest Life possible to man, that subtlest mingling of spirit and matter conceivable by our limited imagination, the Life of the risen Lord before His final Ascension, that His words and assumptions, otherwise arrogant, are the vital and literal statements of astonishing and unprecedented incidents in His own career, and not the mere varnishing of average experience which our modern apologists of Christianity would fain have us believe. It is in this proof, that He gave to carefully selected witnesses, of the truth of His claim to immortality, that He has been able to constitute Himself the tangible Divinity, Hero, Perfect Mediator, Intercessor or explainer of God to Man, and that He has become the centre of Christian worship, the God we invoke on our altars, to teach us also how to drink of the same cup as He drank of, and to be baptized with the same baptism.

## CHAPTER VII

### INVOCATION

THE directions for attaining this hope, His message of good news for us, Jesus has summed up in words which, if not altogether easy to understand, leave at least no metaphysical ambiguity about them. They are, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and follow Him.

The cross He bids us carry is not only the cross of the inevitable suffering which must always accompany the adoption of a life so strangely antagonistic to the life of the world—not only the cross of suffering and grief which we are accustomed to associate solely with a conscientious obedience to the Christian discipline, and to exaggerate the importance of, till every sane, and young, and vigorous mind shrinks from confessing to its burden of unrelieved sorrow, morbid introspection, and undefined ideals: it is not only the symbol of His sacrifice and terrible death, nor even the penalty we have ourselves to pay, less to purchase Heaven than to satisfy Hell, in inevitable expiation sooner or later for our deviations from the straight path; but also the eternal symbol of the secret of His life, of His peculiar life, of His power and triumph over circumstance, and of the



mystery of His creative, healing and recuperative powers. It is the symbol of the tree of life, whose fruit in fulfilment of prophecy He bids us re-enter paradise to gather. It is the sign of His faith, of His ready command, and never-failing resource and refuge in the Father's will which is all in all.

We have grown accustomed, how falsely let us hasten to acknowledge, to think that religion is only a change of mind and has no corresponding effect on our work, on the way in which we dig or sow, or play or paint. This would be a contradiction of that correspondence which underlies the whole science of symbology. Religion has as much to do with life as it has with thought, as much with matter as with spirit. I shall insist on this point as peculiarly the Christian one. Religion relates to everything inside us, and outside us. It is not only contemplative and reflective, it is practical and energetic. It is a gospel of such import that the counter and the workshop have to be left, the nets and the boats deserted, family and business ties disregarded, till the secret is revealed, the mystery of life laid bare.

Then, whether we take up this cross as a torch of fiery light to others, or return to shop or bench, or ship, or family, a new principle inspires us: we no longer work as we used to work, winning from a stubborn world our right to live in it; no longer in the sweat of our face shall we eat bread till we return unto the dust out of which we were formed, and to whose thralldom we were condemned. That curse is removed, we have circum-

vented the enemy, he is with us, we have won the world, the seasons are for us. Nothing can longer offend, everything is good, everything in its season welcome. His words are literally true: "Every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and for the gospel's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold NOW IN THIS TIME, with persecutions (truly, but not without joy), and in the world to come, eternal life."

Can we believe it, do we believe it? For that is the exchange the cross symbolises: always a practical gain, many brothers and sisters for a few, much land for a little, infinite wealth here and hereafter. It is this element of increase that is so marked a characteristic of His promises. This power of faith is to grow in us constantly, like a grain of mustard seed, not a small quantity, but a large one, evolving from small beginnings. He is the great apostle of the evolution of the soul of man, preaching renunciation not as an end in itself, but as the necessary outlay or investment to procure an ever-increasing interest.

Let us try and epitomise what has been exceedingly difficult to say, in spite of 2000 years of a professed understanding of our Master's thoughts; or rather, for we would fain be orthodox, let us take the chief apostle's explanation of what Christianity means, only now let us read it as free as possible from the obscurity that traditional reverence, or traditional carelessness has surrounded it with.

We might read, but for the length of it, the whole of the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles,

which contains the account of the first fire-baptism and realisation of their mission by the new church, and St. Peter's enthusiastic explanation of it. The Holy Ghost descended on the disciples in the form of fiery, forked tongues, and "sat upon each one of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to talk with other tongues." This unprecedented performance naturally brought a crowd of people to the spot, demanding an explanation, which spokesman Peter forthwith delivers.

He refutes the accusation of drunkenness against himself and his friends, and declares that these mysterious phenomena are what Joel prophesied should happen "in the last days, before the day of the Lord." For the first time, he grasps that his Master's real object was to give men a different and a greater conception of life—to found a church, and not a state, and only to alter material conditions through mental ones; that, having done all that was possible for a man to do to convince others of the truth of what He taught, even to the pitch of being killed on its account, He had miraculously and unexpectedly reappeared, and then again, in an equally miraculous, but fully evidenced manner, returned to God as the source of life, in order to shed, by a process beyond our knowledge, His own sacred influence, personality, or enthusiasm on the faithful friends He had chosen to represent Him, and systematise His teaching.

And so he burst out: "Men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and signs and wonders,

which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know " (St. Peter has quite a vulgar love of the miraculous—it is that which somehow he remembers before anything else) " Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, *having repealed the birth-pangs of Death, because it was not possible He should be holden of it.*" He then quotes David as prophesying this particular immunity for the Messiah who should succeed him, and for that very reason identifies Jesus with that Messiah, or Christ. " He (David), seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in Hell (Hades, the grave) neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up (from the dead) *whereof we all are witnesses.* Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. . . . Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ ;" Master of our bodies and our hearts.

And when the people, "pricked to the heart," ask what they shall do under the circumstances, Peter replies: "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, to get rid of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him.

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And with many other words He gave evidence, and exhorted them, saying: 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.'"

Now surely in this speech of St. Peter's lies, if anywhere, the gist of the Christian religion. Subsequent experience may intensify or add to it, but not even the authority of Ecumenical Councils could alter or correct such a prominent statement and apology of the early Church. Let us gather this statement into its definite heads.

(1) You, the world, are witnesses of Jesus' miracles, of His crucifixion, and of this miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost.

(2) We, on whom this Holy Ghost has descended, are witnesses of His resurrection and ascension.

(3) Therefore, Jesus fulfils the prophecies of the Messiah, and is Lord and Christ, the Founder of a new dispensation.

(4) The conditions of the membership into this new Church are (a) repentance, *i.e.*, holding a different or reverse opinion about things than "the world" holds, and (b) baptism, or formal admission into the community, *in the name of Jesus Christ*.

(5) The reward of initiation is the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Other benefits follow, other privileges, "breaking of bread, and prayers," but they are consequent on this gift and not conditions of membership. For the early Church, according to its canonical history, is quite consistently clear on this point: that its object is primarily to "witness" to the *miraculous* confirmation of the truth of its Founder's

message. And though it is usual, on St. Paul's own confession, to credit him with little more than diplomatic cleverness when he cried out before the Sanhedrim : " Touching the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question," it was because he avoided the personal issue in the general question that he thought himself, afterwards, to blame ; while he certainly voiced, not only his own interest, but that of all time, in the most absorbing issue that can affect mankind. Indeed, whatever subsidiary ideas, dogmas, and traditions may cluster round the core of religion, and help to mystify its purpose, we can finally conceive of no " Faith," or at least of none that can finally affect our happiness as well as our conduct, which does not in some form or other pretend to solve the problem of Life, by abolishing Death and offering us Immortality.

The first mention of Christianity as a definite religious sect occurs in the 26th verse of the 11th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles : " The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Every mention of belief prior to that statement must consequently carry enormous authority in determining what a Christian, even in these enlightened days, is bound to believe if he calls himself by that name ; and no one who impartially reads the first chapters in that book and accepts their authority can refuse the all-important evidence they contain, that this belief in immortality, as taught and exemplified by their Master, was the reason of its faith in the early Christian Church.

Let us see what mention is made of it. First there is Christ's own commission to His disciples

(Acts i. 8): "Ye shall be my witnesses." Witnesses of what, about Me, think you?

Let us read how they began to witness. St. Peter is almost the only spokesman in these passages, for the fury of his executioners interrupted Stephen before he could reach the climax of his defence, in the only other speech of any dimension, and it is worth, perhaps, remembering that Peter is the "rock" of the Church, and the first "vicar," whose utterances may be supposed to carry some weight.

Now, the Apostles' first duty after the Ascension is to appoint a successor to traitor Judas, and Peter thus epitomises the necessary conditions of that appointment (Acts i. 21, 22): "Of the men, therefore, which have companied with us all the time that the Lord went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day He was received up from us (the Ascension), of these must one become *a witness with us of His resurrection.*" The next piece of evidence is Peter's explanation of the Penticostal phenomenon which we have already analysed, as typical of the whole evidence. Then, after the healing of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful, and in explanation of that miracle, Peter says (Acts iii. 14): "Ye denied the Holy and Just One . . . and killed the Prince of Peace; whom God raised from the dead; *whereof we are witnesses.*" Still more convincing is the passage in chap. iv. 1, 2, that the Priests, and the Captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, "being sore troubled because they taught the people, *and proclaimed in Jesus*

*the Resurrection from the dead.*" And Peter's triumphant words: "Be it known unto you all, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, and *whom God raised from the dead . . . doth this man stand here before you whole.*" And so (v. 33), "with great power gave the Apostles *their witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.*"

The same "witness" is St. Peter's only defence before the Council in chap. v., and, in fact, wherever he is called upon to explain his faith, it is the same argument. For instance, to Cornelius, in chap. x. 40: "Him God raised up the third day, and gave Him to be manifest, not unto all the people, *but unto witnesses . . . even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.*"

There is no mention in any of these passages—no suggestion—of the modern doctrine of a propitiatory atonement. That only comes in later, when it seemed necessary to correlate the new ritual to the old. From the Christian standpoint, which must always be one of mercy and not sacrifice, the doctrine can only be used in a poetical or symbolical sense, never in a literal one.

It is the apparent inability of modern dogmatic Christianity to define for its hearers the difference between the language of faith and the language of common sense, its insensitive confusion of the former with the latter, that shocks the perceptive as well as the logical mind. It has associated spirituality with the renunciation of reason, because it could not show that it was really the assertion of it. In its horror of miraculous clap-trap it has



invited scepticism by confining all miraculous power to Jesus. This false impression of spirituality has been so strong that it has become extremely difficult to read Christ's own words in their literal or material sense, and because they are smothered in a halo of sanctimonious sentiment which it is treason to touch, their prime import is lost.

When Christ says: "I am come that ye may have life, and have it more abundantly," He means life as we know it, as human physical energy, not as a spiritual or mental condition only. Why should we have different meanings for common words when they occur in the Bible? Why should Life mean one thing from the religious point of view, and another from the secular? Jesus Christ came to give us His energy, to show us how to get it and preserve it; aye, miraculously, if you will. Our mistake or sin consists in limiting "Life" to physical movement, which is only the *effect* of life in matter, and in not seeing that all energy is mysterious and miraculous, while physical movement is no more Life than the motion of a piston is steam. Life is spirit.

We are now in a better position to answer the question we set ourselves: "Why Jesus is to be invoked?" He is to be invoked because He is the guardian and giver of this energy or eternal Life, which from any point of view is the one desirable thing in this or any world. It is called "eternal" to prevent the idolatry of believing that when the body ceases to obey its bidding, the impulse ceases too. The epithet "eternal" is really redundant, because Life is spiritual, that

is to say, beyond the limitations of space and time, but it is also used to expose the opposite error of supposing that our physical energies have nothing to do with spirit, while really for us in the world it has everything to do with it, and all movement is the miraculous evidence of its presence.

In answer to the further question: "How is Jesus to be invoked?" we must of course answer that the method of His invocation is the central function of the Christian ritual. If it is successful, if the spirit of Life is really invoked and answers invocation, it is a tribute to the truth of Christianity, it is a confirmation of its pretensions. If it is not successful, Christianity is either untrue, because its Founder's promise is not kept, or we are not keeping the rules for performing the rite.

That is a question for the Church to answer, immediately, if she wishes to live. It is an important one in these days, for if the only function of religion is to become a sort of ethical and political policeman, it would be as well to transfer our more subjective adoration to the mysteries of chemistry, the cult of athletics, or the potencies of radium, as the new lucifer with vibration in his wings.

What are the conditions for successful invocation? Obviously the first and great essential condition is Faith. "Whatever ye ask, believe ye have received it, and ye shall receive it." This rule holds good for any number of people, as well as for the single believer: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name,"—that is to say in the belief and philosophy that Jesus taught,

they must agree as to what they are asking for, otherwise they cannot, corporately, be said to be believing. Perfect harmony is therefore the second condition of successful invocation, and this harmony, as it is superficially true of several, must be also binding on the individual, who shall be in harmony with himself; body and soul and spirit agreeing in the single prayer of the whole man.

The object of all asceticism, of all monastic rule, has been to produce this harmony in the individual and in the community. Happy they who have reached it! The promise of Jesus, if paradoxical, is consistent with nature: "Get yourself in touch with the Spirit of Health, Wholeness, or Holiness, and all things are yours." The value of His gospel lies in its hope, its promise, its certainty; its insistence that if the mind is sufficiently aspirational, sufficiently faithful, brother body, *pede claudo*, will follow.

But, in his stubborn ignorance of the invocatory value of a congregation united in a definite desire, as also in his terror of symbols and ritual, the Protestant extremist has not only missed the main object of public worship, but lost the clue which would keep his idea of spirituality practicable and sane, for we have seen that the business of religion is to reconcile our aspirations with our practice; is, in fact, to spiritualise matter, or to materialise spirit.

The religion of dissent is obliged to dwindle down more and more with the expression of a private understanding between a man's maker and himself, to insist on "secret" more than on public prayer. But Jesus was no dissenter. The pub-

licity He hated was the hypocrite's public performance of his private devotions, and though He knew that He was undermining the religion of His day, He shared and advocated its ritual.

Given Faith, and Harmony of purpose, the third essential of a successful invocation is the ritual proper, the use of such rites and symbols as will gather up the faiths of the individuals present, and direct their harmony into a single expression of desire, whether their prayer is for the spirit of Christ or for any special object which special stress may impel the Church to desire. Ritual is, as we explained in an earlier chapter, the means, medium, or machinery of Faith and Feeling, those vital faculties of the soul. Ritual, alone, is impotent or worse, for as St. Paul says: "He that eateth and drinketh the Lord's Supper eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself ('damnation' in the authorised version) if he discern not the Body," that is to say, surely, if he does not perceive the symbolism of this act, if he does not realise through the strength of his faith and the harmony of himself and his friends, the miraculous efficacy of the symbol of bread and wine. "For this cause," he continues, namely, your want of imagination, your inability to understand, "many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep" (1 Cor. xi. 29).

St. Paul apparently has as strong views about the physical efficacy of religion as St. Peter has. They were both Faith-Healers of the deepest dye, saving souls and bodies by the formula their teacher had left them. This formula accompanies every

miracle. There is no secret about it. No jealousy is possible. St. Peter, like St. Paul, would be only too delighted if all the world were such as himself, capable of wielding the same authority. After curing the lame man, he publicly explains how the miracle has been effected. "By faith in His name hath His name made this man strong whom ye behold and know; yea, the faith which is through Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all," which means neither more nor less than that St. Peter had sufficient faith in the magical power of his Master's teaching or in His invisible presence and help, to invoke Him *by name*, using, that is to say, His name as a fetish, or focus of concentration, for healing a cripple at the church's door.

We may well wonder whether our modern faith is wiser or greater because it has eliminated so large a function as the care or cure of the body, or ask what kind of sublime spirituality we have attained which is helpless before a headache, and avoids the vulgarity of a common miracle.

It is because religion has shrunk, perhaps unavoidably, into the personal and preliminary phase of conviction of sin and of the restoration of harmony between the individual conscience and God—which I have called the Alpha of Salvation—that the real power and object of public worship with its communistic feeling of enthusiasm and practical benefit has been lost sight of, and that it has lapsed into an impotent ceremony, with no deeper association of sentiment than that we are doing God a "service," instead of asking Him to do us one. A wiser and wider

conception of the laws of life which Jesus tried to instil into our minds without using scientific language, with greater insight into the real wants of the world arising from our national sins of luxury and frivolity and selfishness, might give a keener zest and a more truly spiritual purpose to our religious services. It would relieve, if only with its uncompromising admission of our shortcomings, the monotony, the stereotyped apathy and conceit of the unemotional orthodox performance, and perhaps help us to realise that when Jesus says, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven," He really means it.

The success of the meetings in the recent Welsh Revival is due almost entirely to their faith and unanimity, consciously or unconsciously expressed. The congregation is there to invoke a Holy, or Healthy Spirit, and a Holy, or Healthy Spirit certainly answers their prayer. They have the first desideratum of Faith. The Welsh collier is, whatever bad habits he may have acquired, essentially a faithful person. Religion has had a great hand in his bringing up. Religion in Wales is more popular than it is in England. It is more democratic. Higher criticism and higher scepticism have not touched him. His sins are those of passion, not of intellect, as ours are. But they not only have the first essential condition of success in their faith, they have the second also, in their harmony: armed with these powers the Welsh colliers summon what Holy Ghost they are capable

of summoning, and summon Him successfully. He is a gentle, loving, aspirational Comforter, quite the Sunday School Holy Ghost, innocently undenominational, His sphere of control is limited to purely personal relations with men, He is not particularly interested in social or political matters, and is quite orthodox, and exoteric ; but for us just now, the main truth underlying these religious phenomena which seem characteristic of the Welsh temperament or the Welsh society, is that prayer is answered when the suppliants are faithful and agreed.

To scoff at the phenomena as hysterical, and its effects as evanescent, is outside the question, and unscientific. We are not now discussing their nature and permanence, but why they occur. Agreement is comparatively a simple matter in South Wales, because society there is exceptionally monotonous. There is only one class, the miners ; only one profession, mining ; only one standard of living, the miner's ; only one source of wealth, coal. Given such conditions as these, the result is to a certain degree calculable. A revival of religion emanating from the army would invoke a Christian Mars ; on the Stock Exchange, a Christian Hermes. The one would be interested in the ideas of morality involved in war, the other in those involved in exchange and commerce. A kindly Pluto is the God of Wales ; He gropes resonantly underground, looking for warmth and light.

I do not speak in any derogatory tone. Jesus' law is absolute : " Ask, and it shall be given you— with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to

you." What you pray for you shall have. What God you imagine, you shall get, or let us rather say: what part of God you invoke, successfully, will appear unto you. It is idle to pretend that Joan of Arc conceives God as St. Elizabeth does, or that Dr. Torrey and the Curé D'Arms could run a mission together. The soul that prays for light, the receptive soul of David, humbly preferring wisdom, shall doubtless receive what revelation it is capable of receiving: that is surely the best gift any one can receive, but the soul that begins its prayer with the assumption that it is in God's confidence, gets also what it asks for: confirmation of that confidence, and no more.

But there are other prayers than we offer on our knees. Every desire of the soul persisted in, every intentional blessing or curse, is a prayer to the Infinite from the finite, and is answered. The Infinite answers every prayer, but we must not hold Him responsible for the consequences. A curse invoked on our enemy's head may fall on our own. Radium may prove to be a source of spontaneous generation, but let us beware what sort of "untoward" generation we produce from such a source. The sun is a surer, saner, and safer means of generation. Let us keep his light clean and free! We can mould the future as we will by the purity of our prayers: let us ask in faith, not in inquisitiveness! The prayer God loves best is that of the Virgin Soul: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to Thy Word." Thus, the Virgin Birth is an eternal truth. No other marriage must be allowed to contaminate the espousals of a jealous



God. No Virgin can bring forth the Son of God till the virgin heart has conceived Him. Christ, as the perfect man, demands the absolute humility of His Mother. It is Christ's own message to us, that we should bring forth divine fruit, by Faith in the infinite power of God, not in our own finite conceits.

## CHAPTER VIII

### COMMUNION

**W**E have seen that the third condition of successful invocation or religious worship after Faith and Harmony, is Ritual: the right use of those forms, dogmas, or symbols, whose association with the object of worship enables them to gather up the different individual faiths, and directs the unanimity of the worshippers.

This is the machinery of Religion, and the object of the first part of this book was to prove that we cannot do without this machinery, that without symbols of some sort or other our minds are either lost in an anarchic fog or strained to an equally impossible metaphysic. That since we are compact of earth and sky our wisest plan is to accept the inevitable and see that our symbols are beautiful, and significant of what we imagine is true.

In verse 42 of the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we find this mention of the first performance of the ritual which was destined to become the central ceremony of the Christian Church, "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Here we have an epitome of Christian duty, in its double function of doctrine and practice.

- (1) Doctrine—Faith (“The Apostles’ doctrine”).
- (2) Practice — (a) Self Denial (“Fellowship”).  
(b) Public Ritual (“Breaking of Bread”).  
(c) Private Exercise (“Prayers”).

We have seen what special emphasis Jesus laid on three of these four duties, and how He defined them; what importance He attributed to faith; how He insisted on self-denial or self-sacrifice, which involves fellowship; how He advocated prayer as the attitude of mind necessary to that higher fellowship with God; and we can realise how that in founding a church to perpetuate His worship, He would invent a ceremony or rite which should be entirely symbolical of His central thought and message, and that we ought to find in its performance a clue to that thought and message which, if we call ourselves Christians, should be of paramount importance to us.

In spite of St. John’s silence on the subject, and without speculating on the reasons for his omission, we will accept this “breaking of bread” celebrated by every Christian Church under the name of the Lord’s Supper, Love Feast, Communion, or Mass, as the ceremony specially ordained by Jesus for His church, and the central note of Christian worship.

But first let us notice how the inclusion of any rite as binding on its members, or even as their privilege, proves that Christianity cannot be regarded as solely an ethical system independent of

an arbitrary revelation, unless we reject the account of its origin as spurious.

There is something essential to the fullest conception of a Christian's life beyond the direct obligation of morality. To do this and not to do that is insufficient for the man or woman who has learnt to love. They feel called upon to share a function which has other objects than the inculcation of a certain code of conduct. They feel impelled to worship—for the pleasure of worshipping. In other words, this rite recognises man's intellectual development, recognises his need for poetry, recognises that his senses have a sacred function and his imagination a sacred duty to perform in the service of God. It claims for our feelings and thoughts another expression, a different outcome than conduct; and demonstrates, in its use of symbols, that correspondence between physical things and spiritual ones, that instinctive desire to give vent to feelings of adoration and aspirations in extravagant and seemingly illogical ways, which our nature demands.

Our modern popular theology naturally tends to suppress these feelings, and emphasises the tragedy of the chief event in the life of Christ to an extent which often seems almost a reversal of the more buoyant sentiments with which the early church regarded it; and the cross and crucifix, its corresponding symbols, have acquired similar exclusively melancholy associations.

With what feelings the early Church held its first services we can discover in the 46th verse of the same chapter we have already quoted. There

we read that "they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." "With unbroken rapture," we might, perhaps, translate the last two Greek words, which mean more than the old English terms carry to modern ears.

These first followers of the Master were evidently inspired with an ecstasy which we cannot permit ourselves to indulge in. It is the nature of ecstasy to be both intensely joyful and intensely serious. The Christian of to-day is serious enough in his religion, but his joy is somewhat difficult to detect. To them the Crucifixion was the failure of Death to secure its victim; to him it is the doleful murder and martyrdom of a beloved leader. To them it was the fresh vindication of the power of spirit over mortal limitations; to him it is the end of human aspiration in the grave. To him, therefore, the Resurrection is an incomprehensible miracle, if it is anything at all.

No wonder that the world is ceasing to believe in it. The reason is that we have been bent hitherto on concealing the very thing that Jesus meant to make clear. We have tried to substitute an incomprehensible worship for a comprehensible one, a false and impossible miracle for a true mystery, an absurdly supernatural event for one which is indeed extraordinary and even unique, but which it is the very gist of our religion to understand.

Let me explain in clearer words what is the main object of this book. It is to pay a greater tribute

to the eternal need for religion, by pleading for a more rational comprehension of the life and words of the Founder of Christianity.

Jesus is divine, not by virtue of our predicating His divinity—that is the religion of children and savages ; nor by checking every inclination to put His claim to the test of what reason we possess—that is the religion of cowards ; but because He fulfils all the demands our reason can make, because He has realised the greatest ideal we can conceive ; nay, rather because He has taught us to demand an ideal by revealing to us a faculty in our nature which has tilted the monotonous and false equilibrium of our lives, and pointed our destiny to the stars.

He claims our respect, reverence, worship, as intelligent and imaginative people, because we have intelligence and imagination. They are, so to speak, His special faculties, and He has given them to us on one condition ; that we should use them, under His captaincy. Supreme artist, He has attained the greatest simplicity, the greatest “breadth.” Our earth was His canvas, His model our sky. Whatever we do, Jesus demands we should do for a reason, one reason, the kingdom of Heaven’s sake.

He came to give us a meaning for things, to tell us that no object, symbol, ceremony, service, art, has any inherent power in itself which will save us the trouble of responsibility. To believe that they can, to imagine that saying one’s prayers, or going to church, or being ever so kind and good or generous or respectable will save us, that is to

say, make us really happy, is idolatry, is just what Jesus came to prevent our doing. The whole science of symbols is based on that fact. Their use cannot be defended or their value and truth understood while the bigot who abuses and the bigot who misuses them confounds their nature and meaning. Moth and rust corrupts them as it does every other human or material thing. Only the divine thing, the faith, imagination, aspiration in the human heart, associated with them, makes them precious. They are only points, foci for immortal thought, immortal feeling, immortal belief. It is we who give them life, not they us. There is no life but in living things.

Some symbols are more powerful than others, that is to say, affect us more keenly, because they correspond to deeper notes in our own natures; certain shapes, colours, sounds, chords, scents. These have been enlisted for the purposes of ritual, were so enlisted probably long before their uses became secularised in the arts. We are as yet children in this science. It is hardly yet recognised even as a science. Perhaps Pythagoras or the Egyptian priests knew the sacred relation of light and colour, curve, chord, and scent, to the types or the divine memories of these things in our souls, knew the secret numerical clue, too, of their right relation to each other, till the adept could harmonise them as an orchestra and the human heart be rapt into seventh heavens of ecstasy.

Whether they knew or not; whether Jesus knew and left the equation in occult passages which

we cannot interpret \* because we are not fit to understand, who can guess; since, if any know, they cannot or will not tell. Nor can I think it is likely to be known till once more kings shall be lawgivers, and artists priests. Perhaps, after all, our dread of symbols is instinctively just. It would be dreadful to be summoned unprepared to imperil our peace, and be caught, as that wild harmony might catch us, into the race of the planets and the music of the spheres.

The whole case for the conscious adoption of symbols is that they have the effect, when the power to feel is present, of increasing the feeling, by acting, as it were, as a sounding-board, by echoing the feeling back confirmed and strengthened from the plane of feeling to the plane of fact. They can never create the feeling: that is the work of God, the miraculous baptism of the human spirit in the fire of the divine life through the spirit of Christ working in the human heart.

Our first conversion or repentance is the confession or admission of this truth, the confession that life is not in matter, but outside matter; that it is in spirit, mood, atmosphere, our hearts. No work of art wrung from the life-blood of a poet, no poem, or picture, can move eyes and ears that are still insensitive; no landscape, however fertile,

\* When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto Him twelve. And when the seven among four thousand how many baskets full of fragments took ye up, and they said seven. And He said unto them: How is it that ye do not understand?



appeals by its own merits to any feeling in animals on two legs or on four, but that of greed.

The Old Testament command is eternally true. "Thou shalt have no other Gods but me. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image"—of what cannot be imaged. We have only in these days to extend the meaning and scope of the word "graven." Not only an idol but any "likeness," "seeming," or dogma : *that* thou shalt never believe is fixed or absolutely true. What thou shalt believe in and worship is the Lord thy God ; spirit, life, change, evolution, aspiration, development, meaning ; and Him only shalt thou serve. That is in sum the doctrine of the Old Testament. Not a negative but a positive doctrine ; not a prohibition but an assertion maintained by prohibitions. Find God and worship Him, and destroy the material gods of the heathen. That injunction is binding on us all. Christ has not repealed the teaching of the Old Testament, but He fulfils and adds to it.

Most of what passes for Christianity to-day is not Christianity at all, is still only the zeal of Phinehas, the son of Eleazer, is the iconoclastic religion of the Old Testament, is negative and not positive, is directed against sins because they are sins, because they are against the divine law, not because they are impossible with a new life.

All religious enthusiasm, such as the Old Testament religion typifies, takes a negative and physical form first because it is directed against physical excess. That is the first conversion we must all experience on the upward path. But there is a second conversion we must undergo. After we

have rejected the idolatry of matter for the reality of spirit,\* we must return to the recognition of matter as the medium and expression of spirit. That is what Christianity means. It is the return of the prodigal son chastened by his asceticism, with his thoughts purified by spiritual contemplation, to his Father's House, to a new comprehension of his duties as a Son, to a new conception of the meaning of life.

Life is no longer all vanity, as the Old Testament taught. It is now redeemed and has become sacred. It is the Temple of God. The scriptures are opened to him, and he cries with David :

“ One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after :

That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life

To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His Temple.”

This new feeling is summed up in the doctrine of the Incarnation. “ The Word was made flesh,” Matter has become for us the symbol of Spirit.

Objects, symbols, ceremonies, are potent, I say, in proportion to the meaning we bring to bear on them and fill them with. Having divorced

\* “ A wise often-quoted word of Blumhardt's says, ‘ One must turn oneself (be converted) twice. Firstly, from the natural to the Spiritual life, and then again out from the spiritual back into the natural, so far as it is right.’ ” *Hilty's Gluck*, vol. ii. p. 252. Hilty adds, “ Both could happen at the same time perhaps without the previous over-straining of the spiritual existence. Many people remain in this double moulting too long, and during the time offer no enjoyable aspect.”

spirit from matter, we remarry them. In doing so we only follow the course of nature. We take away and give again. We inhale and exhale, destroy and reconstruct, relax and revive. Dogmas are perpetually false as eternal or literal truths, for "God is greater than all," but dogmas are perpetually true as temporary symbols of the Eternal. The world is wicked, the world of thoughtless self-indulgence. Escape from it, Oh man, beginning to see the folly of its ways! "The voice said, Cry! And he said, What shall I cry?"

"All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the People is Grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the Word of God shall stand for ever."

That is the spirit of the Old Testament.

The spirit of the New cries: "The invisible things of God since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity." The world is very real and beautiful and good, the world of perpetual reincarnation and voluntary sacrifice. For now the Son of Man has come and is knocking at the door, at thy door, oh foolish dogmatist and spiritual dog-in-the-manger; at thy heart of pity, that thou shouldst give up thy feeble idolatry of ideas of all sorts, religious and commercial, which yet keep the world imprisoned, and the Son of God sacrificed to thy gods.

The need of the prior conversion is as great as ever. We are still animals and savages, prone to

kill and steal and offend against the laws of society. But the special idolatry which as Christians we are called to take arms against, is the idolatry of dogma and the crime of unkindness, of making others suffer for our own sins. These Jesus saw were deeper sins than the old ones. And there is a corresponding promise of reward attached to this wider and deeper view of our responsibility—that truer conception and realisation of the nature and functions of life, which Jesus calls the Kingdom of Heaven.

For while Christ never ignores the Law and the Prophets, while He says to the sinner, "Sin no more, lest a worse evil come upon thee," while He points continually to a spiritual Father in that world of ideas or imagination which is the real world towards which we must always struggle, He teaches us further that we must not make idols even in that world of ideas and words and thoughts, that these also are temples of God like our bodies; are, like everything else in the world, tabernacles, tents, ephemeral caravansaries of the Everlasting; and that the cure for the idolatry we are guilty of, the idolatry that tries to be scientific and accurate, that tries to fix God in any sense, is not to sweep away our idols in an iconoclastic or Old Testament manner, is not to become agnostic, not to give up idols, but to understand them; not to worship them blindly, but to worship *through* them with eyes open to the eternal truths they reveal or hide. "I am come," says Jesus, "that those who are blind may see, and that those who think they see may become blind."

So far from closing our eyes to facts because all facts are wicked, we must open our enlarged eyes to them because they have become symbols. Christ has brought about a new dispensation by bringing life into the world and making what was dead before, alive. Now, sun and air and cloud and tree and stone and stream cry, "Hosannah to the Highest. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

That was His work as far as Nature was concerned, but further work remained to be done. As Nature was raised to the plane of Life, so living men were to become the sons of God. They were to do more than see, they were to shape; to do more than admire, they were to create. They were, as we have seen Him saying, to be "branches of the vine" and bear fruit. They were to become conscious creators, artists, sensitives, poets. This is the work of God, that ye believe in Him whom He has sent": in Jesus, the Life in men's thoughts, their imagination, to be incarnated in all they do in the great work of civilisation, in furthering everything that will help people to live simpler lives, that will spread the religion of the heart. And out of this truth held truly, every noble institution of Christendom has sprung: all that has made for the fuller life of the world during the last 2000 years, all that is great in thought and science and art and poetry and enterprise, all that has been truly democratic, which has made for the really greater happiness of the greater number whatever the nominal form of government may have been.

Then, as the supremest work of art of which man is capable, Jesus has Himself instituted the sacred

ceremony of a common meal. In that ceremony He has concentrated His teaching. In the natural processes of taking physical food for the sustenance of physical life, man is no longer to eat and drink his own damnation, no longer as a beast to eat as a beast, to live and die as a beast. Henceforth, His food is a symbol, and as such is sacred. "This wheat," He seems to say, "sown in the field, dying in its grave thence to spring into manifold life, watered and sunned from Heaven: this vine of grapes with juice of ruddy blood, redolent of the sunshine: what miracles of mysteries! These are Myself, as I also am they, living symbols of the life that cannot die. These, when you take them, take as if they were, as indeed they are, the incarnation of the God who made them. Take and become full of praise. Take and become one with Me; as in eating them you become one with them. So in constant insight into the mystery of Nature will your bodies more and more consciously receive truer conception of the Divine Life—till He enter you suddenly as an ecstatic Bridegroom and take up His abode with you for ever."

In such guise as I read it, does Jesus teach the lesson of Christian civilisation: the brotherhood of all living things, the sacredness of all animal functions, the value of every beautiful crystallisation of human thought.

Let us again notice the commonplace character of this rite, because with the growth of ecclesiasticism this character is apt to be lost sight of. Not that I wish to suggest that because the head of the house the father of the family, took the priest's part in

the early performances of this traditional rite, there is any argument against the legitimate growth of a Christian priesthood, any more than that the primitive wall painting of the catacombs and the archaic music of the first centuries are arguments against the Madonnas of Raphael and the masses of Palestrina.

On the contrary, we have tried to show that the principle of Christianity, the law of evolution, the growth of the tree, was a very essential part of the Master's teaching. All I wish to point out is, how necessary it is, in order to appreciate the true depth of His wisdom, to grasp what I call the "commonplace" character of this rite, its humility, its deliberate choice of the low things of this earth to confute the magnificent ones, its hatred of monopoly, its imperial generosity.

Priests and kings are alike innocent, nay, invaluable and indispensable, just as they appreciate and obey this law. "He that would be great among you let him be servant of all." In that command lies the whole secret of ritual. Its use is to serve, its officers are servants. The office is sacred, not the person who fills the office, the king only in his crown, the priest only in his vestments.

It is the function which is divine or ideal, the performer is human and imperfect. Idolatry is the betrayal of this law, either by confusing the man with his office or by denying the office. By holding the office sacred, not the person who fills it, all evolution is possible. Christ is supreme in His comprehension of that paradox, and was never tired of illustrating it. "Except ye become as

(humble as) little children, ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom." "The last shall be first, and the first last." It is part of the great lesson of simplicity which He tried to teach, that reverence for common things and common events which we are apt to pass over as insignificant, just because they are common.

"Oh! Foolish critic and unwise,  
Did you but know your Saviour,  
You'd surely see with other eyes  
And change your whole behaviour.

"He talked of grass, and wind, and rain,  
And fig-trees, and fair weather,  
And made it His delight to bring  
Heaven and earth together.

"He spoke of lilies, vines, and corn,  
The sparrow and the raven;  
And words so natural yet so wise  
Were on men's hearts engraven.

"And yeast, and bread, and flax, and cloth,  
And eggs, and fish, and candles:  
See how the whole familiar world  
He most divinely handles!"

—*Lynch.*

He taught the truth that God is in the light, the road, the air—everywhere without us as well as within us, but never distant, removed, chimerical, impossible; that we could all see Him by cleansing our vision, by looking inwardly, not introspectively, but with the eye of imagination and faith, with the "single eye," that is to say, with the two eyes focussed on one object of sight.



He saw the analogy in our bodies to the duality everywhere; that we had a right eye and a left eye; a right hand and a left hand; and, while He recommended the severity of asceticism, the loss of the offending member rather than allowing it to usurp authority, He did not advocate any final mutilation. He wished for the unity of the higher and lower, the harmony of body and soul, the real atonement of which He has become the worshipful example.

That insight and reverence make the true priest and therefore throw open the "mysteries" of religion to those who have insight and reverence, need not in the least abolish the traditions of priesthood and ritual; it should rather purify them by its insistence on their true origin. But neither, on the other hand, need we allow the recognised Church to monopolise all the functions of religion. If no public ceremony was possible unless it was ecclesiastically conducted, Jesus should have been a Levite, a traditional priest. But the office of priest is included in that of king. The Son of David is king before He is priest. A priest is essentially a conservative person. Jesus, however, was the missionary of a true imperialism. He came to throw open the gates of liberty to all the world: the liberty to serve, the freedom to grow, the opportunity to aspire.

The very institution of this rite of breaking bread, of sharing a sacrifice, of redeeming the commonplace, of spiritualising the materialistic, epitomises the doctrine of correspondence which is the philosophy of Jesus, and lays the foundation of that science of symbols whose threshold we have

dared to cross. It is a science which is probably not destined to become popular for many a day : a science which must evolve as man evolves his powers of expression and vision ; but Christ was the supreme and conscious Master of it, and His first disciples accepted what they could understand of it with rapture, as His true followers to-day must see in it the secret of the revival of religion.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

**O**F further instances of religious symbolism (and all symbolism is religious), it is not my intention to write, for I have not the experience of the subject that would warrant my entering on so vast, so fascinating, but so special a sphere of research. I have tried to keep within those paths of criticism which it is anybody's privilege to tread, and to draw attention to the importance of studying this question because it affects the development, not only of our religious life and ritual but the wider thought of the world, which is fast out-growing the ecclesiastical tyranny that has so far dominated it.

I do not rejoice that we should altogether so out-grow this restraint. It is true that we have come to regard religion as a vested interest, and to apologise for secular trespass on its preserves. Varieties of religious experiences have come to be treated scientifically as subjective phenomena—the professors who treat of them are judicially silent as to their ethical merits. Modern civilisation has somewhat contemptuously assigned Religion a distinct province between philosophy and the practical professions. It has been left to deal with only a part of life, and that a very small part.

The fault is on both sides. Religion should deal with the whole of life, and not with only a part of it. Life cannot be sane or healthy till it is wholly religious ; but Religion, as it presents itself to-day, fails to convince us that it can satisfy so large a claim. It demands an unreasoning sacrifice of intelligence which nobody above a certain pitch of intelligence can possibly consent to make. It still performs a great miracle, and gives eternal life to some, but its gift is so curiously conditioned, and is withal so inexplicable to those who possess it, that its power and appeal become less and less. Nevertheless, the question of the time for us is still whether miracles are possible for the enlightened mind. Can we cut ourselves free from those fetters of barren speculation which lure us on with the fond hope of a theory that will explain everything, and once more Feel and Believe and Do, instead of only Think ?

Theories will never help us. "The world is not saved because a clever book has been written." Christianity has only one answer for the quandary in which we are fixed. "According to your faith so will it be to you." "Everything is possible to him that believeth." But either the Faith of Christianity is too childish or too superannuated for our enlightened experience, or, as I firmly believe, we do not to-day sufficiently understand the nature of faith, to appreciate the answer of Christ.

We have seen what an apparently innocent faith possessed our fathers before they became scientific and commercial ; but one and all believed that the miraculous explanation was the only possible explanation ! God ruled over the earth from His

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throne in the sky. He sent, as it pleased Him, thunder and lightnings, earthquakes, plagues, sunshine and rain, harvest, happiness, success, failure, grief, misfortune, death. These were to try us, test us, prove us, His poor creatures. Through these we were to learn to appreciate Him in absolute simplicity of childlike trust. And what miracles happened under conditions like these we cannot say, because in an age of faith the miraculous is commonplace and hardly requires chronicling. A miracle in our sense of the miraculous does not exist for people who live by faith. For them the supernatural has become the natural, and the natural the miraculous. For them, as for Ruskin, the wonder is, not that the sun should stand still for Joshua, but that it should go on for us. In the same way Art was not for them the conscious accomplishment that it is for us, because a faithful age is also an instinctively artistic one. A work of art is itself a miracle, because it is the result of an act of the faith-faculty, that is to say, of the sympathetic imagination.

Art and Faith are alike lacking to us because they have both ceased to be innocent, natural, and spontaneous, and have become conscious and conventional instead. This consciousness, conscientiousness, or introspection, this inability to take things on trust, is the supreme destroyer of our Faith and Art, that is to say, of our religion and our life. Happiness must be the object of life, and only children can be happy because they are unconscious. Only children can inherit the kingdom of Heaven. Consciousness is our sin. To regain Faith, we must lose our con-

Let yourself go

## CONCLUSION

147

sciousness again, we must, as Jesus says, "deny ourselves and follow Him," the *universal* spirit, must lose ourselves in the *whole* of Life, and become like little children once again.

But Christianity is the law of evolution. We look forward and not backwards to that golden age, and live in the hope of a better resurrection. It is necessary to fall in order to rise. This consciousness which is our sin, is also our salvation. We cannot, without it, grasp the higher revelation which Christ offers us. It is the ploughed and harrowed field into which the seed of our redemption is dropped. We can no longer accept the faith, the simple popular faith, of our fathers. Or rather, let us say, for all faith must be the same, that we cannot accept their symbols and dogmas without new interpretation. The fault is not theirs, nor is it ours, except so far as we mistook their symbols for statements of actual facts. When shall we learn that the eternal must always be dressed in temporal clothes, and stop worshipping scare-crows?

Faith is always the same. The Magdalene and the Thief repentant on the cross, enter the same heaven with the philosopher; enter it more easily than he. Verily, thought is a hindrance when it leaves the lines of love. Who can compare that truth which the harlot knows better than the Pharisee, the truth that God is love, devotion, self-sacrifice, the extinction of the person in the passion, the individual in the type: who can compare a truth like that with such puny facts, if indeed they be facts, that the earth is not the

centre of the universe, or that we were once all monkeys ?

Nothing to me is more full of horror than that we, with all our knowledge, and control of natural forces, are still trembling on the brink of Hell : are apt to forget God in our remembrance of ourselves. That lark, in his happy ignorance and faith, seems to me higher on his plane than we are on ours. He is in the bosom of his Father, lost in the rapture of his Eucharist up in the sky. We are taking exercise to get an appetite for dinner !

We think ourselves Lords of Creation, very high indeed on the return road to God. I have my deep misgivings on that score. I do not feel quite confident that because we read and write books, and discuss every matter under the sun, that we have even yet reached the bottom of that descent into matter which the mystics typify by Lucifer's fall. We may eat and drink of the tree of knowledge and yet be damned. Nay, damned because we eat of it, and are driven out of the garden before we can reach the Tree of Life and live for ever. Our greater knowledge may prove our less wisdom and our greater corruption, just as the human corpse or human skeleton is more horrible than that of any other creature.

We are trembling, as I say, on the brink. This is our Last Day, when we realise acutely, intensely, that we must either live by faith, or without it, in imaginative sympathy with the struggling virtue of the world, or in cold separation from it. Now, indeed, must our choice be made, and only in our utter impotence to get help from our boasted know-

ledge shall we be able to ask and accept the help of Him who is able "to raise us up at the last day" of our degradation.

My friends, religious and agnostic, saved and unsaved, bond and free, I would I could see the light more clearly, that we might see to take each other by the hand, not in agreement to disagree, but in the unity of a reasonable belief. This Jesus I would fain preach, lived long ago. Many a myth has been mistaken for history and exposed since then. Is it really long ago, or is it only yesterday? I hardly know. It seems to make no difference, for the spirit of Jesus takes us outside history, and His words call to us as freshly and crisply as the newly turned tilth. Had He been a great statesman, soldier, poet, philosopher, He would have made an indelible mark in our history or our art. But He was none of these. He was only a great personality, a great influence. He wrote no book, not even His own biography; He left that to others. He achieved only one thing; He was absolutely consistent to His ideal, and His ideal was perfection. Progress was His profession, everything had to be sacrificed to that, and everything was. He lived and spoke for all time. Conceive it if you can! He did not say: "I will give Truth a voice, and future generations will acknowledge how wise I was," but, "I and My Father are One—before Abraham was, I am—I am with you always, even unto the end—Heaven and Earth shall pass (all our dogmas and forms of religion, and philosophies, and fine ideas); but My word—(because I speak of the Life that never dies)—shall not pass."



Believe Him, then, as He begged to be believed, as a spirit to whom matter and the conditions of matter, space and time, are nothing in themselves, and mood and feeling and atmosphere, everything ; for only so can He become to us a person in the only sense He would have us know Him, an impersonal one.

You who would materialise Him, who would narrow down the huge significance of His whole Life's work to the perpetration of a single act, losing in the literally conceived and false magic of a heathen compact of vicarious physical suffering, the real meaning of His great offer of life, in the sacrifice or sacred fulfilment of His own : you have only half the truth with you. And if no other words than those you use and have taught others to use, can carry the message of the supreme surrender of our Redeemer's right to live : then, in His name, will you explain a little more what you mean by this sacrifice, to those whose ears and hearts you offend with its dogmatic crudity. The "Blood of Jesus," and the cruelty of the Cross, are not beautiful but barbarous symbols in your hands, and if they attract those whose minds are barbarous, however childlike, they repel others whose susceptibility should not exclude them from the fold.

Of course Jesus was historical, the very hinge of history. He is no myth to me. I will not minimise what He did. I will rather exaggerate it. He was the supreme King of men, who with the genius and power to twist a world to His will, refused to do so, and preferred obloquy to adulation. He might have been a Cæsar, and, with greater authority than ever

Cæsar gained, have established a kingdom, and revolutionised the world. He might have arrested the decline of the Empire, and revived it by anticipating every great improvement that great lives are sacrificed to effect. Not a living soul, then or now, but would have called Him to regenerate Society. This He might have done, but refused to do it, because greater work had to be done, which also He alone could do, and to all such temptations, if temptations they were, He had but one answer : " My kingdom is not of this world."

His choice is deliberately made before His ministry begins. It is typified or told in the story of The Temptation in the Wilderness, when, one by one, the pleasures of appetite and the pleasures of material and mental power, are renounced in favour of the task of that supreme self-denial which was to join Him to the Father, and enable Him to become our Comforter and Help. Then, it is said : " Angels came and ministered to Him," for mortal men could do so no longer. Henceforward He was alone in His career, for " He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of Him, for He knew what was in man,"—knew how little there is in the very best of us.

How can we expect that He, who refused to entertain any human ambition, or be conditioned by any material limit, could impose a literal and historical dogma as the only test of our belief in Himself, or deny His help to those who in reverence for what they conceive to be His message will not submit to see His Spirit of immortal hope buried in a mortal grave ?

In rejecting the infallibility of dogmas, we vindicate dogmas ; in rejecting salvation on such terms we vindicate Christ, for the Redemption He offers us is the Redemption of the whole world, and it was for this He sacrificed the Body of His labour, and the Blood of His enthusiasm.

The kingdom of Heaven is still "at hand," and calls for sacrifice. If we could understand what it exactly meant—still more if we could immediately bring it about—the work of the Church would be accomplished, the end of our civilisation attained ; for in the New Jerusalem there is no temple, no need of religion, ritual, or symbol, "because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple." But the work of Christ's Church must ever be incomplete on earth. It must be at once its pride, as it is its disappointment, that it cannot halt on the road of Faith. It holds the key to an endless vista of swelling hope and joyous deed ; and again, of dissatisfaction, new aspiration, and new achievement. It must be content to pass, I do not say, from creed to creed, but to greater fulfilment, and deeper interpretation, of its one creed : That God has visited His people, and given to them Eternal Life.



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