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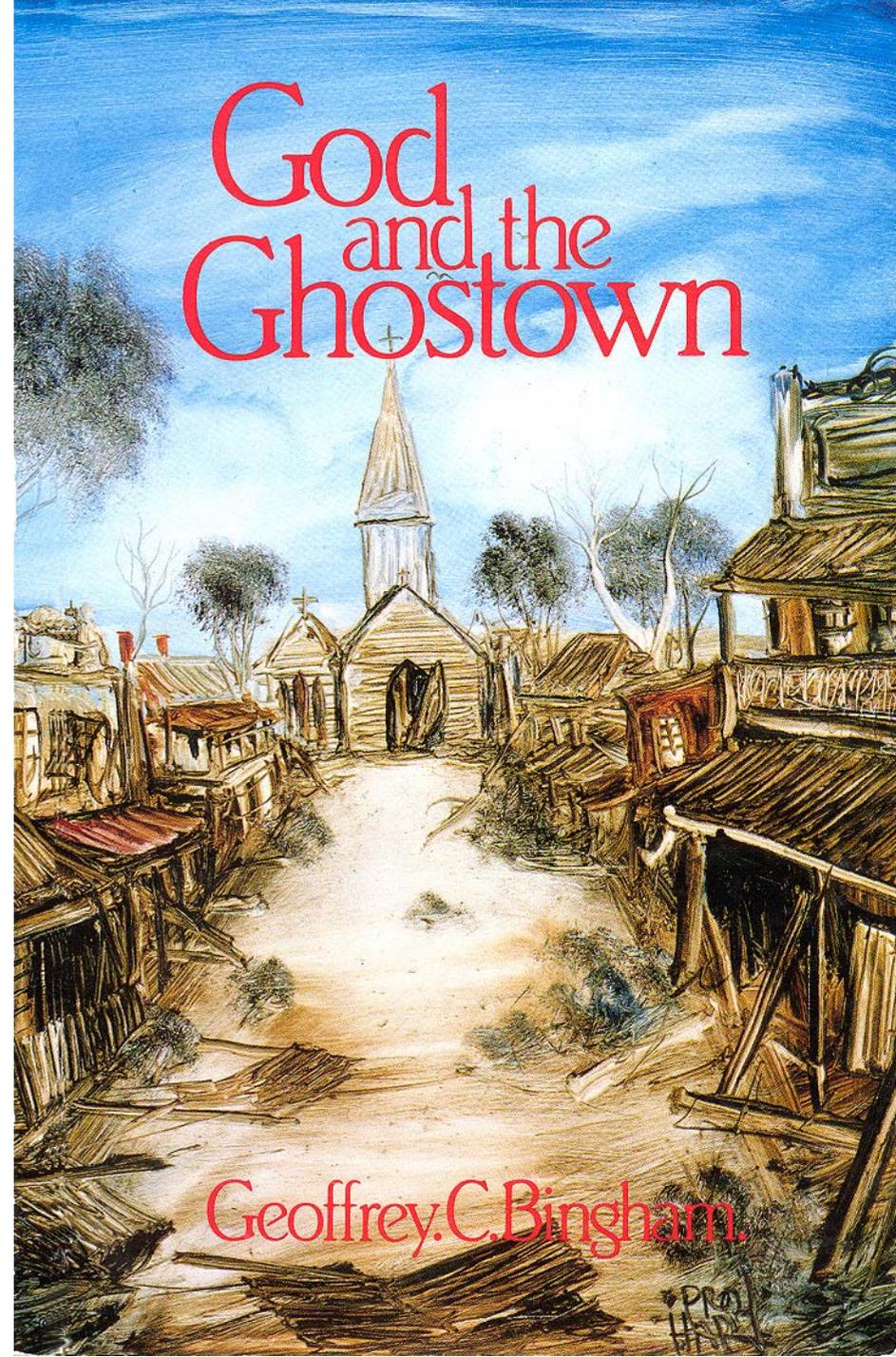
For those who like their writing to be neither fact nor fiction but both, then the writer has prepared a delectable meal. In his last six titles he has developed a new type of book, if not a new style of writing. Call it what you will-pot pourri, chop suey, sweet-and-sour, or even smorgasbord-the result is attractive.

Geoffrey Bingham is a competent story-teller who knows that truth comes through best as narrative. He also knows that theology has its best medium in poetry-truth that appeals to human intuition. Also he has revived-for his own purposes-the essay. To have these three forms of writing in one volume is quite pleasing.

Do not be deceived, however; for the author is at his most cunning ploy for good communication. Take, for example, the three stories which form the title of the book: are they fact, fiction, allegory or fantasy? Probably something of all these things. In themselves they are both chilling and exhilarating, especially if we perceive what lies behind the artless description of a country ghost town in its anger, its decay and its revival.

The painting of the ghost town is by *PRO HART* Who better than he could depict the decay of an outback town that has known better days? Artist and writer combine to create yet another memorable book.

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God and the Ghostown

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# God and the Ghostown

**Geoffrey C. Bingham.**

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## Foreword A Story Concerning Stories

There is something puzzling, something intriguing about the facts of facts and fiction. Mostly fiction is factual, ie. composed of persons who have lived, actions which have happened, situations which have been lived out in human affairs. Fiction, then, is not purely fictional, and factual accounts are not always necessarily true. Writers of biography cannot avoid identifying with their subjects. They see the object of their writing with some kind of partiality or prejudice. Their accounts to that degree must be fictional. It is not always easy to decide what is fact, what is fiction. That is why some writers have coined a word for factual writing, calling it ‘faction’—as against fact *or* fiction.

What is it about the factual and fictional that grips us so powerfully? I admit that I am wholly weak when it comes to reading fiction. Even the worst writing grips me. I am back into the issues of life in a flash. I am soon involved, whether it be on the TV screen, at the cinema, reading a book, or listening to a play—to me it is all vivid. I am seeing, more and more, that truth is narrative. We adduce principles regarding God, man and the creation, but we make our judgements by the acts which happen. We work out living principles by the way people and creatures live. So we are always eager to get new glimpses. At least, I am; but I know some folk who are too timid (or scornful) to move outside of what they call ‘fact’. I think fact would be even more difficult to describe and nominate than fiction. Humans are poor at telling all the truth, so help them, God!

I am not writing this essay to defend fiction. Long ago

fiction won the field in ancient cave, in old meadows, and in the courts and campuses of mankind. Fiction reigns, I am sure, but often it is closer to the facts than the facts themselves; or, should I say, closer to truth than the facts which we fondly imagine constitute truth. Let me make it clear that I am not speaking against the facts as we see them; only against their interpretation, for such can be far from the mark. What I am trying to say is that fiction—somewhat like poetry—can take a bit of license in the way it handles the so-called facts. It can in fact interpret them rightly or wrongly, but genuine fiction is helped to express the truth because characters are not created by authors, nor, for that matter, managed by them. The genuine writer hangs loose to the characters and their action, whilst they for their part do as they will, always acting consistently with what they are—by nature. The truth of people reaches us by some kind of a creative literary osmosis. We absorb what is so.

When we come to the matter of biography, or—even more so—autobiography, a problem arises. Is it cheating on fiction to use one's own experience, setting it forth even blithely as fiction? Few writers have scruples on this score. When, however, the writing of fiction from autobiographical experience becomes prophetic, then this arouses feelings in the reader. The prophetic always seems strongly egotistical, as though the writer is preaching. In one sense he is: in one sense he is like any artist who, seeing what he sees, communicates to his audience by strokes of the brush, use of instruments, or by means of the pen. In this, he is having interaction with his reader (or listener), for he is seeking to communicate truth in its special and immediate sense, and truth for its part is always personal, always confronting, especially when it is not being posed in terms of propositions, but in terms of life. When, then, fiction comes to us in the prophetic vein, we can say that it is 'fiction which is stranger than fiction'.

Autobiographical material used fictionally may seem to be

one form of cheating, but this is not the case: it is a personal sharing of truth. Again, this kind of writing may appear to be egotism, the writer speaking about himself under the veil of anonymity. This of course may be the case, but where writing is prophetic, the charge of egotism cannot rightly be levelled at the author. This 'fiction which is stranger than fiction' is most powerful, for this is how human beings are, and how things, too, are. I am sure it is at this level that we are most powerfully gripped, and here that the writer can most usefully communicate.

I have noticed in these latter years of writing that whilst theological minds (if such there be) gladly concentrate on theological propositional literature, yet the majority of readers like to grasp their theology or truth via the medium of fiction, albeit factional fiction. It is because of this that I set forth this medley of stories, essays and poems, trusting it will penetrate to the heart by reason of its truthfulness. I trust also that it will greatly entertain, for I am sure that truth is deeply entertaining as we recognise its reality. In the depths of every human creature is a certain knowledge of the truth. Only the hardened will resist truth, but then so-called truth can be greatly disarming, and often it is a case of 'deep calls unto deep', ie. truth finds its home at last in the needy heart.

*Geoff Bingham  
Coromandel, March 1984*

## God and the Ghost Town

It was my friend Barry who found me in that little cockle of a boat outside the Bay and on the waters of the Peninsula. He said I was lying upwards, looking at the sun. The oars had gone, and all that I had done was to drift; just to drift.

I have a vague memory of the faded yellow sand with its onion weed growing thickly, stemming the pull and tug of eroding tides. I partially remember seeing the derelict huts, the deserted week-ender shacks, and the decaying pleasure-ground buildings. What does stick in my memory is the red brick toilet block, alone substantial in that deserted place. I kept thinking how strange it was that a toilet building could look so much like a sentinel fortress, strong and unvanquished when all else was surrendering to time, but then my sun-crazed mind was about as stable as the high surf that battered against the plum-pudding rocks of that desolate sea.

As I have said, all of this was confused in my mind, when Barry's red face, sprinkled as though with black pepper by the jets of his facial bristles, loomed over me. I remember him staring down at me, as though coming into, or just out of, my troubled dreams. I remember saying, 'Barry, your eyes are very, very black!'

At the bush hospital, they set me out on a long bed in a wide room. I wondered at its spaciousness, and also its coolness. There were shutters on the window which kept both light and heat at bay. Fires were burning on my skin and invading my brain. Somewhere, people were talking, and I could hear Barry's voice, excited and insistent. I could not distinguish words. I was drifting back into the rocking motion of the little cockle of a boat; so long I had drifted in it; so long I had been a chip on the ocean. I rocked on and on,

even on that long bed in that spacious room. I knew in some strange way that I was not in a boat but a bed. Even so, I rocked on...

If you go out on to the lip of the Peninsula, you will find one or two of those old towns. That is for certain. You may call them 'ghost towns', and you would be pretty close to the mark. 'Ghost towns' is a good name, for they are pretty uncanny. You wander down the streets, or rather, one long main street. At the same time you can see that back of this main thoroughfare there are only desolate, derelict and broken houses. Everything is decaying. Come one of those hot months and you will hear ghost-music, old galvanised iron swinging loosely, or rusty hinges creaking eerily with the protests of bland hopelessness. Even the hot northerlies seem to expend their strength, growing tired and then leaving the town to its listless self. Only the brave peppercorns have true semblance of life, their insistent green giving colour to all that is drab.

It was in one of these old towns that I found myself, although for the life of me I cannot tell you why, or when.

What I cannot recall properly was how I happened to be in that old church. Since the first days in hospital I have been trying to get Barry back to that old building to show him what is what, or, rather, what was what! Each time I insist, he goes silent, as though this is his only defence against me. Of course he does not believe me. That is why any movement he makes is an uneasy one. Evading me, he twists himself sideways as though this movement will outwit me, and put him out of the line of my observation and the demands of my insistence.

I say to him—as I have said a hundred times—'Look here, Barry! What's to stop us going out there? What's to prevent us from seeing the church?'

He generally says nothing, hiding in his silence, but if he says anything, it is dogged. 'It was the sun, Tony. It was the sun.'

He is sure I suffered sunstroke. He thinks my experience was no experience, but a mad dream born of the Peninsula sun. I agree with him that the sun got me in that little cockle of a boat, but what happened before the boat event? I know that you cannot be out in the sun for a day or two and not be affected. I acknowledge that, but I also insist that something quite strange—and, I am sure, significant—happened prior to my being in that boat. That is why I keep saying to Barry with unending patience, 'Barry, I give it to you, old chap, that the sun affected me. I also give it to you that I was almost gone when you found me, but it was before the boat and the sun that I was in the church.' When I say this sort of thing, Barry looks away from me, and I feel his fingers drumming on his knees where he sits beside me, near the bed. Then I sigh, and sighing isn't something Barry easily endures. He has to do something, and that is generally turning sideways from me and looking ahead.

Once he said, 'You get better properly and we'll take you back in the Landrover. I'll let you show me. What about that, eh?'

I knew he was humouring me on that occasion. I wanted to prove my point, but clearly I didn't want any patronage from him as though I was a mental case. I had often humoured such cases myself, and it is right and proper to do this where the situation warrants it, but in this case it was unwarranted. I forbore on this occasion to sigh with frustration and impatience. Instead I said simply, 'You do that, Barry. You take me back in the Landrover when I'm really well.'

The bush nurse was a good one. She was strongly built, very kindly in her ways, but unbending when it came to my hos-

pitalisation. She had other patients, but not in this large ward. The reason was, Barry told me, that at nights I would make the most terrible noises. I would be crying out in some kind of protest, and at other times just grunting and groaning. Other patients couldn't handle that son of thing.

When we went back to the church after my time of convalescence, the church was there, all right. To me, it was not so much an anti-climax as it was sickening. I was sure I would see traces of the event in which I had been involved. I expected to see a few hymn books lying about, and maybe, here and there, a loose page or two of them; but it was not like that.

The first thing I should have seen was the old organ. I could have gone across to it and played. I was sure it was there because it was fixed in my mind's eye. When I went towards the place where it had been, I saw that it was missing. I felt my hair prickle a trifle, but after a time I became calm. Something must have happened to that organ.

Barry was watching me quietly. I decided to forget about the organ for a time. I pointed to the pews.

'Look Barry,' I said, 'they were sitting there, a whole congregation of them.'

'Yes, Tony,' Barry said, 'the whole place was full of them, eh?'

I shouted at him. 'It was no mistake! It was no sun! They were there all right.'

Barry was gentle. He cleaned a place on the front pew, brushing the red dust with a handkerchief. 'Tony,' he said, 'sit here, my friend and long-time mate.'

I read the signs. Barry was being patient with me. I would have to sit with him. Trying not to sigh, I sat. He smiled gently, looking at me in his sideways fashion. He even touched my hand lightly before he began speaking.

'Tony,' he said, 'you and I have been together for a long time.' I knew the tone: I knew the technique. He was drawing up his lines broadly, setting out his action, logically patterning his proof to bring me to sensibility. I decided to humour him. I would need great patience.

'A long time, old son,' I said. 'Years, in fact.'

He seemed pleased at that. He nodded. 'In all those times I have known you as a great man of faith.' I gave a faint nod, not prepared to express what was coming to the surface—tears. We were both men of faith: so were our wives. I mean, they were women of faith. For that matter, so were our families. We were part of a sane and faithful community. We lived in faith and taught it. That was why we had the Landrover. As a man proclaiming faith, Barry kept himself tidy. Only on country tours was his face this kind of red with black stubble all over it. In the city it was different.

'I have listened to you, time without number, old warrior,' he was saying, as we sat in the old silent building, amongst the red volcanic dust. This basaltic dust had swept across the ancient Peninsula for numberless years. 'Yes, old son, I have listened to you proclaim the faith, teaching and preaching a thousand times. I have seen you speak to large crowds, but mainly see you talk eyeball to eyeball with persons, small groups and run-of-the-mill congregations. I have seen you burn with wonder, astonishment, earnestness and hope; sometimes with frustrated impatience.'

I kept a steady gaze although a grin was forming within me; Barry rarely let himself go like this.

Suddenly an idea struck him. 'Tell me, Tony; do you ever have a strange dream, one nearly always along the same lines, and which keeps repeating itself?' He seemed to be looking into the distance as though the dry old weatherboards were not restricting his vision.

'A repetitive dream?' I asked, and even as I said the words, I knew it was true. Sure, I was visited—time and again—with

a repetitive dream. I have often wondered how many preachers and teachers have a similar dream. In the dream—almost a nightmare—I would be speaking to a congregation which seemed, at first, to listen. They quickly tired. They would fidget, look at the ceiling, and even sigh. It was not that their eyes were hard, but they were indifferent, showing a withdrawing from the message, and the withdrawal was deliberate. In the dream, they would begin to talk to one another, and I had the feeling that they were talking about me. It was all very terrible, and sometimes it seemed I did not exist. They had sent me to Coventry. They were ignoring my authority to preach. It seemed that their thought was, ‘If we talk amongst ourselves long enough he will go away. Anyway, he doesn’t belong here.’

Now the strange thing was that in your dream you knew you had something very wonderful to say. If there was anyone who needed to hear it, it was the people of that congregation. However, they were the very ones who would not hear.

Gradually, in the dream, they began to drift out of the church, until all were gone. At some point of their departure you became imploring, but to deaf ears. Soon they were all gone, and you were there in the pulpit, your anguish having now become a thing of fear and horror. Yes, that dream had come, time and again.

‘Yes, Barry,’ I said, ‘I do have a repetitive dream. It’s the one where they never hear you. They ignore you, and then begin to fade away.’

Barry was a bit startled that I had got to this dream before him. He remained in silence. Finally he said, very gently, ‘You don’t think it could have been one of those dreams, one become so real that you think you did not dream it?’

‘*Certainly* it is similar—the thing that happened here—but it was no dream. *It happened.*’ We sat there in the hot day, blowflies buzzing against the

windows. After a time the buzzing died as the flies escaped into the open. Everything was quiet, even sleepy. Then Barry said, ‘Get it off your chest, Tony. Just tell me the whole story.’

That was when I told him the story, the whole of it, the unbelievable whole of it.

Barry had dropped me from the Landrover into the old ghost town. He knew my love of the past, my fascination with history and my obsessive interest in derelict towns, villages and farmhouses. Maybe it was because I was primarily interested in derelict people, human beings who are decaying. In my mind I re-people towns, restore villages to their former character and life, and because I seek in ministry to re-pristiniate the past, especially derelict human beings, I wanted to renew their leases on life as though they had never died. I would shutter them back in my mind to childhood, even babyhood, imagining what they must have been before the lines of degeneration had set in. So then I would see them not as defeated and decayed, but as full-blooded people, rehabilitated by some rich and mysterious grace, evoked into living faith. In some ways, my very seeing of them this way was an act of faith. Indeed it was also an act of hope and love. I wanted the people themselves to catch up with my faith for them.

When Barry dropped me on the outskirts of the town, I made my way to the main street. There were people about; I could see that easily enough. The utility trucks looked a bit vintage-class to me, but then I knew that farmers, especially those on the Peninsula who had felt the pinch over many seasons, often had old trucks. What surprised me was the sight of horsedrawn vehicles. That was unusual: it was years since I had seen sulkies.

I trudged through the dust to the church. Typical of a

country town on Sunday morning, there were few people in the main street. The pub was closed and the general store had not yet opened. Perhaps it would open after the church service. I wandered across to the church.

I was grudgingly noticed. The folk were either shy of me as a person, or it was their habit: that is, not to welcome visitors heartily. They talked about the weather, and some brought up the subject of cricket, which was fair enough. I was surprised, however, when one of the men—who appeared to be a steward of the church—said to me, ‘You will be our preacher for today?’ It was a question, but he seemed to have no doubt. Strangely enough, I felt I was! This was surprising because no one had appointed me.

‘There’s no one else,’ he said abruptly, ‘so you had better come, and we’ll talk about the hymns.’

The organist seemed to be a sweet woman. To be an organist in a country town is always to be a bit special. Playing the organ is not for everyone; so few learn to do that.

We looked through the old Methodist hymn-book: chunky, jam-packed with hymns by the Wesleys, Watts and others. I selected Whittier’s famous hymn, ‘Dear Lord and Father of Mankind’. The organist rather favoured ‘Who is a Pardoning God Like Thee?’ and the steward diffidently suggested ‘And Can It Be?’

The organist—as did most country organists—liked Handel’s ‘Largo’, and we had that as a preliminary. The men seemed mostly to be in white shirts, black ties and dark suits. Few coloured shirts showed up. I guess I thought their era was slow in catching up to our modernity. The women wore hats, high heels and stockings, and carried hand-bags.

In fact, everything was typical. The notices were given after the first hymn. They included a brief but formal welcome to me as ‘the visiting preacher’, although I was left nameless. There was a bit about the coming church picnic and the annual fete. Mention was made of the win the cricket team had

had the previous day. After the notices came the offertory, which they called ‘the collection’.

When it came to sermon-time I stood before them, wondering a little. My regular (and repetitive) dream was hovering somewhere at the back of my mind, but then I knew this was no dream. It was here, before me, in this year of our Lord, and on the Peninsula. The day was warm enough, but even so I gave a little shiver. Only the organist gave me a smile. She had eyes with a light in them. I kept thinking about her ‘Who is a Pardoning God Like Thee?’

A preacher without nerve can soon be disheartened. Before him are the blank Sunday morning faces. Are they intended to express piety? Or presupposed boredom? Or are they a deliberate barrier against truth’s confrontation? The nervous preacher must often wonder. Perhaps they are simply the expression of Anglo-Saxon conservatism; it may be that they are the nervous ones. On Saturday afternoon at cricket they are less conservative. At football—that moving and exciting game—they are no longer conservative. Red-faced, stimulated, inhibitions broken down, they show how animated a human being can become. The contrast of Sunday morning’s stolid neutrality is certainly a shock to a timid preacher.

Looking at them, I decided to take the plunge. There was no change in the faces. Here and there a gleam in the eyes, and the organist looked quite interested. [‘Who is a pardoning God like Thee, and who has grace so rich and free?’] I felt stirred, but no one stirred greatly as I set out my materials, ideas, concepts and truth. They bore with me (I think!) until I started to apply the truth. My voice rose with a certain excitement as I shared my amazement. They stared back at me. Unintimidated, I asked them directly, ‘Do you love God?’ There was no reply. ‘Do you love all men, everywhere?’ Stolid silence.

I began to speak about the unique thing of God’s being. ‘He is Father,’ I said, ‘and under Him we are Family. God is

not *like* a Father: He is not *one* father amongst many other fathers. He is *the* Father, or just *Father!*'

Because this is basic truth, no one could really object against such teaching, but the application seemed to stir them greatly. The bland Sunday morning tradition was beginning to wear a bit thin. Some faces had become red and some white. 'There is anger there,' I thought to myself. For years I had known about the anger that there is in humans—most, if not all, humans. I thought, 'I wonder what they will do with this anger?' Suddenly I wished Barry were there. Then my eyes caught those of the organist. They were sparkling with delight.

I am aware that pulpit and pew often get locked into conflict. I am also aware that the pulpit has to prove itself to the pew. They have certain criteria for what they call 'good preaching'. These criteria relate to length of sermon, way of preaching, subject of study, mode of expression and the like. Some congregations are very fussy. Often they require that the preacher not become personal, not apply his material, and never call his audience in question. I seemed not to fit this audience's criteria. After a time, some could stand it no more. The steward could not conceal his own anger when he stood and said, 'Mister preacher, I think you have said enough!'

The organist shook her head freely. 'Oh no!' she said. 'Oh no! He has only just begun.' She nodded her head to me. 'Please keep going,' she said.

I did, but after a few minutes someone said, 'Enough is enough! We don't want any more of that stuff.'

I decided to go ahead. 'God is *here!*' I cried. 'He is here to be worshipped because He loves us, right here, this Sunday, in this building, on this Peninsula.'

Someone shouted, 'Let's have the hymn and go!'

'He is our Father; we are His children!' I cried. 'And that means we are one people—as Family. We are brothers and

sisters.'

'Mighty strange idea,' someone protested.

A woman said, 'That would make us all one family across the world.' She knew that couldn't be true. The implications were staggering. No, that couldn't be true.

Someone added with disgust, 'That would make us one with the Japs and the Mohammedans. That just can't be.'

It was a statement made and not a question asked, but I decided to go in, boots and all. 'If Japs and Moslems come to God as Father,' I said, 'then that makes them His children, and all of us to be brethren.'

The steward was adamant. 'God is God!' he shouted, 'and man is man. You must not mix them.' He paused and glared. 'God cannot be our Father. He may treat us as His children, but we are not. He is God. We are men.'

I respected his argument. At least he had thought about the matter. At the same time I wondered whether I was going crazy. I had never been in a church like this. Generally listeners bore with the preacher, and never talked at him from the congregation. I decided to risk the growing sea of anger.

'God is Father,' I said, 'because He has always had His Son. His Son has always had the Father. By nature He is Father. By sending His Son, He has rescued us from guilt and death, and made us sons. We share in the Sonship of His Son.'

I began to explain the *how* of this, but there was something which seemed to enrage many of the men and women. The point I was making must have had some bearing on their local situation. Perhaps there was hatred between families. Maybe they were an inbred community, with all the problems such inbreeding brings. I did not know. So I continued talking.

'The fact of family faces us with loving,' I said, 'and we must love as brethren. We love others because He first loved us. If He so loved us then we ought to love one another. Such love should be throughout our community, and then across

the world.'

I looked at the organist. She was in delight. Looking around, I saw there was anger, but it was mixed with fear. I was stirring hate. Their Sunday-go-to-meeting aplomb was there no longer. They were glaring at me. Maybe they wondered whether I had been told about the local feuds and divisions, and the weapons they had used against each other—weapons which were not physical, but the armoury of words, the cutting edge of criticism. Even now, I do not know what it was that set fires racing amongst them. I imagine that the grace of God was unacceptable to them, because man wishes to do things from himself, and needed grace is wholly from God. I have to leave that matter with you for consideration: I do not know.

Now there was anger unleashed, but with it—as I have said—that deep fear. I was appalled at the waving hands. They were moving wildly in the air, although no one had stood except the church steward. Tradition kept them seated, but anger, hatred and insecurity were urging them to wild protest.

'He is right! He is right! The preacher is right!' the organist was saying, almost with glee. Her hands were gripped together in delight. The next moment they would loosen and she would clap her hands in joy. She seemed totally oblivious to the wrath about her. 'Who is a pardoning God like Thee? And who has grace, so rich and free.<sup>9</sup>' It seemed that rivers of grace were flowing to her, and cascades of it falling on her.

This unsolicited commendation seemed to further enrage the congregation. 'Where did he come from?' they shouted. 'Who asked him to come here? Who asked him to preach?'

There was a sudden silence. No one answered. The steward said slowly, 'He just came, from what I can gather.' He stared hard at me. 'Who told you to come, eh?'

I thought about that. It seemed clear enough to me, if not

to them. 'God must have sent me,' I said.

Someone shouted, 'He's not qualified. Off with him! Send him off!' It sounded to me like 'Off with his head!'

Now they were at it again, their arms flailing in the air, their shoutings and screamings making sound-streamers in the air, confusion in the mind, and an horrific combination of bitterness and hatred. It was like an explosion of anger that suddenly had caused a conflagration.

It was in vain that my voice beat up against the tide of salivated babble, bubbling rage and deep hatred. As I said, such a dream had occurred repeatedly over the years, but never as strong as this. Perhaps those dreams had warned me for such an occasion. I am not sure. Looking back in history, I can see this was a fairly regular thing for the great proclaimers. I felt I should keep repeating some of the great verses and sayings about the love of God, but far from calming, it seemed further to incense them. They shouted even louder. I kept thinking of some of the statements concerning man's depravity which I had read in the Book. All the time they were confirming it by their cries.

It seemed that something snapped inside me. I decided to out-shout them. 'Love! It is love!' I shrieked. The organist was nodding continuously in agreement, and then she began to play, 'O Love, that Wilt Not Let Me Go...' None heard her, or if some did, they only shouted more loudly.

Some thought was trying to break its way into my brain, but its very elusiveness caused panic within. I was looking at the baleful eyes of people now roused beyond rational control. I slipped down from the pulpit and moved towards the door. My last sight as I stealthily made my way out, was of the congregation rising and moving as a deadly phalanx towards the pulpit. Soon they would know I was gone.

Once through the vestry door, I made my way, ducking between the silent vehicles that stood ranged like so many sentinel ghosts at the back of the church building. Looking back,

I can see my imagination was alight at that point of time, and perhaps no wonder! The churchyard was overgrown with a medley of wattles and stunted native pines. They led to the river mouth, where she-oaks rimmed the dry basaltic earth of the picnic grounds.

I remember seeing the derelict remains of the picnic huts, the destructing huts fallen askew and awry in the barrenness of this desolation. Rotting timbers lay around the grounds, and closer to the river was the pale yellow sand and the onion grass holding it together. Beyond the river, the other side of the old kiosk, was the open bay.

I was surprised to see the row-boat moored close to the thin beach, rocking in the movements caused by the river and the sea in their meeting. I ploughed my way through the water to the boat, and tumbled into it.

At first I rowed with all the strength that I possessed. I looked back to the shore, but the sand-hills hid the church from view. I saw no one running towards the sea, and listening intently I could hear no cries. Overhead, the sun was hot. It beat down upon me and the little boat. I began to feel a trifle bemused, sitting as I was, not using the oars and giving way to the lethargy that comes when excitement dies; and the monotonous rocking of the boat acted as a soporific. Then the thought which had eluded me for the time came bursting in upon me, fantastical and foolish as it was. I tried to beat it back, but it was like a persistent gull which will not take 'No!' for an answer. It was then that I let it come.

It seemed to personalise itself, to speak in noiseless terms. 'What happened today is what has happened many times before. It happened in history before the Man came, and it has happened no less since he went. There are times when it is articulated aloud, and times when it is not; but it is there.'

What penetrated my now dazed mind was the insinuation that not only in my dream, but in many of the services in which I had spoken—and indeed others had spoken—the

anger and rebellion had been present, and no less than on this Sunday, in this old Peninsula town. It had always been silently present, silently felt, but the anger was no less because unexpressed outwardly. Down in the depths—far from prying eyes—the hatred and rebellion were present. They were eluding the direct action of conscience upon them. A great hoax was being played out by much, if not most, and even all, of the human race.

I could see suddenly that mankind is involved in much cosmetic action—'make-up' and 'cover-up'—and that its time spent on camouflage is almost endless. The hatred for the Creator is no small thing, and the anger at grace is the protest by man that he, of himself, can do what is needed. That beautiful offer of the seemingly needless supply of life seems to put man down, as though he were impotent without God. This I knew to be the fact of the matter.

As I listened to the voice that penetrated, and thought on the matter of man's anger against God, I felt tremors of fear and panic within myself. I well understood that man is deprived beyond his own self-reformation or self-regeneration, yet his state should not frighten us. It should have no power over us to subdue us from telling the truth. We ought to trust the Father-Creator, even if we cannot wholly trust those who do not understand Him.

It was then that something happened to me which I do not fully understand, not even now. I find myself, even now, trying to lock out the invasion of that terrible happening. It seemed to me then that the cries and the shouts and the screams were reaching across the water, that the wild gesticulations and waving arms were there, flailing about the boat. The impassioned opposition to my words of grace were being formed and madly verbalised by mouthing, foaming lips.

Beyond that, I do not remember. I recall hearing the cries, and then seeing a blank white wall before me. It was then that

I disappeared into that whiteness, into some kind of coma, whether from shock or conditions brought on by sun and water, I do not know. I do remember the oars slipping from my hands, and the boat beginning to rock like a cockle-shell on a silent sea, or a wooden chip on a wide, wide ocean.

When we rose and left the church at length, Barry was quiet. We trudged back to the Landrover. He leaned against the door before opening it. He faced me, and said, 'I agree, Tony. It wasn't the sun. No, really it wasn't that.'

My heart began to warm in hope, but for the main part it was still numb. Into the numbness came quick flashes of pain. 'Well, Barry,' I said, 'what was it? What was it all about?'

He spoke slowly and steadily. 'It was not just a dream. It was a vision you had. It was a vision God gave you.'

He turned to open the door. Then he climbed in and sat. His hand was on the driving wheel. The key was in the ignition, but he did not touch it.

'It was for a purpose,' he said, and I recognised that this was his final statement about the matter. He switched on the ignition.

All the way back to the hospital, I pondered what he had said. I was sure, now, that he was right. Of course it was for a purpose! With a strange quirk, my mind flicked back to a story I had heard of a minister who had been run out of town by the members of his congregation. I guess I felt a little comfort to have some precedent for what had happened, even if the happening were in a vision.

There was the hospital in our sights. I kept murmuring to myself in my mind, 'Of course it was for a purpose. Yes, of course!'

## Ghostown Revisited

Of course it was foolish of me to go back to the old ghost town. I ought to have known better. I am not speaking about the time Barry and I returned to it after the remarkable event in which he had found me in a small boat somewhere in the Peninsula waters. No, I am speaking of a different event; a fresh event, you might say. I am reluctant to make a geographical identification of the town for certain reasons, and so I will simply call it 'GHOSTOWN'. In fact, that is the way I keep thinking about it.

This time I took the Landrover and went off on my own. Barry had been good to me in the way he had accepted my story. He could have called it a fantasy, but in fact he called it a vision, and that was what put the idea into my head. Why not return to the old town? Maybe I had been given a special prophetic gift. Perhaps God would give me another vision. Not, mind you, that I have ever been a visionary other than in my own thinking. Most people who have visions work away at them all their lives, or parts thereof. I am thinking, of course, of people with an idea on which and at which they work so determinedly. This would be for such cases as climbing Everest, being an Olympic champion, or succeeding wonderfully at business, farming or politics. You can call that a sort of vision. My idea of a vision is different from that.

Let me explain. In the Good Book, God said, 'Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream.' This sort of idea is repeated in many places. On the great Day of Pentecost, the same idea was promulgated. The prophet Joel had foreseen the day when God would pour out His Spirit upon all mankind, upon His sons and daughters,

and they would prophesy. How? 'Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams... and [so] prophesy'. A wise writer in the same book said, 'Where there is no vision [prophecy] the people cast off restraint [perish]'. By this, then, can be seen that God often speaks directly to prophets, and so *through* them to others. I saw this as a very rich concept, and I thought, 'Perhaps God did give me a vision—as Barry suggested—and maybe He will give me another.'

Well, I have admitted I was foolish to go back to Ghostown, but then it was with the idea of getting a further vision, and so some new or additional message. As I have told you previously, Barry and I were in the business of telling God's word to people as well as we could, and to the extent that we knew it.

Strong as had been my desire to go to Ghostown, I found that I was becoming increasingly uneasy as I came towards the place. I remembered the anger of the people and their annoyed shouting, and then my trying to slip away from them, and their (so it had seemed in the vision) angry pursuing of me, and my escape in the little cockle-shell of a boat. What now would I find when I reached the old town?

The Landrover hummed along the strip of bitumen, that long line of black which twisted and coiled before me in the new autumn. We sped through miles of low-lying scrub until suddenly the cleared land would break into sight, with the vast acres of ploughed ground and the early wheat, barley and oats, richly green against the red of the basalt soil. Here and there a farmhouse, although they were few and far between. Overhead, the sky was a strong blue, and in the scrub or the wheat paddocks, with long distances between, great eucalypts which had escaped the pioneer axemen. Sometimes there would be sheep gathering near them, or there were

flocks of cacophonous galahs, or strident yellow-crested cockatoos, shouting their presence to the wide free world of the country.

Then came the notice 'GHOSTOWN 6 KMS', and it was somewhat awry. Vagrant boys had practised their rifle-shooting on it. But I knew that we had now turned on to the red dirt road, and its corrugations. The Landrover bit the surface, and then roared over it, keeping to the left, with one side almost off the road. At times, the parrots rose up like white clouds, or pink clouds, and always they protested the intrusion of the non-feathered creature.

Suddenly we were at Ghostown. I knew there was a shop or two, but no great commerce. Long ago business had departed. There was no central supermarket such as are now sported in the larger towns; no great pub, no place where the vast agricultural machinery sprawled and the saleyards were packed on sale days. This glory had long departed. I was mildly surprised then to see a few vehicles. One was at the small general store, and another at a shop whose front contrasted with the derelict fronts of the old and neglected stores. I decided I would pull up outside it. I knew immediately that I was in no vision. I was very much in the present, and it seemed my presence was to no great point. It seemed I ought to have left well enough alone, and been content with just one vision.

What surprised me was the cake-shop. This was the shopfront that looked so well-cared for. There was gleaming paint over the old weatherboards. Everything about it was clean and attractive. The old bitumen of the footpath had been washed until it was exposed, and contrasted with the dust-covered path in front of the other shops.

I had time to sense—with something of a shiver—the dreary dereliction of the remainder of the town, before I opened the wire-screen door and went into the shop.

Inside, it was spotless. It looked almost modern in its fix-

tures and its fittings. There was no one in the shop, and I looked around. From the moment I walked in, I could smell the enchanting fragrance of newly baked bread, and freshly baked cakes. This surprised me, of course. Who would buy so much enticing food in a ghost town? There were cakes and bread, pies and tans, buns and rolls—all wonderfully kept behind glass, but attractively displayed. I noticed a bell fixed to the counter. It had a notice which said 'PLEASE RING', and I was about to do that when a door opened behind the counter and a woman entered.

I was amazed: stunned in fact. It was my organist of the Sunday morning when I had preached in the local church. Here she was, now, and no different. She looked at me for a few moments without recognition, and then she asked cheerfully, 'Can I do something for you?' I was still under the shock of recognition, and it took me some moments to recover.

'Yes,' I said. 'I would like to get some bread and cakes. In fact I would like a pie and a tan also.' Then my eyes fell on the lamingtons. I had not seen such large lamingtons in all my life! 'I'll have some lamingtons too,' I said lamely. I was thinking of Barry and our wives and the children back at the other place.

She nodded brightly. 'People love my lamingtons,' she said. 'They come from far and wide to buy them.'

Suddenly I came to life. Some sense within me was telling me that this occasion was most important. 'Far and wide?' I asked. 'What does that mean?'

'You must be a stranger around here,' she said. 'Probably you haven't been to Ghostown before.'

When I said nothing, but kept staring at her, she said, 'That's not to be wondered at. Like its name, it is an old ghost town.' Her smile was still there. 'There are a few of these towns on the Peninsula.' She stopped and looked at me keenly. 'Do you live on the Peninsula?' she asked.

I shook my head, and she seemed disappointed. 'We are about the place for a few months,' I said. '—my friend Barry, our wives and children.' When she looked puzzled, I added, 'We teach the faith.'

I thought it was uncanny the way her eyes gleamed, because it was the same gleam I had seen in the organist's eyes. I thought I would try my luck. 'Do you play the organ?' I asked.

'Organ?' she asked back. Her eyes had grown round and large with surprise. 'Now why would you be asking that kind of a question?'

Somewhere I could hear a fly buzzing, but apart from that, there was only the old silence. It was just as I remembered from the former visit with Barry—flies buzzing in the deserted church. I said slowly, 'I seem to remember coming to this place, and preaching at the church, and you being organist.'

That puzzled her. 'That couldn't have happened. We haven't had church services here in years. We just don't have a congregation. Folk around here go into the town.' 'Isn't this the town?' I asked gently.

Her eyes clouded slightly, but she smiled again. 'Not any more,' she said, with a shake of her head. I noticed how well set up she was, how tidy and how self-assured. 'Once, Sunday would be a special day here. It was like a big family meeting together; but that was in my mother's time. I only came in on the end of that time. I was a toddler when they closed down the church.'

I leaned forward on the counter and stared at her. 'Did your mother play the organ?' I asked.

Again that look of surprise. 'Well, yes,' she said. 'But when the church closed she had no opportunity to go on playing.' She smiled at some memory. 'After a time, they gave her the church organ.' Her smile widened. 'We still have it at home,' she said. As an afterthought she added, 'I play it

now. ‘

I stood there, deeply puzzled. Then I asked another question. ‘Is your mother still alive?’

She shook her head. ‘Mother’s been dead many years. I have grown children. I do this baking and selling for something to fill out my existence.’ Then, as though to banish the conversation, she said, ‘How is your preaching and teaching going—on the Peninsula?’

‘Fairish,’ I said. ‘Here and there we get warm welcomes. The best times are in house meetings.’

She seemed surprised. ‘Now isn’t that strange!’ she exclaimed.

‘Not really,’ I said, surprised at her surprise. ‘People are much more relaxed in house meetings.’

She nodded warmly. ‘That’s what I mean,’ she agreed. ‘But the strange thing is that we are having a meeting tonight, and we are looking for a speaker.’

‘Having a meeting!’ I echoed..I felt a sense of excitement. ‘Where are you having the meeting?’ I asked.

‘At our place,’ she said. ‘It’s the only house with music.’ She noted my surprise. ‘You don’t have to come,’ she said, ‘but it would be a treat for us if you could come.’

I thought about our families back at Western Bay and knew they wouldn’t worry anyway. I nodded. ‘Love to come,’ I said, ‘but I was just thinking about the families.’

‘We could ring through from home,’ she said. ‘There’s no ‘phone here, but we could get through from home.’

I grinned. ‘Well, that seems to settle it. I guess I had better wander around a bit and get the cakes later. They’ll keep fresh if I leave them here.’

She agreed, and then asked where we were staying. When I told her Western Bay, she smiled. ‘You’d never get back there tonight after the meeting,’ she said. ‘You had better stay the night. I’ll have a fresh batch for tomorrow.’ Before I could ask a question, the door opened and a well-dressed woman

greeted the organist’s daughter.

‘I want to get a good stock, Marie,’ she said. ‘We are having folk up from the city.’ The ‘city’ meant Adelaide. Marie nodded. ‘The usual?’ she asked.

The other woman nodded. ‘Add a couple of dozen lamingtons,’ she said. ‘They’ll go crazy over them.’ She gave a grin. ‘Don’t get cakes like yours down in the city!’

People came and went, and in between we talked. At midday she closed up the shop. ‘I only work half-day,’ she said. When I looked surprised, she said, ‘It’s only a hobby. Fred and I are still farming, but this gives me something to do. We keep good contact this way with the local folk. That’s why some of them come to the meeting. Some come from other places also.’

By the time we left the shop, there was not a car in the old town. ‘The General Store closes too,’ she explained. ‘Old Howlett, who runs it, is just trying to keep up the tradition of his family. The Howletts don’t need any cash, really. They are quite rich from way back. But Jerry is the last of the line. He just loves the store. It’s a hobby for him, just as it is for me.’

I followed her utility truck in the Landrover. The farm must have been about thirty kilometres from the old town. We both rumbled over the grid and stopped at the prosperous-looking farmhouse. Surrounding it was the towering agricultural machinery for seed-sowing, fertiliser distribution, earth-moving, dam-making and harvesting. Also there were the shearing sheds, shearers’ quarters, yards for dipping and the like, the same as seen over many parts of the country, and typical of wheat and sheep areas.

Meeting Fred—Marie’s husband—was quite an event. Some wheat-and-sheep men are fairly tight, keeping their own counsel, especially if it is a person from the city they are meeting. Many of them have only one love and preoccupation—their work. Fred, however, was different. He was

open, free in his manner, and most genial. I felt welcome, which is not always the case with persons who are seeking to bring the faith to Aussie secularists. We seemed immediately to accept each other, and it wasn't long before we were drinking tea and sharing happenings. It also wasn't long before we discovered mutual acquaintances and even distant relationships. The conversation flowed freely. When, at lunchtime, the subject of the evening meeting came up, Fred gave me a quizzical look.

'We'll be glad for you to speak,' he said, 'but you had better be on your toes. You had better not be one of those stereotype study leaders.'

Marie said briefly but confidently, 'He isn't.'

Fred said with a grin, 'I just thought I'd better warn him.' Strangely enough, his words didn't evoke any uneasiness.

There was certainly no call for uneasiness. I heard the sheep dogs barking in the early evening as the cars drew up. There were shouts of greeting, cries of delight from the women who entered the house with hands laden with food. 'Coals to Newcastle,' Marie was saying, and Fred was adding, 'Bit of a change from Marie's diet.' There was something of pride in his voice, all the same.

The large lounge-sitting room was scarcely big enough to contain the people who tumbled into it. A couple of well set up young men had guitars. Everyone had a book of songs. Soon they were singing them. The effect was close to thunderous. I was a bit dazed, but also quite excited. When they stopped singing, it was to share needs for prayer, and then there was the praying. It was quite dynamic. When the prayer ceased, Fred introduced me as the speaker.

I had literally to shake my head to see whether I was in a vision or in reality. Now the strange thing was that I was in both. The people were flesh and blood. The situation was

actual, but I could not figure out how this group could be so rich with life, when somehow or other that church of my vision had been rifled with hostile worshippers. When I looked at Marie the organist, the past vision and the present reality joined themselves. She had the same naive smile that her mother had had, but the group were one with her in her spirit of expectancy.

Something made me take the same theme I had taken that morning. Perhaps that was because it was (and is) my favourite subject, namely the Fatherhood of God, and the nature of His true family. There was acceptance right from the beginning, but as the theme developed I saw frowns of thoughtfulness. Some eyes were puzzled. Others were filled with delight. I wondered when I had known such a group, when I had received such gentle acceptance. It was as though they trusted every word I uttered. I thought—at the back of my mind—of how many critical audiences I had known. Often one's words were tested by suspicion and harsh critical examination. Here it was different. They were hearing everything.

Finally the words had run to their necessary end. I saw tears. I saw faces shining. There was anguish, and there was joy. In all of it, there was that living element which springs from, and makes for, reality.

They began asking questions. When they pressed for answers, it was not because they doubted. It was because they believed, but they looked for clarification. Many of the questions and responses remain imprinted on my mind: indelibly, in fact.

The ladies brought in the food, the tea and the coffee. That was good, but the flowing conversation was wonderful. Some stood—cup and food in hand—chatting. Others leaned across, talking with animation. In some cases, tears were still flowing. Then, after a time, there was the excited barking of

dogs as the vehicles started up, and as gradually the yard was cleared of the visitors. Then there were only Fred and Marie. Their children were all in the city, at school or college or university, so the three of us were alone together.

I said to them both, 'I'm really puzzled. How come such a large group is so vivid and alive? We travel quite a lot, and we meet some excellent groups, but rarely like this one. How did they come to change?'

Fred said simply, 'It was the glory that did it.' 'The glory?' I echoed.

He nodded. ' "The glory", as we call it, was what did it. It finished Ghostown as a living place, and started all this.' He paused and looked at me. 'Mind you, it took a long time. Nearly a generation in fact.'

Marie said, 'Fred, start at the beginning. You're being mysterious and complicated.'

Fred scratched his head, put on a rueful smile, and then began his story.

'One day,' he said, 'in fact one Sunday, we had a strange preacher come to Ghostown. Most of us were only toddlers, or at the oldest, kids. For that reason we didn't see much of the strange preacher. He was strange all right, strange for Ghostown folk, who were fairly traditional in their faith and their church-going.

'No one had ever triggered people off like that fellow. The congregation thought he was mad, but they couldn't ignore him. They thought of themselves as reasonable sorts of folk, and so they were—according to their lights! They became angry at the inferences he was drawing, and the conclusions he was making.'

Fred paused and stared thoughtfully at me. 'As a matter of fact,' he said, 'his subject was the very one you shared with us tonight. It was the Fatherhood of God. This strange preacher stated that the way we look at our own fathers, indeed at our fathers and mothers, is the way we look at God. He then con-

fronted them with their relationship with God. Did they know Him? Did they love Him? Did they worship Him with every part of their being? Did they see that the acts of the Cross—the crucifixion and the resurrection—were God's own acts as Father? He talked a lot about the relationship of the Son and the Father, of the Son's obedience, and of the Father's deep love for humanity in its great personal and emotional need. He also talked about God's wrath on evil, and the Son's bearing of the wrath.

'Some of the men figured out that the preacher's words inferred that they—the listeners—were worthy of God's wrath and had better accept that estimation of God. Then he said that God had borne that wrath within Himself, that is, in the Son, and that the way had been made clear for them to come to Him as Father.

'That was bad enough, but then he began on the relationships the listeners had with their neighbours in the community, and even in their own families. It was that which made them really angry. What the preacher did not know was that, for the most part, the farmers of the district had pious backgrounds. Many years before, their ancestors had migrated from Great Britain. They had been Methodists who burned for the truth. Most of them had been Primitive Methodists or Wesleyans, and they had built two churches in Ghostown.

'After some years. they had combined into one congregation, and the union didn't take away from their fire and fervency. There were others in the district of course, especially evangelical Lutherans who had left their homeland because of persecution. Some of their descendants were here tonight. They are still good Lutherans. But that morning it was just Methodists who gathered to hear this strange preacher.'

Something was beginning to move in me, a sort of strange excitement. I scarcely dared believe what I thought could be the case. Fred went on.

‘They got so angry that morning that you would have thought they wanted to kill the preacher. I don’t rightly know why. I suspect they had drifted in their faith because over the years they had become successful. That was the time when the trace element experiment had been made. Many poor farms were turned into comparatively rich ones. Not, mind you, that they became greatly wealthy, but they had become well off. There had been a spiritual decline along with this, and I guess many of them felt guilty about their neglect of the faith. Services had become social meeting events. There was little or no dynamic in the sermons and the worship, so they were sitting ducks for the preacher.’

Fred paused, and looked at Marie. ‘Tell him how your mother saw it,’ he said.

Marie smiled. ‘Mother was an unusually sensitive person,’ she said. ‘She often told Dad that the district had gone downhill in its faith. She herself was most alive in these things. So she liked the preacher, and of course she was right. What the preacher did was quite right. Mother found him stimulating and encouraging, because sometimes she wondered whether she was the queer one in that church. They had so little time for the living faith.’

For a time we sat in silence, and so strange was the excitement within me that I thought I might faint. I guess the adrenalin was flowing powerfully.

Fred took up the story. ‘It was the glory that did it,’ he said. ‘You will never believe what I am going to tell you, but it is true. I think they could have killed that young preacher. Certainly they wanted to hurt him, but somehow he disappeared from the church. Then they saw him making a beeline for the river mouth where the old picnic ground used to be. They started chasing him across the sand-hills, but somehow he beat them. He found a boat and got into it, and started out into the Bay.’

Fred grinned. ‘It was a little cockle-shell of a boat,’ he said.

‘A little cockle-shell of a boat?’ I echoed.

Fred nodded. ‘There were other boats there,’ he said, ‘and some of the men raced towards them to get them out, but they stopped because they saw the glory.’

I felt a little helpless. ‘Glory?’ I asked. They both nodded. Fred must have told the story many times, but there was still awe in his voice.

‘Glory,’ he repeated. ‘My dad actually saw the glory and so did some others, but not everyone. It was as though a flame shot up from the little boat. At first they thought the boat had caught fire, but then they noticed the preacher was rowing, and the flame—if it was that—was not affecting him. Then the glory rose higher and was quite brilliant, although it was also very soft; fleecy, you might say. After a time it disappeared, and so did the boat.’

The three of us sat in silence for some time. Then I asked a question. ‘Did they ever find the preacher?’

Fred shook his head. ‘Never,’ he said. ‘That’s why they were frightened. Maybe "awed" is a better word. No, they never found him. Some of them thought he must have been an angel, having all that glory about him in the boat. Others thought he must have been a prophet sent specially to them. A few were worried about him, because they reckoned he might have died out there in the boat.’

‘They called a special meeting of the congregation. It was on the following Thursday night. They came in from everywhere. Even some of the Lutherans came, they were so curious. Lee Tracey, the chief steward, led the meeting. He had always been a hard man, though a very religious person, but now he was a broken person. He said that Sunday had shaken him. He reckoned he had never known how angry he could get, angry enough to want to do harm to a preacher.’

‘What he said profoundly affected others. Some had come to grumble about giving strangers the opportunity to preach without having some kind of reference, but this sort of

objection died quickly. Before folk knew it they were weeping, and broken down. They started to pray, and all their spiritual ancestry seemed to come back to help them. Before the meeting was finished, something like a revival had taken place. They had heard of this son of thing occasionally happening in the mining towns, but never on their Peninsula.'

Fred gave me a grin, and Marie smiled dreamily. 'That's what has happened to us,' he said. 'We are now a different people. We grew up in that generation where parents were both serious and joyful about their faith.'

My mind was in a whirl. I had a strong temptation to tell them about my vision, but I desisted. At the same time a thought struck me. 'What of Ghostown?' I Eked. 'Why did it go downhill so quickly when you all had such rich faith?'

Fred nodded, as though my question was a good one; but he didn't answer me directly. 'It is very strange,' he said, 'but for some reason we never used the church again. It seemed that it wasn't the right thing to do. So we used the other church, the old Wesleyan building. It was behind the town near the river flat. No, we never went back to the old building.'

'But the town,' I persisted, 'why did it go downhill so quickly?'

Fred looked thoughtful. 'I don't rightly know,' he said. 'Maybe we thought there was a kind of curse on the town for the way it had treated the preacher.' He shook his head. 'I don't rightly know. Our parents were pretty tight about the whole matter. They never said very much. I guess they never quite got clear of the whole experience.'

I was puzzled. 'But tonight there was such a rich meeting,' I said. 'There didn't seem to be any cloud over the people.'

He agreed. 'They have found the spiritual trace elements,' he said.

He saw my puzzled look. 'You know what I mean by trace elements. The land here was deficient in certain mineral

elements and so the land seemed too poor for good farming. Then this man discovered what was lacking in the soil, and they experimented here, on the Peninsula. The place came to life, agriculturally speaking.' He paused. 'Over many years, we have lacked something here in our churches, and in later years the church has had a rich renewal. The spiritual trace elements that were missing have been discovered.'

His smile was as rich as Marie's was beautiful. 'There is a great time of growth here,' he said, 'and there is going to be a great harvest.'

## Ghostown and the New Birth

'Ghostown,' Barry said, 'is really a symbol.'

'A symbol?' I said. 'What do you mean—a symbol?'

'In a way,' Barry said, 'it signifies the action of God upon a community.'

'A curse?' I asked him.

He shook his head at that. 'Maybe it includes a curse, but I don't think I would make much of that. It is just an act of judgement, and then an act of renewal and reconciliation.'

He saw my puzzled look and explained. 'Judgment is really a mercy,' he said. 'When we are judged, it means our guilt is brought out into the light and then disposed of by some judgement. Thus the guilt is dealt with and the person is free to go ahead with life.'

'Judgement can be very painful,' I said.

'Of course,' Barry said. 'Of course it is painful, but living with guilt is more painful.'

He added, 'Ghostown's day of guilt and judgement is well ended. Now they could get back to rehabilitating things.'

'Surely you don't mean reinhabiting Ghostown and filling it up?' I protested.

He nodded. 'Just that,' he said.

When we went to see Marie and Fred, they surprisingly enough agreed with Barry, a little to my chagrin. I rather liked the idea of a deserted town, a museum that told of the past. That wasn't Barry's idea at all. Nor, for that matter, was it Fred's and Marie's.

'Why do you think I have the cake-shop there?' she asked. I hadn't thought about that. 'I guess I thought you had a

hobby.'

Fred smiled. 'Marie reckons the past is over,' he said. 'She reckons the revival of Ghostown will be a kind of witness to the district. Especially a witness to the love of God.' He looked at me. 'I mean, the love of the Father.'

Barry was on his hobby-horse. 'Whenever I see old derelict houses I want to renew them,' he said. 'Rehabilitation is almost better than making a new thing.' He looked at me. 'It's better to be a restorer than to be a curator,' he said. There was a general laugh. 'Making human derelicts into renewed people is wonderful,' Barry said.

We sat for a time, sipping at our hot coffee and thinking about Barry's words.

Finally, Fred nodded strong agreement. 'That's what we do with a lot of things,' he said, 'even old fences and broken dams.'

'People are moved,' said Barry, 'when they see a useless house become like new. That gets to them.'

'So it does,' said Marie, 'and I remember when we had the organ repairer in to fix the old church organ.'

While they were talking like this, I was trying to visualise Ghostown. It had been in some disrepair the day of that Sunday, the Sunday of the vision, but then it had been a living town. I guess my vision somehow or another had to be between the two conditions: that before the Sunday, and then that condition which resulted from the Sunday—given, of course, that Barry's thesis was correct. I could see the town coming suddenly to life, but the practical part of me said it was a bit foolish trying to rehabilitate a town.

Fred was saying, 'We could start with the picnic grounds. People still use it on holidays, although they mostly come from other places.'

Marie was answering. 'They used to be great days in the holiday periods. We had lots of fun as kids.'

'As small kids,' Fred mended. 'People seemed to shun the

Bay after seeing what they called "the glory".'

'The Bay it is,' said Barry. 'Let's start at the Bay.'

The farmer and his wife seemed surprised. 'You're going to help?' they asked.

Barry nodded. 'Of course! Why not? We're not just preachers; we're also workers! Tony here is good with carpentry tools. Me? I like working with metals. I can weld.'

'Just a minute!' said Fred with feeling. 'You don't imagine for a moment that we are going to try to rebuild the picnic grounds, and then the town, on our own, or even with a work-party, do you? And what about those old properties? They belong to many of the families here. They will need to be brought in on it.'

Barry was indifferent. 'Oh, I hadn't really thought anything through,' he said. 'I had expected the Father would start something.' He looked casual. 'If He doesn't, we won't.' It was at that point that something struck me, and I began thinking of it, letting them talk on, not hearing what they were saying.

I was seeing the church of that morning of the vision. Somehow I had slipped back in time, and had seen the Ghostown and district folk. They had been as Fred described them, namely people who had lost their living knowledge of God and to whom the matters of faith had become social. Also I was seeing the church of the beginning, the apostolic church, freshly minted through the event of Pentecost. I was seeing the warmth of their love, the concern and care they had for one another, and—on the vertical level—their relationship with God. These were things that the Ghostown church had virtually misplaced or even lost. Now they needed renewal. *What better place to share the renewal that had come than the old church they had abandoned?*

The first service at the old church aroused enormous interest.

Some had been reluctant at first. They thought it was a kind of 'Back to Ghostown' week, and that the church would be opened just for that Sunday. They were a bit stunned when Fred told them it was a permanent arrangement. 'What about the parish church?' they said. 'Won't folk be a bit offended at the withdrawal of the people at the Ghostown end?'

Some folk were uneasy. 'Isn't there a sort of hoodoo on it?' they asked. Some said the town had had a hoodoo on it ever since the day that wild preacher had come. That is, if he had been a preacher and not someone supernatural or unnatural. Some of them had been a bit uneasy about Marie's cake shop. It was trying your luck; it was even tempting fate! As for old Howlett—well, his general store was a kind of luxury, a sort of hobby for the old boy. They felt that Howlett would be pretty immune to things like hoodoos.

Anyway, they came. They came in their droves in fact. It was strange to realise that Ghostown had always been at the back of their minds, like an unanswered question. Now, strangely enough, something was moving. Some laughed it off, but others were silent and serious.

They had come from the city, from the land, from everywhere. The Adelaide papers had made much of it. Old-time Methodist clergy and lay-preachers remembered the former days and they came. There were even reporters and videomen there. I noted it all with a bit of a smile. Barry wasn't sing. 'We're in the midst of a curious kind of miracle,' he said. 'You know, it is a bit like the Israelites coming back out of Babylon to their old temple.'

'In the true story they didn't have an old temple,' I said. 'They had to rebuild it.'

Barry nodded. 'True enough,' he agreed, 'but then this is like renewing the old temple.'

He was partly right. There had been restoration all right. Marie and some of her friends had scrubbed the place out from bow to stern, from top to bottom. The dust was gone',

everything looked freshened. The old furniture had been polished until it glowed. Fred and some of the men had painted the windows and doors. The old paint had not peeled but had just sunk into the ancient timbers so that they looked antique.

Marie had brought back the organ. It was piled with hymn books. Out in the hail, the women had prepared a good midday meal. The urns were new, ready for the tea and coffee. Someone had brought an old fridge and there was cold water, cordial and drinks for the youngsters.

Barry looked curiously at me. 'You don't seem very tense,' he said. 'No one would think you were preaching today.'

'That's right,' I agreed. 'I don't know why I am not nervous.' I grinned at Barry. 'It's easier when one doesn't have to arrange things.'

And then, suddenly, they were all there, looking up at me; so different from the congregation I had seen before. I could detect no anger, no stubbornness, no rejection. Fred was at the front, getting them to sing Scripture choruses and songs of devotion. They seemed to like that. There was a general warmth about the building and the people. Barry led the service. Fred stood up and talked about the return to the church. He didn't mention much about the incident of years ago. He just said that it was good to be home again. There were murmurs of assent, and some mutterings which sounded like dissent. The very old folk had their own memories, and they were not altogether pleasant.

Different ones took part in the service, reading lessons, giving notices, and saying prayers. Then I stood up to preach. There were many eager looks and some noddings; a few people looked enraptured. I was speaking about new birth, about a new creation, and then the promise of Christ: 'I make all things new.'

This time, folk were listening genuinely. I think we all knew we were in the centre of some kind of a miracle. Being in the

centre of a miracle is a strange but wonderful thing. The heart warms at the amazing thought of reality, of God being personally present for the occasion. Of course He is always present, but not everyone senses the personal outpouring of His grace. This day almost all of us appeared to be relaxed. I was enjoying the unusual nature of the event. Then we noted that an event of restoration was going on, and that we could have a new town if we so desired, and at that point most seemed to grasp the idea that if ever there had been any sort of curse on the old town, it was now ended. Ghostown could come alive if that was what we wanted. The service was finished and it was time for lunch.

It is an old custom in rural areas to divide into two groups—the men in one and the ladies in the other. These groups tend to divide also, namely into country and city folk. The last subdivision is the young and the old—adults and children. On this occasion it was not so. Everyone talked freely. One of the main topics of conversation was the changes that were about to take place.

One or two had been wily enough to buy old shops and/or blocks of land for a mere song. For the most part, however, the town belonged to members of the congregation. That is why they talked rapidly and with interest. The very old could remember past days, and they talked about the comparative prosperity of some of those times.

When the lunch was ended, the two young fellows who had played guitars at Fred's home began to tune up, and then the music began. Some folk were talking loudly in their groups, unaware of the singing, but others gathered around in a circle and joined in. Soon there was a rich volume of voices as they sang old-time hymns and new-time songs. Fred and Marie suggested they go inside the church, and many did. The guitarists joined Marie at the organ, and then the sound began to swell. A note that had not been heard in the morning service now began to emphasise itself.

An old Methodist minister stood up. We had talked during the lunch hour about the past, the death of the town, the drift from the church, the guilt at the back of the minds of many. Although he had lived for years in Adelaide, and had long ago retired, his thoughts were often of Ghostown. He had not only thought about the place, but also he had prayed long and earnestly for it. Like others, he had been puzzled by the events of that strange Sunday. I told him what had happened to me, and he wondered whether—in some way—I had relived the events so much further back in history. He was sure the person who preached that day was not an ordinary man.

Now, as he stood up, his fine old worn face, his noble head surmounted with soft white hair, and his eyes alight, he began to speak. Indeed he was like an old prophet as he talked about the past. Soon tears were trickling down his time-beaten cheeks. The congregation of adults and children was quiet and gentle as each listened to this person out of Ghostown's past. Few—if any—were disagreeing with him.

For myself, I felt a thrill in my body. Waves of strange sensations—love and peace and adoration—were flowing in and over my body. The tears began to prick my own eyes, and, in deed, the same was true for many others.

'It is grace,' the old man was saying, 'grace that covers the worst that man could do.'

In a sudden flash I saw the hostile and angry congregation of so many years ago. I marvelled at the gentleness and joy of this later congregation. The old preacher was putting together the events of the past, and drawing out their meaning in terms of hardness of heart, rebellion against God, neglect of the truths of love, unity, grace and family. He interpreted the events of that strange Sunday, but declined to say whether or not the visitor was a preacher who had wandered in. He insisted that it was a divine visitant anyway.

He spoke then of the renewal that was coming to the church, not only of this district, but to the whole church. He

taught them finely that such renewal was only a beginning. He urged them not to stop in the joys and sweetnesses of church renewal. 'This can become selfish,' he said, 'and something which catches us in its own pleasure. Out there, where men and women live, something of a dreadful moral landslide is taking place. We will never see Australia changed until revival comes. Revival is different from renewal. It is the power of God which sweeps across the land. Judgement comes first and then revival, and it is a power we cannot handle, manipulate or contain. As bushfires sweep this land suddenly and none can resist them, so does revival. It purges the land, cleanses the minds and memories of guilty men and women, and liberates them to live the powerful life we call "new". It is a visitation of the heavenly Father which sweeps us into purity and family, and makes us dally dependent upon His love and grace.'

There were few, now, who were not weeping. The whole congregation had eyes fixed on the old prophet. I wondered how much of hurt and rejection he had known in this building and district. Certainly he had known much, but he was living in a miracle this afternoon. I could picture him, like old Simeon, crying in his heart,

'Lord, lettest now thy servant depart in peace  
according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation  
which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples...'

Someone began to pray, and tears were in the voice, a gentle sobbing of someone moved by a power that was beyond the human. Others began to pray. Weeping, sobbing, and cries of joy were heard around the old building. The older ones were confessing the hardness of the old days, the neglect of the great grace of God, and others were lifting their voices in praise. Occasionally someone would begin a song and the whole congregation would sing. Sometimes a person

would rise—Bible in hand—and read from some prophecy, some place of comfort, some word of promise and assurance.

The day darkened into evening and no one moved. Some were conscious that they would cherish the memory of this day, but others were more deeply informed. They knew that something had happened which was greatly significant. It was not just an old town with its ghost memories that was beginning to come alive. It was not just the rehabilitation of a society that had once been far from God. It was the very beginning of a revival that would soon sweep a land which had never known revival, the bringing to life of a nation which had so many times been called 'the Lucky Country' but which was now in the grip of destructive secularism, living for its sensationalist sport, pleasure and plenty.

No plans were made, no matters discussed. The folk flowed out from the church and to their vehicles. Some had far to go. Some would be staying with friends, and others were being invited to billets or the evening meal. The arrangements were practical, but the grip of the afternoon hours was upon all.

Fred and Marie hadn't invited others back to the farm, but they asked us to come. We stood there—the four of us—as the evening darkened and the tall gums were all but blotted out of sight.

We were drinking in joy as the dry earth drinks in the rain. Peace was there in that ebbing twilight.

Marie said, 'When it comes, it is worth it all.'

I knew she was speaking about the dry times, the hard times, the anger and the rebellion. I knew she was thinking about her little cake shop, and the movement towards faith which had been born in prayer, anguish and even tears.

Barry was saying, 'Oh, it was worth it all, of course.' He was thinking of preaching, teaching, travelling, penetrating the hardness and finding response on the one hand and resistant defence on the other.

We watched the crowd drift away, melting into the velvet evening. Fred and Marie went off in their car, and we followed them in the Landrover.

At first, Barry just hummed his song, and then suddenly we were both singing, our voices lifted in pitch and volume, and we were singing an old hymn which seemed properly to fit the occasion.

As I said, it was an old hymn, but one which had become universal. We were singing,

"Twas grace that taught our hearts to fear,  
And grace our fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear,  
The hour we first believed.'

## The Ghost Town

Under the eaves the birds building,  
 But here and there the gutters sagging  
 And the galvanised iron dangling  
 With sad swinging and often moaning  
 In the wind. The swallows twittering,  
 Mudding their neat nests  
 On the old verandahs, but no singing  
 Of children: children all gone,  
 And only the memory of young laughter  
 Remains in the ghost hall and the ghost school.

Sometimes the hot northerlies come,  
 Bearing the desolate deserts  
 On their breasts, and penetrating  
 The dry dirt roads, the weed-grown lanes  
 And the deserted houses. Sometimes  
 A pan rattles and doors start eerily  
 As though ghosts were turning the handles  
 And looking out from their lone habitations.  
 Sometimes a vagrant vehicle also penetrates,  
 And seeing the desolation accelerates,  
 A secret panic gripping the driver  
 Who chanced fearfully  
 On this ancient graveyard.

One, coming upon this place pensively,  
 Sat in the ruined park called 'garden'  
 And marvelled at the brave oleanders  
 Battling for their being without water  
 Over against the old pepper trees'  
 They gnarled and bent but brightly

Green in shining—so that in the heat  
 The person dreamed. He dreamed alive  
 The once living past and saw  
 The sheepmen in their moleskins,  
 The broad Stetsons, and the drovers  
 Passing the town with flocks,  
 Dogs panting in the hot day, and laughter  
 From the brown public house.  
 He dreamed alive the children in the park  
 Shouting and laughing, screaming and joyful,  
 Over against the general store  
 Picking out lollies for pennies.

Days passed in his dreams:  
 The long lorries high piled with grain,  
 Or high with hay—oaten and wheaten—  
 Gave way to the motor-haul, engines chugging  
 And the tractors roaring high  
 Hauling the long lorries.  
 Days passed from the week  
 Into Saturday shopping, the streets  
 Lined with the trucks and the drays,  
 The cars and the lorries, also the utes  
 And the occasional out-of-date sulky  
 Insisted upon by the arch-conservative.

The Saturday night was a revelling time,  
 The old bush dance, the hall and the people,  
 The band or orchestra, or just  
 The vagrant busker passing through  
 To much acclaim. Then the noise  
 Of the horses snorting, neighing and whinnying  
 As the cars and trucks roared into life.  
 Then the lights of them bobbing in the jogging  
 As they headed to the small suburbs

Or out on the long run  
To the old homesteads.

Come Sunday and the scene had changed.  
Here and there a vehicle waiting  
For the short opening of the general store.  
Most were at the church on hitching rail  
Or undetermined parking; men stood around  
In dark suits, white shirts and sober ties,  
Uncomfortable in the heat  
But trying to be reverent. Here the group  
Discussed the lagging of the rain,  
The reports of cricket at the Oval  
Or the M.C.G. Rumours passed around  
As the sudden breezes come in the dark  
And refresh the news-hungry spirit of men.

How strange the worship on these summer morns,  
Or in the silent days of the bright winter  
When toes move in the frozen boots,  
Seeking for circulation: the lay reader reads  
(‘When will the parson himself visit us?’)  
With crude enthusiasms for the Truth he knows.  
How come then this country congregation  
Knows true worship of the Living God?  
Why not the mosque? Why not the temple  
And the visible gods of man’s making?  
Why does it happen in this strange sanctuary  
That men and women and their young spawn  
Espouse the Living God? Strange it seems  
Even to the sleeper in the park:  
Recalling days of old, he ponders too  
At the recurring mystery  
Of human worship. Ponders too  
The hope and seeking faith

That demands the unveiling of mysteries  
By the half-articulate preacher.

Came a time (he dreamed) when tired  
And pressed by drought, by fire and dying stock,  
The anger rose within the breasts  
Of the worshippers. Hope was effete  
And faith a senseless striving to believe.  
As anger rose, as preacher spoke of God with love  
As Father of the human race  
(Through Christ of course, through Son of course).  
They rose in anger, publicly denying  
The free love of God, the Fatherhood  
And the ever caring Providence.  
Their sight demanded sight, the sight of God  
In helping act, in dally demonstration,  
Cessation of the world’s depressions  
And the sightful giving  
Of things more favourable to man.

For him who dreamed within the park  
Time passed. Some rains had come and some had gone,  
And so had years, and so had men; so too had all  
That older generation. More cheerful times  
Assisted faith. These prosperous times  
Helped faith to grow afresh. Rich words were said  
Within their hearing, in their homes,  
And in their hearts. The anger dead,  
They came alive to God. The judgement passed  
A generation born anew  
Had found the Father they had lost.

The sleeper woke and stretched his arms,  
He yawned and rubbed his slothful eyes  
And stared with wonder at the living town.

The streets were filled with living ones,  
 Who walked and talked and shopped and found  
 The life they sought within their grasp.  
 The children gambolled in the park,  
 And played and cried and laughed and sang.  
 The rooves were painted and the rust  
 Had vanished in a trice of time.  
 The general store was filled with life,  
 The bank, the cake shop and the stores  
 That sold their meat and milk and bread.  
 The garage was alive with sound,  
 The roads were sealed and filled with cars  
 Parked by the shops and near the ground  
 Where once he dreamed.

Some birds still built beneath the eaves,  
 And swallows twittered near their nests,  
 But in the mind of him who dreamed  
 Was joy and peace and sight of love.  
 He knew the stuff of human hearts—  
 How twisted, angry, they can be,  
 Deceitful too and full of fear  
 And hate for God, and hate for man—  
 But yet he knew the throbbing joy  
 That comes when man returns to God.  
 He knew the glory that is man—  
 Made in the image of true God—  
 Can come afresh when love is seen  
 And love is God's and God is love.

Then as he drove, leaving the place  
 His mind and heart were occupied  
 With the unceasing grace of God  
 That never leaves the things of men  
 To work themselves to tragedy. 'This grace,'

He pondered, 'is the health of man,  
 And is has finest destiny.'  
 For all of that, he could not understand,  
 Which dream was dream and which reality l

## Len: Man of Grace

There are some people about whom I feel I must write. I once made a pact with myself that I would not write as a professional journalist does, in order merely to use the material of his sight and memory. Such material then becomes temporary fuel for his (or her) writing finesse. I vowed I would only write about a person because the story or biography would bring useful joy or the stimulation of thought—creative evocation—to another, or to many.

I have a strong belief that the remarkable which we see in certain human beings ought to be shared with our generation, and even be handed on to other generations as a rich and useful legacy. It is by seeing good men and women who have lived their lives well, that we counter the sorry things others do who betray their true humanity. Some human beings, when they see or hear of such betrayals, become bitter and cynical. In a way, such a reaction is itself a further betrayal. We must believe that man as created is a wonderful creature.

I confess that this introduction is unusually serious, and it should not be so, since the man of whom I am about to speak was a person of rich—if dry—humour. Most of my memories of him are of his humour.

If I describe him physically, then it may help you to picture him. Len was a man not short but then not tall. He was wonderfully built, strong, nuggety and fair. His blue eyes could look guileless, but you would be deceived if you thought him to be unknowing. He had unusual shrewdness. He had the gift of quick discernment, although I doubt that he ever sought to discern. He naturally knew people, and I am sure this was because he was uncritical of them, unsuspecting.

I scarcely ever saw him out of *shalwar kameez*.<sup>\*</sup> He looked like one of those fair hill-men, a nuggety Pathan, and he had acquired their ways. He could speak superb Urdu, and excellent Pushtu—the language of the Pathan tribes. However, it was not just that he spoke well, but that he spoke idiomatically. His natural American accent died away as he rounded his Eastern vowels and rattled out his harsh fricatives and deep gutturals. I am sure he was not an actor. It was just that he was empathic. He lived the roles of those he loved, and I doubt whether he ever had even a sliver of culture shock. Culture shock only comes when we compare the things of another with elements of our own. Len accepted everything about him, not gullibly but then not critically. He had the unusual acceptance that comes with love.

I hope I do not lead you astray in regard to Len. He had been a tough enough person in his lifetime, all of which is another story on its own. He had seen the rough side of life, and of the Second World War. No American marine was tougher than he, but his transforming experience of God's love had transmuted his rough materials into precious metal. This is by no means an overstatement.

All this had been before he met Ruby. If Len is one of the most outstanding men I have met, then Ruby no less among women. She was—and is—a serene person, gentle but strong, and with a beautiful face and unforgettable eyes. They simply spoke peace and common sense at the same time. I doubt that she idealised Len, but she loved him deeply. A well-built woman on the side of plumpness, she was the paradigm of rich womanhood, both as wife and mother, and—I do not doubt—daughterhood.

She kept Len in tow. Sometimes his vision teetered on the edge of idealism, and she would recall him with blunt words.

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<sup>\*</sup> The dress which is typically worn by Moslems on the Indian sub-continent, composed of a long loose shirt (Kameez or chemise) and baggy pants.

I think he was fairly practical, but she outshone him in that area. I understand people had both secretly and publicly 'married them off' long before they had even met. This had had the effect of making them both obstinate. They would not marry! However, they had only met one day and talked together long enough in that one day, to announce their engagement! They were quick to see that this was how it was, and to give new life to the old cliché that marriages are made in heaven. Fairly quickly, they paralleled this experience on earth, and set about producing a family. Sadness with the illness and death of one of their children brought no bitterness, but rather a deepened sweetness and maturity. The other children were bonny and filled with fun.

Len sought me out in that spur of the Himalayas called 'the Murree Hills'. In the day of the British Raj, it was gay and colourful, a cool hill-station to put back the bloom into sire-faded cheeks, especially if they had been decolourised by living and working in the intense heat of the Pakistani plains. It had become a holiday centre for vacationers and a place for missionaries to learn languages. These missionaries were dotted across tree-clad hills and met fully as a community only at the Sunday worship service.

Len and I both had the idea of training young men in the faith. We were about the same age, nearing our forties, and we were practical missionaries. We wanted to see men come alive to the dynamic reality of faith and then share that with their fellow creatures. The idea of such a training centre had long been in Len's mind, and no less in mine. We came together there on vision and not on personalities, for in many ways we were different.

I think I was more of an emotional person than Len. He seemed to keep a fairly even keel, but then he was no less feeling in his person than I was. I had the sense that he respected, and even admired, the theological prowess that I had obtained. I suppose I did not analyse him at all. I just liked him

and his family.

When we decided we ought to share the same training centre, it seemed to be a practical impossibility. Our societies really had no links. The centre that was forming would be over a thousand miles away from Len's North West Frontier. We were in Sindh, a place so perpetually hot that the proverb had been born: 'When God made Sindh, what need was there for Him to make hell?'

In the way that fine miracles happen, we came together in the new training centre. It was a huge army cantonment church—the size of a cathedral—which was reshaped into a hostel, a chapel and a lecture room. It surpassed our modest dreams.

The day we began lectures, Len took the first period. I was hastily gathering my meagre Urdu around me for the next lecture. Sometimes he would take two periods, so that I could be ready and equipped for the third. Gradually our dream began to be fulfilled. Our training centre began to have its effects on the men who came under our combined leadership.

However, it is not of that vision I wish to speak. It is of Len. Gradually it began to dawn on me that here was an unusual man. I sensed resources in him that were not in me, yet I always had the feeling that he deeply respected me. I am sure Ruby did also, but she found my brand of humour a bit of a test for her continuing sanity—a matter which, for Len, was a huge delight. He would egg me on and then laugh uproariously at her, until she would hastily disappear, her natural aplomb in unaccustomed disarray.

His humour kept us sane in those first days. There was little or no spirituality in our students, let alone well-grounded faith. They were delighted at the *interzam* (arrangement) which had been made for them. They were quick to take advantage of every privilege they had, and were clever enough to get every bit of mileage out of the new centre. It was Len who would devastate them with a sudden discerning comment.

Embarrassed, they would give up, giving him sidelong glances, and finally breaking into laughter. My more intense and ethical approach would have landed me in anger and difficulties. Unconsciously, I learned from him.

He was loved in the market place. Always dressed in his humble *shalwar-karneeze*, he drove a Landrover. One day a man came asking for employment. I was seated in the back, dressed in regular European clothes. Len clicked his tongue, snapped his fingers, and gestured toward me. 'Ask the Sahib!' he said. 'I'm just the driver!'

They would look at him suspiciously when he talked like that, but he would soon outstare them.

When the beggars asked for *baksheesh*, he would stare at them solemnly and pass them on to me—the great Sahib! In all innocence, they would leave off tormenting him and set about pressing me. I could hardly say anything for suppressed laughter.

However, it was his ease and facility in the language which won him so many admirers. He had a way of speaking as they spoke—pronunciations, gestures, idioms: he had the lot. On one occasion, one of them burst out with admiration, 'Sahib, you speak Urdu better than we do. My goodness, you shoot us with our own gun!'

When a couple of them came with a pressing request for employment, he curled his lip without smiling. 'Employment! he exclaimed. 'How would I give you employment? I'm just a servant like you!'

He stared at them contemptuously. 'You don't know a fellow countryman when you see one?' He seemed outraged.

They drew back in astonishment and a little shame. 'You are one of us?' they said in astonishment and doubt.

'Can't you tell a fellow countryman?' he asked. He was nearly roaring. If my memory serves me correctly, he dropped in a Pushtu word or two, to indicate his Pathan origins.

Whatever he said put them to flight. 'One of us, eh?' they said, as they took off respectfully. They touched their turbans and backed down the narrow road. I was trying to keep in my explosion of laughter, and scarcely did until they disappeared after a last wondering look back.

Then I exploded. Len gave one of his quiet grins, winked at me and drove the Landrover out of the bazaar. I am not too sure, however, that he did not think he was 'one of them'.

How did he manage to be so equable in life? Part of the answer must be Ruby and his family. However, it was more than that, and one day I discovered what it was.

In fact, it was one night. We were sleeping with our mattresses on the floor of our study-office. A convention was being conducted, and hundreds of visitors were dossed down for the night. We had had to monitor the arrangements, and had given some messages in Urdu. The effects of these had been visible. We were fairly exhausted from all the activity.

I was lying back on the floor, and suddenly the meaning of grace broke in on me. Doubtless, over the years, I had given studies on the theme, but at this moment my understanding was not merely theological. It was personal. In fact it was a brilliant revelation. I lay on the mattress, bathed in gentle and pervading peace.

When I talked to Len, my voice was filled with astonishment mixed with gratitude and serenity. 'You know, Len,' I said, 'God doesn't expect anything of me?'

'That's right,' he agreed.

'Then why have I been so fussed up about so many things?' I asked him. I was thinking not only about the arranging of the convention and the teaching at the school, but about a whole life of attempted achievements.

He grinned his slow grin. 'Why indeed?' he asked gently.

Then it was that I knew the secret of his quietness, his rocklike stability, his refusal to be intense and get uptight.

‘It’s just justification!’ I cried. Happiness was spreading through my body like a combined stimulant and sedative.

Again, he gave the quiet knowing grin. ‘Just what you have been teaching,’ he said. ‘You know, Paul in Romans, and all that.’

What puzzled me was that, in all our deep conversations, we had never discussed the matter. He sensed my puzzlement. When he spoke, his voice was gentle and unpatronising.

‘I wondered when you would come to this,’ he said. ‘I wondered how you could know so much truth, but not know this—in experience.’

For me (as on other occasions when insights of truth had come dynamically), so much suddenly changed. I felt all forms of self-justification fall away: all attempts to prove myself, and all plans to accomplish something. I was able to recover the same rich sense of God’s accepting love which I had known years before. I learned to live in a new freedom. I now understood Len.

I guess the rest of Len’s story need not take a lot of time. He took over my principalship when we returned home for a year. On coming back, I found the students in fine fettle. I had a momentary alarm when I saw their deep affection for him, but that melted when I realised he had not sought it. Of course he deserved it. I was soon back in harness.

He would often ask my theological opinion on something. I suppose I marvelled at that, and would have to keep seeing that he was a man-like us all.

When he and the family left us to set up his mission’s own training centre so many miles away, I felt the loss deeply, but we were sure that the two centres would prove to be the one work. By this time, we had seen some good effects of our labours and the general respect our graduates drew in their work amongst the churches. The North West Frontier would benefit greatly from the new centre.

The next news that I heard was of Len’s ministry in the

Hills as he pastored the missionary congregation one summer. The old theological debate of neonomianism and antinomianism\* again reared its head. It is not my purpose here to pursue this or to explain it in length. Len had shared with the missionaries the joys of a human being who has been freed from paralysing guilt. He showed (as had Paul) that ‘God has given us all things to enjoy’, and that ‘everything created by God is good and to be enjoyed’—without guilt.

It was inevitable that in a missionary community, there would be those who were intense, and who, being to some degree legalistic, saw spirituality in terms of certain behaviour stereotypes. It seemed that Len’s proclamation of freedom was an attack on their manner of life, and their disciplined living. In their understanding, Christian holiness lay very much in *not* doing certain things, most of which were fairly pleasurable.

The sheer freedom that Len expressed made them at first suspicious, and finally angry. Some walked out while he was preaching. They felt he was betraying the Gospel. Others were equally certain that he was not. Many discovered, with delight, the liberating power of love that comes in release from guilt. Suddenly—it seemed to them—the gifts of God were released in them. They could enjoy the creation in which they lived, without feeling guilty.

I know that Len felt the opposition keenly. He was not an aggressive man, but he was unyielding on the reality of grace. So were many of his students. Doubtless they developed a personal loyalty for the man they had come to both admire and love, but their loyalty to his teaching was rooted in the experience of grace which he had brought to them. No one

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\* 'Neonomianism' is an over-emphasis on the principle that Christians ought to live by obeying the law. It is in fact strong legalism. 'Antinomianism' is an over-emphasis on Christian freedom. It claims that believers need no law because grace covers all failures automatically. It is a perversion of true Christian freedom, which follows the principle of obedience to the law of Christ, out of the motivation of love.

can assess or compute the effects of this one strong, quiet and persistent man. So many of his students still remain loyal to his teaching of grace. They certainly need it in a land of Islamic legalism. No less is it needed by their congregations and others to whom they expound it.

When we heard the news of his death, we were stunned. It all happened so unexpectedly and suddenly. He was at home, in the States, having lunch and joking as usual with the family. They watched him idly as he wandered outside to mow the lawn. He had scarcely begun mowing, when he dropped dead. That great heart had failed him, even though he was still a comparatively young man. He had gone quickly to the Source of the liberating Love he knew so well.

For me, he is the most remarkable person I have known, and I have known many remarkable men and women. He was a man impatient with eulogies and praise. I am sure he would frown on this story of his life if it were exaggerated or idealised. He was a truly humble man and would be surprised to think that he was great, and unusually great. I know he would be glad for me to write the truth, especially if I were to share the rich truth of God's justifying grace—the truth he had so wonderfully grasped. Without a parallel experience of his understanding, I could not tell you the story of the man. At the same time I have to be honest and admit that I have not paralleled his strong advocacy of grace. He was tireless in proclamation, explanation and debate on that great theme. Most of all, it was the ease, simplicity and graciousness of his lifestyle that impressed the truth of grace upon those he met.

I hope, as my wife and I revisit Pakistan, to meet his wife Ruby. His death did not deter her from returning to the land she had so long served. Her family is grown and the children have all done creditably. The fruits of the lives of Len and Ruby are useful and lasting ones. I need say no more. Ruby's freedom to return and serve is a further attestation—if such is needed—of their mutual knowledge of God's great grace and

overwhelming love.

I may be wrong, but I believe I came closer to this man than did others. I felt I knew him, and I know I knew him. I believe it is not merely a useful thing to speak of him and to tell of his life. I believe it is essential, for it is a story of grace in our own generation.

We are in deep need of such stories, for they do not primarily glorify human beings, but the Father who created them and redeemed them.

How wonderful He is, this One who has been called 'the God of all grace'.

*'And of His fulness have we all received,  
and grace upon grace.'*

## The Warm and Wise Woman

In the staring gaze of the sphinx—  
 Eyes set, gaze fixed, held unwavering—  
 We have detected wisdom. Man has made—  
 Empathy reversed—the projection of his wisdom.  
 Man-made, man-tailored,  
 Fitted to impress  
 With reasonable recognition.  
 It is the projection—we repeat—  
 Of man-wisdom fitted to stone.

In her eyes—the eyes of the beloved—  
 There is wisdom not derived  
 From fashioned knowledge striving  
 To outwit its neighbour's knowledge.  
 It is the wisdom of God, feminised  
 To fit its own functional uses,  
 Fitted to accept into itself  
 The creation which is about it.  
 Use amplifies wisdom, brings it near;  
 But this only in the wise ones.

Who then is the wise?/The wise is she (or he)  
 Who gently accepts the truth as it comes.  
 Not in rebellion seeking to surpass  
 Or in muted ambition slyly emulating  
 With a view to outplaying it.  
 Wisdom is the spirit that accepts the truth  
 Though it humbles one, brings pain  
 And draws down into suffering.  
 Through our long years I have watched,

Doubting not but waiting  
 For the outgrowth and the upgrowth  
 Of the thing that was stifled  
 But then liberated. The humble spirit  
 Bid His great wisdom grow  
 As though in a prepared garden  
 Or an orchard lately become fecund,  
 Fruited before the autumn of its ripeness.

No sphinx has living wisdom;  
 Its muted frozen form  
 Claims wisdom from the watcher,  
 The fearful spectator, the frightened devotee  
 Who imputes near deity to things,  
 Stunned by their silence, muted too  
 in the puzzlement of the cogitative mind.  
 He too is frozen, immobile  
 To the warm wisdom that must make its home  
 In the unmuted flesh,  
 The human reality.

Her face is warm, is living;  
 The wisdom flashes from her eyes,  
 Flows freely on her children,  
 On her spouse, the pliant crowd  
 That asks for understanding.  
 In this complex world—  
 This club of clever ones, sophisticates  
 Who issue their homemade brand  
 Of rational brilliance—  
 The cool and calming word of truth—  
 Made flesh within her ample life—  
 Is sought by those who ask reality.  
 Hers is the true integrity  
 That meets the needs of simple and of sage.

Warm, vibrant, living sphinx,  
 Unchanging though nobly mobile,  
 I salute your wisdom and your love.

## I the Prophet!

You will not know me unless you need me, but even then you may not know that you do need me. I am not one, but many: I am not many, but one. My being covers all time, for I have been since the world began.\* The words that I speak are timeless, but they are only for time, where man dwells. They are the words of the Eternal, from the Eternal through me to you, and are concerned with the temporal, although their perspective is eternal.

Without me, you would be bewildered. The way of man is not in himself, but in God. Without direction, his paths lead not to life but to destruction. Man cannot be serene without the Word, for it is for this that he was born. Man without the Word is trackless, and though he cut a path for himself, cannot, without me, arrive at the true goal of his being.

I came into being only when man decided by his own will to forsake the goal of his creation, the Father-Creator Himself. That was when humanity divided itself into two streams. Both flowed from the same fallen source, but in the mystery of grace some were creatures of faith, and the others, refusing to be true creatures, sought to be free of the Creator and all His powers. They lived in the thought that man has a certain godhead in himself and thus marks out his own destiny, be that good, or be it otherwise.

Into this world I was born, and always I have known the voice of God. I have known from the beginning that end which He revealed to me. Thus my brother hated me, for in prophecy, my voice—though my own—was in reality the voice of God Himself. This is a great offence, for man had

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\* Luke 11:51, Acts 3:21, cf. Revelation 10:7.

exchanged the truth of God for a lie. For this reason their minds have ever sought to make the lie the truth, thus making the truth the lie. To do this, they vowed never to retain God in their memories or to listen to His voice. When, then, I was sent as the perpetual prophet, their anger was greatly raised. At that point, as the man Abel, the first of the true prophets, my voice and my life became intolerable and I was slain—I who knew the true God and was His authentic voice.

I have been many prophets, though at the time of utterance only the one prophet. It was I who said, 'Let us call upon the name of the Lord', for that is good for men of faith to do.

Later, as one of the sons of God, I heard the voice of the Creator-Father, and this time I cried, 'Behold, the Lord came with His holy myriads to execute judgement on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which the ungodly have spoken against Him'.

There has always been this conflict against God and His faithful people, and it has been my responsibility to let them hear the clear voice of God, lest they become so secure in their unbelief of God that they think He has ceased to regard them, or indeed that He continually lives and acts towards His creation.

In every age there are those who hate me. Those who would not be reminded of the Lord Creator are prepared to stifle my words, which are the true words of God. Others who blindly repeat the acts and sayings of men of faith—though they themselves have no faith—are the most bitter, for their own words are made to look pallid and lifeless in the light of the powerful words of the living God.

Within my being are the great prophets—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Later, Moses was my being and proclamation. He was a great man of the prophets, because he spoke face to face with God. Often, as the prophet of God, I have been spoken to in dreams and visions. I have been full of power by

the Spirit of God, and the dreams and visions have helped me to be the voice of God. In all my prophethood, I have been but a man. To come close to God is for me as wonderful and fearful as for any man. How could I speak for God, as his mouthpiece and His voice, unless first I knew Him as He is, as is possible for a man to know Him? Had all men been true to the living God, then doubtless all their words would have been truth. In rejecting that truth and in seeking not to know God through the sound of creation, they caused this great need for God to speak. It may seem true that He could have remained silent, but creation would still have cried out—as indeed it has and does.

I need to tell you that God will always speak, not as a human being speaks—for the sake of talking—but being the God of both judgement and grace He must warn and admonish. At the same time He calls men and women into life and faith, encouraging them in His purposes as those who are partners within His covenant.

For me, this word of God is greater than 1. It is power within my veins and arteries. It is fire in my bones. It is the living truth, present within me and insisting that I proclaim it to the world. Because of this, my calling is at once high and awful, as also it is a vocation of danger. The danger of death is so little in comparison to the danger of altering—in any way—the word which comes through me.

If my humanity seeks to influence my utterance of the word, then I will be judged of God. If I seek by my eloquence to make that word acceptable, then I err deeply. If I seek to soften the strong, confronting message of God, or ameliorate its impact, or mollify the wounds it causes, then my judgement will be fearful. In my history, I have been tempted to veer from the principle of clear, undiluted utterance, and there have been times when I failed. These times are very few, but they have brought disaster to the prophetic body. Before God sends out His prophet, He calls him in, and reveals and

declares Himself to that degree necessary to give the prophet wonderful and awesome knowledge of Himself. After this, He sends him out. In the heart of the prophet there is then fear, awe, knowledge of the loftiness of God, as well as His grace and tender loving-kindness. This is why it is rare for a prophet to fall.

It is true—as it was with Jeremiah and others—that the prophetic messenger pleads to be released from so serious a vocation, so demanding and painful a ministry, but there is no thought of modifying the message or falsifying the utterance of God. Also, this prophet cannot shut up his mouth, for the fire of the message burns in his bones, threatening to consume them. Only when he cries, ‘Thus says the Lord’, does the fire pour through his lips and save his bones. His only peace is in proclaiming the strong fierce word of God.

This is not all. The prophet knows that his word goes out to substantiate the words and gifts of God. As the prophet, I am not against the law of God. I am the one who recalls to the law. When men wavered from the truth, God spoke through me to bring them back again. His law, His word, His precepts were instruction for people of faith, direction to the willing, and warning to the rebels.

Sometimes those who do not understand me think I am a wild man of God, seeking to break down structures and create some new thing, and that when this new thing has become an old thing, then I will seek to renew it also. This is untrue. I am the voice of God to every generation, and God does not depart from His law. It is a most awesome thing, and I am bidden to draw men from their rebellion to the life of this law. It is true also that when the great institutions of God’s people become only traditional, and when the rituals become devoid of power and life, that God will proclaim against them. Prophecy is for renewal, and for rebuilding. Where the foundations must be razed, there the new structures must be built, but only *when and how* God wills.

I must now speak of the false prophets. In order to do this I must tell you of the power of true prophecy. Prophecy is the word of God, spoken by means of His servant. Because God’s word is the pure truth, there is nothing in all the world so powerful. Also, you must know that humanity as God has created it must have the word of God. It is indispensable to man; it is as necessary to him as his breathing. ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God shall man live.’

If prophecy were not essential to man, then false prophecy would have no special power. It seeks—in its falsity—to exploit the functional need of man for the word of God, since it is through (authentic) prophecy that God speaks to humanity, instructing, informing, correcting, guiding and assuring it. Prophecy has two great and basic elements: (i) exhortation, ie. ‘forthtelling’, and (ii) prediction, ie. ‘foretelling’.

Forthtelling is related to foretelling. Man wishes to know the future. Indeed he is at a loss if he does not, for he is a creature of destiny. The future is linked with his manner of living, hence the need for exhortation, and even warning. The promises of God not only hold true for the future, but they make it. The warnings likewise will be fulfilled where the exhortations are not heeded.

False prophecy has great attraction and power, because it gives man a soothing view of the future. It speaks of success and makes no high moral demands. It appears to give assurance, but the things it says are the lies and excitements which come from the soothsayers, the messengers of divination, the deceivers of auguries and the like. They claim to speak from the source of truth, but they defame the true God. They cannot *make* history; they can only distort it. Even so, men and women with itching ears like the occultic mystery, and are glad to bypass the Eternal and His high holiness.

False prophets lay their traps for the superstitious. They imitate the words of God and arrogate authority to them-

selves. Well has God spoken through Jeremiah:

‘I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, “I have dreamed, I have dreamed!” How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another. even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord. Is not my word like fire, says the Lord. and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who steal my words from one another. Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues and say, “Says the Lord.” Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all. says the Lord.

‘When one of this people, or a prophet, or a priest asks you. “What is the burden of the Lord?” you shall say to them. “You are the burden. and I will cast you off. says the Lord.” ‘

Let no one think that I—God’s servant—am a servant of God without power, a man without might, a mere utterer of words. I am the voice of God. When I speak, I speak as the oracles (truths) of God. So strong are these words that they confront my listeners, disturbing them, rousing their anger even to homicide. Well has Messiah himself said of Israel, and to Israel: ‘They [you] have slain the blood of the prophets, from Abel to Zechariah’. Did he not say concerning his own fate under their hands: ‘Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow, and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem’?

They slew also—those people of Jerusalem—that prophet-servant, John the Baptist, who was ‘a prophet, yes, and more than a prophet’. The very people who have slain me in every generation are those who have built my tombs, but who

have not accepted my words, the words of the Lord. They have always resisted the Holy Spirit, stoning the prophets.

The fruit of my prophetic word is Messiah himself, for ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’. Whilst in God’s name I have ‘called God’s people to His law and His Kingship, I have also—from the beginning—spoken of him who is Messiah, that he would come. His coming has always been the promise of God for the healing and the saving, first of Israel, and then of all mankind, albeit that they have exchanged His truth for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator. This is at once the prophetic word which is love and judgement.

It has been my great joy to give this word of truth. From the beginning, the Spirit of Christ has prophesied through me, and I myself have enquired as to what person or time was indicated when predicting the sufferings of Messiah and the subsequent glory. I have been able to give rich and glorious intimations of him who is at once all things—Davidic King, Son of God, true Son of the Father, Messiah, and Suffering Servant. I have been able to tell the word of the Lord concerning the triumph and the suffering, the salvation and the healing that he was to bring, and which he has brought. Also, I have proclaimed the last days and times, until the end, when the defeat of evil will be completed. They will be the days of triumph and peace, of universal tranquillity and of the glory which will come to man and all creation.

So many of my prophecies have been fulfilled, much of them in and by Messiah himself. His birth, his life, his ministry, his death and resurrection, yes, and his ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit: these constitute the substance of my prophetic word. God’s intention from before time has been

fulfilled in His Son-Messiah. Christ himself has been the ultimate in prophetic communication. We must say again and again, 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'.

Now I have to tell you a wonderful and powerful matter: 'In many and various ways God spoke of old by [me] the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken [to all] by a Son'.

Prophecy has reached its peak in the Son, but not in its finality. *The word of prophecy still proceeds.* I, the prophet, am still in action. I am the prophet and I am the people of God, still speaking His word into history, into the affairs of men. This is why He has sent His Spirit, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of witness and testimony. 'You shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and you shall be my witnesses'.

At Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out, this reason was given for his coming:

'In the last days it shall be, says the Lord, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, upon your sons and your daughters, *and they shall prophesy.* Your young men shall see visions. and your old men shall dream dreams: yea, and on my menservants and my maid-servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, *and they shall prophesy.*'

From these events of Pentecost until the Parousia (the appearing of Christ), the Spirit of God will go on being poured out, and this for the proclaiming of the Word of God. This prophetic word will reach to the corners of the earth as the very utterance and oracle of God Himself. They who speak by the Spirit will speak the direct and dynamic word that is prophetic. Their word will stir the hearts of men to submission or anger, setting them towards either salvation or judgement. This is the word of the Lord: this is the prophetic word. Many will suffer greatly 'for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus', for this is how it ever was, is, and will be. We speak then of the 'prophethood of all believers', al-

though all do not hold the prophetic office itself. These believers constitute the prophetic community who proclaim and declare the word of truth, the personal witness to Jesus, the word of life to their hearers.

I then, the prophet, the new people of God, the last prophetic community, declare unto you this word which you must hear under pain of death, but with the promise of life. By this word you shall see God and know Him, shall cry 'Jesus is Lord!', and bow before him in liberating submission. By this word and Spirit you will have a heart to serve God and love only His law, the one true law of love.

Hear then the prophetic word! Behold then the proclaimed Lord! Repent in joy and bow before him in adoration. Come then, and be one with me.

This is His intention for the now-time, the then-time, the eternity for which He created us, redeemed us, and for which He will soon glorify us.

This is the destiny of the Eternal for us.

## What Have You Given, Father?

What have you given to me, my Father;  
 Maker of heaven and earth, what have you given?  
 I conclude now—with adrenalin flowing free—  
 That you have given me all things:  
 Given me myself, which is the prized gift,  
 Though often enough I have despised it,  
 Defaced and shameful as my sin has made it.

In creation, in the moment before time,  
 You decided me, planned what I am,  
 Planned what I will be, and really be  
 When the work you once began  
 Is fully perfected, complete  
 As once you planned for time, in grace.  
 I cannot understand this intricate,  
 This mystery of nature, this life,  
 What man in essence really is, this image  
 And this likeness, this imaged you.  
 I cannot understand but yet can live  
 This given life in wonder and in joy  
 Of being truly human!

What have you given me? Not only the body,  
 But the unique being, the personal identity,  
 I as spirit, flesh and blood, as soul,  
 I as man-man, I as the growing entity  
 The substance of flawless giving; Father-creating  
 Maker of perfect gifts and Lord of true giving:  
 This you have given. You have given  
 The power and the thrust of worship,  
 The irresistible longing to relate,

And with it the salvific gift  
 Of reconciliation: union with you  
 Without absorption of identity  
 But relational oneness, totality of unity,  
 Man with God, or—better still—  
 God with man, for you have come:  
*I never followed you.*

What have you given me? This total gift  
 This gift which is all gifts engifted—  
 Multiple and inextricable—  
 Made one through unity of love  
 Since you yourself are love.

I ponder not only in the long deep silence,  
 Not only in the hours of contemplation,  
 The times of thoughtful rumination,  
 But also in the flashing times, the busyness  
 Of fret and fury, anger's restlessness,  
 The traumatic times of repetitive blunders,  
 The incoming waves of human pressures  
 Beating relentlessly  
 Upon my defenceless shores.  
 In these times I think of the gift of gifts,  
 And wonder at their necessary supply,  
 Their graces that aid me in the hard hours  
 And the times of difficult pain.

One gift I treasure in all the supplies of grace  
 Is the gift of worship, the power of adoration,  
 The ability to serve, the useful use  
 Of all the given gifts. From you  
 How out the streams of grace and glory,  
 You flood the heart with true creative love.  
 'Tis you who makes the gifted spirit selfless

And glad to give without restraint,  
 Returning the adoration born of love and grace,  
 Without the coveting of one minor gift,  
 Nor seeking to possess the gift of gifts—oneself—  
 The gift of life unique. This gift is given back,  
 Returned in loving worship, in awful gratitude,  
 Only to remain, persist as unpossessed,  
 Revealing to all the famished sons of men  
 His world of gifts in gift of gifted worship.  
 From gifts received the royal tribe is born,  
 The kingly priests and priestly kings,  
 Waking the world with worship  
 As joy and praise reverberate  
 Down to, into and fully through  
 God's given time and all eternity.

## I the Possessed

I write this story about my life to share the irresistible fascination which I have known of being possessed. The word 'possessed' might make people wonder, because it is generally used of those who are psychotics or who are gripped by demons. This, I hasten to say, is not my case, although in one sense being possessed is a sort of madness, an intoxicated, delighted madness. You can find this sort of description in De Quincey's account of the opium addict.

When was I first possessed? As far back as I can remember, I have known a fascination for being myself, being independent of the whole world, and working towards goals which would thrill me by achievement and which would draw admiration from others. As a small child, I secretly wished and planned to outflank the rest of humanity in my accomplishments. It was not that the success of others irritated or angered me. Indeed, such success simply spurred me on to do better than they had done. I was not quite sure of my ability to do so, but that worried me little.

I can remember my magnificent day-dream. The modern super-men of our cartoons and films had not then been invented, but in my dreams I did not fall short of them. Even so, we know that day-dreams are not reality, but only aids to planning great successes ahead. After a time, I became more realistic, conscious that my day-dreams were indeed interfering with my practical accomplishments.

It would not be difficult for me to fill pages of description as the memories of those early days flood back on me, so I must be selective. I must simply share with you the principle I followed, albeit I had not consciously worked it out. Whatever would bring me intense emotional fulfilment was what I

set out to capture and use. I loved nature. It brought a great joy to me. What I could not explain was that there was also a certain fear in my relationship with it. I had a kind of adoration of the bush, the scrub, the woods and the forest. I loved bare feet in the dawn-dewed grasses, the cries and calls of birds, the peering into their nests, the curious looks of scarcely feathered fledglings, the despair of hen birds who sought to lure me away from their young. I loved the robust life of the bushland, the mystic quietness, where I could sit and contemplate, thinking that at any moment nymphs and dryads of ancient lore might emerge in this southern setting, this antipodean homeland.

You may say that this was not being possessed, but just a love of nature. True, but a love of nature which grips every moment of one's thoughts is no less than an idolatry. The word 'idolatry' is one which is, on the whole, distasteful to human thinking. The intellectual person feels himself debased, put alongside of those who worship physical images of wood and stone and metal. I think anything for which we have excessive affection ('inordinate' was the old word for such love) places us in the class of idolaters. Because of reaction to the terms 'idols' and 'idolaters', I use the word 'possessed' in order to catch the attention of readers and listeners.

I do this because—so far as I can see—all humanity is possessed. It is gripped by some ambition, some relationship, some passion or love which can divert it from a holistic view and experience of life. I once heard of an English aristocrat who devoted the whole of his life to breeding a white mouse with black spots on it. Others have lesser aims. I suppose, too, that the word 'idolatry' is demeaning to a human person. He sees an idolater as being subject to his idol, and of course he is correct. An idolater is the slave of his idol, without doubt.

In my case, I loved serving my idol. When I adored the

game of cricket and saw myself (ultimately, of course) striding out on Lord's Oval all in white flannels to the applause of men, I lived continually in sweet dreams. I not only pored over cricket manuals, but everything else was driven out of my mind—day and night—as I thought of breaks and spins, googlies and wrong 'uns. I would go miles to stare in a sports store and I would wallow in the bitter sweetness of covetousness.

It affected my schooling, it penetrated my dreams, it set me in competition with my fellow cricketers, and it brought me into conflict with my father, who wanted me to do other things than dream and play cricket.

Probably you will smile at this, thinking it just a passing enthusiasm of a child and not worthy of self-criticism in the possessed. I would differ. Idolatries are for the most part seemingly innocent things. As most will agree, they are also passing things. The particular possession may pass slowly or rapidly—but the principle of being possessed never passes. You will pardon me then if I take a little time to explain this.

I am sure of this one thing: that human beings primarily seek one thing—emotional fulfilment. Such fulfilment comes in many ways, but most clearly through the supply of human needs which are physical, social, intellectual, and even moral and spiritual. We get emotional satisfaction through eating, drinking, clothing, through *comforts*, amenities and numerous activities. Relationships can be a prime source of emotional satisfaction and fulfilment.

However, it is being possessed by one or other of these things which is highly stimulating and delightful to a human being. You must agree that the human race is confronted with many distasteful things such as pain, sorrow, suffering, excessive anger, hatred, resentment, cruelty, bitterness, cynicism, rivalry and many kinds of tragedy. It seems natural to many of us to bypass or evade unnecessary emotional privation or damage. So it is we look for satisfying emotional

fulfilment.

Let me draw a picture for you of a typical possessed person. He (or she) is deeply gripped by a love which brings rich emotional experience. The object by which the person is gripped promises so much. If it is sport, then success promises the plaudits of others, praise of those who admire accomplishment. If it is a person, then romantic love promises the highest of all fulfilments, and if this romantic element includes the sexual, then the latter has no peer in the whole gamut of human experience. The desirability of a man or a woman, whether in orthodox or homosexual relations, is the promise not only of high emotional satisfaction but of the richest human experiences of sexuality, mutual loyalty, and satisfying companionship.

We must never minimise the enormous drive for relational fulfilment in human experience. Man seems to base all his thinking upon his rights. He has a 'right' to total fulfilment. Nature, life, fate and others owe it to him. It is a sort of birthright. The drive to achieve fulness is irresistible and unceasing. There is a kind of irrationality in the endeavour to achieve fulness. A person is gripped beyond reasonable sanity. He is the slave of his drives. He senses and enjoys that by which he is possessed. He passionately believes that the object of his worship and his desire is wonderfully enriching. He lives in dynamic hope. He constantly feeds this hope both with desire and endeavour. Look then at your typical idolater.

If he is an alcoholic, you can see his pathetic trust in his idol. It will stimulate him, giving him a certain joy and an amount of peace. It will cover over his hurts, his pains, his inadequacies. It will help him to live in a world where he has respite from his troubles and difficulties. Of course, the same goes for drug addicts. One drug will stimulate, giving an induced joy, and another will sedate, granting a temporary serenity. In fact, this will go for almost any idol. By such

objects, man is gripped with incredible passion, intense feeling, inexpressible sweetness, almost intolerable joy. He rises to great heights, and even if he sinks to terrifying depths, the promise is there that he will nevertheless regain lost joy and know it even more richly.

It may well be that one idol proves faithless, and ceases to keep its devotee gripped. An object or a person may pale or diminish in the eye of the disillusioned worshipper. No matter! Soon another object or person will take its place. Soon the round of anticipation, intimate relationship and emotional experiences will begin to take place. The world is richly supplied with such things.

### I, the Disillusioned

No one doubts that the world is also filled with broken hopes, destroyed desires, smashed shrines, groggy idols, fractured devotees and disillusioned worshippers. The frenetic search for satisfying pleasure and fulfilment is sometimes abandoned. Only a grey and sterile world stretches before such neutral spirits. Even the suggestion that a new and exciting idol is there on the horizon is received with grey unbelief.

'I, the disillusioned.' That is quite a name, quite a term. The world of broken idolaters is a sad one. Here it is expressed in deep and bitter hatred for a former idolatrous object or person. There it is seen in an abandoned project, an unfinished course of study, training or action. It may be seen in divorce, in the hatred and resentment of a broken relationship, in the pain of an abandonment by a faithless lover. It may be felt in the hollowness of a love never achieved, or the sheer exhaustion and brokenness of an expired idolatry.

What we have said to this point is wholly empirical. We have observed such things; we have experienced them. We all know something of the fascination and the treachery of

possession. The intensity of desire, the hope of fulfilment, the motivation to accomplishment cover the multitudinous acts of the entire human race every day. It is when this action proves unsatisfying and abortive that we turn to anger, despair, bitterness and even horror. Some of us then turn to thinking about the whole matter, trying to understand, even seeking to rationalise it, and if possible to develop a philosophy of the matter.

My thoughts in this direction have been born out of experience and out of a philosophy or theology of humanity. In this, I have drawn deeply upon the history of the human race, and, in particular, upon the prophets and the men of wisdom of the Judaic writings and the Messiah who emerged from their history. My rationale goes as follows:

Man is made to love. His love comes from being loved by his Creator. In response he then loves this true Lord of life. To be loved by such a Lord, and to respond by loving Him, gives man healthy and creative living. However, this vertical relationship is simultaneously expressed in a horizontal relationship, ie. the loving of all human creatures. Such love is also necessarily expressed in love for the creation.

The drive to love God is exactly the same drive to love any object, person or thing which is an idol. The *wrong* use of this love-drive is what makes an idol out of a person, object, ambition or thing. Essentially, that is, innately, there is no such thing as an idol. God alone is real and authentic. If we seek to live without God then we will be driven to make a substitute, ie. a surrogate God. We will invest that idol with all the powers God has to fill, enrich and fulfil a human person. Of course, no idol can do this. It only promises (or appears to promise) what the devotee insists it can give—and will give. When it does not, then the devotee is angry and feels denied and thwarted.

What further complicates the matter is the presence of evil in the world. There is no such thing as impersonal evil. Evil is

the simulation of the nature and power of God. Evil therefore uses human idolatry in its plans and purposes. It encourages human beings to believe that they can obtain true human fulfilment apart from God. Men like Moses and Paul declared that there is a real sense in which demonic powers attach themselves to, and even inhabit, the idols that humans make. These powers are anxious for human beings to dissipate their love on illicit objects, in the hope and intention that the minds and spirits of the devotees will be destroyed in their exercises of idolatry and possession. Nothing must delight them more than to see the foolish possession of human beings, the incredible endeavours and exercises of misplaced love and the desperate endeavours and pilgrimages of unfulfilled creatures. They also revel in the abasement of the human spirit, the debased endeavours to placate the idols, the pitiful exercises of extracting gifts from their gods.

It may be that in this twentieth century, and in Western civilisation with its vaunted enlightenment, that we scorn the crude idolatries of the animists and Eastern religions; but is there any more dignity and richness in our current idolatry of materialism? In essence is there any difference? There may well be differences in expression.

History has shown the incredible trust a people has in its national gods. It has required a dynamic and radical power to destroy such an idolatry. In some cases, crude idolatry has been rationalised in high religions and philosophical concepts. These alter very little the practical expression of the idolatry, but they do help it to be even more securely seated in the culture which has formed it.

### I the Transformed

There are three religious traditions which have attacked idolatry: the Judaic, the Christian and the Islamic. Even so,

all three have themselves been in constant danger of the possession they have condemned. The Hebrew Scriptures speak of the incessant attacks of idolatry upon the Hebrew nation. A close study of these writings will show that a great proportion of them is occupied with the subject of delusive lords, gods and idols. In fact, a whole and well-developed thesis of idolatry is available to the interested and thoughtful reader.

The advent of Jesus the Messiah caused the new faithful congregation to see most clearly the danger and diabolical nature of idolatry. The first few Christian centuries saw an all-out attack upon idolatry, both in its principles and practices. There is no doubt that these early centuries—as indeed some later centuries also—are rich in their practical elimination of such idolatry. Islam has always had to contend with incipient idolatry because of its teaching of the transcendence of God. The human heart longs for the warmth, grace and intimacy of a God who is close and immediate.

This is the point where we need to speak of liberation from possession and idolatry. A too detailed and intellectual explanation would in fact obscure the radical act of God whereby He liberates a human being from the deadly bondage of possession. Simply put, it is this:

By nature, no human being can be satisfied (and fulfilled) by less than the whole love of God and by this love thus loving others, and so coming to love himself as a person loved by God. God chose to reveal His love by the sending, life, death and resurrection of His Son. The Son revealed Him as Father and brought with him the gifts of forgiveness, cleansing, liberation and love. Once a human being sees—by a dynamic revelation—this love of the Father, and is released by a radical liberation, then he wholly loves God, his fellow creatures, himself, and the creation in which he is placed. His love now moves in true functional channels. As a result of this, the new believer is given healthy peace, joy and fulfil-

ment. The very powers and emotions he dissipated in idolatry now become useful in true human living. The worshipper of lesser things now becomes the true devotee of God. Because he idolises nothing in the universe, the universe becomes to him the wonderful gift of God.

The idolater now becomes the true lover, the authentic creature, the serene person: the true human being he was created to be.

## The Healing from the Wounding

This is the impediment,  
 The object beneath the hardness,  
 The formed anguish,  
 The unresolved bitterness, the fostered thing  
 Of unforgiveness. At first it was born in anger,  
 Conceived suddenly of the committed injustice,  
 Gestated in the womb of thought  
 And concealed forever. Time's healing  
 Seemed good enough, seemed covering.  
 The anger had faded from its outward acts  
 But within the will was strong. Alive,  
 It kept its attitude, insisting perpetually  
 That somehow justice must be done.

Down in the labyrinthine depths  
 Time captures nothing from itself.  
 What was is yet to be, and always is  
 Where love's true solvent is denied.  
 Nothing dissolves or dissipates,  
 But in the cavernous depths the darkness grows,  
 Enveloping the life, choking the breath,  
 Replacing the required vitality  
 With creeping cancer, subsuming all  
 The good in the bitterness.  
 Harsh protest spreads, embracing all  
 Until existence is no longer life,  
 But life without life.

Come the brilliance of his forgiveness,  
 Come the high cry of his painful cross

And the evil cowers in its darkful self,  
 Fearing the liberation of the wondering spirit  
 Who hears the footfalls of grace,  
 The cascading abundance  
 Of the terminal forgiveness.  
 High cry, reaching down touches depths  
 Hitherto unreached by the *form* of truth,  
 The mere rationale of the forgiveness matter.  
 The *form* of grace is impotent  
 Without the substance, the dynamic reality.

Forgiveness is love in love.  
 Where forgiving is a law, and love is not  
 Gripping the spirit and the heart  
 Then pardon is a legal thing, a law object  
 Issuing from mind but not heart.  
 Deep down the root is seated firm  
 Of the spreading and encroaching bitterness.  
 Here all the acids wait their dreadful hour,  
 That point in time where harsh corrosion  
 Erodes the proud edifice of holy man,  
 Making him slave to bitterness and hate,  
 Increasing the raging anger and  
 Filling out the pain.

Whose eyes can see the anguish of the cross,  
 Whose ears can hear the gout upon the stones,  
 The dripping, pounding blood of willing flesh  
 And hear the high cry of dereliction,  
 'Tis he who hears alone can understand; can know  
 The high and anguished cost of grace.  
 He traces pain to its dark death  
 In angry sinful roots that grip the heart  
 And bid its hardness set for time  
 And all eternity.

Sometimes the godly child who hates  
 And feeds the anger—oil to flame—  
 Pauses to watch and even share the feast  
 Which man calls *eucharist*—*the* feast of praise,  
 Remembrance of the toil of love,  
 Golgotha's drama of authentic love  
 When Son and Father (Spirit too)  
 Dissolved the inner hell of man  
 And placed him in new paradise—  
 'Tis then the heart should weep for love,  
 Abandoning its hold on memory's lot,  
 Forgiving because forgiven, loving from love  
 And liberating where its self is free.

'Should weep for love,' we say, but if  
 The weeping is suppressed, the hate  
 Is left untouched, and anger reigns afresh,  
 Then grace is full denied.  
 The heart Hardens beyond its former will  
 And darkness turns its partial light  
 To deeper blackness than before.  
 This is the state that Paul calls 'ill';\*  
 A spreading sickness and the sleep of death  
 That stems upon these wrathful ones  
 Who sin against the healing death  
 As though it had not been.  
 This judgement stern is not for those  
 Whose ears have never heard the Cross,  
 Whose hearts as yet have not been warmed  
 By the high grace of Suffering Son  
 And ever-loving Father. Had they but heard  
 They would have let the anger go,  
 Bitterness would turn to sweet

And all dark chains would fall away,  
 Effecting the dazzling liberty.

Come then to love! Come in this hour  
 To celebrate the festival of love,  
 The full forgiving of the loving God  
 That takes the heart to sweetness swift  
 And floods the depths with holy joy;  
 Such love within its turn forgives  
 And heals the hurts that caused the pain  
 And neutralises all the gall,  
 And sweetens what was bitterness.  
 How rich release! What freedom full!  
 Release from God and man and self  
 Into such reconciliation full  
 That all the world is one.

Then spring to life the gifts of God,  
 Then dissipates paralysis  
 As powers emancipated pour  
 Their aid to graces now restored  
 To pristine purpose; these aides of love  
 Reveal the purpose of creation's powers  
 And set the heart a-throb with life.

How could the enlivened spirit brood  
 On wounds and hurts and sorrows old  
 When Christ has borne these all to death  
 And full annihilation? How can our eyes  
 Behold the passion of our God  
 And still deny the purpose of his blood?

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\* See I Corinthians 11:27 to 32.

## The Bitter and the Sweet

The first sound that came to his ears was the harsh cries of the crows. He had not seen crows of this blackness before; neither had so many been together before. They were crying around the great house. They were filling the trees. They seemed insistent, even angry, but he did not know what they were about. He slipped across to Momma and clung to her. 'Crows, Momma,' he said, 'lots of them.'

She smiled sleepily at him. Dadda had gone out to reconnoitre the scene. Last night, after supper, the stiff English missionary had told them about the arrangements. She had not been condescending or patronising, but simply stiff. He had never seen a Marm like her before. Dadda had gone to make the way easy.

Momma had hustled him into the tall bathroom. He could remember it after all these years. It had been very tall. It was also large. Everything about the house was large, including the house itself. The walls must have been massive and of *pise* finely plastered. In the bathroom they had used dippers to flood his body. Warm though it was, he had shivered. But of course the sensation was delicious.

Soon they would have to go to the room.

Dadda came back to escort them to the room. He had on a white shirt, khaki slacks and tan shoes. They were all crumpled from the luggage, but they seemed fine. Dadda was a serious father this morning. It seemed that the crows and the house were having their effect on him. He drew closer to Momma.

They entered the room. Instinctively he looked up at the fan. Nothing had altered overnight. It was still there. So was the room. The room was large. It was wide both ways. Its

tallness was almost to the sky, the ceiling being so far away. He had never seen a ceiling so remote. It looked down upon them, loftily.

They approached the table in the centre of the room. Although the table was not small and was set for five, it was a long way from all the walls. He felt that. The walls would not come near the table. They were most detached and had the same lofty stare as the ceiling. The walls and the ceilings together stared at one and the same time, looking upon the Americans. It was not that they had not seen Americans before, but they seemed to reserve this particular gaze for the sons of the Revolution. They were walls of the Great British Raj, and they knew their place.

He looked around the room, his four-year-old eyes of liquid blue taking in the whole matter. One table, though sufficient, seemed out of proportion in that mausoleum of a room. It was lonely and dwarfed in the vastness of enclosed space. Momma was taking a chair, Dadda helping her to it, when the *pukka sahib* entered. He was tall and fair, superb and British. He was confident about five. Years later, when the boy recalled that moment, he knew he had taken in the man fully. A four-year-old is well-equipped to distinguish between *pukka* (mature), and *kutchra* (immature), that is between one ripe in wisdom and one merely green in his salad days.

What the boy did not know at that time was that *the pukka sahib* was Oxford. Not that knowing would have made much difference. He was young enough and resilient enough to take a great deal of impact. So he watched the genuine Oxford graduate become the polished (though hearty) missionary. It was *missionary* which made the difference. However defective the faith in the New World, it was *the faith*. Hands stretched across the Atlantic—and all that, you know!

No one was fully seated until the Marm appeared. She was tall, towering, efficient, well-starched, and clearly pious with-

out nonsense. His four years so absorbed it that in later years she was the model for conformity and the paradigm of genuine (though feminine) leadership.

Oxford assisted her to a chair. Two nations were seated and the cereals brought. The turbaned servant was stiff but adaptable. He served plates for the cereals; first to the true *and eternal Missahiba*, all white and starched, and then the strange *Memsahiba*—not quite British, though blonde as a Britisher.

It was after the cereal that it all happened. It began with Dadda. Dadda passed Momma the toast. The boy saw the pain in the eyes of the Oxford man. Doubtless that revered figure was human and even, perhaps, a warm man. Nevertheless he said, though quite gently, 'Oh! The eggs have not arrived as yet.'

'No,' Dadda said. 'Well, I guess they will come.' Momma took the toast, though a little nervously. Dadda offered it to the Oxford Sahib who said, without emotion, 'I don't believe I will.' He added a meaningful appendix. 'Oh, that is, not until the eggs come.'

Dadda did not receive the message that the sensitive four-year-old received. It was, *No toast before eggs! Indeed, never!*

Four-year-old suddenly did not want toast. Momma was confused, Dadda was perturbed, frowning. Silence drifted through the vast room.

Dadda began a search for something. 'Jam?' he asked. 'Where is it?' Dadda was clever enough not to ask for jelly. He wanted jam.

The blond Oxford man raised an eyebrow. 'Jam?' he echoed. 'I doubt that you will find jam. Ah, not on this table. I mean, of course, not in the morning.'

'Oh?' Dadda said, startled. 'No jam for breakfast, eh?' Oxford nodded solemnly. 'Of course,' he said, simply. Dadda's eyes hardened for all his native spirituality. 'Then

what do I see there?' he demanded. He added, pointing, 'Surely that is jam.'

Oxford permitted the pointing, but not the conclusion. 'Marmalade,' he said briefly. He was a little stern. 'Definitely not jam,' he said firmly.

Dadda, the boy remembered, made choking noises. He stretched forth a hand to take the marmalade.

Although it was not actually alarm in the Britisher's eyes, it was definitely pain. The boy was to remember that. He saw the long blond arm held up in protest.

'I say, old man, the eggs haven't arrived yet!'

But Dadda had the toast, the butter, and the marmalade. He was spreading marmalade in thick blobs across his golden toast. Then he was cutting his toast into slices.

The eyes of the British missionary were lowered, but the small boy knew the pain in them had increased. For his own part, a new and strange world was opening up to him. No waffles and syrup, no strong smell of coffee, and no jam to go with the eggs. He knew, instinctively, that this would not be *pukka* but *kutch*.

Mercifully, the eggs came. The turbaned Indian knew how to infuse a little of life. He made a gracious and warm ceremony of the serving. They all had eggs, each in a curious container of its own. Momma could not forbear a joyous and appreciative cry. 'Oh, what darling containers!' she said.

Blond Oxford nodded with careless acquiescence. 'They are rather good, you know,' he said. 'Always had them, of course,' he added, 'in Britain.' He thought for awhile. 'Not too sure about Scotland,' he said slowly.

'Ireland?' asked Dadda, in a calm voice.

Oxford laughed, seeing the point of the joke. 'Well!' he said, his hands up in the air. He looked keenly at Dadda. 'Very good,' he said appreciatively. 'You certainly have a point there.'

Four-year-old watched sixty-year-old, the ancient *Mis-*

*sahiba*. Watched her tap her egg with the spoon, loosening its cap. That was quite something! Momma cut hers across the top with the knife, likewise removing a cap. Oxford pretended not to see. He had heard of people doing it that way. His gaze was really upon Dadda. Dadda had taken his egg out of its egg-cup. He had laid it upon the side-plate, length-wise. With a quick downward slash of his knife he had slain it, cut it in two. Some of its inwards were spilling out, and before you could think to say anything, the yolk and white of it all had been spread across the jam—or, marmalade.

Oxford did not actually moan. He was too university-polite to do that, but his pain was scarcely repressed. He darted a sudden look at the starched Marm, who quickly returned a supportive but warning look. Dadda chewed away appreciatively at the slain egg, marmalade and toast.

It was then that the boy felt hungry. He took the marmalade firmly and began to spread it across his own toast. He would have jelly or nothing, even if it was most unfamiliar jelly. Its blobs rose in small hillocks or settled into low valleys. He had ceased to care for the British person.

For a moment he looked at the jam, jelly or marmalade. 'Oh,' he thought fearfully, 'they have laced it with peel.' The skin had been cut up and cooked with it.

Notwithstanding, his mouth watered, every gland salivating equally and simultaneously. To the horror of the missionary graduate from England, he lifted his toast with two hands, spacing them out to grip it so that his mouth would be unimpeded.

Four-year-old had the eyes of Oxford, Marm, and turbaned bearer upon him. He gloried in the audience. He revelled in the publicity. He warmed in the show. Every fibre of him tingled to scandalise a whole culture.

He bit. He munched widely and deeply. He took in a whole world of new taste. Marmalade! He would never forget— never! Without warning, and against all normal or glorious

anticipation, he felt the acrid bitterness against his expectant taste-buds. The tart bite of the astringent citrus bit deeply into his soul, and that soul was filled with immediate loathing. For him it was the first cruel impact of another world. As a person facing imminent death suddenly has the film of his life played before his inner eyes, so his vision was filled with the memory of true breakfasts. He could see his beloved waffles, loaded with maple syrup and even rich clotted cream surmounting them. There were great slices—hunks you might say—of coffee cake: beloved early morning coffee cake. Jellies for bread, jellies for toast—toast itself golden and crisp, or French toast with its soft underbelly or its soft brown overbelly. Jellied fruits, lashings of cornflakes with jugs of cool milk, or special roasties with warm milk... and so on.

Above him towered fearsome white Marm, the eagle-eyed Britisher, and the concerned but mystified turban. Momma was staring at him, uncomprehending but maternal, and Dadda paternal but a little stern. What should he do? Instinctively he knew that to throw up would not be permitted. It would even be a family betrayal.

For this reason he began to chew. Oceans of acrid bitterness flowed over his mortified taste-buds. He chewed and gulped, gulped and chewed. With enormous difficulty he swallowed, just a little at a time, and gentle beads of sweat stood out on his child-lips. His eyes threatened to fill with tears, but these he kept back with stoical insistence.

What was fearfully disturbing about it all was the sudden knowledge that this world, and especially this Indian world, was one in which all was not true breakfast, in which lashings of North American niceness was absent. It was a world in which there was bitterness beyond sweetness, acidity beyond the gentle cloying of syrup. Also it was a world of deceit, for what looked promising contained a huge fraud.

Into this tumble of thoughts, suspicion and anger came, spilling their acid over all. The first faint traces of cynicism

were hardening his spirit. There was an element of the acerbic even in that four-year-old, as the true world of men made its first harsh impact upon his spirit.

Suddenly it was too much—that host of adult eyes, that senior staring, that sternness, puzzlement, enquiry and even judgement. The tart toast cleaved to his palate, saliva drained away. The horrible mash refused the reluctant chomping of his jaws. Horror flooded him, and within, a heaving began.

‘Kathleen,’ his father said, ‘he is going to throw up!’ ‘Ed,’ she said, ‘take him out.’

Oxford was horrified. Marm was stunned and astonished. Turban threw out his hands helplessly. Junior arose suddenly, as though he were a cannon ball propelled from an old iron cannon. Like a missile he shot through the door, clattered across the earthenware tiles of the verandah and into the courtyard of the compound.

His angry stomach began its heaving. He retched and retched, and with every convulsion he purged the new cruelty of the world. He effected a thorough catharsis, not only of bread and marmalade but of all unaccustomed bitterness.

Now, years later, he could see the picture of himself, without anger and without sympathy. In fact he could smile at the memory, vivid as it remained, because in fact he rather enjoyed a breakfast with marmalade and toast—with, of course, eggs.

He could smile, but then of course it had been different with the boy, legs apart, convulsing, caught in hearty projectile vomiting, causing the crows to gather from all corners of the compound, drifting down from the great banyan and zeroing in on this unexpected and unaccustomed gift of human generosity.

He could still hear their noisy cawing, see their huge blackness, and read great expectancy in the brilliance of their eyes.

## Father! I Sometimes Think...

Father! Why is it that sometimes I think  
 Your eyes are warm upon me? Why do I think  
 That not only do you love me  
 But that you have joy in me, not even because of love  
 But because of me? Father, it is hard to know  
 That you can have joy in me because of me,  
 When for my part I ache with all my failure,  
 Despise myself for all my sin, shiver with sorrow  
 Because of secret thoughts; weep in the night  
 When thought comes slinking back  
 From past events. Accusing voices crowd my spirit  
 And ghosts float in to join the pointing ones  
 Whose fingers pierce my soul. Ruthless  
 And unrelenting—servants of the ancient dragon—  
 They twist the knife of guilt within,  
 Hoping to see my latest breath as that of death.

Father! Why is it that I sometimes know  
 Your love for me is very deep, descending  
 Beneath the anguish and the pain of me, and of us all,  
 Probing the ancient lies and hates of men,  
 And bringing to us who weep upon your sorrow  
 The unspeakable joy of new creating? I know  
 Your love is for the weak and failed,  
 As for the strong and noble hearts  
 Whose faith fails not; who quail not ever  
 Before the holy Eyes. Somehow they know  
 Beyond the intermittent sights I have  
 Of deep strong love you have for me.  
 They know beyond my knowing—my fainting knowing—

That you love them—and me—with love unfailing  
And love that takes and holds for all eternity.

One day I'll see when faith is not required;  
One day I'll know when knowing's part of me  
Beyond the tear-stained trying and endeavour  
That marks the path my stumbling footsteps tread.  
I'll know the truth as now I scarcely know it,  
And feel your arms around my body new. I'll know  
That love I think this day is wholly for me  
Has always been, and ever so will be  
Beyond the doubts that visit and accuse;  
I'll know in knowing's deepest depths  
That as I love the children you have given to me,  
So too, you give yourself to me.  
No matter how I weep in this dear darkful dawn  
The Truth is you, eternal Love  
Who bids me weep and weep and weep anon  
Because you love me as I am,  
Else joy would rend the heart to death  
And life that is before my time.

What then? Shall I cry out within the joy  
That death is love, and love is life,  
Or let the tired mind of me relax  
And find me in the sheltering arms  
That long have called responding faith  
To have no fear, so rest?

## A Christmas Happening

### The King of Our Race

#### THE CHARACTERS:

- (1) The Narrator; (2) Mary of Nazareth;
- (3) Joseph, Mary's Husband; (4) The Shepherds;
- (5) Simeon (or, Simon); (6) Anna; (7) The Choir

Narrator:.

They come each year—the curious,  
Not the idly curious, but the thinkers,  
Those that seek in their depths.  
Over the bland shininess, the tinsel,  
The canned music in the department store;  
They come, wondering about this celebration,  
This gift-giving time,  
This Yuletide and holly time,  
The time of the Christ-child,  
The mass of Messiah.

We too are questing with them.  
We tire of the jollity, the crisp thinness.  
We know that somewhere beneath—  
In the place of truth—  
Lies the mystery of God, the coming  
Of the only true manhood.  
The resolution of the dilemma—

Man against God, against his own manhood—  
 So that we must ask Him.  
 We must tell Him to tell us.

**Mary of Nazareth:**

He has told us. Over many generations  
 He has spoken by the prophets.  
 They too were startled. They turned—amazed—  
 To their own words. They spoke, and then enquired  
 About what they had said. Somewhere  
 In the depths of the entire humanity  
 The sense of the coming was strong.

When the angel came to me—Gabriel  
 They call him—I was so simple.  
 I was a maid, a maid with a lover.  
 The glory startled me. The salutation  
 Deeply troubled me. I was shaken.  
 As one always dissatisfied  
 With what I had been, I could not believe,  
 Could not receive, 'You are favoured of all women.'  
 Who could believe such a thing?

The angel discerned—did I fancy he smiled?—  
 He spoke with the gentle thunder of heaven,  
 Thrusting the shaft of the truth  
 Into the surround of my soul:  
 'With Him the impossible  
 Is rightly possible. Fear not,  
 It is not elevation but election.  
 It is not praise but the direct command;  
 His choice authentic. You are the one.  
 Messiah whom you will bear  
 Is the Son of the Most High.  
 He is the Davidic King. Only the

Spirit, only the Father  
 Can accomplish this miracle—  
 The Word become flesh.'

When he said, 'Elizabeth thy kinswoman...'  
 My heart almost failed  
 For the fury of its fast beating.  
 When I knew her womb had become living,  
 That she was the bearer of prophetic flesh,  
*I knew!* I knew as a woman in truth knows,  
 That this is the purpose of woman—not just the  
 Other things!

**Narrator:.**

These were not actors—given their lines,  
 Clever talkers strutting their stage.  
 These were the humblest of flesh  
 Working out the incredible purpose  
 Of the loving Father, the determined God  
 Whose love must redeem, as also  
 It must judge. They must be  
 What He had called them in His grace  
 To be.

Joseph was the amazed man,  
 Whose humility must bring,  
 Must take him through the same impossible,  
 The unfathomable intention  
 Of the God who acts.

**Joseph**

When the angel came I too was troubled,  
 But not with the amazement at glory,  
 Not stunned astonishment at the celestial,

But bathed in the sorrow of my trust betrayed.  
 Mary—I could not understand—  
 Was full with child. I could not ask—  
 Nor she convey—the way of God.

Betrothal is betrothal. Quick the pain  
 If betrothal is betrayed. Betrayal cuts  
 Into the deepest truth, the full yearning  
 For the total union; the one great gift  
 The troubadours are singing. Mary, my maid,  
 Had gone where none could follow.  
 I did not understand; but when the angel came,  
 Joy's intuition gripped my soul;  
 My spirit sang. Forbearance was not asked  
 But worship deep. That Son of His would be  
 Son, too, of mine. My heart might worship him  
 Whose name must Jesus be—the Saviour come.  
 How high I held my head, rejoiced  
 In dignity of privilege.  
 How vast the honour that I gave to her,  
 How deep the gratitude to Him,  
 The gift of fatherhood from Fatherhood.

**Narrator:**

Those were the days! Israel all agog!  
 The word of prophet and of sage  
 With rising tempo warned the land.  
 Old promises renewed with power came  
 And stirred faint hearts with new expectancy.  
 False starts, false risings of the rebel minds;  
 Anger at Roman heel and Roman mace,  
 Italian cohorts and their cruelty.  
 Proud Jewish hearts, God's special ones  
 Striving to fill their ancient destiny.

When then the shepherds on Judean hills  
 Saw glory break across their flocks,  
 The startled terror of their minds recalled  
 The ancient glory Abram knew,  
 And all his sons who followed him.

Then let them tell their story.

**The Shepherds** (in chorus):

What makes the angel choir break  
 From places where celestials dwell?  
 What makes them burst in richest praise  
 Across our old Judean hills?  
 The hearts of simple shepherds  
 And their sheep; but praise of God.  
 These sons of light had shouted loud  
 When He created all the worlds. Their shouts of joy  
 Resounded down the ages long. Their song  
 Reverberates these days through hill and dale  
 But most of all this night, this splendid night.  
 They do not try to hold their joy.  
 It spills across Judean hills,  
 It breaks within the shepherd's hearts,  
 Who hear the amazing song:

‘Glory to God in the highest be,  
 Glory to His humanity,  
 Glory on earth to men of peace,  
 Glory to Him for all this Face’.

We heard the message and the song, we heard  
 The angel of the Lord proclaim  
 That fear is vanquished; in its stead  
 Great joy, such joy that men have never known.  
 The crowning power of God's great grace

Now visits man within His Christ,  
That Saviour who himself is Lord.

**Narrator:**

What then can shepherds do? What then decide?  
They can but go to Bethlehem's inn  
And find the Adored of God, the Man of men,  
Attired as child, warm chuckling flesh  
Who brings redemption in his heart and mind  
And body given to him. True man he be  
As truly God. No truer can  
Be God and man, and man and God.

**Mary of Nazareth**

If this be night, then night be day.  
True glory is a simple thing,  
A body full, a babe that moves,  
A child that comes as each child does,  
But yet is different. No vision that we see  
Can ever dim. No promise that is truth  
Can ever die. God knows the expectancy  
That He Himself creates within our hearts  
Of Prophet, Priest and King. Real though it was,  
The coming of the shepherds brought afresh  
The promise that His angel gave to me.  
My Joseph too, with mind agog,  
Listened to what they said. They crouched—  
As minding shepherds ever crouch—  
Within that stable crude. Their eyes were filled  
With glowing worship, wonder rare  
That visits man when Yahweh speaks.  
The silence followed when the words were done,  
When God's great future for the human race

Became the present action of the truth.  
His Son had come, my little son,  
Whose destiny of all men, great,  
And greater than a man can know,  
Was nestling in my breasts. I thought,  
I pondered on the gracious words  
Of angels and of men. I pondered them  
And knew the greatness of our God of grace.

**Narrator:**

Down through the years the tales have gone,  
Of how the Magi came and went. Not at that time of birth,  
But when the star led all their steps.  
Frozen in motion over him the star was poised.  
They fell adoring at the feet  
Of him whose destiny was set  
By grace and love. They worshipped him,  
The regal one of heaven—now man,  
And man for all eternity. The King they knew  
But could not know without the vision of the Cross.

Somehow they knew. The gifts they gave  
Spoke of his royalty, spoke of his praise  
And spoke of the sorrow that would come  
To him from all the world. When they had gone,  
The king in anger cruelly dealt  
With other babes—some call them innocents—  
But in their death strong spoke the sin  
Of the whole human race. This Christmas time  
Is not for play, but thought. The 'jingle-bells'  
May crowd the grim thought of man's duplicity  
And cruelty against his God. The Magi knew  
And worshipped the mystery of Him.  
Not yet, dear friends, is all the story told.

Our time of Christ not yet full  
 Until the prophetic affirmations come  
 From those who lived with God. Let Anna tell  
 And Simeon seal, and Mary wait upon their words.  
 It's then the story's told; the story but begun,  
 The story that a Cross must end  
 And empty tomb fulfil.

**Simeon:**

My name is Simeon. Hear my word.  
 My years have known the mystery of God.  
 My heart has always turned to Him  
 As flowers do to sun, oxen to crib  
 And child to parents—that from which it came.  
 I for so long the prophecies have kept  
 Within my heart and mind, have thought on them  
 Until the yearning grew so great  
 As to possess me all.

That day I came into the court—that temple court—  
 My heart rose up, indeed it flew  
 And fluttered like the spirit-dove. It saw  
 The truth within her arms. This, then, was he  
 For whom all mankind cried—know it or not.  
 Yahweh had said to me, 'You shall not die  
 Until you see the comfort of the tribes,  
 Messiah of the nations.' This word to me was truth,  
 And truth lay in her arms.

Now truth lay in my arms. See it or not,  
 This is the greatest grace of God—all grace that's His.  
 Yet trembled not my hands or arms. Only my heart  
 Thundered the song that grew in me. I cried,  
 'Now Lord the time has come. I go in peace. I go in joy.

I go in your fulfilment.  
 My eyes have glimpsed, nay fully seen  
 What you have done before mankind.  
 This is the proclamation of your will,  
 That he should come, and with him bring  
 Light to the nations, light to all the tribes  
 And be glory from and glory of  
 Your holy people Israel.'

**Narrator:.**

Had you seen her—Anna was her name—  
 Then you had seen a holy woman of the Lord.  
 So many years her life was spent  
 In worship of the Lord. She too had known  
 The secrets of the word of truth,  
 The cries of psalmist, priest and kings,  
 The mystery of prophetic word, the fire  
 That lit within her heart from it.  
 She burned with truth and knowledge; she  
 Looked—as Simon, Mary, Joseph and the rest—  
 For the great appearing of the Christ,  
 The world's Redeemer, universal love,  
 Whose matrix was God's Zion,  
 The City of the world.

So let her speak.

**Anna:**

What do you seek in life?  
 What binds your very thoughts in one?  
 What makes the day enriched to you, in truth,  
 And drives the powers that God has given  
 To bring you to that goal? What goal is that?

Is it self's ambition, pleasure's goal,  
 High pride and heady thought?  
 Is it the search for truth that never ends,  
 That never comes to it; or is it truth Himself,  
 Creator God, Redeemer One, the Hope of Israel  
 And the One we trust? Is it the Faithful One  
 Who through His prophets speaks to us,  
 And gives us hope?

The hour when Simon came, I also came.  
 I saw the light that made his face  
 Shine in angelic glory, holy pride.  
 I felt within that pure joy  
 Which visits me at times of prayer, at times  
 When fasting is forgot, when praise is high  
 And all the things of life recede, returning  
 To bring the great pleasure, the vision true  
 That draws us on. What can I say?  
 I knew his joy of Christ. Mine too that joy  
 Transcending pleasures that would hold  
 Our mind and body from his peace,  
 Feeding with lesser things for longer time  
 Until the taste for him has died,  
 Fading to pointless nothingness.

Then did I praise with my old voice,  
 And worship him with my old heart  
 Grown new and young in ecstasy  
 Flowing from truth—the truth made known  
 And shown to us, in this the Babe.  
 I looked around. I saw them awed.  
 I knew the light had broken ground  
 That all too long had fallowed lay.  
 Now from the Babe that light had shone  
 Which is the life of men. What more  
 Can an aged woman ask? Not more; not less.

With Simeon then, I too depart,  
 Whilst you who hear come on  
 Into new life. The celebration now  
 Is him. Let us repair to him  
 And live within that light.

**Narrator** (or Choir reciting in unison):

This then the celebration true.  
 Lift high your praise, lift high your voice.  
 Rejoice in him. Rejoice! Rejoice!  
 Lift high your hearts; your hands lift high,  
 Hear with the saints, and with them cry,  
 The Christ is come! The Christ is come.  
 The blessed Babe to lead us home  
 Via his way—the Cross, the tomb,  
 Sin purged, guilt taken, filth erased.  
 Oh Christ, in all your ways be praised.  
 Oh Father-God, Your love be seen  
 In Christ Your Son, through him redeemed  
 We join the angelic choir and sing,  
 Praise be to him, our King, our King!  
 Praise be to Son of Mary dear, and Joseph strong  
 And Father God. Praise be to him who came from God,  
 Praise be for birth and life and blood,  
 Praise be to Spirit by whose breath  
 That Son was raised from tomb and death.  
 Praise be! Praise be! Through all the earth  
 To him who gives mankind new birth!

*(The choir now sings the anthem, the Christmas carol which sums up the theme of Christ's Kingship. This is the Kingship of which he said, 'For this cause came I into the world'.)*

## THE KING IN OUR FLESH

Oh Father! Oh Father! we come in our wonder,  
To join with the angels who sang at his birth.  
We learn the great anthem they sang from the glory  
To shepherds who trembled with joy on the earth.

You sent your great angel to speak to the virgin,  
You took the sweet maiden you chose in your grace.  
She bore our dear Sovereign—the scion of Jesse—  
Our loving Redeemer, the King of our race.

To Mary and Joseph the angels brought tidings,  
The tidings the prophets had ever foretold;  
The hope of the ages was born in a manger,  
The news of his coming was heard in the fold.

The sword of his sorrow pierced Mary his mother,  
The fire of baptism raged in his soul.  
The Cross and its suffering, the Tomb and its silence  
The Father had planned as His love's highest goal.

Come Mary and Joseph, come Simon and Anna!  
Come Magi and shepherds, come heaven and earth!  
Come all the new-born of all the creation!  
Shout praise to the Father for Jesus' dear birth!

Raise louder and louder the anthem of Wonder,  
All creatures cry, 'Glory!' to Yahweh's great grace!  
All nations fail down to the praise of His glory,  
Cry, 'Jesus is born the King of our race!'

## The Justice-Men & the Great Rage

### An Essay on the Anger which comes from Injustice, Human and Divine

It is the justice-men who have the great rage. If you ask, 'What is the great rage?' then you must be knowing what it is, deep down under your own question. There are very few of us who do not have the rage. It is basically rage against the injustice which is endemic to mankind and his world.

We never really find justice in life, but few ever adapt to this fact. So man is always seeking justice. When he does not find it, he becomes very angry. He easily slips into the great rage.

Mind you, many are adept at not betraying the great rage. They can fool others, even psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors and pastors. They know—so to speak—when to drop the eye, when to ease themselves into a covering gesture, when to look bland. They posture as surprised persons when confronted with the question which would unmask or unveil their inner anger.

There are some who have the inner wrath, but have gone beyond knowing they have it. This thing which is in them they have long ago rationalised as an integral part of them. They have reasoned that their anger is not wrong anger. They feel quietly assured about this fact: it is not even righteous indignation: it is just basic recognition of what is righteous. They believe themselves to be the righteous ones, who know both righteousness and unrighteousness when they see it. They reason that they must be basically and inherently righteous or they would not recognise unrighteousness for

what it is. They have fooled themselves. They are both the antecedents and descendants of the justice-men. For the justice-men have lived in every age. They are the true men; the salt of the earth. Or so they think.

Before telling you *how* the great rage begins, let me share with you a few thoughts about *when* it comes. My own research—for whatever value it may have—tells me (more intuitively than by observation) that it may well begin in the womb. I have been given to understand that in the womb the foetus, ie. the true child (at what age I do not know), begins to receive its impressions. It receives impressions of the parents, and even the world beyond the parents. It receives two kinds of impression. One set is about God. The psalmist knew that God had known him in the womb. In Psalm 139 he developed this theme in statements which are unique in man's history, namely:

'For thou didst form my inward parts,  
thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful.  
Wonderful are thy works!  
Thou knowest me right well;  
my frame was not hidden from thee,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.  
Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance;  
in thy book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,  
when as yet there was none of them.  
How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.  
When I awake, I am still with thee.'

For God then to *know* the foetal child, is *to know it into what it is*.

The unborn but vital womb-child, it would seem, can use its will in forming attitudes, and its attitudes influence the way it exercises its will. It can say 'No!' to God and man, or it

can say 'Yes!' to them. The impressions it receives cause action within will and attitude. Esau and Jacob strive within the womb, and the mother can scarcely contain the agitation that is happening within her. Later God tells Jacob that he is a rebel from his mother's womb, whilst it is evident that Esau is a secular man from the same point of time. Jacob grasps Esau's heel as he emerges to be the first-born. Why does Jacob do this? Why does the Scripture say, 'The wicked go astray from the womb...speaking lies' (Psalm 58:3, cf. Isaiah 48:8, Genesis 25:21-23)?

I cannot prove that this is when the great rage, along with other human attitudes, begins. You may well put my thinking down as mere speculation. What we do know (and this is not a matter of speculation) is that child-attitudes are formed very early in life. Quite tiny children can be very angry. Some of them can cry day and night. Some of them never seem settled. Others are docile, submissive, compliant. The trouble here (please do not name me as a cynic) is that you cannot be sure that under the docility of some there is not deep rebellion. The outwardly angry and rebellious may have a certain emotional honesty which is lacking in the docile ones, who may well be the sly ones, even though they are not conscious of tiffs state and attitude.

But to return to the great rage. Most human creatures carry around rage with them. When you enquire, when you listen, when you discern, you find the great rage is directed at the injustice in the world. To put it bluntly, such rage is saying, 'God has not handled His world very well.' There is scarcely a human being on this earth who believes he could not tell God how to handle it better. Given the wish of Omar Khayyam, we would all desire to 'Shatter it to bits, and then remould it nearer to the heart's desire'.

This is the solemn idea and intention of the terrorist. This is the yearning of every Utopian, and the fixed goal of every self-appointed messiah. Simple politicians start off in this

way. Every reformer receives his motivation from the desire to effect simple justice in all the earth. There is, of course, great danger in this fervent approach to the world's problems. Only worse than the justice-reformer is the one who, having set out to right the injustices and having failed, has then become a cynic. He may be covering up deep despair by this seemingly blase approach. He may be hiding his embittered anger under cold cynicism because he can no longer believe in man, because he can no longer believe in anyone but himself. Himself, then, is set over and against the rest of society. His is not simply rage, he thinks, but justified rage. It is the grand rage, rooted and based in the fearful injustices of God and man. He knows—this person—for he is more terrible even than God in his righteous wrath.

In all of this, let us recognise that a certain indignation is permissible. Righteous anger is even a required part of man. It shows he has ethical discernment, and moral sensitivity. It is only the cynical and disillusioned who have given up seeking righteousness and justice. They have been hurt and hardened beyond useful exercise of their moral gifts. They have—they think—risen above the ruck of hopeless man, and believe that they alone are the ones who are not hopeless. Yet it is a fact that hope has died within them. Their bitterness has defiled them, searing their consciences until they no longer feel in the moral realm. This luxury they will not allow themselves. Their rage is now a hard and frozen entity within them. They are simply wrapped around their rage. They have become 'rage-in-a-skin'.

How then does the great rage begin, and how is it fostered? What makes it grow? How does it finally come to possess a person, and turn him into states of neurosis, psychosis and the like? Why does he develop such hatred for God and man, and why does he banish God in his agnosticism and atheism, so-called? The answer is that man, at some point in his life, reacts to God, creation, man, and even to himself. Perhaps

most of all to himself. He finds that the world in which he lives is an unjust world.

Now what is most intriguing is the fact that he understands the nature of justice. The existentialist who said, in deep disgust, 'This existence is absurd!' must have had an image or standard of what is not absurd. You only know the absurd over and against what is not absurd. You only know injustice over and against what is justice. So you have some inner image, some true norm, and by this you measure what comes to you. You have a sense of the *true*. You may not call it truth. You may merely say it is the functional norm. But you know it. You may get angry when things—life, experiences, circumstances—go against justice. This then, you reason, is injustice.

The root of anger about injustice is the perception that God has not handled His universe properly: that He ought to be busy about keeping it clear of injustice, and so free from sin, crime, social inequality, births of deformed children, sickness, plague, wars, genocides, cruelty and rape. In fact some claim that history easily shows how dilatory God has been; that He has done little to handle properly all these elements we have nominated. We, for our part, believe we know better how to handle it, and even against the sarcasm of the cynics. We are convinced that something could be done about it, and that with the metaphysical powers which God has, and the great advantage of being supernatural, He ought to have done more. He seems remiss, not using His Creator's powers properly. Is it to be wondered at that clean-minded men and women get angry, disillusioned, and opt for agnosticism and refreshing atheism? 'Has not God—after all—brought this upon Himself?' they ask.

Perhaps this kind of conviction is the reason why man has made curiously little enquiry into his endemic anger. He has, perhaps, assumed its correctness right from the beginning. We mean the beginning of time (eg. Cain with Abel) and the

beginning of each person. As we have said, perhaps from conception or later, in the womb.

To me—who am also in some measure a justice-man—it is evident that most, if not all men are justice-people. Few, if any, escape the great rage. We require justice in all the earth. We are sure that God has failed. Yet not all put it this way. There are those who set out to vindicate God. They are loyal, it would seem, to God. So they seek to vindicate Him. In this they unwittingly portray theft fear that He is not, after all, just. They *want* Him to be that way. They *must have* Him that way. So they seek to vindicate Him for theft own comfort. They dare not face the fact that He might be unrighteous. In this approach they are both right and wrong. They are the victims of theft own ambivalence.

To those with some perception—and some objectivity—the Scriptures are filled with the subject. It seems that God has by no means ignored the problem which faces man. Many times He brings up the subject—or allows it to be brought up.

First there is Adam. Doubtless, he thinks that by becoming as God, he will understand truly what is good and what is evil. With such understanding he can effect justice. He is wrong though, because for a man to be as God would mean that he would exist autonomously, and that is not possible. Adam, like all men, is a creature, and, as such, dependent upon his Creator. One aspect of this dependence is that his wisdom is limited, and he cannot always distinguish between justice and injustice. Much less can he consistently carry out justice.

Then there is Cain. He, in the great rage, kills Abel. He feels that he has been unjustly treated by a God who is partial, favouring Abel's sacrifice. 'What kind of a God is this?' he would be asking. God tells Cain that his brother's blood cries from the ground—for justice, of course. Cain, however, is not convinced.

Now we are in a dilemma. Cain thinks God is unjust. He

slays Abel in his great rage, which is based upon imagined injustice. God says Abel's blood cries for avengement. Abel must have the balance righted. God then places punishment upon Cain. Cain objects, saying, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear!' ie. Cain implies that *God does not know how to mete out punishment*. What a world to live in for both the Cairns and the AbeIs of man's continuing history!

Abraham recognises that God has the *power* to punish Sodom and Gomorrah. He has the *right* within Himself. Abraham—as it were—is a man of mercy, pleading for God to have mercy such as Abraham himself would have! Abraham is also astute. He says to Elohim, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' What a saying! What a statement! It has been used down the centuries, but mostly in cynicism and sarcasm. *Man is really saying that the Judge of all the earth does not do right.*<sup>t</sup> Abraham, however, meant what he said. It was simply that his ideas of justice, and the ideas God had of justice, differed somewhat. Even so, Abraham has made the point: the Judge of all the earth does right. We, for the most part, do not agree with him. We look at history and ask, 'What? Is this the justice which God has meted out to the human race?' Then we exclaim in our indignation, 'What justice!'

Habakkuk was faced with the same problem. God, looking at the state of Israel, said He would send in the Chaldeans to be His scourge upon a recalcitrant covenant-people. The prophet was horrified. He was nothing if not a patriot, so he quoted God against Himself. He said, with Abraham's famous words floating about in his head, 'You are of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and you cannot look upon evil'. He was saying, 'You are a just God. You cannot submit your people to the evil depredations of a cruel nation such as the Chaldeans.' God's steady stare must have eventually unmanned him. Then it must have manned him in the true way. He saw the righteousness of God, and the unrighteousness of

his own people. If the Chaldeans should be the whip and scourge of God, then so be it. Even if the fig tree should be barren, and the vines and olives fruitless, and there were to be no calves in the stall, this amazing prophet would rejoice in God. He had given away his great rage for the incredible peace of acceptance. Suddenly he felt God to be his strength, and his feet were as hinds' feet, climbing into the high places and seeing across the vista of time, history, creation, and humanity. When he agreed with God, he fully understood. He was one of the justice-men who has come to perpetual terms with the true righteousness of God. He became sane and peaceful in the genuine acceptance of God's just will.

Jesus understood the problem. He said once, 'Men ought always to pray and not to faint.' He knew why men fainted in prayer. Obviously they thought that God did not hear their prayers, that He was remote, indifferent to their pleas or casual in His hearing. Rarely did prayers seem to be answered. The skies appeared brassy, and the heavens utterly silent. The pathetic prayers had little satisfaction from this apparently dilatory Deity.

Jesus shook his head. 'It is nothing like that,' he said. 'Let me show you the principle.' He then told them about an unjust judge. This man did not fear God and man when they pursued justice. He was in the business of judging for money. He who gave the highest bribe was dispensed the most justice! Justice was his business, his stock-in-trade. Justice was a commercial commodity. To this hardened man, a helpless widow came. She kept asking the judge to give her justice where an opponent was using the law to defraud her. 'Give me justice!' was her continual plea. This kind of thing was distasteful to the judge. In fact he thought scornfully that she lacked taste. She was not playing according to the accepted rules of the game. She ought to accept the injustice like a man, and go about her duties. Not so this widow. She had the ability to nag! And nag she did. Finally the judge was heartily

sick of her coming, and got her off his back by getting justice for her.

Said Jesus, 'Would you regard God in this light? Do you think He will not give you justice? You know, don't you, that He is not unjust? You don't have to bribe Him and surely you won't have to nag Him! No! You don't have to. He *speedily* gives justice. Giving justice is what He is all about!'

Who believed what Jesus said? Who indeed believes it now? Tell me: who thinks God is speedily carrying out justice in all the earth? Very few, then as now. That is why Jesus concluded his session by saying, 'When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?' He meant, 'When the Son of man comes in the denouement of history, will he find *this kind of faith* on the earth—that God *speedily* avenges His elect?' Some readers of this statement, in their mindlessness think that Jesus is asking whether when he comes he will find faith in him. They conclude wrongly that there will be no faith, ie. few men of faith will be extant at that time. Perversely, they have a wish that faith should dwindle and die so that the Son of man shall come! They have entirely missed the point. Jesus is saying emphatically, 'Every moment, every minute of the day, God is dispensing justice in all the earth. When you pray for such vindication of yourselves against the injustice which is upon the earth, *God is hearing your prayers and answering them speedily*. For this reason always pray. Never grow weary. There is no true prayer which He hears and does not answer. 'When I come, will I find this faith— faith in the speedily vindicating God?'

How many then really believe God is *speedily* vindicating? His vindication and retribution for cruelty, evil and injustice often seem a long way off.

It is here we must pause for a valuable discursus. It is to do with the time factor. Humans live within time and have great

regard for it. Some simple tribespeople have little awareness of time. Yet, for the most part, man is a creature within time and a creature of time. To justice-men, caught up in this concern with time, God appears slack in the matter of executing justice. Those with an apocalyptic mind-set are sure that He will dispense it *at the end-time*. Others believe He neglects the matter altogether.

To both groups, He does not seem to be overly concerned with justice in the present. Dictators do not suddenly fall. Cruel men seem to prosper and succeed. The devious and deceitful seem to get good returns for their evil. The wicked prosper. The righteous poor are ground underfoot.

Because they observe such things, some justice-men become knights of social justice, who can scarcely conceal their contempt for the dilatory Deity. In their prophetic rage, they lay about the tyrants of injustice. They despise the conservatives, and have contempt for the traditionalists. They are the creators of the brave new world, and the destroyers of the old and effete governments which have brought only tyranny, injustice, mediocrity and misery.

Some social activists, believing that God is withholding His action until the end-time, will leave Him to what they see as His pitiful lethargy. They will get on with the job. As justice-men, they will see that justice is dispensed now, in our generation. They despise the millennialists who see justice coming only when Satan, the beast and the false prophet are rounded up, and the finally impenitent consigned to the lake of fire. True justice-men are angered at such simplistic interpretations of history. Because they are practical men, they go about what they believe God has neglected. They aim to spread justice in all the earth, albeit it is only secular justice.

Much, if not all of this, is because man has a different time concept to the one which God employs. It is said of Him that a thousand years are but as a day, and a day as a thousand years. An indolent theologian might pick up this point, and

make a rather smug conclusion: 'You see, God is not caught up in our petty time concepts.'

In this he is both deadly right and deadly wrong. God is not hasty, impetuous, or anxious to put wrongs to right in a nervous endeavour to gain the approbation of men and the applause of His creation. He works steadily. He does what we so rarely do. He takes all the facts and factors into consideration. He does nothing one whit before or one whit after the required time. He knows the implications, ramifications and relationships of all things as they are. He refuses to reduce His understanding and actions to simplistic categories.

God does nothing but that which is 'in the fulness of time'. He gives Palestine to Abraham but will not allow him to immediately enter and possess it. His descendants must do this, and only after some centuries have passed. Why? 'Because the wickedness of the Amorites is not yet fulfilled,' ie. the inhabitants are not ripe for judgement. God would not be righteous in His judgements if He judged before the time. Cain must destroy Abel before God can execute judgement. Sodom and Gomorrah must wallow in their evil before God will visit them with punishment. Corruption and violence must spread across the face of the earth before God will judge with a deluge. And so on. Men in great rage do not accept this. They have made their decision. They are sure that God acts either before the time (precipitately) or after the event (in dilatory manner). This is how they see Him. This is why they are contemptuous of Him. They, for their part, are 'action' men.

Jeremiah was, then, naturally misunderstood. Few understood his messages of warning. Few understood the love of God as did he, and few knew the agony of his spirit as his words were misunderstood. How poor a patriot they thought him! They cried, 'The temple! The temple of the Lord! The temple of the Lord are these!' They were chiding him. 'Foolish Jeremiah,' they were crying, 'do you not see the

temple in the midst of the city, in our Jerusalem? This means, "Gott mitt uns!" We are the true people. He would be unjust if He destroyed us, His favourite people. He will never do that. He is a God of justice.' Yet Jeremiah knew that God acts on time. He is truly of purer eyes than to behold iniquity and He cannot look upon evil. He judges; yes, but at the correct time. Never before: never afterwards.

Our attitudes towards time, and in particular towards God's timing, are quite basic in the problem of the great rage. We need to understand how different His viewpoint is from ours: otherwise we cannot begin to be free from our inner anger.

In Romans 1:32, the apostle Paul suggests that all men know there will be ultimate judgement. Our anger comes from the fact that justice is not immediately dispensed. When men see that God does not act immediately—according to their ideas of immediacy—they grow angry or arrogant. Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, 'Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.' In this case the observer of justice is angered and the doer of injustice is encouraged in his evil. All evil is injustice towards God, man and creation, since it is unrighteousness. In terms of Romans 1: 18, evil is 'suppressing the truth in unrighteousness'. The same verse tells us that God is meting out judgement to the sinner every moment of his life. Because what we might call 'the big bang of judgement' has not happened to the sinner, both he and the justice-observer feel that God is weak or dilatory and even that He has failed. Yet, given in all that, man still has a present sense that judgement hovers over him. If the justice-men would be reasonable and view the matter clearly, ie. in the revealed truth of Scripture, they would see that there is never a moment in which God—in some way or another—is not dispensing justice. It is because man thinks in terms of 'the big bang' that he misses this continuing action of judgement.

What then is the solution to our problem? How can we be rid of the great rage? How can we cease from being justice-men, from becoming Pharisees or angry men seeking to effect the justice God seems to neglect? How can we come to terms with the injustice which is in the world?

The answer must be that we accept the fact that God is *speedily* avenging His elect, and that as Judge of all the earth He is *continually* doing right, and doing it every moment of the day. Nothing is neglected. We need, in humility, to learn to attune to God's concept and use of time. We need to see that in God's timing the *end* is *now*, and that our *now will* be there at the *end*. We need to see that all God seems to have passed over He has never passed over. We need to see that what He has appeared to wink at, was never, in fact, winked at.\*

In other words, we need to be men of faith. We need to have the faith that God is speedily avenging His elect, and that He is always dispensing justice. Now only *a man of faith* can believe that. *A man of sight will* always remain the angry man, accusing God in his heart of being careless and ineffective, mindless of man's predicament. The sight of a deformed child may bring him to rage, and a child with Down's syndrome may bring him into further contempt of God. His control may be lost in the face of rape, genocide and murder, and he may even have a stroke at the sight of what appears to be cruel and senseless injustice.†

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\* Romans 3:25, Acts 17:30, II Peter 3:8-10.

† The real problem is the difference between the true God and fallen man. God is pictured so many times as having 'loving kindness' (Hebrew *chesed*) or 'grace'. Passages such as Nehemiah 9:30-31, Exodus 34:6-7, Jeremiah 9:24, and Psalm 103:6-14 show Him as gentle, loving, and longsuffering. It is not that God does not practise justice, but in His wrath He remembers mercy (Habakkuk 3:2). In the New Testament the basic point is made that God's kindness, forbearance and patience are no less present than in the Old Testament, and that they are meant to lead men to repentance (Romans 2:3-5). It is most significant that this passage points out that those who judge others—and judge them with righteous indignation—are those who in fact do the very same things but are not aware that what they do parallels the evil they judge so strongly! Jesus, of course, warned against judging another person, for he said that the same judgement would come upon us. Doubtless he meant, in that saying, precisely what Paul meant in Romans 2. Hence Christ's references to 'specks' in others' eyes and 'logs' in our own.

The man of faith also looks at the Cross. There he sees his problem solved and his rage evaporates. For it is in the Cross that every sorrow, pain, shame and hurt of man is borne by Christ and carried by him as the true Healer. 'He bore our sins in his own body on the tree'. He was the true Propitiator of our sins. The mystery of divine wrath was solved in his dimensionless suffering. The true anger on evil, ie. God's wrath, was vindicated as just when it judged sin in his flesh. The griefs and sorrows of the human race had a phenomenal bearing in his body. He bore them wholly as no other man could, so that no other man would have to bear them. His wounds were essential to heal the prodigious wounds of man. When 'countless thousands mourn man's inhumanity to man', Christ bears this human cruelty in his wounds. He is wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and by his wounds our wounds are healed.

There, the man of faith sees justice carried out, albeit very differently from the way the justice-man would want it done. Now his anger has no basis.

If the man of faith does not see that God's dealing with all injustice is in the Cross, then there is no way he can escape his sufferings, and evacuate his anger. Either Christ has done this for him in his own suffering, or he has not. If he has not then man must become a stoic, or believe that the sheer power of positive thinking will release him from what has come to him, and from what he has magnified in his heart and memory by his wrong reactions. Otherwise man is left to despair, hopelessness, and—as he wills it—cynicism.

Unfortunately though, man, for the most part, has no desire

to escape his anger. He wishes to retain it. He insists upon his own idea of justice as though it were his right. He seems to covet the bitterness that comes from injustice laid upon him. In fact his judgements—though having the appearance of being legally right—are wrong in that God alone is the true Judge. James tells us that only the Lawgiver can truly administer the Law. Man does not have the prerogative of judgement. Also man is never impartial, never wholly objective in his assessments. Hence God says, 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay.' Paul advises, 'Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God.' He means, 'God, at the fight time, will mete out justice. Don't you attempt to do this. You will not only do it wrongly, but you will get in God's way of doing it properly. In fact you will cause injustice.'

We need not go deeply into the *ways* God effects His judgements. That is a subject on its own. *That* He effects judgement is the story of Scripture. Yet no more powerfully is the subject put before humanity than in the Book of the Revelation. It is as though Christ told the parable of the unjust judge, in order to prepare us for this prophetic book, for in essence it is the book which tells us that God is working out His judgements in the processes of history. We must not here expand this principle, lest our essay develop into a commentary upon the Revelation.

What we do see in this prophecy is that history is opened up, and controlled by, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, namely the Lamb-as-it-had-been-slain, ie. 'Christ crucified'. In other words, 'He who has suffered all the judgements of God in the Atonement is now able to effect the judgements of God upon a rebellious and impenitent humanity.' Nor is it limited to humanity, for rebellious celestial creatures and the foul innovations of Satan are all subject to judgement. They too were fought and defeated at the Cross in the suffering of Christ. This is why the wounded Lamb is worthy to judge all evil in the practical processes of history.

When the Lamb proves to be the one who is worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll (the scroll of history) and commences his judgements, we are drawn to what seems—at first sight—a minor parenthesis. It is the vision of the souls of the martyrs as they live under the throne. Like the widow who sought justice, they importune God as Judge to quickly avenge them. They are each given a white robe, and told to rest. That is, they must exercise trust in God and patience as to the outcome of justice. They are informed that nothing will be done until the roll of the martyrs is filled up. God will effect judgement at the proper time, but not before it.

If we miss the significance of this incident, we miss much of the significance of the Revelation prophecy. If we take this as one of the major clues to the book, we will see that ultimately the martyrs are avenged when Babylon, the great world system, falls. Not only are the martyrs avenged, but they now reign as kings with Christ in the millennium—whatever and whenever that may be. It is to be noticed that the martyrs are not seeking for personal retribution or vengeance, but simply for justice to be executed in history. Nor is that justice for them alone. It is for all who have met injustice in history. On the one hand God vindicates His persecuted people. On the other He brings judgement to all evil for all time. In the Cross He has brought judgement upon every detail of evil. In history He works out that judgement, seating it home personally to all that are (and were) impenitent. The attempts of evil powers to defeat God and His people in battle are thwarted. Evil is wholly vanquished. The beast, the false prophet, Satan and his minions, all find themselves in the lake of burning fire. Death and Hades are also cast into it. All creatures stand before the great white throne and justice is fulfilled, and so God is finally vindicated. No creature in all creation dares bring even the whisper of accusation against the Holy Father.

That is the vindication. The justice-men with great rage will

find their indignant protests die away, and fear will fill them for having accused the holy, righteous and just God. Most of all, the revelation of His love will shame them deeply. Where they once sought to play ‘true God’ to their universe, they will see the pitiful nature of their attempts. They will see their high pride, and understand the evil nature of their indignant disdain. They will see that the Judge of all the earth always did right, and that He worked all things for good and that He was exceedingly patient and longsuffering, making no move before the time, and never being tardy in effecting His judgements.

Rage and anger, wrath and indignation, then, are not justified. True, man must seek to be ethically and morally sensitive. There may well be an anger against evil and injustice which is authentic, but Pharisaism must be sedulously avoided, as also cynicism, and self-protecting indifference. Given in all this, man must trust God for the outcome. He must not seethe with personal anger and bitterness. He must see Christ bearing the injustices and yet ‘committing himself to Him that judgeth righteously’. He must also read the Revelation with understanding, and see that much of the worship and applause of God in heaven is because:

‘Just art thou in these thy judgements...  
Yea, Lord God the Almighty,  
True and just are thy judgements.’

and,

‘Great and wonderful are thy deeds,  
O Lord God the Almighty!  
Just and true are thy ways,  
O King of the ages!  
Who shall not fear and glorify thy  
name, O Lord?  
For thou alone art holy.  
All nations shall come and worship thee,  
For thy judgements have been revealed.’

In conclusion then, what shall we say? We shall say that the insistence by man on his anger as being right only proves the tenet that 'We are never so wrong as when we are right'? The kangaroo courts of our minds are no places for dispensing judgement. Vengeance is a dangerous and destructive principle of human conduct.

Medical science tells us much concerning the dangers of internal anger. Such anger can lead us into diseases of the body and deep unnecessary suffering of the mind, adversely affecting our personalities. Violence is always born in the pit of unrequited human anger.

The even more important fact is that anger which is directed against human creatures, circumstances, environment and heredity, *is really anger which is against God. Man* then—in his anger—becomes his own time-bomb. All the time he lives it ticks away, warning him of imminent danger. Sadly enough he does not hear its ticking as the explosive tragedy draws near. In the pursuit of so-called human justice he is bound to do that which is far more evil and unjust than the evil he believes has been done against him. He does injustice in the name and cause of justice! This is why Scripture says of men generally, 'The way of peace they have not known.'

Men and women of faith are not given the alternatives of either expressing or suppressing their injustice-anger. They can only evacuate it entirely by the love of the Cross. In the light of that Cross, Paul says, 'Put off all anger, wrath, malice...' In the light of the Father's love, Jesus says, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven'. It is the love of God which is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that causes the injustice flames to die down and then be extinguished. The growth of new love brings the flowering and fruitage of the Spirit. The great rage has gone, and although all about us the same injustices seem to be extant, and

even to flourish, yet the heart cries with conviction: 'The Judge of all the earth is doing right, for just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages!'

Lest—even at the last—we should still cling to the ragged remnants of our rage and insist upon the justice we demand, we ought to read Ezekiel chapter eighteen. In this, God says that—in the ultimate—every man shall bear his own sin. No man will bear the sin of another. Likewise the true man will reap the reward of his own integrity. The man of integrity will surely be a man with peace of mind. To men who imagined that God was unjust, the prophet cried—for God:

'Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is not just." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die for it; for the iniquity which he has committed he shall die. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is lawful and right, he shall save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, "The way of the Lord is not just." O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?

'Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God; so turn, and live' (Ezekiel 18:25-32).

Not so the justice-men. This will not impress them. They will be scorning God and planning better things than He does. Out of them—as ever—will come the Utopians, the builders of better kingdoms than God can build. These are the perfectionists, the dangerous and dynamic messiahs, the ever-recurring ideologists, those who become terrorists in the cause of justice, anarchists in the cause of sensibility. These men-gods of mighty volatile utterance and action will base their

dynamic godhead on their own imagined sense (and schemes) of justice, and will conscript the world to new terrors and suffering.

They need to learn the truth that God is love and that injustice is not forever. They need to learn the principle of the Cross and the Lamb, 'who when he was reviled, reviled not again, but committed himself to Him *who judges righteously*'.

It is the love in action at the Cross which evacuates our self-destroying anger. It is this love of the Cross alone which evacuates our foolish rage and fills us with true peace.

## Fellowpain

Sometimes within the blackest night  
Or at the time before the dawn  
My mind awakes in turbulence  
And I am looking to the world of men.  
I see the anguish of their hearts,  
I sense the boiling of their minds,  
And note with sorrow and with fear  
The evil in their fearful acts of hate  
Rejoice to see the cruelty within  
That finds its home in hearts of men.

These times I wake with sudden start  
Are times my eyes must see afresh  
The horror of the angry heart,  
The hatred of the God by men.  
I hear the accusing cries that rise  
To fellowman, unfellowed God  
And knife of pain strikes wounds afresh  
In me, and in these fellowmen.

I cannot tell the anguish felt,  
Describe the terror evil brings;  
I weep and weep for us—the race  
God shaped to show His glory full  
In act and deed and attitude  
Upon the fair earth, in heaven too,  
My mind sinks slowly down to earth  
And deeper to the hell we've made.

I cannot cry compassion down—  
Compassion lives in all his tears—

I cannot ask beyond his love  
 Which made the cross his bed of pain,  
 I can but enter into pain  
 And seek to hold the hand of them  
 Whose shattered spirits droop beneath  
 The cruelty of us and them.

I thank you that you share the pain,  
 Draw anguish from us for the race,  
 Compassion give from ocean-love  
 And send our hearts to every place  
 Until our minds are one with yours  
 And we are crucified with Christ,  
 Until our hearts are one with you  
 Who wept to save the human race.

## Come Wind! Come Weather!

They keep publishing those pictures of the Kampuchean refugees. It makes things very difficult. The kids are terribly emaciated. ‘Terribly’ is the word. I guess it is the vacant look in their eyes which worries me the most. So help me, God, why do they keep doing this! They used to do it with Bangladesh children, and, way back, the Biafran children—though less in those days for some reason. I suppose we get a fair bit of guilt over seeing these children and adults starve, and partly because we do so well.

As I was saying, they keep publishing the pictures. I saw the cover of a church journal the other day. I don’t know whether it was by accident, or whether by intent, but they had a Kampuchean child lying back, and you could see his backbone showing through his stomach. His abdomen was as flat as a tack. Poor kid! On the same page, and well-balanced artistically, was a medieval painting of the Madonna and the Child. Was Jesus chubby! He had thighs like a young baby elephant. He was fat and rosy, cosy and chuckling, and his mum was so plump, and even old Joseph looked as though Nazareth lived in the good of wads of milk and honey. Somehow, to me, it seemed all wrong. I had a different idea altogether about the stable, and the poverty of the parents (I bet they had to sell the gold, incense and myrrh to keep the little fellow), because the little Galilean must have had a bit of what the Kampucheans know.

Anyway, to get back to my story. Those kids in Kampuchea, or rather, in Thailand, as refugees—they remind me of three and a half years when I was a prisoner with others. One can never see the look in one’s own eyes, not even in a mirror, so I can’t tell you how I looked. It is a fact of life that

my friend Keith came to see me one day, and afterwards went out of the hospital to vomit. That was when I was on the 'Dangerously Ill' list, and I was certainly thin. Once I tried putting my thumb and longest finger around my thigh, and they did it easily. I can also remember looking down at my stomach. So help me, it was just like the Kampuchean kid's tummy—not there, so to speak.—'I could see the vertebrae where the skin lay over it. I remember Major Nairn, my surgeon. He used to come each day and lay his hand on it gently, over the top of dysentery and malaria, and sometimes the body-shaking dengue. You forget these things, you know, until you see some of those photographs.

I don't want to play the theme too hard, because there is another side to it: the side of what it can do to man that is good. I mean, what it does is good. I can also remember lying on that bed, hungry of course, aching with desire for food, and thinking about the best thoughts I have ever thought. Some men found a world they never knew existed. You will be telling me, of course, that they hallucinated through sheer lack of food and sustenance. This would be one of the times when you would be wrong. Don't ever be responsible for the suffering of any human creature—if you can help it—but, by golly, don't miss out on the good things suffering can bring. It can take you into a world where you begin to understand what everything is about, and that is quite stunning.

I have a very good friend. He was a missionary in another country, a fairly impoverished country. He had gathered around him a set of young men, and they were a bit like a troubadour band. They used to go about telling the good news, and singing, and bringing joy to the very poor people. Mostly those poor people were sanitation workers. 'Sanitation workers' is a high-sounding term for the people who cleaned the latrines at a certain gaol. I suppose that is the lowest work you can do. You would think so if you had seen those particular latrines. Anyway, my friend and his boys

used to go to these folk, mostly on Sundays. I'll give you his description, word for word.

'There we were,' he said, 'in this old brick building. It had a room about twelve feet by twenty, and at least two families lived in it. It had an earthen floor, and there were bars on the windows, to keep out thieves, of course—only God knows what the thieves could have pinched! They had two little firepots to cook their meals, and a dixie or two to cook in. There were some plates and some tin mugs. Not much more.

'Outside, the men were in their loincloths. They were washing out the only set of clothes they possessed, loose baggy pants and a light shirt. The things dried quickly of course, because the temperature was high. Inside the hut-house it was 115° Fahrenheit, so you can imagine what it was outside. They all looked thin in their loincloths. The women were cooking special food for Sundays—rice and vegetable curry, *and chapattis*, the flat wholemeal flour breads. They were going to live like kings that day.

'The inside walls were black from the fifes, but then we didn't care, the boys and I. We leaned back, sitting on our old bits of hessian, and the fellows began to play on their *tabla* (their twin drums), and a little hand-organ wheezed happily, and one or two had other Eastern instruments. In no time we were singing away, and people were flapping their hands, and some became inward-looking. Others were very outward-looking. You might even say, "up-looking".

'I thought I had never witnessed a scene quite so poverty-stricken, quite so sordid. If one of my friends from the USA or England or Australia had walked in, he might have even vomited. Certainly he would have had to fight to remain polite and seemingly unmoved. It would have looked like wholesale degradation to him; and I guess, from his point of view, he would have been right. But then to me it was different.

'Sure, I had seen these men line up with the Sallys for their

measure of Western relief—flour and dried milk and some tinned cheese stuff—but then they did that with dignity. They were not beggars but dignified receivers. They were not getting more than their due. They worked as hard as any one in the West, and you have to leave it at that.’

My friend paused when he told me these things. Then he looked into my eyes and said, ‘Ooddie, I suddenly realised that in the midst of that sordid scene we were all incredibly serene. Not happy, you know, but quietly joyful. Not replete, you understand, but graciously calm. We sang our songs, and we related to one another, and we believed beyond our suffering. Suddenly I realised that in all my life I had never been so filled with joy and tranquillity. You may think that was queer, but then it was true.’

This friend of mine was quiet for a moment, and then said, ‘You know, there was an old codger there, and he looked like something out of the patriarchs. He came up to me and said, "Sahib! I saw Jesus walk and talk here today."’

My friend said he didn’t quite understand what the man meant, but he reckoned that in fact Jesus might have appeared to them, for he always went where the poor people went, and they were surely there—the poor, he meant.

Now all of this (above) is a preliminary to telling you about Old Moses (as we used to call him), because it was Old Moses who showed me that poverty could be dignity, and in a way poverty is not an absolute term but a relative one. Of course, poverty, of itself, is neither dignity nor indignity. It is the way you live in it which makes it one or the other.

Denny Bracken, Ossie Griffin and Clarrie Owens were my mates: my mates in sport, robbing orchards, and all the other things we did together. We were a gang, so to speak. We had

secret treasure-holes where we buried special things. We weren’t aggressive. We didn’t fight other gangs. In fact there was little or nothing of that sort of thing when we were young. One thing we did do, and that was make bush huts. We even called them ‘log cabins’. We used to go to the deepest, most secluded, most tree-covered spots of our local suburban Sydney bush, and we would build them. Not lots of them—very few in fact—but the one we liked best, and spent most time in, was a bobby-dazzler.

We built it of gum saplings, stripping the bark, and packing the poles close together. We put a bit of old chook-wire on the roof poles, and then we piled about a foot of bracken-fern, moss and old earth mould. We pummelled it until it was close together, and waterproofed. We even had a window on one side, and we hung a sugar-bag over this because it just fitted nicely. We used to be proud when we rolled up that sugar-bag.

We played a lot in that old bush house. In the middle of the floor we had a well-concealed treasure-hole. We kept all our special goodies in it, like string, knives, odd pennies and halfpennies, special bottle-tops, cigarette cards, and other forms of barter. We built a bush table, and we imported some kerosene cases, and we would sit there and hold counsel, or eat our lunch.

Lunch used to be tea we boiled with sugar and milk. It was sausages we cooked over a fire. We never had a high-sounding name like ‘barbecue’ in those days. We baked potatoes in the ashes, and then we peeled off the thick layer of charcoal and got to the hot floury potato below. It used to stick to your face and get mixed up with the ash carbon, but man, it was good!

That was until Old Moses came. He just came one night and established himself in our bush house. Of course it was almost to be expected, those being the Depression years. We knew all about the Depression, but I won’t go into that.

Simply to say that every day you saw those men who were down on their uppers, who went from house to house in our select middle-class suburb, trying to beg food or work or money, and this without losing their dignity.

Old Moses just took over our bush house without so much as a 'by-your-leave'. He arrived as he was, dropped his swaggie's roll, undid his billy, set a fire going, and in no time he was quite at home. He spread some newspapers on the bush table, and put out his bread, jam, knife and fork, with the old enamel plate and tin mug, and, as we said, he was wholly at home. Of course he piled a lot of gum leaves and bracken on the floor before he undid his bed roll, but then that was all there was to it, except of course for his parcel of books. These he had in one comer, set out on a kerosene case. He also commandeered our kerosene lamp, which he hung on a wire hook in the middle of the hut. Old Moses had found himself a home.

We, of course, were immensely surprised. As a gang we had raced down early one Saturday morning, and there was Old Moses. I suppose we called him that because of his white hair—or what we thought was his hair. He wore an old army hat, khaki in colour, but not slouched. Believe it or not, he had the old corks dangling down, all around, to keep the flies away in summer. His white hair fluffed out beneath the hat, and it was long for a day when 'short back-and-sides' was the custom. He wore a black flannel shirt ('undershirt' they used to call it), and then moleskins tied around the ankles, and Blucher boots, all gnarled and crinkled in the leather, the toes showing ever so slightly through them. This, of course, was what the typical swaggie wore.

He was seated on a kerosene case, in front of the bush house. When we appeared he was unperturbed. He peered up from beneath the hat and out of his bearded face, showing old blue eyes that seemed very wise. We were a trifle taken aback. Some swaggies we knew to be thieves, others to be

wanted criminals. Some, we had heard, were sex-offenders. We didn't rightly know what that meant. So we stood poised in a half-circle, our faces showing disapproval. After all, he had taken our own bush house!

'Now what would you be wanting, boys?' he asked, with the faintest touch of Irish brogue. Later we found out that he was Australian by birth, but both his parents were Irish. 'Our bush house,' we said together.

He looked faintly surprised. 'So it is you who built me this fine home?' he asked.

We were indignant. '*Our* home,' we chorused.

He shook his head. 'A pity,' he said gently. 'Then this is the only home you have?'

We told him we all had homes, but this was our bush home. He seemed a trifle sad. 'So you'll be wanting the old man to vacate, I suppose. Tonight when you go home you'll be remembering the old fellow without a house at all.'

Silence fell. We looked at one another. Then we burst out laughing. Old Moses stared up at us, eyes screwed up with appreciation. 'So the old fellow can stay?' he asked. We nodded. Old Moses said, 'This calls for a cup of tea.'

In no time he had a fire going. Already he had driven two forked sticks into the ground, and a tough sapling had been laid on them. His billy boiled merrily, and as it boiled he threw in the tea-leaves, adding some condensed milk from a tin. We looked wistfully at that tin of condensed milk.

There were no biscuits, but we liked it all anyway. We asked him whether he had discovered our treasure-hole, and he said he hadn't. We told him where it was, and asked that he guard it. We settled down inside the hut with him, whilst he spun yarns of the tallest order, yarns which neither he nor we believed, but which we all loved.

Of course I could tell you a lot about Old Moses, but this isn't

the time and the place. It was the pictures of the suffering Kampucheans I saw the other day which sparked off my memory of Old Moses, and it was Old Moses on the subject of suffering whom I cannot forget. The old man had undoubtedly suffered, but then he had developed some kind of philosophy of the matter.

Most of his yarns were humorous. He loved to have us laughing. Perhaps it did something for him. I often caught a glimpse of sadness in his face, just as we would leave, but if he thought we had glimpsed it he would immediately brighten, and make one of his famous quips. We did what we could to brighten his life. There wasn't much we could bring, but then there didn't seem much he wanted. So far as we knew, he never lined up for the dole, and later, when it was all relief work, he wasn't about for that.

I noticed something quite strange. When Denny, Ossie and Clarrie were present, he was always on for telling humorous stories. The moment they went, he would begin to tell me stories in which there was suffering. At first I did not notice the fact, but then it became obvious, so one day I asked him. I said, 'Mr Moses, why is it you never tell serious stories when the boys are here, and always tell them when they aren't?'

Something like a cloud went across his face. Then he spoke, although after a slight hesitation. 'Because, my boy, your mates are on for fun, but you are not on for fun.' That puzzled me. 'But I like fun,' I protested.

'Do you now?' he asked, and when I was about to protest again, he lifted his hand. 'Think about it,' he said.

When I thought about it I found the answer a strange one. When I really came to think of it, I was not greatly on for fun. In the midst of something crazy or prankish I would get a sense of the emptiness of it all. Somehow I felt I had wasted time. Old Moses nodded, because he knew I was puzzled.

Then he did something I had not seen him do previously.

He took off his great khaki hat. To see his head caused a shock. I had imagined that he had a great head of hair, but just above his ears his crop of hair ceased and he was bald, but with a pink that was like that of a new baby. Also his head was a perfect dome, and shining into the bargain. He saw that I was somewhat stunned, but he did not seem to mind. I learned, as the days went by, that Old Moses took that hat off when he wasn't funning and when he was going to say something which he considered to be serious, and maybe even wise. It was the highest compliment he could pay, but then I never saw him take off his hat in that way—apart, of course, from those serious conversations we had.

'One day,' he told me, 'you are going to suffer. I have the sense, my boy. It's something to do with the Irish blood in me. And some men when they suffer get twisted. They buckle under the weight of suffering. Some of them become sour and bleak and bitter. I have the feeling you could get that way if you're not careful. You have standards that are too high.'

When I looked putted, he said, 'What about your mate Denny? Don't you get mad inside when he says he will do something, and when he doesn't do it, seems puzzled that you expected him to do it?'

I stared at the old man. 'Well, of course I would get mad. Who wouldn't?'

'Lots wouldn't,' he said. 'They just don't care about integrity.'

'What's integrity?' I asked.

He grinned. I mean, his eyes crinkled at the corners and shone from the centres. 'It's being honest with yourself, others, and your circumstances,' he said.

I didn't understand what he meant; not then, anyway. Later I understood. Also I was remembering years before when Denny had cheated, and I had told my father about it. He had just stared back at me. 'People cheat,' he said. 'You

have to get used to that.' When tears came to my eyes which were tears of indignation, he shook his head. 'You'll have to get used to those things,' he said. 'People are like that. You just mustn't get fussed up.'

'It's not that there's anything wrong with ideals,' Old Moses was saying, 'but you just can't expect people to be what you think they should.'

It was after that he told me the story. It was something about him being out in France in the First World War, and being wounded out on no man's land, and his cobbler Kevin promising to bring back another mate so they could carry him out, and then never coming back, just leaving him there. He lay there for two days with what he called the 'whizz-bangs' flying overhead, and some landing around him. The smell of dead bodies, and the staring of their eyes, and the grotesque twisted shapes of them were enough to send a man mad. But he had waited for that mate. Then the thought came that his mate had been killed, and he felt sorry for him, and sorry he had thought things about him.

Some days later there was another charge, and some Tommies came flying over the trench he was in. When he called out, they nearly died of fright and surprise. They had been good to him. After the charge they came back and lifted him out, and he had gone to the Casualty Clearing Station. When, months later, he got back to his unit, his mate was there, alive and well. He thought of talking to him, but the other soldier kept out of his way. After a while he felt the hatred of the man who had left him to die.

'Things like that you never get to understand,' he said, 'until you do something like it yourself.'

I was a bit shocked at that. I couldn't see Old Moses in the role of a betrayer. Old Moses volunteered nothing, but sat staring into the dusk that was gathering about us. Finally I had to go, and when I did I looked back and saw him immobile, his hat at his side, his bald dome visible in the late

day, and him silent and grimly lonely.

On another occasion when the three mates were absent he resumed the conversation. In fact he took up from where he had left off.

'I've waited until your friends have gone,' he said. 'They only see me as an eccentric old tramp. That is not what I really am. I'm like thousands of men who have left their home situations and have tramped the country, because somewhere I failed.'

He looked at me. 'I don't think I can correct that failure, but at least I've learned something, and I want to pass it on to you. I have the sense that you will need it.'

His touch of Irish had passed away. His brogue was gone. He laid his hat down again at his side, and sipped at the billy tea.

'I never let a mate down,' he said. 'Never. But I have let my family down.' He paused and sipped again. Then he put down the pannikin and looked into the distance. 'I don't think I can explain all that to you,' he said shortly. 'But I will tell you some other things.'

That was when he surprised me. He turned and looked at me fully. 'All the suffering in the world is because of humans. And it is because of nothing else.'

The old man did not sound at all preachy, but I was puzzled. It seemed so out of context with him. I said, 'Why are you telling me this?'

He gave a faint sigh. 'Because I wished someone would have told me, years ago, even when I was young, like you.' He went on. 'Hear me out, young Goddie, even if it sounds like the local parson speaking.' At that he gave a wry grin, twisting his face.

'You know,' he said, 'when I was waiting for my mate to come back, I cursed God.' He nodded solemnly, remembering the hour. 'Then I cursed men. Then I was bitter. When they brought me back I forgot it was men who brought me

back, and I never gave the Almighty any credit. I carried that bitterness back into Civvy Street. I carried it into my marriage. Underneath it all, I blamed God.'

For some time he stared ahead, as though trying to peer into some dimension beyond the sky. When he spoke, his voice was slow and pained. 'Don't ever blame God,' he said. 'It all comes from man.' Then he turned and gazed at me, steadily. 'And don't ever get mad with faulty human beings.' His face was set grimly. 'It just doesn't help,' he said.

When Denny, Clarrie and Ossie returned, they saw Old Moses, full of racy stories, the true type of Depression swaggie, shaking his hat so the flies flew upwards, and talking about billy tea, damper, and the prospects under the new Federal Government.

That summer we all went on a hiking trip. The four of us made our way into the Blue Mountains, fossicking in corners where nobody usually went. We made our way over the mountains to Bathurst and Orange. When we came home we went straight to see Old Moses.

There was something strange about his camp. The billy was hanging above the dead cold ashes, and there was tea in it, but also flies and dust, and some grass seeds. There had been heavy rain, and some of his clothes were hanging on a line as though they had been there a long time. They had a strange look of lifelessness, so stiff they were. We went into our old bush house, and came out running. To tell the truth, I didn't run out. The other three just fled. I looked at the old bloated face. The beard had sagged, the mouth was open, the eyes were staring upwards. The hands lay limply on the old bed roll, and his hat had rolled away. The tail round pate was blotched red against white. If it had not been for the smell I would have fallen next to him and wept. When I went out I was brushing tears away.

Our parents came, and with them the police. There was a lot of questioning. It was about the bush house and the tenancy

of Old Moses. It was about our friendship with him, and then there was the collecting of papers after the police had taken away the body. One day we came back and tidied the place. We dug up our treasure, intact, and we never went back. The doctor reckoned that Old Moses had caught pneumonia in the rain. His opinion was that the old boy had waited for someone to come, and that he had become too weak to get up. Then he had just died.

My father talked about Old Moses. In no way, he said, was he a typical tramp. I suspect now that the faint Irish brogue was a cover-up, a son of alias. My father felt deeply over the matter. 'Poor old cuss,' he muttered. 'Came from a good family according to the police. They went through his papers. Just up and left his family, but then somewhere there was a woman.'

A woman! I hadn't suspected that. In later years I thought maybe she was some kind of compensation for his bitterness. I also remembered that at the last the old fellow did not have one trace of bitterness in his blood. Hurt? Yes, but not bitterness. I have never met anyone quite so tender as Old Moses.

I remember our dash along Reformatory Road, in Singapore. It was in those last days when the skies were black with burning oil. The Japs had bombed the dumps, and every well had been set alight. We were black ourselves, our faces thick and greasy with the stuff. Our beards were black, even if some of us were blond by birth. Our eyes stared through the oily soot. We had been forced to charge, our backs being against a plantation of rubber, and behind it, too, more Japs. So we had gone on a crazy and desperate venture. For my part I had enjoyed it in a sudden burst of lofty courage. Even now I can hear the high singing of the Jap machine-guns, and see the mortars spun about us, as they did before a burst of gunfire

brought me down. The mates all went on, or back, or they slewed away from the front, or they fell, never to rise again. The cries of men and the yammer of guns died away, and I was alone in a world of my own. That was when I began to think.

Some trick of the memory brought Old Moses back to me. Maybe it was what they call 'association of ideas'. I don't rightly know. I was a boy again, crouched beside him while he was telling his war experiences. I suppose my mind demanded some precedent and my unconscious mind had fished it up for me. Anyway, I could see the old fellow warning me against blaming God. Also against getting angry with my fellow man.

There were no fellow men. Not at that time. Someone must have seen me fall. They had gone on. Time after time we had heard the cry, 'Every man for himself!' I have come to think that that is the cry of men when they are at the end of their tether, just before they turn into animals. In fact they are on the turn. This is the point at which humanity breaks down. As I waited for someone to come, everything went grey. Then it was all a blank. Later I woke up in a hospital.

So help me, I heard a man the other day saying, 'Kampuchean? Suffering? Well, get it straight—that's their thing. Over there they are used to death. It just doesn't worry them. Suffering is part of their life.'

I could have hit him. I could even have argued. But then, where do you get with a man like that? He just doesn't understand. It isn't suffering that made such a person indifferent and callous. It's just affluence, getting too much from life, being spoiled rotten, so to speak. When I looked at him, he seemed surprised. I mean, surprised by my look. When I left him, I knew he wanted to run after me and ask me all about it. He couldn't bear not being right, not being accepted. One

day, when he is ready—if ever he is ready—I'll tell him.

I remember being surprised at what could happen when men were dying of starvation, disease and despair. That was in the prison camp. It's a long time ago, and nothing is served by bringing up the past. It is just to say that some men were incredibly hard, and unbelievably selfish, and that some wanted to stay alive by hook or by crook, and most of it was crook.

I can remember seeing a soldier die. The flies were on his face, crawling into his mouth as his head dropped lower and lower. Suddenly he dropped over his plate of rice, and there he was, dead. I can remember another man rushing to get his meal, pushing the head aside, and grabbing the plate. Sure, he was hungry, but at death there is a universal protocol. 'Ah,' you say, 'but not when men are starving.'

There were other incidents. There is no need for me to tell them. You will have gotten the message. Each time, Old Moses' face came up before me, warning against bitterness. I marvelled that the old man had used some sixth sense to warn me so I never became bitter. Hurt? Yes, but then so was the old fellow, in his own way.

Other men became bitter. I meet some of them now. At times I have to go to the Repat. Hospital—or, as they called it, 'Veteran's Welfare'. People call these Diggers 'old lags', but I see them as men out of whom the sweet juices of life have gone. They are people crying for the moon, hoping to come across some Shangri-La in the jungles of human toughness and competition. Quite a number of these old fellows tell me about broken homes and broken health, and I almost feel guilty that being old myself, my health is so good, and my family more than fair to average.

Of course, when I see photographs or films of starving children and grown people, whether Kampuchean or Biafran or whatever, I am tempted to get angry, knowing it all comes

from man. Then I hear of the millions of dollars the nations are pouring into relief, and I know a lot of it is coming from some persons to other persons. I keep wishing we didn't have to wait for crises before acting in this way. I keep wishing men and nations would not be at each other's throats. But I do not get bitter about it. I hold fast to Old Moses' realism, and accept man as he is, myself as I am, and hope to God that somehow, some day, He will make it all right.

I have the feeling that was what Old Moses was trying to say to me. Without being preachy, of course. He was trying to say, 'Come wind, come weather, He will handle it all right.'

Sounds good and is probably true. Yet I keep wishing that come wind, come weather, we would handle it properly too.

## From Height to Heart

Who is this who dwells in the heart,  
The heart of the meek and the contrite?  
It is the High and Lofty One  
Who inhabits eternity, who is  
Present to revive and renew  
The heart that has lingered in pleasures  
That are but for a season and then gone.

Who is this who comes to the needy one,  
To the angered and the despairing  
And makes all things new, revives  
Where all was nigh dead, who moves  
In the dehydrated parts  
Of the dying and desperate one  
With coolness of touch, with renewing waters  
Hooding the dry ground, awakening again  
The powers that were there?

It is the Holy One who comes,  
And comes He in holiness, purifying,  
Reaching to the sin-sodden depths,  
Changing the glaring crimson of the flaunting sin  
To calm whiteness, to gleaming purity:  
He takes the rudeness of blatant evil—  
Because of the penitent one—  
And gives serenity of spirit  
By His own Spirit.

It is the Lofty One  
Bringing the resources  
Of His own eternal being, His calm,

Unruffled and immutable self.  
 He is the steady rock, the unwavering eternity  
 Rich with the resources that compose His being—  
 The pure love, the unsullied goodness, the righteousness  
 And the powerful truth, the strong holiness—  
 And all from on high.

In the ancient rebellion, the revolution of man,  
 The gifts of Godly image seemed to him—the man—  
 That his powers were endless, that nobility given  
 Was nobility retained, even in the sight of sin.  
 He planned in his conceived brilliance  
 Changes to all that is; the manipulation  
 Of the great resources. In his hand  
 All is manipulable, nothing is withheld;  
 Even God will be impressed and domesticated.  
 Here lies the horror, the imagined deity,  
 The godness of man, the occult powers  
 Of self-initiated grace. So high is man!

Only where the majestic ship of human pride  
 Is wrecked on the rocks of his high *hubris*,\*  
 Only where the mind comes to anguished despairing,  
 The spirit dehydrating away to a sere wisp,  
 Does relieving humility come. It comes  
 To the broken and battered spirit, bringing hope  
 Of divine forgiveness for the haughty headiness  
 And the self-induced lordship,  
 The hauteur of unhumbled man.  
 'Pride comes before the fall,'  
 Said the ancient seer, and none knew when he said  
 How fearful is the headlong falling,  
 The dread of endless decline

Into the pit of hopeless and infinite  
 Nothing.

O Lord! With what adoring joy we praise You:  
 With that calm relief at Your high majesty:  
 With what weeping gratitude we behold You  
 And adore You in Your power! You are Creator!  
 You are the Lord! Your serene majesty is so high!  
 All creatures turn to worship You, the floods  
 Of their beholding eyes flow freely  
 Across the barren deserts of man's crazed inducing.  
 You alight in the hearts of the broken ones,  
 You move to altars shattered by sin  
 But new again by regenerating love  
 And peerless purity. You make anew  
 The dignity of the humbled, give again  
 The gifts—not hitherto withdrawn  
 But used in hard arrogance—the gifts  
 That now are used in accompanying grace.  
 O Lord! We worship You.

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\* Pride, imagined self-power and success.

## The Powerful Presence

As far back as he could remember, there never was a time when the Presence was not there. In fact, he was not conscious in those early days of a Presence as such. Perhaps he was guileless, not examining himself, his condition or his personal make-up. He simply lived, from one experience to another, accumulating a little early wisdom but not greatly contemplating himself. Even so, he was aware of Something more than himself which persistently related to him. Later, when he was taught by others, he felt it must be what they called 'God'.

When he thought about it now—late in life—he was sure he had always believed in God. In fact—reasoning from his own experience and using some innate intuitive conviction—nothing could make him think that all human beings did not believe in God. Of course they believed—however much they fought against this belief—and what is more, in a very general way, they all know the truth. How else could they make assessment, especially moral and ethical judgements? In his later years, he was constantly surprised by the fierce ethical judgements young people made. They understood how things should be. What is more, they saw them all in black and white. If he could not remember his early childhood—let alone his youth—he would not have believed they could have such moral insistence.

Well, he had always believed. He had always known something of a quiet but powerful and insistent Presence. What was it? Well, in a way it was God, but in a way it was not. It was a sort of Representative Presence which, on the one hand, knew the mind and intention of God, but on the other, wholly understood him—the boy—in all stages of his life. It

clearly judged his wrong actions and commended—to him—those decisions and actions which it judged to be right.

Later, he came to call it 'conscience'. In fact he saw it as a dual consciousness; namely, on the one hand, it kept him conscious of God, and on the other, of his thoughts, intentions and actions. So far as he could remember, he never tried to analyse it, but he knew it to be the source of much guilt and despair, whilst at other times it proved to be the source of joy and relief, of gladness and happiness. One thing he knew—that he could never ultimately deceive this Presence, whatever it was, or whatever name he cared to give it.

Even as a young boy, he was astute enough to realise that, whilst the same Presence was in others, it did not seem to act in the same way. Take his young friend 'Tiger', for example. That boy could hear the truth and ignore it quite cheerfully. He could tell a lie with emotionless indifference. He somehow seemed to have no visitations of guilt. For some time these facts puzzled and worried him, although they seemed to mean nothing to Tiger. As he grew older, he discerned this to be the case with others. They seemed to have no Presence with them. They were devoid of ethical sense, but were cheerful enough in that state.

His question was, 'Do they not believe? Is there no Presence with them?' He was inclined to think that they were free from the actions of a conscience. However, from time to time they showed signs of uneasiness. Also, they could express indignation at the *wrong* of others. What caused their unease, and why did they judge the wrong of others and even demand justice, if they did not have much the same sense of things as he possessed?

He discovered one day that you could ignore the Presence. He had previously known that you could rebel against it, but in doing so you paid the penalty in some loss of peace or well-being. He then discovered, with a shock, the device of deceiving yourself. He quickly realised that this was what his friend

Tiger had been doing. With him it was now habitual. Perhaps his father or mother had unconsciously, by their actions, taught him this dangerous technique. For their part, they seemed bland people, neither enjoying life nor disengaging it. They simply seemed neutral.

He knew the technique was dangerous, because something was lacking in Tiger. Tiger would never be able to recall his lies and his self-deceits, so they would always be with him, and perhaps eventually would harden him beyond recall. Of course, he was saving himself some of the pains which guilt brings to sensitive people. Even so, he was driving right and natural guilt down into some basement of his life. There it could never be eradicated, only kept hidden and locked away. Perhaps within its confined space this guilt was hatching up horrendous trouble for its unwilling host. He could not be sure. For himself, he preferred to let his guilts be alive. Even though they made him uncomfortable, they were to his moral system as nerves were to his physical system, giving him pain, but, since pain is a warning, he was guided by these warnings against wrong extremes of action.

When he was a boy, that Presence was with him constantly. For this reason, lies brought no joy. When he raided orchards with the boys or nibbled prohibited food in his mother's pantry, the excitement he felt was not a peaceful and enriching one. He knew these things were wrong, and what could be said for them was that they were wrong in black and white. He was not given to excusing rationalisations. Once the whole group of young boys were caught by an orchardist. As the man lashed them with his tongue, he—the boy—had felt a sense of fear but also of ease, and even joy. It was good to be punished! Later he realised that authentic punishment was a great gift. He realised that he respected—and even loved—true strong people who would punish him when he did wrong. He realised that he had contempt for those who would excuse him or let him off lightly.

They were betraying some sacred trust as persons in authority, although what it was he did not rightly know.

The same principle worked at school. His childhood days were days of caning. One year he averaged two cuts a day. The strange thing was that his headmaster seemed to understand. He would look at him—the boy—and say, 'Ah, you again.' He seemed—that headmaster—to be quite impartial in the way he brought the cane down on the open palm: two on the left hand so that the right hand could go on working.

Looking back, he realised that he had been a somewhat secretive boy, keeping his thoughts to himself. At the same time, he had longed for recognition. It was as though he were telling the Presence, 'Oh, I am so wrong, but I want some life, some sense of excitement. I want to be noticed. That is why I do these things which I know to be wrong. I do not excuse myself, but some inner force seems to be stronger than I am. Hence I do these things, but, having done them, I cannot blame that force. I feel I must be honest and blame myself.'

He found that, on the one hand, he firmly believed he belonged to God, and was indeed His servant. On the other hand, he found himself opposing every outward expression of godliness. It was as though he were testing it, making it prove itself. If it failed—like the Sunday School teacher-superintendent who could not keep him in order—then he took over the situation with a sense of contempt. When he encountered strong men and women of God, he admired them and listened to them with respect.

It happened that when the day and message of truth came to him, he was prepared for it. Meeting strong people of faith had convinced him that he had always been meant for truth. He recognised it in a moment, for it corresponded to something that was already within him.

This then is how it came about: having met strong believing people, he was prepared to listen to the good news of the truth. Their witness to truth deeply impressed him, for it

spoke of a dimension he had not yet experienced, a dimension holding serenity and joy. Doubtless his own family had an integrity he would always admire in retrospect, but that dimension of true joy and peace was missing. In a small church some four miles from his home, he heard an earnest evangelist proclaim the good news. It was simple—almost too simple—but what he grasped at was the announcement that God's Son, sent from heaven, had become truly human and deliberately, gladly and out of love, had taken the sins of the world into himself, somehow suffering them in their fullest guilt in his person upon the Cross to which both Jews and Romans had nailed him.

In a flash that message did its work. The guilt, which he (unlike Tiger) had not hidden in the basement of his being but had allowed to worry, torment and oppress him, was suddenly gone—all of it. He felt tightened because there was no burden, cleansed because there was no defilement, freshened because there was no staleness. He was tittle interested in the mechanics of the evangelist—such as 'hands up' or 'come out' or 'sign this card'. In fact, he slipped away out into the night, jumping, dancing, running, and even singing and shouting. He tried to touch high branches that were across his path, and he burst excitedly into his home, announcing the good news. He even weathered the polite and studied neutrality of their listening. He just knew he was free.

This, of course, was not all. It was—in another sense—the beginning of understanding the Presence or the awareness of conscience. From this point onwards he was one with that Presence. He had a co-awareness of God, and a co-awareness of himself. It was both strange and wonderful. It was demanding, but it was also enabling, in the new life which he had undertaken.

It would be untrue to say that from that point onwards he felt no guilts. His awareness was advanced, his sensitivity enlivened and sharpened, so that whilst life was greatly

enriched, it also brought deep pain. He could still see things in black and white, but in some cases there were matters that did not appear in these stark colours. Other things were shaded. For example, he had conflicts with his love for the creation about him. He had an intense passion for the bush, its grasses, trees, insects and birds. On Sundays he would want to explore it, feel the flora and the fauna, and examine the mysteries of birds and their nestings and even trap finches for his aviary, but there was an insistence that he observe the Sabbath. There was church in the morning and the evening, and Sunday School in the afternoon. How could he neglect these, especially as his family now identified him as a believer, a boy of faith?

The guilt troubles began again. Sometimes he would be lost in wonder in the bush only to be awakened by the tolling of a bell, and he would hasten to the service or the Sunday School somewhat dishevelled, his knicker-bockers out of his long woollen sox, or his tie untied or awry, hanging to one side. He could not explain to himself the different streams of joy that were his. There was a world of creation which brought him joy, but also a world of worship and love which both awed and gripped him. He had a sense that both joys were authentic but also felt that somehow they conflicted. He hardly dared appeal to the tribunal of the Presence lest his creation-love be forbidden. He felt instinctively that he needed it. The other—the worship, the learning of truth, the encouragement of faith—he also needed. Why then did it seem to conflict with what some would have called 'love of nature'?

No one answered his inner questions. They were not the questions that were raised. People seemed to live by standards without caring about their inner nature, need or value. The questions he would have liked to ask would have seemed peculiar to them and he would have appeared strange. For this reason he remained silent. When a new love came into his life—that of writing poetry, essays and short stories—his con-

flicts increased. Already he sensed he was to be a man who announced faith and the good news to mankind, but he was gripped by these other loves.

What must be said is that he carried the conflict on in his own being. He did not seek advice. His weakness—and his strength—was that he acceded to his various loves. In a way, he both protected and nourished them, developing them into viable entities. To them he added a love of farming. Indeed, he attended an agricultural training school, which heightened his love of nature and of writing.

The curious thing is that he never once suspected that all of these loves were compatible. Years later, when thinking about it, he concluded that his spiritual friends and teachers had never understood the truth of creation. Somehow within them was a dualism, incipient but unsuspected. The redemptive action of God was focal for them and creation was an almost unknown entity. It lay over the periphery of their thinking—away out on the unseen perimeter. He came—in his later years—to realise how unnecessary and artificial were those youthful conflicts. What is meant by this whole paragraph is that the boy was surrounded with the truth of redemption but not of creation, and since both creation and redemption are of the one piece, he was naturally enough confused. He had an instinct for *both* creation and redemption, but was denied support in the former whilst being over-supported in the latter.

Before resuming the story of the boy who was becoming a man, it is necessary to see this so-called Presence, or conscience, this faculty of awareness, through eyes that are other than his. His subjective experiences and feelings are no infallible guide to those who read the account. They tell how *he* experienced conscience, and we need not call the account into question. Not all necessarily see conscience this way. If we examine as objectively as possible this matter of conscience, we may better appreciate the further narrative which will

follow. The reader who is easily confused or bored by theological discussion should feel free to skip the following work-out on conscience.

Conscience has been said to be a co-awareness faculty by which we are aware of ourselves, especially in the choices we call right and wrong. In one sense we are two, ie. I am I and my conscience. My conscience is that utility or entity by which I am aware of my actions and indeed am the judge of them. In practice this is fairly true. It is also a fact that many things influence the conscience in the making of its decisions. There are the elements or 'shape' of our culture, our obtained ethical and moral standards, as also the principles of the particular religion we may hold. In one culture the conscience demands that which in another culture it may reject. Conscience, then, can be taught, informed, trained and disciplined. Experience tells us it can be suppressed and virtually enslaved to the insistent will of the host-person.

The matter, however, is not so simple. There is the deeper question as to whether conscience is fulfilling its true and whole function when it is not making human beings aware of God. The 'co-awareness' of which we have spoken should be firstly a 'co-awareness' of God. The conscience should make the person aware of God. If this is the case then the person will know 'right' and 'wrong' in the authentic way, for he (or she) will see things as they really are, and see them from God's perspective as much as is possible for creaturely humanity.

If, however, the conscience operates on law as it is separated from God, then it becomes a tyrannous unit to be fought by its host. The law of God is never apart from God, except in the minds of the guilty or the chronic legalists. True law is the outshining of the nature of God. It is in no sense legal. When the human person is one with God (co-aware-

ness), then the law is directive and not oppressive. To the happy Jew it was *torah*, ie. 'instruction'. He was not merely happy with law. It was his positive delight. He was glad to be instructed. He felt secure and fulfilled as he walked in 'the Way'.

When the conscience brings awareness of law apart from God, then it brings the human spirit to a state of turmoil and unhappiness. All demands seem legal. Human joy is suppressed and human longing seeks to create the joy it misses as part of its true experience. The means of making this joy generally come into conflict with a stern conscience. The mind becomes a law court, with the conscience its wearisome, unrelenting judge.

The biggest question of all is this: does any man—however much he may seek to suppress it—know the truth? Does it mean then that man has somewhere rejected what he knows to be true and is therefore at enmity with his own conscience? Is it that in the painful experience of his guilt he seeks to pay off his conscience by doing a kind of 'good' in exchange for the kind of evil he believes he has done? A clear answer to this question would help us to understand the true nature of conscience.

Shakespeare said, 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all'. Another writer said, 'Conscience is the most universal thing of all... that which goes deepest to the conscience goes widest to the world'.\* We know how conscience makes cowards of us. There is much we would do if guilt did not follow. The presence of guilt seems to indicate a judgement we must experience, and in a way guilt is itself much—if not all—of that judgement.

Even more important is the fact that when a man rejects the truth he cannot in the ultimate defeat or seduce his conscience. He can alienate it from his will, from his most

intimate self, but in doing this he makes it his enemy. If he thinks he has hidden his failure in the basement of his being, then he is wrong. Guilt—no matter where hidden—remains dynamic. It is like fissionable material: it is always innately active. One day it will exact its retribution, whether in making its host a coward, or causing a breakdown which we call 'neurosis' and, sometimes, 'psychosis'. Since man is built for the truth, he cannot possibly beat or defeat that truth, since his conscience indicates that the judgement is always coming. The novel *The Trial* by Franz Kafka, is a superb enacting of this principle.\*

We are now ready to resume our story.

When did that boy, that youth, that young man, discover the truth? In one sense he always knew the truth as though he had been born with it. In another sense he learned it. He was aware in his childhood that when confronted with the truth, he must always act. He sensed that the Presence indicated, beforehand, the rightness or wrongness of a decision he might make and the action which would follow. He realised that the Presence was concerned with the will. He was aware that he could have a 'cut-out' point in regard to truth. Like his childhood friend Tiger, he could simply ignore the truth, or greatly rationalise it away. What he did know was that with any decision, and its consequent act, the Presence either congratulated him (perhaps 'commended' is a better word) or brought a sense of judgement, of irrevocable wrongness.

As he grew, he realised—by his studies of the Hebrew Scriptures—that the Jews had no word for conscience. If they used any word, it was 'heart'. They could not conceive of a psychological faculty called 'conscience'. This, he reasoned, was because they were one with God. In union with God,

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\* P. T. Forsyth. Unfortunately I am unable to give the reference.

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\* Penguin, Middlesex, 1970

they simply lived life as it was, not introspecting and not dividing their unitary personhood. At the same time, he approved of Paul's use of the word 'conscience'.

As the years went by, he deepened in his understanding of the misery of man. He often wondered how Tiger had fared in life. Tiger represented for him that part of humanity which ignored true values, and which developed an attitude to life that nothing mattered. Perhaps their habituated blandness was itself the judgement they brought upon themselves. He wondered what would happen if ever the basement flooded and the dark black tide moved upstairs... He could picture the horrified look, the sudden shock, the horrendous revelation. Perhaps this was what was meant by 'And the books were opened'. Perhaps this was the apostle Paul's meaning: 'Their conscience meanwhile accusing... them...'

He knew that some people suffered deep misery. For this, the Presence or the conscience could not be blamed. Their real problem had been that they had opposed the Presence, and argued with the conscience, and refused to believe the Word of truth. Each excursion into the false and the untrue was wreaking further devastation. To be alienated from one's own conscience was like being divided within oneself. Where the conscience is always an enemy, anger grows within the host-person as insecurity continues to plague it.

Gradually he began to understand what once he had so simply known, namely that he (or she) who lives in gentle fellowship with the conscience is a quiet and serene person. He saw that the one who carries no guilt is the true person, not merely coping with life, but living life richly. He saw with something of wonder and excitement that a guiltless human being is a stimulated person, one in whom the gifts of creation are not bound by paralysing fear, but whose gifts are free to be expressed. He realised in himself that urgings of thought were coming. It would be easy, in one person, to write poetry—indeed imperative. He knew that in another,

art and painting would flow. Thinking, too, would take on a new form. Instead of following traditional patterns of thinking and stereotypes of cogitation\*—moving steadily from point A to point Z—the mind would be free to roam laterally and have what seemed rich creative thinking. He knew that of course there is no such thing as creative thinking, but rather, thinking that encompasses the vast areas of knowing and willing and feeling which have resulted from the creation God has evoked and the powerful forces He has released into His universe.

What he came to see was the amazing richness of the death of Christ on the Cross. Whilst he had known that resurrection must represent enormous power, he had not realised the immense power that lies within and issues from suffering. In fact, he had taken too lightly—for many years—the events of that night when forgiveness had come to him. True, he had found liberation in forgiveness, but had tended to regard it as an initial experience which rated itself in some kind of instalment process. One day his eyes were opened to see that the sufferer, Christ, had taken into his mind, his body, his heart and every element of himself, the entire corpus of guilt which was the sum total of man's evil.

Had the Sufferer's passion not been holy, had his love had any object such as tolerance and pity in regard to evil, then his suffering would have been weak and useless. Guilt required total judgment, and in some internal way Christ absorbed this terrible judgment, expending it wholly in his own holy love, until it had played itself out to exhaustion and extinction. Every element of guilt had, so to speak, a right to fulfil its evil self, to work itself out to that fulfilment which was at the same time its extinction. On the one hand, this could be seen to be what the Jews called 'the curse'. This was

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\* That is. one-dimensional thinking, as over and against lateral and involuntary thinking

also the judgement of pitiless and unrelenting law. In a personal way, it was the anger of God upon evil, and His intention—and action—to destroy evil, utterly abolishing it by the voluntary suffering of His Son, so that now guilt was fulfilled, exhausted, and utterly abolished.

This renewed vision of the judgement upon human evil greatly excited and energised him. In his grown manhood and new maturity, he realised a powerful truth: until, by the revealing power of the Holy Spirit, a person's conscience sees that all his sin has been judged and dealt with utterly on the Cross, *the conscience can never be at peace*. Thus the heart of man can never know tranquillity, ie. that serenity which is the creational right and nature of all who are truly human, their true humanity having been restored to them by forgiveness and what the Word of truth calls 'propitiation', ie. the practical justification of a sinful person by the holy and redeeming love of Christ, the true Sufferer.

He saw so clearly that every human being—even the Tigers of this world—are driven to justify themselves by the works they seek to do. Self-justification is man's constant work. It becomes an obsession and an enslaving practice. Man is always in fear lest he fail, lest he appear to be guilty of this or that. This obsession is not always seen as such because it is a game or practice exercised by the whole human race—no person being excepted.

Once he thought, 'My, what a powerful change would be wrought in human behaviour and in human action if the guilt of the race were entirely erased, and self-justification consequently disappeared from the behaviour of man!'

For himself, he knew he was learning wonderfully to live in this state. The apostle Paul's famous statement, 'There is therefore now no condemnation...' was a most powerful factor in his life. It helped to keep him from guilt and so from the power which evil exercised by reason of guilt.

He saw that this would be the one way—the only way—to

change the behaviour and action of the human race. He marvelled that there was a way. Equally he marvelled that human beings did not know this, and that where there was an inkling, it was not pursued, not followed up. He began to love to tell his friends and others that this was the simple way, the sure solution to their problems. The Tigers of this world seemed proof against the penetration of this truth. The 'do-gooders', ie. the 'self-justifiers', were shocked, even raising an outcry against him, but he pressed on to tell them the joys of forgiveness and the grace of God which would justify them, *freely*.

In all this, he felt no compulsion to justify himself by his act of telling. It sprang from him through the motivation of grateful love. Along with it, he was entranced by the beauty of creation. No longer was there any division in his mind in reward to farming, true daily pleasure, the exercise of writing, and the life he enjoyed with his wife, his children, his grandchildren, his friends, and even those who constituted themselves his enemies.

This was because he was a man who was learning to live free from guilt. The truth which had been with him from birth was proving itself the true source of beautiful human liberty.

## Comes the Forgetfulness

Comes the forgetfulness, often,  
 When in our dreams we dream again  
 Other than visions given by God—  
 Dreams that He gave in night  
 For our living by day—  
 Dreams that we can accomplish,  
 Heights we can climb,  
 Gifts we can use  
 Wherever man is found.

In this our love and compassion,  
 This purity and obsession  
 With suffering man, we would give,  
 We would heal the wounded world  
 Which seemingly, God has neglected.  
 We would bring the message of love  
 Through our human loves and pitying.  
 We would renew the whole world.

So we work, and so we strive,  
 Sometimes it is in the lonely night,  
 The heart-breaking dawn, the reality  
 Of the glaring day. We work and ply  
 The gifts and graces that we have  
 Without recourse to heaven.

See then the anger come,  
 The bitterness, the fist shaking  
 At unfeeling heaven. The recourse  
 To our resources. The endeavour  
 To fill out the needs of man—

The horizontal needs in all that is  
 Between earth and sky.

Lord, teach us of this foolishness:  
 Teach us to know no river flows  
 From us, from what we are,  
 And where we are. Teach us  
 That the eternal source is You and You alone,  
 But You in all Your grace  
 For all this needy world.

Lord, lift us in the vertical,  
 Lift us from the horizontal;  
 Help us from there above,  
 Seated as we are in heavenlies,  
 To see and know our human selves,  
 Our limitations, yet the graces given  
 To have compassion in the world of man.

## The Love Builders

And it came to pass, in this vision of mine, that I saw a great desert place. I say 'great', because, as far as the eye could see, all was desert. Not that it was merely sand, for it was not. Indeed, I knew in my mind that the soft was in fact rich and useful, but at this point in time and place, there was little or no moisture. I knew that this place, given great rains, would blossom as the rose. Some of the growth upon it gave signs that the land could be most fruitful.

I could see hills in the distance and, from my vantage point, they seemed both ancient and noble. The time the vision came was in the hour before the dawn fully broke. I knew that the sun would burst with a riot of colour on those silent grey mounds of hills.

Around me was a gentle silence. The breeze that blew was soft and cool on my skin. So I was filled with quiet anticipation for what was about to happen.

As the sun suddenly tumbled across the rim of the world, breaking on us from the east, I was amazed at what I saw. Doubtless each vision is unique, for each carries its own message. What shocked me in this vision, however, was the sight of modern manufactured materials, lying in the grey sands of that barren place. Doubtless here and there was an ancient acacia bush, such as Moses may have seen aflame with mysterious fire; also smaller bushes that had clung to life through dry years were also present. But between their rare appearances were great mounds of shining plastic, thick long rolls of gleaming polythene sheeting.

Also, in other piles, were sets of rods of various sizes, made from hard plastic. The incongruity of them all struck me sharply, and I began to laugh. So harsh was my laughter that

it sounded like an invasion of cawing crows, although, to be sure, not even a crow seemed- to inhabit that desert.

Then came the voice. 'Arise and build!'

I looked around in astonishment, but could see no one. Again the voice said, 'Arise and build.'

It was then that I heard the multi-voiced response. 'Yes, Lord, we will arise and build!'

To my amazement, I suddenly saw that the desert was inhabited. There was a large group of people, earnest in their features, eager in their intentions, but poised; for the detailed instructions they needed. It was clear that they did not notice me or think about my presence. Their thoughts were upon the piles of materials.

They seemed suspended in their actions, as they awaited their instructions. As they stood poised in a kind of suspended animation, I saw the white-clad figure of a being. It was approaching me, and in my heart there suddenly came a sweet sort of confusion, a tripping of my heart, a painful yet beautiful thudding within my breast. I longed desperately to fall upon the ground and worship this wise and gentle creature. It was not to be, however.

He held up a hand of salutation. 'Peace be to you,' he said, and as he spoke an ageless calm fell upon me. It was as though all pain I had known, all uncertainty and insecurity, fled gently from me, and I was alone with this serene and noble creature, destined, forever, to be at peace. The tranquillity that possessed me calmed my trembling and filled me with a glad assurance about being a man, about being in this world, and, in particular, about being in this desert.

He said peacefully, 'Have no fear. You have been brought here to witness the action of the people of God. You have been brought to be a testimony to the grace of God and His thoughtful sovereignty.'

Now my heart was filled with joy, joy that did not disturb this new-found serenity but rather undergirded it. Rarely in

my life have I known these first-fruits of the Spirit—love, joy and peace—but now I knew them in truth, and I am bound to say that they were most beautiful to experience.

In my vision, I knew, rather than was told, that this was one of the timeless Elders of God. Call him an angel, an authority, a prince or a celestial—it does not matter—he was one of the wise ones, gentle, strong and most noble.

‘See,’ he said, ‘they are about to begin.’

It came as no surprise to me—such things happen in visions—to find myself above the ground, and given a vantage point which allowed me to see clearly all things that were happening.

I saw the eagerness of the workers as they ran forward to take the offered materials. Already, in their minds, they had selected their sites. I saw them grasp the strong plastic rods and begin to lay them on the desert surface.

At first I was puzzled. This use of modern materials seemed so incongruous to this ancient desert, and in my heart I was sure that it was of the East, having its own history of civilisations growing, living, dying, being subjugated, rising from the ashes of defeat to win its place again in the sun and the rains. You may think such a conclusion very surprising, seeing there were no evidences of this historic past, but the presence of the beautiful one conveyed such thoughts even without his uttering them. My mind’s eye could range over that past history without much effort.

Again, as the incongruity of it all confronted me, I said to the great and gentle Elder, ‘Why should so much of modernity invade this ancient and honourable desert?’

He smiled at that. ‘It is true that modernity has invaded it, but then, from time to time, it has known such invasions. People bring their thoughts and contributions to their civilisations in their own times. In that sense, what was once new has become old and venerated, but once it represented the newness of the mind of the time. Only after a time was it

viewed as honourable and ancient.’

Somewhat puzzled, I watched the men and women who were manipulating the manufactured rods. I saw that they were well-made and that their users were quite ingenious. Rods fitted to rods. In no time, a foundation of base-work had been laid, and now, as the rods were interconnected, what appeared to be walls were rising in a network of interrelated rods.

The Elder saw my surprise and laughed. ‘You see, your friends are quite clever,’ he said.

I could see that these folk were quite brilliant, but the idea of their being my friends quite putted me.

‘I am sure I do not know these people,’ I said.

He nodded. ‘Just watch them,’ he said, ‘and you will see that they have the characteristics of your friends. Indeed, some of them are your close acquaintances.’

That surprised me, so I began to watch one or two of them with deep concentration. I was astonished to discover that one man was an old friend from the days of seminary studies. His name was Aldershott, Colin Aldershott. I could remember some of the envy he inspired in me. His mental agility often made me feel quite foolish. Now, as I observed him, I could see his amazing facility for rapid building. I was beginning to see that all of these busy people were occupied in building something. Colin seemed to be outstripping all.

‘He is very gifted,’ I said. ‘He builds very quickly.’

The Elder nodded. I glanced sharply at him, not knowing whether he approved of this facility or not. ‘He is most competent,’ he murmured.

As I turned eastward, I was surprised to see, against the sun, a completed dome made from the interconnecting rods. The work had been rapidly completed. I saw the builder motion to a companion and then they both took a roll of the polythene plastic and began to unroll it. They had selected a smooth area of the desert where there were no stones or

growth of small shrubs. As they laid out the plastic sheet, it glimmered and glistened in the sun. It was like a sheet of beaten gold, edged with silver.

Having unrolled it, they measured it according to their required calculations. I was surprised at how snugly it fitted the dome of rod-work. I was keenly curious to watch the way in which they fastened it to the dome and then proceeded to manufacture doors and windows from rods and sheeting. It was like a miracle, watching them complete the job.

'What do you think now of friend Robert and his dear wife?' the beautiful one asked.

As I peered, I could see it was Robert, without doubt: Robert Thistlewaite, a person I had met in the missionary training college. I had always admired his technical mind. He was a man of methodologies and, as such, attempted tasks which were soon completed. It seemed to me in those college days, that security meant much to him. He limited himself to obtainable goals, but achieved them with genuine success. Even as I watched him secure this building goal, I gave a sigh.

The Elder smiled. 'If you look inside, you will see that Robert is making his dome very livable.' 'What is the dome for?' I asked.

A smile hovered on the lips of the celestial one. 'You have a saying,' he said, 'and I alter it only a little. "There's no place like dome".'

I conceded that heavenly Elders, being such free creations, must also have a sense of humour, and I smiled in appreciation.

'You mean that is home for Robert and his wife Evelyn?' 'Oh yes,' he said, 'but after a time Robert will be moved to build another for someone who needs it. Having done this, he will go back to improving his dome facilities!'

My attention was caught by a net of rod-work which was soaring up into the sky. It was of unusual proportions. I glanced interrogatively at the Elder, who again smiled.

'Do you not recognise another friend?' he asked.

As I peered, I could see the anxious and visionary features of a fellow missionary.

'Why,' I exclaimed, 'that's Rodney!'

Now I was not surprised. He was always on vast ventures. Not for him the mediocre operations which some of us knew. Not for him the dull pedestrian ways of life. He had a mind like an eagle's. He soared into the heaven of heavens. His brilliance outpaced the rest of us. He was a noble creature, indeed he was the opposite of Robert. Robert was a plain fellow really, and gratified by modest and immediate accomplishments. Not so Rodney. He planned on a large scale and seemed competent enough to realise and fulfil his plans.

Again I sighed, and again the light smile played about the lips of the celestial Elder. He point away from Rodney. As I looked, I saw single persons building small bivouac-like tents. They took little time in doing this and were soon ensconced in their humble dwellings. I noticed that they were lining the small tents inside. They did not seem to appreciate the clear plastic, and were lining it with a further spread of green sheeting.

'They are the single people,' he said. 'They like to privatise their operations.'

'You mean unmarried?' I asked.

The Elder's sense of humour got the better of him. 'You humans have a strange saying,' he said. 'You call unmarried people "single", yet you do not call married people "double". No, some of them are married, and some of them are not. They are just people who wish to privatise their lives. They cannot accept the principle of community. It is too emotionally demanding. They prefer to individualise themselves, and they see all life—and death for that matter—from this vantage point.'

Gradually the meaning and significance of the vision was beginning to impress itself upon me. Had I seen the vision in

another age, I would have seen it in a non-plastic era. Perhaps they would have built with more durable materials. I do not know. Being a child of my own age, I recognised the plastic symbol. It made for quick building, present durability and speedy adaptation.

I seemed now released from needing explanations from my mental guide, the Elder. I quickly recognised old friends, and even some enemies. I seemed to understand what they were about. They *were all building*.

When I reached that point, I could then perceive *why* they were building, *what* they were building, and *how* such building typified them as persons. What I did not understand was the wider significance of all this building. Doubtless time and space were telescoped before my eyes, and action appeared to be almost frenetic, so I knew that I would have to ask my new and celestial friend what was the purpose and significance of it all.

'In a sense, you already know,' he said. 'It is just the matter of building.'

I nodded. 'Also,' I said, 'it is temporary and flimsy building.'

He shook his head and looked earnestly at me. 'No! No! my friend. Do not think that. The materials used are symbols of materials of a more permanent nature.' He paused, and then said, 'You know your Book, of course, and know what it says about building.'

I delved into my stores of theology and biblical knowledge. 'Christ the truth is the foundation as set out in the substance of the prophetic and apostolic truth.'

He nodded. I continued. 'Upon that foundation, believing man is expected to lay further building materials.' 'That is true,' he agreed.

'It is the *kind* of materials we lay,' I said, 'which determines the eternal or temporary nature of our participation and contribution.'

'Very good,' he said. 'It is a matter of gold, silver, precious stones, or consumable wood, hay, stubble and the like.'

This time I nodded. 'To be tried by fire of judgement,' I said.

He agreed. 'That fire is love,' he said. 'One can only build by love. If not by love, then all is futile.'

I thought of the work of Robert and Rodney, and others. I asked, 'Is it possible to build great projects without love?' I could see folk swarming over the network of Rodney's highrise project.

He nodded. 'You can have great projects with love or without it. Likewise, simple projects with or without love.'

I shook my head helplessly. 'Then it is impossible to discern the value of what we are seeing before our eyes.'

He shook his head. 'Not impossible at all. You can easily detect in human eyes whether the work they do springs from pure and free love, or just from insecurity and fear and the urge to prove oneself. There is no reason for anyone to prove himself to God or man. Long ago, God made this provision for man by His grace. He justifies every human person who will have faith in His grace. From this foundation alone will a man begin to build in love.'

The words shot into my heart like a golden shaft of light. They flooded the uneasy recesses of my mind, enlightening them. They gripped my affections strongly so that suddenly I was flooded afresh with that joy and tranquillity, that serenity and love which from the first had emanated from this

'True building, then,' I said, 'must be love building.' 'Of course,' he agreed calmly. 'How else could it be?' For some time I watched the efforts of the builders. I could not but admire their continuous persistence, their indefatigability, their compounding confidence and success. As though to counter these successful ones, there were others who had left off building. Rods did not seem to fit, plastic became

twisted and awry. Projects seemed incapable of being completed. I was silent before the mixture of success and failure, of hopeful labour and hopeless abandonment of projects. The beautiful one must have known the point to which my thoughts had reached.

‘Now I will tell you,’ he said, ‘the true meaning of your vision, so that, in turn, you will convey its significance to others. It will also prove to be a guide to you in the work you do—of building.’

‘The building you see has been going on since the creation of man. Some men and women are builders and some are destroyers. Some destroy in rebellion, anger, bitterness and evil. They will accomplish nothing. At the end, nothingness will be their reward; indeed, their eternal loss. The gifts for building are the inheritance of the human race. Not to build is evil, the most dire evil of all.’

‘Others build, but only for themselves. They seek to secure themselves. They carry this spirit into all they do. Some—when they become persons of faith—still persist in building for themselves. Like Robert, some build for immediate security and to prove they can be successful. Others build so that their fine projects may be seen of all. They need the praise of men to encourage them, but such praise has nothing of the nature of permanency about it. Hence, when they succeed, they are bound to attempt further great projects.’

The Elder paused. ‘These are the sad builders,’ he said, ‘and they will be sadder when, at the last, they discover that little or nothing of what they have built remains. It returns to the dry desert because it is degenerable. Love was absent, hence its temporal nature.’

I remembered the phrases, ‘...love builds up’; ‘...upbuilding itself in love’.

‘Some work will remain,’ said the gentle Elder. ‘Done out of love, it is permanent.’ ‘But this plastic,’ I objected, ‘this artificial industrial rod-

work, this material of temporary quality?’

He smiled. ‘It is but a symbol,’ he said. ‘It is not given to you—or even to me—to see the hidden work. Only He sees that.’

I felt a tremor pass through me, and I remained silent. ‘Man, as you know,’ he said, ‘looks on the outside, but He looks on the inside—on the heart. He alone knows the motives. He alone can discern the true love and the false.’

I nodded dumbly. ‘Love,’ said the Elder, ‘is most free— not as to its cost, but as to its nature, as to its action.’

Again, within me the golden flow of light and the deep serenity of true understanding. I murmured to myself, ‘He is love.’

The Elder continued ‘Building is not an exercise. It is not even an apprenticeship for later building. It is something for which man was created. So he builds and is man: so he is truly man and he builds.’

He paused. ‘Do not be deluded by the clever builders, by the competent and brilliant ones. They may or may not be building. Love is not ostentatious. Love may use brilliance but in the quiet way; even the concealed way. But it must be love alone that builds. True love is always present with faith and hope, for without these, love does not work. Even so, some attempt to build by faith alone and they must fail. Both faith and hope must work by love.’

He smiled. ‘We need not make too deep and mysterious a thing of this love. It is very simple. God’s love flows to man and man works out of that love.’

He paused for a moment and stared down at the busy scene. ‘You must not condemn a man because he is anxious to build,’ he said. ‘This is his great reason for being man. He has been made like his Maker.’

‘Even so,’ he continued, ‘man deceives himself by what he builds. He is so sure it is eternal, and in this he may be

My mind was working furiously. Suddenly I saw the frenetic planning of man, the intellectual lines of his study, the distillation and abstraction of principles even from the Book, the use of methods so that all operations were in his own power, scarcely requiring the presence or intimate guidance and empowering of the Spirit. 'How man loves his independence, even in the midst of his building operations!' I thought, and another thought answered me. 'Yes, and how clever he thinks himself to be!' Both thoughts tempered my new joy with something of sadness, especially as I thought of the innumerable books written, conferences organised, and clever builders recognised.

'Here in this desert,' the Elder was saying, 'are the tribes of man living. They themselves may come for this work of building which you are now seeing, but they will be blind to it. They have a history of their own. They have a notion and a tradition of a great city. These pilgrims and wanderers are not impressed by the excellent notions of brilliant men. They simply wish to come to the true sight of that which now—inspired by love—they believe in by faith and look for in hope.'

It was then that I saw that in the heart of man there is always the basis of his nostalgia, the cause of his deepest longing, the desire of his most inward and secret heart.

I saw it—in vision—as Paul may have seen into the third heaven. Less of its profound mysteries I may have seen, but not less of its beauty.

I saw it there, forming itself from the grey of the desert sand, more powerful than the distant hills, and before it the plastic efforts of man—deeply symbolic though they may have been—melted away in a trice, as though being nothing in themselves.

Then arose the beatific vision, the Golden City, the Eternal

Temple, the Sanctuary of God (the Father of His holy family), the Dwelling Place of the Eternal.

It was at once the most beautiful of all creations, a Bride to the glorious Bridegroom, a holy daughter to the Heavenly Father, a wife to the Eternal Son, and the Mother of us all.

The Elder, too, was no less entranced than the redeemed earthling who stood beside him, reflecting the glory of his Creator. Together we gazed at that most beautiful sight, gloriously adorned with the jewellery of love and holiness, and our hearts were drawn out by the incorruptible beauty of it all.

I know not whether, in that vision, we stayed gazing for a fleeting moment or for an eternity, but I do know that the impression of it was indelibly imprinted upon my soul, and shall be thus forever.

What also will remain in my memory and echo forever in the vaults of my mind, are the last words of the Elder as we stood gazing.

'This, my son,' he said, 'this is what the people of God have been building since the days of their creation.

'This is what love, and only love, has built. Co-workers with the Father, His Son and His Spirit, His true people have been not about their own labour but His—the true labour of love.'

As the City dissolved before my eyes, and as the desert once again appeared, I knew the truth and heart of that vision.

No Elder stood beside me, and none appeared before me, but the Vision had entered into me and I knew that I must write it down. It would be a warning to those who destroy and those who futilely seek to build from their own motives and resources. It would also be true encouragement to those who seek to build in love, albeit little is seen for their work except by the eyes of faith, and little is expected, except in hope. True, he who builds in love scarcely knows he loves, but for

him the Vision comes to encourage and renew.

His eyes are set forever on that Golden City, the object of his labours and the true home of his Love.

## Voiding the Void

Summer grass on a summerless sea,  
The humourless clotted clods of green,  
Yesterday's detritus drifting towards nothing,  
Aimlessly rocking and rolling  
On a goalless tide expecting nil  
In the pointless drift.

In a cemetery of the old kind—  
Tall headstones, broken columns,  
Stony books half opened and half closed,  
Angels in frozen movement—I have felt  
That death had some honour, life some reverence  
Even where man's tragedy of violence  
(His hatreds, murders, rapes and incest)  
Had anger's irrational reason;  
Some cruel attempt to vindicate  
The injustice of being born,  
Some shaking of wrathful hands  
At an insensate deity.

Where there is the drift however  
Of the humourless detritus,  
The non-sighing indifference  
Of the deadened mind, here  
There is nought for nothing  
And nothing for something,  
Only the endless goalless drift  
Of the self-negating humanity.  
Deity dies drearily  
In the soulless mind; the suicide  
Of created dignity is executed

In the nerveless nihilism  
Of voiding self-denial.

Here, then, thee are new cemeteries,  
Anonymous plaques on flat ground,  
Bland caskets with their bronze inscriptions  
Nearly parcelling man into neutral death,  
Homogenising the eternal dimensions  
Into metred plots. God save the mark l  
God save the Queen! God save anything  
On which man stamps the mediocrity  
Of his simpering stupidity!  
'Here lies nothing, to the empty glory  
Of Nothingness Itself.' Praise be  
To the endless end, and the death even  
Of authentic nostalgia!

On the other hand there is the true ocean,  
Seas of surprising surgings,  
Launchings afresh of dolphins and seals,  
Cavorting of whales, shootings of sharks  
In the translucent depths and the creamy crestings  
Of today's depthless movements.  
There is no mere drift but currents  
That move in their appointed directions  
Fulfilling their functional goals.  
Nothing that happens is merely repeated,  
But each is unique, each thing, each happening  
Within the purposeful movement  
Of its patterned creation.

Repentance in man's mind  
Is the facing of the truth;  
It is the end to deviousness,  
The cunning rationalising

Of things-as-they-are to emptiness,  
The spiritless voiding  
Of the ontological reality.  
Repentance is an oceanic joy,  
The dynamic surging of the hearted mind  
Acknowledging the dignity  
Of God and man, of man-with-God,  
And the acceptance  
Of immortal human dignity  
Given in creation and redeemed  
In the Eternal Cross, and  
The Resurrection from the dead.

## Denying the Truth (or, affirming it)

I guess the quotes I am about to make from one of the letters of the early apostles cannot be said to be—as is often said of certain passages—'hid in the text'. Generally nothing is tucked away in an obscure corner of the great inscripturated word. It is there—strongly obvious—for all to see, to read, to ponder and to be astonished.

John the apostle writes these words which for too many years met my eyes but were not perceived by my heart in their great and dynamic significance. So important are they that I feel like tolling every bell in every land, lighting beacons on all shores of all countries, even earth's remotest shores—be there inhabitants in those lands or not.

I prepare your heart as reader (whether you are familiar with this quote or not), so that as a person you will come with unaccustomed expectancy, enormous and grand anticipation, as well as with new astonishment and excited joy.

Even now you may be saying, 'This writer is exaggerating. He has found something which in his eyes is news-worthy. Because he is a prolific writer\*', he now seeks to induce his own excitement in our wearied minds, insisting that he is some gold prospector who has fortuitously happened upon a chance nugget.'

No, this is not so! I say this sharply, urgently. Often it takes many years—whether through human dullness, ensconced laziness, or just through unconsciously persistent

obtuseness—before one sees a blinding truth, a brilliant revelation that causes one to say, 'Of course! How stupid I have been! How could I ever have missed such a revelation?' Then one groans at the understanding missed in all those years, an understanding which—had it been shared—could have been a source of powerful illumination and a dynamic motivation for truth; truth, I say, with a sharp cutting edge, and with an unrelenting penetration into the minds of men and women, so that their hearts were gripped strongly and their wills constrained by the immense grace now possessing them.

Do not think this introduction to my quote to be overly extended or exaggerated. I am aware that too often our eyes slide over the inscripturated word. Some have a reverence for it that is too pious to give it immediate dynamic. Some love the words, phrases, clauses and statements with a cloying love: so much so that they do not hear them as the demanding word of the Creator-Lord, as the trumpeted announcement of the prophet, the irreversible truth of the divinely accredited apostle. In their too easy acceptance of the sacred writer, they demean his utterance by a total refusal to be critical in thinking, thoughtful in sensible contemplation and discerning in meeting the direct word given by God Himself. In a sense the words read are not the immediate direct oracles of God. Were they so, then tears might suddenly start in the eyes, the emotions might be profoundly moved, and the heart might leap out at the living pronouncement of the God of love and action.

No, my introduction is far from being an exaggerated or unduly prolonged one. I want you to read with opened eyes, to scan the words of the prophetic apostles, for it could be that having done this a vista of the eternal truth could then open wonderfully before your eyes.

The immediate quote from the first letter of the apostle John is best read in its true context, which is, of course, the entire epistle. When the entire letter is read and absorbed—as

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\* This is true. Many of my literary critics complain that I write too much. Imagine that! How sad a thing to be a gluttonous writer, a bibulous scribe, a perpetual scribbler, loading my wares on unsuspecting readers!

much as is possible in one's present reading—then our particular quote abstracted will be seen in all its importance. So then I quote, earnestly hoping that you as reader will have done it justice.

‘Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.’ (i John 2:18-25).

You have now read the quote. I would be greatly interested to know and gauge your reaction or response. Are you mildly disappointed, or even greatly surprised, that I should spend so prolonged an introduction on so ordinary and regular a section of Johannine thought? Do you fail to see any special significance in the passage? I ask this because one can easily miss the very heart of the matter. The apostle who wrote it had a deep and rich concept in mind. His concept is of immense significance, but to understand it one must look deeply into what he has written, and ponder it. This scribbler—your present writer—has an ache in his heart that this truth may not be overlooked, because its essence is indispensable to the functional nature of man. Only when one understands what John is saying can one's emotional and relational needs be fulfilled.

The scribe—when paraphrased—is saying something like the following:

‘My little children—those who have come into the family of God through the words I have spoken and the love I have given—I have written urgently to warn you that evil is on the march. It is not a crude evil which may be scorned, but an intelligent evil which—though totally wrong—is quite brilliant in the art of deceiving. This evil is called antichrist. It is evil which not only opposes Christ, but which also seeks to set itself up *in the place of Christ*. It seeks to wean men and women from God and His Christ and provide a substitute which will—ostensibly—satisfy the needs of man, and make him emotionally and relationally independent of God.

‘Already some have been deceived by this antichrist. The question may be asked, "Were they ever truly of us? Did they ever genuinely experience God and His Christ? Did they ever know the grace of spiritual new birth (of which I speak much in this letter)?" Had they, they would have remained with us—adverse persecution notwithstanding. No, they were not of us. It is a good thing that they have parted company with us. They have so easily been deceived, and claimed, by this antichrist evil.

‘As for you, you have had the teaching, the anointing of God. He has poured out His Holy Spirit upon you and so led you into all the truth—as indeed His Son promised us would happen. It has happened. Because of this, you know all the truth, ie. the only truth there is, the truth which/s God, His nature, person, word and acts—for they are the sum of the truth.

‘Observe then how antichrist approaches you. He is a liar, a deceiver, a seducer from the powerful and eternal truth. If you will (and you should), you should see through his subterfuges, you should unmask his lies, for his lie is of the most terrible order. He denies, with plausible arguments, that Jesus is the Messiah. For Jesus to be Messiah is a claim that discloses the eternal love of God, and the complete salvation, not only of believing persons, but the whole elect people of

God, of whom I have also spoken in this letter.

'Now this antichrist is not content with denying that Jesus is Messiah. He goes on to even more terrible things; he sets out to subvert us from Jesus as the Son and God as the Father. This is a dreadful ambition, a despicable endeavour. He is seeking to put us back where God was not seen as the true Father of faithful men and women, and His Son not seen as eternal Son but as only a pretender messiah.

'If he should succeed—this evil antichrist—then he would banish essential Fatherhood (which is irretrievably and inseparably related to essential sonship) from all the earth. I tell you, let that which you have heard from your beginning in the Gospel remain, dwell, and abide dynamically within you. Namely, let the truth of His Fatherhood and His Son's Sonship be the truth which possesses you; otherwise you will be disenfranchised of this Father and the Son. You will not then live and dwell and have your being in them—the true Father and the true Son. To know them, to live in them and to have them live in you, is what He promised: the very possession of the deep knowledge and experience of, eternal life. The knowing, the relationship, the living in the Father and the Son, is true life. It is eternal life.'

What I have made here is of course an extended paraphrase. Having read John's writings for a period of over fifty years, I suppose I can make some moderate claim to being conversant with his mind. So then, I know that behind the eight verses I have abstracted from his letter lies a most powerful understanding of the Triune nature of God and His actions as Creator, Father/Son/Spirit, and Redeemer, to say nothing of His work of regenerating His creation which has endured a certain spoiling from evil powers and human sin.

I am now going to attempt to give some of the thinking of John which is behind his warning to his readers. At the same

time, I am bound to say that this thinking is not only Johannine. It is Pauline. It is Petrine. It is more—it is the ethos of all Scripture, the true genus of the word. It concerns God Himself.

John is really teaching us afresh what he knows the Holy Spirit has already taught us—that God is Father, that Jesus Christ is His Son, and that the Spirit has impressed this upon our whole being, starting from the inward man (or, the 'secret heart'\*) and moving out into every part of man's humanity.

In the same letter, John exclaims, 'See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God; *and so we are...* Beloved, *we are God's children now*; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3: 1-3). John is exclaiming out of some astonishment at the comprehension of what it means to be God's children. He understands the basic principle of Fatherhood and Sonship.

What he really knows is that God's Fatherhood is not figurative, not analogical, but actual. We say in today's language that the Fatherhood of God is ontological. This Fatherhood is true Fatherhood. It is of the essence of God's being. He always was (to context it in our time-grid) Father. There never was when He was not Father. This presupposes that there never was when the Son was not Son. The categories of Fatherhood and Sonship are innate in the Godhead. The New Testament indicates that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and at once also the Spirit of the Son. Hence the social integrity of the Triune Godhead. God is Father before He creates, and His Son is Son also before he participates in creation.

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\* See Psalm 51:6. This translation of the RSV is especially descriptive. See with it Psalm 1:2 and Romans 7: 22.

The implications of this are enormous. I trust that you, as reader, do not give way to the contemporary custom of getting a headache when a few demanding thoughts are presented to you, and that you will persist with this trifle of theological reasoning. Yes, the implications are enormous. One of them is that God did not become Father when He redeemed man and so opened up to him the way to sonship, the authority to become sons (or, children) of God. No. God was always Father.

Paul calls him 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Ephesians 1:3). This means that God is the Father, uniquely, at the level of Godhead, of the one (unique) Son who became man. In this vein, John says, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as of the *only* Son of the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). In eternity then—before our 'true beginning'—the Father was Father and the Son, Son.

When then God said, 'Let us make man in our image', it must mean He allotted a likeness to Himself that involved the reflection of His own Being. Christ the Son is called 'the likeness of His glory and the express image of His person' (Hebrews 1:3). Doubtless in this—as the Son—he was (is) unique, but for man to be 'the image and glory of God', he must have been like the Son, ie. in the image of the Father. He must then have been creationally a son.

Without doubt, he abdicated or forfeited his sonship in the Fall, but the ontological lines or elements of sonship must have remained. For him (like the prodigal son) to come back to the Father must surely mean that there had once been a Father and a home, albeit the elder brother was—in character-incongruous in that family. When man is regenerated, he is not given a *new* category as a son, but a *renewed* category which is filial. The dynamic significance of this is that God is actually Father to His new (renewed) children, and not merely figuratively (or analogically) a Father, for this

would make His children merely figurative. They could not ontologically cry 'Abba!', ie. 'Dear Father!'

The implications and ramifications of a human person now being permitted—indeed motivated—to cry 'Father', are powerful and numberless. The most significant *personal* implication is that the *filial* nature of man is wholly fulfilled in the *paternal* nature and love of God. Without doubt Paul teaches that our *personal* sonship is a participation in the actual sonship of the Son: '... for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many as were baptised *into* Christ, have *put on Christ*' (Galatians 3:26-27). Paul then explains (in Galatians 4:4-6) that this sonship comes to us existentially in and by the presence of the Spirit. God sends 'the Spirit of His Son' into our hearts, and the Spirit in our hearts cries, 'Abba!' In this sense we receive the sonship, especially the functional Sonship of Christ from his conception to his ascension.\*

We can conclude then that *personally* our sonship arises from participation in, and the resources of, Christ's Sonship, these being communicated by the Holy Spirit, ie. the Spirit of Sonship.

Paul also teaches us that the *corporate* sonship is immensely significant. In a number of passages he shows us that 'we are all one in Christ Jesus', that we are a new humanity, and a family, ie. 'the household of God'. What he is really saying is that there is the ontological family, the true family of God under the Fatherhood of God, and this is through the Sonship of Jesus Christ, as also through his (Christ's) ontological brotherhood.†

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\* The Spirit is present in Christ's conception, birth, baptism, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, as the Gospels and Epistles indicate.

† See Galatians 3:26-29, I Corinthians 12:13, Colossians 3:11, Romans 5:12-21, Ephesians 2:11-22, I Timothy 3:15, of Hebrews 3:1-6, I Peter 2:4-10.

Now I will try to work out—as it has come to me—the urgency, power and message of John's exhortation to his readers against antichrist. John is saying, in effect:

'If, for any reason, you forget or refuse to believe that God is Father and Jesus Christ is His Son and you are the Father's children, then you will fail to have the personal fulfilment of sonship. The emotional needs you have, which pertain to your *creational and redemptional* sonship, will be wholly denied. The *functional* nature of your sonship will be impeded. You will have the *drive* of sonship but not the fulfilment. You will have to live a life which is malfunctional, dysfunctional, disorientated and dislocated. *You will be denying your own personal essential sonship.*

'The second great and deleterious effect will be that you will lose your participation in functional familyhood. You may imitate familyhood with others, in the context of their fraternal response, but it will be empty. *There can be no true family without the Father, without the Son.*'

The implications are even wider, even more serious. The Gospel of Christ, if it does not peak and climax in the Fatherhood of God, is truncated. It is virtually useless. True, it can give man what is called 'salvation', but then what is salvation—except an escape from penal judgement and punishment—if the redeemed person merely bows in gratitude to the Judge for pardon and cannot stretch forth his arms to Him as his Father? What is the system of creation if it is not headed up by 'the one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all and in all' (Ephesians 4:6)? Indeed, what kind of a God is He of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is *not* named (Ephesians 3:14-15)? Paul says, 'There be gods many, and lords many, but for us there is *one* God, the Father... and *one* Lord, Jesus Christ' (I Corinthians 8:5-6). Now the implications for the human race are many and

most powerful. If God is Father—and He is—then man can have his personal fulfilment in sonship under the Father, brotherhood under the Elder Brother, and in the familyhood of all the children of God.\* What we need to say is that God's Fatherhood, Christ's Brotherhood, and the being of the Family of God are indispensable to the functional, relational, emotional, vocational and personal fulfilment of man.

This is most important, for the grace that redeems man is at once Fatherly, Filial, of the Spirit, and Familial. If it is not seen in this light then we have a church which is not the family, not the household of God, but *the aggregate* (not even the congregate) of 'saved' persons. It is not constitutionally the functional family, fulfilling the emotional needs of its members. No matter what New Testament doctrines there are of 'family', 'household', 'body of Christ', 'people of God', 'the bride of Christ' or 'the temple of God', it will remain an organisation, fragmented as it is into denominations, experimental units, and sects.

The functional over-all bonding of the people of God lies in His essential nature of Father. The *accession* of sinful men and women is through the Son, via the revelatory ministry of the Holy Spirit. The ontological basis of Familyhood is the nature of the Triune Godhead as Father/Son/Spirit. The essential love of God is required for the relational fulness of man as son and familial creature.

No wonder then that antichrist wishes to obscure the nature of God as Father, as Son! No wonder that this truth which has been made innate within us by what John calls 'the anointing' is a deadly threat to all antichristliness. It is a threat to the pseudo or mock familyhood of the Evil One.† Antichrist must kill the truth of God as Father, Christ as Son,

\* To cry 'Abba!' is also to cry 'Brother!' and 'Sister!' and to have brotherly love: cf. I Peter 1:22, I Thessalonians 4:9, I John 2:7ff., 3:10ff., 4:20—5:2.

† I John 3:10-11. John 8:39-47. Ephesians 2:13

or he is doomed.

For what we are pleased to call 'missiology', the implications are on a grand scale. First let us say that the ultimate of the Gospel is not simply eschatological. It is immediately Pateriological.\* That is, for man the ultimate is coming to the Father through the Son and through the Spirit.† When man has thus come he is complete. If the Gospel—either seen as *euangellion* or *kerugma* is not Pateriological, then it is not truly Christological, nor for that matter truly Pneumatological. Hence it will be deficient and *it must inevitably produce deficient churches*. History has shown that missionary churches have concentrated on salvation, on the Lordship of Christ, and have neglected the truth of 'the Father and the Son'.

This means that the functional nature of the Church as the Family of God will receive little or no recognition. Therefore the problems of the churches so formed will be many. The call to love in the New Testament is structured in the following way: (i) God loves us, ie. as Father, Son and Spirit; (ii) we love both God and others because He first loved us (ii) John 4:19-20); (iii) our love vertically is to God and horizontally it is brotherly, ie. *family* love. We need to note again that if God is not authentic (ontological) Father, and Jesus authentic (ontological) Son, then there can be no authentic (ontological) Family.

The true witness to God as Father and Christ as Son must be the presence of the Family—the Household of God. Any

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\* N.B. The three divisions of theology of Godhead are, (i) Pateriology, the Person and Work of the Father; (ii) Christology: the Person and Work of the Son; (iii) Pneumatology: the Person and Work of the Spirit. Ideally they are the one study and system.

† Access to God as Father must be by the Son (John 14:6, Matthew 11:27, Ephesians 3:11, Romans 5:2), but *revelation and application* of this must be by the Spirit (John 16:12-15, Ephesians 2:18).

proclamation of the Gospel must be in the authentic setting of the Family. If we are to talk about evangelism (does the New Testament talk about evangelism?), then we must talk about it in the familial structure of the proclaiming church. Even the small teams which were apostolic in their proclamation were known as 'the brethren'.\* The term 'disciples' seems rather to be one used by those outside to describe followers of Christ. John makes it clear that our nature as sons (brethren) is greatly hidden from the world (I John 3:1, cf. John 15:21-26). Whilst it may be said on one score that the world will not recognise our (unique) familyhood, yet the witness of this familyhood is necessary as the true witness and proclamation of the Gospel. The first chapters of Acts have abundant proof and demonstration of this. 'Family' commenced at Pentecost and showed itself in the oneness of all.

Students of missiology of a certain school will acclaim much of what I have said. Some—who are gripped by the principle of 'peoples' movements'†—will exclaim, 'Ah! This is what we have said!' However, it may not be what they have said.' In seeking to get whole tribes or peoples to come to Christ, they are endeavouring to preserve the nature of human families, trying to bring them as whole families or peoples to the Gospel and the church. This must be seen as highly commendable. Unnecessary fragmentation of families is most undesirable. However, the preservation of already formed families must not militate against the unique nature of the Family of God. We may seek to preserve the interests and integrity of the lesser to the detriment of the greater.

We must therefore in no way give in to the spirit of anti-

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\* I believe the stern insistence on the term 'discipleship' is an unconscious endeavour to escape 'family'. See my book. *Discipleship: Doom? or Delight!* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1978).

† See the writings of Donald McGavran, namely, *Understanding Church Growth* (Eerdroans, Grand Rapids. 1970) and *The Bridges of God* (World Dominion Press, London, 1957).

Christ. We must teach to persons—as to tribes and people—the Gospel of the Fatherhood, Brotherhood and Familyhood. It alone will break down caste, tribal pride and exclusivism. It alone will destroy the spirit of elitism. It will naturally cause the families and tribes to find their true identity in the Family of the Father.

Before we draw our appreciation of John's revelation to a close, let us take an even closer look at elements of his text. He says, 'Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?' He later amplifies this in his letter (4: 1-6). Now is it possible not to deny Jesus is the Christ, and yet to deny the Fatherhood and Sonship? I am sure that biblically to accept Messiahship but to deny Fatherhood and Sonship is incongruous. The passage under consideration surely indicates this.

However, in what I am about to say I intend to be pragmatic, even—it might appear—a little untheological. It is this: 'Is it possible to think of God as God, Jesus as Messiah, and so refer to them in these categories that we miss substantially, if not entirely, their being as Father and Son?'

I ask the further and most terrible question: 'Is it possible that antichrist has so worked on many that the truth of God's Fatherhood and Sonship has been obscured because the emphasis has come upon Jesus as the Christ and God as—God? !

I say this because John says, 'No one who denies the Son has the Father'. Whilst *nominally* we may not deny the Son, yet existentially we may not know and experience him as the Son. This would necessarily mean we would not know God as the Father. In turn, this would radically affect our way of life, our proclamation of the truth, and it would deprive us of true relational, emotional, vocational and personal fulfilment. Further, our church structure and life as the essential *modus operandi* of living would be affected.

I submit then that in subtle and insidious ways antichrist may have—indeed has—made inroads into the life and practice of the church. Doubtless the liberal teaching of the universal Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man (a doctrine not found in Scripture) may well have provided us an opportunity to 'throw out the baby with the bath-water'!

What then should we consider? What then ought we to do? How then should we be? The answer lies in the passage before us. John first of all affirms the following: 'He who confesses the Son has the Father also'. To 'have the Father' must be a dynamic fact and experience. Already in this chapter John has said. 'I have written to you, children, because you *know* the Father'. He has said previously, 'Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ'. To confess the Son (ie. Jesus as Son) is necessarily to confess the Father—for how can you have the Son as Son unless he has God as his Father? John, of course, sees such a confession not merely as a *credal* thing, a matter of intellectual assent, but as a significant matter of life.

The next advice that John gives is 'Let *what you heard from the beginning* abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Father and the Son. And this is what he promised us, eternal life'. An examination of these words will show us that what John's converts had heard from the beginning was the Gospel of Fatherhood and Sonship. Of course it entailed the Messiahship, Cross and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet it did not stop at these foundational things. The grace of God ('the God of all grace') sprang from the Father and the Son; hence his own epistolary salutation: 'Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son in truth and love' (II John 3). This of course was the salutation (in substance) of all Paul's epistles, and in essence of the

Petrine epistles.

John's exhortation then is to let this truth which came from 'the anointing' abide in us. By 'abide' he means 'let its dynamic possess you. Let it be the basis of your life and faith. Let the truth of Fatherhood and Sonship possess you, then you will consciously and existentially abide in the Son and the Father.' John has, in this manner, put us on a living course of action, a course which is experimental and experiential. He is speaking of something which is not only cerebral but also visceral; indeed, both elements are one.

Let us see then what this will do in our lives in giving us comfort and security in the Father and the Son; what it will do in meeting our basic emotional needs in a world where we confuse our true Father with our earthly father and mother, where we have lesser relationships than we ought to have with the family of our blood. Elevation into the true Fatherhood and Sonship will rehabilitate all earthly relationships—with earthly father and mother, brother and sister, and our earthly family as a whole. Not only will abiding in the Son and the Father be remedial in these relationships where required, but it will be fruitful for all living. John says a little later in this letter: 'We know we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren'. Brotherly love is one of the fruits—and parts—of eternal life. Jesus had said (and John had recorded): 'This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent'. John from himself, has also written in this very letter: 'And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true. in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life'.

True eternal life, *now*, is to know the Father and the Son, to be in them, and to have them in us. It is to love the brethren in the Family of God.

It is no wonder that the antichrist is dismayed at this truth and fearful of its propagation and acceptance, for such spells

doom to the rebellion of evil powers against God and errant children against the Eternal Father.

It is not to be wondered at then that I made an extended introduction to this text, a plea for true examination of it, and an exhortation to come to true knowledge of the Son and the Father. One word of the prophet keeps ringing in my ears. I leave it with you, for it was applied by the angel of the Lord to John the Baptist, and thus—by extension—to Christ himself.

'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. lest I come and smite the land with a curse.'

## Life is in the Limits: Death Beyond

These are the limits.

Beyond these we may not go.

Dare to go we may, and do:

But beyond is the beyond-the-beyond,

The no-place, the unauthentic.

De-ontologised, it is the dread place,

The abdication of the true humanity,

The unhallowed halls of the lost,

The place where the unremitting law

Searches in ruthless persistence,

And finds its intolerable victims.

Law in the love sense proffers life.

It is the substance, the warp and woof

Of the unchanging reality: its ways are life

Up to the 'beyond' perimeter. There

Its faces change. The gentle becomes the granite.

The countenance so benign becomes adamant,

The hard stare of the inexorable,

The implacable and austere remains pitiless.

Remorseless it pursues the rebel spirit

As it pursues in the beyond-the-beyond.

In the dim silence, the land of no-saying,

Where even the conscience has ceased

In its non-sighing silence—the sighs muted,

Where the grey wraith of light

Has become the no-substance of soulless despair—

There the doom of the enraged rebellion

Creeps up as a beleaguering silent surf,  
Washing the suspended spirit, the inanimate soul  
In a non-receding tide  
Of noiseless dread and frozen apprehension.

Do not go, I say, beyond the beyond;  
Stay here in the exercise of acknowledgment,  
The goalful obedience of the same law  
Which has and is unchanging love, but defied  
Or denied, transgressed or fissiparated  
Is implacable judgement, unswerving execution  
Of timeless death.

## The Things that are Forever

He could remember sitting in the steam train with his aunt. She was without doubt his favourite aunt. Partly this was because she would bring meat pies for all the children (nine of them) in his family. That meant a large brown paper bag, or sometimes two paper bags. He could remember no other occasions when they had had pies. In a way, the family was too genteel or conservative for that: pies just did not register in his parents' thinking. His mother, however, did make moist saffron cake in a large tin baking dish. Even so, the occasional pie was a rare treat.

Also, he liked her because she was a woman of faith. He did not quite know how to use that term. It was just that she did have faith, and was joyous and assured and even beautiful about it. He knew she was beautiful and he wanted to please her. When, a few years before, he had gone through unexpected experience of spiritual conversion, she had really understood him. That helped him, as the family had thought it a temporary matter—an aberration. They had every right to think this, seeing that his emotional life had not greatly changed. He could still have fits of temper, as had always been the case, and could break out in some haughtiness. One time he had even been expelled from Sunday School, but to be fair, that had been before his spiritual experience. But there were signs of change; now he did not raid orchards with the fellows. Even so, he could still lose his temper at cricket.

And now he was in the train with his aunt. They were going towards the mountains. He could hear the strained 'Chuff! Chuff!' of the engine as it pulled up the long and steady incline. Outside, the eucalypts, banksias and clustered clematis slipped by with the lazy movement of the train. Sometimes,

the smell from the engine would drift inside the carriage, bringing with it its unforgettable coal-tar tang.

Above him was his suitcase. He wondered whether he had enough clothes in it. Only once had he been away from home prior to this, and that had been with the family next door. Now he was remembering that earlier occasion, thinking particularly of Reggie, trying out the waves away down at Terrigal. He could hear again the boom of the surf as it crashed on to the rocks and the beach. That had been a great and unexpected holiday. He had not believed that his father would let him go, but it had happened. He had travelled in the car with Reggie, and Reggie's dad and mum. They had stayed at a beach boarding house. It was all so unusual.

Now his mind worried about what was ahead. He knew he wasn't religious, and the people he would meet would be religious. He knew he had faith, but not religion. He thought for some moments about being his own age, and about the young people at his own church. He ached when he thought about one girl. She was so beautiful, so gentle, and so full of kindly faith. He wanted her for a friend—and how friendly she was!—but sensed there was a social gap somewhere. He knew that it just felt good to be a person of faith with her. How she had encouraged him! He knew that he would remember her all his life. If only some miracle could happen and they could be joined together forever!

His eyes dropped to the box on his lap. His aunt had given him a new Bible. She had one herself, identical with this gift. He had taken it reverently from its box. He had smelt it—new soft black leather, gold edges to the pages, and the sweet, sweet smell of print. Oh, he loved clean white paper and rich black print!

He knew it was no ordinary edition. It had a central reference column, chapter headings, theme headings and copious notes. It traced subjects. The whole thing excited him. He wanted to open it and read, but there were others in

this compartment of the carriage and he felt embarrassed. When the box was closed, no one knew what it was, so he just let his hands lie on it. It was like special treasure beneath his palms.

He set about worrying again. He was always socially uneasy. In his own family there was no problem. There he had a clear identity. Rules had been worked out for this and that. The order of seniority was unmistakable. Also, there was his small flower garden, his part in the aviary of birds. In summer, there were the cicadas to watch as they emerged from the ground. There was the heady scent of the pittosporums, the purple velvet of the Narrabeen plums, the golden velvet of the Wicksons. However, he did not know what lay ahead of him.

His thoughts were anxious. When they arrived at tile station, and the engine stopped with a sigh and a heave and a hiss, these thoughts were not interrupted. They became even more significant and urgent. Who would be at this convention? Young people? Old people? Religious people or people of faith—or both? Would there be lots of praying?

Where would he sleep? This was the main thing that troubled him. He knew that religious people had different ideas. They loved one another. They might all sleep together—men and women, boys and young women! He must not let them see his surprise. He must act as though it were all regular to him.

His aunt knew innumerable people, people who greeted one another with joy and a sort of special understanding. He felt lonely amidst all these happy greetings, even when his aunt included him, telling them his name. He gripped his suitcase, lugging it along, trying to hold his boxed Bible under the other arm. By the time they had walked the long road to the convention ground, he was feeling tired.

His relief was enormous when he found he was to sleep in a tent with other young boys and men. He even joined in the

laugh when a jovial man explained that what looked like mattresses were really palliasses. In fact, this man had a funny saying: 'A man is a bally ass, if he can't find a palliasse!' They all laughed over that.

He quickly discovered that not all were religious. Indeed, there were others like him, new to faith and still excited about it, but very insistent that they were not going to be religious. He walked off with a couple of them into the summer bush, seeking familiar scents, his practical eyes looking for birds' nests and listening for the bird calls and sounds he loved so much. He soon discovered that the country was different. Here his beloved finches were not to be seen, and bird nests were almost absent.

There was, however, the magnificent scenery of the Blue Mountains. Old, rugged and worn, these ancient hills gripped him. He knew that he would remember them forever. He loved and feared them in the same moment. He was cheered when he was told that there would be trail walking and mountain climbing and that they would discover waterfalls and crashing cascades.

After the communal meal in the mess-tent, they all went to the large marquee, every person holding his Bible, each grasping a hymn book. He liked that part—the singing. He liked the warmth of a great crowd. He noticed how gentle they were on the whole, yet, also, how intent. He was amazed at the interjections, the half-shouts that would meet a good statement, and during prayers the assenting grunts. None of this went on in his church, but perhaps it ought to be introduced there. It made for social warmth. He felt free enough to grin at it all; the culture shock had not been too much for him—not yet, anyway.

During the first talk—or was it a sermon?—his mind drifted. He felt warm and cosy and secure. He knew that here harm would come to no one. His social misgivings were replaced with a gentle assurance that human rivalries could not

exist in this atmosphere. His new friends comported with his own glad acceptance of this strange and admirable culture. Even his aunt did not expect him to sit with her. His new Bible was quite at home with the hundreds of others.

Looking back in later years, he realised the value of those days, strange as they were to his family's way of life, and distinct as they were from anything he had known. The golden days of Terrigal dimmed in the light of this new and unusual event, the hours of meetings small and large, stout walks, high climbs, and even prayer meetings. He felt nothing wrong in any of it. He heard no jarring or false note. He submitted gladly to it all. It soaked into him, telling him that there was another Kingdom which human beings could know, one which was other than what they generally knew.

Two things remained with him forever. The first was the mountain climbing and the valley walking. Even fifty years later, when at times he revisited the selfsame vantage points of the hills, he would look down into the purple valleys and know so well the ferns—the beautiful soft tree ferns—the bush and its luxuriant undergrowth, the wildflowers, and the nutty mountain devils with their sharp heads and ears on the ferny scrub. Was it all this which had drawn him and his bride—unconsciously—to take their honeymoon in these surroundings? He did not know; but he would see himself, muscular in body, intent with youth, racing to outpace his new friends as they clambered up the Giant Stairway, tearing around the Three Sisters, or finding the quickest routes to the top, scorning the worn pathways as having no touch of danger, no adventure.

That was the first thing which remained with him. The second was different, and almost incidental. True, he admired and respected the circumspect preacher who had come to them from his native Scotland. He received the polished truths with gratitude, and greatly appreciated the wit and wisdom of that practical speaker. Even more he listened with

rapt attention to a tall emotional man of faith who stirred his own heart with emotion as his waving arms and constant tears brought a rich response from his audience. However, strangely enough—apart from a joke or two—he remembered nothing which they sought to teach him. Perhaps their words had sunk down deeply into him, working their own mysterious effects upon him, but to the boy they were an event without conscious effect.

It was the school teacher who left the lasting impression. This was the second great thing that had happened.

It was all the more strange because he did not like school teachers. He knew there were two reasons for not liking them. The first was that they represented authority, and he was a quiet but determined rebel. The second was that he wanted no human being to shape his mind. He had a fear of being bound in the stereotypes of others. Not that he knew the word 'stereotype', or even realised that he counted his personal freedom the most precious and significant thing of his life.

Only two teachers at the schools he had attended had ever impressed him. The first was a man who refused all conditioning. When he spoke, he was exciting, evocative. He was a witness to a world where human beings could try themselves out as wonderful creatures within a fascinating creation.

Second to him, there had been another teacher. This one was not as exciting, but he had sparked off gifts within him—the boy. Suddenly a new era had opened up for him in which was the writing of poetry and the illimitable world of fiction. The man himself was stolid, outwardly unemotional, but at the same time, profound. He well knew the kingdom which he had opened to the curious young boy.

When, then, this teacher of the convention opened his Bible, he—the boy—had expected nothing. He never dreamed of making him the third memorable teacher of his life. He was totally unaware that the words he was hearing

would stay with him over his lifetime and shape his understanding of truth, and determine his shape of theology.

To look at, the teacher-person was not prepossessing. He—the boy—had also heard that his subjects were maths and science, subjects which were unattractive to him. Yet it was the assurance in the man's eyes, the genuine authority in his voice, the calm manner of his speaking—even the serene set of his body—which impressed the boy, and doubtless most who listened to him.

What the boy remembered most was the statement written by the apostle Paul in one of his letters. 'All things are yours'. This gripped him. He said to himself, wonderingly, 'There is nothing that is not mine.' This thought was stunning. He felt inexplicably stirred within.

This third chapter of the apostle's first letter to the explosive church at Greek Corinth was saying, in effect, when men divide into party groups, confining themselves one way of looking at (the) truth, then they cut themselves off from the fulness of truth, and from its many riches.

He did not want to be cut off from 'all the truth'. It seemed to him—suddenly—that it was for this that he was created. This surely was what was intended for a true human—to be filled out in the vastness of truth. He could sense—with intense excitement—that all his life was to be spent in exploring and living truth. He would not have to *make* it, only discover it.

Of course, he did not know what lay ahead—pain, suffering, hurt, anguish. He did not know that he would discover horror and hate, bitterness and cruelty, deceit and evil, but he did know that whatever came would be his. Of course, not his alone—all things were for the whole human race, especially if they would have it that way—but he would share these treasures with the generality of humankind.

Time and again, that stocky school teacher was to appear before him—in memory—to destroy the encroachments of

mindless dogmatism, inane obscurantism, and deadly fundamentalism.\* It was not, of course, to deter him from the truth, but rather to encourage him in it, to keep him alert as a person, 'always alive to what was fresh and new, while, at the same time, guarding him from things merely novel and bizarre, with their appeal to a jaded mind and tired spirit.

Often, over the years that followed, he would be tempted to retract his thinking, to keep it within certain confines, and to be content with such lines of understanding that would not be disturbing either to himself or others. This, of course, was a constant temptation, but he would not accede to it. The rich joy created that day by the stolid old teacher would grip him afresh, so that no Columbus or Magellan ever had greater joy in sailing new (chartered or unchartered) seas. He would remember the encouragement:

'All things are yours. whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.'

It was remarkable to him when he first heard it, and no less remarkable as he kept hearing and believing it. Perhaps it was even more remarkable as through the years he realised that all these things were not his to obtain. They were not his when he would take or achieve them. They were already his, given by a Hand which would not take them back. It was in this understanding that he learned the truth that we often do not know what we possess, or if we know we possess something, do not yet know what it really is. It is discovering the nature of the things and the relationships that we have which amazes, delights and enriches us.

The pies, the train journey, the aunt beautiful, the ancient

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\* To hold determinedly to fundamental truth is not to be a fundamentalist. Any 'ism' is an overplaying of the reality it affirms. It is also a doctrinaire approach to that which in itself is authentic. Doctrinaire treatment of the truth misses the warm, functional and living nature of truth.

blue hills—all these were good and never lost, and with them all the unfailing reminder that the things we have are forever, and made eternal by the giving, and made precious and enriching by the having of faith.

## Holy Epic

There in the non-time—  
 The time before time—  
 Before time was, God was Himself.  
 In the counsels of His immutable will  
 He designed the to-be: He planned  
 The rich revelation of His love,  
 The ripening of His holy purposes  
 For the impending creation.

We who are in the midst of it—  
 The time after time, beginning and to end—  
 We are the recipients of the marvellous grace:  
 We are the spectators of the eternal field,  
 Of the breaking into time of the eternal  
 And the action in time of the God of all grace.

When then we see the amazing word of creation,  
 Out of which rolls the entire universe—  
 All galaxies, all patterned things,  
 The large and the infinitesimal,  
 The dark and mysterious,  
 The plainly open and beautiful—  
 Then we begin to know  
 The plain mystery of the Father Eternal,  
 He who is at once our Father and our God.

When, too, we view the original man—  
 Man and woman in the one bond  
 Made flesh as one, and in pure love—  
 We see the true nature of the Creator  
 Bent on giving to man

The redeeming insight of His nature  
 Not only as unchanging Creator and Provider  
 But also Redeemer: having pain  
 In the depths of His Son who in his turn  
 Reveals the high anguish  
 Of the Eternal Father.

In the time before time—  
 I speak as a limited human—  
 The Kingdom was planned, shaped up  
 For the blessed of God. It was determined  
 That the sinful-made-holy should enter  
 And know the bliss of man-in-God.  
 God's counsel was to give His glory  
 To the dust-made-living-being.  
 His considered will reached out  
 To raise the dust of the dust-man  
 To perpetual glory.

When then we consider the first act—  
 The act of brilliant creation—  
 And see the magnificent beginning,  
 The emergent reality of the fixed order,  
 The daily dynamical system of God,  
 We are initially caught in its splendour  
 And give the glory along with the angels  
 To the gracious Eternal. We who were not  
 Could not at that no-time  
 Demand that we be, and be what we desire.

Amazing then that the true Father,  
 The eternal and only authentic Pater  
 Should design our existence,  
 Call into being what never was  
 That it should ever be. This mystery

May itself so grip us  
 That we fail to realise  
 The wonder lies not only in creation  
 But in creation's deepest purpose,  
 That is the revelation of grace.

None can describe, none can communicate  
 The loathsome evil of the depraved,  
 The fallen malignity of the rebel man,  
 The dark reaches of his hatred  
 And his unchanging anger  
 At the Eternal God. Time is when we glimpse  
 Something of the soul's putrescence  
 And shiver at the suppurating heart  
 Of evil, man's inner evil,  
 Incarnate in the basic humanity  
 That emerged from the pure will of God.

Through the times in which we have lived,  
 From the beginning to this present end  
 We have pondered the stomach-retching reality  
 Of the depthless evil of man, let alone gods,  
 Idols and weird demons which have demanded  
 The God-loyalty be farmed out to them.  
 We have considered our evil-upon-evil  
 When evil itself is so evil  
 That it cannot comprehend  
 The evil of its evil self.

Here in a blazing sudden insight,  
 There in a horrified comprehension  
 We have measured the immeasurable guilt  
 Of the rebel heart, the opposed will  
 Damning the ineffable Eternal, making Him  
 The despised of the despised.

We have raised our own gods  
 In the impetuosity and impatience  
 Of man-godness. We have designed  
 Better things and ways than His  
 And have fashioned a new brilliance  
 Which outmodes the wisdom and the ways  
 Of the Creator-Father, the long-suffering Redeemer.

Why is it then—  
 I ask not in anger and frustrated futility—  
 That the self-evident grace of creation  
 Does not grip the minds and wills of men?  
 Why do their hearts not blaze with joy  
 And their eyes drip tears of gratitude  
 When all is so evident?  
 The answer is of course  
 That sin has blinded us; self-will so rampant  
 Enslaves the mind, fixes its bias  
 And determines its blindness.

Only when the Spirit comes, bringing the truth,  
 Will men see the great mystery. Only then  
 Will the scales drop from blinded eyes  
 And the eternal love be revealed  
 In multi-coloured glory  
 And in faceted beauty of wisdom.  
 Only then will the veil be taken away  
 And the sheer grace appear, lovely as the face  
 Of the Ineffable. It is the ineffable we will see  
 In the revelation of humility,  
 The dear common flesh of the Nazarene  
 And the quiet obedience unto death  
 Of the condemned blasphemer.  
 There on the craggy heights of Golgotha,

In the knotted glory of the stark timber  
 And the dry agony of the twisted body,  
 Do we see what the Will once planned  
 And has now fulfilled. This mystery  
 Will grasp the will, the inner spirit and the secret heart  
 Unchangingly forever. It will make man  
 See the flooding glory  
 Of the Eternal Father. It will draw  
 The spirit of the transformed human  
 To the core, to the inner heart  
 To the centre of the Creator-Father.

This, then, was the grace  
 Extant and planning, the wise counsel of will  
 Before the time-yet-to-be.  
 This was what was happening  
 In the no-time: the time before time.

## Nebuchadnezzar

This man Nebuchadnezzar was a great man on many counts. In fact on most—if not all—counts as we use them today. He was rich, had power, was absolute ruler over much of the then known world. His methods of rule kept the vast kingdom under his powers. His building of the city was, to put it mildly, brilliant. Yes, he was a great man, and a fine emperor. History can give us a lot of detail concerning this person, but then we are not on a biographical stint. We are trying to see what special elements constituted this great monarch, and especially those which parallel our own. Humanity is a thing common to us all, or we would never understand other persons. For our purposes, we will adhere closely to what David tells us about him. Daniel, in himself, warrants a special essay.

We meet Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel's account at a very pleasing moment of his life. It was the moment we all work towards, even if few of us obtain it. It was the moment that one of Jesus' parable figures had obtained. That farmer surveyed all that he had, and it was plenty! Only one small annoyance faced him, namely pulling down his barns to build larger ones, in order to store his increased harvest. He lolled back on his divan, which allowed him to look from his capacious balcony as he surveyed his great wealth. God then tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'Tonight you will die. Whose then will all these things be?' The farmer knew the bitterness of labouring for the ultimate ease of later middle age, only to see it—the wealth and its enjoyment—slip from his fingers, probably to be taken over by fools.

At first it seemed to Nebuchadnezzar that this was not his problem. He says, of himself, 'I Nebuchadnezzar was at ease

in my house, and prospering in my palace.' Forget the labour and sweat by which he had obtained it all. Forget the great battles he had planned, and think not of the dead, the injured screaming in pain, the distorted faces and bodies wounded, disembowelled, contorted with shock and hate. Forget the bereaved wives, the parentless children. All had come well: the great King was at ease in his palace. His prosperity was endless.

That indeed is the first great shock to us—the thoughtful, the compassionate, the temperate. Not for us the cruelty of kings, the pride and pomp of emperors, the hauteur and dominance of dictators. We work out the little authority we have in ways less intense, in ways more bland. These days we are more compassionate. Yet we have our theological problems. We ask the question: 'How can God allow such tyrants to come to such great ease?' Our problem is merely one of not knowing God, His sovereignty, His timing in history, His love and His justice as they order the affairs of men.

Nebuchadnezzar may have ignored these problems. We have no way of knowing. Of one thing he could be sure: *he was secure*.<sup>t</sup> He had reached a time in life when he could enjoy fully the labours of his earlier years. We need not enter into the modes of his enjoyment. All would have been perfect but for the dreams which were now coming to him, as later they faced Hamlet: '... to sleep, perchance to dream'. Who could know what dreams might come, even before he shuffled off this mortal coil?

Dreams he had, this prosperous king. They troubled him because of their vividness and because, somehow, he knew they applied personally to himself. He said, 'I had a dream which made me afraid; as I lay in bed the fancies and visions of my head alarmed me...' Fear in one so great was not admissible; alarm in one so powerful was intolerable. Yet the king lacked nothing, and so he called in his wisest men.

They were, of course, professionals in the main. History

speaks with awe and admiration of these men of the occult. It seems they—beyond all others in human history—had systematised the unseen, had structured understanding of the occult. They had special esoteric powers, but the king's problem had them baffled. It was not easy to confess they could not understand the dream. Probably their non-understanding was also dangerous.

### The King and Prophecy

It is fascinating to realise that Nebuchadnezzar was not proof against the supernatural. Probably he had not thought he was, but for the most part he could handle all of life. Had he not won empires? Had he not built Babylon, that most famous and extensive city of all history? He had; yet a dream had undone his sense of security. That which was beyond men—the supernatural—had pierced his mind in the silent watches of the night. No human being can set a sentinel over these night-thoughts. Herein could lie the undoing of the great emperor.

Daniel (given the Babylonian name of Belteshazzar) was a Hebrew. He was simple towards God and profound towards men. He had a secret. He knew that God speaks to His prophets by dreams and visions. He knew the Scripture concerning this:

*‘Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you,  
I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision,  
I speak with him in a dream’ (Numbers 12:6).*

God then had spoken to the king, but the king was not a prophet. He needed the Spirit of God to interpret the dream. He himself said of Daniel, ‘I know the spirit of the holy gods [or, ‘the Holy God’] is in you, and that no mystery is difficult for you. Here is the dream which I saw; tell me its interpretation.’

What will puzzle many is why God chose to give the king a dream. Why not let him go down to his own destruction? Why should God bother about any king? To give thought to a king is an alarming thought to a Deist, the person who believes that God stands back from His universe, allowing the human race to work out its own petty schemes and plans. Not so! Nebuchadnezzar's story—fascinating as it is to us—is the rich revelation that God cares deeply about the affairs of men. More remarkably (as we will see), it shows that God had a personal concern for the king himself. Pity the man who does not believe in the electing purposes of God, who does not understand that not only does the falling of a sparrow not go unheeded, but that its fall is always on time. God, then, had a purpose in this dream. It was to show His grace to this oriental ruler.

### The Prophet and the Dream

Who can tell what visions and fancies alarmed the king? ‘Alarmed’ may prove to be too mild a word for the state of the king. ‘Tortured’ might be a better word. Out of the events of the past, the inner ambitions of the boy, the aspirations of the young man, the fierceness and ruthlessness of the older man, did it happen that, within that memory data bank, the dynamics of guilt stirred him fearfully and he could not enjoy the credits he had accumulated, the authority he had gotten to himself?. We can easily imagine the anguish, the horror and the dread which would move in the night hours. Left alone with himself, he could have suffered the tortures, of the damned.

One dream certainly stood out vividly—the dream of the great tree. He tells it in detail to Daniel, saying,

*‘The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree  
in the midst of the earth; and its height was great. The*

tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its leaves were fair and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the air dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

'I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. He cried aloud and said thus, "Hew down the tree and cut off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven; let his lot be with the beasts in the grass of the earth; let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven times pass over him. The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets over it the lowliest of men" ' (Daniel 4: 10-17).

When the king had told the dream, he spoke to Daniel:

'This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you' (Daniel 4:18).

We are told in the text, 'Daniel was dismayed for a moment, and his thoughts alarmed him'. Obviously his feelings showed on his face, for the king encouraged him to tell the truth. It is doubtful whether telling the truth alarmed Daniel. He seems to be a man of truth who would be more alarmed if he were to withhold it. There must have been something which greatly disturbed him. Was he feeling his inadequacy to counsel the king? Did the whole matter seem too enormous to communicate to a king whose mind could not comprehend the essence of historical election? Was it perhaps that the king would not heed the warning of God? We cannot say, but we have these moments of despair and dismay ourselves when we try to communicate the great eternities to our fellow humans. Who is sufficient for these things?

Daniel's explanation seems reasonable enough to us, in hindsight. Daniel describes the tree first as Nebuchadnezzar himself, and then as the kingdom he has built. The man and his kingdom are one. In good oriental symbolism—but not in exaggeration—the prophet spells out the interpretation. The king is benevolent, his kingdom beneficent. All the earth benefits by it. The leaves of the tree are 'fair' and the fruit 'abundant... for all'. Beasts rest in the shade, birds in the branches. What these are does not really matter. The kingdom is a great kingdom, the king a great ruler.

Daniel does not philosophise or moralise. We all know that 'all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely', but the truism is not known in the action. One who has power does not sense its corruption, does not feel he is being deceived by his own beauty and accomplishment. The Pharisees saw nothing but good in their attainments, nothing but virtue in their moral patterns. It is easier to suppress truth in acts which seem righteous than those which seem unrighteous. The heart of the matter was put to the king, but in his blindness he would not see. Hearing, he would not understand. Was this what dismayed Belteshazzar at the beginning?

So judgement was to come to the king!

'It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will. And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be sure for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules.'

Daniel has gone to the deepest interpretation of the dream. More than that, he has declared the reason for the decree, namely that Nebuchadnezzar—the man who has always made history—may know that only God makes it. The king must come to know that his kingship is by the Most High,

and not by Nebuchadnezzar's accomplishment. All the time the king was working and planning towards his universal kingdom, it was the universal King who had worked this end. In fact, we will miss the incredible truth and principle of it all if we pass over these words too quickly. Daniel is saying that *God is the God of grace and God has been working, giving the king the kingdom which he (the king) thinks he has obtained by his own efforts.*

This thought is of course a scandal to the minds of the religious. God may only bless the truly godly, the righteous ones. He must spare no favours for the pagans. They are worthy of nothing! Herein the religious condemn themselves, saying they are the righteous ones, and their conclusion is in contradiction of grace: 'We are those who deserve the grace of God!'

### **The Dreamer's Dream Come True**

What human being has ever discerned the depth of depravity of another's heart, let alone the evil of his own? Jeremiah's wise saying confronts every human creature with the dismaying fact: 'The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt' (Jeremiah 17:9).

Jesus said firmly that every form of evil issues from the heart, and, in so doing, defiles him. The great King Nebuchadnezzar does not know the enormity of what he says. Sin's deceit is cunning. It says to us, 'That is not very bad. In fact, rightly understood, *it is nothing!*' Of course it is nothing.

The king is walking on the roof of the royal palace. He looks across the city and its vast suburbs. No city has ever measured such a large area; nothing like this has happened before in history. One account says it was all erected in two weeks. Whilst this is improbable, it is known that the city was

a remarkable feat of engineering and building. The world acknowledged the greatness of Babylon. No wonder the prophets have taken it up as the symbol of worldly achievement. In the old days of Babel, they had said, 'Let us build a city, and let us build a tower up to heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves.' The old sin of Eden was still rampant, compounding itself. The king of this system had said,

'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God

I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of the assembly  
in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,

I will make myself like the Most High' (Isaiah 14:13-14).

If what I am about to say sounds like preaching, then bear with it; preaching of the true sort never hurt anyone. It is necessary to all, especially when it is truly prophetic. Remember this, then: it is the highly righteous who are the most sure, and in the most danger. Satan, of all the proud creatures, is the highest perfectionist. Who follow in his train? The answer is, 'The Pharisees, the moralists, the legalists, the Utopians and their fellow travellers.' And with them, Nebuchadnezzar. He is along with the other kingdom-builders, the ones who do it their way, and not His (God's) way.

Nebuchadnezzar needed some comfort from himself. Doubtless he flung out his arms, and said with sheer joy and high passion, 'I did it my way!' His actual words were: 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence, and for the glory of my majesty?'

Elsewhere it is recorded that Nebuchadnezzar esteemed his contribution so highly in the affairs of men that he desired, 'May I live forever.' Dangerous self-esteem, to say the least. He—like most of us—had forgotten 'the holy watcher'. Up there, in the heavenly dimensions, in the place of the supernatural, are 'the watchers'. Their eyes rove to and fro across the face of the earth, to see whether men will do righteousness

or do evil. Nothing is missed. None on earth—be they kings or commoners—must imagine they are gods. Nor must they impugn the Most High as though He were sleeping or an absentee Deity to His creation. His high holiness is zealous for a true and pure creation—the work of His hands. He will have it known that He dwells in the heart of the humble, and revives the heart of the humble ones. The watchers are jealous for the Most High, and in Nebuchadnezzar's case they had made a decree and sent their special holy watcher to execute it.

Thus, when Nebuchadnezzar began to revel in his human 'godness', he went crazy. He heard a voice from heaven:

'O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; and you shall be made to eat grass like an ox; and seven times shall pass over you, until you have learned that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.'

### The Crazy King

From the human point of view it could not be called by the name of some psychosis. He had no delusions: he was king. He had no delusions of grandeur: he was grand. His dangerous delusion was that he was *of himself* a king, and splendid. What he had always been inside, and what had not expressed itself because of the restraining grace of God, now became overt. The essential and evil selfishness by which he had become the benevolent king, now showed itself in its own true, ghastly self. The polished king became the unpolished beast. Shame upon us, that we liken our evil selves to beasts, who for their part live acutely by laws. But we have seen beasts in our dreams, and demonic creatures in our visions, and whilst doubtless they exist in their own fight, we are seeing the elements of sin, our highmindedness in striving to be

as the Most High and to take His prerogatives. We become hellish in our desires, cruel in our passions, evil in our self-aggrandisement. The high-born do it suavely and finely, whilst the low-born do it with demonic crudity; and both are the same.

So the highly-groomed king, the lord of the nations, became a scrabbling animal, snouting in the grass like the swine, clutching his bundle of grass and tearing at it with maniacal lust. He gibbered about in the early dew, his long lank locks dripping about his bearded face, whilst his eyes were red with insane restlessness. His long nails rivalled the talons of great birds. This muttering, gibbering, scrabbling creature outdistanced the Gadarene demoniac.\* How long, then, could this last?

'Seven times shall pass over you, until you have learned that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will'. That has been the visionary and prophetic word, the word direct from the Most High. Seven means completeness, exactly the time needed to reach the depths of that mind, crazed with its own pride, and break the iron spirit of an haughty king! The God who is not bound by time works His purposes within time. He knows the times of man, and that was why He appointed the time needed to break the heady high-mindedness of the mad monarch. Another prophet† was yet to say in history, 'He whose soul is puffed up shall fall, but the righteous shall live by his faith', i.e. by his faith and trust in God.

### The King Regenerated

God, through the prophet, had warned Nebuchadnezzar. 'Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you;

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\* Luke 8:26-39

† Habukkuk 2:4

break off your sins by practising righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your tranquillity.’ This the king had not done. Why then had God not destroyed him? Why indeed, for he deserved it? However—contrary to the common belief of homespun theologians, judgement is not primarily for destruction, but for grace; not for annihilation, but for renewal. Indeed grace is often judgement.

So in this case of the king: God had preserved the stump, the butt of the tree which was at once the king and his kingdom, in which had been missing the knowledge that ‘the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will’.

Grace having judged the king, it now renewed him.

*‘At the end of the days [ie. the seven times] I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven and my reason returned to me’.*

The king was whole again. Whole? Again? He had never been whole. Now he was. The proof of this was in his true worship of God:

*‘I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives forever’.*

Now God was King, as ever He had been, but the true monarch recognised that

*‘... his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;  
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing;  
and he does according to his will in the host of heaven  
and among the inhabitants of the earth;  
and none can stay his hand or say to him "What doest thou?"’*

Grace was not merely restorative. It was regenerative. It made the king what he had never been—a man of broken spirit, a man of broken and contrite heart, yet strong and

noble, regal in his new life.

*‘At the same time my reason returned to me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendour returned to me. My counsellors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.’*

That the king was now a man of grace, a man who lived in grace, is seen by his words as he ends his narrative, for only he who believes in the sovereignty of God knows the truth, the reality, of the grace of God. To him it is not merely a tenet of the faith; it is the very heart of true experience, the great truth of God. His words are:

*‘Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven; for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to abase.’*

The great king had known what only those who think they are gods know: the loneliness of living in the haughty heights, the existential emptiness of having arrived without having arrived, the loss of true creaturely joy, the boredom of conquest, the alienation from the true warmth of true humanity, the warm dependency which constitutes true human creatureliness, the joy of submission to the God of heaven, and the gladness in letting Him be who He is, so that one can be truly who one is. This is authentic integrity.

As for the rest, it also is contained in the above: creaturely dependency. Such dependency only has reality when the human mind grasps the warm truth that He is the God of grace. He had allowed—no, purposed—a kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar, incorporating the evil and pride of the man and yet not destroying him. The wounds of evil were deep in the spirit of the ruler, and it took the sufferings given by grace to heal those wounds, and to bring that one to life. Whom the Lord loves He chastens and rebukes. Whom He does not chasten is no son of His. He wounds in order to heal; He kills in order to make alive.

This is a great mystery and the fainthearted or the squeamish of mind shall never know it. Only those who know and trust themselves to the grace of God shall wonderfully know it. Others may live in this grace and be weak-hearted and querulous under it. That which they count humility is not true humility. It is the pride of weakness; it is the high-handedness of ancient Adamic rebellion. Even so, the God of grace works, waiting until our faith shall rise to that grace.

In truth, we are not saved by faith, but by grace. In truth, we are not kept by faith, but by grace. When—like Nebuchadnezzar—the crazed mind breaks through to grace, it adores the God of all grace, and its faith rests in Him, and in Him alone.

## Belated Books and Trifling Trifles

I looked down at them, lying there face-upwards on their shelves. It wasn't that they looked at me reproachfully, for that would have been my imagination, but even so they seemed to be saying something to me. To tell the truth, I was quite surprised. Over the past decade or so I have been used to writing and turning out books, and I suppose I have never considered their case, ie. that being books they are—so to speak—those having a soul, albeit a literary soul.

When then I felt a pang in my heart concerning them, I wondered whether it was senility approaching me prematurely, or sentimentality making inroads on my firm and assured person. I am a man who thinks that weakness is not necessary, even if it dogs the heels of many of us. 'Put sentiment away,' is my sentiment. So why then, and what then, was I feeling for these books I had written?

The truth is that I have a mind for business, for effective promotion, when it comes to the distribution of books. I say 'distribution' rather than 'sales', for I am a little diffident about the commercial side of things. I know there has to be commerce, but when you are dealing in truth, you need to be truthful in your dealings. Yes, I am all for organised distribution, and if the sales further promote distribution, then sales are acceptable to me.

Lying there on their shelves, those volumes of theology, fiction and truth seemed to be saying, 'Lying here in semiobscurity is a sad thing. It is not that we lack humility—bookish humility—but we think we have much to say that people ought to read and hear. Kept in this partial hiddenness

we are unable to do so.' That was the idea which I felt was being conveyed to me.

Of course, you could counter this by saying, 'Oh, that was all in your mind. Books do not have souls or spirits. They are flat paper, graphic ink, devised covers and bound pages, divided of course into sections or chapters.' Undoubtedly you are right; indeed only too correct. I am forced to agree with you. These, too, are my ideas when I am feeling objective and realistic. Even so, the books seemed to be talking to me.

They seemed to be saying something like the following: 'Look friend, you helped us to come into being. You thought we were important enough to write. Indeed, you spent many sleepless nights devising us. You would get up—unable to rest, dream or even meditate—and you would sit before your rapid-firing electric typewriter and roll out your thoughts and ideas until we began to take form from words and bondpaper, after which you would go back to sleep, or take up your duties for the day, still keeping us in mind, and returning—time and again—to add to us, to shape us into more defined entities, thus giving us an ever-increasing identity. Finally—through you—we received our full identity.'

Now all this is, and was, true. There is something about writing a book—even a badly conceived and executed book—which defies description. If it is theology, then it forms itself, substantiates its thoughts, and grows into that form and identity which is unique to itself. If it is allegory, then it allows itself first to riot in imagination and then to spill across white paper, after which it smiles happily—even if wryly—and announces, 'I was conceived in your mind. I was gestated and born. I am a new thing, a fresh entity. Forever I have my indestructible identity. You have both fathered and mothered me, and here I am to stay. Empires may rise, form, recede and moulder, but I am forever.'

All of this is of course true, and if true it is easy to understand why such books speak volumes with their quiet

reproachful airs. If theology (ie. maps or charts of the truth), then they are anxious to get their readers on to mental hiking, forced route-marches, eager travelling, orientation towards the truth. They do not wish to be hidden, conscripted into dumbness, doomed to a covering of dust.

If they are fiction then it is even more understandable. You who are writers—and even you who are readers—surely understand that the writer does not create his characters. They are there, fully formed, and they simply present themselves in the action of the story, the interchange of characters, the complexities of thought and living. They are rich palpable beings. They emerge as the writing continues. They are of different ilks. They walk, talk, strut, or drag their limbs. They are proud, bombastic, good, evil, quiet, humble, ambitious, and so on, each according to his unique type and being. The actions they undertake, the relationships in which they share, and the thoughts which they conceive, are all typical of their personal identity, and the writer virtually has no control over them. They act consistently with themselves, even if many of them are inconsistent sons of people.

Can you imagine such characters lying on shelves, hidden partly in darkness and not well-displayed? I can. I often spend time in old bookshops, browsing through the shelves, scanning old volumes. Sometimes I come away with a son of emotional sickness. I feel pity for many of these creatures—books—conceived under the special conditions which brought them to the light of day. Some are like children weakly conceived, and even illegitimately born. They have been denied their true character. The creator of such books has not given them the time to grow into full beauty. He has had a second or third-rate mind. He may have been practised in his writing technique, but indifferent in his perception, unable or unwilling to let his characters—or his so-called truth—become full-blooded. They lie in the apathy of their own anaemia, doomed forever to mediocrity. I find this most

depressing.

Yet again I come away sick at heart because some of the books I have seen are rich with life and thought. They do credit to man as a creature within his universe. He, as author, has grasped high thoughts and lofty concepts and—confound it, man!—has brought something unique and exciting to life. Sadly enough, I do not have the money to buy all these books, any more than I can accede to the compassion, pity and attraction which wants to make me buy every appealing puppy I see and hear in the local pet centre. So I must leave many of those books on the shelves to lie in helpless oblivion. One day a lover may come along and affianc[e] himself (herself) to such adorable volumes.

In the case of my own titles—the books lying in semiobscurity—I have more than a pang or two. I exhort you not to think that this is some kind of inverted egotism which I am rationalising. Sure, I confess to intermittent spasms of that sort of thing, but in the main I have developed a certain moderate (and modest) habit of objectivity. I know, as do these books, that we are saying something important. Of course, if you like to look at it one way, you can say, with a bit of an ironical laugh, ‘Why, these books had not been written for as long as the history of the world, up to your literary point of conception. Somehow the world managed without them, and could probably manage without them forever.’

Your observation is, at one and the same time, both false and true. On the principle you state, nothing would ever have been written. Nothing contemporary in thought, truth and action would ever have been committed to mud tablets, baked sherds, reed parchments, modern paper or electronic recording. Then we would be hither and thither as a race, damned by false modesty, hindered by reproachful self-inferiority, and the worse off for hidden but unexpressed thought. No, the world has been made different—both for good and evil—by the dynamic of human thought expressed

in writing and other forms of art. So then, every form of communication brought forth by human thought and endeavour has a right to express itself; it has a claim to being heard. The judgement of man will decide its fate—rightly or wrongly—consigning it either to the hails of fame or to the dusty places of oblivion.

Of course, my little excursion into the inept display of books is a personal one. It is merely my whimsy to interest others in it. Yet it is not only whimsy, for the principle which obtains in my case serves as a principle for all books and all situations. As humans we try many means and methods to display ourselves—rightly or wrongly. We are experts in the cosmetics of personality as well as the adornment of face and body. We are saying, ‘Every person born into this world has his or her uniqueness of being, and each contributes to the whole. So look at me and receive something, or look at me and give something.’ It is no less for books. They demand the right setting to display their appeal and offer their gifts.

If it had only been reproach at an indifferent promotion, then I think I could have worked—which I have—towards a better display of their wares. Yet as I looked at the titles, I was aware that some people had peered into these difficult shelves, and had selected titles that appealed to them. Perhaps the titles had been more graphic than others, or they promised them some excitement, some fresh insights, or perhaps the readers were intrigued, caught by a sudden chance thought. I do not know, but I have to admit with some shame that the titles which were missing were—many of them—my more favourite ones. I have also to confess that their covers were better conceived and more attractive than others. So titles, themes and covers had motivated persons to buy them. I felt that the titles and covers before me had an element of blandness. To tell the truth, I knew they were not best-sellers, and I felt more than a trifle guilty about them.

This, then, brings me to the heart of this little self-

reproachful essay. I have to say that no book I have written has ever come up to expectations. The glowing vision that first came to me has often sobered down to an incomplete communication, which, if not trite, is also not too grand. Maybe I have had at the back of my mind that I am not a master-workman. Maybe I have had the reader-audience too much (or too little) in mind. I have tried to accommodate to their modern ways of thinking, the influences under which they live, the opposition I might arouse—and a hundred such things. Instead of going ahead in firm unwavering style and ignoring what readers might think, I have tried to win them to the vision, and for that reason the vision has been ineptly communicated. I am not sure, because often waves of passionate desire that the truth be given free rein and powerful communication have swept through me whilst writing. One does not rise at midnight or the early hours of the morning, just to please readers! One may have it in mind that this or that thought might not be acceptable, but then one has to press on and write what is in the heart. In all honesty, I do not think I have compromised what I saw, however inadequately I have composed my writing.

I mean it something like this: one tells the truth, then one seeks to substantiate it for the sceptics, having a certain pity for them. One hints eagerly at the richness of the truth and endeavours to present a note on truth's tuning fork, but slowly one learns that ears can be deaf to 'the ring of truth', and to follow a preceptor means willingness and even submission of spirit. Willingness of spirit is a matter we know little about until we realise it is somehow related to, and conditioned by, love.

By this time, sadly enough, I may have tired you. Even so I press on, hoping you will follow. I believe the mute cry of those books ought to be translated into vivid sound and so be heard. I acknowledge that bookshops have great difficulty in promoting some books. The current trend is to obviate the

Creator and fill His place with modern saints and agents of good from our resources of technocracy. I acknowledge that the bionic (human) creations of man are 'better than anything ever before', and that super men, boys, women, girls and animals beat God's creations hands down. These creations sell well, and they get the advertising space they deserve. Block-buster novels, filled with violence, rape, genocides, machos and mayhem, do marvellously well. Their thick black type on gaudy colours assures them of a good display, and their cousins—the large interminable literary sagas and soap operas—are also assured a place in the sun and the reading room, if only because of a promoted snob value.

But I must control this insane jealousy. I must retreat from this envy of large sales and pray that also the human mind may more seek to grasp and live with the great eternities, endeavouring to discover who God and man are and what they—the very readers themselves—are all about in this marvellous and present creation.

Somehow we must get past the fads, the escapism, and the triteness of much of the contemporary mind. These books say then, with some sadness, 'Could we not receive just a trifle of promotion, a modicum of display commensurate with our worth?' Big words but true ones; they deserve the clothing that will speak of their worth, and the setting forth which will proclaim their true nature and value.

Let me give you an example. Once a certain bookshop put a theological book on the nature of man into its psychology section. The few volumes displayed sold rapidly and the title had to be replenished. Some psychologists are reductionists and see everything of man and life in the light of psychology. Now they were introduced to another field of research and were undoubtedly intrigued—enough anyway to read the book. Does a theology of man somehow relate to a secular approach to psychology? Of course! The book then was placed correctly on the shelves. This was a title which

achieved its necessary promotion and display.

Imagine then, if you will, a goodhearted bookseller, hoping to make sales, but pressed by many things. He wants to supply the needs of his customers, so he stocks his shelves with advertised best-sellers. He knows the thoughtful reader to be in the minority, so he—naturally—gives a minor display of the more worthwhile book. In his desire to sell many books, he packs his shelves with stock just as a supermarket has large stocks of best-selling goods and even larger stocks of its 'specials'. The browsing customer turns to the back of the volume he is handling and reads the blurb. It is composed of superlatives. It assures the reader that everyone—repeat, everyone—is reading this book. It is safe for the customer to purchase and read. He will be one among millions who are fascinated by this exceptional title. The customer need not be timid: his choice has already been made for him. The book has been placed in that favoured situation in the bookstore. Customer and shopkeeper both beam. Hours of enjoyment are ahead of the purchaser. The classics (which are dull) and the thoughtful books (which require too much thought) are left on their seldom-visited shelves, so that the levels of thought and discovery are kept at a modest level.

Even so, there is much on the side of the honest writer and artist, for in the long run he may succeed, albeit posthumously. I remember some of my days as a librarian within a prisoner-of-war camp. I remember many mindless readers who tried to kill their boredom with yellow-backs and penny-dreadfuls, who rarely ventured beyond the wild and woolly West with its monotonous mixture of cowboys and Indians and goodies and baddies. Some opted for crime mixed with lechery, and others were amused by better crime literature. I noted a strange phenomenon: gradually the readers of trash began to experiment with novels even of third-rate and second-rate quality, and, discovering a new world, began to demand the better titles, until they began to break into the

world of true art. Others tired of cheap fiction and began reading good non-fiction. Doubtless many of these had been provoked into genuine thinking by their circumstances, especially those related to human cruelty and human suffering. No matter; time is on the side of the artist. The block-buster novel is a temporary—though recurring—phenomenon. It does not answer, in the ultimate, the needs of thoughtful human beings.

So I have made up my mind. I will crusade strongly, even if a bit under-cover, for opportunities for books. In my own case I will revise and edit what I have written. I will take out the substantiating bits that have been included in the text and leave them in footnotes for the sceptics or critics. I will speak plainly, simply and with honesty. I will not be a journalist, just writing for a living, turning trash to treasure or treasure to trash. I will not write a word that I ought not to write and neglect to write a word I should publish. I will plead with cover artists and layout experts to first identify with the heart and spirit of this new manuscript. I will ask them to soak themselves in the matter and then proceed to their layout, typesetting, editing, cover designs, printing and the like. In this way we will place a vibrant title on the shelves, and it will make its way even in spite of the insignificant place it is given.

Even more, I will develop a team of promoters who will regularly visit the host bookshops and fight for the place and power of these selected titles. When they are sold, they will be immediately replaced. If possible, I will arrange for competent reviewers to read and review the books. I will insist—as far as possible—that we (ie. the books and I) have no clever Dicks reviewing books. Too many critics trample over the backs of writers, using (and abusing) their own critic-vocations to work out their personal psychological problems through their reviews. They are often like preachers who

work out their guilts and shortcomings on their captive audiences. Whilst we want no fawning or favouring reviews (would we ever get them?) it will assure our books that they will receive fair treatment.

Of course you realise that these last two paragraphs have been written tongue in cheek. No writer would ever be allowed to be so cheeky, so insistent that his books get their great and deserved opportunity. I have to announce, sadly, that I will be able to do little, if anything, of this protectiveness and promotion I have proposed for our books. They must make their own way. If good, they will win through even from shelves set low in the room, from poor display and even indifferent covers, layout and the like. I will just have to go on trusting that revising and editing being done, and some plea for reasonable display having been attempted, our friends the books will stand on their own merit.

You may say, with laughter in your eyes, 'A jolly good thing, too!' and I would have to agree with you.

I also have a sense of humour. After all, you are reading my book! I also may have the luxury of a chuckle. So then, I have made a point, and conducted a plea for my other books, as also for books in general. In a way I have even been promoting them, working out the guilt I had for my neglect of them, and in a way, surely, this book is speaking for itself!

Happy reading!

## The Taking and the Giving

He saw her bent over the delicate crystal ware. His first thought was, 'How beautiful!' He was not thinking about the water-set, but the woman bowed over it. For many days he had watched her as she walked through the compound. Something about her delighted him immensely. She walked erect, but her rectitude was graceful. Her body flowed as she walked, her tribal dress also flowing with the suppleness of her limbs. He had not seen her walk—as some of the women did—with a water-pot on her head, but he visualised her in some Sindh desert village, going with the other women to the well. As small girls, they carried the small water-pots. As mature women, they were proud of their ability to raise the smooth earthenware pot to their heads, settling it on the head-cloth which was about their faces, half-veiling them, adding to the mystery of their ancient modesty. In such a way he could see her.

Here, in the city, there was a difference. She and her husband had become strangely separated from their tribe. He was often curious about the unusual decision—to be a single family in a city of Moslems, most of whom were changeless in their faith, following the ancient ways of the prophet.

He was never sure of her. Martha, he knew, was a beautiful person: not only as a woman typical of her own tribe, but she had an unusual beauty of nature. Unlike others of her people, she would meet his eyes clearly, exchanging look for look. Sometimes he thought she was seeking for something, some answer he could give to her which would solve the half-hidden puzzlement she carried with her. Perhaps she was appealing to him out of the ancient culture of her tribe, wanting him to help her mesh it with the crisp new culture he had

brought with him. The crystal ware—the water-set—was fine and delicate Czechoslovakian in manufacture. Set on a tray of the same crystal, the fragile glasses surrounded the exquisitely shaped jug. It surmounted the glasses with dignity and beauty. Filigree gold was set as a delicate tracery through the thin crystal.

‘She knows what beauty is,’ he thought. His mind wandered to artefacts he had seen at Mohenjo-Daro and other archaeological sites. Beauty was not new to this ancient civilisation. He thought of the unearthed skeletons he had seen—arrow-pierced—in those same unearthed cities. They had disturbed him deeply. The old enigma of beauty and cruelty, art and avarice, had always been with the human race.

Martha had been unaware of his presence. Suddenly she knew he was there, and in a quick reflexive action she straightened. She drew the veil, almost covering her face. He was slightly startled by the action.

She said, in an embarrassed way, ‘It is very beautiful, Sahib.’ She always spoke to him in Urdu, and not her native Gujerathi. He noticed, however, that a Gujerathi word had slipped into her utterance. He wondered idly why she was confused. She slipped away, like an elusive shadow.

When the sun became burning hot, making its turn over the Fahrenheit century before even the dawn was completed, the man, his wife, and their children began to taper off their tours into the desert villages. They stayed more in the ancient city with its old walls and battlements, and its ancient bazaars filled with noise and colours and exotic merchandise.

In those days they travelled to the distant Himalayan hills by the long slow trains drawn by new and powerful diesels. It

meant days and nights in the box carriages, sleeping on the tiered bunks. There were times of being drawn into a siding whilst another train rattled and thundered its way past, directed by the altered points. Sometimes they would pause in the desert. He remembered the long night silence, broken only by the occasional cry of a desert animal, or the involuntary snore of an exhausted passenger.

That first year they had seen, in the Hills, distant views of the snows of Kashmir capping the high hills, gleaming against the background of intense blue. There, too, at the hill station, were new faces—lean strong hill-men, fair as any European, proud as any race, proud of walking their native hills, beholden to no other human creature.

The family had loved to roam the bazaars with their variety of Kashmir shawls and carpets, the rich woodwork and the brilliant stock of cloth. The spiced foods at first repelled and then captured. They found themselves settling into the culture, accepting things different from their own mores, and finally being content with many of the new values.

In a way, as the months passed, they were both to return to the intense and burning heat of the Sindh. However, when they had ploughed through the Punjab, through the State of Bahawalpur, and had re-entered the Southern desert, they were glad enough to disembark and be embraced again by the city they were beginning to know.

Friends and servants greeted them with salaams and salutations. Nothing must break the ancient customs of studied politeness. Nor must deeper feelings be betrayed.

Padre Emmanuel was the best of all. Warm, fat, jolly and sincere, he helped to clear them from the train. He jollied the two tonga-men into taking the family, the luggage and the water-pots, and soon they were swinging on the way back to the compound. It was there that Chaman the cook met them,

his displayed teeth as broad as his smile.

Martha was a trifle hidden but she came forward, slightly bowed, but then looking at them, clear-eyed. He thought again, half-unconsciously, that she was unusually beautiful, graceful in the classical style. He noticed how eagerly she took the new baby. She was possessive in a healthy, objective way. He knew she would make a good *ayah*. He also knew she would hopelessly spoil this latest daughter of theirs.

When they went to the large *almari*, the old dining sideboard, they saw what had happened. He had looked at his wife and her puzzled eyes. As yet there was no pain in them. The bare shelves told the story. The water-set was gone. So were the other things they had liked so much. The flowered tea-set of Doulton china was missing. The canteen of silver cutlery which, with the water-set and the tea-set, had been a wedding present, was not there.

He looked again at his wife. Her puzzlement had gone. She just looked calm. She smiled at him and said wonderingly, 'Well, what do you think has happened?' He said, 'I'll see Padre Emmanuel.'

The warm brown eyes of the pastor were troubled. 'It's all gone,' he said. 'We locked the doors, but then sometimes we had to entertain people in your bungalow.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'I'm very sorry.' Then he said sadly, 'This is how we are.' His hands splayed out, fingers spreading. 'They cannot resist valuable things.'

He had started at that. 'Valuable things!' He had not thought of them as being valuable, only special because they had been gifts. For this reason he had locked the *almari*. Now they were gone.

Secretly he marvelled at her—his wife. They took a tonga together into the Shahi Bazaar. The china on the stalls was cheap but functional. Some of it was bizarre in its pattern and

colour. They chose the quieter patterns. The new crockery would be sensible, utilitarian. Many times he glanced at the woman beside him. She showed no signs of anger or hurt, of resentment or bitterness. He also knew she was hiding nothing. He marvelled. Perhaps more than she, he wondered where the gifts had gone. Were they being used by the people who had taken them? Had they long ago been sold, bought by some Eastern 'fence' who would make sure they would reach another city, never to be discovered? As they jogged back to the house, he decided he would exchange grace for grace. Like her, he would forget. And he did.

Nothing was said in the months that followed. The theft was forgotten. It was at morning tea that Emmanuel raised the subject. He was gruff, almost peremptory, as he talked to them. They were puzzled by his diffidence.

'We know where your precious things are,' he said. 'We have tracked them down.'

As man and wife they exchanged looks. A message passed between them. He spoke to Emmanuel. 'Do they want to give the things back?' he asked.

The padre shook his head impatiently. 'Of course not. They think they were clever to get them. They think you were foolish—even wrong—to leave them. No, they will not give them back until I insist. Then they will lose face. They will be angry. They will even blame you for their acts of stealing as though they were your fault.'

He relaxed slightly, grinning faintly and ruefully. 'That's the way guilt works,' he said, and the man recognised his wisdom.

Then Emmanuel frowned. 'Even so,' he said, 'we should insist they return the goods. We should not let them keep them because they will be angry at being discovered.'

The man exchanged looks with his wife. Again, the same

message.

He said quietly to Emmanuel, 'Let them keep the things.' Emmanuel's eyes flashed. 'That is condoning their evil,' he said. 'They will think themselves right in what they did. They will reason that you are the guilty ones, leaving precious things where they could be tempted.' There was something of anger in his eyes. The other man could not tell whether it was because of the theft, or because of the supposed carelessness.

He said gently, 'Tell them we do not know who stole the precious things, but tell them we give them to them as gifts.'

He saw anger in the pastor, and he divined its cause. 'It's not because it is the only thing we can do,' he said. 'It is because we want them to have them. We have died to those things. They don't hold us.' He looked again at his wife. Her nod was slight and quiet. Emmanuel, he could see, was seething.

He spoke again. 'There is no condescension in this,' he said softly. 'There is no patronage.'

Emmanuel nodded curtly, fighting with his anger. 'We find it hard,' he said, 'to become beholden to gift-givers. That is a great bondage. It makes us bitter.' When the other man—his fellow worker—said nothing, he went on. 'We are people of a long history. Wave after wave has invaded this sub-continent. They have suppressed those below them, becoming their masters, only to be mastered by the next wave of invaders.' He sighed deeply. 'We are all master-races,' he said. 'We all think highly of ourselves. We are proud peoples. We do not like the inferiority that time and circumstances have imposed upon Us.'

The man and his wife sat in silence. Their minds found it difficult to grasp the complex issues. If they had not been persons of faith they would have given up in despair.

The man thought, 'These ethical issues call for wisdom greater than mine.' He turned to Emmanuel. 'Just tell them they are voluntary gifts, and that we do not need them.' He

looked thoughtfully at the pastor. 'You know, Emmanuel,' he said quietly, 'that is true. We do not have need of them.'

Emmanuel knew how powerful was this act of their giving. He knew that although it was grace, it would stir guilt in those who had stolen the things. Those who had taken the valuables would not call it stealing. He did not rightly know what they would call it. In some way they would feel it to be their right.

With Martha, the matter was not complicated. She had taken the water-set; nothing more. She had taken it because it was beautiful. Perhaps—away back in the history of her tribe—there had been men and women of nobility and substance. She often thought she had royal blood in her veins. She sensed vestiges of regality in her being. It was easy to walk in the regal way. Things like this fragile water-set belonged to the ancient way of life her people had known.

In any case, she would take the set out of the wooden trunk—the *sundook*—and look at it. She felt palpitations, gentle thrills, as she touched and fondled, with possessive awe, the smooth rounded lines of the elegant water jug. She was scarcely moved by any ethical factor.

That day she heard a sound in the midst of her worship. It was Padre Emmanuel, well-fed and fat, his frame filling the door, his brown eyes warm with strong feeling, his Punjabi face set in a frown.

'Martha,' he said, 'you have not done good.'

She had a pert smile she kept for men. She was a loyal wife, but she used her femininity well. Her smile was meant to be disarming, to win this stocky pastor and beguile him. His look was set, unchanging. His wisdom permitted no frivolity of her womanhood.

'I took it because it is so beautiful,' she said. 'They never seemed to use it. They shut it up in their *alrnari*.'

'It is their way,' he said sternly. 'Also they do not wish to

embarrass us. They are modest with their possessions.'

She knew she had lost. She gestured towards the crystal set. 'You should take it.' Her statement was partly a question, partly a comment.

He did not move. 'They have given it to you as a present,' he said. When she looked astonished, he sighed, relieved of his mixed emotions.

'That is how they are,' he said, but all the anger had not left his voice.

For her part, she was puzzled by her emotions. She knew her own feelings so well. As a simple person she lived each moment for its own sake. With her there was almost no introspection. What she could not understand was the deep pang of fear which had shot like a shaft into her heart, fear that was now mingled with the most beautiful emotion of joy, the thrill of possessing something of high and noble beauty.

She was almost dumb. 'A gift,' she repeated wonderingly. The word Padre had used was not the one for what beggars were given. It was a word used for equals.

Even so, she would not fully believe. 'Is this the only way out for them?' she asked.

The dark look came again to his face. 'They are not scheming,' he said, '—not this couple, anyway. They are genuine.' He said angrily, 'They have shamed us.' 'They are clever,' she acknowledged.

He put up his hand impatiently. 'That is not true,' he said. 'In this act they are fully innocent.'

The fear was back in her heart. The beauty of the crystal ware suddenly seemed a withdrawn, solemn beauty. She felt a deep ache.

To Emmanuel she gave an impervious smile. 'Since they do not know I have done this, give them thanks anonymously.'

The pastor looked savagely at the water-set. 'Have it your own way, if you will,' he said. He went quickly, leaving her with her joy and fear.

Her husband Nimmo was neutral. His mind had never left the idols. He knew how precocious they were. One day they would bring you suffering. Another day they would give unexpected largesse. Either way they kept you in bondage. You had to be clever to keep yourself. Neutrality was needed. Be neither obsequious nor grateful. The gods respected those who had the same mind as themselves. In truth, they were not arbitrary. Every action of theirs was cleverly planned. Their continued existence depended upon the gullibility of their devotees. They worked to keep them in dependence upon their deity.

Nimmo would watch Martha at her crystal-ware devotions. He acknowledged her love of the beautiful. He knew that she was a compulsive thief, but she stole only those things which were beautiful. He knew that she tired quickly of their beauty. It was then that they sold the objects and this bonus-income was a matter of delight.

This day he knew her worship was different. It was as though she feared the beautiful water-set.

'What is wrong?' he asked her.

'It has changed, this thing, since it has been given to me. Now it seems distant. I cannot properly possess it. I do not know what is the matter.'

'The matter is this,' he said, '—you cannot receive the gift.'

She said, 'If one steals a thing and the owner gives it to you, is it then really a gift?'

Nimmo said, 'It is in fact a double gift. They ask no restitution or reparation. So then, they give the gift and also forego the reparation.'

Martha was now disturbed in a manner she had never known. For her—though she knew it not—it was the dynamic awakening of her conscience. Her natural cleverness and cunning had always taken care of her conscience. However, a

new and disturbing factor had broken into her world— genuine grace. It was with grace that she was unable to cope. Her husband smiled. Whilst he gratefully accepted her beauty, he had no illusions about her deceitful mind. He looked with some amusement on her perturbation. It seemed to him to be some humour of the gods that conscience had been awakened.

For Martha it was no matter of humour. She had looked at her master and mistress with the clear bold look of the accomplished liar. She had rationalised her actions as valid. There was nothing of accusation in her master's eyes, and this was all the more strange because she was convinced he knew she had taken the crystal ware. Now it was she who could not look at him. Nor could she relate—as she had previously done—with a natural carefree spirit. She felt servile although she knew that he did not despise her.

Only when Nimmo was not present would she open the *sundook*. Nor would she lift it out of its trunk. She would not set it upon its crystal tray, jug surmounting the ring of glasses about it. She would just stare at it, and its beauty would seem distant from her, static towards her, having its being within itself.

Her guilt now began to show in anger. Nimmo, who was clever, would explain the strange critical spirit that was working in her.

'You are critical about Sahib and Memsahiba,' he would say. 'Whenever we do a person some evil, we get angry with them because we are guilty. We must make them inferior so that we can feel righteous.'

He was a clever one, all right, that Nimmo. She was surprised at the man who, being her husband, she had considered to be quite ordinary. She had not looked to having an extraordinary husband. She was pleased at what she found in

him, but now he baffled her. Also he caused stirrings in her. He was showing her a world she had not known existed. Sometimes, too, she would flare at him in anger, but he was only amused.

One day a terrible thought struck her. She was not better than a Char. The Char tribespeople were very debased. They lived on theft. Every one was a trained thief. In a way, because they were acknowledged thieves, there was a curious honesty in what they did. She felt the burden that was on her. Nimmo just laughed when she confided in him.

'Chars steal all the time. You only steal some of the time. You are only pan of a thief.' Then he sobered. 'You are making too much of your act. They have given you the gift. Be content with it.'

She knew that what he said was wholesome common sense. She could not, however, defeat the misgivings that were within her. To her surprise—and horror—the matter became an obsession. There was also a strange perverse spirit within her. She was like a compulsive alcoholic. Having stolen, she needed to steal again, and she did. This time she only took token things, like a pen, a child's toy, an odd rupee or an anna or two. The old thrill of having something beyond her rightful pay no longer came to her. Genuine shame had been foreign to her. The only shame she had known had been in losing face. This shame had nothing to do with her conscience, but only social practice and cultural mores.

One night she felt an intolerable loneliness come upon her. The children were sleeping. Nimmo was out on work, miles from the city. She felt an oppressive weight and wondered whether it was a supernatural force.

The night wasted away around her. She lay exhausted. She

had tried to recapture the ease of the days she had known prior to the first sight of the crystal ware.

Once she rose from the bed and lit the oil wick. She opened the trunk, hoping to dispel the restlessness that was around her. The sight of the gift did nothing to dispel her irrational thoughts. Back on the bed she tossed and turned. It seemed that a fever had gripped her. Now her dreams and visions became distorted. Weird convolutions of thoughts encapsulated her.

That was when she consciously began to hate the gift. It was like an idol with its own personal being, but being beautiful was yet not capricious. Nor was it condemning her. To her it seemed like a calm personality, retaining its own dignity, preserving its own counsel.

She knew the children would not wake before the full dawn. She opened the *sundook* silently. With care she took out each piece of crystal glass. She wrapped them skilfully in newspaper. She laid them in a large *chaddar*—a new sheet she had bought and treasured. Drawing the four corners across the gift, she tied them securely. Now she had a bundle. She lifted it on to her head.

Her feet scuffed the coal dust of the early morning. There were few around as she pattered towards the compound. One or two people eyed her idly but said nothing. They left her to be.

At the Shahi Bazaar, shopkeepers were stirring. A few were setting out their wares. Some were squatting on the footpath. One spat out his betel-nut, idly but accurately aiming at a vagrant stone. She hurried on.

In the vegetable market it was different. The huge bullock wagons were lumbering through, seeking a place to rest and off-load the farm produce. She came to the crossroad at the end of the bazaar, and it was then that it happened.

She had not seen the motor vehicle as she stepped out from behind the slowly moving bullock cart. Before she was aware, it was upon her.

She felt it knock her on the right side. There was no pain: only surprise and some shock. The *chaddar* tumbled off her head. She heard the tinkling of light music.

The *chaddar* had opened on the road. Beyond her spreadeagled legs she could see the fragments, glinting in the early dawn light. She was aware of people standing about her, peering down. Because she was a woman, the men would not touch her. She had a sudden longing for Nimmo.

The driver of the motor vehicle was staring down at her from his driving seat. He was scared. The local people might tear him from limb to limb if she were to die. Another danger faced him. The family of this tribeswoman might ask for huge damages. He wished to drive away quickly, but if he made a move that would prove his guilt.

Somehow she stood up. She could see the jug was broken, its delicate fragments scattered in the dust. Someone picked up an unbroken glass. She stared at it unbelievably. The tray and other glasses were shattered. She took the glass with one hand and felt herself with the other. Bruised she probably was, but not badly hurt. All she wanted to do was to escape these staring men. Her mind did not move on to the thought of compensation.

They watched her as she gathered up the soiled *chaddar* from the red dust. As she walked away she was shaking and folding it, slightly hindered by the one glass she was holding. Soon the *kabardi wallah* would come and collect the broken glass. He would make *diamantes* out of its slender shards. They would be beautiful.

She trudged towards the compound. Barkat, the watchman, let her in, unlocking the gate, his eyes still sleepy. She had

covered the glass with her *chaddar*.

When she rang the donkey bell at the door, she could scarcely wait until the Sahib came. She held the glass firmly. It was not the Sahib but Memsahiba who came. She looked at her mistress with new eyes. She noticed the baby on her hip.

Then suddenly she was shouting and weeping. She was holding the glass—lone survivor of the accident. Something strange, but then also wonderful, was happening in her mind. The burden, the irrationality of her mind, the distorted ideas and the weird weaving thoughts were dissipating. Something like light was beginning to break through. She was as bewildered as she was delighted. She kept proffering the glass to this woman before her, who was at first puzzled, then intrigued, and, finally, understanding.

The Sahib had come and was looking at her with a quiet smile. He had understood out of the tumble of her words. He accepted the proffered glass, setting it down on a table. When he talked, he told her that it was hers, the gift given. Whatever had happened to the other crystal did not really matter.

For a short moment she could not believe. It seemed difficult, even, to believe that they did not care. The freedom that was beginning to flow into her may have had something to do with their kindness, but mainly it was the sudden release from guilt which was making this joy flow up in her.

It kept tumbling out as though it were a special dynamic, and it flowed into the bungalow, around her and the other woman and the man. It was like a new world opening up to her, a new wide universe unfolding.

She began to laugh, and her laughter flowed, not sobbing or gasping, but in trills—liquid trills, you might say—and after a few moments the other woman and the man both joined with her.

Their laughter flew around the morning. The baby, which had been awake, did not cry. Instead it looked—as though with eyes of ancient wisdom—at Martha, the laughing

woman of grace and beauty.

Nothing seemed to prevent that laughter as they were enfolded in it. Nothing else seemed to matter, not even the delicate glass with its gold pattern of filigree, as it stood on the table, a lone sentinel, but a symbol also of the beauty that ultimately sets free.

## Am I Immutable?

Mutable, or immutable?  
 Alterable or unalterable?  
 Mutate or unmutate?  
 This is the question that burns my mind,  
 Sending me into teared nights  
 And weeping mornings, moods dark  
 Under the desperate joyfulness  
 That I show to the curious world  
 Pressing about me.

Am I the victim of myself?  
 Is then the child stern father  
 Of the matured man? Or does the leopard  
 Miraculously change his spots, the dark Nubian  
 The glossy sleekness of his skin?  
 Am I the steady product of my thoughts,  
 Doomed to be bound forever  
 In the circus circle of my trotting mind,  
 As noble beast I follow the eternal round?

Is there no break for me,  
 No sudden escape from the closing solemnity,  
 The encircling insistence of my mind  
 Beating upon me in its inevitable closure,  
 Reducing me to what I was?  
 Is hell then the release of me  
 Into me as I always was, and must  
 I thus be, thus always be?  
 This is the terror that causes sweat  
 To break from the weeping pores  
 Through nights insatiable.

Does then the guilt forever claim me  
 Beyond mercy's call, or grace's recall  
 And have my holy wails been breached  
 To tear the spirit down, bring ruin and despair  
 In everlasting dereliction? Was that the cry  
 He uttered on his wooden cross,  
 A cry that swept into the storm  
 Of his own mind, to be forever lost  
 Upon some blasted waste, some high-flung gale  
 That swept it on to hell  
 As a muttered babbling?

Are breaches once made within the soul  
 Forever irreparable?  
 Do derelicts—their ragged heads  
 Arrested in motion, frozen in space—  
 Remain immutable sentinels  
 Over the irreversible history  
 Of their own defection, tears denied  
 Are they ossified immutability?

These questions I mutter to myself,  
 Seated in trams and trains and cars,  
 Thinking at nights upon my bed,  
 Snatching the fierce pleasure of a hateful joy,  
 Filling the moments with defiant laugh,  
 Or pliant to heaven on faithless knees,  
 Knowing the dice are stacked against me,  
 Knowing the inevitability of faith  
 And cursing the fixating Deity.

Times are when even fate is weak,  
 God's smiling through His dappling sun,  
 And summer chuckles in its pleasant days  
 And dreamy surfs cream up against the sands,

Retreating with flirting laugh and twinkling smile  
 To come again with joy. Then think I  
 'It's not immutable, unalterable  
 And inexorable. It changes,  
 Beaming through with hope,  
 Shafting my inner heart with light,  
 Dissolving the castle derelict  
 In a moving mist, illuminating  
 The rigid darkness with the plumes  
 Of love's irresistible light.'

Yet in the moment of unspeakable hope  
 Tolls gloomily again the bell,  
 Clangs painfully its scarcely muffled note,  
 And the sun has gone and the gold foreshore  
 Is swept with dismal waves  
 That beat in an agony of darkful doom  
 On the darker rocks, the stern heads  
 Of an unenterable bay. I die again,  
 Wrapped in the inevitability of fate,  
 Settled derelict in mind, immutable.

Once in the intolerable agony,  
 Once immutable in the fixed circle  
 Of guilt and fate, act and consequence,  
 I stumbled upon the crudity  
 Of wooden cross and hanged man,  
 Stark in its foolishness of time,  
 Pathetic in its claim of human dynamism,  
 Purporting to solve the ceaseless mystery  
 But being a scandal in itself, the consequence  
 Of love that pitted its puny powers  
 At rigid fate, fixed inevitability  
 In the hope—even the insistence—  
 Of authentic escape, emancipation planned

In the mercy depths of the Eternal—  
 The Mind that minded man.

In the bewildering insistence  
 Of the crude cross, the dry timbers,  
 I paused in my passionate desires,  
 Wept tears from the inner caverns stored.  
 Let cries' will encircle that cross  
 And bled life out on the dried drippings  
 Of Golgotha's stone. Hands scrabbled,  
 Pleading the incredible liberation,  
 Hope scorching hope into black cinders  
 Even as hope cried fresh again.

Out of the misted mysterious heavens—  
 The place where gloomed fate rules rigidly—  
 Swept the encircling Spirit, *shekinah* pure;  
 It bore itself into the recesses  
 Of my immutated mind, bearing  
 The bloody evangel, the curse's curse  
 Shrivelling my anti-hope, blasting my doom,  
 Cracking wide open the unbending despair,  
 Liberating the ensconced inner heart  
 Battened about with the dreadful logic—  
 Guilt's ancient and unalterable doom.

Of this new liberty I will say little,  
 But much I will say of the lease of suffering  
 My Lord took of the implacable fates.  
 Suff'ring they insist upon, but do not know  
 Its powers to defeat the past and ensure  
 The mutable future. They do not know  
 Love's darling fate is mutability.  
 We know who know that in the cross—  
 The cragged timbers of the passionate love-

Love's fountains break and crash  
 On unsuspecting flesh, the surprise  
 Of grace's inevitable delight  
 That pain produced like gleaming gold  
 Made pure in the crucible of pain  
 As love-in-flesh battles the unchangeable elements  
 To unchanging change. Love's hands  
 Clasped the dead fingers of a fated race,  
 Suffering the suffering in a noble hour,  
 Reversing its cycle of immutable doom.

Come then the power of that Cross,  
 Come then the joyful Spirit on the wing  
 And the whole is changed; the guilt quivers down  
 To an immutable nothing. Hope flares its rescue lights  
 Over the wild wastes of former lostness,  
 Stamping their impotence on the false endeavour  
 To entrap the beloved flesh of man.  
 God's mind's delight breaks chuckling  
 Into the belated mind of man, breaking  
 The chains of imagined inevitability,  
 Liberating to changeable choice  
 And brilliant motivation.

No longer then the immutable,  
 For only of all is love immutable.  
 The old becomes the new, the new is free  
 To newer be. What was is not, what is was not  
 Except in form. Under the form the dynamic change,  
 The new creation—the old created new—  
 The slant of things has changed, the slant renewed  
 Brings the authentic truth to light,  
 And light brings life, life's actions  
 In the movingly mutable man.  
 The new shapes up to the eternal cast,

The purpose of Deity for man  
 In the bright glory of the palpable Son,  
 The die that is cast for the glorified flesh,  
 The goal of the eternal purpose,  
 Joyful humanity forever  
 With the joyful Creator-Father.