ГЕРБЕРТ УЭЛЛС

THE SOUL OF A BISHOP

Herbert George Wells

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Wells H.

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Содержание

H. G. Wells
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CHAPTER THE FIRST – THE DREAM

(1)

IT was a scene of bitter disputation. A hawk-nosed young man with a pointing finger was prominent. His face worked violently, his lips moved very rapidly, but what he said was inaudible.

Behind him the little rufous man with the big eyes twitched at his robe and offered suggestions.

And behind these two clustered a great multitude of heated, excited, swarthy faces…

The emperor sat on his golden throne in the midst of the gathering, commanding silence by gestures, speaking inaudibly to them in a tongue the majority did not use, and then prevailing. They ceased their interruptions, and the old man, Arius, took up the debate. For a time all those impassioned faces were intent upon him; they listened as though they sought occasion, and suddenly as if by a preconcerted arrangement they were all thrusting their fingers into their ears and knitting their brows in assumed horror; some were crying aloud and making as if to fly. Some indeed tucked up their garments and fled. They spread out into a pattern. They were like the little monks who run from St. Jerome's lion in the picture by Carpaccio. Then one zealot rushed forward and smote the old man heavily upon the mouth…

The hall seemed to grow vaster and vaster, the disputing, infuriated figures multiplied to an innumerable assembly, they drove about like snowflakes in a gale, they whirled in argumentative couples, they spun in eddies of contradiction, they made extraordinary patterns, and then amidst the cloudy darkness of the unfathomable dome above them there appeared and increased a radiant triangle in which shone an eye. The eye and the triangle filled the heavens, sent out flickering rays, glowed to a blinding incandescence, seemed to be speaking words of thunder that were nevertheless inaudible. It was as if that thunder filled the heavens, it was as if it were nothing but the beating artery in the sleeper's ear. The attention strained to hear and comprehend, and on the very verge of comprehension snapped like a fiddle-string.

"Nicoea!"

The word remained like a little ash after a flare.

The sleeper had awakened and lay very still, oppressed by a sense of intellectual effort that had survived the dream in which it had arisen. Was it so that things had happened? The slumber-shadowed mind, moving obscurely, could not determine whether it was so or not. Had they indeed behaved in this manner when the great mystery was established? Who said they stopped their ears with their fingers and fled, shouting with horror? Shouting? Was it Eusebius or Athanasius? Or Sozomen… Some letter or apology by Athanasius?.. And surely it was impossible that the Trinity could have appeared visibly as a triangle and an eye. Above such an assembly.

That was mere dreaming, of course. Was it dreaming after Raphael? After Raphael? The drowsy mind wandered into a side issue. Was the picture that had suggested this dream the one in the Vatican where all the Fathers of the Church are shown disputing together? But there surely God and the Son themselves were painted with a symbol – some symbol – also? But was that disputation about the Trinity at all? Wasn't it rather about a chalice and a dove? Of course it was a chalice and a dove! Then where did one see the triangle and the eye? And men disputing? Some such picture there was…

What a lot of disputing there had been! What endless disputing! Which had gone on. Until last night. When this very disagreeable young man with the hawk nose and the pointing finger had

tackled one when one was sorely fagged, and disputed; disputed. Rebuked and disputed. “Answer me this,” he had said… And still one’s poor brains disputed and would not rest… About the Trinity…

The brain upon the pillow was now wearily awake. It was at once hopelessly awake and active and hopelessly unprogressive. It was like some floating stick that had got caught in an eddy in a river, going round and round and round. And round. Eternally – eternally – eternally begotten.

“But what possible meaning do you attach then to such a phrase as eternally begotten?”

The brain upon the pillow stared hopelessly at this question, without an answer, without an escape. The three repetitions spun round and round, became a swiftly revolving triangle, like some electric sign that had got beyond control, in the midst of which stared an unwinking and resentful eye.

(2)

Every one knows that expedient of the sleepless, the counting of sheep.

You lie quite still, you breathe regularly, you imagine sheep jumping over a gate, one after another, you count them quietly and slowly until you count yourself off through a fading string of phantom numbers to number Nod…

But sheep, alas! suggest an episcopal crook.

And presently a black sheep had got into the succession and was struggling violently with the crook about its leg, a hawk-nosed black sheep full of reproof, with disordered hair and a pointing finger. A young man with a most disagreeable voice.

At which the other sheep took heart and, deserting the numbered succession, came and sat about the fire in a big drawing-room and argued also. In particular there was Lady Sunderbund, a pretty fragile tall woman in the corner, richly jewelled, who sat with her pretty eyes watching and her lips compressed. What had she thought of it? She had said very little.

It is an unusual thing for a mixed gathering of this sort to argue about the Trinity. Simply because a tired bishop had fallen into their party. It was not fair to him to pretend that the atmosphere was a liberal and inquiring one, when the young man who had sat still and dormant by the table was in reality a keen and bitter Irish Roman Catholic. Then the question, a question-begging question, was put quite suddenly, without preparation or prelude, by surprise. “Why, Bishop, was the Spermaticos Logos identified with the Second and not the Third Person of the Trinity?”

It was indiscreet, it was silly, to turn upon the speaker and affect an air of disengagement and modernity and to say: “Ah, that indeed is the unfortunate aspect of the whole affair.”

Whereupon the fierce young man had exploded with: “To that, is it, that you Anglicans have come?”

The whole gathering had given itself up to the disputation, Lady Sunderbund, an actress, a dancer – though she, it is true, did not say very much – a novelist, a mechanical expert of some sort, a railway peer, geniuses, hairy and Celtic, people of no clearly definable position, but all quite unequal to the task of maintaining that air of reverent vagueness, that tenderness of touch, which is by all Anglican standards imperative in so deep, so mysterious, and, nowadays, in mixed society at least, so infrequent a discussion.

It was like animals breaking down a fence about some sacred spot. Within a couple of minutes the affair had become highly improper. They had raised their voices, they had spoken with the utmost familiarity of almost unspeakable things. There had been even attempts at epigram. Athanasian epigrams. Bent the novelist had doubted if originally there had been a Third Person in the Trinity at all. He suggested a reaction from a too-Manichaean dualism at some date after the time of St. John’s Gospel. He maintained obstinately that that Gospel was dualistic.

The unpleasant quality of the talk was far more manifest in the retrospect than it had been at the time. It had seemed then bold and strange, but not impossible; now in the cold darkness it seemed sacrilegious. And the bishop’s share, which was indeed only the weak yielding of a tired man to an

atmosphere he had misjudged, became a disgraceful display of levity and bad faith. They had baited him. Some one had said that nowadays every one was an Arian, knowingly or unknowingly. They had not concealed their conviction that the bishop did not really believe in the Creeds he uttered.

And that unfortunate first admission stuck terribly in his throat.

Oh! Why had he made it?

(3)

Sleep had gone.

The awakened sleeper groaned, sat up in the darkness, and felt gropingly in this unaccustomed bed and bedroom first for the edge of the bed and then for the electric light that was possibly on the little bedside table.

The searching hand touched something. A water-bottle. The hand resumed its exploration. Here was something metallic and smooth, a stem. Either above or below there must be a switch…

The switch was found, grasped, and turned.

The darkness fled.

In a mirror the sleeper saw the reflection of his face and a corner of the bed in which he lay. The lamp had a tilted shade that threw a slanting bar of shadow across the field of reflection, lighting a right-angled triangle very brightly and leaving the rest obscure. The bed was a very great one, a bed for the Anakim. It had a canopy with yellow silk curtains, surmounted by a gilded crown of carved wood. Between the curtains was a man's face, clean-shaven, pale, with disordered brown hair and weary, pale-blue eyes. He was clad in purple pyjamas, and the hand that now ran its fingers through the brown hair was long and lean and shapely.

Beside the bed was a convenient little table bearing the light, a water-bottle and glass, a bunch of keys, a congested pocket-book, a gold-banded fountain pen, and a gold watch that indicated a quarter past three. On the lower edge of the picture in the mirror appeared the back of a gilt chair, over which a garment of peculiar construction had been carelessly thrown. It was in the form of that sleeveless cassock of purple, opening at the side, whose lower flap is called a bishop's apron; the corner of the frogged coat showed behind the chair-back, and the sash lay crumpled on the floor. Black doeskin breeches, still warmly lined with their pants, lay where they had been thrust off at the corner of the bed, partly covering black hose and silver-buckled shoes.

For a moment the tired gaze of the man in the bed rested upon these evidences of his episcopal dignity. Then he turned from them to the watch at the bedside.

He groaned helplessly.

(4)

These country doctors were no good. There wasn't a physician in the diocese. He must go to London.

He looked into the weary eyes of his reflection and said, as one makes a reassuring promise, "London."

He was being worried. He was being intolerably worried, and he was ill and unable to sustain his positions. This doubt, this sudden discovery of controversial unsoundness, was only one aspect of his general neurasthenia. It had been creeping into his mind since the "Light Unden the Altar" controversy. Now suddenly it had leapt upon him from his own unwary lips.

The immediate trouble arose from his loyalty. He had followed the King's example; he had become a total abstainer and, in addition, on his own account he had ceased to smoke. And his digestion, which Princhester had first made sensitive, was deranged. He was suffering chemically, suffering one of those nameless sequences of maladjustments that still defy our ordinary medical

science. It was afflicting him with a general malaise, it was affecting his energy, his temper, all the balance and comfort of his nerves. All day he was weary; all night he was wakeful. He was estranged from his body. He was distressed by a sense of detachment from the things about him, by a curious intimation of unreality in everything he experienced. And with that went this levity of conscience, a heaviness of soul and a levity of conscience, that could make him talk as though the Creeds did not matter – as though nothing mattered…

If only he could smoke!

He was persuaded that a couple of Egyptian cigarettes, or three at the outside, a day, would do wonders in restoring his nervous calm. That, and just a weak whisky and soda at lunch and dinner. Suppose now – !

His conscience, his sense of honour, deserted him. Latterly he had had several of these conscience-blanks; it was only when they were over that he realized that they had occurred.

One might smoke up the chimney, he reflected. But he had no cigarettes! Perhaps if he were to slip downstairs…

Why had he given up smoking?

He groaned aloud. He and his reflection eyed one another in mutual despair.

There came before his memory the image of a boy's face, a swarthy little boy, grinning, grinning with a horrible knowingness and pointing his finger – an accusing finger. It had been the most exasperating, humiliating, and shameful incident in the bishop's career. It was the afternoon for his fortnightly address to the Shop-girls' Church Association, and he had been seized with a panic fear, entirely irrational and unjustifiable, that he would not be able to deliver the address. The fear had arisen after lunch, had gripped his mind, and then as now had come the thought, "If only I could smoke!" And he had smoked. It seemed better to break a vow than fail the Association. He had fallen to the temptation with a completeness that now filled him with shame and horror. He had stalked Dunk, his valet-butler, out of the dining-room, had affected to need a book from the book-case beyond the sideboard, had gone insincerely to the sideboard humming "From Greenland's icy mountains," and then, glancing over his shoulder, had stolen one of his own cigarettes, one of the fatter sort. With this and his bedroom matches he had gone off to the bottom of the garden among the laurels, looked everywhere except above the wall to be sure that he was alone, and at last lit up, only as he raised his eyes in gratitude for the first blissful inhalation to discover that dreadful little boy peeping at him from the crotch in the yew-tree in the next garden. As though God had sent him to be a witness!

Their eyes had met. The bishop recalled with an agonized distinctness every moment, every error, of that shameful encounter. He had been too surprised to conceal the state of affairs from the pitiless scrutiny of those youthful eyes. He had instantly made as if to put the cigarette behind his back, and then as frankly dropped it…

His soul would not be more naked at the resurrection. The little boy had stared, realized the state of affairs slowly but surely, pointed his finger…

Never had two human beings understood each other more completely.

A dirty little boy! Capable no doubt of a thousand kindred scoundrelisms.

It seemed ages before the conscience-stricken bishop could tear himself from the spot and walk back, with such a pretence of dignity as he could muster, to the house.

And instead of the discourse he had prepared for the Shop-girls' Church Association, he had preached on temptation and falling, and how he knew they had all fallen, and how he understood and could sympathize with the bitterness of a secret shame, a moving but unsuitable discourse that had already been subjected to misconstruction and severe reproof in the local press of Princhester.

But the haunting thing in the bishop's memory was the face and gesture of the little boy. That grubby little finger stabbed him to the heart.

"Oh, God!" he groaned. "The meanness of it! How did I bring myself – ?"

He turned out the light convulsively, and rolled over in the bed, making a sort of cocoon of himself. He bored his head into the pillow and groaned, and then struggled impatiently to throw the bed-clothes off himself. Then he sat up and talked aloud.

"I must go to Brighton-Pomfrey," he said. "And get a medical dispensation. If I do not smoke – "

He paused for a long time.

Then his voice sounded again in the darkness, speaking quietly, speaking with a note almost of satisfaction.

"I shall go mad. I must smoke or I shall go mad."

For a long time he sat up in the great bed with his arms about his knees.

(5)

Fearful things came to him; things at once dreadfully blasphemous and entirely weak-minded.

The triangle and the eye became almost visible upon the black background of night. They were very angry. They were spinning round and round faster and faster. Because he was a bishop and because really he did not believe fully and completely in the Trinity. At one and the same time he did not believe in the Trinity and was terrified by the anger of the Trinity at his unbelief… He was afraid. He was aghast… And oh! he was weary…

He rubbed his eyes.

"If I could have a cup of tea!" he said.

Then he perceived with surprise that he had not thought of praying. What should he say? To what could he pray?

He tried not to think of that whizzing Triangle, that seemed now to be nailed like a Catherine wheel to the very centre of his forehead, and yet at the same time to be at the apex of the universe. Against that – for protection against that – he was praying. It was by a great effort that at last he pronounced the words:

"Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord …"

Presently he had turned up his light, and was prowling about the room. The clear inky dinginess that comes before the raw dawn of a spring morning, found his white face at the window, looking out upon the great terrace and the park.

CHAPTER THE SECOND – THE WEAR AND TEAR OF EPISCOPACY

(1)

IT was only in the last few years that the bishop had experienced these nervous and mental crises. He was a belated doubter. Whatever questionings had marked his intellectual adolescence had either been very slight or had been too adequately answered to leave any serious scars upon his convictions.

And even now he felt that he was afflicted physically rather than mentally, that some protective padding of nerve-sheath or brain-case had worn thin and weak, and left him a prey to strange disturbances, rather than that any new process of thought was eating into his mind. These doubts in his mind were still not really doubts; they were rather alien and, for the first time, uncontrolled movements of his intelligence. He had had a sheltered upbringing; he was the well-connected son of a comfortable rectory, the only son and sole survivor of a family of three; he had been carefully instructed and he had been a willing learner; it had been easy and natural to take many things for granted. It had been very easy and pleasant for him to take the world as he found it and God as he found Him. Indeed for all his years up to manhood he had been able to take life exactly as in his infancy he took his carefully warmed and prepared bottle – unquestioningly and beneficially.

And indeed that has been the way with most bishops since bishops began.

It is a busy continuous process that turns boys into bishops, and it will stand few jars or discords. The student of ecclesiastical biography will find that an early vocation has in every age been almost universal among them; few are there among these lives that do not display the incipient bishop from the tenderest years. Bishop How of Wakefield composed hymns before he was eleven, and Archbishop Benson when scarcely older possessed a little oratory in which he conducted services and – a pleasant touch of the more secular boy – which he protected from a too inquisitive sister by means of a booby trap. It is rare that those marked for episcopal dignities go so far into the outer world as Archbishop Lang of York, who began as a barrister. This early predestination has always been the common episcopal experience. Archbishop Benson's early attempts at religious services remind one both of St. Thomas a Becket, the "boy bishop," and those early ceremonies of St. Athanasius which were observed and inquired upon by the good bishop Alexander. (For though still a tender infant, St. Athanasius with perfect correctness and validity was baptizing a number of his innocent playmates, and the bishop who "had paused to contemplate the sports of the child remained to confirm the zeal of the missionary.") And as with the bishop of the past, so with the bishop of the future; the Rev. H. J. Campbell, in his story of his soul's pilgrimage, has given us a pleasant picture of himself as a child stealing out into the woods to build himself a little altar.

Such minds as these, settled as it were from the outset, are either incapable of real scepticism or become sceptical only after catastrophic changes. They understand the sceptical mind with difficulty, and their beliefs are regarded by the sceptical mind with incredulity. They have determined their forms of belief before their years of discretion, and once those forms are determined they are not very easily changed. Within the shell it has adopted the intelligence may be active and lively enough, may indeed be extraordinarily active and lively, but only within the shell.

There is an entire difference in the mental quality of those who are converts to a faith and those who are brought up in it. The former know it from outside as well as from within. They know not only that it is, but also that it is not. The latter have a confidence in their creed that is one with their apprehension of sky or air or gravitation. It is a primary mental structure, and they

not only do not doubt but they doubt the good faith of those who do. They think that the Atheist and Agnostic really believe but are impelled by a mysterious obstinacy to deny. So it had been with the Bishop of Princhester; not of cunning or design but in simple good faith he had accepted all the inherited assurances of his native rectory, and held by Church, Crown, Empire, decorum, respectability, solvency – and compulsory Greek at the Little Go – as his father had done before him. If in his undergraduate days he had said a thing or two in the modern vein, affected the socialism of William Morris and learnt some Swinburne by heart, it was out of a conscious wildness. He did not wish to be a prig. He had taken a far more genuine interest in the artistry of ritual.

Through all the time of his incumbency of the church of the Holy Innocents, St. John's Wood, and of his career as the bishop suffragan of Pinner, he had never faltered from his profound confidence in those standards of his home. He had been kind, popular, and endlessly active. His undergraduate socialism had expanded simply and sincerely into a theory of administrative philanthropy. He knew the Webbs. He was as successful with working-class audiences as with fashionable congregations. His home life with Lady Ella (she was the daughter of the fifth Earl of Birkenholme) and his five little girls was simple, beautiful, and happy as few homes are in these days of confusion. Until he became Bishop of Princhester – he followed Hood, the first bishop, as the reign of his Majesty King Edward the Peacemaker drew to its close – no anticipation of his coming distress fell across his path.

(2)

He came to Princhester an innocent and trustful man. The home life at the old rectory of Otteringham was still his standard of truth and reality. London had not disillusioned him. It was a strange waste of people, it made him feel like a missionary in infidel parts, but it was a kindly waste. It was neither antagonistic nor malicious. He had always felt there that if he searched his Londoner to the bottom, he would find the completest recognition of the old rectory and all its data and implications.

But Princhester was different.

Princhester made one think that recently there had been a second and much more serious Fall.

Princhester was industrial and unashamed. It was a countryside savagely invaded by forges and mine shafts and gaunt black things. It was scarred and impeded and discoloured. Even before that invasion, when the heather was not in flower it must have been a black country. Its people were dour uncandid individuals, who slanted their heads and knitted their brows to look at you. Occasionally one saw woods brown and blistered by the gases from chemical works. Here and there remained old rectories, closely reminiscent of the dear old home at Otteringham, jostled and elbowed and overshadowed by horrible iron cylinders belching smoke and flame. The fine old abbey church of Princhester, which was the cathedral of the new diocese, looked when first he saw it like a lady Abbess who had taken to drink and slept in a coal truck. She minced apologetically upon the market-place; the parvenu Town Hall patronized and protected her as if she were a poor relation…

The old aristocracy of the countryside was unpicturesquely decayed. The branch of the Walshinghams, Lady Ella's cousins, who lived near Pringle, was poor, proud and ignoble. And extremely unpopular. The rich people of the country were self-made and inclined to nonconformity, the working-people were not strictly speaking a "poor," they were highly paid, badly housed, and deeply resentful. They went in vast droves to football matches, and did not care a rap if it rained. The prevailing wind was sarcastic. To come here from London was to come from atmospheric blue-greys to ashen-greys, from smoke and soft smut to grime and black grimness.

The bishop had been charmed by the historical associations of Princhester when first the see was put before his mind. His realization of his diocese was a profound shock.

Only one hint had he had of what was coming. He had met during his season of congratulations Lord Gatling dining unusually at the Athenaeum. Lord Gatling and he did not talk frequently, but on

this occasion the great racing peer came over to him. “You will feel like a cherub in a stokehole,” Lord Gatling had said…

“They used to heave lumps of slag at old Hood’s gaiters,” said Lord Gatling.

“In London a bishop’s a lord and a lark and nobody minds him,” said Lord Gatling, “but Princhester is different. It isn’t used to bishops… Well, – I hope you’ll get to like ‘em.”

(3)

Trouble began with a fearful row about the position of the bishop’s palace. Hood had always evaded this question, and a number of strong-willed self-made men of wealth and influence, full of local patriotism and that competitive spirit which has made England what it is, already intensely irritated by Hood’s prevarications, were resolved to pin his successor to an immediate decision. Of this the new bishop was unaware. Mindful of a bishop’s constant need to travel, he was disposed to seek a home within easy reach of Pringle Junction, from which nearly every point in the diocese could be simply and easily reached. This fell in with Lady Ella’s liking for the rare rural quiet of the Kibe valley and the neighbourhood of her cousins the Walshinghams. Unhappily it did not fall in with the inflexible resolution of each and every one of the six leading towns of the see to put up, own, obtrude, boast, and swagger about the biggest and showiest thing in episcopal palaces in all industrial England, and the new bishop had already taken a short lease and gone some way towards the acquisition of Ganford House, two miles from Pringle, before he realized the strength and fury of these local ambitions.

At first the magnates and influences seemed to be fighting only among themselves, and he was so ill-advised as to broach the Ganford House project as a compromise that would glorify no one unfairly, and leave the erection of an episcopal palace for some future date when he perhaps would have the good fortune to have passed to “where beyond these voices there is peace,” forgetting altogether among other oversights the importance of architects and builders in local affairs. His proposal seemed for a time to concentrate the rich passions of the whole countryside upon himself and his wife.

Because they did not leave Lady Ella alone. The Walshinghams were already unpopular in their county on account of a poverty and shyness that made them seem “stuck up” to successful captains of industry only too ready with the hand of friendship, the iron grip indeed of friendship, consciously hospitable and eager for admission and endorsements. And Princhester in particular was under the sway of that enterprising weekly, The White Blackbird, which was illustrated by, which indeed monopolized the gifts of, that brilliant young caricaturist “The Snicker.”

It had seemed natural for Lady Ella to acquiesce in the proposals of the leading Princhester photographer. She had always helped where she could in her husband’s public work, and she had been popular upon her own merits in Wealdstone. The portrait was abominable enough in itself; it dwelt on her chin, doubled her age, and denied her gentleness, but it was a mere starting-point for the subtle extravagance of The Snicker’s poisonous gift… The thing came upon the bishop suddenly from the book-stall at Pringle Junction.

He kept it carefully from Lady Ella… It was only later that he found that a copy of The White Blackbird had been sent to her, and that she was keeping the horror from him. It was in her vein that she should reproach herself for being a vulnerable side to him.

Even when the bishop capitulated in favour of Princhester, that decision only opened a fresh trouble for him. Princhester wanted the palace to be a palace; it wanted to combine all the best points of Lambeth and Fulham with the marble splendours of a good modern bank. The bishop’s architectural tastes, on the other hand, were rationalistic. He was all for building a useful palace in undertones, with a green slate roof and long horizontal lines. What he wanted more than anything else was a quite remote wing with a lot of bright little bedrooms and a sitting-room and so on, complete in

itself, examination hall and everything, with a long intricate connecting passage and several doors, to prevent the ordination candidates straying all over the place and getting into the talk and the tea. But the diocese wanted a proud archway – and turrets, and did not care a rap if the ordination candidates slept about on the carpets in the bishop's bedroom. Ordination candidates were quite outside the sphere of its imagination.

And he disappointed Princhester with his equipage. Princhester had a feeling that it deserved more for coming over to the church from nonconformity as it was doing. It wanted a bishop in a mitre and a gilt coach. It wanted a pastoral crook. It wanted something to go with its mace and its mayor. And (obsessed by The Snicker) it wanted less of Lady Ella. The cruelty and unreason of these attacks upon his wife distressed the bishop beyond measure, and baffled him hopelessly. He could not see any means of checking them nor of defending or justifying her against them.

The palace was awaiting its tenant, but the controversies and bitternesses were still swinging and swaying and developing when King George was being crowned. Close upon that event came a wave of social discontent, the great railway strike, a curious sense of social and political instability, and the first beginnings of the bishop's ill health.

(4)

There came a day of exceptional fatigue and significance.

The industrial trouble was a very real distress to the bishop. He had a firm belief that it is a function of the church to act as mediator between employer and employed. It was a common saying of his that the aim of socialism – the right sort of socialism – was to Christianize employment. Regardless of suspicion on either hand, regardless of very distinct hints that he should "mind his own business," he exerted himself in a search for methods of reconciliation. He sought out every one who seemed likely to be influential on either side, and did his utmost to discover the conditions of a settlement. As far as possible and with the help of a not very efficient chaplain he tried to combine such interviews with his more normal visiting.

At times, and this was particularly the case on this day, he seemed to be discovering nothing but the incurable perversity and militancy of human nature. It was a day under an east wind, when a steely-blue sky full of colourless light filled a stiff-necked world with whitish high lights and inky shadows. These bright harsh days of barometric high pressure in England rouse and thwart every expectation of the happiness of spring. And as the bishop drove through the afternoon in a hired fly along a rutted road of slag between fields that were bitterly wired against the Sunday trespasser, he fell into a despondent meditation upon the political and social outlook.

His thoughts were of a sort not uncommon in those days. The world was strangely restless. Since the passing of Victoria the Great there had been an accumulating uneasiness in the national life. It was as if some compact and dignified paper-weight had been lifted from people's ideas, and as if at once they had begun to blow about anyhow. Not that Queen Victoria had really been a paper-weight or any weight at all, but it happened that she died as an epoch closed, an epoch of tremendous stabilities. Her son, already elderly, had followed as the selvedge follows the piece, he had passed and left the new age stripped bare. In nearly every department of economic and social life now there was upheaval, and it was an upheaval very different in character from the radicalism and liberalism of the Victorian days. There were not only doubt and denial, but now there were also impatience and unreason. People argued less and acted quicker. There was a pride in rebellion for its own sake, an indiscipline and disposition to sporadic violence that made it extremely hard to negotiate any reconciliations or compromises. Behind every extremist it seemed stood a further extremist prepared to go one better…

The bishop had spent most of the morning with one of the big employers, a tall dark man, lean and nervous, and obviously tired and worried by the struggle. He did not conceal his opinion that the

church was meddling with matters quite outside its sphere. Never had it been conveyed to the bishop before how remote a rich and established Englishman could consider the church from reality.

"You've got no hold on them," he said. "It isn't your sphere."

And again: "They'll listen to you – if you speak well. But they don't believe you know anything about it, and they don't trust your good intentions. They won't mind a bit what you say unless you drop something they can use against us."

The bishop tried a few phrases. He thought there might be something in co-operation, in profit-sharing, in some more permanent relationship between the business and the employee.

"There isn't," said the employer compactly. "It's just the malice of being inferior against the man in control. It's just the spirit of insubordination and boredom with duty. This trouble's as old as the Devil."

"But that is exactly the business of the church," said the bishop brightly, "to reconcile men to their duty."

"By chanting the Athanasian creed at 'em, I suppose," said the big employer, betraying the sneer he had been hiding hitherto.

"This thing is a fight," said the big employer, carrying on before the bishop could reply. "Religion had better get out of the streets until this thing is over. The men won't listen to reason. They don't mean to. They're bit by Syndicalism. They're setting out, I tell you, to be unreasonable and impossible. It isn't an argument; it's a fight. They don't want to make friends with the employer. They want to make an end to the employer. Whatever we give them they'll take and press us for more. Directly we make terms with the leaders the men go behind it… It's a raid on the whole system. They don't mean to work the system – anyhow. I'm the capitalist, and the capitalist has to go. I'm to be bundled out of my works, and some – some " – he seemed to be rejecting unsuitable words – "confounded politician put in. Much good it would do them. But before that happens I'm going to fight. You would."

The bishop walked to the window and stood staring at the brilliant spring bulbs in the big employer's garden, and at a long vista of newly-mown lawn under great shapely trees just budding into green.

"I can't admit," he said, "that these troubles lie outside the sphere of the church."

The employer came and stood beside him. He felt he was being a little hard on the bishop, but he could not see any way of making things easier.

"One doesn't want Sacred Things," he tried, "in a scrap like this.

"We've got to mend things or end things," continued the big employer. "Nothing goes on for ever. Things can't last as they are going on now…"

Then he went on abruptly to something that for a time he had been keeping back.

"Of course just at present the church may do a confounded lot of harm. Some of you clerical gentlemen are rather too fond of talking socialism and even preaching socialism. Don't think I want to be overcritical. I admit there's no end of things to be said for a proper sort of socialism, Ruskin, and all that. We're all Socialists nowadays. Ideals – excellent. But – it gets misunderstood. It gives the men a sense of moral support. It makes them fancy that they are It. Encourages them to forget duties and set up preposterous claims. Class war and all that sort of thing. You gentlemen of the clergy don't quite realize that socialism may begin with Ruskin and end with Karl Marx. And that from the Class War to the Commune is just one step."

(5)

From this conversation the bishop had made his way to the vicarage of Mogham Banks. The vicar of Mogham Banks was a sacerdotal socialist of the most advanced type, with the reputation of being closely in touch with the labour extremists. He was a man addicted to banners, prohibited

ornaments, special services at unusual hours, and processions in the streets. His taste in chasubles was loud, he gardened in a cassock and, it was said, he slept in his biretta; he certainly slept in a hair shirt, and he littered his church with flowers, candles, side altars, confessional boxes, requests for prayers for the departed, and the like. There had already been two Kensitite demonstrations at his services, and altogether he was a source of considerable anxiety to the bishop. The bishop did his best not to know too exactly what was going on at Mogham Banks. Sooner or later he felt he would be forced to do something – and the longer he could put that off the better. But the Rev. Morrice Deans had promised to get together three or four prominent labour leaders for tea and a frank talk, and the opportunity was one not to be missed. So the bishop, after a hasty and not too digestible lunch in the refreshment room at Pringle, was now in a fly that smelt of straw and suggested infectious hospital patients, on his way through the industry-scarred countryside to this second conversation.

The countryside had never seemed so scarred to him as it did that day.

It was probably the bright hard spring sunshine that emphasized the contrast between that dear England of hedges and homes and the south-west wind in which his imagination lived, and the crude presences of a mechanical age. Never before had the cuttings and heapings, the smashing down of trees, the obtrusion of corrugated iron and tar, the belchings of smoke and the haste, seemed so harsh and disregardful of all the bishop's world. Across the fields a line of gaunt iron standards, abominably designed, carried an electric cable to some unknown end. The curve of the hill made them seem a little out of the straight, as if they hurried and bent forward furtively.

"Where are they going?" asked the bishop, leaning forward to look out of the window of the fly, and then: "Where is it all going?"

And presently the road was under repair, and was being done at a great pace with a huge steam-roller, mechanically smashed granite, and kettles of stinking stuff, asphalt or something of that sort, that looked and smelt like Milton's hell. Beyond, a gaunt hoarding advertised extensively the Princhester Music Hall, a mean beastly place that corrupted boys and girls; and also it clamoured of tyres and potted meats…

The afternoon's conference gave him no reassuring answer to his question, "Where is it all going?"

The afternoon's conference did no more than intensify the new and strange sense of alienation from the world that the morning's talk had evoked.

The three labour extremists that Morrice Deans had assembled obviously liked the bishop and found him picturesque, and were not above a certain snobbish gratification at the purple-trimmed company they were in, but it was clear that they regarded his intervention in the great dispute as if it were a feeble waving from the bank across the waters of a great river.

"There's an incurable misunderstanding between the modern employer and the modern employed," the chief labour spokesman said, speaking in a broad accent that completely hid from him and the bishop and every one the fact that he was by far the best-read man of the party. "Disraeli called them the Two Nations, but that was long ago. Now it's a case of two species. Machinery has made them into different species. The employer lives away from his work-people, marries a wife foreign, out of a county family or suchlike, trains his children from their very birth in a different manner. Why, the growth curve is different for the two species. They haven't even a common speech between them. One looks east and the other looks west. How can you expect them to agree? Of course they won't agree. We've got to fight it out. They say we're their slaves for ever. Have you ever read Lady Bell's 'At the Works'? A well-intentioned woman, but she gives the whole thing away. We say, No! It's our sort and not your sort. We'll do without you. We'll get a little more education and then we'll do without you. We're pressing for all we can get, and when we've got that we'll take breath and press for more. We're the Morlocks. Coming up. It isn't our fault that we've differentiated."

"But you haven't understood the drift of Christianity," said the bishop. "It's just to assert that men are One community and not two."

"There's not much of that in the Creeds," said a second labour leader who was a rationalist. "There's not much of that in the services of the church."

The vicar spoke before his bishop, and indeed he had plenty of time to speak before his bishop. "Because you will not set yourselves to understand the symbolism of her ritual," he said.

"If the church chooses to speak in riddles," said the rationalist.

"Symbols," said Morrice Deans, "need not be riddles," and for a time the talk eddied about this minor issue and the chief labour spokesman and the bishop looked at one another. The vicar instanced and explained certain apparently insignificant observances, his antagonist was contemptuously polite to these explanations. "That's all very pratty," he said…

The bishop wished that fine points of ceremonial might have been left out of the discussion.

Something much bigger than that was laying hold of his intelligence, the realization of a world extravagantly out of hand. The sky, the wind, the telegraph poles, had been jabbing in the harsh lesson of these men's voices, that the church, as people say, "wasn't in it." And that at the same time the church held the one remedy for all this ugliness and contention in its teaching of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of men. Only for some reason he hadn't the phrases and he hadn't the voice to assert this over their wrangling and their stiff resolution. He wanted to think the whole business out thoroughly, for the moment he had nothing to say, and there was the labour leader opposite waiting smilingly to hear what he had to say so soon as the bout between the vicar and the rationalist was over.

(6)

That morning in the long galleries of the bishop's imagination a fresh painting had been added. It was a big wall painting rather in the manner of Puvis de Chavannes. And the central figure had been the bishop of Princhester himself. He had been standing upon the steps of the great door of the cathedral that looks upon the marketplace where the tram-lines meet, and he had been dressed very magnificently and rather after the older use. He had been wearing a tunicle and dalmatic under a chasuble, a pectoral cross, purple gloves, sandals and buskins, a mitre and his presentation ring. In his hand he had borne his pastoral staff. And the clustering pillars and arches of the great doorway were painted with a loving flat particularity that omitted nothing but the sooty tinge of the later discolourations.

On his right hand had stood a group of employers very richly dressed in the fashion of the fifteenth century, and on the left a rather more numerous group of less decorative artisans. With them their wives and children had been shown, all greatly impressed by the canonicals. Every one had been extremely respectful.

He had been reconciling the people and blessing them and calling them his "sheep" and his "little children."

But all this was so different.

Neither party resembled sheep or little children in the least degree.

The labour leader became impatient with the ritualistic controversy; he set his tea-cup aside out of danger and leant across the corner of the table to the bishop and spoke in a sawing undertone. "You see," he said, "the church does not talk our language. I doubt if it understands our language. I doubt if we understand clearly where we are ourselves. These things have to be fought out and hammered out. It's a big dusty dirty noisy job. It may be a bloody job before it's through. You can't suddenly call a halt in the middle of the scrap and have a sort of millennium just because you want it…

"Of course if the church had a plan," he said, "if it had a proposal to make, if it had anything more than a few pious palliatives to suggest, that might be different. But has it?"

The bishop had a bankrupt feeling. On the spur of the moment he could say no more than: "It offers its mediation."

(7)

Full as he was with the preoccupation of these things and so a little slow and inattentive in his movements, the bishop had his usual luck at Pringle Junction and just missed the 7.27 for Princhester. He might perhaps have got it by running through the subway and pushing past people, but bishops must not run through subways and push past people. His mind swore at the mischance, even if his lips refrained.

He was hungry and, tired; he would not get to the palace now until long after nine; dinner would be over and Lady Ella would naturally suppose he had dined early with the Rev. Morrice Deans. Very probably there would be nothing ready for him at all.

He tried to think he was exercising self-control, but indeed all his sub-conscious self was busy in a manner that would not have disgraced Tertullian with the eternal welfare of those city fathers whose obstinacy had fixed the palace at Princhester. He walked up and down the platform, gripping his hands very tightly behind him, and maintaining a serene upcast countenance by a steadfast effort. It seemed a small matter to him that the placards of the local evening papers should proclaim "Lloyd George's Reconciliation Meeting at Wombash Broken up by Suffragettes." For a year now he had observed a strict rule against buying the products of the local press, and he saw no reason for varying this protective regulation.

His mind was full of angry helplessness.

Was he to blame, was the church to blame, for its powerlessness in these social disputes? Could an abler man with a readier eloquence have done more?

He envied the cleverness of Cardinal Manning. Manning would have got right into the front of this affair. He would have accumulated credit for his church and himself…

But would he have done much?..

The bishop wandered along the platform to its end, and stood contemplating the convergent ways that gather together beyond the station and plunge into the hillside and the wilderness of sidings and trucks, signal-boxes, huts, coal-pits, electric standards, goods sheds, turntables, and engine-houses, that ends in a bluish bricked-up cliff against the hill. A train rushed with a roar and clatter into the throat of the great tunnel and was immediately silenced; its rear lights twinkled and vanished, and then out of that huge black throat came wisps of white steam and curled slowly upward like lazy snakes until they caught the slanting sunshine. For the first time the day betrayed a softness and touched this scene of black energy to gold. All late afternoons are beautiful, whatever the day has been – if only there is a gleam of sun. And now a kind of mechanical greatness took the place of mere black disorder in the bishop's perception of his see. It was harsh, it was vast and strong, it was no lamb he had to rule but a dragon. Would it ever be given to him to overcome his dragon, to lead it home, and bless it?

He stood at the very end of the platform, with his gaitered legs wide apart and his hands folded behind him, staring beyond all visible things.

Should he do something very bold and striking? Should he invite both men and masters to the cathedral, and preach tremendous sermons to them upon these living issues?

Short sermons, of course.

But stating the church's attitude with a new and convincing vigour.

He had a vision of the great aisle strangely full and alive and astir. The organ notes still echoed in the fretted vaulting, as the preacher made his way from the chancel to the pulpit. The congregation was tense with expectation, and for some reason his mind dwelt for a long time upon the figure of the preacher ascending the steps of the pulpit. Outside the day was dark and stormy, so that the stained-glass windows looked absolutely dead. For a little while the preacher prayed. Then in the attentive

silence the tenor of the preacher would begin, a thin jet of sound, a ray of light in the darkness, speaking to all these men as they had never been spoken to before…

Surely so one might call a halt to all these harsh conflicts. So one might lay hands afresh upon these stubborn minds, one might win them round to look at Christ the Master and Servant…

That, he thought, would be a good phrase: "Christ the Master and Servant."…

"Members of one Body," that should be his text… At last it was finished. The big congregation, which had kept so still, sighed and stirred. The task of reconciliation was as good as done. "And now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost…"

Outside the day had become suddenly bright, the threatening storm had drifted away, and great shafts of coloured light from the pictured windows were smiting like arrows amidst his hearers…

This idea of a great sermon upon capital and labour did so powerfully grip the bishop's imagination that he came near to losing the 8.27 train also.

He discovered it when it was already in the station. He had to walk down the platform very quickly. He did not run, but his gaiters, he felt, twinkled more than a bishop's should.

(8)

Directly he met his wife he realized that he had to hear something important and unpleasant.

She stood waiting for him in the inner hall, looking very grave and still. The light fell upon her pale face and her dark hair and her long white silken dress, making her seem more delicate and unworldly than usual and making the bishop feel grimy and sordid.

"I must have a wash," he said, though before he had thought of nothing but food. "I have had nothing to eat since tea-time – and that was mostly talk."

Lady Ella considered. "There are cold things… You shall have a tray in the study. Not in the dining-room. Eleanor is there. I want to tell you something. But go upstairs first and wash your poor tired face."

"Nothing serious, I hope?" he asked, struck by an unusual quality in her voice.

"I will tell you," she evaded, and after a moment of mutual scrutiny he went past her upstairs.

Since they had come to Princhester Lady Ella had changed very markedly. She seemed to her husband to have gained in dignity; she was stiller and more restrained; a certain faint arrogance, a touch of the "ruling class" manner had dwindled almost to the vanishing point. There had been a time when she had inclined to an authoritative hauteur, when she had seemed likely to develop into one of those aggressive and interfering old ladies who play so overwhelming a part in British public affairs. She had been known to initiate adverse judgments, to exercise the snub, to cut and humiliate. Princhester had done much to purge her of such tendencies. Princhester had made her think abundantly, and had put a new and subtler quality into her beauty. It had taken away the least little disposition to rustle as she moved, and it had softened her voice.

Now, when presently she stood in the study, she showed a new circumspection in her treatment of her husband. She surveyed the tray before him.

"You ought not to drink that Burgundy," she said. "I can see you are dog-tired. It was uncorked yesterday, and anyhow it is not very digestible. This cold meat is bad enough. You ought to have one of those quarter bottles of champagne you got for my last convalescence. There's more than a dozen left over."

The bishop felt that this was a pretty return of his own kindly thoughts "after many days," and soon Dunk, his valet-butler, was pouring out the precious and refreshing glassful…

"And now, dear?" said the bishop, feeling already much better.

Lady Ella had come round to the marble fireplace. The mantel-piece was a handsome work by a Princhester artist in the Gill style – with contemplative ascetics as supporters.

"I am worried about Eleanor," said Lady Ella.

"She is in the dining-room now," she said, "having some dinner. She came in about a quarter past eight, half way through dinner."

"Where had she been?" asked the bishop.

"Her dress was torn – in two places. Her wrist had been twisted and a little sprained."

"My dear!"

"Her face – Grubby! And she had been crying."

"But, my dear, what had happened to her? You don't mean – ?"

Husband and wife stared at one another aghast. Neither of them said the horrid word that flamed between them.

"Merciful heaven!" said the bishop, and assumed an attitude of despair.

"I didn't know she knew any of them. But it seems it is the second Walshingham girl – Phoebe. It's impossible to trace a girl's thoughts and friends. She persuaded her to go."

"But did she understand?"

"That's the serious thing," said Lady Ella.

She seemed to consider whether he could bear the blow.

"She understands all sorts of things. She argues… I am quite unable to argue with her."

"About this vote business?"

"About all sorts of things. Things I didn't imagine she had heard of. I knew she had been reading books. But I never imagined that she could have understood…"

The bishop laid down his knife and fork.

"One may read in books, one may even talk of things, without fully understanding," he said.

Lady Ella tried to entertain this comforting thought. "It isn't like that," she said at last. "She talks like a grown-up person. This – this escapade is just an accident. But things have gone further than that. She seems to think – that she is not being educated properly here, that she ought to go to a College. As if we were keeping things from her…"

The bishop reconsidered his plate.

"But what things?" he said.

"She says we get all round her," said Lady Ella, and left the implications of that phrase to unfold.

(9)

For a time the bishop said very little.

Lady Ella had found it necessary to make her first announcement standing behind him upon the hearthrug, but now she sat upon the arm of the great armchair as close to him as possible, and spoke in a more familiar tone.

The thing, she said, had come to her as a complete surprise. Everything had seemed so safe. Eleanor had been thoughtful, it was true, but it had never occurred to her mother that she had really been thinking – about such things as she had been thinking about. She had ranged in the library, and displayed a disposition to read the weekly papers and the monthly reviews. But never a sign of discontent.

"But I don't understand," said the bishop. "Why is she discontented? What is there that she wants different?"

"Exactly," said Lady Ella.

"She has got this idea that life here is secluded in some way," she expanded. "She used words like 'secluded' and 'artificial' and – what was it? – 'cloistered.' And she said – "

Lady Ella paused with an effect of exact retrospection.

"'Out there,' she said, 'things are alive. Real things are happening.' It is almost as if she did not fully believe – "

Lady Ella paused again.

The bishop sat with his arm over the back of his chair, and his face downcast.

"The ferment of youth," he said at last. "The ferment of youth. Who has given her these ideas?"

Lady Ella did not know. She could have thought a school like St. Aubyns would have been safe, but nowadays nothing was safe. It was clear the girls who went there talked as girls a generation ago did not talk. Their people at home encouraged them to talk and profess opinions about everything. It seemed that Phoebe Walshingham and Lady Kitty Kingdom were the leaders in these premature mental excursions. Phoebe aired religious doubts.

"But little Phoebe!" said the bishop.

"Kitty," said Lady Ella, "has written a novel."

"Already!"

"With elopements in it – and all sorts of things. She's had it typed. You'd think Mary Crosshampton would know better than to let her daughter go flourishing the family imagination about in that way."

"Eleanor told you?"

"By way of showing that they think of – things in general."

The bishop reflected. "She wants to go to College."

"They want to go in a set."

"I wonder if college can be much worse than school… She's eighteen – ? But I will talk to her…"

(10)

All our children are changelings. They are perpetually fresh strangers. Every day they vanish and a new person masquerades as yesterday's child until some unexpected development betrays the cheat.

The bishop had still to learn this perennial newness of the young. He learnt it in half an hour at the end of a fatiguing day.

He went into the dining-room. He went in as carelessly as possible and smoking a cigarette. He had an honourable dread of being portentous in his family; almost ostentatiously he laid the bishop aside. Eleanor had finished her meal, and was sitting in the arm-chair by the fire with one hand holding her sprained wrist.

"Well," he said, and strolled to the hearthrug. He had had an odd idea that he would find her still dirty, torn, and tearful, as her mother had described her, a little girl in a scrape. But she had changed into her best white evening frock and put up her hair, and became in the firelight more of a lady, a very young lady but still a lady, than she had ever been to him before. She was dark like her mother, but not of the same willowy type; she had more of her father's sturdy build, and she had developed her shoulders at hockey and tennis. The firelight brought out the gracious reposeful lines of a body that ripened in adolescence. And though there was a vibration of resolution in her voice she spoke like one who is under her own control.

"Mother has told you that I have disgraced myself," she began.

"No," said the bishop, weighing it. "No. But you seem to have been indiscreet, little Norah."

"I got excited," she said. "They began turning out the other women – roughly. I was indignant."

"You didn't go to interrupt?" he asked.

She considered. "No," she said. "But I went."

He liked her disposition to get it right. "On that side," he assisted.

"It isn't the same thing as really meaning, Daddy," she said.

"And then things happened?"

"Yes," she said to the fire.

A pause followed. If they had been in a law-court, her barrister would have said, “That is my case, my lord.” The bishop prepared to open the next stage in the proceedings.

“I think, Norah, you shouldn’t have been there at all,” he said.

“Mother says that.”

“A man in my position is apt to be judged by his family. You commit more than yourself when you commit an indiscretion. Apart from that, it wasn’t the place for a girl to be at. You are not a child now. We give you freedom – more freedom than most girls get – because we think you will use it wisely. You knew – enough to know that there was likely to be trouble.”

The girl looked into the fire and spoke very carefully. “I don’t think that I oughtn’t to know the things that are going on.”

The bishop studied her face for an instant. It struck him that they had reached something very fundamental as between parent and child. His modernity showed itself in the temperance of his reply.

“Don’t you think, my dear, that on the whole your mother and I, who have lived longer and know more, are more likely to know when it is best that you should begin to know – this or that?”

The girl knitted her brows and seemed to be reading her answer out of the depths of the coals. She was on the verge of speaking, altered her mind and tried a different beginning.

“I think that every one must do their thinking – his thinking – for – oneself,” she said awkwardly.

“You mean you can’t trust – ?”

“It isn’t trusting. But one knows best for oneself when one is hungry.”

“And you find yourself hungry?”

“I want to find out for myself what all this trouble about votes and things means.”

“And we starve you – intellectually?”

“You know I don’t think that. But you are busy…”

“Aren’t you being perhaps a little impatient, Eleanor? After all – you are barely eighteen… We have given you all sorts of liberties.”

Her silence admitted it. “But still,” she said after a long pause, “there are other girls, younger than I am, in these things. They talk about – oh, all sorts of things. Freely…”

“You’ve been awfully good to me,” she said irrelevantly. “And of course this meeting was all pure accident.”

Father and daughter remained silent for awhile, seeking a better grip.

“What exactly do you want, Eleanor?” he asked.

She looked up at him. “Generally?” she asked.

“Your mother has the impression that you are discontented.”

“Discontented is a horrid word.”

“Well – unsatisfied.”

She remained still for a time. She felt the moment had come to make her demand.

“I would like to go to Newnham or Somerville – and work. I feel – so horribly ignorant. Of all sorts of things. If I were a son I should go – ”

“Ye – es,” said the bishop and reflected.

He had gone rather far in the direction of the Woman Suffrage people; he had advocated equality of standard in all sorts of matters, and the memory of these utterances hampered him.

“You could read here,” he tried.

“If I were a son, you wouldn’t say that.”

His reply was vague. “But in this home,” he said, “we have a certain atmosphere.”

He left her to imply her differences in sensibility and response from the hardier male.

Her hesitation marked the full gravity of her reply. “It’s just that,” she said. “One feels – ” She considered it further. “As if we were living in a kind of magic world – not really real. Out there – ” she glanced over her shoulder at the drawn blind that hid the night. “One meets with different sorts of minds and different – atmospheres. All this is very beautiful. I’ve had the most wonderful home.

But there's a sort of feeling as though it couldn't really go on, as though all these strikes and doubts and questionings – "

She stopped short at questionings, for the thing was said.

The bishop took her meaning gallantly and honestly.

"The church of Christ, little Norah, is built upon a rock."

She made no answer. She moved her head very slightly so that he could not see her face, and remained sitting rather stiffly and awkwardly with her eyes upon the fire.

Her silence was the third and greatest blow the bishop received that day…

It seemed very long indeed before either of them spoke. At last he said: "We must talk about these things again, Norah, when we are less tired and have more time… You have been reading books… When Caxton set up his printing-press he thrust a new power between church and disciple and father and child… And I am tired. We must talk it over a little later."

The girl stood up. She took her father's hands. "Dear, dear Daddy," she said, "I am so sorry to be a bother. I am so sorry I went to that meeting… You look tired out."

"We must talk – properly," said the bishop, patting one hand, then discovering from her wincing face that it was the sprained one. "Your poor wrist," he said.

"It's so hard to talk, but I want to talk to you, Daddy. It isn't that I have hidden things…"

She kissed him, and the bishop had the odd fancy that she kissed him as though she was sorry for him…

It occurred to him that really there could be no time like the present for discussing these "questionings" of hers, and then his fatigue and shyness had the better of him again.

(11)

The papers got hold of Eleanor's share in the suffragette disturbance. The White Blackbird said things about her.

It did not attack her. It did worse. It admired her …impudently.

It spoke of her once as "Norah," and once as "the Scrope Flapper."

Its headline proclaimed: "Plucky Flappers Hold Up L. G."

CHAPTER THE THIRD – INSOMNIA

(1)

THE night after his conversation with Eleanor was the first night of the bishop's insomnia. It was the definite beginning of a new phase in his life.

Doctors explain to us that the immediate cause of insomnia is always some poisoned or depleted state of the body, and no doubt the fatigues and hasty meals of the day had left the bishop in a state of unprecedented chemical disorder, with his nerves irritated by strange compounds and unsoothed by familiar lubricants. But chemical disorders follow mental disturbances, and the core and essence of his trouble was an intellectual distress. For the first time in his life he was really in doubt, about himself, about his way of living, about all his persuasions. It was a general doubt. It was not a specific suspicion upon this point or that. It was a feeling of detachment and unreality at once extraordinarily vague and extraordinarily oppressive. It was as if he discovered himself flimsy and transparent in a world of minatory solidity and opacity. It was as if he found himself made not of flesh and blood but of tissue paper.

But this intellectual insecurity extended into his physical sensations. It affected his feeling in his skin, as if it were not absolutely his own skin.

And as he lay there, a weak phantom mentally and bodily, an endless succession and recurrence of anxieties for which he could find no reassurance besieged him.

Chief of this was his distress for Eleanor.

She was the central figure in this new sense of illusion in familiar and trusted things. It was not only that the world of his existence which had seemed to be the whole universe had become diaphanous and betrayed vast and uncontrollable realities beyond it, but his daughter had as it were suddenly opened a door in this glassy sphere of insecurity that had been his abiding refuge, a door upon the stormy rebel outer world, and she stood there, young, ignorant, confident, adventurous, ready to step out.

"Could it be possible that she did not believe?"

He saw her very vividly as he had seen her in the dining-room, slender and upright, half child, half woman, so fragile and so fearless. And the door she opened thus carelessly gave upon a stormy background like one of the stormy backgrounds that were popular behind portrait Dianas in eighteenth century paintings. Did she believe that all he had taught her, all the life he led was – what was her phrase? – a kind of magic world, not really real?

He groaned and turned over and repeated the words: "A kind of magic world – not really real!"

The wind blew through the door she opened, and scattered everything in the room. And still she held the door open.

He was astonished at himself. He started up in swift indignation. Had he not taught the child? Had he not brought her up in an atmosphere of faith? What right had she to turn upon him in this matter? It was – indeed it was – a sort of insolence, a lack of reverence…

It was strange he had not perceived this at the time.

But indeed at the first mention of "questionings" he ought to have thundered. He saw that quite clearly now. He ought to have cried out and said, "On your knees, my Norah, and ask pardon of God!"

Because after all faith is an emotional thing…

He began to think very rapidly and copiously of things he ought to have said to Eleanor. And now the eloquence of reverie was upon him. In a little time he was also addressing the tea-party at Morrice Deans'. Upon them too he ought to have thundered. And he knew now also all that he should

have said to the recalcitrant employer. Thunder also. Thunder is surely the privilege of the higher clergy – under Jove.

But why hadn't he thundered?

He gesticulated in the darkness, thrust out a clutching hand.

There are situations that must be gripped – gripped firmly. And without delay. In the middle ages there had been grip enough in a purple glove.

(2)

From these belated seizures of the day's lost opportunities the bishop passed to such a pessimistic estimate of the church as had never entered his mind before.

It was as if he had fallen suddenly out of a spiritual balloon into a world of bleak realism. He found himself asking unprecedented and devastating questions, questions that implied the most fundamental shiftings of opinion. Why was the church such a failure? Why had it no grip upon either masters or men amidst this vigorous life of modern industrialism, and why had it no grip upon the questioning young? It was a tolerated thing, he felt, just as sometimes he had felt that the Crown was a tolerated thing. He too was a tolerated thing; a curious survival…

This was not as things should be. He struggled to recover a proper attitude. But he remained enormously dissatisfied…

The church was no Levite to pass by on the other side away from the struggles and wrongs of the social conflict. It had no right when the children asked for the bread of life to offer them Gothic stone…

He began to make interminable weak plans for fulfilling his duty to his diocese and his daughter.

What could he do to revivify his clergy? He wished he had more personal magnetism, he wished he had a darker and a larger presence. He wished he had not been saddled with Whippham's rather futile son as his chaplain. He wished he had a dean instead of being his own dean. With an unsympathetic rector. He wished he had it in him to make some resounding appeal. He might of course preach a series of thumping addresses and sermons, rather on the lines of "Fors Clavigera," to masters and men, in the Cathedral. Only it was so difficult to get either masters or men into the Cathedral.

Well, if the people will not come to the bishop the bishop must go out to the people. Should he go outside the Cathedral – to the place where the trains met?

Interweaving with such thoughts the problem of Eleanor rose again into his consciousness.

Weren't there books she ought to read? Weren't there books she ought to be made to read? And books – and friends – that ought to be imperatively forbidden? Imperatively!

But how to define the forbidden?

He began to compose an address on Modern Literature (so-called).

It became acrimonious.

Before dawn the birds began to sing.

His mind had seemed to be a little tranquillized, there had been a distinct feeling of subsidence sleepwards, when first one and then another little creature roused itself and the bishop to greet the gathering daylight.

It became a little clamour, a misty sea of sound in which individuality appeared and disappeared. For a time a distant cuckoo was very perceptible, like a landmark looming up over a fog, like the cuckoo in the Pastoral Symphony.

The bishop tried not to heed these sounds, but they were by their very nature insistent sounds. He lay disregarding them acutely.

Presently he pulled the coverlet over his ears.

A little later he sat up in bed.

Again in a slight detail he marked his strange and novel detachment from the world of his upbringing. His hallucination of disillusionment had spread from himself and his church and his faith to the whole animate creation. He knew that these were the voices of "our feathered songsters," that this was "a joyous chorus" greeting the day. He knew that a wakeful bishop ought to bless these happy creatures, and join with them by reciting Ken's morning hymn. He made an effort that was more than half habit, to repeat and he repeated with a scowling face and the voice of a schoolmaster:

"Awake my soul, and with the sun Thy daily stage of duty run…"

He got no further. He stopped short, sat still, thinking what utterly detestable things singing birds were. A. blackbird had gripped his attention. Never had he heard such vain repetitions. He struggled against the dark mood of criticism. "He prayeth best who loveth best – "

No, he did not love the birds. It was useless to pretend. Whatever one may say about other birds a cuckoo is a low detestable cad of a bird.

Then the bishop began to be particularly tormented by a bird that made a short, insistent, wheezing sound at regular intervals of perhaps twenty seconds. If a bird could have whooping-cough, that, he thought, was the sort of whoop it would have. But even if it had whooping-cough he could not pity it. He hung in its intervals waiting for the return of the wheeze.

And then that blackbird reasserted itself. It had a rich boastful note; it seemed proud of its noisy reiteration of simple self-assertion. For some obscure reason the phrase "oleographic sounds" drifted into the bishop's thoughts. This bird produced the peculiar and irrational impression that it had recently made a considerable sum of money by shrewd industrialism. It was, he thought grimly, a genuine Princhester blackbird.

This wickedly uncharitable reference to his diocese ran all unchallenged through the bishop's mind. And others no less wicked followed it.

Once during his summer holidays in Florence he and Lady Ella had subscribed to an association for the protection of song-birds. He recalled this now with a mild wonder. It seemed to him that perhaps after all it was as well to let fruit-growers and Italians deal with singing-birds in their own way. Perhaps after all they had a wisdom…

He passed his hands over his face. The world after all is not made entirely for singing-birds; there is such a thing as proportion. Singing-birds may become a luxury, an indulgence, an excess.

Did the birds eat the fruit in Paradise?

Perhaps there they worked for some collective musical effect, had some sort of conductor in the place of this – hullabaloo…

He decided to walk about the room for a time and then remake his bed…

The sunrise found the bishop with his head and shoulders out of the window trying to see that blackbird. He just wanted to look at it. He was persuaded it was a quite exceptional blackbird.

Again came that oppressive sense of the futility of the contemporary church, but this time it came in the most grotesque form. For hanging half out of the casement he was suddenly reminded of St. Francis of Assisi, and how at his rebuke the wheeling swallow stilled their cries.

But it was all so different then.

(3)

It was only after he had passed four similar nights, with intervening days of lassitude and afternoon siestas, that the bishop realized that he was in the grip of insomnia.

He did not go at once to a doctor, but he told his trouble to every one he met and received much tentative advice. He had meant to have his talk with Eleanor on the morning next after their conversation in the dining-room, but his bodily and spiritual anaemia prevented him.

The fifth night was the beginning of the Whitsuntide Ember week, and he wore a red cassock and had a distracting and rather interesting day welcoming his ordination candidates. They had a good

effect upon him; we spiritualize ourselves when we seek to spiritualize others, and he went to bed in a happier frame of mind than he had done since the day of the shock. He woke in the night, but he woke much more himself than he had been since the trouble began. He repeated that verse of Ken's:

"When in the night I sleepless lie, My soul with heavenly thoughts supply; Let no ill dreams disturb my rest, No powers of darkness me molest."

Almost immediately after these there floated into his mind, as if it were a message, the dear familiar words:

"He giveth his Beloved sleep."

These words irradiated and soothed him quite miraculously, the clouds of doubt seemed to dissolve and vanish and leave him safe and calm under a clear sky; he knew those words were a promise, and very speedily he fell asleep and slept until he was called.

But the next day was a troubled one. Whippham had muddled his timetable and crowded his afternoon; the strike of the transport workers had begun, and the ugly noises they made at the tramway depot, where they were booing some one, penetrated into the palace. He had to snatch a meal between services, and the sense of hurry invaded his afternoon lectures to the candidates. He hated hurry in Ember week. His ideal was one of quiet serenity, of grave things said slowly, of still, kneeling figures, of a sort of dark cool spiritual germination. But what sort of dark cool spiritual germination is possible with an ass like Whippham about?

In the fresh courage of the morning the bishop had arranged for that talk with Eleanor he had already deferred too long, and this had proved less satisfactory than he had intended it to be.

The bishop's experience with the ordination candidates was following the usual course. Before they came there was something bordering upon distaste for the coming invasion; then always there was an effect of surprise at the youth and faith of the neophytes and a real response of the spirit to the occasion. Throughout the first twenty-four hours they were all simply neophytes, without individuality to break up their uniformity of self-devotion. Then afterwards they began to develop little personal traits, and scarcely ever were these pleasing traits. Always one or two of them would begin haunting the bishop, giving way to an appetite for special words, special recognitions. He knew the expression of that craving on their faces. He knew the way-laying movements in room and passage that presently began.

This time in particular there was a freckled underbred young man who handed in what was evidently a carefully prepared memorandum upon what he called "my positions." Apparently he had a muddle of doubts about the early fathers and the dates of the earlier authentic copies of the gospels, things of no conceivable significance.

The bishop glanced through this bale of papers – it had of course no index and no synopsis, and some of the pages were not numbered – handed it over to Whippham, and when he proved, as usual, a broken reed, the bishop had the brilliant idea of referring the young man to Canon Bliss (of Pringle), "who has a special knowledge quite beyond my own in this field."

But he knew from the young man's eye even as he said this that it was not going to put him off for more than a day or so.

The immediate result of glancing over these papers was, however, to enhance in the bishop's mind a growing disposition to minimize the importance of all dated and explicit evidences and arguments for orthodox beliefs, and to resort to vague symbolic and liberal interpretations, and it was in this state that he came to his talk with Eleanor.

He did not give her much time to develop her objections. He met her half way and stated them for her, and overwhelmed her with sympathy and understanding. She had been "too literal." "Too literal" was his keynote. He was a little astonished at the liberality of his own views. He had been getting along now for some years without looking into his own opinions too closely and he was by no means prepared to discover how far he had come to meet his daughter's scepticisms. But he did meet

them. He met them so thoroughly that he almost conveyed that hers was a needlessly conservative and oldfashioned attitude.

Occasionally he felt he was being a little evasive, but she did not seem to notice it. As she took his drift, her relief and happiness were manifest. And he had never noticed before how clear and pretty her eyes were; they were the most honest eyes he had ever seen. She looked at him very steadily as he explained, and lit up at his points. She brightened wonderfully as she realized that after all they were not apart, they had not differed; simply they had misunderstood…

And before he knew where he was, and in a mere parenthetical declaration of liberality, he surprised himself by conceding her demand for Newnham even before she had repeated it. It helped his case wonderfully.

"Call in every exterior witness you can. The church will welcome them… No, I want you to go, my dear…"

But his mind was stirred again to its depths by this discussion. And in particular he was surprised and a little puzzled by this Newnham concession and the necessity of making his new attitude clear to Lady Ella…

It was with a sense of fatality that he found himself awake again that night, like some one lying drowned and still and yet perfectly conscious at the bottom of deep cold water.

He repeated, "He giveth his Beloved sleep," but all the conviction had gone out of the words.

(4)

Neither the bishop's insomnia nor his incertitudes about himself and his faith developed in a simple and orderly manner. There were periods of sustained suffering and periods of recovery; it was not for a year or so that he regarded these troubles as more than acute incidental interruptions of his general tranquillity or realized that he was passing into a new phase of life and into a new quality of thought. He told every one of the insomnia and no one of his doubts; these he betrayed only by an increasing tendency towards vagueness, symbolism, poetry and toleration. Eleanor seemed satisfied with his exposition; she did not press for further enlightenment. She continued all her outward conformities except that after a time she ceased to communicate; and in September she went away to Newnham. Her doubts had not visibly affected Clementina or her other sisters, and the bishop made no further attempts to explore the spiritual life of his family below the surface of its formal acquiescence.

As a matter of fact his own spiritual wrestlings were almost exclusively nocturnal. During his spells of insomnia he led a curiously double existence. In the daytime he was largely the self he had always been, able, assured, ecclesiastical, except that he was a little jaded and irritable or sleepy instead of being quick and bright; he believed in God and the church and the Royal Family and himself securely; in the wakeful night time he experienced a different and novel self, a bare-minded self, bleakly fearless at its best, shamelessly weak at its worst, critical, sceptical, joyless, anxious. The anxiety was quite the worst element of all. Something sat by his pillow asking grey questions: "What are you doing? Where are you going? Is it really well with the children? Is it really well with the church? Is it really well with the country? Are you indeed doing anything at all? Are you anything more than an actor wearing a costume in an archaic play? The people turn their backs on you."

He would twist over on his pillow. He would whisper hymns and prayers that had the quality of charms.

"He giveth his Beloved sleep"; that answered many times, and many times it failed.

The labour troubles of 1912 eased off as the year wore on, and the bitterness of the local press over the palace abated very considerably. Indeed there was something like a watery gleam of popularity when he brought down his consistent friend, the dear old Princess Christiana of Hoch and Unter, black bonnet, deafness, and all, to open a new wing of the children's hospital. The Princhester

conservative paper took the occasion to inform the diocese that he was a fluent German scholar and consequently a persona grata with the royal aunts, and that the Princess Christiana was merely just one of a number of royalties now practically at the beck and call of Princhester. It was not true, but it was very effective locally, and seemed to justify a little the hauteur of which Lady Ella was so unjustly suspected. Yet it involved a possibility of disappointments in the future.

He went to Brighton-Pomfrey too upon the score of his general health, and Brighton-Pomfrey revised his general regimen, discouraged indiscreet fasting, and suggested a complete abstinence from red wine except white port, if indeed that can be called a red wine, and a moderate use of Egyptian cigarettes.

But 1913 was a strenuous year. The labour troubles revived, the suffragette movement increased greatly in violence and aggressiveness, and there sprang up no less than three ecclesiastical scandals in the diocese. First, the Kensitites set themselves firmly to make presentations and prosecutions against Morrice Deans, who was reserving the sacrament, wearing, they said, "Babylonish garments," going beyond all reason in the matter of infant confession, and generally brightening up Mogham Banks; next, a popular preacher in Wombash, published a book under the exasperating title, "The Light Under the Altar," in which he showed himself as something between an Arian and a Pantheist, and treated the dogma of the Trinity with as little respect as one would show to an intrusive cat; while thirdly, an obscure but overworked missioner of a tin mission church in the new working-class district at Pringle, being discovered in some sort of polygamous relationship, had seen fit to publish in pamphlet form a scandalous admission and defence, a pamphlet entitled "Marriage True and False," taking the public needlessly into his completest confidence and quoting the affairs of Abraham and Hosea, reviving many points that are better forgotten about Luther, and appealing also to such uncanonical authorities as Milton, Plato, and John Humphrey Noyes. This abnormal concurrence of indiscipline was extremely unlucky for the bishop. It plunged him into strenuous controversy upon three fronts, so to speak, and involved a great number of personal encounters far too vivid for his mental serenity.

The Pringle polygamist was the most moving as Morrice Deans was the most exacting and troublesome and the Wombash Pantheist the most insidiously destructive figure in these three toilsome disputes. The Pringle man's soul had apparently missed the normal distribution of fig-leaves; he was an illiterate, open-eyed, hard-voiced, freckled, rational-minded creature, with large expository hands, who had come by a side way into the church because he was an indefatigable worker, and he insisted upon telling the bishop with an irrepressible candour and completeness just exactly what was the matter with his intimate life. The bishop very earnestly did not want these details, and did his utmost to avoid the controversial questions that the honest man pressed respectfully but obstinately upon him.

"Even St. Paul, my lord, admitted that it is better to marry than burn," said the Pringle misdemeanant, "and here was I, my lord, married and still burning!" and, "I think you would find, my lord, considering all Charlotte's peculiarities, that the situation was really much more trying than the absolute celibacy St. Paul had in view."…

The bishop listened to these arguments as little as possible, and did not answer them at all. But afterwards the offender came and wept and said he was ruined and heartbroken and unfairly treated because he wasn't a gentleman, and that was distressing. It was so exactly true – and so inevitable. He had been deprived, rather on account of his voice and apologetics than of his offence, and public opinion was solidly with the sentence. He made a gallant effort to found what he called a Labour Church in Pringle, and after some financial misunderstandings departed with his unambiguous menage to join the advanced movement on the Clyde.

The Morrice Deans enquiry however demanded an amount of erudition that greatly fatigued the bishop. He had a very fair general knowledge of vestments, but he had never really cared for anything but the poetry of ornaments, and he had to work strenuously to master the legal side of the question. Whippham, his chaplain, was worse than useless as a helper. The bishop wanted to

end the matter as quickly, quietly, and favourably to Morrice Deans as possible; he thought Morrice Deans a thoroughly good man in his parish, and he believed that the substitution of a low churchman would mean a very complete collapse of church influence in Mogham Banks, where people were now thoroughly accustomed to a highly ornate service. But Morrice Deans was intractable and his pursuers indefatigable, and on several occasions the bishop sat far into the night devising compromises and equivocations that should make the Kensitites think that Morrice Deans wasn't wearing vestments when he was, and that should make Morrice Deans think he was wearing vestments when he wasn't. And it was Whippham who first suggested green tea as a substitute for coffee, which gave the bishop indigestion, as his stimulant for these nocturnal bouts.

Now green tea is the most lucid of poisons.

And while all this extra activity about Morrice Deans, these vigils and crammings and writings down, were using all and more energy than the bishop could well spare, he was also doing his quiet utmost to keep "The Light under the Altar" ease from coming to a head.

This man he hated.

And he dreaded him as well as hated him. Chasters, the author of "The Light under the Altar," was a man who not only reasoned closely but indelicately. There was a demonstrating, jeering, air about his preaching and writing, and everything he said and did was saturated by the spirit of challenge. He did not so much imitate as exaggerate the style of Matthew Arnold. And whatever was done publicly against him would have to be done very publicly because his book had got him a London reputation.

From the bishop's point of view Chasters was one of nature's ignoblemen. He seemed to have subscribed to the Thirty-Nine Articles and passed all the tests and taken all the pledges that stand on the way to ordination, chiefly for the pleasure of attacking them more successfully from the rear; he had been given the living of Wombash by a cousin, and filled it very largely because it was not only more piquant but more remunerative and respectable to be a rationalist lecturer in a surplice. And in a hard kind of ultra-Protestant way his social and parochial work was not badly done. But his sermons were terrible. "He takes a text," said one informant, "and he goes on firstly, secondly, thirdly, fourthly, like somebody tearing the petals from a flower. 'Finally,' he says, and throws the bare stalk into the dustbin."

The bishop avoided "The Light under the Altar" for nearly a year. It was only when a second book was announced with the winning title of "The Core of Truth in Christianity" that he perceived he must take action. He sat up late one night with a marked copy, a very indignantly marked copy, of the former work that an elderly colonel, a Wombash parishioner, an orthodox Layman of the most virulent type, had sent him. He perceived that he had to deal with a dialectician of exceptional ability, who had concentrated a quite considerable weight of scholarship upon the task of explaining away every scrap of spiritual significance in the Eucharist. From Chasters the bishop was driven by reference to the works of Legge and Frazer, and for the first time he began to measure the dimensions and power of the modern criticism of church doctrine and observance. Green tea should have lit his way to refutation; instead it lit up the whole inquiry with a light of melancholy confirmation. Neither by night nor by day could the bishop find a proper method of opening a counter attack upon Chasters, who was indisputably an intellectually abler man and a very ruthless beast indeed to assail, and meanwhile the demand that action should be taken increased.

The literature of church history and the controversies arising out of doctrinal development became the employment of the bishop's leisure and a commanding preoccupation. He would have liked to discuss with some one else the network of perplexities in which he was entangling himself, and more particularly with Canon Bliss, but his own positions were becoming so insecure that he feared to betray them by argument. He had grown up with a kind of intellectual modesty. Some things he had never yet talked about; it made his mind blench to think of talking about them. And his great aching gaps of wakefulness began now, thanks to the green tea, to be interspersed with theological

dreams and visions of an extravagant vividness. He would see Frazer's sacrificial kings butchered picturesquely and terribly amidst strange and grotesque rituals; he would survey long and elaborate processions and ceremonials in which the most remarkable symbols were borne high in the sight of all men; he would cower before a gigantic and threatening Heaven. These green-tea dreams and visions were not so much phases of sleep as an intensification and vivid furnishing forth of insomnia. It added greatly to his disturbance that – exceeding the instructions of Brighton-Pomfrey – he had now experimented ignorantly and planlessly with one or two narcotics and sleeping mixtures that friends and acquaintances had mentioned in his hearing. For the first time in his life he became secretive from his wife. He knew he ought not to take these things, he knew they were physically and morally evil, but a tormenting craving drove him to them. Subtly and insensibly his character was being undermined by the growing nervous trouble.

He astonished himself by the cunning and the hypocritical dignity he could display in procuring these drugs. He arranged to have a tea-making set in his bedroom, and secretly substituted green tea, for which he developed a powerful craving, in the place of the delicate China tea Lady Ella procured him.

(5)

These doctrinal and physical anxieties and distresses were at their worst in the spring and early summer of 1914. That was a time of great mental and moral disturbance. There was premonition in the air of those days. It was like the uneasiness sensitive people experience before a thunderstorm. The moral atmosphere was sullen and close. The whole world seemed irritable and mischievous. The suffragettes became extraordinarily malignant; the democratic movement went rotten with sabotage and with a cant of being "rebels"; the reactionary Tories and a crew of noisy old peeresses set themselves to create incurable confusion again in the healing wounds of Ireland, and feuds and frantic folly broke out at every point of the social and political edifice. And then a bomb burst at Sarajevo that silenced all this tumult. The unstable polity of Europe heeled over like a ship that founders.

Through the swiftest, tensest week in history Europe capsized into war.

(6)

The first effect of the war upon the mind of the bishop, as upon most imaginative minds, was to steady and exalt it. Trivialities and exasperations seemed swept out of existence. Men lifted up their eyes from disputes that had seemed incurable and wrangling that promised to be interminable, and discovered a plain and tragic issue that involved every one in a common call for devotion. For a great number of men and women who had been born and bred in security, the August and September of 1914 were the supremely heroic period of their lives. Myriads of souls were born again to ideas of service and sacrifice in those tremendous days.

Black and evil thing as the war was, it was at any rate a great thing; it did this much for countless minds that for the first time they realized the epic quality of history and their own relationship to the destinies of the race. The flimsy roof under which we had been living our lives of comedy fell and shattered the floor under our feet; we saw the stars above and the abyss below. We perceived that life was insecure and adventurous, part of one vast adventure in space and time…

Presently the smoke and dust of battle hid the great distances again, but they could not altogether destroy the memories of this revelation.

For the first two months the bishop's attention was so detached from his immediate surroundings and employments, so absorbed by great events, that his history if it were told in detail would differ scarcely at all from the histories of most comparatively unemployed minds during those first dramatic days, the days when the Germans made their great rush upon Paris and it seemed that

France was down, France and the whole fabric of liberal civilization. He emerged from these stunning apprehensions after the Battle of the Marne, to find himself busy upon a score of dispersed and disconnected war jobs, and trying to get all the new appearances and forces and urgencies of the war into relations with himself. One thing became very vivid indeed, that he wasn't being used in any real and effective way in the war. There was a mighty going to and fro upon Red Cross work and various war committees, a vast preparation for wounded men and for the succour of dislocated families; a preparation, that proved to be needless, for catastrophic unemployment. The war problem and the puzzle of German psychology ousted for a time all other intellectual interests; like every one else the bishop swam deep in Nietzsche, Bernhardi, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and the like; he preached several sermons upon German materialism and the astonishing decay of the German character. He also read every newspaper he could lay his hands on – like any secular man. He signed an address to the Russian Orthodox church, beginning "Brethren," and he revised his impressions of the Filioque controversy. The idea of a reunion of the two great state churches of Russia and England had always attracted him. But hitherto it had been a thing quite out of scale, visionary, utopian. Now in this strange time of altered perspectives it seemed the most practicable of suggestions. The mayor and corporation and a detachment of the special reserve in uniform came to a great intercession service, and in the palace there were two conferences of local influential people, people of the most various types, people who had never met tolerantly before, expressing now opinions of unprecedented breadth and liberality.

All this sort of thing was fresh and exciting at first, and then it began to fall into a routine and became habitual, and as it became habitual he found that old sense of detachment and futility was creeping back again. One day he realized that indeed the whole flood and tumult of the war would be going on almost exactly as it was going on now if there had been neither cathedral nor bishop in Princhester. It came to him that if archbishops were rolled into patriarchs and patriarchs into archbishops, it would matter scarcely more in the world process that was afoot than if two men shook hands while their house was afire. At times all of us have inappropriate thoughts. The unfortunate thought that struck the bishop as a bullet might strike a man in an exposed trench, as he was hurrying through the cloisters to a special service and address upon that doubly glorious day in our English history, the day of St. Crispin, was of Diogenes rolling his tub.

It was a poisonous thought.

It arose perhaps out of an article in a weekly paper at which he had glanced after lunch, an article written by one of those sceptical spirits who find all too abundant expression in our periodical literature. The writer boldly charged the "Christian churches" with absolute ineffectiveness. This war, he declared, was above all other wars a war of ideas, of material organization against rational freedom, of violence against law; it was a war more copiously discussed than any war had ever been before, the air was thick with apologetics. And what was the voice of the church amidst these elemental issues? Bishops and divines who were patriots one heard discordantly enough, but where were the bishops and divines who spoke for the Prince of Peace? Where was the blessing of the church, where was the veto of the church? When it came to that one discovered only a broad preoccupied back busied in supplementing the Army Medical Corps with Red Cross activities, good work in its way – except that the canonicals seemed superfluous. Who indeed looked to the church for any voice at all? And so to Diogenes.

The bishop's mind went hunting for an answer to that indictment. And came back and came back to the image of Diogenes.

It was with that image dangling like a barbed arrow from his mind that the bishop went into the pulpit to preach upon St. Crispin's day, and looked down upon a thin and scattered congregation in which the elderly, the childless, and the unoccupied predominated.

That night insomnia resumed its sway.

Of course the church ought to be controlling this great storm, the greatest storm of war that had ever stirred mankind. It ought to be standing fearlessly between the combatants like a figure in a wall painting, with the cross of Christ uplifted and the restored memory of Christendom softening the eyes of the armed nations. “Put down those weapons and listen to me,” so the church should speak in irresistible tones, in a voice of silver trumpets.

Instead it kept a long way from the fighting, tucked up its vestments, and was rolling its local tubs quite briskly.

(7)

And then came the aggravation of all these distresses by an abrupt abandonment of smoking and alcohol. Alcoholic relaxation, a necessary mitigation of the unreality of peacetime politics, becomes a grave danger in war, and it was with an understandable desire to forward the interests of his realm that the King decided to set his statesmen an example – which unhappily was not very widely followed – by abstaining from alcohol during the continuance of the struggle. It did however swing over the Bishop of Princhester to an immediate and complete abandonment of both drink and tobacco. At that time he was finding comfort for his nerves in Manila cheroots, and a particularly big and heavy type of Egyptian cigarette with a considerable amount of opium, and his disorganized system seized upon this sudden change as a grievance, and set all his jangling being crying aloud for one cigarette – just one cigarette.

The cheroots, it seemed, he could better spare, but a cigarette became his symbol for his lost steadiness and ease.

It brought him low.

The reader has already been told the lamentable incident of the stolen cigarette and the small boy, and how the bishop, tormented by that shameful memory, cried aloud in the night.

The bishop rolled his tub, and is there any tub-rolling in the world more busy and exacting than a bishop’s? He rolled in it spite of ill-health and insomnia, and all the while he was tormented by the enormous background of the world war, by his ineffective realization of vast national needs, by his passionate desire, for himself and his church, not to be ineffective.

The distressful alternation between nights of lucid doubt and days of dull acquiescence was resumed with an intensification of its contrasts. The brief phase of hope that followed the turn of the fighting upon the Maine, the hope that after all the war would end swiftly, dramatically, and justly, and everything be as it had been before – but pleasanter, gave place to a phase that bordered upon despair. The fall of Antwerp and the doubts and uncertainties of the Flanders situation weighed terribly upon the bishop. He was haunted for a time by nightmares of Zeppelins presently raining fire upon London. These visions became Apocalyptic. The Zeppelins came to England with the new year, and with the close of the year came the struggle for Ypres that was so near to being a collapse of the allied defensive. The events of the early spring, the bloody failure of British generalship at Neuve Chapelle, the naval disaster in the Dardanelles, the sinking of the Falaba, the Russian defeat in the Masurian Lakes, all deepened the bishop’s impression of the immensity of the nation’s difficulties and of his own unhelpfulness. He was ashamed that the church should hold back its curates from enlistment while the French priests were wearing their uniforms in the trenches; the expedition of the Bishop of London to hold open-air services at the front seemed merely to accentuate the tub-rolling. It was rolling the tub just where it was most in the way.

What was wrong? What was wanting?

The Westminster Gazette, The Spectator, and several other of the most trusted organs of public opinion were intermittently discussing the same question. Their discussions implied at once the extreme need that was felt for religion by all sorts of representative people, and the universal conviction that the church was in some way muddling and masking her revelation. “What is

wrong with the Churches?" was, for example, the general heading of The Westminster Gazette's correspondence.

One day the bishop skimmed a brief incisive utterance by Sir Harry Johnston that pierced to the marrow of his own shrinking convictions. Sir Harry is one of those people who seem to write as well as speak in a quick tenor. "Instead of propounding plainly and without the acereted mythology of Asia Minor, Greece and Rome, the pure Gospel of Christ… they present it overloaded with unbelievable myths (such as, among a thousand others, that Massacre of the Innocents which never took place) … bore their listeners by a Tibetan repetition of creeds that have ceased to be credible… Mutually contradictory propositions… Prayers and litanies composed in Byzantine and mediaeval times… the want of actuality, the curious silliness which has, ever since the destruction of Jerusalem, hung about the exposition of Christianity… But if the Bishops continue to fuss about the trappings of religion… the maintenance of codes compiled by people who lived sixteen hundred or two thousand five hundred years ago… the increasingly educated and practical-minded working classes will not come to church, weekday or Sunday."

The bishop held the paper in his hand, and with a mind that he felt to be terribly open, asked himself how true that sharp indictment might be, and, granting its general truth, what was the duty of the church, that is to say of the bishops, for as Cyprian says, ecelesia est in episcopo. We say the creeds; how far may we unsay them?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.