

**ГЕРБЕРТ
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GOD, THE
INVISIBLE KING

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God, the Invisible King:

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H. G. Wells

God, the Invisible King

PREFACE

This book sets out as forcibly and exactly as possible the religious belief of the writer. That belief is not orthodox Christianity; it is not, indeed, Christianity at all; its core nevertheless is a profound belief in a personal and intimate God. There is nothing in its statements that need shock or offend anyone who is prepared for the expression of a faith different from and perhaps in several particulars opposed to his own. The writer will be found to be sympathetic with all sincere religious feeling. Nevertheless it is well to prepare the prospective reader for statements that may jar harshly against deeply rooted mental habits. It is well to warn him at the outset that the departure from accepted beliefs is here no vague scepticism, but a quite sharply defined objection to dogmas very widely revered. Let the writer state the most probable occasion of trouble forthwith. An issue upon which this book will be found particularly uncompromising is the dogma of the Trinity. The writer is of opinion that the Council of Nicaea, which forcibly crystallised the controversies of two centuries and formulated the creed upon which all the existing Christian churches are based, was one of

the most disastrous and one of the least venerable of all religious gatherings, and he holds that the Alexandrine speculations which were then conclusively imposed upon Christianity merit only disrespectful attention at the present time. There you have a chief possibility of offence. He is quite unable to pretend any awe for what he considers the spiritual monstrosities established by that undignified gathering. He makes no attempt to be obscure or propitiatory in this connection. He criticises the creeds explicitly and frankly, because he believes it is particularly necessary to clear them out of the way of those who are seeking religious consolation at this present time of exceptional religious need. He does little to conceal his indignation at the role played by these dogmas in obscuring, perverting, and preventing the religious life of mankind. After this warning such readers from among the various Christian churches and sects as are accessible to storms of theological fear or passion to whom the Trinity is an ineffable mystery and the name of God almost unspeakably awful, read on at their own risk. This is a religious book written by a believer, but so far as their beliefs and religion go it may seem to them more sceptical and more antagonistic than blank atheism. That the writer cannot tell. He is not simply denying their God. He is declaring that there is a living God, different altogether from that Triune God and nearer to the heart of man. The spirit of this book is like that of a missionary who would only too gladly overthrow and smash some Polynesian divinity of shark's teeth and painted wood and mother-of-pearl. To the writer such elaborations as

“begotten of the Father before all worlds” are no better than intellectual shark’s teeth and oyster shells. His purpose, like the purpose of that missionary, is not primarily to shock and insult; but he is zealous to liberate, and he is impatient with a reverence that stands between man and God. He gives this fair warning and proceeds with his matter.

His matter is modern religion as he sees it. It is only incidentally and because it is unavoidable that he attacks doctrinal Christianity.

In a previous book, “First and Last Things” (Constable and Co.), he has stated his convictions upon certain general ideas of life and thought as clearly as he could. All of philosophy, all of metaphysics that is, seems to him to be a discussion of the relations of class and individual. The antagonism of the Nominalist and the Realist, the opposition of the One and the Many, the contrast of the Ideal and the Actual, all these oppositions express a certain structural and essential duality in the activity of the human mind. From an imperfect recognition of that duality ensue great masses of misconception. That was the substance of “First and Last Things.” In this present book there is no further attack on philosophical or metaphysical questions. Here we work at a less fundamental level and deal with religious feeling and religious ideas. But just as the writer was inclined to attribute a whole world of disputation and inexactitudes to confused thinking about the exact value of classes and terms, so here he is disposed to think that interminable controversies and

conflicts arise out of a confusion of intention due to a double meaning of the word “God”; that the word “God” conveys not one idea or set of ideas, but several essentially different ideas, incompatible one with another, and falling mainly into one or other of two divergent groups; and that people slip carelessly from one to the other of these groups of ideas and so get into ultimately inextricable confusions.

The writer believes that the centuries of fluid religious thought that preceded the violent ultimate crystallisation of Nicaea, was essentially a struggle – obscured, of course, by many complexities – to reconcile and get into a relationship these two separate main series of God-ideas.

Putting the leading idea of this book very roughly, these two antagonistic typical conceptions of God may be best contrasted by speaking of one of them as God-as-Nature or the Creator, and of the other as God-as-Christ or the Redeemer. One is the great Outward God; the other is the Inmost God. The first idea was perhaps developed most highly and completely in the God of Spinoza. It is a conception of God tending to pantheism, to an idea of a comprehensive God as ruling with justice rather than affection, to a conception of aloofness and awestriving worshipfulness. The second idea, which is opposed to this idea of an absolute God, is the God of the human heart. The writer would suggest that the great outline of the theological struggles of that phase of civilisation and world unity which produced Christianity, was a persistent but unsuccessful attempt to get

these two different ideas of God into one focus. It was an attempt to make the God of Nature accessible and the God of the Heart invincible, to bring the former into a conception of love and to vest the latter with the beauty of stars and flowers and the dignity of inexorable justice. There could be no finer metaphor for such a correlation than Fatherhood and Sonship. But the trouble is that it seems impossible to most people to continue to regard the relations of the Father to the Son as being simply a mystical metaphor. Presently some materialistic bias swings them in a moment of intellectual carelessness back to the idea of sexual filiation.

And it may further be suggested that the extreme aloofness and inhumanity, which is logically necessary in the idea of a Creator God, of an Infinite God, was the reason, so to speak, for the invention of a Holy Spirit, as something proceeding from him, as something bridging the great gulf, a Comforter, a mediator descending into the sphere of the human understanding. That, and the suggestive influence of the Egyptian Trinity that was then being worshipped at the Serapeum, and which had saturated the thought of Alexandria with the conception of a trinity in unity, are probably the realities that account for the Third Person of the Christian Trinity. At any rate the present writer believes that the discussions that shaped the Christian theology we know were dominated by such natural and fundamental thoughts. These discussions were, of course, complicated from the outset; and

particularly were they complicated by the identification of the man Jesus with the theological Christ, by materialistic expectations of his second coming, by materialistic inventions about his “miraculous” begetting, and by the morbid speculations about virginity and the like that arose out of such grossness. They were still further complicated by the idea of the textual inspiration of the scriptures, which presently swamped thought in textual interpretation. That swamping came very early in the development of Christianity. The writer of St. John’s gospel appears still to be thinking with a considerable freedom, but Origen is already hopelessly in the net of the texts. The writer of St. John’s gospel was a free man, but Origen was a superstitious man. He was emasculated mentally as well as bodily through his bibliolatry. He quotes; his predecessor thinks.

But the writer throws out these guesses at the probable intentions of early Christian thought in passing. His business here is the definition of a position. The writer’s position here in this book is, firstly, complete Agnosticism in the matter of God the Creator, and secondly, entire faith in the matter of God the Redeemer. That, so to speak, is the key of his book. He cannot bring the two ideas under the same term God. He uses the word God therefore for the God in our hearts only, and he uses the term the Veiled Being for the ultimate mysteries of the universe, and he declares that we do not know and perhaps cannot know in any comprehensible terms the relation of the Veiled Being to that living reality in our lives who is, in his terminology, the true

God. Speaking from the point of view of practical religion, he is restricting and defining the word God, as meaning only the personal God of mankind, he is restricting it so as to exclude all cosmogony and ideas of providence from our religious thought and leave nothing but the essentials of the religious life.

Many people, whom one would class as rather liberal Christians of an Arian or Arminian complexion, may find the larger part of this book acceptable to them if they will read "the Christ God" where the writer has written "God." They will then differ from him upon little more than the question whether there is an essential identity in aim and quality between the Christ God and the Veiled Being, who answer to their Creator God. This the orthodox post Nicæan Christians assert, and many pre-Nicæans and many heretics (as the Cathars) contradicted with its exact contrary. The Cathars, Paulicians, Albigenses and so on held, with the Manichæans, that the God of Nature, God the Father, was evil. The Christ God was his antagonist. This was the idea of the poet Shelley. And passing beyond Christian theology altogether a clue can still be found to many problems in comparative theology in this distinction between the Being of Nature (cf. Kant's "starry vault above") and the God of the heart (Kant's "moral law within"). The idea of an antagonism seems to have been cardinal in the thought of the Essenes and the Orphic cult and in the Persian dualism. So, too, Buddhism seems to be "antagonistic." On the other hand, the Moslem teaching and modern Judaism seem absolutely to combine and

identify the two; God the creator is altogether and without distinction also God the King of Mankind. Christianity stands somewhere between such complete identification and complete antagonism. It admits a difference in attitude between Father and Son in its distinction between the Old Dispensation (of the Old Testament) and the New. Every possible change is rung in the great religions of the world between identification, complete separation, equality, and disproportion of these Beings; but it will be found that these two ideas are, so to speak, the basal elements of all theology in the world. The writer is chary of assertion or denial in these matters. He believes that they are speculations not at all necessary to salvation. He believes that men may differ profoundly in their opinions upon these points and still be in perfect agreement upon the essentials of religion. The reality of religion he believes deals wholly and exclusively with the God of the Heart. He declares as his own opinion, and as the opinion which seems most expressive of modern thought, that there is no reason to suppose the Veiled Being either benevolent or malignant towards men. But if the reader believes that God is Almighty and in every way Infinite the practical outcome is not very different. For the purposes of human relationship it is impossible to deny that God PRESENTS HIMSELF AS FINITE, as struggling and taking a part against evil.

The writer believes that these dogmas of relationship are not merely extraneous to religion, but an impediment to religion. His aim in this book is to give a statement of religion which is no

longer entangled in such speculations and disputes.

Let him add only one other note of explanation in this preface, and that is to remark that except for one incidental passage (in Chapter IV., 1), nowhere does he discuss the question of personal immortality. [It is discussed in "First and Last Things," Book IV, 4.] He omits this question because he does not consider that it has any more bearing upon the essentials of religion, than have the theories we may hold about the relation of God and the moral law to the starry universe. The latter is a question for the theologian, the former for the psychologist. Whether we are mortal or immortal, whether the God in our hearts is the Son of or a rebel against the Universe, the reality of religion, the fact of salvation, is still our self-identification with God, irrespective of consequences, and the achievement of his kingdom, in our hearts and in the world. Whether we live forever or die tomorrow does not affect righteousness. Many people seem to find the prospect of a final personal death unendurable. This impresses me as egotism. I have no such appetite for a separate immortality. God is my immortality; what, of me, is identified with God, is God; what is not is of no more permanent value than the snows of yester-year.

H. G. W.

Dunmow, May, 1917.

CHAPTER THE FIRST

THE COSMOGONY OF

MODERN RELIGION

1. MODERN RELIGION HAS NO FOUNDER

Perhaps all religions, unless the flaming onset of Mohammedanism be an exception, have dawned imperceptibly upon the world. A little while ago and the thing was not; and then suddenly it has been found in existence, and already in a state of diffusion. People have begun to hear of the new belief first here and then there. It is interesting, for example, to trace how Christianity drifted into the consciousness of the Roman world. But when a religion has been interrogated it has always had hitherto a tale of beginnings, the name and story of a founder. The renascent religion that is now taking shape, it seems, had no founder; it points to no origins. It is the Truth, its believers declare; it has always been here; it has always been visible to those who had eyes to see. It is perhaps plainer than it was and to more people – that is all.

It is as if it still did not realise its own difference. Many of those who hold it still think of it as if it were a kind of Christianity. Some, catching at a phrase of Huxley's, speak of it as Christianity without Theology. They do not know the creed they are carrying. It has, as a matter of fact, a very fine and subtle

theology, flatly opposed to any belief that could, except by great stretching of charity and the imagination, be called Christianity. One might find, perhaps, a parallelism with the system ascribed to some Gnostics, but that is far more probably an accidental rather than a sympathetic coincidence. Of that the reader shall presently have an opportunity of judging.

This indefiniteness of statement and relationship is probably only the opening phase of the new faith. Christianity also began with an extreme neglect of definition. It was not at first anything more than a sect of Judaism. It was only after three centuries, amidst the uproar and emotions of the council of Nicaea, when the more enthusiastic Trinitarians stuffed their fingers in their ears in affected horror at the arguments of old Arius, that the cardinal mystery of the Trinity was established as the essential fact of Christianity. Throughout those three centuries, the centuries of its greatest achievements and noblest martyrdoms, Christianity had not defined its God. And even to-day it has to be noted that a large majority of those who possess and repeat the Christian creeds have come into the practice so insensibly from unthinking childhood, that only in the slightest way do they realise the nature of the statements to which they subscribe. They will speak and think of both Christ and God in ways flatly incompatible with the doctrine of the Triune deity upon which, theoretically, the entire fabric of all the churches rests. They will show themselves as frankly Arians as though that damnable heresy had not been washed out of the

world forever after centuries of persecution in torrents of blood. But whatever the present state of Christendom in these matters may be, there can be no doubt of the enormous pains taken in the past to give Christian beliefs the exactest, least ambiguous statement possible. Christianity knew itself clearly for what it was in its maturity, whatever the indecisions of its childhood or the confusions of its decay. The renascent religion that one finds now, a thing active and sufficient in many minds, has still scarcely come to self-consciousness. But it is so coming, and this present book is very largely an attempt to state the shape it is assuming and to compare it with the beliefs and imperatives and usages of the various Christian, pseudo-Christian, philosophical, and agnostic cults amidst which it has appeared.

The writer's sympathies and convictions are entirely with this that he speaks of as renascent or modern religion; he is neither atheist nor Buddhist nor Mohammedan nor Christian. He will make no pretence, therefore, to impartiality and detachment. He will do his best to be as fair as possible and as candid as possible, but the reader must reckon with this bias. He has found this faith growing up in himself; he has found it, or something very difficult to distinguish from it, growing independently in the minds of men and women he has met. They have been people of very various origins; English, Americans, Bengalis, Russians, French, people brought up in a "Catholic atmosphere," Positivists, Baptists, Sikhs, Mohammedans. Their diversity of source is as remarkable as their convergence of tendency. A

miscellany of minds thinking upon parallel lines has come out to the same light. The new teaching is also traceable in many professedly Christian religious books and it is to be heard from Christian pulpits. The phase of definition is manifestly at hand.

2. MODERN RELIGION HAS A FINITE GOD

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between this new faith and any recognised form of Christianity is that, knowingly or unknowingly, it worships A FINITE GOD. Directly the believer is fairly confronted with the plain questions of the case, the vague identifications that are still carelessly made with one or all of the persons of the Trinity dissolve away. He will admit that his God is neither all-wise, nor all-powerful, nor omnipresent; that he is neither the maker of heaven nor earth, and that he has little to identify him with that hereditary God of the Jews who became the "Father" in the Christian system. On the other hand he will assert that his God is a god of salvation, that he is a spirit, a person, a strongly marked and knowable personality, loving, inspiring, and lovable, who exists or strives to exist in every human soul. He will be much less certain in his denials that his God has a close resemblance to the Pauline (as distinguished from the Trinitarian) "Christ."

The modern religious man will almost certainly profess a kind of universalism; he will assert that whensoever men have called upon any God and have found fellowship and comfort and courage and that sense of God within them, that inner light which is the quintessence of the religious experience, it was the

True God that answered them. For the True God is a generous God, not a jealous God; the very antithesis of that bickering monopolist who “will have none other gods but Me”; and when a human heart cries out – to what name it matters not – for a larger spirit and a stronger help than the visible things of life can give, straightway the nameless Helper is with it and the God of Man answers to the call. The True God has no scorn nor hate for those who have accepted the many-handed symbols of the Hindu or the lacquered idols of China. Where there is faith, where there is need, there is the True God ready to clasp the hands that stretch out seeking for him into the darkness behind the ivory and gold.

The fact that God is FINITE is one upon which those who think clearly among the new believers are very insistent. He is, above everything else, a personality, and to be a personality is to have characteristics, to be limited by characteristics; he is a Being, not us but dealing with us and through us, he has an aim and that means he has a past and future; he is within time and not outside it. And they point out that this is really what everyone who prays sincerely to God or gets help from God, feels and believes. Our practice with God is better than our theory. None of us really pray to that fantastic, unqualified *danse a trois*, the Trinity, which the wranglings and disputes of the worthies of Alexandria and Syria declared to be God. We pray to one single understanding person. But so far the tactics of those Trinitarians at Nicaea, who stuck their fingers in their ears, have prevailed in this world; this was no matter for discussion, they declared,

it was a Holy Mystery full of magical terror, and few religious people have thought it worth while to revive these terrors by a definite contradiction. The truly religious have been content to lapse quietly into the comparative sanity of an unformulated Arianism, they have left it to the scoffing Atheist to mock at the patent absurdities of the official creed. But one magnificent protest against this theological fantasy must have been the work of a sincerely religious man, the cold superb humour of that burlesque creed, ascribed, at first no doubt facetiously and then quite seriously, to Saint Athanasius the Great, which, by an irony far beyond its original intention, has become at last the accepted creed of the church.

The long truce in the criticism of Trinitarian theology is drawing to its end. It is when men most urgently need God that they become least patient with foolish presentations and dogmas. The new believers are very definitely set upon a thorough analysis of the nature and growth of the Christian creeds and ideas. There has grown up a practice of assuming that, when God is spoken of, the Hebrew-Christian God of Nicaea is meant. But that God trails with him a thousand misconceptions and bad associations; his alleged infinite nature, his jealousy, his strange preferences, his vindictive Old Testament past. These things do not even make a caricature of the True God; they compose an altogether different and antagonistic figure.

It is a very childish and unphilosophical set of impulses that has led the theologians of nearly every faith to claim infinite

qualities for their deity. One has to remember the poorness of the mental and moral quality of the churchmen of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries who saddled Christendom with its characteristic dogmas, and the extreme poverty and confusion of the circle of ideas within which they thought. Many of these makers of Christianity, like Saint Ambrose of Milan (who had even to be baptised after his election to his bishopric), had been pitchforked into the church from civil life; they lived in a time of pitiless factions and personal feuds; they had to conduct their disputations amidst the struggles of would-be emperors; court eunuchs and favourites swayed their counsels, and popular rioting clinched their decisions. There was less freedom of discussion then in the Christian world than there is at present (1916) in Belgium, and the whole audience of educated opinion by which a theory could be judged did not equal, either in numbers or accuracy of information, the present population of Constantinople. To these conditions we owe the claim that the Christian God is a magic god, very great medicine in battle, “in hoc signo vinces,” and the argument so natural to the minds of those days and so absurd to ours, that since he had ALL power, all knowledge, and existed for ever and ever, it was no use whatever to set up any other god against him..

By the fifth century Christianity had adopted as its fundamental belief, without which everyone was to be “damned everlastingly,” a conception of God and of Christ’s relation to God, of which even by the Christian account of his teaching,

Jesus was either totally unaware or so negligent and careless of the future comfort of his disciples as scarcely to make mention. The doctrine of the Trinity, so far as the relationship of the Third Person goes, hangs almost entirely upon one ambiguous and disputed utterance in St. John's gospel (XV. 26). Most of the teachings of Christian orthodoxy resolve themselves to the attentive student into assertions of the nature of contradiction and repartee. Someone floats an opinion in some matter that has been hitherto vague, in regard, for example, to the sonship of Christ or to the method of his birth. The new opinion arouses the hostility and alarm of minds unaccustomed to so definite a statement, and in the zeal of their recoil they fly to a contrary proposition. The Christians would neither admit that they worshipped more gods than one because of the Greeks, nor deny the divinity of Christ because of the Jews. They dreaded to be polytheistic; equally did they dread the least apparent detraction from the power and importance of their Saviour. They were forced into the theory of the Trinity by the necessity of those contrary assertions, and they had to make it a mystery protected by curses to save it from a *reductio ad absurdum*. The entire history of the growth of the Christian doctrine in those disordered early centuries is a history of theology by committee; a history of furious wrangling, of hasty compromises, and still more hasty attempts to clinch matters by anathema. When the muddle was at its very worst, the church was confronted by enormous political opportunities. In order that it should seize

these one chief thing appeared imperative: doctrinal uniformity. The emperor himself, albeit unbaptised and very ignorant of Greek, came and seated himself in the midst of Christian thought upon a golden throne. At the end of it all Eusebius, that supreme Trimmer, was prepared to damn everlastingly all those who doubted that consubstantiality he himself had doubted at the beginning of the conference. It is quite clear that Constantine did not care who was damned or for what period, so long as the Christians ceased to wrangle among themselves. The practical unanimity of Nicaea was secured by threats, and then, turning upon the victors, he sought by threats to restore Arius to communion. The imperial aim was a common faith to unite the empire. The crushing out of the Arians and of the Paulicians and suchlike heretics, and more particularly the systematic destruction by the orthodox of all heretical writings, had about it none of that quality of honest conviction which comes to those who have a real knowledge of God; it was a bawling down of dissensions that, left to work themselves out, would have spoilt good business; it was the fist of Nicolas of Myra over again, except that after the days of Ambrose the sword of the executioner and the fires of the book-burner were added to the weapon of the human voice. Priscillian was the first human sacrifice formally offered up under these improved conditions to the greater glory of the reinforced Trinity. Thereafter the blood of the heretics was the cement of Christian unity.

It is with these things in mind that those who profess the

new faith are becoming so markedly anxious to distinguish God from the Trinitarian's deity. At present if anyone who has left the Christian communion declares himself a believer in God, priest and parson swell with self-complacency. There is no reason why they should do so. That many of us have gone from them and found God is no concern of theirs. It is not that we who went out into the wilderness which we thought to be a desert, away from their creeds and dogmas, have turned back and are returning. It is that we have gone on still further, and are beyond that desolation. Never more shall we return to those who gather under the cross. By faith we disbelieved and denied. By faith we said of that stuffed scarecrow of divinity, that incoherent accumulation of antique theological notions, the Nicene deity, "This is certainly no God." And by faith we have found God..

3. THE INFINITE BEING IS NOT GOD

There has always been a demand upon the theological teacher that he should supply a cosmogony. It has always been an effective propagandist thing to say: "OUR God made the whole universe. Don't you think that it would be wise to abandon YOUR deity, who did not, as you admit, do anything of the sort?"

The attentive reader of the lives of the Saints will find that this style of argument did in the past bring many tribes and nations into the Christian fold. It was second only to the claim of magic advantages, demonstrated by a free use of miracles. Only one great religious system, the Buddhist, seems to have resisted the temptation to secure for its divinity the honour and title of

Creator. Modern religion is like Buddhism in that respect. It offers no theory whatever about the origin of the universe. It does not reach behind the appearances of space and time. It sees only a featureless presumption in that playing with superlatives which has entertained so many minds from Plotinus to the Hegelians with the delusion that such negative terms as the Absolute or the Unconditioned, can assert anything at all. At the back of all known things there is an impenetrable curtain; the ultimate of existence is a Veiled Being, which seems to know nothing of life or death or good or ill. Of that Being, whether it is simple or complex or divine, we know nothing; to us it is no more than the limit of understanding, the unknown beyond. It may be of practically limitless intricacy and possibility. The new religion does not pretend that the God of its life is that Being, or that he has any relation of control or association with that Being. It does not even assert that God knows all or much more than we do about that ultimate Being.

For us life is a matter of our personalities in space and time. Human analysis probing with philosophy and science towards the Veiled Being reveals nothing of God, reveals space and time only as necessary forms of consciousness, glimpses a dance of atoms, of whirls in the ether. Some day in the endless future there may be a knowledge, an understanding of relationship, a power and courage that will pierce into those black wrappings. To that it may be our God, the Captain of Mankind will take us.

That now is a mere speculation. The veil of the unknown is set

with the stars; its outer texture is ether and atom and crystal. The Veiled Being, enigmatical and incomprehensible, broods over the mirror upon which the busy shapes of life are moving. It is as if it waited in a great stillness. Our lives do not deal with it, and cannot deal with it. It may be that they may never be able to deal with it.

4. THE LIFE FORCE IS NOT GOD

So it is that comprehensive setting of the universe presents itself to the modern mind. It is altogether outside good and evil and love and hate. It is outside God, who is love and goodness. And coming out of this veiled being, proceeding out of it in a manner altogether inconceivable, is another lesser being, an impulse thrusting through matter and clothing itself in continually changing material forms, the maker of our world, Life, the Will to Be. It comes out of that inscrutable being as a wave comes rolling to us from beyond the horizon. It is as it were a great wave rushing through matter and possessed by a spirit. It is a breeding, fighting thing; it pants through the jungle track as the tiger and lifts itself towards heaven as the tree; it is the rabbit bolting for its life and the dove calling to her mate; it crawls, it flies, it dives, it lusts and devours, it pursues and eats itself in order to live still more eagerly and hastily; it is every living thing, of it are our passions and desires and fears. And it is aware of itself not as a whole, but dispersedly as individual self-consciousness, starting out dispersedly from every one of the sentient creatures it has called into being. They look out for

their little moments, red-eyed and fierce, full of greed, full of the passions of acquisition and assimilation and reproduction, submitting only to brief fellowships of defence or aggression. They are beings of strain and conflict and competition. They are living substance still mingled painfully with the dust. The forms in which this being clothes itself bear thorns and fangs and claws, are soaked with poison and bright with threats or allurements, prey slyly or openly on one another, hold their own for a little while, breed savagely and resentfully, and pass..

This second Being men have called the Life Force, the Will to Live, the Struggle for Existence. They have figured it too as Mother Nature. We may speculate whether it is not what the wiser among the Gnostics meant by the Demiurge, but since the Christians destroyed all the Gnostic books that must remain a mere curious guess. We may speculate whether this heat and haste and wrath of life about us is the Dark God of the Manichees, the evil spirit of the sun worshippers. But in contemporary thought there is no conviction apparent that this Demiurge is either good or evil; it is conceived of as both good and evil. If it gives all the pain and conflict of life, it gives also the joy of the sunshine, the delight and hope of youth, the pleasures. If it has elaborated a hundred thousand sorts of parasite, it has also moulded the beautiful limbs of man and woman; it has shaped the slug and the flower. And in it, as part of it, taking its rewards, responding to its goads, struggling against the final abandonment to death, do we all live, as the beasts live, glad,

angry, sorry, revengeful, hopeful, weary, disgusted, forgetful, lustful, happy, excited, bored, in pain, mood after mood but always fearing death, with no certainty and no coherence within us, until we find God. And God comes to us neither out of the stars nor out of the pride of life, but as a still small voice within.

5. GOD IS WITHIN

God comes we know not whence, into the conflict of life. He works in men and through men. He is a spirit, a single spirit and a single person; he has begun and he will never end. He is the immortal part and leader of mankind. He has motives, he has characteristics, he has an aim. He is by our poor scales of measurement boundless love, boundless courage, boundless generosity. He is thought and a steadfast will. He is our friend and brother and the light of the world. That briefly is the belief of the modern mind with regard to God. There is no very novel idea about this God, unless it be the idea that he had a beginning. This is the God that men have sought and found in all ages, as God or as the Messiah or the Saviour. The finding of him is salvation from the purposelessness of life. The new religion has but disentangled the idea of him from the absolutes and infinities and mysteries of the Christian theologians; from mythological virgin births and the cosmogonies and intellectual pretentiousness of a vanished age.

Modern religion appeals to no revelation, no authoritative teaching, no mystery. The statement it makes is, it declares, a mere statement of what we may all perceive and experience. We

all live in the storm of life, we all find our understandings limited by the Veiled Being; if we seek salvation and search within for God, presently we find him. All this is in the nature of things. If every one who perceives and states it were to be instantly killed and blotted out, presently other people would find their way to the same conclusions; and so on again and again. To this all true religion, casting aside its hulls of misconception, must ultimately come. To it indeed much religion is already coming. Christian thought struggles towards it, with the millstones of Syrian theology and an outrageous mythology of incarnation and resurrection about its neck. When at last our present bench of bishops join the early fathers of the church in heaven there will be, I fear, a note of reproach in their greeting of the ingenious person who saddled them with OMNIPOTENS. Still more disastrous for them has been the virgin birth, with the terrible fascination of its detail for unpoetic minds. How rich is the literature of authoritative Christianity with decisions upon the continuing virginity of Mary and the virginity of Joseph – ideas that first arose in Arabia as a Moslem gloss upon Christianity – and how little have these peepings and prying to do with the needs of the heart and the finding of God!

Within the last few years there have been a score or so of such volumes as that recently compiled by Dr. Foakes Jackson, entitled “The Faith and the War,” a volume in which the curious reader may contemplate deans and canons, divines and church dignitaries, men intelligent and enquiring and religiously

disposed, all lying like overladen camels, panting under this load of obsolete theological responsibility, groaning great articles, outside the needle's eye that leads to God.

6. THE COMING OF GOD

Modern religion bases its knowledge of God and its account of God entirely upon experience. It has encountered God. It does not argue about God; it relates. It relates without any of those wrappings of awe and reverence that fold so necessarily about imposture, it relates as one tells of a friend and his assistance, of a happy adventure, of a beautiful thing found and picked up by the wayside.

So far as its psychological phases go the new account of personal salvation tallies very closely with the account of "conversion" as it is given by other religions. It has little to tell that is not already familiar to the reader of William James's "Varieties of Religious Experience." It describes an initial state of distress with the aimlessness and cruelties of life, and particularly with the futility of the individual life, a state of helpless self-disgust, of inability to form any satisfactory plan of living. This is the common prelude known to many sorts of Christian as "conviction of sin"; it is, at any rate, a conviction of hopeless confusion... Then in some way the idea of God comes into the distressed mind, at first simply as an idea, without substance or belief. It is read about or it is remembered; it is expounded by some teacher or some happy convert. In the case of all those of the new faith with whose personal experience I have any

intimacy, the idea of God has remained for some time simply as an idea floating about in a mind still dissatisfied. God is not believed in, but it is realised that if there were such a being he would supply the needed consolation and direction, his continuing purpose would knit together the scattered effort of life, his immortality would take the sting from death. Under this realisation the idea is pursued and elaborated. For a time there is a curious resistance to the suggestion that God is truly a person; he is spoken of preferably by such phrases as the Purpose in Things, as the Racial Consciousness, as the Collective Mind.

I believe that this resistance in so many contemporary minds to the idea of God as a person is due very largely to the enormous prejudice against divine personality created by the absurdities of the Christian teaching and the habitual monopoly of the Christian idea. The picture of Christ as the Good Shepherd thrusts itself before minds unaccustomed to the idea that they are lambs. The cross in the twilight bars the way. It is a novelty and an enormous relief to such people to realise that one may think of God without being committed to think of either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost, or of all of them at once. That freedom had not seemed possible to them. They had been hypnotised and obsessed by the idea that the Christian God is the only thinkable God. They had heard so much about that God and so little of any other. With that release their minds become, as it were, nascent and ready for the coming of God.

Then suddenly, in a little while, in his own time, God comes.

This cardinal experience is an undoubting, immediate sense of God. It is the attainment of an absolute certainty that one is not alone in oneself. It is as if one was touched at every point by a being akin to oneself, sympathetic, beyond measure wiser, steadfast and pure in aim. It is completer and more intimate, but it is like standing side by side with and touching someone that we love very dearly and trust completely. It is as if this being bridged a thousand misunderstandings and brought us into fellowship with a great multitude of other people..

“Closer he is than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.”

The moment may come while we are alone in the darkness, under the stars, or while we walk by ourselves or in a crowd, or while we sit and muse. It may come upon the sinking ship or in the tumult of the battle. There is no saying when it may not come to us... But after it has come our lives are changed, God is with us and there is no more doubt of God. Thereafter one goes about the world like one who was lonely and has found a lover, like one who was perplexed and has found a solution. One is assured that there is a Power that fights with us against the confusion and evil within us and without. There comes into the heart an essential and enduring happiness and courage.

There is but one God, there is but one true religious experience, but under a multitude of names, under veils and darknesses, God has in this manner come into countless lives. There is scarcely a faith, however mean and preposterous, that has not been a way to holiness. God who is himself finite, who

himself struggles in his great effort from strength to strength, has no spite against error. Far beyond halfway he hastens to meet the purblind. But God is against the darkness in their eyes. The faith which is returning to men girds at veils and shadows, and would see God plainly. It has little respect for mysteries. It rends the veil of the temple in rags and tatters. It has no superstitious fear of this huge friendliness, of this great brother and leader of our little beings. To find God is but the beginning of wisdom, because then for all our days we have to learn his purpose with us and to live our lives with him.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

HERESIES; OR THE

THINGS THAT GOD IS NOT

1. HERESIES ARE MISCONCEPTIONS OF GOD

Religion is not a plant that has grown from one seed; it is like a lake that has been fed by countless springs. It is a great pool of living water, mingled from many sources and tainted with much impurity. It is synthetic in its nature; it becomes simpler from original complexities; the sediment subsides.

A life perfectly adjusted to its surroundings is a life without mentality; no judgment is called for, no inhibition, no disturbance of the instinctive flow of perfect reactions. Such a life is bliss, or nirvana. It is unconsciousness below dreaming. Consciousness is discord evoking the will to adjust; it is inseparable from need. At every need consciousness breaks into being. Imperfect adjustments, needs, are the rents and tatters in the smooth dark veil of being through which the light of consciousness shines – the light of consciousness and will of which God is the sun.

So that every need of human life, every disappointment and dissatisfaction and call for help and effort, is a means whereby men may and do come to the realisation of God.

There is no cardinal need, there is no sort of experience in

human life from which there does not come or has not come a contribution to men's religious ideas. At every challenge men have to put forth effort, feel doubt of adequacy, be thwarted, perceive the chill shadow of their mortality. At every challenge comes the possibility of help from without, the idea of eluding frustration, the aspiration towards immortality. It is possible to classify the appeals men make for God under the headings of their chief system of effort, their efforts to understand, their fear and their struggles for safety and happiness, the craving of their restlessness for peace, their angers against disorder and their desire for the avenger; their sexual passions and perplexities..

Each of these great systems of needs and efforts brings its own sort of sediment into religion. Each, that is to say, has its own kind of heresy, its distinctive misapprehension of God. It is only in the synthesis and mutual correction of many divergent ideas that the idea of God grows clear. The effort to understand completely, for example, leads to the endless Heresies of Theory. Men trip over the inherent infirmities of the human mind. But in these days one does not argue greatly about dogma. Almost every conceivable error about unity, about personality, about time and quantity and genus and species, about begetting and beginning and limitation and similarity and every kink in the difficult mind of man, has been thrust forward in some form of dogma. Beside the errors of thought are the errors of emotion. Fear and feebleness go straight to the Heresies that God is Magic or that God is Providence; restless egotism at leisure and

unchallenged by urgent elementary realities breeds the Heresies of Mysticism, anger and hate call for God's Judgments, and the stormy emotions of sex gave mankind the Phallic God. Those who find themselves possessed by the new spirit in religion, realise very speedily the necessity of clearing the mind of all these exaggerations, transferences, and overflows of feeling. The search for divine truth is like gold washing; nothing is of any value until most has been swept away.

2. HERESIES OF SPECULATION

One sort of heresies stands apart from the rest. It is infinitely the most various sort. It includes all those heresies which result from wrong-headed mental elaboration, as distinguished from those which are the result of hasty and imperfect apprehension, the heresies of the clever rather than the heresies of the obtuse. The former are of endless variety and complexity; the latter are in comparison natural, simple confusions. The former are the errors of the study, the latter the superstitions that spring by the wayside, or are brought down to us in our social structure out of a barbaric past.

To the heresies of thought and speculation belong the elaborate doctrine of the Trinity, dogmas about God's absolute qualities, such odd deductions as the accepted Christian teachings about the virginity of Mary and Joseph, and the like. All these things are parts of orthodox Christianity. Yet none of them did Christ, even by the Christian account, expound or recommend. He treated them as negligible. It was left for the

Alexandrians, for Alexander, for little, red-haired, busy, wire-pulling Athanasius to find out exactly what their Master was driving at, three centuries after their Master was dead..

Men still sit at little desks remote from God or life, and rack their inadequate brains to meet fancied difficulties and state unnecessary perfections. They seek God by logic, ignoring the marginal error that creeps into every syllogism. Their conceit blinds them to the limitations upon their thinking. They weave spider-like webs of muddle and disputation across the path by which men come to God. It would not matter very much if it were not that simpler souls are caught in these webs. Every great religious system in the world is choked by such webs; each system has its own. Of all the blood-stained tangled heresies which make up doctrinal Christianity and imprison the mind of the western world to-day, not one seems to have been known to the nominal founder of Christianity. Jesus Christ never certainly claimed to be the Messiah; never spoke clearly of the Trinity; was vague upon the scheme of salvation and the significance of his martyrdom. We are asked to suppose that he left his apostles without instructions, that were necessary to their eternal happiness, that he could give them the Lord's Prayer but leave them to guess at the all-important Creed,¹ and that the Church staggered along blindly, putting its foot in and

¹ Even the "Apostles' Creed" is not traceable earlier than the fourth century. It is manifestly an old, patched formulary. Rutinius explains that it was not written down for a long time, but transmitted orally, kept secret, and used as a sort of password among the elect.

out of damnation, until the “experts” of Nicaea, that “garland of priests,” marshalled by Constantine’s officials, came to its rescue... From the conversion of Paul onward, the heresies of the intellect multiplied about Christ’s memory and hid him from the sight of men. We are no longer clear about the doctrine he taught nor about the things he said and did...

We are all so weary of this theology of the Christians, we are all at heart so sceptical about their Triune God, that it is needless here to spend any time or space upon the twenty thousand different formulae in which the orthodox have attempted to believe in something of the sort. There are several useful encyclopaedias of sects and heresies, compact, but still bulky, to which the curious may go. There are ten thousand different expositions of orthodoxy. No one who really seeks God thinks of the Trinity, either the Trinity of the Trinitarian or the Trinity of the Sabellian or the Trinity of the Arian, any more than one thinks of those theories made stone, those gods with three heads and seven hands, who sit on lotus leaves and flourish lingams and what not, in the temples of India. Let us leave, therefore, these morbid elaborations of the human intelligence to drift to limbo, and come rather to the natural heresies that spring from fundamental weaknesses of the human character, and which are common to all religions. Against these it is necessary to keep constant watch. They return very insidiously.

3. GOD IS NOT MAGIC

One of the most universal of these natural misconceptions of

God is to consider him as something magic serving the ends of men.

It is not easy for us to grasp at first the full meaning of giving our souls to God. The missionary and teacher of any creed is all too apt to hawk God for what he will fetch; he is greedy for the poor triumph of acquiescence; and so it comes about that many people who have been led to believe themselves religious, are in reality still keeping back their own souls and trying to use God for their own purposes. God is nothing more for them as yet than a magnificent Fetish. They did not really want him, but they have heard that he is potent stuff; their unripe souls think to make use of him. They call upon his name, they do certain things that are supposed to be peculiarly influential with him, such as saying prayers and repeating gross praises of him, or reading in a blind, industrious way that strange miscellany of Jewish and early Christian literature, the Bible, and suchlike mental mortification, or making the Sabbath dull and uncomfortable. In return for these fetishistic propitiations God is supposed to interfere with the normal course of causation in their favour. He becomes a celestial log-roller. He remedies unfavourable accidents, cures petty ailments, contrives unexpected gifts of medicine, money, or the like, he averts bankruptcies, arranges profitable transactions, and does a thousand such services for his little clique of faithful people. The pious are represented as being constantly delighted by these little surprises, these bouquets and chocolate boxes from the divinity. Or contrawise he contrives

spiteful turns for those who fail in their religious attentions. He murders Sabbath-breaking children, or disorganises the careful business schemes of the ungodly. He is represented as going Sabbath-breaking on Sunday morning as a Staffordshire worker goes ratting. Ordinary everyday Christianity is saturated with this fetishistic conception of God. It may be disowned in THE HIBBERT JOURNAL, but it is unblushingly advocated in the parish magazine. It is an idea taken over by Christianity with the rest of the qualities of the Hebrew God. It is natural enough in minds so self-centred that their recognition of weakness and need brings with it no real self-surrender, but it is entirely inconsistent with the modern conception of the true God.

There has dropped upon the table as I write a modest periodical called THE NORTHERN BRITISH ISRAEL REVIEW, illustrated with portraits of various clergymen of the Church of England, and of ladies and gentlemen who belong to the little school of thought which this magazine represents; it is, I should judge, a sub-sect entirely within the Established Church of England, that is to say within the Anglican communion of the Trinitarian Christians. It contains among other papers a very entertaining summary by a gentleman entitled – I cite the unusual title-page of the periodical – “Landseer Mackenzie, Esq.,” of the views of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Obadiah upon the Kaiser William. They are distinctly hostile views. Mr. Landseer Mackenzie discourses not only upon these anticipatory condemnations but also upon the relations of the weather to this war. He is convinced

quite simply and honestly that God has been persistently rigging the weather against the Germans. He points out that the absence of mist on the North Sea was of great help to the British in the autumn of 1914, and declares that it was the wet state of the country that really held up the Germans in Flanders in the winter of 1914-15. He ignores the part played by the weather in delaying the relief of Kut-el-Amara, and he has not thought of the difficult question why the Deity, having once decided upon intervention, did not, instead of this comparatively trivial meteorological assistance, adopt the more effective course of, for example, exploding or spoiling the German stores of ammunition by some simple atomic miracle, or misdirecting their gunfire by a sudden local modification of the laws of refraction or gravitation.

Since these views of God come from Anglican vicarages I can only conclude that this kind of belief is quite orthodox and permissible in the established church, and that I am charging orthodox Christianity here with nothing that has ever been officially repudiated. I find indeed the essential assumptions of Mr. Landseer Mackenzie repeated in endless official Christian utterances on the part of German and British and Russian divines. The Bishop of Chelmsford, for example, has recently ascribed our difficulties in the war to our impatience with long sermons – among other similar causes. Such Christians are manifestly convinced that God can be invoked by ritual – for example by special days of national prayer or an increased observance of Sunday – or made malignant by neglect or levity.

It is almost fundamental in their idea of him. The ordinary Mohammedan seems as confident of this magic pettiness of God, and the belief of China in the magic propitiations and resentments of “Heaven” is at least equally strong.

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