THE VEIL OF GOD

H. WHEELER ROBINSON
D.D.

"Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

By the Dean of St. Paul's

THE books which are issued in this series are intended to meet a need and to demonstrate a truth. It is hoped that they may be found useful by many who desire some guidance and encouragement in the spiritual life which they can no longer be sure of gaining from the great classics of devotion, and it is believed that these books will show that the elements in the older devotional literature which sometimes make it seem strange to us are not essential to the fullness of Christian experience but due rather to passing and temporary modes of thought. The authors of the books in this series have different ecclesiastical allegiances, and no doubt in some respects different theologies, but they agree in adopting on the whole the results of modern research and criticism, and at the same time they hold fast to the conviction that only in the communion of the soul with God through Christ is man's true life to be found. But though these writers speak to some extent a different

language from that of the older books which have treated of the spiritual life, they are saying essentially the same thing.

To a superficial judgment the differences in Christian devotion from one age to another may seem the salient fact, but to a deeper view it will appear that beneath these differences the central Christian experience remains the same. These books deal with the old themes of God as the Father of our spirits, of the forgiveness of sins and of the dedicated life. Not less than the writers of a former generation these authors desire to speak to us of Christ crucified as our Saviour and Lord.

It is the prayer of the writers and of the Editor that these old themes have been so handled that they may strike with fresh vigour upon the hearts of readers, and that, like Scribes instructed in the Kingdom, we have brought out of the treasures of Christian life things new and old.

W. R. M.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS book is written for Christian people, sharing its pre-supposition of the Christian faith. It does not attempt, therefore, to present directly any argument for the truth of that faith. Its aim is rather to help those who from time to time may find it hard to hold the faith without wavering, because for one reason or another God seems to hide Himself, "as though there were no God". It asks them to *think* about the world and our life in it in such a way as may help to scatter the clouds of the mind itself, as well as those darkenings of the vision of God which arise from outer circumstance. Devotion is neither luxuriating sentiment nor mechanical obedience; at its highest it is that fellowship with God which shares, so far as man may, the standpoint of God's purpose, and finds in His will its peace. The intellect ought to accompany devotion as far as it can go, and then the surrendered will may continue its journey, not alone, but with a sufficient Guide.

* * * *

The prayers appended to each chapter are as

follows: (1) a prayer for holy intention, taken from the close of Chapter I of Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living"; (2) part of a prayer from James Martineau's "Home Prayers", pp. 5, 6 (by kind permission of Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co.); (3) a prayer from Dr. Johnson's "Prayers and Meditations", dated August 12, 1784, together with Charles Wesley's prayer-hymn, "Come, O Thou Traveller unknown" (selected verses)—the two forming an interesting contrast in contemporary religion; (4) a prayer from the "Primer" of 1553; (5) part of another prayer from the same source, together with the Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Easter, taken from "The Book of Common Prayer". The verses appended to the sixth chapter are by R. D. Blackmore (1825–1900), best known as the author of "Lorna Doone", and bear the title, "Dominus Illuminatio Mea".

I have to thank my friend and colleague, the Rev. A. J. D. Farrer, for a careful and valuable criticism of the typescript.

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INTRODUCTION

IT is easy to admire the beauty of holiness in Jesus of Nazareth as He is portrayed in the Gospels, to feel the glory of His life of heroic self-devotion to a great cause, and sometimes, perhaps, to wish that it were possible to share such a life ourselves. But it is much harder to believe that the gracious words and deeds of the life and the forgiving love of the death belong to God as well as to the highest of men, and that love, such sacrificial love as we see in Christ, is central in the universe and constantly inspires the divine purpose to save and to bless. Yet the hard thing and not the easy thing is the essential fact for Christian faith. No logic can prove it. It can be reached only by intuitions of faith, the conviction that, if this is not true of God, man is more than He. This is the faith that created the Church and still maintains it. This is the victory that has overcome the world and will finally and completely overcome it.

The vision of God can be obscured in many ways, and with some of them this little book is not concerned. At both ends of the spectrum of Christian experience there are invisible rays. At the one end

there is that loss of the vision which springs from our own wilfulness, our misuse of opportunity, our actual rebellion and sin. The beatitude has its necessary converse, and the impure in heart cannot see God. How can a really selfish man believe in the unselfishness of God, when he is unable to believe in the unselfishness of his neighbour? At the other end of our possible experience there is that realm of the majesty of God which necessarily puts Him beyond our comprehension. What adequate conception can we have of the Creator and Sustainer of such a world as ours, with its limitless vistas of the starry sky, so far beyond the reach of our imagination? How can we conceive that in Him we live and move and have our being whilst retaining a measure of actual freedom and responsibility? How can we conceive a divine atonement for sin which is wrought both within God and for God? In such realms our faith must often content itself with being a confidence that the mystery is a mystery of light and not of darkness, as in the psalm of Habakkuk (III, 4): "His brightness was as the light . . . and there was the hiding of His power."

Between these limits, however, there is a realm of God's relation to man comparable with the band of colours which the glass prism will make of the sun's rays. In a well-known experiment in physics, an

absorbing vapour causes a dark shadow across this band at a particular point. In the same way, man's prejudice or ignorance may hide some particular aspect of God which might have been revealed to him. We wrestle with an apparent enemy like Jacob at Peniel, only to discover the disguised friend. We cry with Jeremiah, "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived" (XX, 7), though our very disappointment did but draw us closer to Him. We stand up like the embittered Job to denounce the ways of God, all unconscious of that hidden purpose, the vindication of disinterested religion, which may be wrought out through our sorrows. Here, then, is something which concerns our common experience and often sorely strains our Christian faith. It is found in all the different aspects of our relation to God, simply because His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, so that His ways must be higher than our ways. It is encountered in the realm of physical nature, so regardless of the individual life, though created and upheld by God. It is encountered again in human history, when we try to hold fast to faith in God's control of human lives, in spite of all those aspects of life which seem to contradict it. The challenge becomes more intense when we think of redemption as wrought out in history, through the Incarnation and the Atonement. Even Scripture

itself, though "revelation", is revelation by slow development involving apparent inconsistencies. The believer's personal growth in grace and in knowledge is itself never an unbroken course in the full light of God's presence. Finally, there is the supreme mystery as to what lies beyond death. These six realms, then, viz. nature, history, redemption, the Bible, the inner life and the life beyond death, may properly be considered in regard to that "veiling" of God which is met in each of them.

To find God in any of the events of our experience always gives a "sacramental" quality to them. But the failure to find Him there may often be far more than the mere loss of opportunity. It may leave the untoward event or the unexplained fact to work on us as a sort of "Black Mass"—a reversed sacrament of which the perversity dishonours God and tends to rob us of the power to find Him elsewhere. We cannot afford to leave God out of any part of our experience.

Each of us in his own degree is challenged to do with his struggle, his disappointment, his suffering, what Jesus did with His Cross—to transform its darkness into light, to convert seeming defeat into real victory, to make a sorrow into a sacrament.

This challenge is a necessary result of the great sacramental principle which runs through all existence.

We have no experience of an absolutely unmediated contact of spirit with spirit (notwithstanding the relative truth in the claim of the Christian mystics to transcend the ordinary means of grace and of fellowship with God). Spirit touches spirit either through external means, as the clasp of a friend's hand, or through those inner motions of spirit which have themselves been brought to birth through the same external world, and now form the content of consciousness. Both the Spirit of God and the spirit of man thus use means lower in the level of being than themselves in order to reveal themselves. But that which reveals can also conceal, if we look no higher. That is why every realm of the sacramental unveiling of God can also veil Him, and that is why this little book has been written.

I

THE VEIL OF NATURE

THE Bible begins with an ordered account of Nature as created by the word of God. Nature, on this view, represents the mind and purpose of God, so far as it is able to reveal them. It revealed to the Hebrew the majesty and wisdom, the glory and power of the Creator. But he saw it always as the framework of a distinct and unique creation—man himself. Glorious and wonderful as is God's work in the starry sky, it was for the Hebrew but the splendid roof of man's world, the earth on which he rules as viceroy of God over all other creatures. All the majestic work of God, whose garment is the light and whose chariots are the clouds, and whose voice is the thunder, all the habitable earth, where He makes provision for the bird of the air, the wild goat of the mountains and the lion of the forest—all this forms the arena on which " man goes forth to his work and to his labour until the evening ", unique amongst God's creatures by his consciousness of God and his ability to praise Him who is thus so gloriously revealed.

According to Josephus, (1) the outermost veil of the Jewish Temple was a marvellous tapestry, symbolizing the elements of the universe, its fire by scarlet, its earth by fine linen, its air by blue, and its sea by purple, whilst it included a panorama of the heavens. Not every Jew would respond to the suggestion of that veil as he entered, and pass through the contemplation of Nature to the worship of God. For some reflective minds the majesty and the glory were so great as to be overwhelming. The swiftly-moving panorama of Nature which makes the divine reply to Job's challenge is inspired by a single purpose —to remind him how much higher are God's ways than his, and how far God's thoughts are beyond his comprehension. Proverbs (XXX, 1–4) records the utterance of an agnostic asking in effect how man can hope to comprehend God. The sceptical and pessimistic author of Ecclesiastes describes the monotony of Nature (I, 4–11) and of the life of man, who is a prisoner, working on the treadmill of time (III, 1–9).

This variety of interpretation within the Bible itself prepares us for a similar variety in the moods of men in modern times. To Wordsworth, Nature in her majesty and beauty is the revelation—the unveiling—of God, and yields

> a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,

which can inspire moral obedience or religious awe. On the other hand the thought stirred in his younger contemporary, John Stuart Mill, (2) by the spectacle of Nature is that "next to the greatness of these cosmic forces, the quality which most forcibly strikes every one who does not avert his eyes from it is their perfect and absolute recklessness." Clearly, Nature has attributes which veil, as well as reveal, God. What are they?

The vastness of Nature has been brought by the telescope before the modern mind to a degree beyond all comparison with the conceptions of the ancient world. Yet it may be doubted whether these new and unimaginable magnitudes of the stellar universe are able by their greatness to hide God. It is rather our inability to make any mental picture of infinite space that robs God of any *place* in His universe. The naïve imagination of His palace just above the solid sky which the unsophisticated child of to-day shares with the ancient Hebrew does give such a resting-place for the thought of Him. But when the grown man escapes from the din and glare of the modern city, and walks beneath the silent stars, it is not easy for him to give any adequate answer to the ancient question, "Where is thy God?" He believes the statements of the astronomer, incredible as they sound, so far as to be certain that no far-flung

journey to the remotest star would bring him any nearer to God. The God for whom his restless heart longs *here* is not *there*, is not anywhere in limitless space. The imagination, like Noah's dove, finds no rest for the sole of its foot, and without imagination of some kind, working through mental construction or concrete symbolism, worship becomes thin and unreal, and faith wavers.

If, however, he takes refuge in the thought that "God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth," Nature still threatens his peace, and the artillery of the microscope replaces that of the telescope, the army of biologists that of the astronomers. This "spirit" which he claims to be, what is it? Personality seems to be lost in its apparent origins. The close and intimate relation of body and soul is apt to make the body seem after all the predominant partner. Behind this body there is the long trail of man's evolutionary development, linking him to lower creatures, so that his ancient claim to be but little lower than the angels seems self-flattery. Modern psychology has not been content to bring the mind of man into closest dependence on his body; it has also sought to penetrate beneath the level of his consciousness in order to show that his highest and holiest thoughts have their roots in animal strivings and delusive dreams. Heredity

becomes the modern fate, marking the limits of his destiny and mocking his feeble and ineffective protests against its tyranny. Again, the inability to *imagine* the spiritual, and this time within himself, tyrannizes over his understanding. His brain and his nervous system and his sensory organization are there to be measured and tested, but *where* is that elusive consciousness which he seems to possess? Is there some point of contact between mind and body like that which philosophers have sought, or is consciousness itself merely an "extra", like the striking of a clock? Yet if this consciousness be not the functioning of an actual personality independent, in the last resort, of the physical organism, what permanence have the spiritual values which are the basis of belief in the reality of God? Once more, then, God is veiled, through our fuller knowledge of the close interrelation of mind and body.

These two obscurations of God are central and belong to man's own nature. But there are other difficulties, springing rather from the nature of the universe, when we try to consider it in its Biblical presentation as the unveiling of God. It is true that the conceptions of the latter part of the nineteenth century have been greatly modified by modern physics. We have in some measure escaped from the idol of natural law, partly because there is wider

appreciation of the truth that law itself is a metaphor, a mere description of activities, and of itself can produce nothing, and partly because the theories of modern physics have made "Nature" less of a tyrant, by showing how much the mind of man contributes to the making of "science". But there remain great aspects of Nature, simple and obvious, which in themselves certainly do not reveal the love of God. There is, for example, that "recklessness" of which John Stuart Mill spoke. Its storms and its earthquakes pay no regard to human life and human values. The infliction of disasters and misfortunes, in callous indifference to our needs and interests, not only robs Nature of moral significance in itself but seems utterly inconsistent with the providence of God in relation to individual lives or the destinies of peoples. A river flood in China which robs millions of their homes and thousands of their lives is not an easy item to fit into the theory of Nature as the revelation of God. In the presence of the scornful indifference of the wind, the earthquake and the fire, the man who claims to hear the still, small voice of God seems to many no better than the child who holds the sea-shell to his ear, and fancies that he is listening to the imprisoned murmur of the waves.

There is no legitimate escape from these difficulties through the dualism which would relieve God from

responsibility for Nature. A limited God doing his best against the forces of a hostile natural order is no adequate or worthy conception for the Christian to hold. It was a sound instinct that led the Hebrew to follow the expanding vision of his God till from a tribal deity He became the Creator of the ends of the earth. It was a sound instinct because, as we can see in the exilic prophet who proclaimed a coming deliverance from Babylon, the faith in that deliverance was itself based on the deliverer being the creator-God. However fully we admit that the ways of Nature and the ways of grace stand in sharp antithesis to one another, we cannot accept such a dualism as ultimate without sacrificing essential elements of the Christian faith. The God of grace is also the God of Nature and His purpose must comprehend and unify both realms in spite of their apparent contrasts. Nature belongs to God though it is only part of His great way and of His high thought. This is not to justify the transference of Nature's ways to human life and social relations. The cross of Christ is the inversion of the sword of nature, and the gospel, because it is the higher principle, puts out of court the retention of lower principles on the higher level.

We are to-day witnessing great national experiments, involving the transference of "natural" law to the spiritual world. Whether they succeed

or fail by the measures of this world, the result will not affect the intrinsic authority of the higher over the lower. It is from the conflict and the tension between these opposing principles that the opportunity for spiritual progress comes, as it has always come. That which most intimately concerns us here is to consider what is the right Christian attitude to these perplexities, the general attitude that can resolutely hope to penetrate behind the veil of Nature and see the face of God even where it was most hidden. (The individual reaction of the believer to particular events in the "natural" providence of God will be noticed in Chapter V.)

In the first place, if we are to penetrate beyond the veil of Nature we must constantly remind ourselves of the reality and values of the spiritual. St. Paul enumerates some of these values and bids us *take account* of them (Phil. IV, 8ff.). Everything is apt to become dim and blurred when our minds cease to be occupied with it. These values are like human faces which remain sharp and clear in our consciousness only when we are constantly meeting them. Now Nature itself, at least in the aspect which it presents to us, is impersonal. Its lineaments are too far removed from those of the human body for us to regard them as the revelation of personality. Within the intercourse of man with man, the familiar

features of a friend are transfigured almost into spiritual entities. They are physical features no less than those of Nature, but because we are constantly associating them with spirit it is easy and natural to interpret them as spiritual. Nature, on the other hand, is so vast and unimaginable and in our modern world has been interpreted in such impersonal ways that it requires a distinct effort even on the part of the theist to interpret Nature as the face of a friend.

Here, perhaps, it is well for us to remember how human friendship comes into being. We meet someone casually for the first time and little or no impression is made upon us. We meet again and mutual interest may be aroused. Circumstances may throw us together in an intercourse through which some sympathy of outlook is discovered. We reach a point at which we deliberately seek fellowship and communion with our *friend*. Finally there comes a time when we no longer depend on frequency of meeting or even on explicit interchange of thought. We feel that we know each other without words, and silence in the company of our friend is spiritual companionship. In all this gradual process we start with the external, but we transcend it, and then we attain the power to re-interpret the external so that in a sense our friend can do whatever he likes and

we shall not misunderstand him, because we feel that we know the man himself beyond all that is visible. But nothing of this process would be possible if we did not possess a spiritual nature through which we can interpret the physical signs and expressions of human intercourse. All through we are making a projection of faith into the unseen personality of our friend.

This analogy is useful when we try to think of the God of Nature. Indeed it is only by such an analogy that we can justify our Christian interpretation of it. We cannot see God ; we cannot find a place for Him *within* Nature. If we look at Nature alone in its visible presentation, it often veils rather than reveals God, as we have just seen. But that is often true of our relations with a stranger whom we never take into our friendship. We are constantly misunderstanding the actions and words of other people because we have no clue of sympathy with their inner life. So it will be, and to a greatly increased degree, in our relations with God, so long as He remains a stranger to us. Only as we come to think His thoughts and enter into His purpose do we get the power to interpret His speech to us in Nature. Nature is, of course, not His only manner of revelation. If it is taken alone without considering other and higher ways of revelation, it can be grievously misunderstood.

We are constantly misjudging men of whom we know nothing beyond some of their public and official actions, without the deeper knowledge which comes from relations of home and personal friendship. So, if we try to construe the purpose of God in Nature without regard to any higher levels of the revelation of His purpose, our own thoughts may weave a veil that will hide Him from our eyes. In short, we must not expect to understand God's ways in this realm (even so far as man can understand God at all) until we have brought to the interpretation of Nature the same intimate personal knowledge as is ours in the Christian experience. Nature's apparent indifference, her ruthless disregard of human interests, may admit of a higher meaning when the unflinching order and the resistless magnitude of Nature are subordinated to spiritual control and purpose. If beyond the veil of Nature there is the existence of spirit and the purpose of personality and the grace of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then it is only in the light of the higher principle that we shall be able to look beyond the veil and find our faith in God illuminated and His ways in Nature made comprehensible.

Nature herself warrants this reference to a higher level to explain each lower level. The different sciences, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology,

psychology, all of them deal with increasingly complex forms of existence, each of which might be regarded as the emergence of something new *which includes the old.* Nature always seems to be looking ahead, and to be always ready for some new manifestation of vitality. From the standpoint of the higher level, the data of mathematics exist for those of physics, those of physics for those of chemistry, and so on. In the light of Nature, then, there is nothing irrational in seeking the explanation of the lower in the higher, of physical nature in spiritual nature, of man in God. From that higher level we are justified in saying that one of the great purposes of God seen in Nature is the creation of man. One of them—not all; for we have no right to assume that Nature exists solely on our own account. God may have purposes beyond all the imagination of man; indeed, He must have such purposes, being God and not man. It is the contemplation of the starry sky which more than anything else in Nature brings home to us the infinity of God. Man traces amongst the stars the imaginative patterns of the constellations, which through countless ages have been the enduring spectacle of the night for all earth-dwellers. Yet those very constellations are but the illusion of earth-born eyes, something that seems to be because we are here and not somewhere else in that vast universe the stars

constitute. From another planet, the stars would have a very different pattern.

Nature has not only been the workshop of God for the creation of man; she has also been his school. Without the order of Nature, human freedom would lose not only its meaning, but also its training. The "ethics" of Nature are very different from those of grace; yet they seem to be a necessary foundation for the work of the higher classes in God's school. It is out of the clash and struggle of life that some of its higher possibilities become actualities—the courage and the heroism, the patience and the persistence, even the very need of God. There are very real limits to what Nature can teach us, and there is a point at which the work of the preparatory school is over. But up to that point the very condition of the advance lies in the competitive struggle. Biologists remind us that "comfort rather than perfection has been and is the goal of all flesh", (3) that the invertebrates acquired backbones in the struggle against the rush of waters caused by the uplift of continents, that the drying up of pools and streams caused fishes to acquire lungs and legs, that the cold which destroyed forests brought down man's animal ancestors from the trees. So at a higher level, it is the very clash and struggle with Nature when it seems to tyrannize over man's spiritual life that evokes the highest qualities of that life.

Nature is reckless—yes, but with a calculated recklessness that seems to know that she is handing over her child to better things. She triumphs over him, that he may learn to triumph over her.

O ETERNAL God, who hast made all things for man, and man for Thy Glory, sanctify my body and soul, my thoughts and my intentions, my words and actions, that whatsoever I shall think, or speak, or do, may be by me designed to the glorification of Thy name; and by Thy blessing it may be effective and successful in the work of God, according as it can be capable. Lord, turn my necessities into virtue; the works of Nature into the works of Grace, by making them orderly, regular, temperate, subordinate, and profitable to ends beyond their own proper efficacy: and let no pride or self-seeking, no covetousness or revenge, no impure mixture or unhandsome purposes, no little ends and low imaginations, pollute my spirit, and unhallow any of my words and actions; but let my body be a servant of my spirit, and both body and spirit servants of Jesus; that doing all things for Thy glory here, I may be partaker of Thy glory hereafter: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

II

THE VEIL OF HISTORY

I KNEW an old Scottish gamekeeper who could remember when the first news of the Battle of Waterloo came up his glen—by word of mouth just a year after the event. When we contrast the news of to-day, with its rival posters and headlines, its contemporary wireless comment, and its sound-films, we can explain some of the unrest and uncertainty of the age in which we live, and its different attitude towards "history". What do we really know about the past, when it is so difficult to ascertain the facts of the present? In particular, since there seems so little evidence of the guiding hand of God to-day in current events of political and social history, what right have we to assume that the past centuries would afford any clearer evidence, when the tidy text-book and its convenient eliminations are ignored?

To some extent, the veil of Nature is also the veil of history. The natural and non-moral forces of earth and sea and climate, the particular place in the sun which a nation holds, its hills and valleys and rivers, the fertility and mineral wealth of its territory, all

carry with them a profound effect on the social and economic life of that nation, and therefore on its history. Nature, as we have seen, can be intellectually, but not morally, rationalized. History can be partly rationalized both intellectually and morally (because of its psychical factors), but only partly, for reasons to be seen. The interpretation of Nature is more complete, but at a lower level; the interpretation of history is less complete, but at a higher level.

The activity of the physical factors and their great influence on human history cannot be ignored. They continue the competitive clash of the forces of Nature at the higher level of human society, and they set some of its chief social and political problems. It is on the sway of economic, *i.e.* ultimately of material forces, that Marx and Marxian Socialism have concentrated their attention. But just as materialism is bound to fail, for all its partial truth, as an interpretation of the individual life, so is it bound to fail as an interpretation of social life and its history. Man is compact of body and soul; his history is not even intelligible when the existence and rights of that soul are ignored. Nationality itself is inexplicable when its spiritual side is ignored: "A nation is not the physical fact of one blood, but the mental fact of one tradition." (4)

On the other hand, attention can be fixed and

practical emphasis laid on the *psychical* factors of human history, but in such a way as to seem to dispense with any divine element. Great experiments in concentrated human leadership are now being made by Italy and Germany. They are not necessarily incompatible with religion. Yet it certainly seems to the outside observer that their general trend and their dominant principles unduly exalt the human side of history, quite apart from the question of the compatibility of their methods with Christian ethics. They claim to shape and control the social order in ways learnt from Nature rather than from grace. They include, of course, many spiritual values, and "patriotism" may be made into a sort of religion. But on the whole they are forms of political "humanism", corresponding with those other types of humanism which are so prevalent to-day.

We may recognize the partial truth in both these ways of interpreting and dealing with history, without regarding them as adequate. The Christian is bound to believe that beyond and above the physical and psychical factors history will disclose the activity of the God in whom he believes. It is with the difficulties in discerning this that we are concerned. We need not linger on the philosophic problems of the relation of an infinite and eternal God to a finite and temporal world, not only because they lie beyond the scope

of such a book as this, but also because they only indirectly affect the outlook of the ordinary man. At most, he may be puzzled at the thought that the small happenings of human history should concern the God on whom the vast Universe depends. That difficulty can hardly be felt, however, by one who has recognized a realm of values as well as a realm of events, and knows that the two are incomparable. Much more difficulty is caused by the element of contingency or "chance" in the events of history. The trivial indisposition of a statesman may result in a political crisis of the first magnitude. The accidental death of the leader in some great cause may set it back for generations. Even the literary record of a man or a movement, with all its importance for subsequent generations, may depend on the chance that someone is on the spot, able to see and able to articulate in permanent form that which it is vital for mankind to know.

Closely allied with this factor of contingency, and indeed like it in its irrationality, is what we may call the ministry of illusion, the place of error in the beliefs of mankind. As we look back over the vast expanse of what would to-day be universally regarded as superstition and error, we are forced to admit that the progress of the race has not been something independent of this, but something often made through it.

Alchemy leads to chemistry, and astrology to astronomy, and idolatry to religion in spirit and in truth. It would almost seem as if illusion were a pedagogic necessity of the way to truth. But what, then, is truth?

The difficulty just named is not felt by all, for not all have realized what "relativity" means in relation to revelation, and how it may veil the authority of God. But all men must sometimes have felt the far greater difficulty raised by moral evil within the providential government of the world. Here is something which directly challenges that government, and often seems to carry off its challenge successfully, so far as any visible providence is concerned; did not Bunyan show his truth of observation by saying that "Mr. Badman died like a Lamb, or as they call it, like a Chrisom child, quietly and without fear"? Nor is it safe to say that in the social order, at least, right is always vindicated by the overthrow of wrong, unless we beg the question by implying that the survival of a society proves its moral goodness. A social order seems to have no permanent security of tenure, and its vitality does not always rise or fall with its morality, as has too easily been suggested. The present state of Western civilization certainly favours no confident generalization about progress in morality and religion, as distinct from the greater mastery of

physical forces and of the external conditions of comfort.

The interest and importance for religion of these and other aspects of history may be seen in the number of English and foreign writers who are discussing the precise nature of "history" at the present time. Any adequate discussion would become a whole philosophy. On the general questions, all that can here be said is to refer the reader to such a book as that on *The Purpose of God* by the editor of the present series. It is there argued that "The chief significance of history is the development of the creative powers of persons when living in community." (5) This development includes the conquest of the material environment, the conquest of the self, and the increasing realization of the social ideal. Such a view would be shared in general by most theists. Let us see how far we can lift the veil that hides God's administration of the world by adopting it. In the first place, the admitted evil in the history of the race and in our contemporary cross-section of it is explained by the fact of moral freedom. God has given to every man, within definite limits marked out by his heredity and environment, the power to say "no" as well as "yes" to Him. This freedom is the necessary condition for the existence of any moral values at all, and for the existence

of any religion which insists on moral values. Evil must be free to exist, if good is to have any reality. If there could be no villains, there could be no saints. As Thomas Traherne has finely said (6), "When all that could be wrought by the use of His own liberty was attained, by man's liberty He attained more." The abuse of freedom does hide God in the present order, and that abuse exists by His permission, and by His continued maintenance of the evil-doer in the physical order. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." So far, He is responsible, but only so far. Once it is admitted that the moral values and their spiritual accompaniments are worth while, then all that faith is entitled to expect is that God should ultimately find some way of overcoming the evil, without violence to His own purpose of progressive moral and spiritual creation. The evil must be overcome in both its aspects, viz. as an active disposition of the individual will, and as an act wrought out in time, and passing into the sum of racial history. The first is accomplished by the grace which leads to conversion; the second by that transformation of the whole "meaning" of history, which is seen in miniature in Christ's transformation of the crime into the glory of the Cross. This is a necessary part of "Redemption" (see the next chapter). If our faith

in the adequacy of redemptive grace be justified, then human history will eventually reveal God, like a finished picture, by its deep shadows being gathered up into the meaning of the whole, as well as by its high lights.

We have also to remember that our data for a judgment of history are necessarily incomplete. Even the most learned and impartial of historians cannot collect and assimilate all the available material; if he could, it would still be but a fragmentary and inadequate record of the unimaginable detail of the centuries during which the human race has existed. We know in part and we prophesy in part, and even though we knew all, it would be but part of an unfinished process, without its final result. If it be said that this cuts both ways, and deprives history of any evidential value at all, the answer is both simple and important. The Christian faith is indeed based on a historical revelation, but not on the general revelation of history. It is not based on an intricate calculus, resulting in a sort of profit and loss trading account, to show that, on the whole, there is more good than evil in the world. It was from the beginning a challenge to the history, not an inference from it. The truth as it is in Jesus would not be less true though He had won no disciple, created no institution, transformed no society from paganism to

the Christian faith, though it is, of course, inconceivable that He should win no response from human nature. Both the prophet of Jehovah and the apostle of Christ did indeed find God in history ; but it was because they brought their personal faith to bear upon it, and to select from it those incidents which confirmed it. From that faith as a centre they flung out their daring generalizations of a Kingdom of God yet to be realized, a Kingdom they never saw, and no man has yet seen. Their followers rightly welcome every sign and token of God's activity in the world which faith enables them to discern, but they must not try to build that faith on the balance of good and evil in the world. The pattern on the loom will become intelligible to us only when we are able to look on the pattern card which outlines for faith the finished result.

This reference to Christian faith as cardinal in the interpretation of history is not an argument in a circle, or a begging of the question. From history as from Nature, "we receive but what we give." Faith, like all knowledge, is a selective blending of the inner attitude and content of consciousness with the external "event", so as to make a new unity, the "fact" of faith. Because our judgments of history are necessarily judgments of value, they are subjective in the sense that they rise and fall in the

individual life and in successive generations. We know that it is so in ourselves, who at different periods of life judge so differently the same "events". So also, as we look upon the panorama of history, there seem to have been, at least relatively, ages of faith and ages of doubt. It is well to remember, especially at the present time, how such differences, such rise and fall of the spiritual level of life, may affect our judgment, indeed our vision, of what we call the "facts". When we look at a relief map of the world (such as the transatlantic cable offices sometimes display) showing the heights and depths of the sea-floor as well as of the continents, we realize how much difference of outline would be made by a small alteration of the sea-level. The very shape of the land, so familiar from the map, would be changed into something new and unrecognizable. So is it with that realm which we call history, known to us in a more or less conventional pattern, some of which is ugly and unpromising enough. Faith sees already a new pattern, a new pattern which will be made by the rise of the sea of faith itself. Just so far as we share in the view and purpose of God, all things become new to us, because their meaning is different. But for spiritual beings, the final reality of things is in nothing other than their meaning.

Such considerations already suggest that this earth

cannot be the ultimate arena of spiritual beings. The apostle Paul, in one of his most dramatic figures (I Cor. IV, 9) compares himself and his companions with gladiators brought forth into the arena as the last item of the programme : " God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death : for we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and to men." From the arena ringed by its sea of human faces, he looks up to invisible spectators, where is his ultimate court of appeal. He transfers his cause to another court. So must it always be with the essential Christian faith, without prejudice to its practical duties and present issues. The earthly arena is indeed an essential part of our growth and training, but only a part, only a means to an end, though a means which is gathered up into that end.

In the generation or two immediately before us, many had become impatient with what was called the " other-worldliness " of Victorian religion. The impatience was justified, in so far as it meant the condemnation of any religion which neglected its present duties and so disproved the genuineness of its faith in the unseen. Those duties are the most effective test of the reality of faith and the most valuable means of its growth. Yet—and this is the paradox which has always to find its practical solution in Christian living—those duties can be discharged on

the Christian level of thought and life only by those who endure as seeing the invisible. We are to work as though this world, even this present hour, were the whole of our opportunity, yet in the confidence that the workman is more to God than the work, and that the most permanent result of all our striving is not in this world at all, but in that invisible and spiritual world of which we are already members. We are to live as those who are always ready for God's signal for departure, with the detachment of Passover pilgrims, staff in hand, with sandalled feet and girt loins. We are to live and work as those who believe in God's complete victory *here*, but as those who know that His victory here owes its lasting and supreme importance to its results *there*. The vexed questions of eschatology, so far as they concern this world, become of very minor importance. God must indeed be vindicated here, as well as in the unseen realm ; we cannot think of a frustrated or unfinished task for Him. But the scaffolding is not the building, and becomes an encumbrance and an obstacle to be cleared away, when the building is finished.

WHAT are we, O Lord, that Thou shouldst call us to be witnesses of Thy righteousness, and open to us a place in the train of the faithful and saintly who labour and live for Thee in every age ? Unless Thou keep watch

over us, and cast us down with Thy rebuke, and lift us by Thy purifying grace, we can think nothing, love nothing, know nothing, as we ought; and Thy Divine light will but be quenched as it passes through our souls. Scatter, O God, the darkness of sense and self within us. Ever looking unto Thee, may we more and more gain the single eye, the trusting mind, the fervent spirit, and the heart of willing sacrifice.

Eternal Father, the stay of all our generations, in whose hands our times are! We bless Thee for the many sweet and solemn memories that surround us in our time and place, and win us to love the simplicity of wisdom and the beauty of holiness. Awaken us to feel how great a thing it is to live at the end of so many ages, heirs to the thoughts of the wise, the labours of the good, the prayers of the devout. Gather and kindle their power in our hearts; and as we muse upon them, may their fire burn and consume whatever is mean and low within us. Make us one with those who have been touched with pity for the sins and sorrows of the world, and willing, by the free offering of ourselves, to fill up the measure of the sufferings of Christ.

III

THE VEIL OF REDEMPTION

REDEMPTION is an old-fashioned word, but we cannot afford to lose it from the Christian vocabulary. It is more circumscribed than its much more frequent synonym "salvation", and puts the emphasis on the delivering act of God rather than on its result in the delivered or "saved" soul. "Salvation" has many aspects and applications, here and hereafter; "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" is the working out of the purpose of God to reconcile man to Himself through the sacrifice of His Son (Rom. III, 25). It is the divine answer to the human cry of need uttered in many tones all along the pathway of human history. It consists essentially in God's entrance into that history in a manner unique within it, yet most closely and intimately related to it.

Truth must be wrought out as an act, before it can be suggested by a word. Scientific truth demands long and arduous labour in the laboratory. Historical truth requires a like devotion amid the laden shelves of the library. Moral truth is born of the travail of

moral conflict; the reflections of the philosopher do but gather the results and shape their expression. So is it with religious truth; however simple and obvious its ultimate statement, the process of first reaching it is always costly. These are the laws of our life under its present conditions, and when God purposed to redeem men, He necessarily accepted those conditions for Himself in His Son. In no other way, so far as we can see, could there be direct contact between God and man. So the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and in the days of His flesh He offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears. The redemptive work of God was done at the cost of human life, and so became an intelligible act of the divine.

This "actuality" of redemption is of the greatest significance for our theme. If God's redemption of man is wrought out in terms of human life-history, it will be in some degree veiled to our eyes. There will be duality of working, since God's act is visible as man's, and it will be possible to miss the divine in the human. So is it also when the redemptive work of Christ is continued by the Holy Spirit in the believer; again, the divine may be hidden and here even contradicted by the human factor. There will be varying human interpretations of what God is doing and how He is doing it. Finally there will be the

mystery that lies beyond knowledge, the ultimate relation of the Person and Work of the Son to the eternal God. We may try humbly to face the chief difficulties that arise, beginning with the simplest and most generally felt.

There is no more frequent "darkening of the purpose of God" (Job XXXVIII, 2) than that which urges the incompleteness of its product in Christian lives. Is this Gospel of Redemption more than an unrealized and unrealizable dream? Does it work? There is a plausibility in this kind of objection which specially appeals to the English temperament. Just as we prefer religious reserve to religious profession (in which we easily suspect hypocrisy), so instinctively we prefer "facts" to "ideas", and any cause which can show results, whatever its tenets, has an advantage in our eyes over the most convincing train of mere argument. This attitude naturally issues in the converse judgment. If the Christian Gospel does not work out in visibly redeemed lives and in a Christian society which reveals Christ, men suspect the truth of its claims. The Christian himself will often find that this is the source of some of his own uncertainties and hesitations. Not a few who have begun the Christian life with enthusiasm are so disillusionized by the failure of the Church to maintain its ideals that they drift into aloofness or even alienation.

(Some of us may recall Doré's picture of "The Neophyte", expressing this disillusionment.)

Several things may be said about this attitude. We are not concerned here with the want of humility, the censoriousness or even the self-deception that snatches at the most obvious excuse for indifference. Our concern is with the honest bewilderment and disappointment we are bound to feel, when Christian men prove to be not so good as we expected. The need is for more use of *imagination*, that often neglected handmaid of the Christian virtues and the Christian faith. These men and women in whom we are disappointed are of like passions with ourselves and may be as much disappointed in us as we in them. At any rate, our own experience of "the divided heart", of the rise and fall of moral and spiritual energies, and of the mingling of lower motives in even our highest resolves, should enable us to understand some of their difficulties. Not only for Christian conduct, but also for Christian faith, it is good to remember the words: "looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. VI, 1). We do not necessarily doubt the genuineness of our own convictions and ideals because we so often fail to act on them, or to realize them; why should we doubt the genuineness of similar convictions and ideals in others? We find our own faith strengthened by the persistence of these

higher elements in ourselves, notwithstanding the broken vow and the frequent fall; why should we not find reinforcement from the continued struggle in other lives? We are apt to expect too much from ordinary folk, just as we are apt to ascribe too much to the saints and heroes of faith. But, as Watts's hymn fitly reminds us:—

> Once they were mourning here below,
> And wet their couch with tears;
> They wrestled hard, as we do now,
> With sins and doubts and fears.

The *inner* history of saintliness, at least in its earlier stages, is much more like that of ordinary Christians than we usually imagine; it may move on higher levels and know more extensive horizons, but it is engaged in similar struggles and wins its victories through its defeats. The actual successes of these men (apart from the scale and setting) were due not so much to Nature as to grace, the same grace that ministers to us and to our fellows. The defeats of the saints are a promise of the victories of the sinners.

There is a "Kenosis", a "self-emptying", of the Holy Spirit in making the Christian His temple which is comparable with, and indeed the direct continuation of, the "self-emptying" of the Incarnation and the Cross (Phil. II, 7). If we can see it aright, therefore, there is ground for an increase of confidence, rather

than a loss of it, in this partial and unfinished work of sanctification. There are few of our fellow Christians in whom we cannot discern some good thing, some spirit of service, some courage or kindliness or patience, however mingled with self-seeking, complaint, uncharitableness and ill-temper. Imaginative sympathy will be moved to give thanks to God that He has not cast them away from His presence nor taken His Holy Spirit from them. How wonderful is this indwelling of His in lives like our own, so far from perfect ! On a higher level of knowledge and faith Christian life repeats that witness to Himself which is to be found, as R. L. Stevenson has reminded us, in the ordinary lives of men : " these men and women, all the world over, in every stage of history, under every abuse of error, under every circumstance of failure, without hope, without help, without thanks, still obscurely fighting the lost fight of virtue, still clinging in the brothel or on the scaffold, to some rag of honour, the poor jewel of their souls ! " (7)

If the worst in men is their own, the best is God's, and must not be hidden by that worst. William James once wrote, in a letter to his wife, that a man's true character is known by his mental and moral intensities ; when he is most alive a voice within says, " *This* is the real me " (8) . This thought reappears in " The Varieties of Religious Experience " (p. 257)

in relation to conversion, of which, he says, the importance is to show a man the high-water mark of his spiritual capacity. Let us lift that thought to the level of our faith in what God is doing in the lives of other Christians. Let us think of the Church in some of its lowliest manifestations, as a group of poor men and women met in some ugly little building, without the aids of architecture and music and a noble liturgy, and yet caught up into something beyond themselves by the Christian faith. If it be said " What are their lives after all, in comparison with what that faith demands ? " it is a sufficient rejoinder to ask, " What would such lives be without that faith, which makes their true poetry and redeems them from monotony and meaninglessness ? "

But God's redeeming purpose may be veiled by questions arising from theory as well as from practice. We may ask ourselves whether, after all, human thought is capable of grasping divine realities, whether the very contradiction of rival doctrines of redemption does not prove the futility of our thinking, and whether we ought not to bring Christian faith back to the firm ground of the Sermon on the Mount and the Parable of the Prodigal Son in all their simplicity. In trying to answer our own questioning on these points, it is certainly wise to be humble and to recognize the limits of human knowledge. Let us

remind ourselves constantly that we know God only as He makes contact with us through our human experience, and never as He may be known to other orders of spiritual beings, or as He is in Himself apart from our experience. But to admit this is not to be driven into agnosticism. All knowledge is relative to our consciousness, as the necessary condition of knowing. But the general truth of the physicist's knowledge of the Universe is not destroyed by the fact that it is in terms of terrestrial mathematics. His explanation of the atom is not put out of court because of his admission that his theory is " symbolic ", and not diagrammatic. Human language and human thought are always and in every realm " symbolic ", even when they try to explain the concrete objects within our experience. But relativity does not matter if man himself be related to God, if his spiritual nature be so far akin to his Creator's that he may think God's thoughts after Him in his own limited and symbolic fashion. If human thought be not doomed to utter nescience in every realm, it may as legitimately aspire to know God in grace as in Nature, though in neither realm can we hope to comprehend the full majesty of God.

As for the variety of doctrines held by the theologians in any one generation or in one generation as compared with its predecessors, we may fairly

ask whether the variety is greater or the central agreement less amongst competent thinkers about God than amongst scientists. " Science " no longer seems the solid rock which it was once represented as being ; it is as much honeycombed with theory as is theology. Both realms have a solid foundation in experienced " fact ", and Spencer's complacent allocation of religion to the Unknowable in contrast with Science as the known has lost its point. But we may say more than this. Variety in religious consciousness and so in theological statement is itself essential to an individual response to God. He is too great for the experience of one man or one generation or all the race to exhaust Him. A modern novelist (Claude Houghton) has described the bewilderment of a man engaged as secretary to an employer he has never seen and ordered to " carry on " until his appearance. The secretary lives in his employer's rooms, gets to know his books and interests, meets his friends and acquaintances, and cannot reconcile the different reflections of his employer from these many mirrors—till it dawns on him that this unknown person is a bigger man than any one of them, big enough to include them all. Then, and only then, does the door open and his employer appear, saying " I am Jonathan Scrivener." We may parallel this thought with that of an ancient Rabbi (9) who thanked God

as he looked on the crowd of men, because God had so many instruments of His purpose, and that of a modern Rabbi who prays "Thou whose infinite power and wisdom are reflected in the infinite varieties of Thy creation, we see Thy handiwork also in the differences which prevail in the minds of men." (10)

It may be said, however, that in contrast with all these "plans of salvation" Jesus offers something very simple and direct. Is not His teaching preferable to the Pauline superstructure and all its successors? Here we may easily go astray, if we forget that the *teaching* of Jesus is a quite inadequate substitute for Himself. It was the Gospel of the crucified Messiah and the risen Lord which created Christian faith, and not simply the words of a great Rabbi. Moreover, simplicity may go with profundity. Behind the simplicity of Jesus there is the enigma of a unique personality. Our very desire to escape from what seems an over-elaboration and an artificial superstructure to the truth as it is in Jesus may hide God's deeper revelation from us. Jesus impressed those who heard Him by His own personality far more than by His teaching. It is in the attempt to understand that Personality as far as we may that the deep realities of the Gospel open before us. The great need of the soul is for a Redeemer. There are other teachers and

other noble examples; there is only one Redeemer for the Christian. We must not only listen to Jesus when He speaks about God; we must also learn to see God in Him, in His life and His death and His resurrection. Here we come to the dividing-line between a hope based on man and a hope based on God, between a refined and noble humanism and a Gospel of divine love, redeeming and sacrificial. Here, in presence of the Incarnation and Atonement, the whole redemptive work of Christ, it is most important that we should enter "within the veil".

One of the most familiar of Christian hymns bids us "veiled in flesh the Godhead see". In what does that veiling consist? What significance has it for us and how ought we to approach it?

First of all, we must recognize that for many who reverence and serve Jesus Christ the veil remains without the vision. Even for those of us whose faith goes far beyond the acceptance of a human Jesus there may come sometimes the haunting doubt, "What if Jesus is after all a great human peninsula thrust out into the unknown sea? What if His personality be man's great question rather than God's great answer to it?" Are we left with the Cross as something infinitely pathetic, a challenge to the justice of the universe which tends to disprove rather than to prove the love of God for men? Every thoughtful

Christian must sometimes have faced this question and must be prepared to answer it if his faith is surely founded. We need not consider the other question which is being asked to-day as to the validity of the Christian ethic, since everyone who shares in the Christian faith in any degree has already answered that. But we must face *this* question as to the divine within the human ; nor can we satisfy ourselves by any answer that does not give a unique place to Jesus. The Christian faith does not find its full warrant when Jesus is considered as the noblest example of a great ideal representing one of the spiritual movements and tendencies of the universe. It would of course be wrong to deny that such a view of Him is a great moral encouragement, and the appeal to His example is familiar to us from the New Testament days onward (cf. I Peter II, 21ff.). We do not exalt the Christian faith by forcing it into a sharp antithesis with incomplete forms of itself. The presentation of Jesus as the greatest of human examples is beyond question one of the principles of Christian conduct, one of the sources of Christian encouragement. But it is very far short of the historic faith and it may easily leave us baffled and disappointed with the thought of a great ideal once achieved but never to be achieved again, a delicate and beautiful thing, yet one too remote and esoteric for the rough and tumble of life. The

Christian doctrine of grace must strike deeper roots in our consciousness than this, and the Christian morality is apt to be a mockery of our weakness unless it is reinforced by the Christian religion. We must strive to see that Christ and His Cross are not only mighty moral forces, as demonstrated by the power they have exerted and still exert, but that in and through them we may enter into knowledge of and fellowship with the purpose and strength of God Himself.

The first of the great Christian heresies was Docetism, which shrank from the intimate contact of the material and spiritual in the Incarnation and, being confident of the presence and activity of the spiritual, held that the material was present in Jesus only in appearance and that His humanity was not real. To-day our great difficulty and the greatest source of the weakening of Christian faith from within itself is a sort of reversed Docetism. We are sure of the humanity ; our hesitation concerns the deity. One result of the historical and critical studies of the last two generations has been to recreate the Jesus of history. We see Him to-day, it is often said, more truly and more vividly as He walked the earth than any generation has done since the first century. The price we have paid for this greater clearness of historic vision is that the presence of the Godhead by comparison seems shadowy

and uncertain, or is even resolved into a vague theory of God's presence in every man, which can claim no real kinship with Biblical doctrine or the historic faith of the Church. Nor can we escape our difficulties to-day by dwelling on the miracles of Jesus or even on the resurrection. If a valid and convincing defence of these is to be made they must be approached through the unique personality and shown to be congruous with it, indeed its "natural" expression; we cannot establish the uniqueness of the personality simply by appeal to the miracles. However good the evidence for them may be, it will not bear the weight of such an external appeal, nor prove the kind of conclusion we need. We are indeed justified in claiming that without the resurrection there would have been no Christian Church and that the rise and maintenance of that Church, based on faith in the Risen Lord, is itself a great confirmation of the truth of the resurrection. But in the first place our faith must seek the truth as it is in Jesus. The only way for the modern man earnestly seeking the confirmation of his faith in Jesus and not blind to all the difficulties of the day, the only way for him is to face Jesus in His humanity and resolutely to seek God in and through the human values of the personality of Jesus.

It is not, of course, our present task even to outline the kind of Christology which this direct approach to

the veil of the humanity might yield. We are concerned rather with the Christian attitude and outlook, so seeking God through the man Christ Jesus. Perhaps the most helpful thought may be to ask ourselves the question: "What other expression of the Godhead could there be than through such a humanity as this?" What is the alternative we restlessly seek if we really want to know God? What difference in *fact* can there be between the divine self-emptying in becoming human and that perfection of our humanity which we more readily see in Jesus? Do we ask for visible signs? Do we wait for human testimony to God? Do we shrink from the direct moral challenge always involved when the spiritual claims authority over us by its own intrinsic nature and bids us follow at any cost? If we feel this claim, what explanation need we give, at least for the purposes of practical faith and conduct, than that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God entering the world at this point as at no other, and that He is claiming an authority over us which we cannot thrust aside without disloyalty to the best that is in us? It seems to be only along such lines of thought as these, supported and enriched by the cardinal truth of man's spiritual kinship with God (which alone makes such a faith as this credible or even intelligible), that we may grasp the truth adumbrated in Raphael's Sistine Madonna, the truth of

the curtains drawn aside, of the parted clouds and of the royal entry of the babe into a waiting world.

But it may be asked, does not this line of approach to the Incarnation rob it of its uniqueness? Do we not feel something at least of the same stirrings of heart in regard to the person of Jeremiah under the old covenant and of Francis of Assisi under the new? Is not all noble achievement in humanity a revelation of God? The answer to this question ought to be an emphatic "Yes". It is the glory of this manner of God's utterance that it was both prepared for and continued; prepared for not only in the history of Israel, but in that of all the peoples, and continued not only in those who bear the name of Christ, but in all who may serve unconscious of their service. There is no need for us to put our little ring fence around Jesus lest He should be dishonoured by the many brethren of whom He is the first-born. The only uniqueness for which we need contend is that which can take care of itself and does take care of itself, which grows upon us according to the degree of our devotion, and which has for its sufficient witness the fact that Jesus still remains ahead of us and of all the generations.

Sometimes it is felt that there is an incongruity in claiming such uniqueness for one who comes in the midst of the generations and not as their culmination

and final glory. But the spiritual does not depend for its quality and its authority on questions of chronological order. The slow progress of mankind in religion and morality does not affect the redemptive finality of Jesus. Jesus comes in the course of the history and not as its goal, that He may transform it to His purpose and bring it to its goal. It is an understatement, rather than an over-statement to say that "Jesus is no more likely to be surpassed or superseded than Bach or Beethoven, and His finality is more significant than theirs." (11)

When all this has been said, the penetration of the veil of the humanity of Jesus necessarily remains an act of faith. When we declare that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh (in any of the senses which the phrase may admit), we are passing beyond the sphere of history. But is history itself, any history and most of all this, intelligible without such resort to its spiritual and supra-human factors? Try to think of it without these higher elements existing in the consciousness and affecting the conduct of men, and you have chaos. If it be said, as it rightly may be said, that the progress of history shows innumerable illusions, this simply compels us to admit the ministry of illusion, already noticed (Chapter II) as the necessary accompaniment of progress by partial truth (12). The faith in God and in the love of God which has sprung

from the human life and death and resurrection of Jesus has taken many illusions to its bosom, illusions which the course of time has dispelled, such as the expectation of a speedy "Second Advent". The truth remains. It is a truth of *faith* which admits of no logical demonstration, but rests on an intuition. God is love: we love because He first loved us: God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son; God commendeth His own love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. All these and hundreds of others of the great sayings of the Christian consciousness concerning God are declarations of *faith*. The transition to them is made when we pass through the veil of the humanity of Jesus into the presence of God whom no human eye has ever seen, save by symbol and as in a mirror darkly.

It is the will rather than the intellect that so passes within the veil. Whatever be said of Kant's philosophy as a whole, his profound conviction that the "practical reason" enters where the "pure reason" cannot pass agrees with the attitude of Jesus in Gethsemane. Jesus prays that the cup may pass from Him, and His own *mind* would choose another path than that of apparent overthrow in death; yet He also says, "Thy will, not mine, be done." It is on the altar of *duty* that he makes the willing offering of Himself. It is by the altar-steps of duty that His

disciples also may climb into God's presence sustained by His strength, guided by His knowledge, and inspired by His example. Those steps imply a *reality* more real than anything of the visible world can be, possess an *authority* so direct that all other authorities become secondary to it, represent a *sacrifice* that actualizes the inner loyalty, giving substance to it in the eyes of man and to the offerer himself, and sustain a *fellowship* which began with the human Christ and ends with the divine. These are not "the great world's altar-stairs" of which the Victorian poet wrote, stairs that slope through darkness up to God, on which lame hands of faith gather dust and chaff. They are altar-stairs that Jesus trod and we may tread with Him, lighted by the glory of the Gospel until we pass through the veil of death itself and await our new adventures with happy confidence. To some who asked for the ultimate glory, Jesus said "Ye *know* not what ye ask . . . can ye *drink* of the cup which I drink of?" This is the New Testament equivalent for the repeated saying of Israel's wise men, that reverence for God is the beginning of human wisdom.

The Epistle to the Hebrews makes impressive use of the figure of the veil. Three times the writer refers to the veil or curtain which separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place in the Jewish sanctuary. In Ch. IX, 3, he refers to it as a barrier beyond which

the high priest alone might pass, and only on the annual Day of Atonement. Here it symbolizes the limitation of the old order as compared with the new ; Christ has entered once for all into the hidden shrine where God is, having obtained eternal redemption through His own blood. This thought is developed in Ch. X, 19, 20, where it is said that He has dedicated a new and living way, by which we also may be emboldened to go in the strength of His sacrifice. By a striking symbolism, the veil here becomes His flesh, rent like the veil of the temple (Mark XV, 38) that the availing sacrifice might be offered. The remaining instance (VI, 19) speaks of the hope based on the eternal high-priesthood of Jesus as " an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and entering into that which is within the veil."

It is when we try to follow out the writer's conception of that hope, and all similar conceptions, that we realize the incapacity of our thought to grasp intellectually the redemption which Christ has wrought for us. We may extend the figure of the Epistle to the Hebrews by recalling the ritual of Lev. XVI, 2ff. Here we read that the high priest carried with him into the Holy of Holies a censer with burning coals on which he scattered incense " that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not " (*v.* 13). It is the

creation of a new veil between the face of God and man. Perhaps it is not too fanciful to extend the thought of the writer of the Epistle, and to let this cloud of incense suggest that some veiling of God must remain even for believers in Christ. This truth applies both to the Person and to the Work of Christ.

In regard to the former, it is not possible for us to " think out " the full relation of the personality of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Godhead. St. Paul's way of putting things still expresses most of what we can say, viz. that *through* Him we have access *unto* the Father, *in* one Spirit (Eph. II, 18). The personality of the Incarnate Son is definite, and necessarily limited by His human nature. Through that personality we are sure of our approach to God. But we cannot transport ourselves into a supra-human realm and explain how that personality can retain its definiteness whilst being identified with Eternal Sonship—the redemptive Personality of God Himself. The time-honoured creeds and definitions do not really help us, save by staking out a claim which they cannot fully develop. So is it with the work of divine redemption done *for* us, as well as *in* us. The human heart needs both divine power to change its purposes, and something more—call it ransom or sacrifice or satisfaction as you will—to meet its consciousness of guilt. It

needs something done at once *by* God and *to* God. Forgiveness must be more costly to God than saying "I forgive you." Holy love must always suffer in taking on itself the burden of our guilt. Again we get a hint of that duality within unity which we have seen within the realm of history and of the Incarnation.

If we cannot wholly explain the unity of the relation between the human and the divine in Christ on the lower level of history, still less can we hope to articulate the higher unity of divine Personality. Even the imagination of Dante had to take refuge in the symbolism of rainbow-like circles of light.(13) It must always be so whilst we remain within the limits of our present form of existence. Shall we not expect the mystery of good to be greater than the mystery of evil, and the mystery of God greater than the mystery of man? But we can venture to draw two inferences from our present experience, which point to something beyond it. One is that the Christian finds that the surrender of his personality to the will of God as known in Christ makes him not less but more a true man (Gal. II, 20). It *is* true that individualized human personality can be gathered into Personality greater than itself without the absorption which would mean annihilation. The other inference is that already the unity of divine "regeneration" and

human "conversion" carry with them the power to transform both the meaning and the consequences of the past, so that its failures incite to a larger success and penalty becomes willingly accepted discipline. May not the crowning work of "Atonement" prove to be some such completed transformation of the irrevocable actualities of human history, in both their individual and social significance?

In the novel called *The Gap in the Curtain* Mr. Buchan makes one of his characters say, "Trying to see something solid in the mist is the whole fun of life, and most of its poetry." To the Christian, Christ offers that "something solid in the mist" and His redemptive work is the poetry of the Gospel. Religion in its highest aspects always becomes something akin to poetry, a poetry which cannot be reduced to prose without the loss of essential truth. Religion has its prose—buildings and organizations and administrative activities—but these things are transient and of the earth, though as necessary to it as the body now is to the soul. Through and in them all, however, there must live that breath of divine poetry which derives from the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and this is the eternal reality which the Christian sees amid the mists of time.

O LORD, my Maker and Protector, who hast graciously sent me into this world to work out my salvation, enable me to drive from me all such unquiet and perplexing thoughts as may mislead or hinder me in the practice of those duties which Thou hast required. When I behold the works of Thy hands, and consider the course of Thy providence, give me grace always to remember that Thy thoughts are not my thoughts, nor Thy ways my ways. And while it shall please Thee to continue me in this world, where much is to be done, and little to be known, teach me, by Thy Holy Spirit, to withdraw my mind from unprofitable and dangerous inquiries, from difficulties vainly curious, and doubts impossible to be solved. Let me rejoice in the light which Thou hast imparted, let me serve Thee with active zeal and humble confidence, and wait with patient expectation for the time in which the soul which Thou receivest shall be satisfied with knowledge. Grant this, O Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

COME, O Thou Traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see !
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee ;
With Thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

* * *

I need not tell Thee who I am,
My misery and sin declare ;
Thyself hast called me by my name,
Look on Thy hands, and read it there :
But who, I ask Thee, who art Thou ?
Tell me Thy name, and tell me now.

* * *

Wilt Thou not yet to me reveal
Thy new, unutterable name ?
Tell me, I still beseech Thee, tell :
To know it now resolved I am ;
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go,
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.

* * *

Yield to me now ; for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair ;
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,
Be conquered by my instant prayer :
Speak, or Thou never hence shalt move,
And tell me if Thy name is Love.

'Tis Love ! 'tis Love ! Thou diedst for me !
I hear Thy whisper in my heart ;
The morning breaks, the shadows flee ;
Pure, universal Love Thou art :
To me, to all, Thy mercies move ;
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

IV

THE VEIL OF SCRIPTURE

IT is, of course, a paradox to speak of the "veil" of *re*-velation, which itself means an unveiling. Yet beneath the paradox there is a truth. The scriptures may hide God as well as reveal Him. This is recognized in the New Testament itself; for St. Paul writes of a veil that hangs over the reading of the Jewish law to hinder his contemporaries from recognizing its spiritual meaning, *i.e.* its forward look to Christ. In his own Christian experience he is conscious of having received an answer to the prayer of the Psalmist (CXIX, 18), "Unveil my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." When that prayer is offered by a teachable spirit, wise enough to be humble, it is always answered, and the answer may be given in the words of the Translators of the Authorized Version to the reader :— "Hee remoueth the scales from our eyes, the vaile from our hearts, opening our wits that wee may vnderstand his word, enlarging our hearts, yea correcting our affections, that we may loue it aboue gold and siluer, yea that we may loue it to the end."

There are a number of causes hindering the right understanding of God's revelation in the scriptures. First among these we may think of that conventionality of form which makes the Bible seem so remote from ordinary life, so remote in fact that translation into the vernacular of our own generation is apt to startle us. The Authorized Version of the Bible is admittedly one of the noblest of translations. Its majestic diction gives it a place of its own, and the associations of even its archaisms contribute many of the undertones and overtones that enrich devotion and worship. Moreover, the printing and binding of the Bible, usually unlike those of any other book, strengthen the impression made by the vocabulary and rhythm. The exalted position of the Bible undoubtedly adds to the reverence of worship. We must always look up if we are to worship God. Yet, on the other hand, the price paid for this expression of the uniqueness of Scripture is too great if it sets the Bible apart from actual life. The scriptures are the revelation of the living God, made in and through the lives of men, and through the Incarnate Son, that men may be sharers in more abundant life. The Bible is the great classic of devotion; yet if it remains only a classic, and if Christians fail to bring it into close contact with their actual living, or regard other books of devotion as a substitute for it instead

of a guide to it, Christian life loses its surest support.

But even when men do turn to the Bible their understanding of it may be hindered by their prejudice as to what a divine revelation ought to be. It is easy to come to it with the impression that it must be a law book or a body of dogmatic truths or the elaboration of a formal creed, something in fact that is permanent in form as well as in substance and *directly* applicable from beginning to end to the life of to-day. One particular aspect of this prejudice which has been responsible for much religious controversy and anxiety is the belief that the Bible should agree in every detail with all scientific truth and all historical investigation. Naturally enough, if we begin with this impression, Copernicus and Galileo and Darwin become the enemies of God, for no ingenuity can elicit modern scientific and historical knowledge from the pages of the ancient scriptures. It is not easy for us to thrust aside this veil. There are still many people for whom there can be no divine revelation apart from an " infallible " expression of it. The words of Scripture associated with their deepest experience have become sacramental in quality, and it is no easy thing to separate the abiding truth given through the Bible from the expectation of its infallibility, in every realm of truth, which they cherished when first

approaching it. The result is that many devout minds are seriously troubled even in these days by the so-called conflict of religion and science.(14) They seem to be faced by the dilemma that either science or the Bible is false. They are driven to such baseless resorts as the idea that the " days " of the first chapter of Genesis really meant geological periods, and not ordinary days of twenty-four hours. Yet a little impartial thought should remind them that a form of revelation exactly suited to any one age must be antiquated for the next, *so far as its mere form goes.* Jesus Himself is of a single generation, so far as His ways of life and speech are concerned. Even the Sermon on the Mount reflects the social conditions of its own generation and is not *literally* applicable to our life at the present time. But through it, and through Him, we know the eternal Son of God, who is the same yesterday, to-day, yea, and for ever.

So is it also with our systems of religious belief. They change just as much as do the scientific interpretations of the Universe or the historical interpretations of human development. The great systems of theology which once derived their " proof texts " from the Bible really brought their own philosophies to it, and were not building on its historical sense. The Bible is richer than any one of them, however true their partial statement of its truth may be.

The eternal revelation, though necessarily veiled by the temporal conditions, makes it a book for all time and for all men, and not for one generation or for one nation.

How then do we approach the Bible, if the veil of our prejudice is removed? The answer is simple in theory, though it involves a great many details which cannot easily be grasped all together. The printed Bible in our hands is the translation reached by a series of progressive efforts to get at the meaning of certain ancient writings in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. These ancient writings extend over more than a millennium. Their writers were many, and were quite unconscious that they were contributing to such a unity as the Bible really is. Their writings are of very diverse character, but their common interest was to describe the lives and experience of men in relation to God. Thus behind the literature there was a continuous life of which the supreme interest is the contact of the human and the divine. This is seen most clearly in the prophetic consciousness of the Old Testament and the filial consciousness of the New. The literature is unique, not because it differs in form from other literatures, but because there was something unique in the life which it records. We are carried back by the record to this life, that we may find God at its centre. This

is the reason why we considered redemption before revelation. Life necessarily precedes the record of it. The Bible is the record of God's mighty acts of redemption and it is in the strains and tensions of human life in its relation to God that the very revelation itself consists. Christianity is not a book religion, however much it treasures the Bible. It is a religion of life, and the highest function of the Bible is to be not a crystallization of life but a fountain of living waters.

But when we have penetrated as far as this and are ready to discover the God who reveals Himself in the life of which the Bible is the literary record, we come face to face with the greatest difficulty. The modern man, sympathetic with the historical standpoint, is apt to approach the Bible looking for *two things at once* instead of *two things as one*. He is looking for a divine element somewhere to be found amongst the admittedly human elements and even if he selects a number of passages in which God speaks supremely, he has the uneasy consciousness that the selection has been made on his own initiative. Such an anthology of noble words, edited by ourselves, lacks the authority of prophet and apostle. Every devout reader of the Bible does in fact virtually make such an anthology for himself. But its authority must spring from the "wholeness" of Scripture, not from his own choice.

It has been said that the difficulty lies in trying to see two things at once instead of two things as one. It is useless to select for ourselves a smaller " inspired " Bible out of a larger literature and to balance the human and the divine in any such external fashion (as is sometimes done by printing certain verses in special type). The life of God's ancient people and of their Christian inheritors should teach us that there is a deeper unity. We must learn to look at the whole Bible as human and the whole Bible as divine, and everywhere to see the divine purpose manifest in the human purpose or in its over-ruling. The revelation of God is essentially constituted by this purpose, which is capable of taking up into itself all the little purposes of man, whether to strengthen them and to carry them to completion, or to overthrow them and make them serve the ultimate purpose of God even in their frustration. We have, in fact, to think about the revelation of God in Scripture as like His revelation within our personal Christian experience. All is human and all can be divine. God used the sheer humanity of Israel's history, that of the old and the new Israel, to show His divinity in actual life. It is no exaggeration to say that every bit of the Bible, in its own very varied degree, is the revelation of God, directly or indirectly, by affirmation or negation, in the sense that it belongs to a continuous process

of life which constitutes that revelation. The very fact that God has thus been able to use all this humanity for His purpose is highly significant. There must be some spiritual kinship between God and His creature, man, in order that man's life in thought and word and deed may reveal God, however partially and imperfectly. (Some of the difficulties which attach to all history as revealing God have been noticed in Chapter II.)

But does not this conception of the spiritual kinship of the divine and human rob us of anything that can be called " special " revelation ? Does it not hide the transcendence of God behind the veil of His immanence ? This is perhaps the fear that holds many back from the acceptance of the belief, and has led to certain reactions of theology, notably " Barthianism ". It would not be difficult to believe that God is behind the Bible as He is behind the Iliad and Odyssey, the Divina Commedia and the plays of Shakespeare. But would the Bible then be a revelation of God more than any other great national literature ? Granted that there is a pattern of sorts being woven on the loom of time through the interplay of human warp and woof, why should the pattern on one of God's looms be called divine rather than that on another ?

We must not try to find the difference in the mere

machinery of the process. In ancient Israel, "false" prophecy was indistinguishable from that of the true prophets by any external marks, or even by the psychological conditions of its reception. The test was partly in the moral quality of the message (cf. Jer. XV, 19), and partly in the ultimate appeal to the tribunal of history (cf. Is. XXII, 11). There is an intrinsic quality in the word of the true prophet, which the providence of God will ultimately confirm. There will also be a most intimate correlation of the will of God to speak and of the receptivity of the prophet or people to hear. The duality in unity which we have noticed goes back to the first reception of the message. Indeed, it goes back at last to the divine choice of Israel, that "election" which is fundamental to Israel's faith. The "election" is, when viewed historically and psychologically, in part the result of a capacity and willingness to be elected. So we find one of Israel's "wise men" writing of Wisdom as a pilgrim seeking hospitality amongst the nations :—

> In the waves of the sea, and in all the earth,
> And in every people and nation, I got a possession.
> With all these I sought rest ;
> And in whose inheritance shall I lodge ?
> Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment ;
> And he that created me made my tabernacle to rest,
> And said, Let thy tabernacle be in Jacob,
> And thine inheritance in Israel. . . .

> All these things are the book of the covenant of the Most High God,
> Even the law which Moses commanded us for a heritage unto the assemblies of Jacob.
>
> (Ecclus. XXIV, 6–8, 23.)

Centuries after, an unknown Christian caught up ben Sirach's word, and wrote in "The Gospel of the Hebrews" that at the baptism of Jesus the divine voice said :—"My son, in all the prophets I was looking for Thee, that Thou shouldst come, and that I should rest in Thee. For Thou art my rest ; Thou art my first-born son, who reignest to eternity." The Christian naturally finds in his Lord, Jesus Christ, the supreme principle for the interpretation of the Bible. In Him, the prophetic consciousness of the Old Testament has been lifted to the filial consciousness of the New Testament, and crowned with a new interpretation of Messiahship, in the light of the suffering Servant of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Yet we may not divorce even Him from the history of which He is part. The process as well as the result belong to the revelation of God. All through, right up and into the life of our Lord, there is that most intimate intermingling of the human and the divine which belongs to the whole method of divine revelation. We may get a hint of it even in our own consciousness, notwithstanding all its hesitations and disloyalties. Our holiest moments depend on an assimilation of environment and

ancestry and past experience which it is beyond our power to analyse. When God speaks to us, whether it be through Scripture or through some living voice, or in the quietness of solitary communion with Himself, He always makes a unity out of the complexity. If we fail to grasp the meaning of this, we not only expose ourselves to unnecessary doubts and fears, but we lose the full vision of His manifold, *i.e.* (as we may render the word in Eph. III, 10), His " iridescent " wisdom.

O LORD, as Thou alone art the Author of the holy scriptures, so likewise can no man, although he be never so wise, politic and learned, understand them, except he be taught by Thy Holy Spirit, which alone is the Schoolmaster to lead the faithful into all truth. Vouchsafe therefore, I most humbly beseech Thee, to breathe into my heart Thy blessed Spirit, which may renew the senses of my mind, open my wits, reveal unto me the true understanding of Thy holy mysteries, and plant in me such a certain and infallible knowledge of Thy truth, that no subtle persuasion of man's wisdom may pluck me from Thy truth, but that, as I have learned the true understanding of Thy blessed will, so I may remain in the same continually, come life, come death, unto the glory of Thy blessed name. Amen.

V

THE VEIL OF THE INNER LIFE

WHEN we stand beneath the majesty of the Dome of St. Paul's, or listen to the successive movements of the Eroica Symphony or reflect on our reading of the Divina Commedia, we can hardly fail to be overwhelmed by the genius which could gather the innumerable details into the harmony and unity of a single purpose. Yet the minds that could create these unities of art out of the wealth of their scope and power were but doing in their great way what each of us is constantly doing in his small way, with the uncounted details of his own life. Each of us living an ordinary life is bringing the whole world about him to the focus of consciousness and shaping it into some sort of unity. The miracle is always with us, so that we forget to wonder at it. How strange, how marvellous, is this little world which I call mine ! How many obscure elements from the ages past, how many potent factors from the life of to-day, have gone to make *me,* and how wonderful is this consciousness of self, with its quality of uniqueness, which has assimilated all

these details and arranged them into some sort of pattern, like iron filings in a magnetic field !

All that has been contributed by Nature, History, Redemption and Scripture acquires new and peculiar meaning in the consciousness of the individual Christian. Over against the activity of God in Redemption there is now the human activity of response. Beneath the apparent simplicity and unity of that response lies the rich complexity of influences which have called it forth. When we discover that complexity (as the historical and psychological interests of this generation have made easy for us), the result may be a veiling of God's activity in eliciting the response. Let us go back to the simplest example of the prophetic consciousness amongst the Hebrews. Amos, when challenged by the priest of Bethel, is content to say " the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." That is all, and nothing could be simpler. Yet behind it is the revival of the ancestral nomadic consciousness, looking sternly on the culture and luxury and vices of a wealthy state, the long musings of a lonely man amongst his herds and sycamore trees, the " visions " of the prophet, drawn from his environment, visions of the devouring locusts and the jungle fire, the badly built wall, the ripe fruit and the tottering building which all spell

judgment to his prepared mind, whilst on the horizon great empires stand ready to execute the judgment of the Lord. We can explain all the details from history and sociology and psychology ; but the miracle is that they are welded together into the new unity of one man's conviction, " Thus saith the Lord."

So is it with the individual consciousness of God through all the generations. We cannot lay our hands on any single event of history or of our individual lives in which we can isolate the revelation of God or His guidance or His general providence from the innumerable details of human experience. If God's purpose is to be known, it must be known as is the purpose of the dramatist—by the meaning of the whole, and not by the arbitrary selection of a fragment. The drama of history, like the drama of the stage, demands a subjective factor for its appreciation. To the drama of art, there will be different responses from different spectators. To the drama of life there is a like difference of response. For the Christian, outer events and influences have been brought into unity and significance by being focussed in consciousness and interpreted by faith. To say this is very far from the admission that all religious faith is the projection of our desires or prejudices into an alien world. There is a congruity of God's activity in things external that waits for the activity of the response in

us before it can be elicited and interpreted, as there is a congruity of the dramatist's meaning with the spectator's sympathetic interpretation of it. The necessity for responsive activity is not peculiar to religious belief. It is equally true of scientific belief and of every interpretation of the Universe. It is the law of knowing, present in every single perception of the external world. But it may easily be presented, and is sometimes still presented to-day, as though it disproved the validity of religious knowledge and left "science" objectively immune from criticism.

On these general considerations, however, it is not necessary to linger, since the faith of a Christian has already made its sufficient affirmation that God does act and speak through all these details of our experience. Our concern is rather with certain difficulties that are felt *within* the Christian consciousness. They chiefly relate to (1) the providence of God in regard to the individual believer, (2) the tendencies to distrust Him that spring from the incompleteness of the work of redemption within ourselves, and (3) the seeming unreality of the unseen spiritual world as compared with the world of things seen. In each of these aspects of our life, there may be a veiling of God's activity and a loss of the vision of His grace.

No one can share in the faith of the New Testament without believing in the providence of God over the

life of the individual believer, including both guidance and help. J. H. Newman, indeed, maintained that this was nearly the *only* doctrine held by the mass of religious Englishmen with a "real assent", *i.e.* with a conviction affecting action.(15) Yet it is a doctrine making enormous demands on faith. It is set in a framework of prayer and miracle, the prayer that casts itself on the love of God and the "miracle" which answers it. Every prayer is a challenge of the visible and an appeal from a lower to a higher court of "rationality". Every answer to prayer would seem to us a miracle, if we paused to imagine the complexity of the factors involved. But what of the unanswered prayers, unanswered at least from the standpoint of those who offer them? Few, if any, of us can look back along that road of life which we have already travelled without thinking of some misfortunes from which we have not escaped and some of our ambitions which have not been fulfilled. It is as when we look along some road by night, with its successive lamps at their regular distances—until we note a patch of darkness where the light has failed. So it is with certain events of life for most of us, events for which the lamp of thanksgiving has never been lighted. Try as we may, it is hard to see why we had to run our race under some particular handicap of failing health, or lack of

opportunity to acquire knowledge and skill at the right time, or why we were put to the uncongenial task, the last we should have chosen for ourselves, or why death or distance robbed us of our friend when we needed him most. It is hard, again, to see why we were exposed to a particular temptation whilst we were so inexperienced in life and "knew no better," why we have been fettered by evil habit long after we had come to hate the sin in which it had begun, why some of our dearest hopes and dreams, honourable and useful in themselves, have never been achieved. For many things we are able to thank God when we kneel in prayer, but these dark patches remain, if not to embitter us, yet at least to evoke no benediction. Indeed they remain as "footnotes" to prayer, like those footnotes in some books which qualify a rash generalization of the text and almost destroy its value. If we were as unsophisticated as the child who had fallen and hurt herself we should pause in our evening thanksgiving to say "But He didn't take care of me this morning!" I have known men, who began well, abandon the Christian faith because it broke down for them at this point. One has told me that he prayed for guidance before a momentous decision and acted according to what he believed to be the answer, yet, as he said, "All the troubles of my life have come from that choice."

Many things can be usefully said about such difficulties. The easiest, of course, though not the least true, is to remember that we have not yet gained the view-point from which our life can be seen in its full perspective and the part interpreted by the whole: not yet do we stand

> beside that shrine,
> Occult, withheld, untrod,
> Whose lamps are stirred continually
> With prayer sent up to God;
> And see our old prayers, granted, melt
> Each like a little cloud. (16)

Sometimes it may be our own (unconscious) wilfulness that misinterprets the guidance we receive, for there is no such thing as infallible guidance for fallible men. Sometimes the solution to the problem set to faith lies further along the line of persistent effort, in the gain that the struggle with the hard or uncongenial task has then itself brought us. But through most, if not all, of the valid answers there runs a common principle already urged in other connections, viz. that of our ability to transform the meaning of things. This power has been best described in the present application by Wordsworth ("Character of the Happy Warrior")

> Who, doomed to go in company with Pain
> And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
> Turns his necessity to glorious gain;

> In face of these doth exercise a power
> Which is our human nature's highest dower ;
> Controls them and subdues, transmutes, bereaves
> Of their bad influence, and their good receives.

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this principle of transformation in the whole economy of the divine providence. The unities with which we are dealing, *in which God means us to co-operate*, are not given to us ready-made. They are constituted by our right reaction to the event and to the whole complex of events. In the realm of spiritual things, we are made fellow-workers with God. We are made to share in His creative artistry, and in that very sharing lies the value of the chief product, a spirit attuned to His, which has become like His by learning to work with Him. Through such an outlook on life we can face its worst, not simply with the Stoic strength of the unconquerable soul, but with the Christian strength that says, "I can do all things through Him that strengtheneth me." This creative fellowship with God is one of the secrets of that joy within sorrow that ever marks the way of the Cross. The artist sometimes feels "the pride of the prophet that has seen the face of God."(17) Not less may the "happy warrior" of God feel the pride of the artist who has let loose the angel from the marble and created, even from the most unpromising

material of life, something that has beauty in God's eyes, and permanent value in the realm of spiritual things. So any and every apparent denial of God's providence can be made an occasion to affirm it afresh in a deeper and richer meaning.

This is the creative spirit in which Esther, faced by her grim kinsman Mordecai, clad in sackcloth and ashes, hears his summons to risk her life for her people's sake ; she is able to recognize in him an ambassador of God. This is the creative spirit of St. Paul, when his repeated prayer to be relieved of the mysterious "stake in the flesh" is unanswered ; he is enabled to discover that divine power comes to its own in human weakness, and that God may be better served through our limitations than through our advantages. This is the spirit in which Aubrey de Vere bids us count each affliction as God's messenger sent to commend "great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end." In the little story called *The Woodcarver of Tyrol* (18) an old woman, half crazed by the deaths of both her husband and her son, daily carries the carved Christ wrought by her husband's hands to the roadside, and sits there in all weathers that she may complete the Pieta by being herself its Mary which her dead son was to have carved. Sorrow is essential to the fellowship of the Cross ; without the apparent hiding of God's face

from *us,* as well as from His Son, we should never come to know what that fellowship really means. So it is well for us, when we review the day's life in our evening prayer, not only to thank God for all in which we plainly see His grace, but also to ask that the veil may be lifted from whatever hides it, since behind that veil there will be some new knowledge of Him to be gained, some gift withheld, only that our importunity may prove our readiness to receive it, some revelation of the friend disguised as an enemy, with whom we have wrestled in the darkness, strong in the conviction that there is a blessing to be won.

We have been thinking of the way in which God may be hidden from our eyes in the course of His providential control of our lives. But He may also be hidden, not by results springing from outer events, but in the course of His redemptive work within us. The incompleteness or tardiness of that work, the contrast between our first expectation of it and its actual development, the discovery of the divided heart within us instead of a single-minded devotion to God—all this may and often does bring disillusionment and disappointment. Observe that we are not here thinking of the effect of sin itself in blinding us to truth, but rather of the fact that "conversion" has been after all a "half-hearted" affair, and that we are not so very different from what we were before it.

Different results may follow from such a discovery. One man may gradually settle down into the sort of compromise which keeps him in touch with religious life and work but without much enthusiasm for it. Another may abandon religion altogether, since it seems to have failed him at the crucial point, and may even become the cynic who thinks other men no better than himself, whatever their protestations. Yet another may carry on the moral struggle, hoping that some day things may be better, conscious that he must hold on to his faith despite his failure to live up to it, but also conscious that he is spiritually maimed and half his usefulness lost by this constant alternation between his better and worse self. He may even be tempted to doubt whether God has not left him to himself.

It is this last type of man with whom we are chiefly concerned. It is a type far more frequent than we might think, for men naturally do not speak of such things, as they might of some apparent failure of external providence. This man still prays, "God be merciful to me a sinner," though he wonders sometimes whether he has not said it too often to be an effective prayer. He still says to God, "Lord, I believe," but he usually has to add "help thou mine unbelief." He still cries with Jacob at Peniel, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me," but beneath

the cry there is the sub-consciousness of fighting a losing battle and fighting it alone. He feels the attraction of noble example and heroic life, of loyal devotion to a worthy cause, and of the steadfast pursuit of an ideal that shall bring dignity to a life of useful achievement and the peace of quiet and happy evening hours when the day of toil is over. But what of the daily experience, in which goodness is as the morning cloud and as the dew that goeth early away, when he finds himself drifting into doing just what he had resolved not to do, caught in the net of habit, surprised by the unforeseen into irritation and unworthy anger, swept from calm reason by the sudden storm of passion? This is the man who condemns himself for the bitter word or the unworthy act more severely than anyone else. He is puzzled or vexed or ashamed or despairing about it all, and might sum up his life with apostolic words "not what I would, that do I practise, but what I hate, that I do," without ever being able like the Apostle to thank God through Jesus Christ for deliverance from the body of this death.

What shall be said to such a man, it may be to ourselves? What can best help him to see God in spite of the veil of his own divided heart, and seeing Him to become confident of victory, which confidence is the surest step to victory itself? First

of all let him make sure that he really *wants* to win the fight. That is the first and most essential condition. Bishop Ridding used to put this very plainly and simply to his confirmation candidates: "You are going to make a promise which will be your prayer for the Holy Spirit to enable you to keep it. Is this promise a *reality*? Do you *wish* it? That is the one question of your reality. On that all your prayer depends, all your promise depends. If you can't feel it real, ask yourselves, Do you *wish* to dislike the wrong things? Or, if you can't be sure of that, do you wish to *wish* to dislike them? If you can go as far as that you have reached the stage at which your promise will be a reality; so be quite honest with yourselves and *pray*." (19)

Granted this essential condition, the next thing is to remember the apostolic word, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, *for it is God which worketh in you*." (Phil. II, 12, 13). Fear and trembling are right and fitting, but in Christian experience only up to a point. Directly they begin to take the emphasis off God and put it on self they are wrong. Many people quote the first part of that text and leave off without adding the second, on which the apostle's emphasis falls. The natural man ought to think far more of his sins to-day than he is said to do, but the Christian ought often to think less. One of

the diseases of to-day is its excessive subjectivity. We need to think more about God and less about ourselves. We need to recover more of the truth beneath Augustine's famous paradox, "Give what thou commandest and command what thou wilt," a truth expressed more fully in the Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Easter (given at the end of this chapter). When we are sure of our own will to be saved, then we must learn that it is God's.

This last step needs fuller statement because of its supreme importance and because of its theoretical, though not practical, difficulty. Every one knows how a good purpose may be formed, and felt to be so strong that it is invincible. Then, as the hours or days pass, its first strength is lost, and we find ourselves asking ourselves whether we really meant it. That is the point at which the Christian religion can reinforce the moral resolution. For that purpose is God's, and not simply ours. Our purpose has been lying all the time in the bosom of His; ours may flag, but His will not. This, I think, is partly what Calvinists have meant by their doctrine of election, Arminians by their "witness of the Spirit", and Quakers by their "Inner Light". When we can go on no longer in the strength of our own purpose, faith will fling itself on that purpose as God's. This is an alternation, an oscillation, which means strength and

not weakness. This is the basis of the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints and this is the condition for the unveiling of God's dealing with us in our inner life. In such a redemptive purpose, and through our own partial response to it, we have the clue to much that would puzzle or depress us without it.

Out of the mingling of motives which made us doubt our own sincerity, this emerges as the dominant one. Lesser motives fall into their pedagogic place, like the schoolboy's prize in relation to the schoolboy's equipment for life. The inconsistencies of our moods do not matter so much after all, for we are not saved by our feeling but by God's purpose. Even our repeated failures, deeply as we must regret them and go on regretting them, cannot rob us of the strength of knowing that God means us to be successful, and therefore we shall at last succeed.

So out of the tangle of our inner life there comes the vision of a unity not yet achieved, though in process of achievement. Archbishop Temple reminded us in an early book ([20]) that education consisted in getting the child to *attend* to some one thing, out of the mass of his chaotic interests and impulses. So began the discipline of education which continues ideally till a will is created with the power to form its own purposes and exercise its own freedom. That

might be fairly applied to the redemptive work of God so far as it is concerned with what used to be called our " sanctification ". Conversion is itself the creation of a unity or at least the vision of it, the unity of surrender to the will of God, the unity of a single purpose. It begins as an ideal, but as an ideal that is meant to become real. The struggle and the conflict, the dark hours of defeat, the half-won victories, the doubts and the fears—all these are inevitable in the process of growing into the unity and freedom of true servants of God. But we cannot afford to wait till the end is achieved before we know what it is ; we cannot afford to misjudge God as a schoolboy may misjudge his stern master.

The greatest of all factors in our progress to the goal will be the recognition of it as the abiding purpose of God. It abides, whether we are conscious of it or not. For, just as man may serve God without present consciousness of it (Is. XLV, 5 ; Matt. XXV, 37ff.), so God serves men, in the plenitude of His grace, without asking even for the reward of their gratitude. As the earth goes forward on its ceaseless path carrying the burden of men and men's lives without their consciousness of its movement, so continue the ministries of grace. They began long before we could know of them ; they continue even though the veil of our unconsciousness hide them from us. But the joy and

strength of the Christian life are surely to know more and more of God and to become more and more conscious of His increasing activity on our behalf.

The world without—the world within—and what of the world " above " into which our inner life opens, the world of spiritual reality which so often seems unreal to us ? It is like some vast " Hinterland " of the soul, which lies with all its undeveloped resources behind the coast on which we live our busy lives. It is there all the time, though the mists are on the mountains. Sometimes we make our little excursions to where they begin, and a few have penetrated further and come back to us with stories that we regard as a beautiful dream. They have seen the play of light and shade upon those mountains ; they have glimpsed forms vaguely outlined ; they have heard voices speaking in strange tongues ; and they summon us to go with them that we too may see and hear. Some day, we say, when we have more time, perhaps we, too, will go and see ; but now we are too busy.

It is only the occasional intensities of our human need that quicken us into taking that hidden land seriously. Out of those disappointments and calamities for which we have perhaps blamed God's providence, there is born in us the consciousness that our lives are not self-contained and complete,

entirely able to fend for themselves. We long for the use of the greater resources that are supposed to be up there, the undeveloped wealth of an unexplained land of spiritual reality. But we know so little of it that imagination has nothing on which to build; perhaps all we say or think about it is merely imagination? So we go on, as best we can, with our trades and professions, our home and civic life, the world of the newspapers and the novelists, the things that at least seem real, even though at times they seem inadequate for the needs and capacities of spiritual beings.

But is not all this a wrong way of thinking about things spiritual, based on that dualism which is inherent in beings compounded of body and soul? Must we not overcome it to obtain that unity of which we have already spoken, and is not that unity the only true basis for thinking about the unseen? Are we not already living in the land of which we speak so vaguely? Let us begin with the actuality of that living, in which the spiritual and eternal is already present. A contemporary novelist has finely spoken of "that wonderful and dreadful pilgrimage that I have made with Time. Whatever the record, I have lived, finished the course, bound myself to Eternity by the tendrils of experience and growth."(21) We are not likely to discover any realm of reality by

forsaking the only one we know. We shall not succeed in working up a genuine interest in the spiritual, if we begin by setting it in artificial contrast with the life we now live in the flesh. All our methods of worship and of devotion fail when they forget this. They are legitimate and indeed necessary to awaken us to those realities of our actual life which we are in constant danger of neglecting. But they become a positive peril when they are detached from that life to become an anaesthetic or an intoxicant, an end in themselves which is attained when "we feel better" for having prayed and worshipped God. No one has put this more forcibly than William Law, in his characteristically named devotional classic: *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. Its keynote is struck in the opening words, "Devotion is neither private nor public prayer, but prayers whether private or public are particular parts or instances of devotion. Devotion signifies a life given or *devoted* to God."

William Law did not mean us to take these words in the superficial but plausible sense, "As long as you live a good life, nothing else matters." Readers of his book know his insistence on prayer as a regular habit, not only early and late, but also at other hours of the day. But he points out that "there is not one command in all the Gospel for Public Worship

. . . Whereas that Religion or Devotion which is to govern the ordinary actions of our life, is to be found in almost every verse of Scripture." The lack of it he ascribes to the absence of *intention,* and he claims, in his second chapter, that "the first and most fundamental principle of Christianity" is "an intention to please God in all our actions". This is the very principle already urged in regard to our divided hearts; here we may see a new application of it, as the way by which we reach more assurance of the unseen. The will to obey brings conviction as to what is obeyed: "if any man willeth to do God's will he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God." Many fail to reach that conviction because they wait for a convincing formula. But all that most deeply concerns life is learnt by living. The formula will come, or come to be known as *truth,* only at the end of the laboratory work, without which it is often not even intelligible. On the other hand, the will to serve and glorify God draws on all the material of life itself. It is capable of baptizing all our "busyness" into worship. (22) We believe only in that in which we are willing to invest, but the investment in spiritual interests itself gives them the actuality of life, incarnates them in the business of living.

All this means then, that we must train ourselves to

see the spiritual in actual life, as part of its very substance. If the spiritual is to possess the quality of actuality and to be seen in its true nature (instead of the inner life seeming, as it does to many, a world of shadows, and instead of its becoming for the few the cloistered and fugitive reality amid an outer world of shadows), it must be the pathway to a life *in* the world but not *of* the world, a life that is warm and interesting and full of colour, because it is human life, and yet also confident and far-seeing and victorious because the breath of the divine animates it. It is a striking fact that men respond to-day to a partial truth stated in the less conventional ways of the drama and the novel much more than when it is in its full context of religion. The reason may be that the partial truth is at least alive, whilst the fuller and more adequate conventional statement is often lifeless. The cardinal principle involved in the Incarnation should teach us that truth is much more than an affair of words. God may be hidden as well as revealed by what we *say* about the unseen. If truth be not alive, it ceases to be truth. If religion is not the greatest of realities, it is illusion. If the vision of God does not, with the growth of Christian experience, become more real to us than all else, it must be because we have never learnt to see Him in the lineaments of human life, amid the actualities of its joy and sorrow, its

hopes and purposes, its social fellowship and its inner solitude, all of which Jesus Christ made His own.

GRACIOUS Lord, make my way sure and straight to Thee, so that I fall not between prosperity and adversity; but that in prosperous things I may give Thee thanks and in adversity be patient, so that I be not lift up with the one, nor oppressed with the other: and that I may rejoice in nothing but that which moveth me to Thee, and be sorry for nothing, but for those things which draw me from Thee, desiring to please nobody, nor fearing to displease any besides Thee. Let me not be merry with the joy which is without Thee, and let me desire nothing besides Thee. Let all labour delight me which is for Thee, and let all the rest weary me which is not in Thee. Make me to lift up my heart oftentimes to Thee; and when I fall, make me to think on Thee, and be sorry with a steadfast purpose of amendment. Loving Lord, make me humble without feigning: merry without lightness: sad without mistrust: sober without dulness: true without doubleness: fearing Thee, without desperation, trusting in Thee without presumption.

* * * *

ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men: grant unto Thy people that they may love the thing which Thou commandest and desire that which Thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found.

VI

THE VEIL OF DEATH

IN Ray Palmer's well-known hymn,

> Jesus, these eyes have never seen
> That radiant form of thine,

it is the veil of sense which hinders the vision, and death marks the moment when "the rending veil" reveals the unseen Lord in His glory. For such a faith, death is but the welcoming door at the end of the journey. An old friend of mine, who has almost reached its threshold after a long life of faithful service, writes to me: "I cannot commune with men much now. I am rather deaf. But the doorway above is open, and I live mostly there."

Many Christians are able to say this, in all sincerity, and for them this chapter is not necessary. But there are many others who have not escaped the doubts and hesitations of the modern world as to the reality of life beyond death. There is, in fact, much more variety of outlook amongst Christians themselves than conventional statements would lead us to expect; indeed, there are often varying attitudes in the same man at different times. There is the

vague anticipation by tired men and women of the life beyond the veil as at least affording a rest from their labours. There is the hope of a new start under fresh conditions which is cherished by those who feel ashamed of their own irrevocable neglect or sinful use of opportunity. The range of outlook may extend from the wistful longing of Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar" to the strong virility of Browning's "Epilogue to Asolando".

If we may venture to generalize amongst so much variety, all of us, I suppose, instinctively cling to life, and all of us shrink from the actual discomfort or pain of dying, and from the thought of the burden which it may entail on others. In our health and strength, we find it hard to believe what a doctor will tell us, that the great majority of people die without realizing it, and that the *tempo* of life is slowed down to a point at which its stoppage becomes easy. As to what may lie beyond death, most of us to-day find little comfort, or indeed attraction, in the conventional pictures, "painted on the clouds", according to the terms of apocalyptic literature. We tell ourselves that nobody knows or can know what that life is. There are quite a number of Christian people to-day, doing most useful work in the world, for whom the life beyond means little or nothing. They would go on with their work, as worth doing in itself, even if

you could prove to them that there is no after-life. For all of us, death is apt to seem a stepping forth from the warm and lighted house of life into the darkness of the night.

These general considerations suggest three points for particular notice: (1) the prejudice created by the obvious destruction of the body, (2) the contrast between the apparent reality of our familiar life with all its interests and the unreality of anything that seems to be offered to us beyond the veil; and (3) the consciousness that we are leaving so much unachieved, so many unfulfilled hopes of which the fulfilment is for ever made impossible by death.

The first of these is as old as the Phædo, where an objector to immortality regards the soul as the harmony of a lyre, ceasing when the strings are snapped. The objection has been strengthened by the biological and psychological studies of to-day which have shown the very intimate connection between body and mind. For every psychical event there seems to be a physiological accompaniment. It is natural, then, for men to think of consciousness simply as a function of the body with no independent existence, so that the death of the body seems to make the survival of the soul very uncertain. No one will yield to this prejudice who has learnt to recognize that spiritual values can never be derived from material things, that they belong to a

different level, and pre-suppose some spiritual basis in "personality".

We may put this differently, and meet this prejudice in the way that Professor William James does in his Ingersoll Lecture on "Human Immortality". He protests against the fallacy underlying the ambiguity of the word "function". As he points out, there is not only productive function but releasing and transmissive function. The body is certainly the necessary condition for the normal exercise of consciousness under present forms of existence, but this fact would be as well explained if spirit were simply using body to release or transmit its activities. If it be said that such a line of argument does not carry us far towards a strong belief in life beyond death, yet it may carry us far enough to win escape from some of our prejudices to-day. We are left free to believe, provided there is good reason to believe, that there is continuity of life beyond the veil, even though its present means of bodily realization and communication be withdrawn. We are left free to believe that the friend we knew and loved so well, whose personality was so real to us, has not ceased to be because the familiar form can no longer enter our room and sit with us by the fireside and disclose to us the kindness and generosity of his heart, the quick and lively play of his intellect, the moral strength of his purpose.

He is not dead, for all that really mattered in him was beyond the grasp of physical corruption. He is not dead, for such reality does not die in a universe governed by the God and Father of Jesus. He is not dead, though imagination can picture him now only in the old and outworn form of his being, beyond the need of which *he* has passed.

It is chiefly the contrast between the unknown forms of the life beyond and the warm familiarity of the life on this side of the veil that makes the unknown seem unreal. St. Paul found this difficulty at Corinth, and overcame it by his faith that there would be a heavenly or "spiritual" body, more fitted to the spirit's needs in the life beyond (II Cor. V, 1, cf. I Cor. XV, 35ff.). It was the "nakedness" of the bodiless spirit which was feared by these Greeks, as by other Greeks before them. So, to-day, many a Christian shrinks from the unknown world where all that is familiar and dear seems left behind. I remember standing, as a youth, by the deathbed of a man who had lived a long and faithful Christian life and I recall my surprise at hearing him say, "I don't want to leave all this." To my inexperience, the words seemed unnatural on Christian lips. I know now that they are natural, but that does not make them right. Readiness for dying ought to include a growing detachment from living.

The old-fashioned truth remains that we are strangers and pilgrims here, even though we may not, like Archbishop Leighton, feel that it is fitting we should die in an inn (a wish strangely granted him). Gustav Frenssen begins one of his remarkable village sermons with two simple incidents from his pastoral experience. The first is that of a little boy crying in the street, unable to say where he lived or even to give an intelligible name. The other scene is that of an old woman dying, and as she looks round on the faces of her children and grandchildren without recognition, she says "Nothing but strange faces!" He makes these incidents a symbol of man's state when, sooner or later, he is detached from the familiar but transient things of this world and brought face to face with "the deepest things" that are rooted in eternity. How will it seem to us when *we* are asked, "Who are you and where do you live?" (23) From this point of view the inscriptions on the monuments of church and graveyard are a strange comment on the Christian life, dwelling as they so often do on the familiar things of earth, its now forgotten achievements and irrelevant pride. There is something wrong with the emphasis of our life if such things figure largely in our own minds or those of our friends, when the time comes for us to die.

This unreality of the life beyond is, of course, a

particular aspect of that unreality of spiritual things in general to which reference has already been made (Chapter V). As was there urged, we miss the revelation God would give to us by letting ourselves become too much absorbed in the trivial and the transient. It is the abiding vision of the whole of things that we all need, so that, however busy we must needs be, some higher purpose informs and transforms things temporal,

> —to him who looks
> In steadiness, who hath among least things
> An under-sense of greatest ; sees the parts
> As parts, but with a feeling of the whole. (24)

One more aspect of our reluctance to pass through the veil of death is that self-pity to which we are so prone, at the thought of a world condemned to live without our assistance. It is often difficult for a busy man, who has been the centre round which other lives have moved, to conceive how the world will get on without him. Then there is the closely related thought of his work, always unfinished. Who will do it ? Will it ever be done ? Probably the more earnest and industrious the life, the more keenly this side of things is felt. On the other hand, there is always the consciousness of the humble Christian that the spiritual work within him is still so largely unfinished.

> So many worlds, so much to do,
> So little done, such things to be. (25)

It cannot be denied that there is a true pathos of the unfinished, whether it be that of the task without, or that of the growth within. There is something, indeed, in the very spectacle of an unfinished thing which sets us asking what its completion would have been. Surprise has been expressed that no one has collected unfinished works of art. (26) But this is the interest of the detached spectator, not the tragedy of the artist himself, compelled to leave his work unfinished.

What are we to say to the man whose chief tie with life has been the now unfinished task to which he has so ardently given his best ? Two things at least. The first is this : that none of us is indispensable for any task God wills to be done, and that the very fact that the tools must fall from our own hands may be what is needed to call out someone who will complete the task better than ourselves. The second is this : that when measured by the standards of eternity, the most impressive human work is a small thing, and that to God the workman means far more than the work. In a sense the work we do is but a token of the will to do it, and the failures of some men (as George Macdonald has said) are eternities beyond the successes of others. Benjamin Jowett,

speaking of broken lives, once said, " some of them have been like fragments of ancient art, which we prize not for their completeness, but for their quality." (27) That surely is the very essence of that view of life which has the Cross for its centre and principle. The Christian confidence is that God will finish that which He has begun, whether in this world or the next, and whether the work is being done *through* us or *in* us.

So far, we have been thinking of some of the obstacles to a Christian view of life beyond death. In what does that view essentially consist ? Here we must distinguish imagination, legitimate or illegitimate, from sound reason arguing from the data of experience. It is told of a Chinese artist (28) of the eleventh century A.D. that his method with his pupils was to have them throw a piece of white silk over some old wall. Then they were to remain before it looking on the silk until they could see every detail of the wall through it. Then they were to see with the eye of imagination all these details transformed into mountains and streams and forests, with travellers passing amongst them and birds flying in the air.

It is in some such way that imagination always works ; it must have data that it can transform. So it is with the Christian imagination of the life beyond the veil. Its only data are taken from the experience of

this life ; these make its constant and inevitable background. But in this life there are both transient and permanent elements ; it is a subtle blend of both. What are the permanent elements that make " eternal life ", which Christian faith can legitimately project into the world beyond experience ? Surely all those that belong essentially to the new personality which God creates in us (II. Cor. V, 17 ; cf. IV, 6). To it belong the fruit of the Spirit, viz. love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, all that helps to make the inner life and the outer expression of the new personality (Gal. V, 22 ; even patience will still be needed by " ministering spirits " !). The *gifts* of the Spirit, in St. Paul's sense (I Cor., XII, 28ff.) belong chiefly to the present order and are transient, though their informing quality of service within the fellowship belongs as much to the future as to the present social order. The abiding things, as St. Paul so emphatically reminds us, are faith, hope and love, the essential qualities of a Christian life here or anywhere we can conceive in God's universe. " It is the very excellence of the redemption wrought for us by Christ that it draws our faith and hope and love towards the true unseen God." (29)

If the " values " of the spiritual life abide—and their very nature removes them from dependence on

conditions of time and space and demands an eternal world for its full expression—then the personality which they constitute also abides ; indeed, they have no meaning apart from such a personality. (30) If it be asked whether this means the continuance of individual existence the answer is plain. They are so bound up with the relations of individuals that they would become unrecognizable without them ; a Christian fellowship in heaven as on earth implies such relation. A redemption of individual life such as Christian experience knows must point to fuller use of that which is redeemed at such cost, if this is a rational universe.

It will be seen that this way of putting the Christian hope makes no use of " natural immortality " (which is not a Biblical conception at all). Whatever mystery may attach to the continued existence or cessation of those who ultimately fail to find their fulfilment in Christ, the Christian outlook begins with the experience of a new life, the life eternal, which physical death cannot touch. Its supreme guarantee is the love of God as it is known in Christ. From that love nothing, says St. Paul, can separate us, and he puts " death " in the forefront of the challenging powers (Rom. VIII, 38, 39). The only " immortality " that is worth having is religious in its foundation ; mere survival, giving

quantity not quality, has no religious value at all.

How then ought a Christian to anticipate the incidence of physical death ? With the prayer that he may be given patience to bear whatever pain may accompany it ; with the confidence that the transformation of character begun in him and so far from its completion will be continued under new conditions ; with no sentimental musing on the retrospect of his life and its many failures, but with a humble penitence that casts itself joyfully on God's love and looks for such a transfiguration of the past as is expressed so finely in Strauss's symphonic poem, " Death and Transfiguration " (31) ; with the zest of one who is undertaking a new adventure, and with no fear of its outcome, but in the spirit of John Bunyan, when facing the imminence of death and crying, " I will leap off the ladder even blindfold into eternity, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell ; Lord Jesus, if Thou wilt catch me, do ; if not, I will venture for Thy name." (32)

IN the hour of death, after this life's whim,
When the heart beats low, and the eyes grow dim,
And pain has exhausted every limb—
The lover of the Lord shall trust in Him.

When the will has forgotten the lifelong aim,
And the mind can only disgrace its fame,
And a man is uncertain of his own name—
The power of the Lord shall fill this frame.

When the last sigh is heaved, and the last tear shed,
And the coffin is waiting beside the bed,
And the widow and child forsake the dead—
The angel of the Lord shall lift this head.

For even the purest delight may pall,
And power must fail, and the pride must fall,
And the love of the dearest friends grow small—
But the glory of the Lord is all in all.

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(27) *Select passages from the theological writings of Benjamin Jowett*, ed. by Lewis Campbell, p. 231.
(28) How Sung Ti, mentioned in E. H. Short's book, *G. F. Watts*, pp. 92, 93.
(29) Llewelyn Davies, in a sermon on I Cor. XIII, 13, printed in *Spiritual Apprehension*.
(30) H. Wheeler Robinson, *Personality and the Life Beyond*, in "Life Beyond Death, according to Christianity and Spiritualism" (1925).
(31) *Tod und Verklärung*.
(32) *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, par. 337.