

## CHAPTER VIII - THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DESERT

There was a story in Jerusalem so true or so well told that I can see the actors in it like figures in coloured costumes on a lighted stage. It occurred during the last days of Turkish occupation, while the English advance was still halted before Gaza, and heroically enduring the slow death of desert warfare. There were German and Austrian elements present in the garrison with the Turks, though the three allies seem to have held strangely aloof from each other. In the Austrian group there was an Austrian lady, "who had some dignity or other," like Lord Lundy's grandmother. She was very beautiful, very fashionable, somewhat frivolous, but with fits of Catholic devotion. She had some very valuable Christian virtues, such as indiscriminate charity for the poor and indiscriminate loathing for the Prussians. She was a nurse; she was also a nuisance. One day she was driving just outside the Jaffa Gate, when she saw one of those figures which make the Holy City seem like the eternal crisis of an epic. Such a man will enter the gate in the most ghastly rags as if he were going to be crowned king in the city; with his head lifted as if he saw apocalyptic stars in heaven, and a gesture at which the towers might fall. This man was ragged beyond all that moving rag-heap; he was as gaunt as a gallows tree, and the thing he was uttering with arms held up to heaven was evidently a curse. The lady sent an inquiry by her German servant, whom also I can see in a vision, with his face of wood and his air of still trailing all the heraldic trappings of the Holy Roman Empire. This ambassador soon returned in state and said, "Your Serene High Sublimity (or whatever it is), he says he is cursing the English." Her pity and patriotism were alike moved; and she again sent the plenipotentiary to discover why he cursed the English, or what tale of wrong or ruin at English hands lay behind the large gestures of his despair. A second time the wooden intermediary returned and said, "Your Ecstatic Excellency (or whatever be the correct form), he says he is cursing the English because they don't come."

There are a great many morals to this story, besides the general truth to which it testifies; that the Turkish rule was not popular even with Moslems, and that the German war was not particularly popular even with Turks. When all deductions are made for the patriot as a partisan, and his way of picking up only what pleases him, it remains true that the English attack was very widely regarded rather as a rescue than an aggression. And what complaint there was really was, in many cases, a complaint that the rescue did not come with a rush; that the English forces had to fall back when they had actually entered Gaza, and could not for long afterwards continue their advance on Jerusalem. This kind of criticism of military operations is always, of course, worthless. In journalists it is generally worthless without being even harmless. There were some in London

whose pessimistic wailing was less excusable than that of the poor Arab in Jerusalem; who cursed the English with the addition of being English themselves, who did it, not as he did, before one foreigner, but before all foreign opinion; and who advertised their failure in a sort of rags less reputable than his. No one can judge of a point like the capture and loss of Gaza, unless he knows a huge mass of technical and local detail that can only be known to the staff on the spot; it is not a question of lack of water but of exactly how little water; not of the arrival of reinforcements but of exactly how much reinforcement; not of whether time presses, but of exactly how much time there is. Nobody can know these things who is editing a newspaper at the other end of the world; and these are the things which, for the soldier on the spot, make all the difference between jumping over a paling and jumping over a precipice. Even the latter, as the philosophic relativist will eagerly point out, is only a matter of degree. But this is a parenthesis; for the purpose with which I mentioned the anecdote is something different. It is the text of another and somewhat more elusive truth; some appreciation of which is necessary to a sympathy with the more profound problems of Palestine. And it might be expressed thus; it is a proverb that the Eastern methods seem to us slow; that the Arabs trail along on labouring camels while the Europeans flash by on motors or mono-planes. But there is another and stranger sense in which we do seem to them slow, and they do seem to themselves to have a secret of swiftness. There is a sense in which we here touch the limits of a land of lightning; across which, as in a dream, the motor-car can be seen crawling like a snail.

I have said that there is another side to the desert; though there is something queer in talking of another side to something so bare and big and oppressively obvious. But there is another side besides the big and bare truths, like giant bones, that the Moslem has found there; there is, so to speak, an obverse of the obvious. And to suggest what I mean I must go back again to the desert and the days I spent there, being carted from camp to camp and giving what were courteously described as lectures. All I can say is that if those were lectures, I cannot imagine why everybody is not a lecturer. Perhaps the secret is already out; and multitudes of men in evening dress are already dotted about the desert, wandering in search of an audience. Anyhow in my own wanderings I found myself in the high narrow house of the Base Commandant at Kantara, the only house in the whole circle of the horizon; and from the wooden balustrade and verandah, running round the top of it, could be seen nine miles of tents. Sydney Smith said that the bulbous domes of the Brighton Pavilion looked as if St. Paul's Cathedral had come down there and littered; and that grey vista of countless cones looked rather as if the Great Pyramid had multiplied itself on the prolific scale of the herring. Nor was even such a foolish fancy without its serious side; for though these pyramids would pass, the plan of them was also among the mightiest of the works of man; and the king in every pyramid was alive. For this

was the great camp that was the pivot of the greatest campaign; and from that balcony I had looked on something all the more historic because it may never be seen again. As the dusk fell and the moon brightened above that great ghostly city of canvas, I had fallen into talk with three or four of the officers at the base; grizzled and hard-headed men talking with all the curious and almost colourless common sense of the soldier. All that they said was objective; one felt that everything they mentioned was really a thing and not merely a thought; a thing like a post or a palm-tree. I think there is something in this of a sympathy between the English and the Moslems, which may have helped us in India and elsewhere. For they mentioned many Moslem proverbs and traditions, lightly enough but not contemptuously, and in particular another of the proverbial prophecies about the term of Turkish power. They said there was an old saying that the Turk would never depart until the Nile flowed through Palestine; and this at least was evidently a proverb of pride and security, like many such; as who should say until the sea is dry or the sun rises in the west. And one of them smiled and made a small gesture as of attention. And in the silence of that moonlit scene we heard the clanking of a pump. The water from the Nile had been brought in pipes across the desert.

And I thought that the symbol was a sound one, apart from all vanities; for this is indeed the special sort of thing that Christendom can do, and that Islam by itself would hardly care to do. I heard more afterwards of that water, which was eventually carried up the hills to Jerusalem, when I myself followed it thither; and all I heard bore testimony to this truth so far as it goes; the sense among the natives themselves of something magic in our machinery, and that in the main a white magic; the sense of all the more solid sort of social service that belongs rather to the West than to the East. When the fountain first flowed in the Holy City in the mountains, and Father Waggett blessed it for the use of men, it is said that an old Arab standing by said, in the plain and powerful phraseology of his people: "The Turks were here for five hundred years, and they never gave us a cup of cold water."

I put first this minimum of truth about the validity of Western work because the same conversation swerved slowly, as it were, to the Eastern side. These same men, who talked of all things as if they were chairs and tables, began to talk quite calmly of things more amazing than table-turning. They were as wonderful as if the water had come there like the wind, without any pipes or pumps; or if Father Waggett had merely struck the rock like Moses. They spoke of a solitary soldier at the end of a single telephone wire across the wastes, hearing of something that had that moment happened hundreds of miles away, and then coming upon a casual Bedouin who knew it already. They spoke of the whole tribes moving and on the march, upon news that could only come a little later by the swiftest wires of the white man. They offered no explanation of these things; they simply knew

they were there, like the palm-trees and the moon. They did not say it was "telepathy"; they lived much too close to realities for that. That word, which will instantly leap to the lips of too many of my readers, strikes me as merely an evidence of two of our great modern improvements; the love of long words and the loss of common sense. It may have been telepathy, whatever that is; but a man must be almost stunned with stupidity if he is satisfied to say telepathy as if he were saying telegraphy. If everybody is satisfied about how it is done, why does not everybody do it? Why does not a cultivated clergyman in Cornwall make a casual remark to an old friend of his at the University of Aberdeen? Why does not a harassed commercial traveller in Barcelona settle a question by merely thinking about his business partner in Berlin? The common sense of it is, of course, that the name makes no sort of difference; the mystery is why some people can do it and others cannot; and why it seems to be easy in one place and impossible in another. In other words it comes back to that very mystery which of all mysteries the modern world thinks most superstitious and senseless; the mystery of locality. It works back at last to the hardest of all the hard sayings of supernaturalism; that there is such a thing as holy or unholy ground, as divinely or diabolically inspired people; that there may be such things as sacred sites or even sacred stones; in short that the airy nothing of spiritual essence, evil or good, can have quite literally a local habitation and a name.

It may be said in passing that this genius loci is here very much the presiding genius. It is true that everywhere to-day a parade of the theory of pantheism goes with a considerable practice of particularism; and that people everywhere are beginning to wish they were somewhere. And even where it is not true of men, it seems to be true of the mysterious forces which men are once more studying. The words we now address to the unseen powers may be vague and universal, but the words they are said to address to us are parochial and even private. While the Higher Thought Centre would widen worship everywhere to a temple not made with hands, the Psychical Research Society is conducting practical experiments round a haunted house. Men may become cosmopolitans, but ghosts remain patriots. Men may or may not expect an act of healing to take place at a holy well, but nobody expects it ten miles from the well; and even the sceptic who comes to expose the ghost-haunted churchyard has to haunt the churchyard like a ghost. There may be something faintly amusing about the idea of demi-gods with door-knockers and dinner tables, and demons, one may almost say, keeping the home fires burning. But the driving force of this dark mystery of locality is all the more indisputable because it drives against most modern theories and associations. The truth is that, upon a more transcendental consideration, we do not know what place is any more than we know what time is. We do not know of the unknown powers that they cannot concentrate in space as in time, or find in a spot something that corresponds to a crisis. And if this be felt everywhere, it is necessarily and abnormally felt in those alleged holy places and sacred spots. It is

felt supremely in all those lands of the Near East which lie about the holy hill of Zion.

In these lands an impression grows steadily on the mind much too large for most of the recent religious or scientific definitions. The bogus heraldry of Haeckel is as obviously insufficient as any quaint old chronicle tracing the genealogies of English kings through the chiefs of Troy to the children of Noah. There is no difference, except that the tale of the Dark Ages can never be proved, while the travesty of the Darwinian theory can sometimes be disproved. But I should diminish my meaning if I suggested it as a mere score in the Victorian game of Scripture versus Science. Some much larger mystery veils the origins of man than most partisans on either side have realised; and in these strange primeval plains the traveller does realise it. It was never so well expressed as by one of the most promising of those whose literary possibilities were gloriously broken off by the great war; Lieutenant Warre-Cornish who left a strange and striking fragment, about a man who came to these lands with a mystical idea of forcing himself back against the stream of time into the very fountain of creation. This is a parenthesis; but before resuming the more immediate matter of the supernormal tricks of the tribes of the East, it is well to recognise this very real if much more general historic impression about the particular lands in which they lived. I have called it a historic impression; but it might more truly be called a prehistoric impression. It is best expressed in symbol by saying that the legendary site of the Garden of Eden is in Mesopotamia. It is equally well expressed in concrete experience by saying that, when I was in these parts, a learned man told me that the primitive form of wheat had just, for the first time, been discovered in Palestine.

The feeling that fills the traveller may be faintly suggested thus; that here, in this legendary land between Asia and Europe, may well have happened whatever did happen; that through this Eastern gate, if any, entered whatever made and changed the world. Whatever else this narrow strip of land may seem like, it does really seem, to the spirit and almost to the senses, like the bridge that may have borne across archaic abysses the burden and the mystery of man. Here have been civilisations as old as any barbarism; to all appearance perhaps older than any barbarism. Here is the camel; the enormous unnatural friend of man; the prehistoric pet. He is never known to have been wild, and might make a man fancy that all wild animals had once been tame. As I said elsewhere, all might be a runaway menagerie; the whale a cow that went swimming and never came back, the tiger a large cat that took the prize (and the prize-giver) and escaped to the jungle. This is not (I venture to think) true; but it is true as Pithecanthropus and Primitive Man and all the other random guesses from dubious bits of bone and stone. And the truth is some third thing, too tremendous to be remembered by men. Whatever it was, perhaps the camel saw it; but from the expression on

the face of that old family servant, I feel sure that he will never tell.

I have called this the other side of the desert; and in another sense it is literally the other side. It is the other shore of that shifting and arid sea. Looking at it from the West and considering mainly the case of the Moslem, we feel the desert is but a barren border-land of Christendom; but seen from the other side it is the barrier between us and a heathendom far more mysterious and even monstrous than anything Moslem can be. Indeed it is necessary to realise this more vividly in order to feel the virtue of the Moslem movement. It belonged to the desert, but in one sense it was rather a clearance in the cloud that rests upon the desert; a rift of pale but clean light in volumes of vapour rolled on it like smoke from the strange lands beyond. It conceived a fixed hatred of idolatry, partly because its face was turned towards the multitudinous idolatries of the lands of sunrise; and as I looked Eastward I seemed to be conscious of the beginnings of that other world; and saw, like a forest of arms or a dream full of faces, the gods of Asia on their thousand thrones.

It is not a mere romance that calls it a land of magic, or even of black magic. Those who carry that atmosphere to us are not the romanticists but the realists. Every one can feel it in the work of Mr. Rudyard Kipling; and when I once remarked on his repulsive little masterpiece called "The Mark of the Beast," to a rather cynical Anglo-Indian officer, he observed moodily, "It's a beastly story. But those devils really can do jolly queer things." It is but to take a commonplace example out of countless more notable ones to mention the many witnesses to the mango trick. Here again we have from time to time to weep over the weak-mindedness that hurriedly dismisses it as the practice of hypnotism. It is as if people were asked to explain how one unarmed Indian had killed three hundred men, and they said it was only the practice of human sacrifice. Nothing that we know as hypnotism will enable a man to alter the eyes in the heads of a huge crowd of total strangers; wide awake in broad daylight; and if it is hypnotism, it is something so appallingly magnified as to need a new magic to explain the explanation; certainly something that explains it better than a Greek word for sleep. But the impression of these special instances is but one example of a more universal impression of the Asiatic atmosphere; and that atmosphere itself is only an example of something vaster still for which I am trying to find words. Asia stands for something which the world in the West as well as the East is more and more feeling as a presence, and even a pressure. It might be called the spiritual world let loose; or a sort of psychical anarchy; a jungle of mango plants. And it is pressing upon the West also to-day because of the breaking down of certain materialistic barriers that have hitherto held it back. In plain words the attitude of science is not only modified; it is now entirely reversed. I do not say it with mere pleasure; in some ways I prefer our materialism to their spiritualism. But for good or evil the scientists are now destroying their own scientific world.

The agnostics have been driven back on agnosticism; and are already recovering from the shock. They find themselves in a really unknown world under really unknown gods; a world which is more mystical, or at least more mysterious. For in the Victorian age the agnostics were not really agnostics. They might be better described as reverent materialists; or at any rate monists. They had at least at the back of their minds a clear and consistent concept of their rather clockwork cosmos; that is why they could not admit the smallest speck of the supernatural into their clockwork. But to-day it is very hard for a scientific man to say where the supernatural ends or the natural begins, or what name should be given to either. The word agnostic has ceased to be a polite word for atheist. It has become a real word for a very real state of mind, conscious of many possibilities beyond that of the atheist, and not excluding that of the polytheist. It is no longer a question of defining or denying a simple central power, but of balancing the brain in a bewilderment of new powers which seem to overlap and might even conflict. Nature herself has become unnatural. The wind is blowing from the other side of the desert, not now with noble truism "There is no God but God," but rather with that other motto out of the deeper anarchy of Asia, drawn out by Mr. Kipling, in the shape of a native proverb, in the very story already mentioned; "Your gods and my gods, do you or I know which is the stronger?" There was a mystical story I read somewhere in my boyhood, of which the only image that remains is that of a rose-bush growing mysteriously in the middle of a room. Taking this image for the sake of argument, we can easily fancy a man half-conscious and convinced that he is delirious, or still partly in a dream, because he sees such a magic bush growing irrationally in the middle of his bedroom. All the walls and furniture are familiar and solid, the table, the clock, the telephone, the looking glass or what not; there is nothing unnatural but this one hovering hallucination or optical delusion of green and red. Now that was very much the view taken of the Rose of Sharon, the mystical rose of the sacred tradition of Palestine, by any educated man about 1850, when the rationalism of the eighteenth century was supposed to have found full support in the science of the nineteenth. He had a sentiment about a rose: he was still glad it had fragrance or atmosphere; though he remembered with a slight discomfort that it had thorns. But what bothered him about it was that it was impossible. And what made him think it impossible was it was inconsistent with everything else. It was one solitary and monstrous exception to the sort of rule that ought to have no exceptions. Science did not convince him that there were few miracles, but that there were no miracles; and why should there be miracles only in Palestine and only for one short period? It was a single and senseless contradiction to an otherwise complete cosmos. For the furniture fitted in bit by bit and better and better; and the bedroom seemed to grow more and more solid. The man recognised the portrait of himself over the mantelpiece or the medicine bottles on the table, like the dying lover in Browning. In other words, science so far had steadily solidified things; Newton had

measured the walls and ceiling and made a calculus of their three dimensions. Darwin was already arranging the animals in rank as neatly as a row of chairs, or Faraday the chemical elements as clearly as a row of medicine bottles. From the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, science was not only making discoveries, but all the discoveries were in one direction. Science is still making discoveries; but they are in the opposite direction.

For things are rather different when the man in the bed next looks at the bedroom. Not only is the rose-bush still very obvious; but the other things are looking very odd. The perspective seems to have gone crooked; the walls seem to vary in measurement till the man thinks he is going mad. The wall-paper has a new pattern, of strange spirals instead of round dots. The table seems to have moved by itself across the room and thrown the medicine bottles out of the window. The telephone has vanished from the wall; the mirror does not reflect what is in front of it. The portrait of himself over the mantelpiece has a face that is not his own.

That is something like a vision of the vital change in the whole trend of natural philosophy in the last twenty or thirty years. It matters little whether we regard it as the deepening or the destruction of the scientific universe. It matters little whether we say that grander abysses have opened in it, or merely that the bottom has fallen out of it. It is quite self-evident that scientific men are at war with wilder and more unfathomable fancies than the facts of the age of Huxley. I attempt no controversy about any of the particular cases: it is the cumulative effect of all of them that makes the impression one of common sense. It is really true that the perspective and dimensions of the man's bedroom have altered; the disciples of Einstein will tell him that straight lines are curved and perhaps measure more one way than the other; if that is not a nightmare, what is? It is really true that the clock has altered, for time has turned into the fourth dimension or something entirely different; and the telephone may fairly be said to have faded from view in favour of the invisible telepath. It is true that the pattern of the paper has changed, for the very pattern of the world has changed; we are told that it is not made of atoms like the dots but of electrons like the spirals. Scientific men of the first rank have seen a table move by itself, and walk upstairs by itself. It does not matter here whether it was done by the spirits; it is enough that few still pretend that is entirely done by the spiritualists. I am not dealing with doctrines but with doubts; with the mere fact that all these things have grown deeper and more bewildering. Some people really are throwing their medicine bottles out of the window; and some of them at least are working purely psychological cures of a sort that would once have been called miraculous healing. I do not say we know how far this could go; it is my whole point that we do not know, that we are in contact with numbers of new things of which we know uncommonly little. But the vital point is, not that science deals with what



we do not know, but that science is destroying what we thought we did know. Nearly all the latest discoveries have been destructive, not of the old dogmas of religion, but rather of the recent dogmas of science. The conservation of energy could not itself be entirely conserved. The atom was smashed to atoms. And dancing to the tune of Professor Einstein, even the law of gravity is behaving with lamentable levity.

And when the man looks at the portrait of himself he really does not see himself. He sees his Other Self, which some say is the opposite of his ordinary self; his Subconscious Self or his Subliminal Self, said to rage and rule in his dreams, or a suppressed self which hates him though it is hidden from him; or the Alter Ego of a Dual Personality. It is not to my present purpose to discuss the merit of these speculations, or whether they be medicinal or morbid. My purpose is served in pointing out the plain historical fact; that if you had talked to a Utilitarian and Rationalist of Bentham's time, who told men to follow "enlightened self-interest," he would have been considerably bewildered if you had replied brightly and briskly, "And to which self do you refer; the sub-conscious, the conscious, the latently criminal or suppressed, or others that we fortunately have in stock?" When the man looks at his own portrait in his own bedroom, it does really melt into the face of a stranger or flicker into the face of a fiend. When he looks at the bedroom itself, in short, it becomes clearer and clearer that it is exactly this comfortable and solid part of the vision that is altering and breaking up. It is the walls and furniture that are only a dream or memory. And when he looks again at the incongruous rose-bush, he seems to smell as well as see; and he stretches forth his hand, and his finger bleeds upon a thorn.

It will not be altogether surprising if the story ends with the man recovering full consciousness, and finding he has been convalescing in a hammock in a rose-garden. It is not so very unreasonable when you come to think of it; or at least when you come to think of the whole of it. He was not wrong in thinking the whole must be a consistent whole, and that one part seemed inconsistent with the other. He was only wrong about which part was wrong through being inconsistent with the other. Now the whole of the rationalistic doubt about the Palestinian legends, from its rise in the early eighteenth century out of the last movements of the Renaissance, was founded on the fixity of facts. Miracles were monstrosities because they were against natural law, which was necessarily immutable law. The prodigies of the Old Testament or the mighty works of the New were extravagances because they were exceptions; and they were exceptions because there was a rule, and that an immutable rule. In short, there was no rose-tree growing out of the carpet of a trim and tidy bedroom; because rose-trees do not grow out of carpets in trim and tidy bedrooms. So far it seemed reasonable enough. But it left out one possibility; that a man can dream about a room as well as a rose; and that a man can doubt about a rule as well as an

exception.

As soon as the men of science began to doubt the rules of the game, the game was up. They could no longer rule out all the old marvels as impossible, in face of the new marvels which they had to admit as possible. They were themselves dealing now with a number of unknown quantities; what is the power of mind over matter; when is matter an illusion of mind; what is identity, what is individuality, is there a limit to logic in the last extremes of mathematics? They knew by a hundred hints that their non-miraculous world was no longer watertight; that floods were coming in from somewhere in which they were already out of their depth, and down among very fantastical deep-sea fishes. They could hardly feel certain even about the fish that swallowed Jonah, when they had no test except the very true one that there are more fish in the sea than ever came out of it. Logically they would find it quite as hard to draw the line at the miraculous draught of fishes. I do not mean that they, or even I, need here depend on those particular stories; I mean that the difficulty now is to draw a line, and a new line, after the obliteration of an old and much more obvious line. Any one can draw it for himself, as a matter of mere taste in probability; but we have not made a philosophy until we can draw it for others. And the modern men of science cannot draw it for others. Men could easily mark the contrast between the force of gravity and the fable of the Ascension. They cannot all be made to see any such contrast between the levitation that is now discussed as a possibility and the ascension which is still derided as a miracle. I do not even say that there is not a great difference between them; I say that science is now plunged too deep in new doubts and possibilities to have authority to define the difference. I say the more it knows of what seems to have happened, or what is said to have happened, in many modern drawing-rooms, the less it knows what did or did not happen on that lofty and legendary hill, where a spire rises over Jerusalem and can be seen beyond Jordan.

But with that part of the Palestinian story which is told in the New Testament I am not directly concerned till the next chapter; and the matter here is a more general one. The truth is that through a thousand channels something has returned to the modern mind. It is not Christianity. On the contrary, it would be truer to say that it is paganism. In reality it is in a very special sense paganism; because it is polytheism. The word will startle many people, but not the people who know the modern world best. When I told a distinguished psychologist at Oxford that I differed from his view of the universe, he answered, "Why universe? Why should it not be a multiverse?" The essence of polytheism is the worship of gods who are not God; that is, who are not necessarily the author and the authority of all things. Men are feeling more and more that there are many spiritual forces in the universe, and the wisest men feel that some are to be trusted more than others. There will be a tendency, I think, to take a favourite

force, or in other words a familiar spirit. Mr. H. G. Wells, who is, if anybody is, a genius among moderns and a modern among geniuses, really did this very thing; he selected a god who was really more like a daemon. He called his book *God, the Invisible King*; but the curious point was that he specially insisted that his God differed from other people's God in the very fact that he was not a king. He was very particular in explaining that his deity did not rule in any almighty or infinite sense; but merely influenced, like any wandering spirit. Nor was he particularly invisible, if there can be said to be any degrees in invisibility. Mr. Wells's Invisible God was really like Mr. Wells's Invisible Man. You almost felt he might appear at any moment, at any rate to his one devoted worshipper; and that, as if in old Greece, a glad cry might ring through the woods of Essex, the voice of Mr. Wells crying, "We have seen, he hath seen us, a visible God." I do not mean this disrespectfully, but on the contrary very sympathetically; I think it worthy of so great a man to appreciate and answer the general sense of a richer and more adventurous spiritual world around us. It is a great emancipation from the leaden materialism which weighed on men of imagination forty years ago. But my point for the moment is that the mode of the emancipation was pagan or even polytheistic, in the real philosophical sense that it was the selection of a single spirit, out of many there might be in the spiritual world. The point is that while Mr. Wells worships his god (who is not his creator or even necessarily his overlord) there is nothing to prevent Mr. William Archer, also emancipated, from adoring another god in another temple; or Mr. Arnold Bennett, should he similarly liberate his mind, from bowing down to a third god in a third temple. My imagination rather fails me, I confess, in evoking the image and symbolism of Mr. Bennett's or Mr. Archer's idolatries; and if I had to choose between the three, I should probably be found as an acolyte in the shrine of Mr. Wells. But, anyhow, the trend of all this is to polytheism, rather as it existed in the old civilisation of paganism.

There is the same modern mark in Spiritualism. Spiritualism also has the trend of polytheism, if it be in a form more akin to ancestor-worship. But whether it be the invocation of ghosts or of gods, the mark of it is that it invokes something less than the divine; nor am I at all quarrelling with it on that account. I am merely describing the drift of the day; and it seems clear that it is towards the summoning of spirits to our aid whatever their position in the unknown world, and without any clear doctrinal plan of that world. The most probable result would seem to be a multitude of psychic cults, personal and impersonal, from the vaguest reverence for the powers of nature to the most concrete appeal to crystals or mascots. When I say that the agnostics have discovered agnosticism, and have now recovered from the shock, I do not mean merely to sneer at the identity of the word agnosticism with the word ignorance. On the contrary, I think ignorance the greater thing; for ignorance can be creative. And the thing it can create, and soon probably will create, is one of the lost arts of the world; a mythology.

In a word, the modern world will probably end exactly where the Bible begins. In that inevitable setting of spirit against spirit, or god against god, we shall soon be in a position to do more justice not only to the New Testament, but to the Old Testament. Our descendants may very possibly do the very thing we scoff at the old Jews for doing; grope for and cling to their own deity as one rising above rivals who seem to be equally real. They also may feel him not primarily as the sole or even the supreme but only as the best; and have to abide the miracles of ages to prove that he is also the mightiest. For them also he may at first be felt as their own, before he is extended to others; he also, from the collision with colossal idolatries and towering spiritual tyrannies, may emerge only as a God of Battles and a Lord of Hosts. Here between the dark wastes and the clouded mountain was fought out what must seem even to the indifferent a wrestle of giants driving the world out of its course; Jehovah of the mountains casting down Baal of the desert and Dagon of the sea. Here wandered and endured that strange and terrible and tenacious people who held high above all their virtues and their vices one indestructible idea; that they were but the tools in that tremendous hand. Here was the first triumph of those who, in some sense beyond our understanding, had rightly chosen among the powers invisible, and found their choice a great god above all gods. So the future may suffer not from the loss but the multiplicity of faith; and its fate be far more like the cloudy and mythological war in the desert than like the dry radiance of theism or monism. I have said nothing here of my own faith, or of that name on which, I am well persuaded, the world will be most wise to call. But I do believe that the tradition founded in that far tribal battle, in that far Eastern land, did indeed justify itself by leading up to a lasting truth; and that it will once again be justified of all its children. What has survived through an age of atheism as the most indestructible would survive through an age of polytheism as the most indispensable. If among many gods it could not presently be proved to be the strongest, some would still know it was the best. Its central presence would endure through times of cloud and confusion, in which it was judged only as a myth among myths or a man among men. Even the old heathen test of humanity and the apparition of the body, touching which I have quoted the verse about the pagan polytheist

as sung by the neo-pagan poet, is a test which that incarnate mystery will abide the best. And however much or little our spiritual inquirers may lift the veil from their invisible kings, they will not find a vision more vivid than a man walking unveiled upon the mountains, seen of men and seeing; a visible god.