CHAPTER IX - THE BATTLE WITH THE DRAGON

Lydda or Ludd has already been noted as the legendary birthplace of St. George, and as the camp on the edge of the desert from which, as it happened, I caught the first glimpse of the coloured fields of Palestine that looked like the fields of Paradise. Being an encampment of soldiers, it seems an appropriate place for St. George; and indeed it may be said that all that red and empty land has resounded with his name like a shield of copper or of bronze. The name was not even confined to the cries of the Christians; a curious imaginative hospitality in the Moslem mind, a certain innocent and imitative enthusiasm, made the Moslems also half-accept a sort of Christian mythology, and make an abstract hero of St. George. It is said that Coeur de Lion on these very sands first invoked the soldier saint to bless the English battle-line, and blazon his cross on the English banners. But the name occurs not only in the stories of the victory of Richard, but in the enemy stories that led up to the great victory of Saladin. In that obscure and violent quarrel which let loose the disaster of Hattin, when the Grand Master of the Templars, Gerard the Englishman from Bideford in Devon, drove with demented heroism his few lances against a host, there fell among those radiant fanatics one Christian warrior, who had made with his single sword such a circle of the slain, that the victorious Moslems treated even his dead body as something supernatural; and bore it away with them with honour, saying it was the body of St. George.

But if the purpose of the camp be appropriate to the story of St. George, the position of the camp might be considered appropriate to the more fantastic story of St. George and the Dragon. The symbolic struggle between man and monster might very well take place somewhere where the green culture of the fields meets the red desolation of the desert. As a matter of fact, I dare say, legend locates the duel itself somewhere else, but I am only making use of the legend as a legend, or even as a convenient figure of speech. I would only use it here to make a kind of picture which may clarify a kind of paradox, very vital to our present attitude towards all Palestinian traditions, including those that are more sacred even than St. George. This paradox has already been touched on in the last chapter about polytheistic spirits or superstitions such as surrounded the Old Testament, but it is yet more true of the criticisms and apologetics surrounding the New Testament. And the paradox is this; that we never find our own religion so right as when we find we are wrong about it. I mean that we are finally convinced not by the sort of evidence we are looking for, but by the sort of evidence we are not looking for. We are convinced when we come on a ratification that is almost as abrupt as a refutation. That is the point about the wireless telegraphy or wordless telepathy of the Bedouins. A supernatural trick in a dingy tribe wandering in dry places is

not the sort of supernaturalism we should expect to find; it is only the sort that we do find. These rocks of the desert, like the bones of a buried giant, do not seem to stick out where they ought to, but they stick out, and we fall over them.

Whatever we think of St. George, most people would see a mere fairy-tale in St. George and the Dragon. I dare say they are right; and I only use it here as a figure for the sake of argument. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that a man has come to the conclusion that there probably was such a person as St. George, in spite of all the nonsense about dragons and the chimera with wings and claws that has somehow interwreathed itself with his image. Perhaps he is a little biased by patriotism or other ethical aims; and thinks the saint a good social ideal. Perhaps he knows that early Christianity, so far from being a religion of pacifists, was largely a religion of soldiers. Anyhow he thinks St. George himself a quite sufficiently solid and historical figure; and has little doubt that records or traces can be found of him. Now the point is this; suppose that man goes to the land of the legendary combat; and finds comparatively few or faint traces of the personality of St. George. But suppose he does find, on that very field of combat, the bones of a gigantic monster unlike every other creature except the legendary dragon. Or suppose he only finds ancient Eastern sculptures and hieroglyphics representing maidens, being sacrificed to such a monster, and making it quite clear that even within historic times one of those sacrificed was a princess. It is surely clear that he will be considerably impressed by this confirmation, not of the part he did believe, but actually of the part he did not believe. He has not found what he expected but he has found what he wanted, and much more than he wanted. He has not found a single detail directly in support of St. George. But he had found a very considerable support of St. George and the Dragon.

It is needless to inform the reader, I trust, that I do not think this particular case in the least likely; or that I am only using it for the sake of lucidity. Even as it stands, it would not necessarily make a man believe the traditional story, but it would make him guess that it was some sort of tradition of some sort of truth; that there was something in it, and much more in it than even he himself had imagined. And the point of it would be precisely that his reason had not anticipated the extent of his revelation. He has proved the improbable, not the probable thing. Reason had already taught him the reasonable part; but facts had taught him the fantastic part. He will certainly conclude that the whole story is very much more valid than anybody has supposed. Now as I have already said, it is not in the least likely that this will happen touching this particular tale of Palestine. But this is precisely what really has happened touching the most sacred and tremendous of all the tales of Palestine. This is precisely what has happened touching that central figure, round which the monster and the champion are alike only ornamental symbols; and by the right of whose tragedy even St. George's Cross does not belong to St. George. It is not likely to be true of

the desert duel between George and the Dragon; but it is already true of the desert duel between Jesus and the Devil. St. George is but a servant and the Dragon is but a symbol, but it is precisely about the central reality, the mystery of Christ and His mastery of the powers of darkness, that this very paradox has proved itself a fact.

Going down from Jerusalem to Jericho I was more than once moved by a flippant and possibly profane memory of the swine that rushed down a steep place into the sea. I do not insist on the personal parallel; for whatever my points of resemblance to a pig I am not a flying pig, a pig with wings of speed and precipitancy; and if I am possessed of a devil, it is not the blue devil of suicide. But the phrase came back into my mind because going down to the Dead Sea does really involve rushing down a steep place. Indeed it gives a strange impression that the whole of Palestine is one single steep place. It is as if all other countries lay flat under the sky, but this one country had been tilted sideways. This gigantic gesture of geography or geology, this sweep as of a universal landslide, is the sort of thing that is never conveyed by any maps or books or even pictures. All the pictures of Palestine I have seen are descriptive details, groups of costume or corners of architecture, at most views of famous places; they cannot give the bottomless vision of this long descent. We went in a little rocking Ford car down steep and jagged roads among ribbed and columned cliffs; but the roads below soon failed us altogether; and the car had to tumble like a tank over rocky banks and into empty river-beds, long before it came to the sinister and discoloured landscapes of the Dead Sea. And the distance looks far enough on the map, and seems long enough in the motor journey, to make a man feel he has come to another part of the world; yet so much is it all a single fall of land that even when he gets out beyond Jordan in the wild country of the Shereef he can still look back and see, small and faint as if in the clouds, the spire of the Russian church (I fancy) upon the hill of the Ascension. And though the story of the swine is attached in truth to another place, I was still haunted with its fanciful appropriateness to this one, because of the very steepness of this larger slope and the mystery of that larger sea. I even had the fancy that one might fish for them and find them in such a sea, turned into monsters; sea-swine or four-legged fishes, swollen and with evil eyes, grown over with sea-grass for bristles; the ghosts of Gadara.

And then it came back to me, as a curiosity and almost a coincidence, that the same strange story had actually been selected as the text for the central controversy of the Victorian Age between Christianity and criticism. The two champions were two of the greatest men of the nineteenth century; Huxley representing scientific scepticism and Gladstone scriptural orthodoxy. The scriptural champion was universally regarded as standing for the past, if not for the dead past; and the scientific champion as standing for the future, if not the

final judgment of the world. And yet the future has been entirely different to anything that anybody expected; and the final judgment may yet reverse all the conceptions of their contemporaries and even of themselves. The philosophical position now is in a very curious way the contrary of the position then. Gladstone had the worst of the argument, and has been proved right. Huxley had the best of the argument, and has been proved wrong. At any rate he has been ultimately proved wrong about the way the world was going, and the probable position of the next generation. What he thought indisputable is disputed; and what he thought dead is rather too much alive.

Huxley was not only a man of genius in logic and rhetoric; he was a man of a very manly and generous morality. Morally he deserves much more sympathy than many of the mystics who have supplanted him. But they have supplanted him. In the more mental fashions of the day, most of what he thought would stand has fallen, and most of what he thought would fall is standing yet. In the Gadarene controversy with Gladstone, he announced it as his purpose to purge the Christian ideal, which he thought self-evidently sublime, of the Christian demonology, which he thought self-evidently ridiculous. And yet if we take any typical man of the next generation, we shall very probably find Huxley's sublime thing scoffed at, and Huxley's ridiculous thing taken seriously. I imagine a very typical child of the age succeeding Huxley's may be found in Mr. George Moore. He has one of the most critical, appreciative and atmospheric talents of the age. He has lived in most of the sets of the age, and through most of the fashions of the age. He has held, at one time or another, most of the opinions of the age. Above all, he has not only thought for himself, but done it with peculiar pomp and pride; he would consider himself the freest of all freethinkers. Let us take him as a type and a test of what has really happened to Huxley's analysis of the gold and the dross. Huxley quoted as the indestructible ideal the noble passage in Micah, beginning "He hath shewed thee, O man, that which is good"; and asked scornfully whether anybody was ever likely to suggest that justice was worthless or that mercy was unlovable, and whether anything would diminish the distance between ourselves and the ideals that we reverence. And yet already, perhaps, Mr. George Moore was anticipating Nietzsche, sailing near, as he said, "the sunken rocks about the cave of Zarathustra." He said, if I remember right, that Cromwell should be admired for his injustice. He implied that Christ should be condemned, not because he destroyed the swine, but because he delivered the sick. In short he found justice quite worthless and mercy quite unlovable; and as for humility and the distance between himself and his ideals, he seemed rather to suggest (at this time at least) that his somewhat varying ideals were only interesting because they had belonged to himself. Some of this, it is true, was only in the Confessions of a Young Man; but it is the whole point here that they were then the confessions of a young man, and that Huxley's in comparison were the confessions of an old man. The trend of the new time, in very varying

degrees, was tending to undermine, not merely the Christian demonology, not merely the Christian theology, not merely the Christian religion, but definitely the Christian ethical ideal, which had seemed to the great agnostic as secure as the stars.

But while the world was mocking the morality he had assumed, it was bringing back the mysticism he had mocked. The next phase of Mr. George Moore himself, whom I have taken as a type of the time, was the serious and sympathetic consideration of Irish mysticism, as embodied in Mr. W. B. Yeats. I have myself heard Mr. Yeats, about that time, tell a story, to illustrate how concrete and even comic is the reality of the supernatural, saying that he knew a farmer whom the fairies had dragged out of bed and beaten. Now suppose Mr. Yeats had told Mr. Moore, then moving in this glamorous atmosphere, another story of the same sort. Suppose he had said that the farmer's pigs had fallen under the displeasure of some magician of the sort he celebrates, who had conjured bad fairies into the quadrupeds, so that they went in a wild dance down to the village pond. Would Mr. Moore have thought that story any more incredible than the other? Would he have thought it worse than a thousand other things that a modern mystic may lawfully believe? Would he have risen to his feet and told Mr. Yeats that all was over between them? Not a bit of it. He would at least have listened with a serious, nay, a solemn face. He would think it a grim little grotesque of rustic diablerie, a quaint tale of goblins, neither less nor more improbable than hundreds of psychic fantasies or farces for which there is really a good deal of evidence. He would be ready to entertain the idea if he found it anywhere except in the New Testament. As for the more vulgar and universal fashions that have followed after the Celtic movement, they have left such trifles far behind. And they have been directed not by imaginative artists like Mr. Yeats or even Mr. Moore, but by solid scientific students like Sir William Crookes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I find it easier to imagine an evil spirit agitating the legs of a pig than a good spirit agitating the legs of a table. But I will not here enter into the argument, since I am only trying to describe the atmosphere. Whatever has happened in more recent years, what Huxley expected has certainly not happened. There has been a revolt against Christian morality, and where there has not been a return of Christian mysticism, it has been a return of the mysticism without the Christianity. Mysticism itself has returned, with all its moons and twilights, its talismans and spells. Mysticism itself has returned, and brought with it seven devils worse than itself.

But the scientific coincidence is even more strict and close. It affects not only the general question of miracles, but the particular question of possession. This is the very last element in the Christian story that would ever have been selected by the enlightened Christian apologist. Gladstone would defend it, but he would not go out of his way to dwell on it. It is an excellent working model of what I mean by

finding an unexpected support, and finding it in an unexpected quarter. It is not theological but psychological study that has brought us back into this dark underworld of the soul, where even identity seems to dissolve or divide, and men are not even themselves. I do not say that psychologists admit the discovery of demoniacs; and if they did they would doubtless call them something else, such as demono-maniacs. But they admit things which seem almost as near to a new supernaturalism, and things quite as incredible to the old rationalism. Dual personality is not so very far from diabolic possession. And if the dogma of subconsciousness allows of agnosticism, the agnosticism cuts both ways. A man cannot say there is a part of him of which he is quite unconscious, and only conscious that it is not in contact with the unknown. He cannot say there is a sealed chamber or cellar under his house, of which he knows nothing whatever; but that he is quite certain that it cannot have an underground passage leading anywhere else in the world. He cannot say he knows nothing whatever about its size or shape or appearance, except that it certainly does not contain a relic of the finger-joint of St. Catherine of Alexandria, or that it certainly is not haunted by the ghost of King Herod Agrippa. If there is any sort of legend or tradition or plausible probability which says that it is, he cannot call a thing impossible where he is not only ignorant but even unconscious. It comes back therefore to the same reality, that the old compact cosmos depended on a compact consciousness. If we are dealing with unknown quantities, we cannot deny their connection with other unknown quantities. If I have a self of which I can say nothing, how can I even say that it is my own self? How can I even say that I always had it, or that it did not come from somewhere else? It is clear that we are in very deep waters, whether or no we have rushed down a steep place to fall into them.

It will be noted that what we really lack here is not the supernatural but only the healthy supernatural. It is not the miracle, but only the miracle of healing. I warmly sympathise with those who think most of this rather morbid, and nearer the diabolic than the divine, but to call a thing diabolic is hardly an argument against the existence of diabolism. It is still more clearly the case when we go outside the sphere of science into its penumbra in literature and conversation. There is a mass of fiction and fashionable talk of which it may truly be said, that what we miss in it is not demons but the power to cast them out. It combines the occult with the obscene; the sensuality of materialism with the insanity of spiritualism. In the story of Gadara we have left out nothing except the Redeemer, we have kept the devils and the swine.

In other words, we have not found St. George; but we have found the Dragon. We have found in the desert, as I have said, the bones of the monster we did not believe in, more plainly than the footprints of the hero we did. We have found them not because we expected to find them, for our progressive minds look to the

promise of something much brighter and even better; not because we wanted to find them, for our modern mood, as well as our human nature, is entirely in favour of more amiable and reassuring things; not because we thought it even possible to find them, for we really thought it impossible so far as we ever thought of it at all. We have found them because they are there; and we are bound to come on them even by falling over them. It is Huxley's method that has upset Huxley's conclusion. As I have said, that conclusion itself is completely reversed. What he thought indisputable is disputed; and what he thought impossible is possible. Instead of Christian morals surviving in the form of humanitarian morals, Christian demonology has survived in the form of heathen demonology. But it has not survived by scholarly traditionalism in the style of Gladstone, but rather by obstinate objective curiosity according to the advice of Huxley. We in the West have "followed our reason as far as it would go," and our reason has led us to things that nearly all the rationalists would have thought wildly irrational. Science was supposed to bully us into being rationalists; but it is now supposed to be bullying us into being irrationalists. The science of Einstein might rather be called following our unreason as far as it will go, seeing whether the brain will crack under the conception that space is curved, or that parallel straight lines always meet. And the science of Freud would make it essentially impossible to say how far our reason or unreason does go, or where it stops. For if a man is ignorant of his other self, how can he possibly know that the other self is ignorant? He can no longer say with pride that at least he knows that he knows nothing. That is exactly what he does not know. The floor has fallen out of his mind and the abyss below may contain subconscious certainties as well as subconscious doubts. He is too ignorant even to ignore; and he must confess himself an agnostic about whether he is an agnostic.

That is the coil or tangle, at least, which the dragon has reached even in the scientific regions of the West. I only describe the tangle; I do not delight in it. Like most people with a taste for Catholic tradition, I am too much of a rationalist for that; for Catholics are almost the only people now defending reason. But I am not talking of the true relations of reason and mystery, but of the historical fact that mystery has invaded the peculiar realms of reason; especially the European realms of the motor and the telephone. When we have a man like Mr. William Archer, lecturing mystically on dreams and psychoanalysis, and saying it is clear that God did not make man a reasonable creature, those acquainted with the traditions and distinguished record of that dry and capable Scot will consider the fact a prodigy. I confess it never occurred to me that Mr. Archer was of such stuff as dreams are made of; and if he is becoming a mystic in his old age (I use the phrase in a mystical and merely relative sense) we may take it that the occult oriental flood is rising fast, and reaching places that are not only high but dry. But the change is much more apparent to a man who has chanced to stray into those orient hills where those occult streams have always risen, and especially in

this land that lies between Asia, where the occult is almost the obvious, and Europe, where it is always returning with a fresher and younger vigour. The truth becomes strangely luminous in this wilderness between two worlds, where the rocks stand out stark like the very bones of the Dragon.

As I went down that sloping wall or shoulder of the world from the Holy City on the mountain to the buried Cities of the Plain, I seemed to see more and more clearly all this Western evolution of Eastern mystery, and how on this one high place, as on a pivot, the whole purpose of mankind had swerved. I took up again the train of thought which I had trailed through the desert, as described in the last chapter, about the gods of Asia and of the ancient dispensation, and I found it led me along these hills to a sort of vista or vision of the new dispensation and of Christendom. Considered objectively, and from the outside, the story is something such as has already been loosely outlined; the emergence in this immemorial and mysterious land of what was undoubtedly, when thus considered, one tribe among many tribes worshipping one god among many gods, but it is quite as much an evident external fact that the god has become God. Still stated objectively, the story is that the tribe having this religion produced a new prophet, claiming to be more than a prophet. The old religion killed the new prophet; but the new prophet killed the old religion. He died to destroy it, and it died in destroying him. Now it may be reaffirmed equally realistically that there was nothing normal about the case or its consequences. The things that took part in that tragedy have never been the same since, and have never been like anything else in the world. The Church is not like other religions; its very crimes were unique. The Jews are not like other races; they remain as unique to everybody else as they are to themselves. The Roman Empire did not pass like other empires; it did not perish like Babylon and Assyria. It went through a most extraordinary remorse amounting to madness and resuscitation into sanity, which is equally strange in history whether it seems as ghastly as a galvanised corpse or as glorious as a god risen from the dead. The very land and city are not like other lands and cities. The concentration and conflict in Jerusalem to-day, whether we regard them as a reconquest by Christendom or a conspiracy of Jews or a part of the lingering quarrel with Moslems, are alike the effect of forces gathered and loosened in that one mysterious moment in the history of the city. They equally proclaim the paradox of its insignificance and its importance.

But above all the prophet was not and is not like other prophets; and the proof of it is to be found not primarily among those who believe in him, but among those who do not. He is not dead, even where he is denied. What is the use of a modern man saying that Christ is only a thing like Atys or Mithras, when the next moment he is reproaching Christianity for not following Christ? He does not suddenly lose his temper and talk about our most unmithraic conduct, as he does (very justly as a rule) about our most unchristian conduct. We do not find a

group of ardent young agnostics, in the middle of a great war, tried as traitors for their extravagant interpretation of remarks attributed to Atys. It is improbable that Tolstoy wrote a book to prove that all modern ills could be cured by literal obedience to all the orders of Adonis. We do not find wild Bolshevists calling themselves Mithraic Socialists as many of them call themselves Christian Socialists. Leaving orthodoxy and even sanity entirely on one side, the very heresies and insanities of our time prove that after nearly two thousand years the issue is still living and the name is quite literally one to conjure with. Let the critics try to conjure with any of the other names. In the real centres of modern inquiry and mental activity, they will not move even a mystic with the name of Mithras as they will move a materialist with the name of Jesus. There are men who deny God and accept Christ.

But this lingering yet living power in the legend, even for those to whom it is little more than a legend, has another relevancy to the particular point here. Jesus of Nazareth, merely humanly considered, has thus become a hero of humanitarianism. Even the eighteenth-century deists in denying his divinity generally took pains to exalt his humanity. Of the nineteenth-century revolutionists it is really an understatement to say that they exalted him as a man; for indeed they rather exalted him as a superman. That is to say, many of them represented him as a man preaching a decisively superior and ever strange morality, not only in advance of his age but practically in advance of our age. They made of his mystical counsels of perfection a sort of Socialism or Pacifism or Communism, which they themselves still see rather as something that ought to be or that will be; the extreme limit of universal love. I am not discussing here whether they are right or not; I say they have in fact found in the same figure a type of humanitarianism and the care for human happiness. Every one knows the striking and sometimes staggering utterances that do really support and illustrate this side of the teaching. Modern idealists are naturally moved by such things as the intensely poetic paradox about the lilies of the field; which for them has a joy in life and living things like that of Shelley or Whitman, combined with a return to simplicity beyond that of Tolstoy or Thoreau. Indeed I rather wonder that those, whose merely historic or humanistic view of the case would allow of such criticism without incongruity, have not made some study of the purely poetical or oratorical structure of such passages. Certainly there are few finer examples of the swift architecture of style than that single fragment about the flowers; the almost idle opening of a chance reference to a wild flower, the sudden unfolding of the small purple blossom into pavilions and palaces and the great name of the national history; and then with a turn of the hand like a gesture of scorn, the change to the grass that to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven. Then follows, as so often in the Gospels, the "how much more" which is like a celestial flight of stairs, a ladder of imaginative logic. Indeed this a fortiori, and this power of thinking on three levels, is (I may remark incidentally) a thing very

much needed in modern discussion. Many minds apparently cannot stretch to three dimensions, or to thinking that a cube can go beyond a surface as a surface goes beyond a line; for instance, that the citizen is infinitely above all ranks, and yet the soul is infinitely above the citizen. But we are only concerned at the moment with the sides of this many-sided mystery which happen to be really in sympathy with the modern mood. Judged even by our modern tests of emancipated art or ideal economics, it is admitted that Christ understood all that is rather crudely embodied in Socialism or the Simple Life. I purposely insist first on this optimistic, I might almost say this pantheistic or even this pagan aspect of the Christian Gospels. For it is only when we understand that Christ, considered merely as a prophet, can be and is a popular leader in the love of natural things, that we can feel that tremendous and tragic energy of his testimony to an ugly reality, the existence of unnatural things. Instead of taking a text as I have done, take a whole Gospel and read it steadily and honestly and straight through at a sitting, and you will certainly have one impression, whether of a myth or of a man. It is that the exorcist towers above the poet and even the prophet; that the story between Cana and Calvary is one long war with demons. He understood better than a hundred poets the beauty of the flowers of the battle-field; but he came out to battle. And if most of his words mean anything they do mean that there is at our very feet, like a chasm concealed among the flowers, an unfathomable evil.

In short, I would here only hint delicately that perhaps the mind which admittedly knew much of what we think we know about ethics and economics, knew a little more than we are beginning to know about psychology and psychic phenomena. I remember reading, not without amusement, a severe and trenchant article in the Hibbert Journal, in which Christ's admission of demonology was alone thought enough to dispose of his divinity. The one sentence of the article, which I cherish in my memory through all the changing years, ran thus: "If he was God, he knew there was no such thing as diabolical possession." It did not seem to strike the Hibbert critic that this line of criticism raises the question, not of whether Christ is God, but of whether the critic in the Hibbert Journal is God. About that mystery as about the other I am for the moment agnostic; but I should have thought that the meditations of Omniscience on the problem of evil might be allowed, even by an agnostic, to be a little difficult to discover. Of Christ in the Gospels and in modern life I will merely for the moment say this; that if he was God, as the critic put it, it seems possible that he knew the next discovery in science, as well as the last, not to mention (what is more common in rationalistic culture) the last but three. And what will be the next discovery in psychological science nobody can imagine; and we can only say that if it reveals demons and their name is Legion, we can hardly be much surprised now. But at any rate the days are over of Omniscience like that of the Hibbert critic, who knows exactly what he would know if he were God Almighty.

What is pain? What is evil? What did they mean by devils? What do we mean by madness? The rising generation, when asked by a venerable Victorian critic and catechist, "What does God know?" will hardly think it unreasonably flippant to answer, "God knows."

There was something already suggested about the steep scenery through which I went as I thought about these things; a sense of silent catastrophe and fundamental cleavage in the deep division of the cliffs and crags. They were all the more profoundly moving, because my sense of them was almost as subconscious as the subconsciousness about which I was reflecting. I had fallen again into the old habit of forgetting where I was going, and seeing things with one eye off, in a blind abstraction. I awoke from a sort of trance of absentmindedness in a landscape that might well awaken anybody. It might awaken a man sleeping; but he would think he was still in a nightmare. It might wake the dead, but they would probably think they were in hell. Halfway down the slope the hills had taken on a certain pallor which had about it something primitive, as if the colours were not yet created. There was only a kind of cold and wan blue in the level skies which contrasted with wild sky-line. Perhaps we are accustomed to the contrary condition of the clouds moving and mutable and the hills solid and serene; but anyhow there seemed something of the making of a new world about the quiet of the skies and the cold convulsion of the landscape. But if it was between chaos and creation, it was creation by God or at least by the gods, something with an aim in its anarchy. It was very different in the final stage of the descent, where my mind woke up from its meditations. One can only say that the whole landscape was like a leper. It was of a wasting white and silver and grey, with mere dots of decadent vegetation like the green spots of a plague. In shape it not only rose into horns and crests like waves or clouds, but I believe it actually alters like waves or clouds, visibly but with a loathsome slowness. The swamp is alive. And I found again a certain advantage in forgetfulness; for I saw all this incredible country before I even remembered its name, or the ancient tradition about its nature. Then even the green plague-spots failed, and everything seemed to fall away into a universal blank under the staring sun, as I came, in the great spaces of the circle of a lifeless sea, into the silence of Sodom and Gomorrah.

For these are the foundations of a fallen world, and a sea below the seas on which men sail. Seas move like clouds and fishes float like birds above the level of the sunken land. And it is here that tradition has laid the tragedy of the mighty perversion of the imagination of man; the monstrous birth and death of abominable things. I say such things in no mood of spiritual pride; such things are hideous not because they are distant but because they are near to us; in all our brains, certainly in mine, were buried things as bad as any buried under that bitter sea, and if He did not come to do battle with them, even in the darkness of

the brain of man, I know not why He came. Certainly it was not only to talk about flowers or to talk about Socialism. The more truly we can see life as a fairy-tale, the more clearly the tale resolves itself into war with the Dragon who is wasting fairyland. I will not enter on the theology behind the symbol; but I am sure it was of this that all the symbols were symbolic. I remember distinguished men among the liberal theologians, who found it more difficult to believe in one devil than in many. They admitted in the New Testament an attestation to evil spirits, but not to a general enemy of mankind. As some are said to want the drama of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark, they would have the drama of Hell without the Prince of Darkness. I say nothing of these things, save that the language of the Gospel seems to me to go much more singly to a single issue. The voice that is heard there has such authority as speaks to an army; and the highest note of it is victory rather than peace. When the apostles were first sent forth with their faces to the four corners of the earth, and turned again to acclaim their master, he did not say in that hour of triumph, "All are aspects of one harmonious whole" or "The universe evolves through progress to perfection" or "All things find their end in Nirvana" or "The dewdrop slips into the shining sea." He looked up and said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

Then I looked up and saw in the long jagged lines of road and rock and cleft something of the swiftness of such a thunderbolt. What I saw seemed not so much a scene as an act; as when abruptly Michael barred the passage of the Lord of Pride. Below me all the empire of evil was splashed and scattered upon the plain, like a wine-cup shattered into a star. Sodom lay like Satan, flat upon the floor of the world. And far away and aloft, faint with height and distance, small but still visible, stood up the spire of the Ascension like the sword of the Archangel, lifted in salute after a stroke.