

CHAPTER THE FOURTH - THE SYMPATHY OF LADY SUNDERBUND

(1)

THAT night when he cried aloud at the memory of his furtive cigarette, the bishop was staying with a rich man named Garstein Fellows. These Garstein Fellows people were steel people with a financial side to them; young Garstein Fellows had his fingers in various chemical businesses, and the real life of the firm was in various minor partners called Hartstein and Blumenhart and so forth, who had acquired a considerable amount of ungentlemanly science and energy in Germany and German Switzerland. But the Fellows element was good old Princhester stuff. There had been a Fellows firm in Princhester in 1819. They were not people the bishop liked and it was not a house the bishop liked staying at, but it had become part of his policy to visit and keep in touch with as many of the local plutocracy as he could, to give and take with them, in order to make the presence of the church a reality to them. It had been not least among the negligences and evasions of the sainted but indolent Hood that he had invariably refused overnight hospitality whenever it was possible for him to get back to his home. The morning was his working time. His books and hymns had profited at the cost of missing many a generous after-dinner subscription, and at the expense of social unity. From the outset Scrope had set himself to alter this. A certain lack of enthusiasm on Lady Ella's part had merely provoked him to greater effort on his own. His ideal of what was needed with the

people was something rather jolly and familiar, something like a very good and successful French or Irish priest, something that came easily and readily into their homes and laid a friendly hand on their shoulders. The less he liked these rich people naturally the more familiar his resolution to be successfully intimate made him. He put down the names and brief characteristics of their sons and daughters in a little note-book and consulted it before every visit so as to get his most casual enquiries right. And he invited himself to the Garstein Fellows house on this occasion by telegram.

"A special mission and some business in Wombash may I have a scrap of supper and a bed?"

Now Mrs. Garstein Fellows was a thoroughly London woman; she was one of the banking Grunenbaums, the fair tall sort, and she had a very decided tendency to smartness. She had a little party in the house, a sort of long week-end party, that made her hesitate for a minute or so before she framed a reply to the bishop's request.

It was the intention of Mrs. Garstein Fellows to succeed very conspicuously in the British world, and the British world she felt was a complicated one; it is really not one world but several, and if you would surely succeed you must keep your peace with all the systems and

be a source of satisfaction to all of them. So at least Mrs. Garstein Fellows saw it, and her method was to classify her acquaintances according to their systems, to keep them in their proper bundles, and to give every one the treatment he or she was accustomed to receive. And since all things British are now changing and passing away, it may not be uninteresting to record the classification Mrs. Garstein Fellows adopted. First she set apart as most precious and desirable, and requiring the most careful treatment, the "court dowdies"--for so it was that the dignity and quiet good taste that radiated from Buckingham Palace impressed her restless, shallow mind--the sort of people who prefer pair horse carriages to automobiles, have quiet friendships in the highest quarters, quietly do not know any one else, busy themselves with charities, dress richly rather than impressively, and have either little water-colour accomplishments or none at all, and no other relations with "art." At the skirts of this crowning British world Mrs. Garstein Fellows tugged industriously and expensively. She did not keep a carriage and pair and an old family coachman because that, she felt, would be considered pushing and presumptuous; she had the sense to stick to her common unpretending 80 h.p. Daimler; but she wore a special sort of blackish hat-bonnet for such occasions as brought her near the centre of honour, which she got from a little good shop known only to very few outside the inner ring, which hat-bonnet she was always careful to sit on for a few minutes before wearing. And it was to this first and highest and best section of her social scheme that she considered that bishops properly belonged. But some bishops, and in particular such a comparatively bright bishop as the Bishop of Princhester, she also

thought of as being just as comfortably accommodated in her second system, the "serious liberal lot," which was more fatiguing and less boring, which talked of books and things, visited the Bells, went to all first-nights when Granville Barker was the producer, and knew and valued people in the grey and earnest plains between the Cecils and the Sidney Webbs. And thirdly there were the smart intellectual lot, again not very well marked off, and on the whole practicable to bishops, of whom fewer particulars are needed because theirs is a perennial species, and then finally there was that fourth world which was paradoxically at once very brilliant and a little shady, which had its Night Club side, and seemed to set no limit to its eccentricities. It seemed at times to be aiming to shock and yet it had its standards, but here it was that the dancers and actresses and forgiven divorcees came in--and the bishops as a rule, a rule hitherto always respected, didn't. This was the ultimate world of Mrs. Garstein Fellows; she had no use for merely sporting people and the merely correct smart and the duller county families, sets that led nowhere, and it was from her fourth system of the Glittering Doubtfuls that this party which made her hesitate over the bishop's telegram, was derived.

She ran over their names as she sat considering her reply.

What was there for a bishop to object to? There was that admirable American widow, Lady Sunderbund. She was enormously rich, she was enthusiastic. She was really on probation for higher levels; it was her décolletage delayed her. If only she kept off theosophy and the Keltic

renascence and her disposition to profess wild intellectual passions, there would be no harm in her. Provided she didn't come down to dinner in anything too fantastically scanty--but a word in season was possible. No! there was no harm in Lady Sunderbund. Then there were Ridgeway Kelso and this dark excitable Catholic friend of his, Paidraig O'Gorman. Mrs. Garstein Fellows saw no harm in them. Then one had to consider Lord Gatling and Lizzie Barusetter. But nothing showed, nothing was likely to show even if there was anything. And besides, wasn't there a Church and Stage Guild?

Except for those people there seemed little reason for alarm. Mrs. Garstein Fellows did not know that Professor Hoppart, who so amusingly combined a professorship of political economy with the writing of music-hall lyrics, was a keen amateur theologian, nor that Bent, the sentimental novelist, had a similar passion. She did not know that her own eldest son, a dark, romantic-looking youngster from Eton, had also come to the theological stage of development. She did however weigh the possibilities of too liberal opinions on what are called social questions on the part of Miss Sharsper, the novelist, and decided that if that lady was watched nothing so terrible could be said even in an undertone; and as for the Mariposa, the dancer, she had nothing but Spanish and bad French, she looked all right, and it wasn't very likely she would go out of her way to startle an Anglican bishop. Simply she needn't dance. Besides which even if a man does get a glimpse of a little something--it isn't as if it was a woman.

But of course if the party mustn't annoy the bishop, the bishop must do his duty by the party. There must be the usual purple and the silver buckles.

She wired back:

"A little party but it won't put you out send your man with your change."

(2)

In making that promise Mrs. Garstein Fellows reckoned without the morbid sensibility of the bishop's disorganized nervous system and the unsuspected theological stirrings beneath the apparent worldliness of Hoppart and Bent.

The trouble began in the drawing-room after dinner. Out of deference to the bishop's abstinence the men did not remain to smoke, but came in to find the Mariposa and Lady Sunderbund smoking cigarettes, which these ladies continued to do a little defiantly. They had hoped to finish them before the bishop came up. The night was chilly, and a cheerful wood fire cracking and banging on the fireplace emphasized the ordinary heating. Mrs. Garstein Fellows, who had not expected so prompt an appearance of the men, had arranged her chairs in a semicircle for a

little womanly gossip, and before she could intervene she found her party, with the exception of Lord Gatling, who had drifted just a little too noticeably with Miss Barnsetter into a window, sitting round with a conscious air, that was perhaps just a trifle too apparent, of being "good."

And Mr. Bent plunged boldly into general conversation.

"Are you reading anything now, Mrs. Garstein Fellows?" he asked. "I'm an interested party."

She was standing at the side of the fireplace. She bit her lip and looked at the cornice and meditated with a girlish expression. "Yes," she said. "I am reading again. I didn't think I should but I am."

"For a time," said Hoppart, "I read nothing but the papers. I bought from a dozen to twenty a day."

"That is wearing off," said the bishop.

"The first thing I began to read again," said Mrs. Garstein Fellows, "--I'm not saying it for your sake, Bishop--was the Bible."

"I went to the Bible," said Bent as if he was surprised.

"I've heard that before," said Ridgeway Kelso, in that slightly

explosive manner of his. "All sorts of people who don't usually read the Bible--"

"But Mr. Kelso!" protested their hostess with raised eyebrows.

"I was thinking of Bent. But anyhow there's been a great wave of seriousness, a sudden turning to religion and religious things. I don't know if it comes your way, Bishop...."

"I've had no rows of penitents yet."

"We may be coming," said Hoppart.

He turned sideways to face the bishop. "I think we should be coming if--if it wasn't for old entangled difficulties. I don't know if you will mind my saying it to you, but...."

The bishop returned his frank glance. "I'd like to know above all things," he said. "If Mrs. Garstein Fellow will permit us. It's my business to know."

"We all want to know," said Lady Sunderbund, speaking from the low chair on the other side of the fireplace. There was a vibration in her voice and a sudden gleam of enthusiasm in her face. "Why shouldn't people talk se'iously sometimes?"

"Well, take my own case," said Hoppart. "In the last few weeks, I've been reading not only in the Bible but in the Fathers. I've read most of Athanasius, most of Eusebius, and--I'll confess it--Gibbon. I find all my old wonder come back. Why are we pinned to--to the amount of creed we are pinned to? Why for instance must you insist on the Trinity?"

"Yes," said the Eton boy explosively, and flushed darkly to find he had spoken.

"Here is a time when men ask for God," said Hoppart. "And you give them three!" cried Bent rather cheaply. "I confess I find the way encumbered by these Alexandrian elaborations," Hoppart completed.

"Need it be?" whispered Lady Sunderbund very softly.

"Well," said the bishop, and leant back in his armchair and knitted his brow at the fire. "I do not think," he said, "that men coming to God think very much of the nature of God. Nevertheless," he spoke slowly and patted the arm of his chair, "nevertheless the church insists that certain vitally important truths have to be conveyed, certain mortal errors are best guarded against, by these symbols."

"You admit they are symbols."

"So the church has always called them."

Hoppart showed by a little movement and grimace that he thought the bishop quibbled.

"In every sense of the word," the bishop hastened to explain, "the creeds are symbolical. It is clear they seek to express ineffable things by at least an extended use of familiar words. I suppose we are all agreed nowadays that when we speak of the Father and of the Son we mean something only in a very remote and exalted way parallel with--with biological fatherhood and sonship."

Lady Sunderbund nodded eagerly. "Yes," she said, "oh, yes," and held up an expectant face for more.

"Our utmost words, our most elaborately phrased creeds, can at the best be no better than the shadow of something unseen thrown upon the screen of experience."

He raised his rather weary eyes to Hoppart as if he would know what else needed explanation. He was gratified by Lady Sunderbund's approval, but he affected not to see or hear it. But it was Bent who spoke.

He spoke in the most casual way. He made the thing seem the most incidental of observations.

"What puzzles me," he said, "is why the early Christians identified the Spermaticos Logos of the Stoics with the second and not with the third

person of the Trinity."

To which the bishop, rising artlessly to the bait, replied, "Ah! that indeed is the unfortunate aspect of the whole affair."

And then the Irish Catholic came down on him....

(3)

How the bishop awakened in the night after this dispute has been told already in the opening section of this story. To that night of discomfort we now return after this comprehensive digression. He awoke from nightmares of eyes and triangles to bottomless remorse and perplexity. For the first time he fully measured the vast distances he had travelled from the beliefs and attitudes of his early training, since his coming to Princhester. Travelled--or rather slipped and fallen down the long slopes of doubt.

That clear inky dimness that comes before dawn found his white face at the window looking out upon the great terrace and the park.

(4)

After a bout of mental distress and sleeplessness the bishop would

sometimes wake in the morning not so much exhausted as in a state of thin mental and bodily activity. This was more particularly so if the night had produced anything in the nature of a purpose. So it was on this occasion. The day was clear before him; at least it could be cleared by sending three telegrams; his man could go back to Princhester and so leave him perfectly free to go to Brighton-Pomfrey in London and secure that friendly dispensation to smoke again which seemed the only alternative to a serious mental breakdown. He would take his bag, stay the night in London, smoke, sleep well, and return the next morning. Dunk, his valet-butler, found him already bathed and ready for a cup of tea and a Bradshaw at half-past seven. He went on dressing although the good train for London did not start until 10.45.

Mrs. Garstein Fellows was by nature and principle a late riser; the breakfast-room showed small promise yet of the repast, though the table was set and bright with silver and fresh flowers, and a wood fire popped and spurted to greet and encourage the March sunshine. But standing in the doorway that led to the promise and daffodils and crocuses of Mrs. Garstein Fellows' garden stood Lady Sunderbund, almost with an effect of waiting, and she greeted the bishop very cheerfully, doubted the immediate appearance of any one else, and led him in the most natural manner into the new but already very pleasant shrubbery.

In some indefinable special way the bishop had been aware of Lady Sunderbund's presence since first he had met her, but it was only now that he could observe her with any particularity. She was tall like his

own Lady Ella but not calm and quiet; she was electric, her eyes, her smiles, her complexion had as it were an established brightness that exceeded the common lustre of things. This morning she was dressed in grey that was nevertheless not grey but had an effect of colour, and there was a thread of black along the lines of her body and a gleam of gold. She carried her head back with less dignity than pride; there was a little frozen movement in her dark hair as if it flamed up out of her head. There were silver ornaments in her hair. She spoke with a pretty little weakness of the r's that had probably been acquired abroad. And she lost no time in telling him, she was eager to tell him, that she had been waylaying him. "I did so want to talk to you some maw," she said. "I was shy last night and they we' all so noisy and eaga'. I p'ayed that you might come down early.

"It's an oppo'tunity I've longed for," she said.

She did her very pretty best to convey what it was had been troubling her. 'iligion bad been worrying her for years. Life was--oh--just ornaments and games and so wea'isome, so wea'isome, unless it was 'iligious. And she couldn't get it 'iligious.

The bishop nodded his head gravely.

"You unde'stand?" she pressed.

"I understand too well--the attempt to get hold--and keep hold."

"I knew you would!" she cried.

She went on with an impulsive rapidity. Orthodoxy had always 'ipelled her,--always. She had felt herself confronted by the most insurmountable difficulties, and yet whenever she had gone away from Christianity--she had gone away from Christianity, to the Theosophists and the Christian Scientists--she had felt she was only "st'aying fu'tha." And then suddenly when he was speaking last night, she had felt he knew. It was so wonderful to hear the "k'eed was only a symbol."

"Symbol is the proper name for it," said the bishop. "It wasn't for centuries it was called the Creed."

Yes, and so what it really meant was something quite different from what it did mean.

The bishop felt that this sentence also was only a symbol, and nodded encouragingly--but gravely, warily.

And there she was, and the point was there were thousands and thousands and thousands of educated people like her who were dying to get through these old-fashioned symbols to the true faith that lay behind them. That they knew lay behind them. She didn't know if he had read "The Light under the Altar"?

"He's vicar of Wombash--in my diocese," said the bishop with restraint.

"It's wonde'ful stuff," said Lady Sunderbund. "It's spi'tually cold, but it's intellectually wonde'ful. But we want that with spi'tuality. We want it so badly. If some one--"

She became daring. She bit her under lip and flashed her spirit at him.

"If you--" she said and paused.

"Could think aloud," said the bishop.

"Yes," she said, nodding rapidly, and became breathless to hear.

It would certainly be an astonishing end to the Chasters difficulty if the bishop went over to the heretic, the bishop reflected.

"My dear lady, I won't disguise," he began; "in fact I don't see how I could, that for some years I have been growing more and more discontented with some of our most fundamental formulae. But it's been very largely a shapeless discontent--hitherto. I don't think I've said a word to a single soul. No, not a word. You are the first person to whom I've ever made the admission that even my feelings are at times unorthodox."

She lit up marvellously at his words. "Go on," she whispered.

But she did not need to tell him to go on. Now that he had once broached the casket of his reserves he was only too glad of a listener. He talked as if they were intimate and loving friends, and so it seemed to both of them they were. It was a wonderful release from a long and painful solitude.

To certain types it is never quite clear what has happened to them until they tell it. So that now the bishop, punctuated very prettily by Lady Sunderbund, began to measure for the first time the extent of his departure from the old innate convictions of Otteringham Rectory. He said that it was strange to find doubt coming so late in life, but perhaps it was only in recent years that his faith had been put to any really severe tests. It had been sheltered and unchallenged.

"This fearful wa'," Lady Sunderbund interjected.

But Princhester had been a critical and trying change, and "The Light under the Altar" case had ploughed him deeply. It was curious that his doubts always seemed to have a double strand; there was a moral objection based on the church's practical futility and an intellectual strand subordinated to this which traced that futility largely to its unconvincing formulae.

"And yet you know," said the bishop, "I find I can't go with Chasters. He beats at the church; he treats her as though she were wrong. I feel

like a son, growing up, who finds his mother isn't quite so clear-spoken nor quite so energetic as she seemed to be once. She's right, I feel sure. I've never doubted her fundamental goodness."

"Yes," said Lady Sunderbund, very eagerly, "yes."

"And yet there's this futility.... You know, my dear lady, I don't know what to do. One feels on the one hand, that here is a cloud of witnesses, great men, sainted men, subtle men, figures permanently historical, before whom one can do nothing but bow down in the utmost humility, here is a great instrument and organization--what would the world be without the witness of the church?--and on the other hand here are our masses out of hand and hostile, our industrial leaders equally hostile; there is a failure to grip, and that failure to grip is so clearly traceable to the fact that our ideas are not modern ideas, that when we come to profess our faith we find nothing in our mouths but antiquated Alexandrian subtleties and phrases and ideas that may have been quite alive, quite significant, quite adequate in Asia Minor or Egypt, among men essentially orientals, fifteen hundred years ago, but which now--"

He expressed just what they came to now by a gesture.

She echoed his gesture.

"Probably I'm not alone among my brethren," he went on, and then: "But

what is one to do?"

With her hands she acted her sense of his difficulty.

"One may be precipitate," he said. "There's a kind of loyalty and discipline that requires one to keep the ranks until one's course of action is perfectly clear. One owes so much to so many. One has to consider how one may affect--oh! people one has never seen."

He was lugging things now into speech that so far had been scarcely above the threshold of his conscious thought. He went on to discuss the entire position of the disbelieving cleric. He discovered a fine point.

"If there was something else, an alternative, another religion, another Church, to which one could go, the whole case would be different. But to go from the church to nothingness isn't to go from falsehood to truth. It's to go from truth, rather badly expressed, rather conservatively hidden by its protections, truth in an antiquated costume, to the blackest lie--in the world."

She took that point very brightly.

"One must hold fast to 'iligion," she said, and looked earnestly at him and gripped fiercely, pink thumbs out, with her beautiful hands held up.

That was it, exactly. He too was gripping. But while on the outside the

Midianites of denial were prowling for these clinging souls, within the camp they were assailed by a meticulous orthodoxy that was only too eager to cast them forth. The bishop dwelt for a time upon the curious fierceness orthodoxy would sometimes display. Nowadays atheism can be civil, can be generous; it is orthodoxy that trails a scurrilous fringe.

"Who was that young man with a strong Irish accent--who contradicted me so suddenly?" he asked.

"The dark young man?"

"The noisy young man."

"That was Mist' Pat'ick O'Go'man. He is a Kelt and all that. Spells Pat'ick with eva so many letters. You know. They say he spends ouas and ouas lea'ning E'se. He wo'ies about it. They all t'y to lea'n E'se, and it wo'ies them and makes them hate England moa and moa."

"He is orthodox. He--is what I call orthodox to the ridiculous extent."

"idiculous."

A deep-toned gong proclaimed breakfast over a square mile or so of territory, and Lady Sunderbund turned about mechanically towards the house. But they continued their discussion.

She started indeed a new topic. "Shall we eva, do 'ou think, have a new 'iligion--t'ua and betta?"

That was a revolutionary idea to him.

He was still fending it off from him when a gap in the shrubs brought them within sight of the house and of Mrs. Garstein Fellows on the portico waving a handkerchief and crying "Break-fast."

"I wish we could talk for houas," said Lady Sunderbund.

"I've been glad of this talk," said the bishop. "Very glad."

She lifted her soft abundant skirts and trotted briskly across the still dewy lawn towards the house door. The bishop followed gravely and slowly with his hands behind his back and an unusually peaceful expression upon his face. He was thinking how rare and precious a thing it is to find intelligent friendship in women. More particularly when they were dazzlingly charming and pretty. It was strange, but this was really his first woman friend. If, as he hoped, she became his friend.

Lady Sunderbund entered the breakfast room in a gusty abundance like Botticelli's Primavera, and kissed Mrs. Garstein Fellows good-morning. She exhaled a glowing happiness. "He is wondrous," she panted. "He is most wondrous."

"Mr. Hidgeway Kelso?"

"No, the dee' bishop! I love him. Are those the little sausages I like?

May I take th'ee? I've been up houas."

The dee' bishop appeared in the sunlit doorway.

(5)

The bishop felt more contentment in the London train than he had felt for many weeks. He had taken two decisive and relieving steps. One was that he had stated his case to another human being, and that a very charming and sympathetic human being, he was no longer a prey to a current of secret and concealed thoughts running counter to all the appearances of his outward life; and the other was that he was now within an hour or so of Brighton-Pomfrey and a cigarette. He would lunch on the train, get to London about two, take a taxi at once to the wise old doctor, catch him over his coffee in a charitable and understanding mood, and perhaps be smoking a cigarette publicly and honourably and altogether satisfyingly before three.

So far as Brighton-Pomfrey's door this program was fulfilled without a hitch. The day was fine and he had his taxi opened, and noted with a patriotic satisfaction as he rattled through the streets, the glare of the recruiting posters on every vacant piece of wall and the increasing

number of men in khaki in the streets. But at the door he had a disappointment. Dr. Brighton-Pomfrey was away at the front--of all places; he had gone for some weeks; would the bishop like to see Dr. Dale?

The bishop hesitated. He had never set eyes on this Dr. Dale.

Indeed, he had never heard of Dr. Dale.

Seeing his old friend Brighton-Pomfrey and being gently and tactfully told to do exactly what he was longing to do was one thing; facing some strange doctor and going slowly and elaborately through the whole story of his illness, his vow and his breakdown, and perhaps having his reaction time tested and all sorts of stripping and soundings done, was quite another. He was within an ace of turning away.

If he had turned away his whole subsequent life would have been different. It was the very slightest thing in the world tipped the beam. It was the thought that, after all, whatever inconvenience and unpleasantness there might be in this interview, there was at the end of it a very reasonable prospect of a restored and legitimate cigarette.