

CHAPTER THE FIFTH - THE FIRST VISION

(1)

Dr. DALE exceeded the bishop's worst apprehensions. He was a lean, lank, dark young man with long black hair and irregular, rather prolonged features; his chin was right over to the left; he looked constantly at the bishop's face with a distinctly sceptical grey eye; he could not have looked harder if he had been a photographer or a portrait painter. And his voice was harsh, and the bishop was particularly sensitive to voices.

He began by understanding far too much of the bishop's illness, and he insisted on various familiarities with the bishop's heart and tongue and eye and knee that ruffled the bishop's soul.

"Brighton-Pomfrey talked of neurasthenia?" he asked. "That was his diagnosis," said the bishop. "Neurasthenia," said the young man as though he despised the word.

The bishop went on buttoning up his coat.

"You don't of course want to break your vows about drinking and smoking," said the young man with the very faintest suggestion of derision in his voice.

"Not if it can possibly be avoided," the bishop asserted. "Without a loss, that is, of practical efficiency," he added. "For I have much to do."

"I think that it is possible to keep your vow," said the young man, and the bishop could have sworn at him. "I think we can manage that all right."

(2)

The bishop sat at the table resting his arm upon it and awaiting the next development of this unsatisfactory interview. He was on the verge of asking as unpleasantly as possible when Brighton-Pomfrey would return.

The young man stood upon Brighton-Pomfrey's hearth-rug and was evidently contemplating dissertations.

"Of course," he said, as though he discussed a problem with himself, "you must have some sort of comfort. You must get out of this state, one way or another."

The bishop nodded assent. He had faint hopes of this young man's ideas of comfort.

Dr. Dale reflected. Then he went off away from the question of comfort altogether. "You see, the trouble in such a case as this is peculiarly difficult to trace to its sources because it comes just upon the border-line of bodily and mental things. You may take a drug or alter your regimen and it disturbs your thoughts, you may take an idea and it disturbs your health. It is easy enough to say, as some do, that all ideas have a physical substratum; it is almost as easy to say with the Christian Scientist that all bodily states are amenable to our ideas. The truth doesn't, I think, follow the border between those opposite opinions very exactly on either side. I can't, for instance, tell you to go home and pray against these uncertainties and despairs, because it is just these uncertainties and despairs that rob you of the power of efficient prayer."

He did not seem to expect anything from the bishop.

"I don't see that because a case brings one suddenly right up against the frontier of metaphysics, why a doctor should necessarily pull up short at that, why one shouldn't go on into either metaphysics or psychology if such an extension is necessary for the understanding of the case. At any rate if you'll permit it in this consultation...."

"Go on," said the bishop, holding on to that promise of comfort. "The best thing is to thrash out the case in your own way. And then come to what is practical."

"What is really the matter here--the matter with you that is--is a disorganization of your tests of reality. It's one of a group of states hitherto confused. Neurasthenia, that comprehensive phrase--well, it is one of the neurasthenias. Here, I confess, I begin to talk of work I am doing, work still to be published, finished first and then published.... But I go off from the idea that every living being lives in a state not differing essentially from a state of hallucination concerning the things about it. Truth, essential truth, is hidden. Always. Of course there must be a measure of truth in our working illusions, a working measure of truth, or the creature would smash itself up and end itself, but beyond that discretion of the fire and the pitfall lies a wide margin of error about which we may be deceived for years. So long as it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter. I don't know if I make myself clear."

"I follow you," said the bishop a little wearily, "I follow you. Phenomena and noumena and so on and so on. Kant and so forth. Pragmatism. Yes."

With a sigh.

"And all that," completed Dr. Dale in a voice that suggested mockery. "But you see we grow into a way of life, we settle down among habits and conventions, we say 'This is all right' and 'That is always so.' We get more and more settled into our life as a whole and more and more confident. Unless something happens to shake us out of our sphere of

illusion. That may be some violent contradictory fact, some accident, or it may be some subtle change in one's health and nerves that makes us feel doubtful. Or a change of habits. Or, as I believe, some subtle quickening of the critical faculty. Then suddenly comes the feeling as though we were lost in a strange world, as though we had never really seen the world before."

He paused.

The bishop was reluctantly interested. "That does describe something--of the mental side," he admitted. "I never believe in concealing my own thoughts from an intelligent patient," said Dr. Dale, with a quiet offensiveness. "That sort of thing belongs to the dark ages of the 'pothecary's art. I will tell you exactly my guesses and suppositions about you. At the base of it all is a slight and subtle kidney trouble, due I suggest to your going to Princhester and drinking the local water--"

"But it's excellent water. They boast of it."

"By all the established tests. As a matter of fact many of our best drinking waters have all sorts of unspecified qualities. Burton water, for example, is radioactive by Beetham's standards up to the ninth degree. But that is by the way. My theory about your case is that this produced a change in your blood, that quickened your sensibilities and your critical faculties just at a time when a good many bothers--I don't

of course know what they were, but I can, so to speak, see the marks all over you--came into your life."

The bishop nodded.

"You were uprooted. You moved from house to house, and failed to get that curled up safe feeling one has in a real home in any of them."

"If you saw the fireplaces and the general decoration of the new palace!" admitted the bishop. "I had practically no control."

"That confirms me," said Dr. Dale. "Insomnia followed, and increased the feeling of physical strangeness by increasing the bodily disturbance. I suspect an intellectual disturbance."

He paused.

"There was," said the bishop.

"You were no longer at home anywhere. You were no longer at home in your diocese, in your palace, in your body, in your convictions. And then came the war. Quite apart from everything else the mind of the whole world is suffering profoundly from the shock of this war--much more than is generally admitted. One thing you did that you probably did not observe yourself doing, you drank rather more at your meals, you smoked a lot more. That was your natural and proper response to the shock."

"Ah!" said the bishop, and brightened up.

"It was remarked by Tolstoy, I think, that few intellectual men would really tolerate the world as it is if it were not for smoking and drinking. Even novelists have their moments of lucidity. Certainly these things soothe the restlessness in men's minds, deaden their sceptical sensibilities. And just at the time when you were getting most dislodged--you gave them up."

"And the sooner I go back to them the better," said the bishop brightly.

"I quite see that."

"I wouldn't say that," said Dr. Dale....

(3)

"That," said Dr. Dale, "is just where my treatment of this case differs from the treatment of "--he spoke the name reluctantly as if he disliked the mere sound of it--"Dr. Brighton-Pomfrey."

"Hitherto, of course," said the bishop, "I've been in his hands."

"He," said Dr. Dale, "would certainly set about trying to restore your old sphere of illusion, your old familiar sensations and ideas and

confidences. He would in fact turn you back. He would restore all your habits. He would order you a rest. He would send you off to some holiday resort, fresh in fact but familiar in character, the High lands, North Italy, or Switzerland for example. He would forbid you newspapers and order you to botanize and prescribe tranquillizing reading; Trollope's novels, the Life of Gladstone, the works of Mr. A. C. Benson, memoirs and so on. You'd go somewhere where there was a good Anglican chaplain, and you'd take some of the services yourself. And we'd wash out the effects of the Princhester water with Contrexeville, and afterwards put you on Salutaris or Perrier. I don't know whether I shouldn't have inclined to some such treatment before the war began. Only--"

He paused.

"You think--?"

Dr. Dale's face betrayed a sudden sombre passion. "It won't do now," he said in a voice of quiet intensity. "It won't do now."

He remained darkly silent for so long that at last the bishop spoke.

"Then what," he asked, "do you suggest?"

"Suppose we don't try to go back," said Dr. Dale. "Suppose we go on and go through."

"Where?"

"To reality.

"I know it's doubtful, I know it's dangerous," he went on, "but I am convinced that now we can no longer keep men's minds and souls in these feathered nests, these spheres of illusion. Behind these veils there is either God or the Darkness.... Why should we not go on?"

The bishop was profoundly perplexed. He heard himself speaking. "It would be unworthy of my cloth," he was saying.

Dr. Dale completed the sentence: "to go back."

"Let me explain a little more," he said, "what I mean by 'going on.' I think that this loosening of the ties of association that bind a man to his everyday life and his everyday self is in nine cases out of ten a loosening of the ties that bind him to everyday sanity. One common form of this detachment is the form you have in those cases of people who are found wandering unaware of their names, unaware of their places of residence, lost altogether from themselves. They have not only lost their sense of identity with themselves, but all the circumstances of their lives have faded out of their minds like an idle story in a book that has been read and put aside. I have looked into hundreds of such cases. I don't think that loss of identity is a necessary thing; it's just another side of the general weakening of the grip upon reality, a kind of anaemia of the brain so that interest fades and fails. There

is no reason why you should forget a story because you do not believe it--if your brain is strong enough to hold it. But if your brain is tired and weak, then so soon as you lose faith in your records, your mind is glad to let them go. When you see these lost identity people that is always your first impression, a tired brain that has let go."

The bishop felt extremely like letting go.

"But how does this apply to my case?"

"I come to that," said Dr. Dale, holding up a long large hand. "What if we treat this case of yours in a new way? What if we give you not narcotics but stimulants and tonics? What if we so touch the blood that we increase your sense of physical detachment while at the same time feeding up your senses to a new and more vivid apprehension of things about you?" He looked at his patient's hesitation and added: "You'd lose all that craving feeling, that you fancy at present is just the need of a smoke. The world might grow a trifle--transparent, but you'd keep real. Instead of drugging oneself back to the old contentment--"

"You'd drug me on to the new," said the bishop.

"But just one word more!" said Dr. Dale. "Hear why I would do this! It was easy and successful to rest and drug people back to their old states of mind when the world wasn't changing, wasn't spinning round in the wildest tornado of change that it has ever been in. But now--Where can

I send you for a rest? Where can I send you to get you out of sight and hearing of the Catastrophe? Of course old Brighton-Pomfrey would go on sending people away for rest and a nice little soothing change if the Day of Judgment was coming in the sky and the earth was opening and the sea was giving up its dead. He'd send 'em to the seaside. Such things as that wouldn't shake his faith in the Channel crossing. My idea is that it's not only right for you to go through with this, but that it's the only thing to do. If you go right on and right through with these doubts and intimations--"

He paused.

"You may die like a madman," he said, "but you won't die like a tame rabbit."

(4)

The bishop sat reflecting. What fascinated and attracted him was the ending of all the cravings and uneasinesses and restlessness that had distressed his life for over four years; what deterred him was the personality of this gaunt young man with his long grey face, his excited manner, his shock of black hair. He wanted that tonic--with grave misgivings. "If you think this tonic is the wiser course," he began. "I'd give it you if you were my father," said Dr. Dale. "I've got everything for it," he added.

"You mean you can make it up--without a prescription."

"I can't give you a prescription. The essence of it--It's a distillate I have been trying. It isn't in the Pharmacopeia."

Again the bishop had a twinge of misgiving.

But in the end he succumbed. He didn't want to take the stuff, but also he did not want to go without his promised comfort.

Presently Dale had given him a little phial--and was holding up to the window a small medicine glass into which he was pouring very carefully twenty drops of the precious fluid. "Take it only," he said, "when you feel you must."

"It is the most golden of liquids," said the bishop, peering at it.

"When you want more I will make you more. Later of course, it will be possible to write a prescription. Now add the water--so.

"It becomes opalescent. How beautifully the light plays in it!

"Take it."

The bishop dismissed his last discretion and drank.

"Well?" said Dr. Dale.

"I am still here," said the bishop, smiling, and feeling a joyous tingling throughout his body. "It stirs me."

(5)

The bishop stood on the pavement outside Dr. Brighton-Pomfrey's house. The massive door had closed behind him.

It had been an act of courage, of rashness if you will, to take this draught. He was acutely introspective, ready for anything, for the most disagreeable or the most bizarre sensations. He was asking himself, Were his feet steady? Was his head swimming?

His doubts glowed into assurance.

Suddenly he perceived that he was sure of God.

Not perhaps of the God of Nicaea, but what did these poor little quibblings and definitions of the theologians matter? He had been worrying about these definitions and quibblings for four long restless years. Now they were just failures to express--what surely every one knew--and no one would ever express exactly. Because here was God, and

the kingdom of God was manifestly at hand. The visible world hung before him as a mist might hang before the rising sun. He stood proudly and masterfully facing a universe that had heretofore bullied him into doubt and apologetics, a universe that had hitherto been opaque and was now betrayed translucent.

That was the first effect of the new tonic, complete reassurance, complete courage. He turned to walk towards Mount Street and Berkeley Square as a sultan might turn to walk among his slaves.

But the tonic was only beginning.

Before he had gone a dozen steps he was aware that he seemed more solid and larger than the people about him. They had all a curious miniature effect, as though he was looking at them through the wrong end of an opera glass. The houses on either side of the street and the traffic shared this quality in an equal measure. It was as if he was looking at the world through apertures in a miniature cinematograph peep-show. This surprised him and a little dashed his first glow of satisfaction.

He passed a man in khaki who, he fancied, looked at him with an odd expression. He observed the next passers-by narrowly and suspiciously, a couple of smartish young men, a lady with a poodle, a grocer's boy with a basket, but none seemed to observe anything remarkable about him. Then he caught the eye of a taxi-driver and became doubtful again.

He had a feeling that this tonic was still coming in like a tide. It seemed to be filling him and distending him, in spite of the fact that he was already full. After four years of flaccidity it was pleasant to be distended again, but already he felt more filled than he had ever been before. At present nothing was showing, but all his body seemed braced and uplifted. He must be careful not to become inflated in his bearing.

And yet it was difficult not to betray a little inflation. He was so filled with assurance that things were right with him and that God was there with him. After all it was not mere fancy; he was looking through the peepholes of his eyes at the world of illusion and appearance. The world that was so intent upon its immediate business, so regardless of eternal things, that had so dominated him but a little while ago, was after all a thing more mortal than himself.

Another man in khaki passed him.

For the first time he saw the war as something measurable, as something with a beginning and an end, as something less than the immortal spirit in man. He had been too much oppressed by it. He perceived all these people in the street were too much oppressed by it. He wanted to tell them as much, tell them that all was well with them, bid them be of good cheer. He wanted to bless them. He found his arm floating up towards gestures of benediction. Self-control became increasingly difficult.

All the way down Berkeley Square the bishop was in full-bodied struggle with himself. He was trying to control himself, trying to keep within bounds. He felt that he was stepping too high, that his feet were not properly reaching the ground, that he was walking upon cushions of air.

The feeling of largeness increased, and the feeling of transparency in things about him. He avoided collision with passers-by--excessively. And he felt his attention was being drawn more and more to something that was going on beyond the veil of visible things. He was in Piccadilly now, but at the same time Piccadilly was very small and he was walking in the presence of God.

He had a feeling that God was there though he could not see him. And at the same time he was in this transitory world, with people going to and fro, men with umbrellas tucked dangerously under their arms, men in a hurry, policemen, young women rattling Red Cross collecting boxes, smart people, loafers. They distracted one from God.

He set out to cross the road just opposite Prince's, and jumping needlessly to give way to an omnibus had the narrowest escape from a taxicab.

He paused on the pavement edge to recover himself. The shock of his near escape had, as people say, pulled him together.

What was he to do? Manifestly this opalescent draught was overpowering

him. He ought never to have taken it. He ought to have listened to the voice of his misgivings. It was clear that he was not in a fit state to walk about the streets. He was--what had been Dr. Dale's term?--losing his sense of reality. What was he to do? He was alarmed but not dismayed. His thoughts were as full-bodied as the rest of his being, they came throbbing and bumping into his mind. What was he to do?

Brighton-Pomfrey ought never to have left his practice in the hands of this wild-eyed experimenter.

Strange that after a lifetime of discretion and men's respect one should be standing on the Piccadilly pavement--intoxicated!

It came into his head that he was not so very far from the Athenaeum, and surely there if anywhere a bishop may recover his sense of being--ordinary.

And behind everything, behind the tall buildings and the swarming people there was still the sense of a wide illuminated space, of a light of wonder and a Presence. But he must not give way to that again! He had already given way altogether too much. He repeated to himself in a whisper, "I am in Piccadilly."

If he kept tight hold upon himself he felt he might get to the Athenaeum before--before anything more happened.

He murmured directions to himself. "Keep along the pavement. Turn to the right at the Circus. Now down the hill. Easily down the hill. Don't float! Junior Army and Navy Stores. And the bookseller."

And presently he had a doubt of his name and began to repeat it.

"Edward Princhester. Edward Scrope, Lord Bishop of Princhester."

And all the while voices within him were asserting, "You are in the kingdom of Heaven. You are in the presence of God. Place and time are a texture of illusion and dreamland. Even now, you are with God."

(6)

The porter of the Athenaeum saw him come in, looking well--flushed indeed--but queer in expression; his blue eyes were wide open and unusually vague and blue.

He wandered across towards the dining-room, hesitated, went to look at the news, seemed in doubt whether he would not go into the smoking-room, and then went very slowly upstairs, past the golden angel up to the great drawing-room.

In the drawing-room he found only Sir James Mounce, the man who knew the novels of Sir Walter Scott by heart and had the minutest and most

unsparing knowledge of every detail in the life of that supreme giant of English literature. He had even, it was said, acquired a Scotch burr in the enthusiasm of his hero-worship. It was usually sufficient only to turn an ear towards him for him to talk for an hour or so. He was now studying Bradshaw.

The bishop snatched at him desperately. He felt that if he went away there would be no hold left upon the ordinary things of life.

"Sir James," he said, "I was wondering the other day when was the exact date of the earliest public ascription of Waverley to Scott."

"Eh!" said Sir James, "but I'd like to talk that over with ye. Indeed I would. It would be depending very largely on what ye called 'public.' But--"

He explained something about an engagement in Birmingham that night, a train to catch. Reluctantly but relentlessly he abandoned the proffered ear. But he promised that the next time they met in the club he would go into the matter "exhaustevely."

The door closed upon him. The bishop was alone. He was flooded with the light of the world that is beyond this world. The things about him became very small and indistinct.

He would take himself into a quiet corner in the library of this doll's

house, and sit his little body down in one of the miniature armchairs. Then if he was going to faint or if the trancelike feeling was to become altogether a trance--well, a bishop asleep in an armchair in the library of the Athenaeum is nothing to startle any one.

He thought of that convenient hidden room, the North Library, in which is the bust of Croker. There often one can be quite alone.... It was empty, and he went across to the window that looks out upon Pall Mall and sat down in the little uncomfortable easy chair by the desk with its back to the Benvenuto Cellini.

And as he sat down, something snapped--like the snapping of a lute string--in his brain.

(7)

With a sigh of deep relief the bishop realized that this world had vanished.

He was in a golden light.

He perceived it as a place, but it was a place without buildings or trees or any very definite features. There was a cloudy suggestion of distant hills, and beneath his feet were little gem-like flowers, and a feeling of divinity and infinite friendliness pervaded his being. His

impressions grew more definite. His feet seemed to be bare. He was no longer a bishop nor clad as a bishop. That had gone with the rest of the world. He was seated on a slab of starry rock.

This he knew quite clearly was the place of God.

He was unable to disentangle thoughts from words. He seemed to be speaking in his mind.

"I have been very foolish and confused and perplexed. I have been like a creature caught among thorns."

"You served the purpose of God among those thorns." It seemed to him at first that the answer also was among his thoughts.

"I seemed so silly and so little. My wits were clay."

"Clay full of desires."

"Such desires!"

"Blind desires. That will presently come to the light."

"Shall we come to the light?"

"But here it is, and you see it!"

(8)

It became clearer in the mind of the bishop that a figure sat beside him, a figure of great strength and beauty, with a smiling face and kindly eyes. A strange thought and a strange courage came to the bishop.

"Tell me," he whispered, "are you God?"

"I am the Angel of God."

The bishop thought over that for some moments.

"I want," he said, "to know about God.

"I want," he said, with a deepening passion of the soul, "to know about God. Slowly through four long years I have been awakening to the need of God. Body and soul I am sick for the want of God and the knowledge of God. I did not know what was the matter with me, why my life had become so disordered and confused that my very appetites and habits are all astray. But I am perishing for God as a waterless man upon a raft perishes for drink, and there is nothing but madness if I touch the seas about me. Not only in my thoughts but in my under thoughts and in my nerves and bones and arteries I have need of God. You see I grew up in the delusion that I knew God, I did not know that I was unprovisioned

and unprovided against the tests and strains and hardships of life. I thought that I was secure and safe. I was told that we men--who were apes not a quarter of a million years ago, who still have hair upon our arms and ape's teeth in our jaws--had come to the full and perfect knowledge of God. It was all put into a creed. Not a word of it was to be altered, not a sentence was to be doubted any more. They made me a teacher of this creed. They seemed to explain it to me. And when I came to look into it, when my need came and I turned to my creed, it was old and shrivelled up, it was the patched-up speculations of vanished Greeks and Egyptians, it was a mummy of ancient disputes, old and dry, that fell to dust as I unwrapped it. And I was dressed up in the dress of old dead times and put before an altar of forgotten sacrifices, and I went through ceremonies as old as the first seedtime; and suddenly I knew clearly that God was not there, God was not in my Creed, not in my cathedral, not in my ceremonies, nowhere in my life. And at the same time I knew, I knew as I had never known before, that certainly there was God."

He paused. "Tell me," said the friend at his side; "tell me."

"It was as if a child running beside its mother, looked up and saw that he had never seen her face before, that she was not his mother, and that the words he had seemed to understand were--now that he listened--words in an unknown tongue.

"You see, I am but a common sort of man, dear God; I have neither lived

nor thought in any way greatly, I have gone from one day to the next day without looking very much farther than the end of the day, I have gone on as life has befallen; if no great trouble had come into my life, so I should have lived to the end of my days. But life which began for me easily and safely has become constantly more difficult and strange. I could have held my services and given my benedictions, I could have believed I believed in what I thought I believed.... But now I am lost and astray--crying out for God...."

(9)

"Let us talk a little about your troubles," said the Angel. "Let us talk about God and this creed that worries you and this church of yours."

"I feel as though I had been struggling to this talk through all the years--since my doubts began."

"The story your Creed is trying to tell is much the same story that all religions try to tell. In your heart there is God, beyond the stars there is God. Is it the same God?"

"I don't know," said the bishop.

"Does any one know?"

"I thought I knew."

"Your creed is full of Levantine phrases and images, full of the patched contradictions of the human intelligence utterly puzzled. It is about those two Gods, the God beyond the stars and the God in your heart. It says that they are the same God, but different. It says that they have existed together for all time, and that one is the Son of the other. It has added a third Person--but we won't go into that."

The bishop was reminded suddenly of the dispute at Mrs. Garstein Fellows'. "We won't go into that," he agreed. "No!"

"Other religions have told the story in a different way. The Cathars and Gnostics did. They said that the God in your heart is a rebel against the God beyond the stars, that the Christ in your heart is like Prometheus--or Hiawatha--or any other of the sacrificial gods, a rebel. He arises out of man. He rebels against that high God of the stars and crystals and poisons and monsters and of the dead emptiness of space.... The Manicheans and the Persians made out our God to be fighting eternally against that Being of silence and darkness beyond the stars. The Buddhists made the Lord Buddha the leader of men out of the futility and confusion of material existence to the great peace beyond. But it is all one story really, the story of the two essential Beings, always the same story and the same perplexity cropping up under different names, the story of one being who stirs us, calls to us, and leads us, and of another who is above and outside and in and beneath all things,

inaccessible and incomprehensible. All these religions are trying to tell something they do not clearly know--of a relationship between these two, that eludes them, that eludes the human mind, as water escapes from the hand. It is unity and opposition they have to declare at the same time; it is agreement and propitiation, it is infinity and effort."

"And the truth?" said the bishop in an eager whisper. "You can tell me the truth."

The Angel's answer was a gross familiarity. He thrust his hand through the bishop's hair and ruffled it affectionately, and rested for a moment holding the bishop's cranium in his great palm.

"But can this hold it?" he said....

"Not with this little box of brains," said the Angel. "You could as soon make a meal of the stars and pack them into your belly. You haven't the things to do it with inside this."

He gave the bishop's head a little shake and relinquished it.

He began to argue as an elder brother might.

"Isn't it enough for you to know something of the God that comes down to the human scale, who has been born on your planet and arisen out of Man, who is Man and God, your leader? He's more than enough to fill your mind

and use up every faculty of your being. He is courage, he is adventure, he is the King, he fights for you and with you against death...."

"And he is not infinite? He is not the Creator?" asked the bishop.

"So far as you are concerned, no," said the Angel.

"So far as I am concerned?"

"What have you to do with creation?"

And at that question it seemed that a great hand swept carelessly across the blackness of the farther sky, and smeared it with stars and suns and shining nebulas as a brush might smear dry paint across a canvas.

The bishop stared in front of him. Then slowly he bowed his head, and covered his face with his hands.

"And I have been in orders," he murmured; "I have been teaching people the only orthodox and perfect truth about these things for seven and twenty years."

And suddenly he was back in his gaiters and his apron and his shovel hat, a little black figure exceedingly small in a very great space....

(10)

It was a very great space indeed because it was all space, and the roof was the ebony of limitless space from which the stars swung flaming, held by invisible ties, and the soil beneath his feet was a dust of atoms and the little beginnings of life. And long before the bishop bared his face again, he knew that he was to see his God.

He looked up slowly, fearing to be dazzled.

But he was not dazzled. He knew that he saw only the likeness and bodying forth of a being inconceivable, of One who is greater than the earth and stars and yet no greater than a man. He saw a being for ever young, for ever beginning, for ever triumphant. The quality and texture of this being was a warm and living light like the effulgence at sunrise; He was hope and courage like a sunlit morning in spring. He was adventure for ever, and His courage and adventure flowed into and submerged and possessed the being of the man who beheld him. And this presence of God stood over the bishop, and seemed to speak to him in a wordless speech.

He bade him surrender himself. He bade him come out upon the Adventure of Life, the great Adventure of the earth that will make the atoms our bond-slaves and subdue the stars, that will build up the white fires of ecstasy to submerge pain for ever, that will overcome death. In Him the spirit of creation had become incarnate, had joined itself to men,

summoning men to Him, having need of them, having need of them, having need of their service, even as great kings and generals and leaders need and use men. For a moment, for an endless age, the bishop bowed himself in the being and glory of God, felt the glow of the divine courage and confidence in his marrow, felt himself one with God.

For a timeless interval....

Never had the bishop had so intense a sense of reality. It seemed that never before had he known anything real. He knew certainly that God was his King and master, and that his unworthy service could be acceptable to God. His mind embraced that idea with an absolute conviction that was also absolute happiness.

(11)

The thoughts and sensations of the bishop seemed to have lifted for a time clean away from the condition of time, and then through a vast orbit to be returning to that limitation.

He was aware presently that things were changing, that the light was losing its diviner rays, that in some indescribable manner the glory and the assurance diminished.

The onset of the new phase was by imperceptible degrees. From a glowing,

serene, and static realization of God, everything relapsed towards change and activity. He was in time again and things were happening, it was as if the quicksands of time poured by him, and it was as if God was passing away from him. He fell swiftly down from the heaven of self-forgetfulness to a grotesque, pathetic and earthly self-consciousness.

He became acutely aware of his episcopal livery. And that God was passing away from him.

It was as if God was passing, and as if the bishop was unable to rise up and follow him.

Then it was as if God had passed, and as if the bishop was in headlong pursuit of him and in a great terror lest he should be left behind. And he was surely being left behind.

He discovered that in some unaccountable way his gaiters were loose; most of their buttons seemed to have flown off, and his episcopal sash had slipped down about his feet. He was sorely impeded. He kept snatching at these things as he ran, in clumsy attempts to get them off.

At last he had to stop altogether and kneel down and fumble with the last obstinate button.

"Oh God!" he cried, "God my captain! Wait for me! Be patient with me!"

And as he did so God turned back and reached out his hand. It was indeed as if he stood and smiled. He stood and smiled as a kind man might do; he dazzled and blinded his worshipper, and yet it was manifest that he had a hand a man might clasp.

Unspeakable love and joy irradiated the whole being of the bishop as he seized God's hand and clasped it desperately with both his own. It was as if his nerves and arteries and all his substance were inundated with golden light....

It was again as if he merged with God and became God....