CHAPTER THE SIXTH - EXEGETICAL

(1)

WITHOUT any sense of transition the bishop found himself seated in the little North Library of the Athenaeum club and staring at the bust of John Wilson Croker. He was sitting motionless and musing deeply. He was questioning with a cool and steady mind whether he had seen a vision or whether he had had a dream. If it had been a dream it had been an extraordinarily vivid and convincing dream. He still seemed to be in the presence of God, and it perplexed him not at all that he should also be in the presence of Croker. The feeling of mental rottenness and insecurity that had weakened his thought through the period of his illness, had gone. He was secure again within himself.

It did not seem to matter fundamentally whether it was an experience of things without or of things within him that had happened to him. It was clear to him that much that he had seen was at most expressive, that some was altogether symbolical. For example, there was that sudden absurd realization of his sash and gaiters, and his perception of them as encumbrances in his pursuit of God. But the setting and essential of the whole thing remained in his mind neither expressive nor symbolical, but as real and immediately perceived, and that was the presence and kingship of God. God was still with him and about him and over him and sustaining him. He was back again in his world and his ordinary life,

in his clothing and his body and his club, but God had been made and remained altogether plain and manifest.

Whether an actual vision had made his conviction, or whether the conviction of his own subconscious mind had made the dream, seemed but a small matter beside the conviction that this was indeed the God he had desired and the God who must rule his life.

"The stuff? The stuff had little to do with it. It just cleared my head.... I have seen. I have seen really. I know."

(2)

For a long time as it seemed the bishop remained wrapped in clouds of luminous meditation. Dream or vision it did not matter; the essential thing was that he had made up his mind about God, he had found God. Moreover, he perceived that his theological perplexities had gone. God was higher and simpler and nearer than any theological God, than the God of the Three Creeds. Those creeds lay about in his mind now like garments flung aside, no trace nor suspicion of divinity sustained them any longer. And now--Now he would go out into the world.

The little Library of the Athenaeum has no visible door. He went to the book-masked entrance in the corner, and felt among the bookshelves for the hidden latch. Then he paused, held by a curious thought. What

exactly was the intention of that symbolical struggle with his sash and gaiters, and why had they impeded his pursuit of God?

To what particularly significant action was he going out?

The Three Creeds were like garments flung aside. But he was still wearing the uniform of a priest in the service of those three creeds.

After a long interval he walked into the big reading-room. He ordered some tea and dry toast and butter, and sat down very thoughtfully in a corner. He was still sitting and thinking at half-past eight.

It may seem strange to the reader that this bishop who had been doubting and criticizing the church and his system of beliefs for four long years had never before faced the possibility of a severance from his ecclesiastical dignity. But he had grown up in the church, his life had been so entirely clerical and Anglican, that the widest separation he had hitherto been able to imagine from this past had left him still a bishop, heretical perhaps, innovating in the broadening of beliefs and the liberalizing of practice, defensive even as Chasters was defensive, but still with the palace and his dignities, differing in opinion rather than in any tangible reality from his previous self. For a bishop, disbelief in the Church is a far profounder scepticism than mere disbelief in God. God is unseen, and in daily things unfelt; but the Church is with the predestined bishop always. His concept of the extremest possible departure from orthodoxy had been something that

Chasters had phrased as "a restatement of Christ." It was a new idea, an idea that had come with an immense effect of severance and novelty, that God could be other than the God of the Creed, could present himself to the imagination as a figure totally unlike the white, gentle, and compromising Redeemer of an Anglican's thought. That the bishop should treat the whole teaching of the church and the church itself as wrong, was an idea so new that it fell upon him now like a thunderbolt out of a cloudless sky. But here, clear in his mind now, was a feeling, amounting to conviction, that it was the purpose and gesture of the true God that he should come right out of the church and all his professions.

And in the first glow of his vision he felt this gesture imperative. He must step right out.... Whither? how? And when?

To begin with it seemed to him that an immediate renunciation was demanded. But it was a momentous step. He wanted to think. And to go on thinking. Rather than to act precipitately. Although the imperative seemed absolute, some delaying and arresting instinct insisted that he must "think" If he went back to Princhester, the everyday duties of his position would confront him at once with an effect of a definite challenge. He decided to take one of the Reform club bedrooms for two or three days, and wire to Princhester that he was "unavoidably delayed in town," without further explanations. Then perhaps this inhibitory force would give way.

It did not, however, give way. His mind sat down for two days in a blank

amazement at the course before him, and at the end of that time this reasonless and formless institution was as strong as ever. During that time, except for some incidental exchanges at his clubs, he talked to no one. At first he did not want to talk to any one. He remained mentally and practically active, with a still intensely vivid sense that God, the true God, stood watching him and waiting for him to follow. And to follow meant slipping right out of all the world he had ever known. To thrust his foot right over the edge of a cliff would scarcely have demanded more from the bishop's store of resolution. He stood on the very verge. The chief secretion of his mind was a shadowy experiment or so in explanation of why he did not follow.

(3)

Insensibly the extreme vividness of his sense of God's nearness decreased. But he still retained a persuasion of the reality of an immediate listener waiting, and of the need of satisfying him.

On the third day he found his mind still further changed. He no longer felt that God was in Pall Mall or St. James's Park, whither he resorted to walk and muse. He felt now that God was somewhere about the horizon....

He felt too no longer that he thought straight into the mind of God. He thought now of what he would presently say to God. He turned over and

rehearsed phrases. With that came a desire to try them first on some other hearer. And from that to the attentive head of Lady Sunderbund, prettily bent towards him, was no great leap. She would understand, if any one could understand, the great change that had happened in his mind.

He found her address in the telephone book. She could be quite alone to him if he wouldn't mind "just me." It was, he said, exactly what he desired.

But when he got to her great airy flat overlooking Hyde Park, with its Omega Workshop furniture and its arresting decoration, he was not so sure whether this encounter was so exactly the thing he had desired as he had supposed.

The world had become opaque and real again as he walked up St. James's Street and past the Ritz. He had a feeling that he was taking an afternoon off from God. The adventurous modernity of the room in which he waited intensified that. One whole white wall was devoted to a small picture by Wyndham Lewis. It was like a picture of an earthquake in a city of aniline pink and grey and keen green cardboard, and he wished it had never existed.

He turned his back upon it and stared out of the window over the trees and greenery. The balcony was decorated with white and pink geraniums in pots painted black and gold, and the railings of the balcony were black

and gold with crimson shape like squares wildly out of drawing.

Lady Sunderbund kept him waiting perhaps five minutes. Then she came sailing in to him.

She was dressed in a way and moved across the room in a way that was more reminiscent of Botticelli's Spring than ever--only with a kind of superadded stiffish polonaise of lace--and he did not want to be reminded of Botticelli's Spring or wonder why she had taken to stiff lace polonaises. He did not enquire whether he had met Lady Sunderbund to better advantage at Mrs. Garstein Fellows' or whether his memory had overrated her or whether anything had happened to his standard of taste, but his feeling now was decidedly one of disappointment, and all the talk and self-examination he had promised himself seemed to wither and hide away within him. For a time he talked of her view, and then admired her room and its arrangement, which he thought really were quite unbecomingly flippant and undignified for a room. Then came the black tea-things on their orange tray, and he searched in his mind for small talk to sustain their interview.

But he had already betrayed his disposition to "go on with our talk" in his telephone enquiry, and Lady Sunderbund, perceiving his shyness, began to make openings for him, at first just little hinting openings, and then larger and larger ones, until at last one got him.

"I'm so glad," she said, "to see you again. I'm so glad to go on with

our talk. I've thought about it and thought about it."

She beamed at him happily.

"I've thought ova ev'y wo'd you said," she went on, when she had finished conveying her pretty bliss to him. "I've been so helped by thinking the k'eeds are symbols. And all you said. And I've felt time after time, you couldn't stay whe' you we'. That what you we' saying to me, would have to be said 'ight out."

That brought him in. He could not very well evade that opening without incivility. After all he had asked to see her, and it was a foolish thing to let little decorative accidentals put him off his friendly purpose. A woman may have flower-pots painted gold with black checkers and still be deeply understanding. He determined to tell her what was in his mind. But he found something barred him from telling that he had had an actual vision of God. It was as if that had been a private and confidential meeting. It wasn't, he felt, for him either to boast a privilege or tell others of things that God had not chosen to show them.

"Since I saw you," he said, "I have thought a great deal--of the subject of our conversation."

"I have been t'ying to think," she said in a confirmatory tone, as if she had co-operated.

"My faith in God grows," he said.

She glowed. Her lips fell apart. She flamed attention.

"But it grows less like the faith of the church, less and less. I was born and trained in Anglicanism, and it is with a sort of astonishment I find myself passing now out of every sort of Catholicism--seeing it from the outside...."

"Just as one might see Buddhism," she supplied.

"And yet feeling nearer, infinitely nearer to God," he said.

"Yes," she panted; "yes."

"I thought if one went out, one went out just to doubt and darkness."

"And you don't?"

"No."

"You have gone at one step to a new 'iligion!"

He stared for a moment at the phrase.

"To religion," he said.

"It is so wondyful," she said, with her hands straight down upon the couch upon which she was sitting, and leaning forward at him, so as to seem almost as much out of drawing as a modern picture.

"It seems," he reflected; "--as if it were a natural thing."

She came back to earth very slowly. She turned to the tea-things with hushed and solemn movements as though she administered a ceremony of peculiar significance. The bishop too rose slowly out of the profundity of his confession. "No sugar please," he said, arresting the lump in mid air.

It was only when they were embarked upon cups of tea and had a little refreshed themselves, that she carried the talk further.

"Does it mean that you must leave the church?" she asked.

"It seemed so at first," he said. "But now I do not know. I do not know what I ought to do."

She awaited his next thought.

"It is as if one had lived in a room all one's life and thought it the world--and then suddenly walked out through a door and discovered the sea and the mountains and stars. So it was with me and the Anglican

Church. It seems so extraordinary now--and it would have seemed the most natural thing a year ago--to think that I ever believed that the Anglican Compromise was the final truth of religion, that nothing more until the end of the world could ever be known that Cosmo Gordon Lang did not know, that there could be no conception of God and his quality that Randall Davidson did not possess."

He paused.

"I did," he said.

"I did," she responded with round blue eyes of wonder.

"At the utmost the Church of England is a tabernacle on a road."

"A 'oad that goes whe'?" she rhetorized.

"Exactly," said the bishop, and put down his cup.

"You see, my dear Lady Sunderbund," he resumed, "I am exactly in the same position of that man at the door."

She quoted aptly and softly: "The wo'ld was all befo' them whe' to choose."

He was struck by the aptness of the words.

"I feel I have to come right out into the bare truth. What exactly then do I become? Do I lose my priestly function because I discover how great God is? But what am I to do?"

He opened a new layer of his thoughts to her.

"There is a saying," he remarked, "once a priest, always a priest. I cannot imagine myself as other than what I am."

"But o'thodox no maw," she said.

"Orthodox--self-satisfied, no longer. A priest who seeks, an exploring priest."

"In a Chu'ch of P'og'ess and B'othe'hood," she carried him on.

"At any rate, in a progressive and learning church."

She flashed and glowed assent.

"I have been haunted," he said, "by those words spoken at Athens. 'Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.' That comes to me with an effect of--guidance is an old-fashioned word--shall I say suggestion? To stand by the altar bearing strange names and ancient symbols, speaking plainly to all mankind of the one true God--!"

(4)

He did not get much beyond this point at the time, though he remained talking with Lady Sunderbund for nearly an hour longer. The rest was merely a beating out of what had already been said. But insensibly she renewed her original charm, and as he became accustomed to her he forgot a certain artificiality in her manner and the extreme modernity of her costume and furniture. She was a wonderful listener; nobody else could have helped him to expression in quite the same way, and when he left her he felt that now he was capable of stating his case in a coherent and acceptable form to almost any intelligent hearer. He had a point of view now that was no longer embarrassed by the immediate golden presence of God; he was no longer dazzled nor ecstatic; his problem had diminished to the scale of any other great human problem, to the scale of political problems and problems of integrity and moral principle, problems about which there is no such urgency as there is about a house on fire, for example.

And now the desire for expression was running strong. He wanted to state his situation; if he did not state he would have to act; and as he walked back to the club dinner he turned over possible interlocutors in his thoughts. Lord Rampound sat with him at dinner, and he came near broaching the subject with him. But Lord Rampound that evening had that morbid running of bluish legal anecdotes which is so common an

affliction with lawyers, and theology sinks and dies in that turbid stream.

But as he lay in bed that night he thought of his old friend and helper Bishop Likeman, and it was borne in upon him that he should consult him. And this he did next day.

Since the days when the bishop had been only plain Mr. Scrope, the youngest and most helpful of Likeman's historical band of curates, their friendship had continued. Likeman had been a second father to him; in particular his tact and helpfulness had shone during those days of doubt and anxiety when dear old Queen Victoria, God's representative on earth, had obstinately refused, at the eleventh hour, to make him a bishop. She had those pigheaded fits, and she was touchy about the bishops. She had liked Scrope on account of the excellence of his German pronunciation, but she had been irritated by newspaper paragraphs--nobody could ever find out who wrote them and nobody could ever find out who showed them to the old lady--anticipating his elevation. She had gone very red in the face and stiffened in the Guelphic manner whenever Scrope was mentioned, and so a rich harvest of spiritual life had remained untilled for some months. Likeman had brought her round.

It seemed arguable that Scrope owed some explanation to Likeman before he came to any open breach with the Establishment.

He found Likeman perceptibly older and more shrivelled on account of the

war, but still as sweet and lucid and subtle as ever. His voice sounded more than ever like a kind old woman's.

He sat buried in his cushions--for "nowadays I must save every scrap of vitality"--and for a time contented himself with drawing out his visitor's story.

Of course, one does not talk to Likeman of visions or intuitions. "I am disturbed, I find myself getting out of touch;" that was the bishop's tone.

Occasionally Likeman nodded slowly, as a physician might do at the recital of familiar symptoms. "Yes," he said, "I have been through most of this.... A little different in the inessentials.... How clear you are!"

"You leave our stupid old Trinities--as I left them long ago," said old Likeman, with his lean hand feeling and clawing at the arm of his chair.

"But--!"

The old man raised his hand and dropped it. "You go away from it all--straight as a line. I did. You take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth. And there you find--"

He held up a lean finger, and inclined it to tick off each point.

"Fate--which is God the Father, the Power of the Heart, which is God the Son, and that Light which comes in upon us from the inaccessible Godhead, which is God the Holy Spirit."

"But I know of no God the Holy Spirit, and Fate is not God at all. I saw in my vision one sole God, uncrucified, militant--conquering and to conquer."

Old Likeman stared. "You saw!"

The Bishop of Princhester had not meant to go so far. But he stuck to his words. "As if I saw with my eyes. A God of light and courage."

"You have had visions, Scrope?"

"I seemed to see."

"No, you have just been dreaming dreams."

"But why should one not see?"

"See! The things of the spirit. These symbols as realities! These metaphors as men walking!"

"You talk like an agnostic."

"We are all agnostics. Our creeds are expressions of ourselves and our attitude and relationship to the unknown. The triune God is just the form of our need and disposition. I have always assumed that you took that for granted. Who has ever really seen or heard or felt God? God is neither of the senses nor of the mind; he is of the soul. You are realistic, you are materialistic...."

His voice expostulated.

The Bishop of Princhester reflected. The vision of God was far off among his memories now, and difficult to recall. But he said at last: "I believe there is a God and that he is as real a person as you or I. And he is not the theological God we set out before the world."

"Personification," said Likeman. "In the eighteenth century they used to draw beautiful female figures as Science and Mathematics. Young men have loved Science--and Freedom--as Pygmalion loved Galatea. Have it so if you will. Have a visible person for your Deity. But let me keep up my--spirituality."

"Your spirituality seems as thin as a mist. Do you really believe--anything?"

"Everything!" said Likeman emphatically, sitting up with a transitory vigour. "Everything we two have ever professed together. I believe that

the creeds of my church do express all that can possibly be expressed in the relationship of--That"--he made a comprehensive gesture with a twist of his hand upon its wrist--"to the human soul. I believe that they express it as well as the human mind can express it. Where they seem to be contradictory or absurd, it is merely that the mystery is paradoxical. I believe that the story of the Fall and of the Redemption is a complete symbol, that to add to it or to subtract from it or to alter it is to diminish its truth; if it seems incredible at this point or that, then simply I admit my own mental defect. And I believe in our Church, Scrope, as the embodied truth of religion, the divine instrument in human affairs. I believe in the security of its tradition, in the complete and entire soundness of its teaching, in its essential authority and divinity."

He paused, and put his head a little on one side and smiled sweetly. "And now can you say I do not believe?"

"But the historical Christ, the man Jesus?"

"A life may be a metaphor. Why not? Yes, I believe it all. All."

The Bishop of Princhester was staggered by this complete acceptance. "I see you believe all you profess," he said, and remained for a moment or so rallying his forces.

"Your vision--if it was a vision--I put it to you, was just some single

aspect of divinity," said Likeman. "We make a mistake in supposing that Heresy has no truth in it. Most heresies are only a disproportionate apprehension of some essential truth. Most heretics are men who have suddenly caught a glimpse through the veil of some particular verity.... They are dazzled by that aspect. All the rest has vanished.... They are obsessed. You are obsessed clearly by this discovery of the militancy of God. God the Son--as Hero. And you want to go out to the simple worship of that one aspect. You want to go out to a Dissenter's tent in the wilderness, instead of staying in the Great Temple of the Ages."

Was that true?

For some moments it sounded true.

The Bishop of Princhester sat frowning and looking at that. Very far away was the vision now of that golden Captain who bade him come. Then at a thought the bishop smiled.

"The Great Temple of the Ages," he repeated. "But do you remember the trouble we had when the little old Queen was so pigheaded?"

"Oh! I remember, I remember," said Likeman, smiling with unshaken confidence. "Why not?"

"For sixty years all we bishops in what you call the Great Temple of the Ages, were appointed and bullied and kept in our places by that

pink irascible bit of dignity. I remember how at the time I didn't dare betray my boiling indignation even to you--I scarcely dared admit it to myself...."

He paused.

"It doesn't matter at all," and old Likeman waved it aside.

"Not at all," he confirmed, waving again.

"I spoke of the whole church of Christ on earth," he went on. "These things, these Victorias and Edwards and so on, are temporary accidents--just as the severance of an Anglican from a Roman communion and a Greek orthodox communion are temporary accidents. You will remark that wise men in all ages have been able to surmount the difficulty of these things. Why? Because they knew that in spite of all these splits and irregularities and defacements--like the cracks and crannies and lichens on a cathedral wall--the building held good, that it was shelter and security. There is no other shelter and security. And so I come to your problem. Suppose it is true that you have this incidental vision of the militant aspect of God, and he isn't, as you see him now that is,--he isn't like the Trinity, he isn't like the Creed, he doesn't seem to be related to the Church, then comes the question, are you going out for that? And whither do you go if you do go out? The Church remains. We alter doctrines not by changing the words but by shifting the accent. We can under-accentuate below the threshold of consciousness."

"But can we?"

"We do. Where's Hell now? Eighty years ago it warmed the whole Church. It was--as some atheist or other put it the other day--the central heating of the soul. But never mind that point now. Consider the essential question, the question of breaking with the church. Ask yourself, whither would you go? To become an oddity! A Dissenter. A Negative. Self emasculated. The spirit that denies. You would just go out. You would just cease to serve Religion. That would be all. You wouldn't do anything. The Church would go on; everything else would go on. Only you would be lost in the outer wilderness.

"But then--"

Old Likeman leant forward and pointed a bony finger. "Stay in the Church and modify it. Bring this new light of yours to the altar."

There was a little pause.

"No man," the bishop thought aloud, "putteth new wine into old bottles."

Old Likeman began to speak and had a fit of coughing. "Some of these texts--whuff, whuff--like a conjuror's hat--whuff--make 'em--fit anything."

A man-servant appeared and handed a silver box of lozenges into which the old bishop dipped with a trembling hand.

"Tricks of that sort," he said, "won't do, Scrope--among professionals.

"And besides," he was inspired; "true religion is old wine--as old as the soul.

"You are a bishop in the Church of Christ on Earth," he summed it up. "And you want to become a detached and wandering Ancient Mariner from your shipwreck of faith with something to explain--that nobody wants to hear. You are going out I suppose you have means?"

The old man awaited the answer to his abrupt enquiry with a handful of lozenges.

"No," said the Bishop of Princhester, "practically--I haven't."

"My dear boy!" it was as if they were once more rector and curate. "My dear brother! do you know what the value of an ex-bishop is in the ordinary labour market?"

"I have never thought of that."

"Evidently. You have a wife and children?"

"Five daughters."

"And your wife married you--I remember, she married you soon after you got that living in St. John's Wood. I suppose she took it for granted that you were fixed in an ecclesiastical career. That was implicit in the transaction."

"I haven't looked very much at that side of the matter yet," said the Bishop of Princhester.

"It shouldn't be a decisive factor," said Bishop Likeman, "not decisive. But it will weigh. It should weigh...."

The old man opened out fresh aspects of the case. His argument was for delay, for deliberation. He went on to a wider set of considerations. A man who has held the position of a bishop for some years is, he held, no longer a free man in matters of opinion. He has become an official part of a great edifice which supports the faith of multitudes of simple and dependant believers. He has no right to indulge recklessly in intellectual and moral integrities. He may understand, but how is the flock to understand? He may get his own soul clear, but what will happen to them? He will just break away their supports, astonish them, puzzle them, distress them, deprive them of confidence, convince them of nothing.

"Intellectual egotism may be as grave a sin," said Bishop Likeman, "as

physical selfishness.

"Assuming even that you are absolutely right," said Bishop Likeman, "aren't you still rather in the position of a man who insists upon Swedish exercises and a strengthening dietary on a raft?"

"I think you have made out a case for delay," said his hearer.

"Three months."

The Bishop of Princhester conceded three months.

"Including every sort of service. Because, after all, even supposing it is damnable to repeat prayers and creeds you do not believe in, and administer sacraments you think superstition, nobody can be damned but yourself. On the other hand if you express doubts that are not yet perfectly digested--you experiment with the souls of others...."

(5)

The bishop found much to ponder in his old friend's counsels. They were discursive and many-fronted, and whenever he seemed to be penetrating or defeating the particular considerations under examination the others in the background had a way of appearing invincible. He had a strong persuasion that Likeman was wrong--and unanswerable. And the true God

now was no more than the memory of a very vividly realized idea. It was clear to the bishop that he was no longer a churchman or in the generally accepted sense of the word a Christian, and that he was bound to come out of the church. But all sense of urgency had gone. It was a matter demanding deliberation and very great consideration for others.

He took no more of Dale's stuff because he felt bodily sound and slept well. And he was now a little shy of this potent fluid. He went down to Princhester the next day, for his compromise of an interval of three months made it seem possible to face his episcopal routine again. It was only when he was back in his own palace that the full weight of his domestic responsibilities in the discussion of the course he had to take, became apparent.

Lady Ella met him with affection and solicitude.

"I was tired and mentally fagged," he said. "A day or so in London had an effect of change."

She agreed that he looked much better, and remained for a moment or so scrutinizing him with the faint anxiety of one resolved to be completely helpful.

He regarded her with a renewed sense of her grace and dignity and kindliness. She was wearing a grey dress of soft silky material, touched with blue and covered with what seemed to him very rich and beautiful

lace; her hair flowed back very graciously from her broad brow, and about her wrist and neck were delicate lines of gold. She seemed tremendously at home and right just where she was, in that big hospitable room, cultured but Anglican, without pretensions or novelties, with a glow of bound books, with the grand piano that Miriam, his third daughter, was beginning to play so well, with the tea equipage of shining silver and fine porcelain.

He sat down contentedly in the low armchair beside her.

It wasn't a setting that one would rashly destroy....

And that evening at dinner this sense of his home as a complex of finely adjusted things not to be rashly disturbed was still more in the mind of the bishop. At dinner he had all his domesticities about him. It was the family time, from eight until ten, at which latter hour he would usually go back from the drawing-room to his study. He surveyed the table. Eleanor was at home for a few days, looking a little thin and bright but very keen and happy. She had taken a first in the first part of the Moral Science Tripos, and she was working hard now for part two. Clementina was to go back to Newnham with her next September. She aspired to history. Miriam's bent was musical. She and Phoebe and Daphne and Clementina were under the care of skilful Mademoiselle Lafarge, most tactful of Protestant French-women, Protestant and yet not too Protestant, one of those rare French Protestants in whom a touch of Bergson and the Pasteur Monod

"scarce suspected, animates the whole."

And also they had lessons, so high are our modern standards of education, from Mr. Blent, a brilliant young mathematician in orders, who sat now next to Lady Ella. Mr. Whippham, the chaplain, was at the bishop's right hand, ready for any chance of making arrangements to clear off the small arrears of duty the little holiday in London had accumulated. The bishop surveyed all these bright young people between himself and the calm beauty of his wife. He spoke first to one and then another upon the things that interested them. It rejoiced his heart to be able to give them education and opportunity, it pleased him to see them in clothes that he knew were none the less expensive because of their complete simplicity. Miriam and Mr. Blent wrangled pleasantly about Debussy, and old Dunk waited as though in orders of some rare and special sort that qualified him for this service.

All these people, the bishop reflected, counted upon him that this would go on....

Eleanor was answering some question of her mother's. They were so oddly alike and so curiously different, and both in their several ways so fine. Eleanor was dark like his own mother. Perhaps she did a little lack Lady Ella's fine reserves; she could express more, she could feel more acutely, she might easily be very unhappy or very happy....

All these people counted on him. It was indeed acutely true, as Likeman had said, that any sudden breach with his position would be a breach of faith--so far as they were concerned.

And just then his eye fell upon the epergne, a very old and beautiful piece of silver, that graced the dinner-table. It had been given him, together with an episcopal ring, by his curates and choristers at the Church of the Holy Innocents, when he became bishop of Pinner. When they gave it him, had any one of them dreamt that some day he might be moved to strike an ungracious blow at the mother church that had reared them all?

It was his custom to join the family in the drawing-room after dinner. To-night he was a little delayed by Whippham, with some trivialities about next month's confirmations in Pringle and Princhester. When he came in he found Miriam playing, and playing very beautifully one of those later sonatas of Beethoven, he could never remember whether it was Of. 109 or Of. 111, but he knew that he liked it very much; it was solemn and sombre with phases of indescribable sweetness--while Clementina, Daphne and Mademoiselle Lafarge went on with their war knitting and Phoebe and Mr. Blent bent their brows over chess. Eleanor was reading the evening paper. Lady Ella sat on a high chair by the coffee things, and he stood in the doorway surveying the peaceful scene for a moment or so, before he went across the room and sat down on the couch close to her.

"You look tired," she whispered softly.

"Worries."

"That Chasters case?"

"Things developing out of that. I must tell you later." It would be, he felt, a good way of breaking the matter to her.

"Is the Chasters case coming on again, Daddy?" asked Eleanor.

He nodded.

"It's a pity," she said.

"What?

"That he can't be left alone."

"It's Sir Reginald Phipps. The Church would be much more tolerant if it wasn't for the House of Laymen. But they--they feel they must do something."

He seized the opportunity of the music ceasing to get away from the subject. "Miriam dear," he asked, raising his voice; "is that 109 or 111? I can never tell."

"That is always 111, Daddy," said Miriam. "It's the other one is 109." And then evidently feeling that she had been pert: "Would you like me to play you 109, Daddy?"

"I should love it, my dear." And he leant back and prepared to listen in such a thorough way that Eleanor would have no chance of discussing the Chasters' heresies. But this was interrupted by the consummation of the coffee, and Mr. Blent, breaking a long silence with "Mate in three, if I'm not mistaken," leapt to his feet to be of service. Eleanor, with the rough seriousness of youth, would not leave the Chasters case alone.

"But need you take action against Mr. Chasters?" she asked at once.

"It's a very complicated subject, my dear," he said.

"His arguments?"

"The practical considerations."

"But what are practical considerations in such a case?"

"That's a post-graduate subject, Norah," her father said with a smile and a sigh.

"But," began Eleanor, gathering fresh forces.

"Daddy is tired," Lady Ella intervened, patting him on the head.

"Oh, terribly!--of that," he said, and so escaped Eleanor for the evening.

But he knew that before very long he would have to tell his wife of the changes that hung over their lives; it would be shabby to let the avalanche fall without giving the longest possible warning; and before they parted that night he took her hands in his and said: "There is much I have to tell you, dear. Things change, the whole world changes. The church must not live in a dream....

"No," she whispered. "I hope you will sleep to-night," and held up her grave sweet face to be kissed.

(6)

But he did not sleep perfectly that night.

He did not sleep indeed very badly, but he lay for some time thinking, thinking not onward but as if he pressed his mind against very strong barriers that had closed again. His vision of God which had filled the heavens, had become now gem-like, a minute, hard, clear-cut conviction in his mind that he had to disentangle himself from the enormous

complications of symbolism and statement and organization and misunderstanding in the church and achieve again a simple and living worship of a simple and living God. Likeman had puzzled and silenced him, only upon reflection to convince him that amidst such intricacies of explanation the spirit cannot live. Creeds may be symbolical, but symbols must not prevaricate. A church that can symbolize everything and anything means nothing.

It followed from this that he ought to leave the church. But there came the other side of this perplexing situation. His feelings as he lay in his bed were exactly like those one has in a dream when one wishes to run or leap or shout and one can achieve no movement, no sound. He could not conceive how he could possibly leave the church.

His wife became as it were the representative of all that held him helpless. She and he had never kept secret from one another any plan of action, any motive, that affected the other. It was clear to him that any movement towards the disavowal of doctrinal Christianity and the renunciation of his see must be first discussed with her. He must tell her before he told the world.

And he could not imagine his telling her except as an incredibly shattering act.

So he left things from day to day, and went about his episcopal routines. He preached and delivered addresses in such phrases as he knew

people expected, and wondered profoundly why it was that it should be impossible for him to discuss theological points with Lady Ella. And one afternoon he went for a walk with Eleanor along the banks of the Prin, and found himself, in response to certain openings of hers, talking to her in almost exactly the same terms as Likeman had used to him.

Then suddenly the problem of this theological eclaircissement was complicated in an unexpected fashion.

He had just been taking his Every Second Thursday Talk with Diocesan Men Helpers. He had been trying to be plain and simple upon the needless narrowness of enthusiastic laymen. He was still in the Bishop Andrews cap and purple cassock he affected on these occasions; the Men Helpers loved purple; and he was disentangling himself from two or three resolute bores--for our loyal laymen can be at times quite superlative bores--when Miriam came to him.

"Mummy says, 'Come to the drawing-room if you can.' There is a Lady Sunderbund who seems particularly to want to see you."

He hesitated for a moment, and then decided that this was a conversation he ought to control.

He found Lady Sunderbund looking very tall and radiantly beautiful in a sheathlike dress of bright crimson trimmed with snow-white fur and a white fur toque. She held out a long white-gloved hand to him and

cried in a tone of comradeship and profound understanding: "I've come, Bishop!"

"You've come to see me?" he said without any sincerity in his polite pleasure.

"I've come to P'inchesta to stay!" she cried with a bright triumphant rising note.

She evidently considered Lady Ella a mere conversational stop-gap, to be dropped now that the real business could be commenced. She turned her pretty profile to that lady, and obliged the bishop with a compact summary of all that had preceded his arrival. "I have been telling Lady Ella," she said, "I've taken a house, fu'nitua and all! Hea. In P'inchesta! I've made up my mind to sit unda you--as they say in Clapham. I've come 'ight down he' fo' good. I've taken a little house--oh! a sweet little house that will be all over 'oses next month. I'm living f'om 'oom to 'oom and having the othas done up. It's in that little quiet st'eet behind you' ga'den wall. And he' I am!"

"Is it the old doctor's house?" asked Lady Ella.

"Was it an old docta?" cried Lady Sunderbund. "How delightful! And now I shall be a patient!"

She concentrated upon the bishop.

"Oh, I've been thinking all the time of all the things you told me. Ova and ova. It's all so wondyful and so--so like a G'ate Daw opening. New light. As if it was all just beginning."

She clasped her hands.

The bishop felt that there were a great number of points to this situation, and that it was extremely difficult to grasp them all at once. But one that seemed of supreme importance to his whirling intelligence was that Lady Ella should not know that he had gone to relieve his soul by talking to Lady Sunderbund in London. It had never occurred to him at the time that there was any shadow of disloyalty to Lady Ella in his going to Lady Sunderbund, but now he realized that this was a thing that would annoy Lady Ella extremely. The conversation had in the first place to be kept away from that. And in the second place it had to be kept away from the abrupt exploitation of the new theological developments.

He felt that something of the general tension would be relieved if they could all three be got to sit down.

"I've been talking for just upon two hours," he said to Lady Ella. "It's good to see the water boiling for tea."

He put a chair for Lady Sunderbund to the right of Lady Ella, got her

into it by infusing an ecclesiastical insistence into his manner, and then went and sat upon the music-stool on his wife's left, so as to establish a screen of tea-things and cakes and so forth against her more intimate enthusiasm. Meanwhile he began to see his way clearer and to develop his line.

"Well, Lady Sunderbund," he said, "I can assure you that I think you will be no small addition to the church life of Princhester. But I warn you this is a hard-working and exacting diocese. We shall take your money, all we can get of it, we shall take your time, we shall work you hard."

"Wo'k me hard!" cried Lady Sunderbund with passion.

"We will, we will," said the bishop in a tone that ignored her passionate note.

"I am sure Lady Sunderbund will be a great help to us," said Lady Ella. "We want brightening. There's a dinginess...."

Lady Sunderbund beamed an acknowledgment. "I shall exact a 'eturn," she said. "I don't mind wo'king, but I shall wo'k like the poo' students in the Middle Ages did, to get my teaching. I've got my own soul to save as well as help saving othas. Since oua last talk--"

She found the bishop handing her bread and butter. For a time the bishop

fought a delaying action with the tea-things, while he sought eagerly and vainly in his mind for some good practical topic in which he could entangle and suppress Lady Sunderbund's enthusiasms. From this she broke away by turning suddenly to Lady Ella.

"Youa husband's views," she said, "we'e a 'eal 'evelation to me. It was like not being blind--all at once."

Lady Ella was always pleased to hear her husband praised. Her colour brightened a little. "They seem very ordinary views," she said modestly.

"You share them?" cried Lady Sunderbund.

"But of course," said Lady Ella.

"Wondyful!" cried Lady Sunderbund.

"Tell me, Lady Sunderbund," said the bishop, "are you going to alter the outer appearance of the old doctor's house?" And found that at last he had discovered the saving topic.

"Ha'dly at all," she said. "I shall just have it pointed white and do the doa--I'm not su' how I shall do the doa. Whetha I shall do the doa gold or a vehy, vehy 'itch blue."

For a time she and Lady Ella, to whom these ideas were novel, discussed

the animation of grey and sombre towns by house painting. In such matter Lady Sunderbund had a Russian mind. "I can't bea' g'ey," she said. "Not in my su'oundings, not in my k'eed, nowhe'e." She turned to the bishop. "If I had my way I would paint you' cathed'al inside and out."

"They used to be painted," said the bishop. "I don't know if you have seen Ely. There the old painting has been largely restored...."

From that to the end there was no real danger, and at last the bishop found himself alone with his wife again.

"Remarkable person," he said tentatively. "I never met any one whose faults were more visible. I met her at Wimbush House."

He glanced at his watch.

"What did she mean," asked Lady Ella abruptly, "by talking of your new views? And about revelations?"

"She probably misunderstood something I said at the Garstein Fellows'," he said. "She has rather a leaping mind."

He turned to the window, looked at his nails, and appeared to be suddenly reminded of duties elsewhere....

It was chiefly manifest to him that the difficulties in explaining the

changes of his outlook to Lady Ella had now increased enormously.

(7)

A day or so after Lady Sunderbund's arrival in Princhester the bishop had a letter from Likeman. The old man was manifestly in doubt about the effect of their recent conversation.

"My dear Scrope," it began. "I find myself thinking continually about our interview and the difficulties you laid bare so frankly to me. We touched upon many things in that talk, and I find myself full of afterthoughts, and not perfectly sure either quite of what I said or of what I failed to say. I feel that in many ways I was not perhaps so clear and convincing as the justice of my case should have made me, and you are one of my own particular little company, you were one of the best workers in that band of good workers, your life and your career are very much my concern. I know you will forgive me if I still mingle something of the paternal with my fraternal admonitions. I watched you closely. I have still my old diaries of the St. Matthew's days, and I have been looking at them to remind me of what you once were. It was my custom to note my early impressions of all the men who worked with me, because I have a firm belief in the soundness of first impressions and the considerable risk one runs of having them obscured by the accidents and habituations of constant intercourse. I found that quite early in your days at St. Matthew's I wrote against your name 'enthusiastic, but

a saving delicacy.' After all our life-long friendship I would not write anything truer. I would say of you to-day, 'This man might have been a revivalist, if he were not a gentleman.' There is the enthusiast, there is the revivalist, in you. It seems to me that the stresses and questions of this great crisis in the world's history have brought it nearer to the surface than I had ever expected it to come.

"I quite understand and I sympathize with your impatience with the church at the present time; we present a spectacle of pompous insignificance hard to bear with. We are doing very little, and we are giving ourselves preposterous airs. There seems to be an opinion abroad that in some quasi-automatic way the country is going to collapse after the war into the arms of the church and the High Tories; a possibility I don't accept for a moment. Why should it? These forcible-feeble reactionaries are much more likely to explode a revolution that will disestablish us. And I quite understand your theological difficulties--quite. The creeds, if their entire symbolism is for a moment forgotten, if they are taken as opaque statements of fact, are inconsistent, incredible. So incredible that no one believes them; not even the most devout. The utmost they do is to avert their minds--reverentially. Credo quia impossibile. That is offensive to a Western mind. I can quite understand the disposition to cry out at such things, 'This is not the Church of God!'--to run out from it--

"You have some dream, I suspect, of a dramatic dissidence.

"Now, my dear Brother and erstwhile pupil, I ask you not to do this thing. Wait, I implore you. Give me--and some others, a little time. I have your promise for three months, but even after that, I ask you to wait. Let the reform come from within the church. The church is something more than either its creeds, its clergy, or its laymen. Look at your cathedral rising out of and dominating Princhester. It stands not simply for Athanasius; it stands but incidentally for Athanasius; it stands for all religion. Within that fabric--let me be as frank here as in our private conversation--doctrine has altered again and again. To-day two distinct religions worship there side by side; one that fades and one that grows brighter. There is the old quasi-materialistic belief of the barbarians, the belief in such things, for example, as that Christ the physical Son of God descended into hell and stayed there, seeing the sights I suppose like any tourist and being treated with diplomatic civilities for three terrestrial days; and on the other hand there is the truly spiritual belief that you and I share, which is absolutely intolerant of such grotesque ideas. My argument to you is that the new faith, the clearer vision, gains ground; that the only thing that can prevent or delay the church from being altogether possessed by what you call and I admit is, the true God, is that such men as yourself, as the light breaks upon you, should be hasty and leave the church. You see my point of view, do you not? It is not one that has been assumed for our discussion; it is one I came to long years ago, that I was already feeling my way to in my St. Matthew's Lenton sermons.

"A word for your private ear. I am working. I cannot tell you fully

because I am not working alone. But there are movements afoot in which I hope very shortly to be able to ask you to share. That much at least I may say at this stage. Obscure but very powerful influences are at work for the liberalizing of the church, for release from many narrow limitations, for the establishment of a modus vivendi with the nonconformist and dissentient bodies in Britain and America, and with the churches of the East. But of that no more now.

"And in conclusion, my dear Scrope, let me insist again upon the eternal persistence of the essential Religious Fact:"

(Greek Letters Here)

(Rev. i. 18. "Fear not. I am the First and Last thing, the Living thing.")

And these promises which, even if we are not to take them as promises in the exact sense in which, let us say, the payment of five sovereigns is promised by a five-pound note, are yet assertions of practically inevitable veracity:

(Greek Letters Here)

(Phil. i. 6. "He who began... will perfect." Eph. v. 14. "He will illuminate.")

The old man had written his Greek tags in shakily resolute capitals. It was his custom always to quote the Greek Testament in his letters, never the English version. It is a practice not uncommon with the more scholarly of our bishops. It is as if some eminent scientific man were to insist upon writing H2O instead of "water," and "sodium chloride" instead of "table salt" in his private correspondence. Or upon hanging up a stuffed crocodile in his hall to give the place tone. The Bishop of Princhester construed these brief dicta without serious exertion, he found them very congenial texts, but there were insuperable difficulties in the problem why Likeman should suppose they had the slightest weight upon his side of their discussion. The more he thought the less they seemed to be on Likeman's side, until at last they began to take on a complexion entirely opposed to the old man's insidious arguments, until indeed they began to bear the extraordinary interpretation of a special message, unwittingly delivered.

(8)

The bishop was still thinking over this communication when he was interrupted by Lady Ella. She came with a letter in her hand to ask him whether she might send five-and-twenty pounds to a poor cousin of his, a teacher in a girls' school, who had been incapacitated from work by a dislocation of the cartilage of her knee. If she could go to that unorthodox but successful practitioner, Mr. Barker, the bone-setter, she

was convinced she could be restored to efficiency. But she had no ready money. The bishop agreed without hesitation. His only doubt was the certainty of the cure, but upon that point Lady Ella was convinced; there had been a great experience in the Walshingham family.

"It is pleasant to be able to do things like this," said Lady Ella, standing over him when this matter was settled.

"Yes," the bishop agreed; "it is pleasant to be in a position to do things like this...."