

## CHAPTER THE EIGHTH - THE NEW WORLD

(1)

THAT night the bishop had a temperature of a hundred and a half. The doctor pronounced him to be in a state of intense mental excitement, aggravated by some drug. He was a doctor modern and clear-minded enough to admit that he could not identify the drug. He overruled, every one overruled, the bishop's declaration that he had done with the church, that he could never mock God with his episcopal ministrations again, that he must proceed at once with his resignation. "Don't think of these things," said the doctor. "Banish them from your mind until your temperature is down to ninety-eight. Then after a rest you may go into them."

Lady Ella insisted upon his keeping his room. It was with difficulty that he got her to admit Whippham, and Whippham was exasperatingly in order. "You need not trouble about anything now, my lord," he said. "Everything will keep until you are ready to attend to it. It's well we're through with Easter. Bishop Buncombe of Eastern Blowdesia was coming here anyhow. And there is Canon Bliss. There's only two ordination candidates because of the war. We'll get on swimmingly."

The bishop thought he would like to talk to those two ordination candidates, but they prevailed upon him not to do so. He lay for the

best part of one night confiding remarkable things to two imaginary ordination candidates.

He developed a marked liking for Eleanor's company. She was home again now after a visit to some friends. It was decided that the best thing to do with him would be to send him away in her charge. A journey abroad was impossible. France would remind him too dreadfully of the war. His own mind turned suddenly to the sweet air of Hunstanton. He had gone there at times to read, in the old Cambridge days. "It is a terribly ugly place," he said, "but it is wine in the veins."

Lady Ella was doubtful about Zeppelins. Thrice they had been right over Hunstanton already. They came in by the easy landmark of the Wash.

"It will interest him," said Eleanor, who knew her father better.

(2)

One warm and still and sunny afternoon the bishop found himself looking out upon the waters of the Wash. He sat where the highest pebble layers of the beach reached up to a little cliff of sandy earth perhaps a foot high, and he looked upon sands and sea and sky and saw that they were beautiful.

He was a little black-gaitered object in a scene of the most exquisite

and delicate colour. Right and left of him stretched the low grey salted shore, pale banks of marly earth surmounted by green-grey wiry grass that held and was half buried in fine blown sand. Above, the heavens made a complete hemisphere of blue in which a series of remote cumulus clouds floated and dissolved. Before him spread the long levels of the sands, and far away at its utmost ebb was the sea. Eleanor had gone to explore the black ribs of a wrecked fishing-boat that lay at the edge of a shallow lagoon. She was a little pink-footed figure, very bright and apparently transparent. She had reverted for a time to shameless childishness; she had hidden her stockings among the reeds of the bank, and she was running to and fro, from star-fish to razor shell and from cockle to weed. The shingle was pale drab and purple close at hand, but to the westward, towards Hunstanton, the sands became brown and purple, and were presently broken up into endless skerries of low flat weed-covered boulders and little intensely blue pools. The sea was a band of sapphire that became silver to the west; it met the silver shining sands in one delicate breathing edge of intensely white foam. Remote to the west, very small and black and clear against the afternoon sky, was a cart, and about it was a score or so of mussel-gatherers. A little nearer, on an apparently empty stretch of shining wet sand, a multitude of gulls was mysteriously busy. These two groups of activities and Eleanor's flitting translucent movements did but set off and emphasize the immense and soothing tranquillity.

For a long time the bishop sat passively receptive to this healing beauty. Then a little flow of thought began and gathered in his mind. He

had come out to think over two letters that he had brought with him. He drew these now rather reluctantly from his pocket, and after a long pause over the envelopes began to read them.

He reread Likeman's letter first.

Likeman could not forgive him.

"My dear Scrope," he wrote, "your explanation explains nothing. This sensational declaration of infidelity to our mother church, made under the most damning and distressing circumstances in the presence of young and tender minds entrusted to your ministrations, and in defiance of the honourable engagements implied in the confirmation service, confirms my worst apprehensions of the weaknesses of your character. I have always felt the touch of theatricality in your temperament, the peculiar craving to be pseudo-deeper, pseudo-simpler than us all, the need of personal excitement. I know that you were never quite contented to believe in God at second-hand. You wanted to be taken notice of--personally. Except for some few hints to you, I have never breathed a word of these doubts to any human being; I have always hoped that the ripening that comes with years and experience would give you an increasing strength against the dangers of emotionalism and against your strong, deep, quiet sense of your exceptional personal importance...."

The bishop read thus far, and then sat reflecting.

Was it just?

He had many weaknesses, but had he this egotism? No; that wasn't the justice of the case. The old man, bitterly disappointed, was endeavouring to wound. Scrope asked himself whether he was to blame for that disappointment. That was a more difficult question....

He dismissed the charge at last, crumpled up the letter in his hand, and after a moment's hesitation flung it away.... But he remained acutely sorry, not so much for himself as for the revelation of Likeman this letter made. He had had a great affection for Likeman and suddenly it was turned into a wound.

(3)

The second letter was from Lady Sunderbund, and it was an altogether more remarkable document. Lady Sunderbund wrote on a notepaper that was evidently the result of a perverse research, but she wrote a letter far more coherent than her speech, and without that curious falling away of the r's that flavoured even her gravest observations with an unjust faint aroma of absurdity. She wrote with a thin pen in a rounded boyish handwriting. She italicized with slashes of the pen.

He held this letter in both hands between his knees, and considered it now with an expression that brought his eyebrows forward until they

almost met, and that tucked in the corners of his mouth.

"My dear Bishop," it began.

"I keep thinking and thinking and thinking of that wonderful service, of the wonderful, wonderful things you said, and the wonderful choice you made of the moment to say them--when all those young lives were coming to the great serious thing in life. It was most beautifully done. At any rate, dear Bishop and Teacher, it was most beautifully begun. And now we all stand to you like creditors because you have given us so much that you owe us ever so much more. You have started us and you have to go on with us. You have broken the shell of the old church, and here we are running about with nowhere to go. You have to make the shelter of a new church now for us, purged of errors, looking straight to God. The King of Mankind!--what a wonderful, wonderful phrase that is. It says everything. Tell us more of him and more. Count me first--not foremost, but just the little one that runs in first--among your disciples. They say you are resigning your position in the church. Of course that must be true. You are coming out of it--what did you call it?--coming out of the cracked old vessel from which you have poured the living waters. I called on Lady Ella yesterday. She did not tell me very much; I think she is a very reserved as well as a very dignified woman, but she said that you intended to go to London. In London then I suppose you will set up the first altar to the Divine King. I want to help.

"Dear Bishop and Teacher, I want to help tremendously--with all my heart

and all my soul. I want to be let do things for you." (The "you" was erased by three or four rapid slashes, and "our King" substituted.)

"I want to be privileged to help build that First Church of the World Unified under God. It is a dreadful thing to says but, you see, I am very rich; this dreadful war has made me ever so much richer--steel and shipping and things--it is my trustees have done it. I am ashamed to be so rich. I want to give. I want to give and help this great beginning of yours. I want you to let me help on the temporal side, to make it easy for you to stand forth and deliver your message, amidst suitable surroundings and without any horrid worries on account of the sacrifices you have made. Please do not turn my offering aside. I have never wanted anything so much in all my life as I want to make this gift. Unless I can make it I feel that for me there is no salvation! I shall stick with my loads and loads of stocks and shares and horrid possessions outside the Needle's Eye. But if I could build a temple for God, and just live somewhere near it so as to be the poor woman who sweeps out the chapels, and die perhaps and be buried under its floor! Don't smile at me. I mean every word of it. Years ago I thought of such a thing. After I had visited the Certosa di Pavia--do you know it? So beautiful, and those two still alabaster figures--recumbent. But until now I could never see my way to any such service. Now I do. I am all afire to do it. Help me! Tell me! Let me stand behind you and make your mission possible. I feel I have come to the most wonderful phase in my life. I feel my call has come....

"I have written this letter over three times, and torn each of them up. I do so want to say all this, and it is so desperately hard to say. I am full of fears that you despise me. I know there is a sort of high colour about me. My passion for brightness. I am absurd. But inside of me is a soul, a real, living, breathing soul. Crying out to you: 'Oh, let me help! Let me help!' I will do anything, I will endure anything if only I can keep hold of the vision splendid you gave me in the cathedral. I see it now day and night, the dream of the place I can make for you--and you preaching! My fingers itch to begin. The day before yesterday I said to myself, 'I am quite unworthy, I am a worldly woman, a rich, smart, decorated woman. He will never accept me as I am.' I took off all my jewels, every one, I looked through all my clothes, and at last I decided I would have made for me a very simple straight grey dress, just simple and straight and grey. Perhaps you will think that too is absurd of me, too self-conscious. I would not tell of it to you if I did not want you to understand how alive I am to my utter impossibilities, how resolved I am to do anything so that I may be able to serve. But never mind about silly me; let me tell you how I see the new church.

"I think you ought to have some place near the centre of London; not too west, for you might easily become fashionable, not too east because you might easily be swallowed up in merely philanthropic work, but somewhere between the two. There must be vacant sites still to be got round about Kingsway. And there we must set up your tabernacle, a very plain, very simple, very beautifully proportioned building in which you can give your message. I know a young man, just the very young man to do



something of the sort, something quite new, quite modern, and yet solemn and serious. Lady Ella seemed to think you wanted to live somewhere in the north-west of London--but she would tell me very little. I seem to see you not there at all, not in anything between west-end and suburb, but yourself as central as your mind, in a kind of clergy house that will be part of the building. That is how it is in my dream anyhow. All that though can be settled afterwards. My imagination and my desire is running away with me. It is no time yet for premature plans. Not that I am not planning day and night. This letter is simply to offer. I just want to offer. Here I am and all my worldly goods. Take me, I pray you. And not only pray you. Take me, I demand of you, in the name of God our king. I have a right to be used. And you have no right to refuse me. You have to go on with your message, and it is your duty to take me--just as you are obliged to step on any steppingstone that lies on your way to do God service.... And so I am waiting. I shall be waiting--on thorns. I know you will take your time and think. But do not take too much time. Think of me waiting.

"Your servant, your most humble helper in God (your God),

"AGATHA SUNDERBUND."

And then scrawled along the margin of the last sheet:

"If, when you know--a telegram. Even if you cannot say so much as 'Agreed,' still such a word as 'Favourable.' I just hang over the Void until I hear.

"AGATHA S."

A letter demanding enormous deliberation. She argued closely in spite of her italics. It had never dawned upon the bishop before how light is the servitude of the disciple in comparison with the servitude of the master. In many ways this proposal repelled and troubled him, in many ways it attracted him. And the argument of his clear obligation to accept her co-operation gripped him; it was a good argument.

And besides it worked in very conveniently with certain other difficulties that perplexed him.

(4)

The bishop became aware that Eleanor was returning to him across the sands. She had made an end to her paddling, she had put on her shoes and stockings and become once more the grave and responsible young woman who had been taking care of him since his flight from Princhester. He replaced the two letters in his pocket, and sat ready to smile as she drew near; he admired her open brow, the toss of her hair, and the poise

of her head upon her neck. It was good to note that her hard reading at Cambridge hadn't bent her shoulders in the least....

"Well, old Dad!" she said as she drew near. "You've got back a colour."

"I've got back everything. It's time I returned to Princhester."

"Not in this weather. Not for a day or so." She flung herself at his feet. "Consider your overworked little daughter. Oh, how good this is!"

"No," said the bishop in a grave tone that made her look up into his face. "I must go back."

He met her clear gaze. "What do you think of all this business, Eleanor?" he asked abruptly. "Do you think I had a sort of fit in the cathedral?"

He winced as he asked the question.

"Daddy," she said, after a little pause; "the things you said and did that afternoon were the noblest you ever did in your life. I wish I had been there. It must have been splendid to be there. I've not told you before--I've been dying to.... I'd promised not to say a word--not to remind you. I promised the doctor. But now you ask me, now you are well again, I can tell you. Kitty Kingdom has told me all about it, how it felt. It was like light and order coming into a hopeless dark muddle.

What you said was like what we have all been trying to think--I mean all of us young people. Suddenly it was all clear."

She stopped short. She was breathless with the excitement of her confession.

Her father too remained silent for a little while. He was reminded of his weakness; he was, he perceived, still a little hysterical. He felt that he might weep at her youthful enthusiasm if he did not restrain himself.

"I'm glad," he said, and patted her shoulder. "I'm glad, Norah."

She looked away from him out across the lank brown sands and water pools to the sea. "It was what we have all been feeling our way towards, the absolute simplification of religion, the absolute simplification of politics and social duty; just God, just God the King."

"But should I have said that--in the cathedral?"

She felt no scruples. "You had to," she said.

"But now think what it means," he said. "I must leave the church."

"As a man strips off his coat for a fight."

"That doesn't dismay you?"

She shook her head, and smiled confidently to sea and sky.

"I'm glad if you're with me," he said. "Sometimes--I think--I'm not a very self-reliant man."

"You'll have all the world with you," she was convinced, "in a little time."

"Perhaps rather a longer time than you think, Norah. In the meantime--"

She turned to him once more.

"In the meantime there are a great many things to consider. Young people, they say, never think of the transport that is needed to win a battle. I have it in my mind that I should leave the church. But I can't just walk out into the marketplace and begin preaching there. I see the family furniture being carried out of the palace and put into vans. It has to go somewhere...."

"I suppose you will go to London."

"Possibly. In fact certainly. I have a plan. Or at least an opportunity.... But that isn't what I have most in mind. These things are not done without emotion and a considerable strain upon one's

personal relationships. I do not think this--I do not think your mother sees things as we do."

"She will," said young enthusiasm, "when she understands."

"I wish she did. But I have been unlucky in the circumstances of my explanations to her. And of course you understand all this means risks--poverty perhaps--going without things--travel, opportunity, nice possessions--for all of us. A loss of position too. All this sort of thing," he stuck out a gaitered calf and smiled, "will have to go. People, some of them, may be disagreeable to us...."

"After all, Daddy," she said, smiling, "it isn't so bad as the cross and the lions and burning pitch. And you have the Truth."

"You do believe--?" He left his sentence unfinished.

She nodded, her face aglow. "We know you have the Truth."

"Of course in my own mind now it is very clear. I had a kind of illumination...." He would have tried to tell her of his vision, and he was too shy. "It came to me suddenly that the whole world was in confusion because men followed after a thousand different immediate aims, when really it was quite easy, if only one could be simple it was quite easy, to show that nearly all men could only be fully satisfied and made happy in themselves by one single aim, which was also the aim

that would make the whole world one great order, and that aim was to make God King of one's heart and the whole world. I saw that all this world, except for a few base monstrous spirits, was suffering hideous things because of this war, and before the war it was full of folly, waste, social injustice and suspicion for the same reason, because it had not realized the kingship of God. And that is so simple; the essence of God is simplicity. The sin of this war lies with men like myself, men who set up to tell people about God, more than it lies with any other class--"

"Kings?" she interjected. "Diplomatists? Finance?"

"Yes. Those men could only work mischief in the world because the priests and teachers let them. All things human lie at last at the door of the priest and teacher. Who differentiate, who qualify and complicate, who make mean unnecessary elaborations, and so divide mankind. If it were not for the weakness and wickedness of the priests, every one would know and understand God. Every one who was modest enough not to set up for particular knowledge. Men disputed whether God is Finite or Infinite, whether he has a triple or a single aspect. How should they know? All we need to know is the face he turns to us. They impose their horrible creeds and distinctions. None of those things matter. Call him Christ the God or call him simply God, Allah, Heaven; it does not matter. He comes to us, we know, like a Helper and Friend; that is all we want to know. You may speculate further if you like, but it is not religion. They dispute whether he can set aside nature. But

that is superstition. He is either master of nature and he knows that it is good, or he is part of nature and must obey. That is an argument for hair-splitting metaphysicians. Either answer means the same for us. It does not matter which way we come to believe that he does not idly set the course of things aside. Obviously he does not set the course of things aside. What he does do for certain is to give us courage and save us from our selfishness and the bitter hell it makes for us. And every one knows too what sort of things we want, and for what end we want to escape from ourselves. We want to do right. And right, if you think clearly, is just truth within and service without, the service of God's kingdom, which is mankind, the service of human needs and the increase of human power and experience. It is all perfectly plain, it is all quite easy for any one to understand, who isn't misled and chattered at and threatened and poisoned by evil priests and teachers."

"And you are going to preach that, Daddy?"

"If I can. When I am free--you know I have still to resign and give up--I shall make that my message."

"And so God comes."

"God comes as men perceive him in his simplicity.... Let men but see God simply, and forthwith God and his kingdom possess the world."

She looked out to sea in silence for awhile.



Then she turned to her father. "And you think that His Kingdom will come--perhaps in quite a little time--perhaps in our lifetimes? And that all these ridiculous or wicked little kings and emperors, and these political parties, and these policies and conspiracies, and this nationalist nonsense and all the patriotism and rowdyism, all the private profit-seeking and every baseness in life, all the things that it is so horrible and disgusting to be young among and powerless among, you think they will fade before him?"

The bishop pulled his faith together.

"They will fade before him--but whether it will take a lifetime or a hundred lifetimes or a thousand lifetimes, my Norah--"

He smiled and left his sentence unfinished, and she smiled back at him to show she understood.

And then he confessed further, because he did not want to seem merely sentimentally hopeful.

"When I was in the cathedral, Norah--and just before that service, it seemed to me--it was very real.... It seemed that perhaps the Kingdom of God is nearer than we suppose, that it needs but the faith and courage of a few, and it may be that we may even live to see the dawning of his kingdom, even--who knows?--the sunrise. I am so full of faith and hope

that I fear to be hopeful with you. But whether it is near or far--"

"We work for it," said Eleanor.

Eleanor thought, eyes downcast for a little while, and then looked up.

"It is so wonderful to talk to you like this, Daddy. In the old days, I didn't dream--Before I went to Newnham. I misjudged you. I thought Never mind what I thought. It was silly. But now I am so proud of you. And so happy to be back with you, Daddy, and find that your religion is after all just the same religion that I have been wanting."