

Adoration the Form of Faith.

THERE are many varieties and degrees of faith. The content of faith will differ widely, as it is the faith of a child or of a sage. In the best of men it will hold in solution many errors and imperfections. And its modes of expression are manifold. But there is one feeling, attitude, temper, so generally present to a living faith in all its ranges that we may perhaps call it the very form of faith, something belonging to its constitution, and that is the spirit of adoration.

Adoration is a feeling in which are awe, wonder, reverence, humility, devotion, love. It is an outward-going movement. In it the beggar self forgets itself. There is in it perhaps the *amari aliquid*—the fear that is like salt to save love from corruption. But joy predominates over fear. At its highest it is an absorption in the beatific vision, with all possible praise and worship. Such a deep feeling, involving all our powers, is the very form of our creaturely faith: “the human spirit finding its peace and support in the Divine spirit, its origin and home”; “underneath are the everlasting arms.”

In this little paper, I shall just indicate and set aside three errors which necessarily destroy such an adoring faith. Next I shall look at some of the classical expressions of such a faith, and contrast these with the general tone of a fair Christian life in our time and church. Then I shall indicate a persistent error which in our communion, as in others, militates against such a faith. And lastly, I shall suggest some helps towards its recovery.

I.

(a) For the three errors. First, a living faith will insist on the reality of its object, God, as against a mere subjectivism. There has been a dangerous tendency—now perhaps receding—to reduce God to the ideas of our minds. That lusty and arrogant child, psychology, has been preoccupied with the processes of these our minds, and has tended to reduce reality to their contents. And this error is practically repeated by controversialists, who are so very certain that God must be quite like their

ideas of God; as astronomers, with their successive systems, have always been sure that the heavenly bodies followed their laws. As against this a living faith is confident of the reality of God, a reality in which all our affirmations and negations make no change.

(b) Second, a living faith knows the transcendence of God. It rejects all those simplifications which are offered from time to time: a religion of common-sense; the religion of the plain man; a religion without the supernatural; a religion in whose nostrils the philosophers have put their hook, so that a man of this world can safely draw Leviathan about. As against all these simplifications faith holds by a transcendent God, who eludes even while He draws us; of Whom, in our clearest moments, we can see but, as it were with Moses, "the back parts."

(c) And third, faith knows the *living* God Who "worketh hitherto," as against a mere deism, or religion as "morality touched with emotion"; "a religion of good conduct, with just the addition of a practical or theoretical reference to God as the sanction and source of morality." The God of Faith is living, active, "not far from any one of us," and quite other than we are, "of Whom and to Whom and through Whom are all things."

II.

Now let us look at some of the classical experiences and expressions of a living faith. Jacob at Bethel, Isaiah in the Temple in the year that King Uzziah died, Job in his misery—these are instances where faith meets with its object. In them all there is the sense of givenness, of surprise. The contact is not the result of any special activity on man's part. It is an act, a condescension, a grace of God. It is somehow immediate and intuitive. The living active God makes them aware of His presence. And this communion is not a hypothesis, a perhaps. It produces certitude in their minds. And its influence extends over a long period after the contact has been withdrawn. And they describe it in simple concrete language. And awe, humility, absorption in the Reality, adoration, are somehow felt in their words. "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.' And he was afraid, and said, 'How dreadful is this place! This is none

other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' ”
“ I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims . . . and one cried unto another and said, ‘ Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts ; the whole earth is full of His glory.’ ” “ I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ears ; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Faith meets with, sees its object, and rejoices with trembling.

Then in the New Testament we have the life of our Saviour and Brother ; a life spent in constant communion with the unseen Father in heaven ; a life in which faith ever enjoyed and adored its object ; a conscious union that was unbroken, save perhaps in the cry of dereliction on the Cross.

And in His disciples after the ascension there is plainly a vivid sense of an Adorable Presence with them in all their ways. And S. Paul had moments when this prevailing sense was quickened : outside Damascus, in the temple, and elsewhere ; when he was rapt into Paradise, and enjoyed a still closer contact with the Author and Lover of all, and heard things which it “ was not lawful to utter.” And Augustine and Monica at Ostia had that rapture when all the world and all their senses were hushed, and all secondary causes and images were hushed, and they seemed in the spirit to touch God. “ And they said, ‘ if this moment could be prolonged, would not that be to “ enter into the joy of thy Lord ” ’ ” ?

And many other instances will occur to you when the soul, rising above all forms and means, has been granted to see and love and adore God.

Our religion generally is not like that. It is not immediate and direct ; it is second-hand and traditional. It has belief and obedience and hope, but hardly fruition and adoration. Our faith is belief rather than vision. We know about God ; we hardly know God. “ The religion that began in vision ends in orthodoxy.” Even when we get the gift we cannot retain it.

“ Love wakes men, once a lifetime each ;
They lift their heavy lids and look ;
And, lo, what one sweet page can teach
They read with joy, then shut the book.”

Yet it is quite certain that our Lord did not contemplate even His experiences as a substitute for ours. His

adoring contemplation of the Father, in the days of His flesh, was not something done to save us doing it. On the contrary, He was "the Way." And He was to bring many sons into glory by that way; by the life of union with Himself. "If a man love Me he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him."

Much less were any of the deepest religious experiences of His servants and saints to be a substitute for ours. Yet even when we make full allowance for the proper reticence of religious souls, we can hardly think that they are generally "satisfied with His likeness." There is much quiet obedience, decent ordering of life, and observance of religious forms; there is little joy, adventure, adoration.

May it be that this contact of the soul with God is more common than we think? And that we do not recognise and enjoy it because we look for it in the wrong way? For evidence there is, very widespread, that incurable dissatisfaction with all finite good, however extended, that encompassing sense of our creaturely frailty and incompleteness. More positively, there is the felt attraction to that unknown life which draws us, that often blind reaching out after something that will support our transitoriness and enrich our emptiness. And, more directly, there is the deep assurance of pardon, the mysterious feeling of peace coming upon the burdened conscience from beyond, the sense of deliverance and power, the life renewed—these are not uncommon experiences. And surely they witness to an act of personal grace. They are acts of God done on the soul. Yet the recognition is usually delayed, and faith still seems to grope after its object, and does not settle in adoration.

III.

What is the cause of this persistent error and loss in our soul's life? It is quite certain that whenever the creature is brought into contact with the Creator, in every living experience wherein faith touches its object, there will be a large element of the unknown and mysterious. And such knowledge as we have will be intuitive and direct and partial, not mediate and reasoned and complete. But all our ideas of knowledge have been coloured and defined by the ideals of mathematics and the natural

sciences. And we have not, and cannot have, such a scientific knowledge of God. And so we are afraid we are in ignorance. Yet as Joubert said, "It is not so hard to know God, if only we will not seek to define Him."

When our Lord spoke of giving eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him, and added, "And this is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God," He certainly did not mean that the ignorant multitude on whom He had compassion must become scientific theologians before they could know God, and so have eternal life. Yet that is the implication of our present views of knowledge. Should we not recognise and guard against a special danger of the specifically scientific mind, with its impatience of mystery and love of clear-cut notions and definitions, its procedure by an ever higher degree of abstraction and resting in these abstractions, and working with them at an ever further remove from the rich concreteness and manifoldness of reality? Science, confronted with that reality, the world of external nature, which enters into our experience in all our waking hours, has made great triumphs, but at a great cost. We acclaim the triumphs and forget the cost. Yet the external world of our experience is wholly unlike that same world as presented in scientific manuals. What sort of a notion of that many-voiced many-coloured world would a man born blind and deaf get from text-books on geology and botany and the like? And will systems of physiology and psychology ever explain or originate or quicken or truly represent a mother's love? And will any science of æsthetics ever produce or account for the feeling with which we hear a little song of Schubert's?

"Just when we are safest, there's a sunset touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, someone's death,
A chorus ending from Euripides,"

and we find that the reality has somehow eluded us.

That great mystic, Wordsworth, will correct this narrow, abstract, clear, and partial view of nature. He has constantly the sense of the whole as against its fragments. You remember in the First Book of the 'Excursion,' when the Wanderer sees the sun rise, and the whole Man is rapt in the experience:—

"In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired."

Keats aimed at the same truth when he said, "O for a life of sensation rather than thought." In fact, nature and art as immediately experienced by us are one thing, and nature and art as theorised by science are somehow a different thing. And God, the supreme Reality, has one face which He turns to the humble and contrite in heart, and another face which He shows to the rationalist.

For a scientific theology will always aim at completeness, definition, system. Theology has, of itself, no data on which to work. It draws its material from the experiences of God's children in every age, as natural science must found on our common sensations. But the scientist, the rationalist, abstracts from the living experience what he can use; the surplus, the margin, he rejects. So men attempt to find the essence of religion in the common residuum that remains, after all the rich concreteness of particular religions has been abstracted from. A similar process would discover the essence of humanity in a low-grade defective.

The voice of science speaks in this way: "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable, in His being wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." A keen personal experience of the living God uses words like these: "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds . . . Thy judgments are a great deep . . . with Thee is the fountain of life . . . in Thy light shall we see light." "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." The catechism is clear as noonday, distinct in every detail, with the hardness of a photograph. The Psalmist's speech is vivid and partial, light falling through clouds and mists: "Jewels seen shining tremulously at the bottom of the great deep." He has the vast background of mystery; the catechism suggests nothing which it does not define. It is surely a childish incompetence which can regard such a statement as that of the catechism as exact and adequate truth—as "*la vraie vérité*," and dismiss these profound intimations of personal experience as figures of speech or "mere poetry."

The religious value of our teachers seems to depend on the vividness with which they retain and suggest this surplus—this living, powerful, present margin of wonder in Reality, which exceeds our comprehension, but makes

its presence felt. Therefore Plato, as against Aristotle, is so religious a teacher. And the great Christian rationalist is full of this sense of mystery when he comes to make an act of faith: "adoro te devote, latens deitas." Newman, with his careful distinction between notional and real assent, von Hügel, Father Tyrrell, Otto in 'The Holy,' are all continually aware of it: and Professor Kay, in his Croall Lecture, when he speaks of the "extra rational life in man"; and again, "The non-human factor" (i.e., in any spiritual effect) "remains beyond human comprehension." Is this perhaps the reason for the comparative failure of Dr Denny's books on the atonement? Because there is in them a hardness of tone, a dialectical assurance, which offends our vivid sense of the encompassing mystery of God's nature and works?

"Tout ce qui est incompréhensible, ne laisse pas d'être." And the religious soul is nourished and sustained by these crumbs of wonder which are swept from the rationalist's table. How direct and wonderful is the language of scripture! "How dreadful is this place." "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." "Mine eye seeth Thee." These utterances can hardly be compressed into a system, but they feed our faith.

This awe often preserves the mystery by negatives. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard . . ."; "To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge"; "Nescio, nescio quae jubilatio, lux tibi qualis . . ."; "Sed quid invenientibus, nec lingua valet dicere, nec litera exprimere." And these negatives do not fall with a chill on the heart. On the contrary, they are understood. They mark merely the limits of the conceptual understanding, and suggest powerfully the joy and wonder of the margin, that untravelled world which is felt, not seen.

This is not a doctrine of nescience. The distinction has been clearly drawn by von Hügel. "Our knowledge is always wider and deeper than is our science. I know my mother, I know my dog, I know my favourite rose-tree; and this, although I am quite ignorant of the anatomical difference between woman and man, of the psychological limits between dog and human being, or of the natural or artificial botanical order to which my rose-plant belongs."

In all our knowledge of God there will indeed be always a conceptual part, a science of theology, however rudimentary; and there will be an intuitive part, a true

religious knowledge, but immediate and unreasoned; and over against these there will be felt the background, the surplus that eludes us as yet. We must try to keep all these elements. And Father Tyrrell finds in their union the source of a living, adoring faith. "It is neither what we seem to understand about God that feeds our love, nor the fact that He is infinitely beyond our understanding, but the fact that we can ever progress in knowledge and love, and always with a sense of an infinite 'beyond.' It is at the margin, where the conquering light meets the receding darkness, that love finds its inspiration."

Even in our relations with our closest friends there is this mystery, this knowledge and ignorance and possibility of surprise, or else our intercourse with them is a very poor thing. How much more in the soul's contact with God! And it is this total impression, this mingling of the known and the unknown, of light and darkness, which truly reflects God in our hearts and minds, and supports in us a living adoring faith.

IV.

We are agreed that God is the supreme reality, living and active, supporting and guiding our little wayward lives, yet transcending all our poor thoughts, "as the heavens are higher than the earth." And our task is not to find God, but to know that God is seeking, and has indeed found, us. "Behold I stand at the door and knock": that is how He Who is the express image of God speaks. We have but to hear and recognise His voice and open to Him. Thought and study will help us. We may profit by the illumination and illustration won by every scholar's devoted life. But all that study will only make us clever and pedantic prigs, unless it be supported and vivified by regular acts of devotion—by the life of prayer. True prayer is the receptive attitude of the soul. In it the soul turns from self, and from all mere human cleverness and power. It turns to the gracious activity of God, and waits like a little child on Him.

And for most of us the forms and ordinances of the Church are necessary to support and discipline this interior devotion. And our faith is helped when we realise the society of the faithful in our common worship. And

though any liturgy, any common prayer, is necessarily expressed in general terms, yet we are able to put into them the specific confessions and aspirations and thanksgivings which come to the surface of our minds when, by an act of faith, we see ourselves in God's presence.

And a living faith will guard against that ruinous error of resting in the means without pressing on to the end. That is the besetting vice of many good Church people, and the cause of our bitterest sectarianism. When a person proclaims that *his* Church's means and ordinances are the only ones, it indicates that he is resting in those means, and has not pressed through them to the goal. A deeper experience will see all those varying rites of the Christian Churches as the radiating spokes of a wheel; we can pass up any of them to the ineffable centre and source of all. And it is a good discipline to join others from time to time in their worship, and try if by that route also the King will not "bring us into His chambers."

And then we shall have a constant recourse to Scripture, where we find the width and depth of Christian experience; what God may be to man, and what man can become through and for God. There we find fruition to a degree that is as yet far beyond us, to quicken our expectation, and illuminate our interpretations of God's dealings with us.

And, above all, in the person of our Saviour we shall learn to know the love of God which passeth knowledge, and come to recognise that same love in our little lots, and have our wonder and devotion fed by the lightest words of the evangelist, and find even in the contradictions in which the records sometimes involve themselves, intimations of the august central mystery.

And for ourselves, as ministers of the Gospel, it will be our effort in all the worship which we celebrate, as especially in the Eucharist, to suggest that we are aware of an Adorable Presence. Not one form should be supreme; not confession nor intercession nor thanksgiving; but the whole congregation of the faithful should bathe, as it were, in the Divine presence. "Return unto thy rest, O my soul."

And our sermons, whatever their particular scope, should never omit this note of wonder and of our human inadequacy. We should feel, and give the impression of, that transcendence that Dante felt: "*All' alta Fantasia*

qui manco possa." To substitute for this mere cleverness in debate, or rhetorical treatment of current topics, is to give stones for bread. The world's great need is to see and know God. And our response to even such partial glimpses of God as our frailty permits us to enjoy is worship, adoration. Our Church life to-day seems to lack that supreme joy and sense of attainment. It should be our great aim to recover it. God has made us for Himself, and our soul is restless till it rest in Him.

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When I wrote this paper I had not read, or I should have referred to, Henri Bremond's admirable 'Prayer and Poetry': English translation by Algar Thorold: publishers, Messrs Burns, Oates & Washbourne.
