WHAT RELIGION IS

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WHAT RELIGION IS

BY

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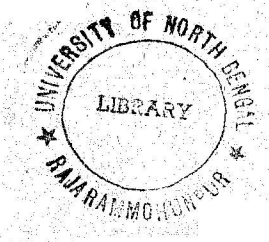

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PREFACE

WHAT I hope and desire to do in writing this little book is to be helpful to persons who, while feeling the necessity of religion, are perplexed by the shape in which it comes before them. I am not thinking about historical criticism. I have in mind more fundamental things. We may be disappointed—I will at once make this suggestion, which is indeed the main substance of what I have to say—we may be disappointed in an experience which we have been taught to regard as all-important, not because it offers us too little, but because it offers not just what we were prepared

for. Everything depends on the expectation and the hope with which we approach it. Religion is the knot, the centre, of all human difficulties; it is a many-sided thing, and if we ask it the wrong questions it will give us misleading responses.

To take the simplest of all examples: Will religion guarantee me my private and personal happiness? To this, on the whole, I think we must answer No; and if we approach it with a view to such happiness, then most certainly and absolutely No. And yet this answer might repel many persons who are quite sincerely inclined to religion. They might perhaps rejoin, "Well, but if not that, then what? We esteem the thing as good and great, but if it simply does nothing for us, how is it to be anything to us?" But the answer

was the answer *to the question*; and it might be that to a question sounding but slightly different a very different answer would be returned. We might ask, for instance, "Does it make my life more worth living?" And the answer to this might be, "It is the only thing that makes life worth living at all."

Now I should think it a great thing if I could help ever so humbly in guiding some minds to the right type of expectation, the true and open attitude in which they will have a fair chance to feel their religion in its fulness and its simplicity.

I insist on two expressions in this last sentence. "Their religion"; my hope is not to suggest or advocate a new religion to them. It is to help them to reach the full value of their own. No man is so poor, I believe, as not to

have a religion, though he may not, in every case, have found out where it lies.

And "simplicity"; for it is a familiar paradox, that in the highest and deepest things, centres though they are of all complexity, yet we go wrong mostly by not being simple enough. "As a little child . . ."; that has been the motto, as of the saints, so of the wisest among mankind. Your mind is a good instrument; only keep it free and sincere; keep away from selfishness, self-conceit, from the vanity of learning, and from the vanity of resentment against learning. Open it to experience, and take that as largely as you can. We know the type of man who on the whole gets nearest to truth. It is not the cleverest. It is, I think, the sincerest.

I have nothing to say that has not been better said by thousands of better

men. But every crisis has its own demand for the right question and the right answer. And even if the word is quite old, it makes perhaps a little difference when it is repeated in your ear by a comrade at your side.

BERNARD BOSANQUET.

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CHAPTER I

THE PEACE OF GOD—SALVATION—JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

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THE PEACE OF GOD—SALVATION—JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

"What must I do to be saved?"

I BEGIN, then, with what I take to be the central knot and need of all religion, "What must I do to be saved?" The old monosyllable, which has sounded so clearly since the coming of Christ the S.O.S. call of humanity, utters, it would seem, an ultimate need. And yet, what is it? Saved from what? The old word does not say; and this, I think, is very significant. We are to understand without telling, and I suppose we do. "Saved from pain and danger and hazardous enterprise?" No, that

will not do at all. Salvation is the entrance to the strait gate and the thorny path. Saved from sin? That is more like it, but if we dwell much on it, it soon becomes too narrow. We seem to stumble as soon as we try to explain. We begin to qualify, to restrict our meaning. The old absolute word is the right one. We cry out to be "saved."

We gather our meaning best from the answer. When are we saved and how? Commonly we feel safe when we have nothing to fear. But safe and saved are not quite the same. Something has happened. We were not safe, but now we are. And how? Nothing outside will do it; no strength, no prosperity. Something has changed within us. We are different, or at least, awakened. And now we are saved, absolutely, we need not say from what. We are at home in the universe,

and, in principle and in the main, feeble and timid creatures as we are, there is nothing anywhere within the world or without it that can make us afraid.

In other words, we are at peace, at rest. Not that we have not to fight; but now the battle itself is the victory. We are certain in our own mind. We are convinced of the supreme good, and that it is one with the supreme power. We have this experience in innumerable degrees, and it is a matter of words where you begin to call it religion. Obviously there must be grades of the religious experience. I do not believe that a human being can be wholly without it. Wherever a man is so carried beyond himself whether for any other being, or for a cause or for a nation, that his personal fate seems to him as nothing in comparison of the happiness or triumph of the other, there you have the universal basis and structure of

religion. Power and perfection united, or such perfection as must, we are convinced beyond contradiction, be in the end a clue to power, as in the beautiful weak,[1] or in the lost cause with whose flag we are content to go down, are that to which in religion we have given our heart away.

And now we can see from what we are saved, and how. We are saved, if we must have a word, from isolation; we are saved by giving ourselves to something which we cannot help holding supreme.

You can trace this structure, I have said, throughout human life, for no man is really isolated. Every man, we must hope and believe, has somewhere an allegiance that binds him, some disloyalty which he would rather die than commit. And if you know what this is, then you know where his religion

[1] Compare, *e.g.*, Rossetti's "Staff and Scrip."

lies. "Where your treasure is"—it is a true saying.

But the special and intensest meaning of the words "salvation," "the peace of God," "religion," indicates, as we saw, something unqualified and complete, something which involves that the root of our certainty is very thoroughly present, if not before our minds as a doctrine, then at least in them as an attitude. What is the nature of the fact which we have been describing, when stated at its simplest and strongest, and recognised, or felt, as the centre of our life and being?

There is a traditional phrase intended to sum up the whole point and meaning of religion; and it utters all those characteristics we have insisted on quite simply and plainly. It is the old expression "Justification by Faith." And whatever practice or doctrine enables us to realise this in our life is

so far a religion, for it does the essential work of a religion; whereas whatever theory or practice does not enable us to realise it may be a very fine or exalted or ingenious thought or custom, but is not, I think, in the strict sense, a matter of religion *at all*. Every man, in the end, must judge for himself, and I am not preaching any particular form of religion, nor intentionally criticising any. I am only trying to help people to get the full good, the point and spirit, of the religion which they profess, or which I am sure they really have, whether they profess one or not.

The situation which this expression embodies is simple, though fundamental, the knot or centre, as we said, in which the open secret of all human nature is bound up. We cannot be "saved" as we are; we cannot cease to be what we are; we can only be saved by giving ourselves to something in which we

remain what we are, and yet enter into something new. The peculiar attitude in which this is effected is religious faith. And this is, as I see the matter, just what we mean by religion—this, and no more, but nothing less. It is faith which is contrasted, *not* with knowledge, but with sight. All the resources of knowledge may contribute to faith. But faith is contrasted with sight, because it is essential to it that we rise into another world while remaining here.

Religious faith has two inseparable sides of will and of judgement. They are hardly indeed sides, for each has the other in it. Both mean absorption in a good such that nothing else matters and nothing else is real. This is why religion "justifies" the religious man. It does not abolish his finiteness—his weakness and his sin. But what it does is to make him deny that they are real —to make his whole being, as he accepts

and affirms it, a denial that they are real. This is the very crux and test of religion, and its combined simplicity and profundity are here most plain. Nothing is so simple, nothing is so impossible. It is the cry from the heart of religion for all time, "Only believe."

It is here that you must leave the distinctive ground of morality, while carrying with you its demands, and the social atmosphere which make it a half-way house to religion. For in the social whole the good is partly real, and partly, therefore, we are saved from the condemning "ought to be." But, in principle, mere morality says, "You *ought to be* equal to the situation." The good is imperative on you here and now, and you are to make it real in and by your will. Fail in doing this, in showing yourself perfectible in and by yourself, and to all conceivable ages you are a moral failure, even if you claim a

life continued for ever in which to complete the work. Out of every moral success the further "ought" springs up inevitably to condemn you once more.

Religion—religious faith—is different. For it, the good is indeed real, as morality claims that it should be; but there is something more; for in the end nothing else is real. And so you can be good, though you are not good, because as you are and as you stand, you yourself are not real. By worship and self-surrender you repudiate and reject your badness, and will and feel yourself as one with the supreme goodness. "Hear again the vehement expression of mysticism. 'When reason tells thee "thou art outside God," then answer thou, "No, I am in God, I am in heaven, in it, in him, and for eternity will never leave him. The devil may keep my sins, and the world my flesh; I live in God's will, his life shall be my life, his

will my will; I will be dead in my reason that he may live in me, and all my deeds shall be his deeds.'"'[1]

Where does all this come from, and how do I know it is true? I answer without hesitation, it comes from the religious experience, which in it speaks with a single voice. And if more is wanted, as an inclined plane for the common-sense intelligence, I say that any one who considers human nature in the light of the facts of love, loyalty, community, will see that the character which in religion comes to a climax, is its very essence or centre or vital knot. Nobody is anything except as he joins himself to something. "Be a whole or join a whole." "You cannot be a whole unless you join a whole."

This, I believe, *is* religion. Strictly speaking, we need go no further. Here is peace, victory, salvation. If your creed

[1] Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 293, note.

effectually gives you this, you have all you want.

But from this great centre, so extraordinarily simple, as from a knot or fulcrum, the whole of life depends. And so, as I said, religion becomes also extraordinarily many-sided; and if we could be helpful in keeping some of its sides in their true place and connection, it would be worth doing. When we get away from this simple basis of religion, we are very apt to go further and fare worse. We add and explain and define to meet particular needs, pressures, troubles, doubts, and we insist on our explanations and perhaps lose contact, wholly or partially, with the centre. I am only too likely to fall into this fault myself. But I will make the hazard, and try to hint at the true proportions in which certain needs may be seen.

CHAPTER II

FREEDOM AND POWER

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FREEDOM AND POWER

"Out of weakness were made strong . . ."

WHEN we speak in the tone we have been using, of a spiritual being absorbed in or surrendered to a greater or to one that is supreme, we may be led to ask questions arising from certain aspects of the experience. We are apt to be curious to know how any such thing is possible.

So in this case we raise a question perhaps about the freedom of a being so absorbed or devoted; and this, I suspect, is at the bottom of our hearts a question about power. How can a

being be said to do anything of himself if his whole rightness and effectiveness depends on a unity in which he seems to be subordinate? It might be idle curiosity to ask whether he could have done otherwise than he did; but we may be assailed by doubts whether as described he can be said to *do* anything. We should hardly be troubled about freedom if we were sure of power.

Now this is, for religion, merely a side issue, a question of description and formulation, within the great central experience. And what religion asks you to do is to keep your eye on that experience, and enter into it as fully as you can. For it is not like anything else, except the degrees of itself. "Out of weakness are made strong"—that is the story of all love and loyalty, all worship, devotedness, aspiration. Life and mind can do nothing by themselves.

Their whole structure and way of working is to throw themselves into something greater, something inclusive. "As a little child," this word will meet us on every side in religion. We are to remain in the great experience, and take it simply, and not to allow subtle reasonings and clamours for explanation to distort our vision of it. And if one says, "But how is it possible?" we are to look at the facts of human nature, and reply, "Because, in the end, there is nothing else that is possible." We are human only in as far as we love and trust. It is no use to compare ourselves with other things, which we understand but imperfectly, and ask whether we can be isolated or united in modes which apply to them. We possess the mode which applies to us, and for religion that is all we want. If we are to argue and define, we must not stop short of philosophy, which just

means keeping hold of the main certainty, while going into all the difficulties. But that is not our business here; we cannot all be trained philosophers, and it would be a queer world if we were. Our business is to see where and how you can really get the good which you trust in your religion to bring you.

In the unity of love and will with the supreme good you are not only "saved," but you are "free" and "strong." Action, initiative, even courage, flow from you like a spring from its source. The source may be fed from a deep reservoir in the hills; but none the less its flow is its own. You will not be helped by trying to divide up the unity and tell how much comes from "you" and how much from "God." You have got to deepen yourself in it, or let it deepen itself in you, whatever phrase expresses the fact best

to your mind. The fact, as we said, taken altogether simply *is* religion. If you could break it up and arrange it in parts you would have destroyed it.

CHAPTER III

UNITY WITH GOD, MAN, AND NATURE

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UNITY WITH GOD, MAN, AND NATURE

"In Him we live, and move, and have our being."

PLAINLY such a spirit as I have been trying to describe is in unity with God, Man, and Nature. Nothing in all the consequences of religion is simpler or clearer than this. Nothing, again, more easily tempts us to draw out particular conclusions in which we may lose our way.

We are spirits, and our life is one with that of the Spirit which is the whole and the good. Then, surely, we are eternal; and, one way or another, your religion gives you this conviction. Now this is no matter for argument, or for trying to take away from you what

you love to believe and what gives you strength. It is only a matter for holding fast to the centre. I will cite a few words from a clever popular book and I will not argue upon them, but will ask the reader just to turn them in his mind, and place them beside the essence of religion as we tried to describe it at first. I do not for a moment say that the talented writer from whom it is cited meant it otherwise than as a dramatic utterance by one of his characters, which need not in the least represent his own convictions. Quite probably he may have felt in it something like the difficulty which it presents to me. "It's chiefly life after death that you are thinking of, which, come to bedrock, is the only religious question that has any interest, and is virtually the origin of all religion."[1] It has been said, too, "We

[1] *The Tender Conscience*, by Bohun Lynch, p. 120.

feel and experience that we are eternal." We should fairly set these two attitudes of mind side by side with each other and with the full religious temper which simply rests on its oneness with what is deeper than anything temporal. When we begin to restrict and define, do we not begin to omit and to diminish?

But again, our purpose here is not to make any man doubt his religion; it is only to offer the suggestion that whatever his belief, he should take it so deeply, so in proportion, as not to lose contact with the complete attitude which makes it religion. What is united with the eternal is eternal. But how, how far, how transformed, or with what kind of consciousness, if consciousness is the right name at all, can we expect to know in particular, and, *for religion*, can it very much matter?

We must be on our guard against fining down and explaining away our

unity with the eternal in the very act, as we think too hastily, of insisting on it. We must not let go our main grasp of the values which, wherever brought into being in a world, so far make heaven of that place and time, and which all religion teaches us to cherish here and now as everywhere and always —love, beauty, truth. In these our unity is solid and plain—our unity with God and with the whole of being. We must not do anything to throw these into the background, and place our unity in remote events.

Unity with God, as a character of human spirit, involves, it is plain, unity with man. And here again many questions offer themselves. What forms does this unity imply, historical, terrestrial, beyond the grave? Is there to be a millennium, a reign of peace and happiness on earth? What, in truth and reality, is the communion of saints?

That spirits in unity with God must in the end be in unity with one another seems guaranteed by the very essence of religion. But what does "in the end" mean? Are we to ask more? and if we ask more, is it really asked in a religious spirit and interest? People who pray too much—it is an old folk-saying—pray themselves through heaven and out on the other side, and are set to herd the geese there. People who ask too many questions, *claiming to be religious in asking them*—it seems much the same. The shrewd old wives felt and saw perhaps that particularity and curiosity may harm the religious spirit. Science and Logic have their rights; but we must not confuse them with religion. What a man's religion brings him, and what he cannot help receiving when he places himself humbly and sincerely in the attitude of religious faith, I should venture to suggest, let

him hold to without scruple. It will be the nearest thing to truth that he can make his own. Against fancies and private interpretations, I am convinced that any great saint, any noble mystic, will warn him. The question is in the last instance for himself. Is it really religion—unity of will and belief with the supreme good—that he is thinking about in any particular doctrine, or is it something else? That is the question for him to answer with all pureness of heart and humility.

The unity of man and nature must be thought of in the same way. For the religious mind nature is the revelation and instrument, or one revelation and one instrument, of God's will. We will look at other questions afterwards, such as the question of suffering. Here I am only thinking of the feeling to which we are liable that not nature, but something else, is where we are to look

for the will of God. The supernatural; this is what we are apt to feel that our spiritual life depends upon. Not merely, for instance, on the values we spoke of, truth, love, beauty. We do not think of these as supernatural; they are, happily, too familiar; though we might quite fairly do so if anything is to be supernatural. But they come home to us at once as our belongings, and as of one web and tissue with our world. Now if we go into ourselves, and keep fast hold of religion, we shall surely feel that all these things are just sides, aspects, consequences of it, ways in which the revelation of supreme will and goodness comes in our mind and heart. Then the seeking for a sign—for something marked as an exception to natural occurrences, or what looks like an exception—all this falls into its true place. If you cannot think of God without it, well and good; think of Him, I believe

one must say, as you best can. Only, let nothing, no love of striking proofs, no yearning for a short cut to a special path of unity, oust you from the central citadel in which Mansoul possesses religion—oneness with the supreme good in every facet and issue of heart and will. This is what matters; innumerable outgoings arise from it, and each must certainly be pursued and grasped for a certain distance. But in any one of them, if you are allured by it, it is easy to lose yourself, and forget the one thing needful. If you are offered a doctrinal certainty, ask yourself *of what* it is a certainty. Is it really of a truth pertaining to religion, or is it of something quite different, which perhaps tradition or controversy has associated with it? Every one, I repeat, must judge for himself. The absolute need in judging is sincerity, pureness of heart. Does this really belong to my

oneness, in love and will, with the supreme good? Does it flow from this, and confirm me in it? If not, it may be an interesting and valuable speculation; but it is not a part of religion.

CHAPTER IV

HOPE AND PROGRESS FOR HUMANITY

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HOPE AND PROGRESS FOR HUMANITY

"He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." CHRIST.

"That which is filled with the more real is more really filled." PLATO.

MAN is a creature active in the world, and an all-absorbing faith in the supremacy of good must affect his action and expectation. But here again in particularising we are very apt to run up into blind alleys. Nowhere is it more important to keep our starting-point full in sight. In religion, man acknowledges his finiteness; it is essential to the basis of the experience, though it is not the whole basis. Religion says, You are victorious in the victory of

good. It does not say that you can, in the world of time, cease to be a finite and defective being.

If, then, we construe the victory of the good to mean either the total sanctification of the finite spirit (you and me) by the perfecting of its morality in fact, or the coming about in time of a state of things which we conceive as involving the ideal rule of righteousness and happiness, these are interesting speculations, but they gain no special support from religious faith. Faith, so far, is rather at one with common sense. It tells you that though your conflict is in itself a victory, yet it is a conflict still. For the religious man trusts in no strength of his own, and to be perfect apart from that in which he trusts would for him be sin and self-contradiction.

At the same time, his main experience *is* the clue to reality. For the total detailed course of the world or the

universe he lives by faith and not by sight. But for his private life and action —I mean, in all that he has contact with, I do not mean merely in self-regarding matters, if such could be distinguished —he has sight continuous with his faith. His vision and experience are not empty, but overflowingly full. He has "the water that I shall give him"; he is filled with "what is real." He is never out of reach of the world of values, revealed to him and in him. Religion does not say, I think, that he is to believe in an order of values some day to be attained without intermixture of what seems hostile to value. Following our simple purpose, we will not speculate about this. But what we do know is that a simple faith finds on all sides confirmation and realisation, strangely intermingled and interdependent with difficulty and obstruction, in the world in which our feet are set.

A cup holds enough for it if it is full; and for the religious spirit the witness of the good is irrefragable.

Of Hope and Progress, as elements in life, the religious man has a solid grasp. He has them in himself, and they are rooted in the good with which he is united. He can see—for here he has sight continuous with his faith—he can see the supreme values at work, cleansing, organising, ordering the world. Their bringers suffer or perish, but in their own operation the values never fail. We are not just now to philosophise on this paradox—how near together are the strongest and weakest of all things. Evidently, there are different kinds of strength, and, to the common eye, no one of them has wholly its own way in the course of things. It is as if the strength of the spirit could not be revealed, indeed, could not *be*, except by measuring itself against another type

of strength. And then, even in its victory, it seems infected by its opposite, and the progress breaks itself. This certainly suggests that there is always more to be learned, a further power of the values, a spiritual progress at least.

But we are running into speculation. All we ought to say is this, that the needful thing is to keep to our religious faith and what it really demands and really gives. It says nothing, I believe, of time. A word like "victory," or "in the end," becomes deceptive if we press it as meaning an event, an occurrence. What it means to say is, I take it, that through all appearances good is supreme. And, saying so, it does not leave us with empty words or empty hands. It gives as much of good as our spirits can contain. It may be that all good demands for its realisation a world apparently mixed. Religion has nothing to say against

this. It only requires us to rise above the appearance, and keep our unhesitating grasp on the reality which is wholly good.

Perhaps we may add, without straying too far from simplicity, that in keeping up this grasp on the complex fact of religion we are led to see that "good" is a hard thing both to appreciate and to realise. It is not some plain decalogue, some clear white against black. It is a life, a spirit, a meaning, to be wrought out and to be fought out. To each of us, religion seems to say, it is and must be offered in our own individual form. My battle is continuous with yours, but it is not quite yours; yours helps me in mine, but it is not quite the same. We are sent on diverse missions, and all of them are necessary to the good.

CHAPTER V

THE NATURE OF SIN

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THE NATURE OF SIN

"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

THE diversity or individuality of the good helps us to see clearly the nature of sin. Sin, it is said, only exists for the religious soul. For this soul has given itself wholly to the good and the perfect, but yet still lives in and as its own particular limited self, and its own particular defective world and will. It holds nothing to be real but the good, but yet its own wicked will and wicked world exist. And both worlds and wills belong to it; both the perfect, which it holds to by faith, and the false and perverse, which it disowns but can-

not abolish. Thus the very working out of the good is a battle, in which our will actually fights against itself. The false will, which is disowned and condemned, which faith rejects and repels, none the less is there in fact, and opposes the will of faith in which the soul is saved and at home through religion. And this is sin; for it is the persistence in the religious man of the very will which as religious he disowns.

Again we must avoid dissecting the plain and sure experience. In the religious unity, we find, a contradiction appears which would be impossible but for that unity, and which actually depends upon it. *The same will*, the same impulse to self-completion and satisfaction, which in religious faith is made one with perfection, has a detailed existence in fact which contradicts this perfection. *Any* experience, entertained or pursued in a way hostile to

the complete service and worship which faith embodies, is sinful. Lists of sins and rules about sin may point out dangers, but are no real guide. They are no real guide, because the object of a sinful desire may not be a bad object. It may be only its opposition, in the special case, to what the perfect will demands, that makes it a sin. There is no sin readier at the religious man's elbow than to feel that he has for a moment achieved, that he has been something of himself and apart from that in which he trusts, that he has in himself been worthy. Now this is not a sin which can easily come of a "bad" action. It is pretty certain to spring from something which we should set down at sight as "good."

Obviously if we refine and reflect upon these consequences, we shall come to matters of great subtlety—heresies of all kinds. Is not, then, all our

righteousness as filthy rags? On the other hand, if a perfection which is not ours is the cure, does it matter what we do? That we are in fact sunk in sin, but are somehow real beyond and outside it, might even be a comfortable doctrine.

It is the old story. We are refining, and losing touch. Here is perhaps a plain though prosaic way of bringing home the simple fact. *Bona fides* is the ultimate need in all matters of conduct, and religion is the supreme *bona fides*. Your heart is *really* given to the best you can conceive. But your actual life is narrow and confused, and while willing the object of faith, you will, also, things that *as you will them* (for they need not be "bad") are its enemy. Then we see the religious significance of faith, and what it means to be saved. This, which I am, is not really I. I am *bona fide* other, and this self, though I am it,

I reject and disown. Sin is thus the very detail of the conflict in which religious faith asserts the supremacy of the good. It is a deep self-contradiction, which, but for the supreme faith, would dissolve and destroy my actual being. It is the embodiment of the flat contradiction, the rise in which we stay here. The good, I take it, is actually worked out, and has the substance of its victory, in this struggle, where the will is fairly and clearly occupied in re-creating itself.

Compare once more the position of morality. In pure morality, not allowing for the social ethical observance which is half a religion, the individual must always count as bad. In religion also he is always bad, but *yet* he is really and truly good. This depends on the nature of faith, and a religion which gives you this gives you all you need to see what is meant by sin.

CHAPTER VI

SUFFERING

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SUFFERING

"The whole creation groaneth and travaileth . . . together."

SUFFERING seems a very much wider fact than sin. What bewilders us most in it, I suppose, is its extension over the whole conscious world independently of goodness or badness. It seems as if it followed from any independence, any separateness or self-assertion in things. If things apparently indifferent to one another's interests assert themselves in the same world, there must be conflict, and, with consciousness, suffering.

Religious faith does not seem to promise exemption from suffering. On the contrary, it almost seems to suggest

that it is inevitable. We saw what a tremendous working contradiction faith involves between the true reality and the actual appearance. This seems to imply the possibility at least of a very fiery trial, though different no doubt for different natures and circumstances.

It is important, here as ever, to keep our attention on the central fact. We are very apt to generalise, to make a conception of human nature, for example, by leaving out special features which we think exceptional, and then to infer "This, and a world to suit, is what 'ought' to exist; and so religious faith, which takes the perfect good to be real, must be presupposed to promise this at least." But all this seems groundless, and to be losing touch with what the facts suggest. We saw that what we find is individual spirits, all marked by different qualities and conditions, each apparently set to fight his

battle and work out his line or grow his fibre of the good, in his particular and peculiar case of the whole striving world. There is nothing to suggest that any special mark or privation or deprivation in him is a sort of mistake in the universe, superfluous to the life of the good, and due to be set right as something without spiritual significance. The fact is that the attempt to recommend for adoption as it were a sort of typical complete man and typical complete life has always broken down, as Plato showed it must. You cannot train a perfect healthy animal man, and then complete him by adding a perfectly sane mind to his sound body. You must work out and let him work out his unique kind of health and his unique spiritual development in view of each other and of what he has to do and be. And you cannot put your finger on this or that condition, privation, deprivation, and say, This

is dead spiritual loss and ought not to be. You may rightly try to hinder what you think hardship or defect. But it is far beyond the facts to say: This or that privation or deprivation is abnormal, an injustice, a necessary spiritual loss. The man, say, is blind. Is he so far less than a man should be? Would Mr. Fawcett have been less or more if he had had his sight? Who can tell? And Mr. Kavanagh, if he had had his limbs? One has a bad wife, a bad son. How can we say what he will make of the burden? We are not entitled to judge that the unique being and equipment which the universe lays upon each individual is such as to impair and defeat the possibilities of good. We must not assume that things would be better if we could make him and his conditions over to suit our smoothed conception of what a man and his life should be.

Here is a simple case of the principle in question. If we take as our standard a complete efficiency of our animal system, we are tempted to condemn its evolution as awkwardly managed. Its arrangements appear to have been primarily adapted to other ends than those they serve to-day, and to have been modified, not too successfully, in the interest of man's spiritual functions. Now if we grant that this is so, does it follow that in this characteristic the universe is on the wrong track? There is a reticence in English treatment of intimate experience which it would probably be ill service to the higher life to violate or impair. Else I believe that it might not be difficult to show in more than one actual particular example how the whole connected set of physical distresses which sprang from one of these evolutionary maladaptations was a definite originating cause of the only

seriously valuable production to which certain lives gave rise. In matters so complex, a particular case goes for little, and it might always be pronounced "exceptional." Nevertheless I believe that it would be feasible by analyses of this kind to produce a good deal of conviction as to the positive values contributed to life by what commonly pass for negations, privations, deprivations.[1] Thus we might get rid of that tendency to standardise all finite spirits and their good at a somewhat commonplace or average level, which implies and is implied in the pretension to set down so much and such as what they ought to have, and again so much and such as what is abnormal and they ought to be spared. Of course, health is a good thing, and we have a right to make good things general if we can. But health, as we saw, itself is relative,

[1] The line of thought of course is affected by Spinoza.

besides that spiritual creativeness is not confined to health. The fact seems to be that the ways and conditions of spiritual productiveness are infinitely various and in each case unique. The good is obviously a highly vitalised and various world. And in all this there is universally present the general form or structure of suffering; beings *prima facie* indifferent to each other and to themselves, with an underlying unity which forces them into transformations.

> Rejoice that man is hurled
> From change to change unceasingly,
> His soul's wings never furled.

It is in and through such a conflict that the good is triumphant for faith, realising the vitality which is its nature in continual origination within and against the dazzle of plausible satisfactions.

Thus it seems to follow from the simple fact of religion that suffering belongs on the one hand to the religious

spirit, and on the other to the finite world. I do not mean, or believe, that pain can be the sole feature of life, or is often the predominant one. But it does seem to me that we are losing sight of religious experience if we assign to it an ideal in which there shall be no place for pain even as a condition which may be suppressed, but is always imminent. A finite world of appearances, *prima facie* at issue with itself and with reality, may be, it would seem, the natural and normal arena for religious faith to dominate.

Now if so, what we call the reciprocal indifference of beings in time, and the maladaptations of evolution, may be no hindrance to the spiritual life, but its essential counterpart. Try to say what you think ought to be removed from any given private life in order to furnish its possessor with the conditions which you consider religious faith to

presuppose, and, though you may feel certain at first about extremes from which you start, you will very shortly find yourself in a region of extreme unreality, almost all definite circumstances being condemned. War, or at least modern war, you would remove; and grinding poverty. And irresponsible wealth? That too. And commonplace mediocrity of circumstances? The worst starting-point of all. A cruel mother? Certainly to be excluded. 'A' devoted self-sacrificing mother? The subtlest of moral dangers. You very soon find that you leave nothing standing. There *is* no normal. All is individual; and every pushing fibre and tendril of the good is unique, and has its own root to start from and its own issue to find. It is crude and pagan, perhaps, to say that all good comes by suffering, and I do not say it. But religious faith seems to mean a going out

of oneself, which may be exultant, but can hardly fail at times to put the finite being on the rack.

We have approached too near to argument. But let the reader consider for himself how a supreme love and trust—Dante's love—must be felt by a finite creature. It cannot be all simple receiving. It must make a severe demand. And if we might choose our own conditions, should we not rule out most things worth doing?

In a word, religion *is* just the weld of finite and infinite. Such an experience may be triumphant, but can it be costless?

"The *whole* creation . . ."; and yet we do not see how it can all share in religion. Yet it has been written:

> The spirit of the worm beneath the sod
> In love and worship blends itself with God.

Religion says nothing against this that I know of. At any rate the

apparently finite world seems to be a necessary arena and instrument of values; and as better insight comes, it does not approximate to a fabric of pure blank preciousness, as the New Jerusalem does to a fabric of mere gems, but rather to more intimate and poignant realisations, united with a deeper perfection and a profounder victory. It is something of this kind that the religious experience offers as the simple and inward fact about suffering. And I believe we must take it so, and not try to reason or explain it away.

CHAPTER VII

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

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PRAYER AND WORSHIP

"After this manner therefore pray ye . . . Thy will be done."

PRAYER and worship seem to be of the most intimate essence of religion. And just for this reason, when separately argued about and insisted on, above all its other features they tend to become distorted. Prayer, I suppose, *is* the very meditation which *is*, or at the very least which enables us to realise and enter into, the unity which is religious faith. Worship, inward or outward, is in principle the same. It is some direction of feeling, thought, or ritual which

renews and fortifies, perhaps with the aid of sympathetic communion, the faith and will which is religion.

Every religion, I take it, intends to help its votaries in this way. It wishes to maintain and to reinforce in them the strictly religious spirit.

But here as elsewhere rationalism, curiosity, metaphor, and deduction from metaphor, operate by way of distortion. When faith weakens, the unity of the spirit tends to sever itself into ideas of persons in relation with each other, and the common conceptions of persons begin to react; the sides of the central experience, which prayer was to hold together, begin to fall apart, and the meditation and inspiration of unity cannot but be transformed accordingly. "Father," "King," "Lord," "Creator," all these words may help our sluggish imaginations in certain ways. But all of them offer by-paths for practical

ceremony and for reflective inquisitiveness, in which the religious mind may lose itself.

If prayer, we argue, can keep us assured of the supreme triumph and of unity with the ultimate power, what can it not do? What can faith not do? From securing our daily bread to any miracle we chance to set our hearts on, all seems possible to it. Here is an example of what we must come to if we stray along roads like these till we run up against sanity and common sense. "Mr. John Scrimgeour, minister of Kinghorn, who, having a beloved child sick to death of the crewels, was free to expostulate with his Maker with such impatience of displeasure, and complaining so bitterly, that at length it was said unto him, that he was heard for this time, but that he was requested to use no such boldness in time coming; so that when he returned he found the

child sitting up in the bed hale and fair. . . ."[1]

The religious unity of spirit and its maintenance is thus coming to be broken up under the influence of various demands construed according to analogies imported into the matter by natural efforts to explain and interpret. With the growing distinction and remoteness of the human and divine factors the whole nature of prayer and worship transforms itself. It comes to be modelled on the normal relations between an inferior and a superior in the asking of favours and the rendering of honour.

Now here as throughout it is for the sincere mind to judge what incidents of hope and belief—what shapes of the answer to prayer—are really involved in his religion. We are only concerned to note the warning that prayer and

[1] *Heart of Midlothian.*

worship certainly change their nature as we pursue curiosity and metaphor along paths which lead us away from what religious faith most strictly implies. What we essentially want, I suppose, is to be helped to realise and hold fast our religious faith, including, as we have seen throughout, our religious will. To this end "religions," systems of creed and ritual, or, more generally, of feeling and practice, have their ways of being instrumental. And what is religious in them, I take it, is all that which contributes to keep true religion alive in the heart. Praise and supplication, so far as they do not help in this, seem not to be religious *at all.*

CHAPTER VIII

THE RELIGIOUS TEMPER

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THE RELIGIOUS TEMPER

"As a little child . . ."

HERE is a sentence worth considering: "It is customary . . . to contrast the humility required by the Gospel with the supposed arrogance and self-sufficiency of the philosophical spirit. Yet if we take men so different and so representative in their differences as Plato, Bacon, and Spinoza, we find them all agreeing, not in a glorification of the human mind, but in the imperative demand that it should shake off its 'chains' and turn to receive the light, that it should surrender its

'idols' and 'become as a little child,' that it should look at things 'under the form of eternity,' not through the vague confusion of its own imagination."[1]

This substantive agreement between the language of religion and that of wisdom is a remarkable thing. I suppose it points to what we have dwelt upon throughout, the total simplicity of supreme experiences, and the impossibility of entering into them except by a total sincerity and candour. Humility no doubt is demanded; but humility taken by itself may be an obsession and distraction, just like vanity, *amour propre*, curiosity, the charm of contrivance and ingenuity. What is aimed at is rather not to be preoccupied with yourself *at all*; not to be preoccupied with your own weakness or littleness, any more than with your own goodness or cleverness. The feel-

[1] Nettleship in *Hellenica*, ed. 1, 152.

ing and admission of defect is, I imagine, presupposed; but it should not, surely, be reflectively predominant so as to divert attention to itself and impair the simple spirit of trust and surrender. Now this is at the same time the spirit of complete appreciation, which alone can seize the whole fact in its due shape and proportion. This is what in any matter of common life we get, as we say, only from those "who really care." "Love speaks with better knowledge and knowledge with dearer love."

The artist, too, we are told, covets "the innocence of the eye"; the gaze for which the whole impression is single, unbroken, and unrationalised.

To illustrate a little further. It is one of the less noted advantages in the succession of fresh lives which death and birth maintain, that the worn and patched and piece-meal experience of the aged scholar or statesman, perhaps

even of the saint, is not perpetuated for ever with the full traces of the mode in which it was painfully acquired. In being swept away along with its possessor, it makes room for the fresh and total contemplative activity of new minds, no longer seamed and wrinkled by the hardships and accidents which attended acquisition.

While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked, "Shall smiting help us?"

. . . . . .

O'erimportuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him. . . .

In the gaze of the rising generation all this is wiped away. It comes, or should come, delighted and unwearied, to seize directly and vigorously on its actual merits and in its total contours the treasure that is offered to it, and so

to accept the experience in its full and real proportions.

Something of this kind is what the religious temper demands. Here even the veteran expert in life must stand to his own mature experience somewhat as the younger generation stands to its predecessor's. He finds himself necessarily negligent of its entanglements, its history, its controversy, and trying to take it at its centre simply as it is and for its own sake. To be one with the supreme good in the faith which is also will—that is religion; and to be thus wholly and unquestioningly is the religious temper. Then all the riches of the spirit may add themselves to the mood, on condition that nothing in them stands out to impair or to violate it. For they all, as we saw, belong to it of right; only their intricacies and distractions make it so easy for us to lose our way among them. To be as a little

child means to keep hold, so to speak, of the direct handclasp; to remain in touch with the centre; not to go wandering after this clever notion and that.

If one could maintain this simplicity, supreme *bona fides*, sincerity of mood and temper, and care about one's religion mainly and especially with reference to those features in it which are truly and strictly religious, I believe the gain would be great. And gradually and naturally, I suppose, there would come about a certain discrimination between what is necessary in religion, and what is more or less superfluous, and, if emphatically insisted on, tends even to become harmful. But I most firmly believe that to a sound and sincere religious temper much that may in itself be superfluous can fall into its place and be in no way dangerous. I do not think controversy is useful, but mischievous. Yet a sense of sanity and

proportion, if it could be promoted by concentrating attention on the simple essence of religion, would, I believe, be of very great religious value.

THE END

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