

SYMBOLISM IN THE MYSTICS

ONE is bound to be impressed by the frequency with which the great mystics apologize for and discount their own use of symbols and metaphors to describe their experiences. St Teresa will write of our Lord as the Bridegroom, of her union with God as a marriage; but then she will go on to say: 'But this is not so: it was not at all like this; but these are the best words I can find for it'. The mystics here are in much the same position as the symbolist poets: what they have to convey is greater than rational language can contain, because what they have known is beyond reason and beyond words. Often one may think that in the symbolist poets this failure to communicate lucidly what they have felt is providential; when such a poet as Rilke has a doctrine of despair, of the renunciation of life and the worship of death to teach, it is well, as he himself recognized, that communion in his thought and experience should be limited to those, relatively few, to whom his symbols are intelligible because they have trodden the same way as he. So it may also be with the mysteries of the Faith, and the symbols through which they are presented to us in the Scriptures and the liturgy. Though it is our duty as rational creatures to strive to comprehend them, we should never forget that reason will never be able to grasp or relate the *sensuum defectus*.

ERIC COLLEDGE

AN ANGLICAN VIEW

I HAVE had Roman Catholic friends in this country and on the Continent, and have been a fairly regular reader of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* for several years, yet I find myself surprised that the atmosphere and substance of this conference should have been so congenial to me. It ought not to have been; but actually hearing Catholic priests and professors talking among themselves with a freedom of judgment that is popularly supposed not to exist in the Roman Church is far more impressive than the reading of many review articles can ever be. It is so easy to forget who else is reading them, so impossible to guess their reactions. And if I, who bear a considerable affection to the Roman Church,

am so vividly impressed by this, it is not difficult to imagine what the effect might be on the general run of Anglicans.

So my first reflection is that the presence of two Anglican priests invited to hear Catholics talking among themselves is likely to be more instructive and more fruitful than many formal 'Unity' conferences which begin, continue, and end, in spiritual stalemate.

But you want the reflections of an Anglican on the subject of the conference. As a boy in a not excessively pious family in a country town, I heard the Bible read at home, with my mother and brothers. We were not meticulously regular, and we read stories at random. We also grew up in familiarity with the sound of the generous scripture lessons at Mattins and Evensong in church on Sundays, so that we assimilated the Bible naturally and easily, and almost unconsciously absorbed its imagery and symbols into our mental make-up. When I was old enough to think analytically, I naturally realized the relation between my attitude to scripture and that to poetry; and now I most readily think of the Bible in terms of the *sensus plenior* and symbological method which the conference has been discussing. The fact that I heard the Bible read aloud so much seems to me to be important. Even as a student of theology I found that the impact of the scriptures was most forceful when I heard it read aloud, and especially in the course of the liturgy.

I was again surprised at the discussion of biblical preaching, because it sounded very like what an Anglican conference might have said on the same subject. It is frequently remarked that our preaching is deficient because it is unscriptural, either in matter or in form. Yet it ought not to be so: topical matters and moral exhortations often form the basis of sermons that ignore the Bible once they have passed the customary opening text, though it calls for no great ingenuity to do better. And when the form is unscriptural there is no excuse for the Anglican preacher, who can still assume a certain acquaintance by all his people with a single standard English version.

This Authorized version still counts for a great deal with us. We never succeed in quite losing its music from our ears—and that is probably why we find the Knox translation,

apart from its other shortcomings, so irritating. We make occasional use of modern versions, particularly partial ones like Bishop Wand's *Epistles*, and most of the clergy use the R.V. for study and read their New Testament in Greek; but the A.V. is our mainstay.

A tailpiece: for me, the most striking thing about *The Sign of Jonas*, though I have seen it mentioned by no reviewer, was Merton's discovery of the riches of Scripture.

RICHARD RUTT



THE OBSTACLES OF A SCRIPTURE SCHOLAR

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

YOUNG Harry Pope, we are informed by the author of this lively and fascinating study of the man,¹ did not shine at the Oratory school in athletics, 'though midway through his school career he came first in the obstacle race'. The shadow of coming events was then already cast; for this man, who as Father Hugh Pope, O.P., became the leading Scripture scholar in England for many years, did in fact in the middle of his career win the obstacle race set by the modernist attack on the Word of God. Fr Mulvey shows how this race was won first interiorly by bringing Father Hugh to the placid yet pungent holiness which all could recognize in the charming fatherly Dominican from the 1920's onwards. It was surely a clear case of divine purification, call it a 'dark night' if you will, leading to a peaceful unity and wholeness of life in God. And that race was won, inevitably, before the victory was recognized by the world outside.

It happened, of course, that Fr Hugh, studying for the highest Scriptural degree and teaching at the same time in Rome during the modernist scare from 1910 onwards, should meet all sorts of obstacles. Those having a care for the purity of doctrine were on edge and nervous, and men of the most shining and unimpeachable orthodoxy like Fr Hugh Pope were liable to sharpen that edginess by the mere fact of teaching Scripture. It all came to a head when Fr Hugh published an article whose very title shows how much we owe to him today and how much we are now entering into his inheritance—'Why divorce our teaching of Theology from our teaching of the Bible?' (*Irish Theological Quarterly*, January 1913).

¹ *Hugh Pope of the Order of Preachers*. By Kieran Mulvey, O.P. (Blackfriars Publications; 12s. 6d.)