

theological virtues, bringing to full flower in man the image of God in which he was created.

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In this number we print what we hope will be the first of a series of short sketches of some of the English martyrs.

We would like to apologize to the editor of *Tertiary Annals* for omitting to mention in our last issue that the article entitled 'Sheep among Wolves' was reprinted from that periodical by his kind permission.



HOLINESS AND PERFECTION

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ISRAEL'S first call to holiness was full of the awe of Sinai, that dread meeting with God on the mountain:

I am the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that I might be your God.

You shall be holy, because I am holy. (Lev. xi, 45-46.)

So far from being 'a serious call to a devout life', this shattering contact with the 'wholly other' is the very source of their life as a people. They live constantly in the memory of this encounter; they respond to its claims with a fanatical insistence on their separateness. The Red Sea divides them now from a profane world; they have been brought out of Egypt to be shattered and remoulded around this experience. God has spoken to them out of the thunders and lightnings of the holy mountain, and in that moment of history they have been set apart; still trembling in the grip of that fearful revelation Israel grows to nationhood as a chosen people. To be chosen by God is always to share in that mystery of life and destructive power which is the holiness of God himself. Although its claims are absolute, to those who consent to be moulded by it there is an opening to intimacy with God. Terrible as those demands are, they are realized in a covenanted love:

Thou art a holy people to the Lord thy God.

The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be his peculiar people of all peoples that are upon the earth.

Not because you surpass all nations in number is the Lord joined unto you, and hath chosen you; for you are the fewest of any people: but because the Lord hath loved you, and hath kept his oath, which he swore to your fathers; and hath brought you out with a strong hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage.

(Deut. vii, 6-8.)

Gathered together and established in the land, the tribes are shaped by their common allegiance. Being God's people fidelity to him is the condition of their common life. While his presence is in the midst of them, he is the centre of their life, and his will is law. To obey his commands and ordinances is to secure his favour and mercy, to be fashioned by his creative love. So long as the voice of God is heard, Israel may enjoy the blessings of consecration; this is the Lord's promise on the mountain:

I have carried you upon the wings of eagles, and have taken you to myself.

If therefore you will hear my voice, and keep my covenant, you shall be my peculiar possession above all people: for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

(Exodus xix, 5.)

'A priestly kingdom and a holy nation', Israel is set apart for intimate converse with God. As a people it has been touched by the presence of God and sanctified. 'Sanctified' because every contact with him involves a withdrawal from the profane, a *tabu* which is set upon the reserved person, object, or place. Sinai itself, on which Moses communes with God, is a sacred mountain, and the people are strictly charged that death will be the penalty for touching it. Limits are set upon man's approach to God, limits of place and person and time, and any trespass on those bounds carries the peril of death from the destructive power which it unleashes. The people are the custodians of these limits and the ministers of God's wrath on the offender. Setting limits and making holy are closely connected, just as there is a link between trespass and the unholy. Every access to God, and all that relates to his presence, calls for a separation and a consecration; the two are connected. One tribe, that of Levi, is set aside as the special ministers of his presence; one family, that of Aaron, is consecrated for his priesthood; one man, the high priest, alone has access to the inner sanctuary of the Lord, the holy of holies entered only on the day of atonement. Only the levites may carry the furniture

of the tabernacle; only the priests may offer sacrifice; only the high priest may enter the dwelling-place of the divine glory. 'The priests that come to the Lord, let them be sanctified; lest he strike them' (Exodus xix, 22). It is an approach which is jealously guarded for those who are made over to the Lord.

The law of holiness of the latter chapters of Leviticus stands in close relation to the rules of purity, the ritual of sacrifice and the investiture of the priests. All these details make wearisome reading if their unity is missed. In the course of time, a complex pattern of observance had evolved around the worship of the God of Israel. It is a closely-knit fabric of ordinations and prohibitions in which the social and religious are merged, a working out of the will of God for particular situations, on a different level of authority from the eternal commands of the decalogue. What is common is the central character of the worship of God, and the way in which it conditions the life of the people, so that purity is essentially purity for sharing in the worship of God, and impurity involves an exclusion from the cult. The ritual of purification itself is a separation, every contact with the presence of God exacting its own degree of segregation. In the mysteries of life and death, birth, bloodshed and disease, all that relates to the dead, whether man or beast, and the act of generation, special manifestations of the hand of God are recognized, contacts which separate a man from society. While the emphasis is still on ritual observance, a ground is being laid for a notion of moral purity as a condition of access to God. This development reaches a climax in Isaias's vision in the temple. There the prophet sees God face to face, enthroned in glory, with the seraphim crying, 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of his glory'. Isaias sees God in all his holiness, and fears for his own impurity: 'Woe is me . . . because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people that hath unclean lips, and I have seen with my eyes the King the Lord of hosts' (Isaias vi, 5).

Fear of the death-dealing presence of God in the ark had little in common with the acknowledgment of conscious guilt, but the whole mission of the prophets is an awakening of conscience, a bringing to light of guilt and the need of redemption and a purer worship of God. It responds to the people's deepening sense of the claims of love, to give oneself up wholly, heart and soul and mind to one's God; and to keep oneself 'unspotted from the

world' is ultimately a condition of that wholehearted self-giving. Purity in its widest sense is required by the holiness in which the beloved meets God; 'Beloved of God called to be saints' (Rom. i, 7) evokes the *convocatio sancta* of Moses; the people who have been called and sanctified are finally invited to fellowship in the love of God, perfectly realized in Christ, the new Israel. 'Be ye holy, because I the Lord your God am holy' (Lev. xix, 2) is fulfilled in the words of Christ: 'Be ye therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew v, 48). To the call to purity and holiness he adds a note of fulness and completion which belongs to the total response claimed by the love of God in the new law. It is the same notion in germ which demanded an unblemished sacrifice in the old law. Man was to give of his best; what he valued most of his sheep and cattle and the produce of the earth was to be made over to God by way of a sacrificial offering, and by the same token, the one who offered sacrifice was to be without disease or deformity: 'Whosoever of the seed of Aaron the priest hath a blemish; he shall not approach to offer sacrifices to the Lord, nor bread to his God' (Lev. xxi, 21). This insistence on physical perfection in the minister and his offering foreshadows the moral perfection of our High Priest and his perfect sacrifice of the new law. Already, in the consecration of Aaron and his sons, a term is used which has the literal sense of 'filling the hand' (Exodus xxv, ii, 41, xxix, 9, 29, 33, 35; Lev. viii, 33, xvi, 32; Num. iii, 3). It is used too in describing the high priest:

The priest who is the greatest among his brethren, upon whose head the oil of unction hath been poured, and whose hands have been consecrated (filled) for the priesthood, and who hath been vested with the holy vestments. (Lev. xxi, 10.)

Significantly, the word which is used here in the Greek translation of Leviticus literally means *perfected*, and is the same as the epistle to the Hebrews uses in describing the excellence of Christ's priesthood:

The Son who is perfected for evermore. (Hebrews vii, 28.)

There is thus a link between old testament 'holiness' and 'consecration', and new testament 'perfection' which is more than verbal. The idea of fulness, of completion, was there in germ; at first, in a very physical sense of the 'unblemished', but already in

connection with sacrifice and the consecrated hands which carry the victim to the Lord.

Christ has instituted a new and more perfect covenant and priesthood, a definitive fulfilment of the old: more perfect because they achieve man's moral and religious perfection, bringing him to the end for which they were instituted, union with God. Nothing is lacking to the believer who is made perfect through them, justified by the grace of Jesus Christ and realizing the fulness of his vocation. 'Perfection' is the key-notion of the epistle to the Hebrews, and it appears there in direct relation to the contrast of old and new. The Christian stands at the summit of that slow revelation of holiness and the awakening of moral consciousness that marks the old testament; in the light and life of Christ nothing is now lacking to bring it to fulfilment. Life in Christ is fully adult, morally mature, and its nourishment is an ever deeper penetration into the mystery of Christ, an ever greater refinement of conscience and conduct. The Christian cannot be content to rely always on the rudiments of the faith; the catechism is only meant as a beginning:

For everyone that lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child.

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity.
(Hebrews v, 13-vi, 1.)

For Solomon, to be perfect was to be faithful to God's commandments:

Let our hearts also be perfect with the Lord our God that we may walk in his statutes, and keep his commandments.

(III (I) Kings viii, 61.)

To be faithful was primarily to keep himself unblemished from idolatry, serving God as his father David had taught him:

Thou my son Solomon know the God of thy Father, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind.

For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the thoughts of minds.

If thou seek him thou shalt find him; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

(I Para. (Chron.) xxviii, 9.)

To be faithful in the fullest sense, though, requires more than obedience, as the rich young man discovered when he came to

Jesus; it requires nothing less than a total giving of self, the sacrifice of all that stands in the way of union with God; the perfect follower of Christ seeks a heavenly treasure by adhering to God's will. This is why St Paul says of the Christian that he is to 'stand perfect and full in all the will of God' (Col. iv, 12), and tells the Romans that they are to be transformed by a renewal of their minds, no longer falling in with the ways of the world, so that they may 'prove what is the good and the acceptable and perfect will of God' (Rom. xii, 2). To be faithful then in the fullest sense requires a mature discernment of what is pleasing to God.

Perfection counts for nothing if a man lacks wisdom (Wisdom ix, 2), but the wisdom which Paul speaks 'among the perfect' is not the wisdom of this world, but the hidden wisdom of God (I Cor. ii, 7), still only a partial grasp of God's mysteries, but one which has its achievement in the perfect knowledge of God, face to face (I Cor. xii, 10-12). It is so easy to make childish curiosity and the pursuit of the marvellous and novel a substitute for wisdom, and against this he warns the Corinthians: 'Brethren, do not become children in sense, but in malice be children, and in sense be perfect' (I Cor. xiv, 20). Always we find the same insistence on the maturity in faith that is needed for perfection; the law of spiritual growth calls for an effort of mind and will, a pressing on 'towards the mark', straining after a 'prize' which is set before those who have a mind to be perfect (Phil. iii, 14-15). Together Christians are called to grow to the full stature of manhood in Christ; all God's various gifts are ordered to this end:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine . . .

Rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. . . . (Eph. iv, 12-15.)

Paul declares his purpose in preaching and teaching 'in all wisdom': that he may present every man 'perfect', mature in Christ (Col. i, 28), and his stress falls here, as everywhere, on the adult status of the perfect. They have come of age spiritually by attaining a higher degree of knowledge and a greater sensitivity to the will of God. Having advanced to proficiency, they have a

fully developed understanding and a sharpened moral sense; they are stable in the truth, and ready to grasp what is more difficult. What has been built up is a condition of mind and will which favours their approach to God. The perfect, being fully instructed in the ways of God, initiated into the mysteries of Christ, offer themselves in the self-sacrifice of lives made pleasing to God. Perfection indeed lies in the accomplishment of God's will with the utmost fidelity, the constant theme of St John in talking about the mission of Christ. He relates the words of the Lord: 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me that I may *perfect* his work' (John iv, 34); '. . . the works which the Father hath given me to *perfect*' (John v, 36). It is in this sense too that Jesus prays for the unity of his disciples, 'that they may be made *perfect* in one' (John xvii, 23). The faithful carrying out of the will of God, the accomplishment of all things in Christ, is not only the condition of access to God, but the source of a growing unity with all believers. Separated from the world by their holy calling, they are bound together in a common hope of seeing God; they are united in that 'perfect charity which casts out fear' (I John iv, 18).

Primarily then perfection lies in the life of charity, the love of God first, and then of one's neighbour. This is a life which is spiritually mature, with a fully adult response to God's will. The perfect man is no longer wholly taken up with the avoidance of sin; he has begun to adhere to God, so that to cleave to him is his principal concern, and already he begins to enter into a heritage. Together with a growing security, he may sense the joy and sweetness of Christ's yoke, and go on to what is more exacting. Increasing attachment to God by charity goes with a keener discernment of what is pleasing to him and the willingness to choose what is more perfect, what is more conducive to charity. To do more than is of strict obligation, to be guided by counsels and not merely obedient to precepts, this is the means and the effect of maturity. Above all then it is in charity that the 'bond of perfection' is found, and the withdrawal of human affections from worldly things, to plunge into the abyss of divine love, is the condition of approach to the All-Holy. The fulness of love, the completeness of man's self-offering calls for a purity of heart and mind. The meat of God's will is for the perfect; they are to be nourished by his wisdom, the food of the mature. Only the

consecrated whose hands have been filled by God can approach the presence; only the sanctified can ascend the holy mountain.



THE MANY-SPLENDURED THING

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IN a gospel passage which is seldom quoted with reference to the spiritual life, our Lord reminds us that no father, asked for a loaf or an egg, will hand his son a stone or a scorpion, and since earthly parents give their children only wholesome food, we may be certain that our heavenly Father will show even greater loving wisdom towards us. Each day we ask him to give us this day our daily bread and, at least in England, usually obtain it. We also ask for patience, charity and such other virtues as we may be in need of; we ask him to increase our devotion and remove our distractions. Very often it seems that our heavenly Father hands us stones instead of virtues; scorpions instead of grace. It seems that the only answers to these prayers take the form of despondency, failure to *be* charitable or patient, or show any other admirable quality; our distractions are worse and our sensible devotion sinks to zero.

This, admittedly, may be a slightly exaggerated picture, but the underlying truth is familiar to anyone who is trying to live the life of the spirit. It is very disheartening. We want so much to please our Lord and he makes it so difficult. Or so we think. We have to realize that our Lord usually gives us the raw materials, not the finished product. Metaphorically we have to bake the dough and cook the egg. He does not answer our prayers by bestowing virtues upon us, ready-made; he sends us opportunities for putting them into practice and the grace to make good use of them. It would be very flattering to our self-esteem (and disastrous to our humility) if we found ourselves suddenly dowered with invincible patience or impregnable recollection. The age of miracles is not yet past, but we have no right to expect them in our own lives.