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THE POWER OF GOD

A CURRENT advertisement for a tonic wine, appearing very frequently in certain parts of England, shows the head of a well-groomed young woman, eyes closed, forehead towards the skies and a pale, ghostly hand soothing her brows. This drink, the multitudes are informed, soothes tired nerves. In an age when many people are in fact 'living on their nerves' owing to the speed, the racket and the increasing anxieties of modern life, and when this sense of nervous strain is uppermost in their consciousness, such an advertisement must possess a powerful appeal. A growing number of people do in fact require some tonic to steady that sub-rational and in a way very human urge which seizes them and carries them into irritable quarrels or brings a gnawing sense of frustration and makes work, companions, recreation, indeed every aspect of life, seem out of joint. It is this common strain which demands an ever-increasing army of psychiatrists to attempt to deal with it and which provides the divorce courts with a large proportion of their teased and confused clients. There must be a great number of people looking for some soothing hand to touch with peaceful and gentle power the storm centres of their nerves. They seem to yearn for some ghostly Prince Arthur to perform his tender offices.

When your head did ache
 I knit my handkerchief about your brows . . .
 And with my hand at midnight held your head,
 And, like the watchful minutes to the hour
 Still and anon cheer'd up the heavy time,
 Saying, 'What lack you?' and 'Where lies your grief?'
 Or 'What good love may I perform for you?'

Such services would seemingly prevent many a social disaster or personal tragedy and keep men and women in a serener frame of mind than is often theirs today.

The misfortune of it all is that those who suffer from this drag upon their nerves are compelled to seek for alleviation of the irritation from psychiatrists and tonics and similar more or less superficial remedies. For the cause of the malaise is too deep for these cures. It has frequently been pointed out of late, in fact, that civilised man has been dislocated from his appointed place in the universe. We hear of oriental remedies for diseases, cured by lying flat on the earth with a special orientation (east-west or north-south) for hours and days at a time. The patient is healed by the pulse of nature, by being drawn back into the life-stream of the earth—or however else the method is explained. Whatever truth there may be in the explanation of such cures, the cure itself would appear to suggest a healing of the dislocation which exists between the individual man and the whole intricate being of created existence. It may be also the secret which is approached by the often recommended practice of 'relaxation' in a technical, psychological manner. But the oriental cure seems to get nearer the cause of the nervous troubles of today than the sophisticated and tentative remedies of the west because it assumes a universal power in nature.

The dislocation is in fact one between the conscious life of man and the inescapable and universal power of God—a power which is not only omnipotent, penetrating 'to the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow', but also unchanging and 'upholding all things' without any alteration of purpose on account of the vacillations of men. For this reason we can think of the single, cleansing power of Nature, not as belonging to nature of itself but as coming to it from the supporting will of God and we can see how that if man is, in the realms of his conscious freedom, out of joint, or out of harmony with this healing power, he has somehow to return to that omnipotent source of health. Power goes out from God into the whole world, the power to heal that we read of in the Gospels; but God cannot change and man must retrace his steps in order to rediscover this spring of life.

One of the difficulties is that the ideas of 'Power' and 'Authority'

have become so warped in the minds of modern men that they are terrified to submit in any way to something which can sweep them off their feet or make them slaves of some other will. The curious paradox of the fear of power thrusting nations into complete slavery through the abuse of power has often been noted in the phenomena of Fascist and Communist states. But such abuses do in fact increase the fear and so increase the slavery until like the snowball men go rolling down the hill locked together in greater and greater numbers and with no control of their destinies. Nevertheless they read of the power of God and fancy that it is some terrible nemesis, the horror of Mount Sinai with its burning fire and darkness, its whirlwind and its storm. So threatening indeed does the omnipotence of God appear that instinctively the little human creature tries to set limits to it by considering God as a remote possibility, a Reality which if it exists has no direct concern with human affairs. The average man today seems to have successfully achieved this sealing off of the Almighty from ordinary daily life (this it is which has caused the disjointure and disharmony in his make-up). And having secured an apparent immunity from the divine power he is more than ever suspicious of the power of God which resides in the Church. It is, for example, a great effort for the convert to the Church to overcome the instinctive distrust of the Church's power and the suspicion that it will lead him into some sort of intellectual slavery or dishonesty, not to mention the subjection to the strict interpretation of the moral law. It is not easy to seal off the power of the Church unless one denies it outright. Consequently there is a great number of people who hold a vague and 'comfortable' doctrine of a distant God and who resolutely dissociate themselves from any specific creed. And yet they are the more likely to be submerged in the sea of tension and jangling nerves.

The power of God does in fact embrace all things down to the very movements of the individual man's free will. But if we consider it in the light of the complete and whole eternity in which it exists and in which alone it can be found, we shall discover that the terror of it is removed. The power of God is contained in the will so that it makes the whole of reality 'all of a piece', God's will moulding the universe and moulding the individual man, moulding man by the laws of nature implicit in the human substance he is fashioning. And the Christian man is being fashioned by the same indivisible will according to the rules of the Church and her Sacraments. It is not as though the convert entering the Church takes on a lot of new demands, additional requirements from God, but he enters more fully and more consciously into the one unique will of God, he accepts the power of God more whole-

heartedly and completely. All the various necessities that occur to any individual man, such as the necessity of weak health or of living with his ageing parents, all these too are only the power of God demanding recognition.

Consequently, as a man's mind begins to see this power in its tremendous significance he understands that it is not a question of an outward structure of rules, an external imposition of a foreign will straight-lacing him and hindering his freedom. He recognises this power in every breath he takes and feels it well up from within, because he is, being created and upheld 'by the word of his power'. God, as a medieval writer has it, 'never takes his hand off his work', and those creative fingers have been likened in Scripture to the delicate touch of the potter drawing forth the individual and graceful form of the vase from the twisting clay. The medieval sculptor at Chartres captured a simile of this truth when he carved the Word-made-flesh creating Adam who grows everlastingly forth from the motionless manipulation of his ceaselessly extended palms. This simile shows that this intrinsic power ceaselessly making the whole of reality real is the gentle work of God disposing all things sweetly, infusing light into man's mind, power into his will, the sap of life into the trunk of the tree. There can be nothing harsh or unseeing, brutal or crushing in this will for good which upholds the world and supports the soul of man.

More wonderful even than this gentleness, a further study of the creative hands of God, the hands of the Word made flesh reveal the wounds of love. There is no division or succession in God and the upholding power is at the same time the power of love, of such intensity that God sent his only begotten Son into the world and delivered him to the death of the Cross. The hands of God are nailed apparently powerless to the Cross; yet his power being infinite his love is infinite too. He has drawn man by grace to equality with himself in order that he may fitly love him as a friend, and the divine love unrequited goes with power intense to the height of Calvary. And the intensity of the divine outpouring of love is not spent upon a vast mass of humanity comprising at once a milliard of souls, but is reserved for every individual man with a direct and personal approach from God.

Who then could fear the power of God or regard his Church as imposing intolerable restraints? Only those who have allowed themselves to be dislocated and put out of touch with the comprehensive omnipotence of the divine love. It is only the man who revolts who finds the laws of his own nature a burden and a constraint. It is only the man who regards the universe from his own human point of view who thinks that the power of God may interfere with his

liberty and interrupt the flow of his free will. Similarly the people who see the Church of God only from outside, as constructed of regulations and sacraments to which the faithful are expected to bow in complete subservience, such men consider the power of the Church as an external threat to the freedom of individuals and nations. From within the hands of God all is seen to be different. Laws are helps towards the fulfilment of man's free choice, as the hungry man feels no constraint in the law of his nature which bids him eat to live. God's power is all of a piece and there is no more constraint applied in the law of monogamous and irrefragable marriage than in that of love or in the necessity of eating.

But for those who have broken away from this unchanging and immense power of God certainly there exist hardship and pain in the return to the acceptance of the healing power of God. Yet so long as they remain in disharmony with this essential and central power of the universe the pain is that of frustration and of the gnawing of unsatisfied nerves out of harmony with and consequently not nourished by the whole cosmic system in which they were made to function. The pain of return to harmony is of a different nature. It is the pain of the cold plunge into icy waters to be reinvigorated, or the pain of sore feet and hands as the climber reaches the summit of the mountain. The first sensations will not be those of the ghostly touch on the temples from the tonic wine nor even of Arthur's kerchief knit about the brows or of the soft words of the sympathetic psychiatrist. The first sensation may well be bitter as a man submits himself blindly to the power of the Word. But soon he finds that he is held in an embrace of love by hands wounded by the Cross that he can relax not flat upon his bed nor yet stretched out upon the bosom of Mother Earth but wholly given in every fibre of his body and with every breath of his soul to the upholding and sustaining power that makes all things whole.

For you are not come to a mountain that might be touched and a burning fire and a whirlwind. . . . But you are come to Mount Sion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . to the Church . . . to God the judge of all . . . and to Jesus the mediator of the new testament. . . . Therefore, receiving an immovable kingdom, we have grace. For our God is a consuming fire.

THE EDITOR.