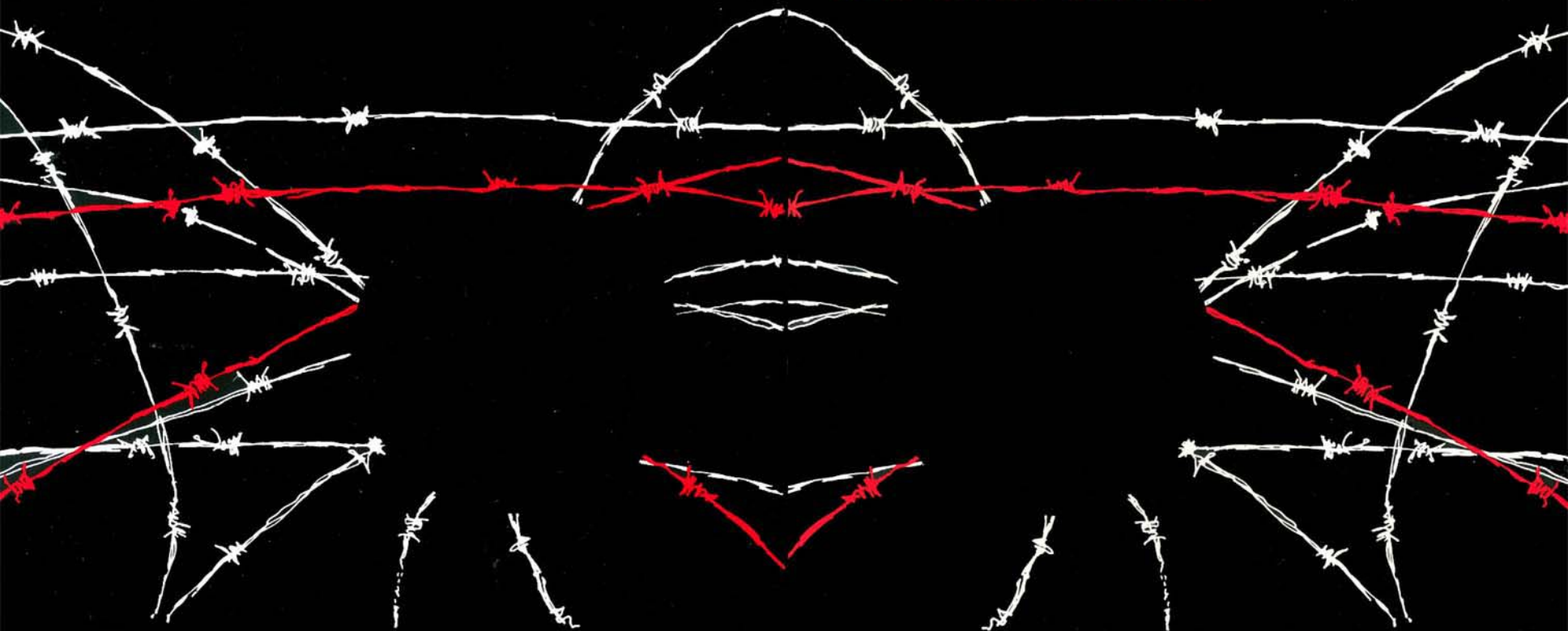


The stories in *The Concentration Camp* illustrate the way so many think, when—but for a touch of faith—Man could really see God as He is, through the eyes and life of His Son. All in Christ are free persons, and all free persons are children of the Father.

the CONCENTRATION CAMP

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Geoffrey C. Bingham



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Preface to the Second Edition

It is some years since this book was first published ten years ago, in fact. It has been out of print for many years, but because of the backlog of new books to be published and others to be reprinted, *The Concentration Camp* has been awaiting its turn in a long queue. Secretly I have long wished for it to be pushed ahead in that queue. This is because I have a special affection for this book. Its main story, 'The Concentration Camp', has deeply touched many people, and so much so that some have asked for it to be printed separately as a booklet, in the hope that it could be helpful in a wider distribution.

I imagine many may have bought the book hoping to hear of my personal experiences within a prison camp, but some of these elements are told elsewhere, in other books I have written. I doubt whether the purchasers of the book have been disappointed at the rather different kind of story under the title 'The Concentration Camp'. I personally think it is a key to wider experiences of life. In this respect I have lately been pondering the fact of the many cultural elements under which we live. We have national culture, family culture, and even denominational culture. All of these systems have quite demanding and unbending laws. Of course, they often have both humorous and entertaining aspects, too. From one point of view they can imprison us, as though we were enclosed in an iron cage. The freedom to be, the delight in experiencing varied elements of life, and the sheer joy of being a liberated

person, are often denied by such cultures. They almost represent prison camps in themselves.

Of course, I do not mean that cultures are necessarily wrong. No; but since our consciences are trained by them we are more likely to hear their laws than the truly liberating and beautiful law of God. It seems that we are first oriented to human laws because they appear to be closest to us. Any law—even God’s law—can mean our spirits come into bondage, but, by powerful contrast, the sheer freedom which comes with grace gives us a transformed view of God’s law. It is really the law of His own self, the internal and living principle of the Triune Godhead and its marvelous relationships. That is to say, it is love in action, and such active love flows to us, and eventually wells up within us and so flows out to others. As the old prayer says, ‘Whose service is perfect freedom’.

In Christ we are freed from the bondage of all laws, but that does not mean laws are banished as wrong; not even cultural laws. It means we can live *in* them, rather than *under* them, and get the good of them, without having to be legal beagles. Such is true freedom, the very essence of authentic life.

I hope that many will want to purchase this new printing, and perhaps come into a freedom they had not thought possible for human beings in this world—the world in which we live, and under whose laws we sometimes suffer. So let us send this little book on its way to cheer others by both entertaining and emancipating those with bound spirits.

I am grateful, as always, for the folk who typeset it, proofread it, did its art-work and then printed it. Also warm gratitude for those who will distribute it. A book is a grand thing, and its production no less a wonderful matter.

Geoffrey Bingham,
June 1993

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Foreword

The Scriptures tell us that God has given us all things richly to enjoy. Not all of us see it this way—more is the pity. It flashed on me one day that for the most part we see this world as a massive concentration camp. We imagine that the One up there is the Commandant, and very demanding He is! He does not wish His prisoners to be happy and contented. It is we who should be making Him happy! How do we do this? By being good, trying to please Him, and feeling dreadful when we are guilty.

This, of course, is a travesty of the truth, for God is the One who loves us freely. His love is unconditional. He wishes us to enjoy the world in which we have been placed. If man's misunderstanding were not tragic and harmful, it would be laughable. It is man who sees God as a great spoilsport, or as an acid-drop. God is far from that!

The story of the Concentration Camp, then, illustrates the way so many think, when—but for a touch of faith—man could really see God as He is, through the eyes and life of His Son. All in Christ are free persons, and all free persons are children of the Father.

The need for the story-teller is perennial. His stories are intended to invite the human race into truth. We are born to hear tales and no tale is, in the ultimate, merely fiction. I hope that these stories will both entertain and enrich. I trust too that the poems—placed at random in the book—will have a better setting amongst the tales than heaped together in one volume of their own.

Here's trusting for a quick escape from prison into freedom! It-
freedom-is the true place for man.

Geoffrey Bingham

Coromandel East, 1982

The Holy Word

Had He not spoken
(The Word, the word)
Then I had not known
God of the Word.
Had He not spoken
Creation were not,
And I, and all things.

Sometimes in the maze
Of men's brilliant words
I feel alone like a crow
On a barren desert,
Acryless pitch
Of sterile nothingness.

I hear the word, read,
See them in their lines,
Am damned and doubted
About all things.
Despair plucks at my mind
Baffled I am
By such brilliance.

Still starves the heart within,
Still wanders the aching mind,
Where the fighting thought
Flashes like cracked lightning
On the dark covered reaches
Of my puny comprehension.

That is when the heart cries,
 The spirit panting
 Lifts hapless, helpless wings,
 Longing for the flight
 That befits true spirit.
 The word of man shrivels
 Like parched peas
 On massive seared granite.

Not so the true Word.
 It is refreshing rain
 On the arid reaches,
 Warm sun on the shivered prairies
 And bleak uplands. It breaks
 In rhythmic joy, filling
 The hungered, quenching the dry,
 Bringing rivulets of sheer refreshment.

How can God speak—
 However He may speak—
 And the delight not come?
 True, the fear
 May well precede delight,
 But the truth liberates,
 Setting free the bound mind,
 The awkward phrase,
 And breaks the chains
 Of human hermeneutic
 Mind's priestcraft
 And denial of the living Logos.

The Preacher and the Parrot

The following is a story which is totally untrue. Yet, in contradiction to what I have just said, the story is wholly true. The story is that of a preacher and a parrot. In fact the parrot belonged to the preacher, or, if you will, the preacher belonged to the parrot. You will undoubtedly find the whole thing confused, as I myself have found it. It was also a matter of confusion for the preacher, to say nothing of the parrot!

The preacher of whom I speak was none of your run-of-the-mill preachers, although on first hearing him you might be tempted to think he was run-of-the-mill, or, as they say these days, 'suburban-mediocre'. Looking up at him in his fine pulpit you might be tempted to think, 'He is saying nothing.' You might even imagine he was saying fine phrases without putting too much body into them. In other words, you would think him empty, the utterer of drained clichés. Many a listener has been deceived along that line, I can tell you. However, let me say this: listen along for a time and you will be first intrigued, then captivated, and finally delighted. I can certainly promise you that, for I myself have been in those various states of listening.

To tell the truth the man had extraordinary histrionic abilities. You know, of course, what *histrionic* means. Roget in his famous THESAURUS has the disappointing and almost laconic synonyms, 'theatric, theatrical, acting, actors'. THE SHORTER OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY goes into the matter more thoroughly, using terms like 'stagey', 'acting a part', 'pretence', and the like. It concludes by quoting John Cowper's couplet:

'Histrionic mumm'ry that let down
The pulpit to the level of the stage.'

I hasten, of course, to deny that this is all histrionic means. To me it is better than that. It is the noble use of great words. It is the mellow and golden phrases, done to a turn, and issuing in magnificent succession, trumpeting from the throat of the preacher. It is one idea moulded finely, followed by another idea, and then yet another, until one is caught in a remarkable succession of ideas. It is that sort of thing which makes magnificent preaching, and makes it altogether tolerable—if not exciting—listening.

Mind you, I am not an undiscerning man, and sometimes I did catch a touch of the theatrical, a flourish here and there which seemed to me to have come more out of conditioned reflexes rather than directly from the heart, but I felt uneasy, almost guilty that I had had such unworthy thoughts, and I quickly put them aside. After all it was the *substance* of what the preacher was saying that put me to shame. It was all about judging others, being wrongly critical, and the like. So I learned to put down such thoughts. In fact I soon learned to mortify them, which, as you know, means to put them to death.

It is at this point I should introduce the parrot. Like myself he was a great admirer of the preacher. To look at there was nothing particularly magnificent about him: the parrot, I mean. In other words he was not as brilliant a bird as was his master. Even so he was not mediocre. He had his soft pastel greys and pinks which betrayed his origins. He was known as a 'galah', having come from that species, and even as I remember this I am forced to chuckle, for in Australianese the term 'galah' is a disparaging one. Sadly enough Fontana/Collins' DICTIONARY OF AUSTRALIAN COLLOQUIALISMS has the following comment: '*Galah*: An ass, nincompoop, sometimes in the expression "mad as a gum tree full of galahs" .' It then quotes indigenous authors using the term in this disparaging way. I refrain from making the actual quotes

because I feel they demean this whole species of fine and remarkable parrots.

Yet at the same time I am compelled—in all honesty—to recount my experiences of galahs in the outback of the land of Australia. It is remarkable to come across a flock of these birds. Their noise is raucous, persistent, unending. They are calling to one another, but mostly they are demanding personal attention in the face of all others equally demanding attention. You might think it impossible for one galah to ignore the thousand other galahs in similar position to itself, but this is just what it does. One bird will hang by one claw of one foot. In fact it will cling by the shiny black tip of a single claw, hanging out both its wings, and the other leg, claws and all—and it will flutter in the most alarming manner. All the time it is performing this remarkable feat it will be screaming raucously—along with its 999 mates—' Look what I can do! Look what I can do!' You expect any moment that it will fall, and be unable to recover itself; that its end will be a tangled, battered mass of black beak and pink-and-grey feathers on the hard, inhospitable ground beneath.

No way! This will never happen. The bird will accomplish amazing—even alarming—convolutions. It will flutter remarkably, twisting and turning its body, wing, and helpless loose leg, and cavort in such a way that you would think it might strangle itself or become so dislocated that it could never put itself together again. Yet nothing like this ever happens.

When the thousand birds have had their bit of megalomaniacal showing off, they recover in a moment. They return to normal. They come back to being rather graceful patches of grey and pink on their gumtree branches. There is a moment of gleeful satisfaction at their histrionic successes, after which another moment of preternatural silence in which, no doubt, there is an outward but insincere pretence of penitence for the outrageous show. Then they take flight, filtering out of the great eucalypts and wheeling towards the eternal west,

much like a mobile sunset–pink, of course, with touches of grey and cloudy fleeciness.

You must forgive this departure from our story, but my memories have quite moved me. In one way they have nothing to do with the particular galah of whom we especially speak. That galah was a rectory galah, or a manse galah. Or perhaps he was a parsonage galah. Anyway, he had a history of belonging to this one preacher for many years, and was quiet for a parrot, and grave enough into the bargain. He was certainly none of your raucous and showy bush galah. He would sit above the shelves of books and look down calmly at the preacher as he went about his work of preparation. He would squint down as though trying to read the very print itself, though doubtless this is impossible for a parrot.

The preacher himself derived an amount of satisfaction from the parrot. It was as though he had a perpetual spectator to his work, a permanent and perennial observer who missed nothing he, the preacher, was doing. Anyone would find life gratifying enough if he were to have a constant, interested audience. So the preacher accepted, with due modesty, this approval of the parrot. Often, then, when he had shaped up a fine phrase, or simplified a tortuous thought, he would smile up at the galah and say, ‘Oh hello, cocky!’ and whilst the parrot itself rarely responded to other communications, it would generally on these occasions give a downward motion of its beak and head which could easily have meant, ‘I acknowledge the communication.’

The fame of the preacher grew. Ministering as he did in one of the more social parishes of his great city, he would have admirers who crossed many a suburb to listen to him. He now took for granted what had once been to him a coveted means of bringing his message, namely National Radio. You could hear him at 10:00am. weekdays, quietly guiding your thoughts in his devotional study, until you too, or at least

some of you, would feel the urge to make the pilgrimage to the church of his preaching. This church was rapidly becoming one of the few famous houses of the homily. In a way the preacher himself, though modestly aware of what was happening, was unchanged by the fame which was fast becoming his.

Perhaps it was the evident fame that stirred the galah. He was aware that the very thing his ancient tribe has perfected to a fine art was also the quality (unconsciously of course) of this eminent preacher. This may have been why his beady black eyes followed the preacher around his study as he practised his art for the Sabbath. When the preacher’s hand went up in a gesture, so did the head of the bird. When the preacher raised a hand in solemn declamation, a leg of the bird would lift reflexively from its perch, and splay its .claws in imitative gesture.

At first the thing was just faint imitation. After a time it became enthusiastic imitation and even mindful miming. There was no question of mindless mimicking, for the parrot was really into the matter. He was there as much as the preacher, who for the most part was unaware of the metamorphosis of his bird. He did not realise that the parrot was changing from a moronic parrot into an enthusiastic feathered divine. We would be going too far to say that he felt about his subject as deeply as the preacher, yet he seemed to do so. It would be an exaggeration to say that he grasped theology in its essence, yet he made a fine show, appearing to do so, and this in depth.

In those early days the preacher was scarcely aware of him, the galah. So absorbed was the divine in his preparations that he would rarely spare the bird a glance. He was unaware that when he would make a disturbed gesture to his (imagined) congregation, the bird itself would ruffle its feathers and go into agitated actions. He was unconscious that when he would make a sweeping bow of emotion that the bird likewise would open its wings, thrust forward its head, and imitate the bow.

Most of this passed the preacher by. Yet, as psychologists tell us, even unconscious awareness has its affects upon us. Quietly, yet powerfully, the actions of another accomplish deep effects within us. This is precisely what happened in the case of the minister, that is to say in the conditioned case of the parrot.

Some Sundays when he was staring down at his magnificent congregation, and when he was in process of preaching, he would hear his voice as though it were that of the galah. At first, slightly mystified, he would toss off the thought with an impatient gesture of his magnificent head. (He had a special barber who knew how to bring out the nobility of his client by the very way he cut the hair, thus bringing, so to speak, another weapon into the spiritual armoury of the great man.) Gradually, however, the idea began to penetrate that he was, in some sense, echoing the parrot. In the first instance of course the parrot had echoed him. This was mainly in gesture rather than in word, for the parrot had few words. Knowing the idea to be quite ridiculous he did not have much difficulty in coping with it, and—given a moment of recollecting concentration—he was soon away into his histrionic exercises.

Alas! He could not wholly rid his mind of the matter. One Monday morning—after a tiring yet gratifying Sunday—he chose to regard his parrot in an exercise of meditative contemplation, and what he saw disturbed him deeply. As he regarded the parrot, so, equally, it regarded him. At first he thought the parrot was actually thinking about him, as he about the parrot, and then he realised with a sense of shock that this was not the case. The parrot was faithfully imitating him. He was moved by this deep devotion. How well he knew the adage, ‘Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.’ After a time he shook himself from his reverie and said, ‘Hullo, cocky!’

For a moment the parrot considered the matter and then answered politely, ‘Hullo, cocky!’ The preacher thought, ‘Well, of course, the parrot is not

going to say, “Hullo, preacher!” After all, we are not conversing. It is just a parrot imitating.’ So he stood, experimentally lifting one hand in the air, and declaimed, ‘My dear people.’

To his immense surprise—even shock—the parrot said, ‘My dear people.’

After that the preacher sat down. The bird was already on its perch, but even so it made a gesture of lowering its body to perch level. The minister was amazed. He then made a clever move. He took a book and opened it. This the bird could not do, but the man of theology noted with uneasiness that as he scrutinised the text, so did the bird. At least this is what it seemed to be doing. He found it a bit unnerving that morning to do the things he had normally done, only to have them, in essence, imitated by the parrot. Of course he had a certain sense of pride in owning a parrot who was so imitative, if not as intelligent. After a time he became accustomed to the fact, and simply accepted it. It was even a matter of pride to be able to say, ‘I and the parrot are one!’

Even so the discovery had made its deep impact upon his own soul. He would often invite the feathered creature to imitate some rolling phrase he had coined, some magnificent idea he had manufactured, and with due gravity and wholesome objectivity the bird would duly respond. The preacher noted with astonishment that the bird could speak with all the enthusiasm, gravity and affects that he himself used. He shook his head in wonder, but decided to keep the secret wholly to himself.

There were other matters I might mention, although some of them seem irrelevant, and yet you may perceive some connection between them and the narrative which now follows. The preacher—we must for obvious reasons always leave him unnamed—had a wife who showed little response to her husband’s preaching. She listened to him dutifully, seated as always in the front pew, but no deep impressions seemed to be made upon her. Some may even have thought she was indifferent to the man. In fact her face betrayed nothing. Had

you sought to discern her reaction or response you could read neither approval nor contempt. She just listened, but then again she may not even have listened. Anyway she attended the morning sermon regularly, although, to tell the truth, she had never been seen in the church for the evening services. The other matter is that she rarely, if ever, visited her husband's study. Also she left firmly alone the rector's companionate galah. She had never accepted the fact of a bird living perpetually in the house, and so her husband had to carry out the feeding of the parrot, the cleaning of its perch, and the renewing of its water supply. His daily chore was to vacuum the litter of nibbled corn and sunflower-seed husks.

Back, however, to the parrot: the metamorphosis in it was astonishing. It had by now quite perfected the art of imitating its master. It had become—so to speak—his very *alter ego*, so much so that the preacher, far from being astonished any longer, had come to regard the authentication of his actions as residing in the imitation of the bird. In a way it was pathetic, because the man himself had been so competent. We must remember of course that he alone fashioned the sermons. Also we must not forget the *substance* of what he preached, for it too was his. No parrot could invent that! Yet even there he seemed to be developing a dependency upon the bird. When at a later date I discovered this I was greatly alarmed, and events proved the dire need for such alarm.

I go further. I describe the day when the parrot first attended a preaching service. I have erred in not previously describing to you something of the domestic life of the parrot. It was quite free to go where it wished. The windows of the study were opened during the day and it could—if it wished—venture outside. It could even—if it so desired—flutter up into the trees. Very rarely did such a happening take place. For the most part the parrot stayed inside. It ignored the garden, and certainly it abstained from the larger life of the parish. Whilst the preacher was not what you might call 'a parish man', i.e. one who undertook regular visitation of his

people, yet of course he had from time to time made certain visiting tours. Not so the parrot.

The parrot simply flew into the church, and seated itself on the Ladies' Guild Banner. As you are probably aware, that sort of banner has a cross-piece on the upright pole from which the banner hangs, and it was perfectly natural for the bird to seat itself there. Its entrance had been unnoticed, for any fluttering of its wings was drowned by the triumphant music of the organ. (This sort of music was always a good mind-setter and highly prized by the preacher.) So it sat there, for the most part unobtrusive and quite silent during the prayers, Scripture readings and the hymns. Only when the preacher softly cleared his throat to announce his text did the bird come to life. It first of all craned forward and secondly turned its head on one side, as is the fashion of parrots, as though they are asking a silent question.

Then the antics began, or, should I say, the histrionics. I had quite come to love that word, and undoubtedly it fitted the bird, if not the preacher. Yet the preacher—though totally unaware of the parrot's presence—was having deep problems. He was feeling that in some way he was echoing the parrot. It was as though he were the parrot and the parrot him. If the parrot had not gone through its imitative actions the whole matter would have passed unnoticed, for only a few adults and a sprinkling of children had observed the presence of the bird, and before the time of the sermon the children—according to the custom of the church—had gone off to another place to be kept quiet. Thus only a few noticed the parrot; that is until the sermon began. Gradually eyes were drawn to the parrot and his grave antics, so that the preacher became desperate to know why on this day people did not keep their eyes glued to him, and only him. He dared not risk a backward glance to the object of the people's attention, but kept on bravely with his monologue.

Alas! It was no monologue. It was not a dialogue, but what you might call a twin-monologue, or 'a shared experience'. It

may even have been called a 'parallelologue'. Yet in all of this the parrot uttered not one word. Its actions constituted pure and perfect miming. Some of the audience were grave about the matter, and others bubbling within with great mirth. Only vagrant tears betrayed the mirthful, and here and there an audible gasp or two. Apart from that the service proceeded, but at the door the usual remarks were—for the most part—missing. No adulating, 'Wonderful sermon, pastor,' or 'Oh pastor, I found that so helpful.' Embarrassed or partly veiled eyes met those of the preacher, only to be hastily averted. The minister felt quite puzzled, that is until going into the church his eyes beheld the miscreant bird, head bowed forwards in sobriety and apt reverence.

One of the congregation leaders—elder or warden I know not—spilled the beans to his pastor. The preacher was inwardly horrified, but outwardly decided to make a joke of it, and laughingly shrug it off. Even so he went to the house with heavy heart, where his wife and children met him with merry eyes. When he fled to his study the bird was already there.

'What have you been at?' he asked, and the parrot repeated his question back to him.

For some moments he sat dejectedly, pondering the tragedy of the morning. Finally he decided to face the music, and went to lunch.

For the next few weeks there was no repetition of the event. He securely locked the windows prior to the service, and left sufficient water and seed to occupy the bird. You will scarcely believe me: when he returned each time, there was the parrot on his desk, gravely contemplating some opened book or even scanning chance notes left upon the table. The parrot was obviously compensating for its enforced absence from divine worship.

The day, however, arrived when the parrot was missing early on the Sabbath morning. It had disappeared. The sympathetic family searched for it, but nowhere was it to be seen. Perhaps the cat had got it, or the dog next door, or even some

larger predatory bird. They did not know. The preacher was slightly ruffled by the loss of his friend. Even so he went to the church, and the service soon soothed him, as always, of course, it had soothed others. Only when he began to preach did he realise the parrot was present. This time he let his gaze swivel to the Ladies Guild Banner. There, surely enough, was the galah. Swallowing hard, he ignored the parrot and commenced his sermon.

For weeks he had been going through a strange experience. It had felt as though he were turning into the parrot, and the parrot into him. He was being transmogrified into avian being, and the bird into human spirit. Outwardly the two were as they had ever been. Inwardly there was a change of substance of hypostasis. It was a curious and frightening experience. We cannot be sure how the parrot felt about it, but to the preacher the matter was weird and uncanny. Sunday by Sunday he had heard his words sounding emptily in his own ears, mocking him, so to speak. When he made a gesture the shadow of the parrot was about him. He would sense its imitative actions. His hand would rise histrionically, and at the same moment he would sense a parrot wing in the same gesture.

The real problem was when his own words began to sound empty to him. He was realising that they belonged to the parrot and not him. For the parrot—so to speak—they were natural. They were real. Doubtless *what* he said was true, but then it *sounded* empty. The parrot may have been safely locked into the study at sermon-times, but even so he was the silent listener, the unseen imitator, the genuine utterer. *It were as though the parrot had become the preacher and the preacher the parrot.* Whilst this mystified him, it also enraged him, and then, curiously enough, gave him huge thoughts of unbelievable release and freedom.

You will not believe me, of course, if I tell you that the parrot now began to echo every statement he made. It was a curious matter. In that large church it was as though the

preacher was being echoed. His sentence would finish and the last word would be repeated. In fact all the words were repeated, but then difficult to be heard. Likewise every action and gesture would be repeated or mimicked. The congregation was, by turns, appalled, delighted, hysterical, penitent, amused, shocked. The preacher's wife quite lost her usual control and indifference, being sympathetic on the one hand, and richly delighted on the other. Sometimes she seemed to be in silent sorrow, but most times she wept tears of joy, inhibited as that joy was because of wifely reverence to her man.

From that day a great battle grew between the preacher and his gah. He took to locking it up on Saturday evenings. He would not then return to his study on Sunday mornings but developed the habit of staying with his family over breakfast, and even later. As time for service drew near he would get somewhat desperate. He wondered whether this unwelcome *alter ego* of his might somehow escape and turn up in the service. When it did not he was relieved, but then his sermons never seemed quite the same. Not that many were disappointed for doubtless they were grateful for whatever was given to them. They knew themselves to be unduly privileged to listen to so competent a preacher.

The wily western bird took to slipping out on Saturdays, and quietly taking up its post in the church on Sunday mornings. Trying to shoo it away was fruitless. Once, when it was dislodged from the Ladies Guild Banner it took up its stand on another banner of lesser significance; the Men's Society Banner to be precise. The Sunday came when it alighted in the pulpit before the preacher climbed the many steps which led to such homiletical elevation. It perched behind the book-rest, and scarcely had the hymn finished—the minister's head just appearing over the pulpit—and *it began to preach without waiting for the clergyman to begin his address!*

There was not one there who did not understand this miracle. There was no laughter. There may have been fear,

shock, and even dismay, but none laughed. Nor did the preacher, standing behind the bird, shocked as he was, grim and yet pathetic. It was as though he were meant to stand there, speechless, and listen to the bird. Anyway he was transfixed, rooted to the spot, and that was that.

If I told you that the bird gave a coherent sermon, and that his histrionics suited his words, then you would call me a liar. What is more you would immediately link the whole matter with the occult, and call it demonic. A spirit, you would say, spoke through the bird. What then I have to report is that the bird did not give a coherent message. It did not support its arguments with Scriptures. It surely did give an exhibition of histrionics, but they seemed to be so real, so sincere, so earnest, as though the parrot were seeking to succeed where perhaps its master had not. All I know is that the bird drew from the rich treasury of a hundred or more of its master's sermons. How incongruous some of its statements were I will never be able to tell. I think everyone wanted to laugh, hugely, and yet the state of shock continued. The congregation-rooted to their pews—listened when another audience might have risen up and thrown the parrot out, or maybe wrung its neck. Yet who could blame them? Events like this rarely happen in true life, and maybe, never!

An ordinary and yet strange thing happened. Whilst the parrot was still burbling away the preacher left the pulpit. This was scarcely noticed, since the parrot was the primary focus of attention. Quietly the preacher made his way to the woman who was his wife. She was strangely silent. Her indifference had gone, and she was not amused. When he whispered something to her she slipped from the pew. He held her arm, steering her from the church. They were gone before the congregation was aware. The parrot preached on.

After a time the parrot ceased its strange articulated mixture of ideas, concepts, aphorisms, and pot-luck theology. In fact it lapsed into silence. It continued to regard the congregation gravely, then, in a sudden act, flew off. It flew out of the

church. It flew up into a tree. Suddenly—for all the children saw it—it hung on a branch, upside-down, and by the tip of one claw. Then it began to screech with a shrieking one can only call sheer hysteria. It called time and again for attention. One child went so far as to say that it actually shrieked, 'Look at me! Look at what I can do!' Naturally, that sounds too rich to be true, but I have often received a similar impression when looking at a treeful of galahs. Of course it may have uttered these words. I cannot be dogmatic, however.

The congregation was strangely muted when it flowed from the church. No pastor was there to greet it. In fact—except to the leaders of the church—the pastor did not again present himself. The family somehow slipped away from the church rectory (or was it the manse or the parsonage?) and were not seen again. I have heard that the family actually went overseas, into another country. I have even heard that there they became genuine and dedicated missionaries. I cannot be sure of that, not having traced the fact, but recently I met the whole family in a country place in the State in which I live. The children had grown into healthy maturity. The wife of the former preacher seemed to me to be a most relaxed person, whilst I could scarcely recognise the preacher himself, so changed and altered was he.

Now comes the shock! He was still a preacher. I mean he was still a minister. I rigidly kept away from asking questions about his parrot, and about the events of the past, and particularly of that famous Sunday morning service, but he seemed quite happy to bring up the matter himself. Oh yes, they still had the parrot. Very grateful they were to it, too. Why? Well, anyone should understand why. They were, as a family, grateful to that clever bird. It had helped the family immensely. They harboured no grudge against the preaching parrot.

If that were not enough of a shock, the family warmly asked me to stay on until the Sunday. The wife of the preacher said, 'If you really want to hear something such as

you've never heard before, you stay for the Sunday.' They even offered to put me up. Now—strangely enough, you may say—I did not remain until the Sunday, despite their gracious invitation. Frankly, I was scared. I did not altogether like the look in the eye of my past minister. I fancied that if I stayed we would have no histrionics, no polished delivery of a famed orator, and no splendid nuances and flourishes as he drove home his exquisite points. I had the fearful feeling that he would be direct to the point of bluntness, and uncompromising to the point of inescapable logic. I had the distinct impression that listening to him would be highly dangerous; that what I would hear would reflect the changes I observed in him and his family. If I were not extremely careful my own life might be vastly changed by the truth and power of his present teaching.

That of course would not do. If we were to have that kind of preaching again—as indeed they used to have in times of old—then the face of the church might be changed, and those changes might even penetrate society itself, effecting all kinds of reforms, and whatever! What then would that do to our current and kindly traditionalism? I do not say that I beat a hasty and undignified retreat. I did not, but in my own way I put distance between that preacher and myself as rapidly as possible. I am not fool enough to misjudge a man. I can catch the gleam of fanaticism in the eye as well as the next man.

And yet, on reflection, I am not sure. Thinking of that relaxed wife, and the smiling preacher, and the grinning children, I am not at all sure.

The Touch

Touch, when you think about it, is a strange thing. I suppose almost anything seems peculiar if you concentrate upon it, and go on thinking about it. Noses, for example, can suddenly seem curious. If you keep looking at them, I mean all the noses about you, then after a time you begin to smile, wryly, or you laugh, or you just stare. However touch is not quite in that category.

When the subject came to me in pensive mood one day I realised with a faint sense of surprise that my life has been composed of touches, that is people touching me, and my touching people, or seeing others touch others, or hearing of touches.

Take, for example, about the most significant touch I have ever felt. It was the touch of a woman which has basically set the direction of my life. This woman who was (and is) four years younger than I am, came to visit me at a veterans' hospital. When she came I was lying on my bed staring at the roof. I had developed the habit of lying and staring when a patient in the Changi Prison Camp Hospital. It was a habit I liked very much. I had discovered that the brain of a human being is a rare piece of work. It can take you almost anywhere. You really don't have to be all that much in your prison. I know the following verse is a little trite, but then trite things are often true, for:

*'Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an heritage.'*

The poet, you may remember, was Lovelace.

So as I stared at the ceiling she walked in. I had known her as a girl. Then she had been a little pen, a trifle heady. She still was, and now is. She looked down at me, and I struggled out of my reverie, a trifle disconcerted. I was ambivalent about women. I wanted a wife, having reached the mature age of 27 years. However, women flowed everywhere, and most of them seemed empty to me. I wanted a thoughtful person who was also goodish to look at, fun to know, and who had quiet understanding. To that point I had not found one, nor did I think at this very point that I would find one. Little did I know.

She was dressed for the beach, or, I think, from the beach. A bit tousled in the hair, cherry red from the sun, and slightly dishevelled in what they called a dirndl skirt. She wore sandals. By no means dressed up to kill. Nor was I to be killed, I resolved. So we chatted. Not emptily, but then not with great wisdom either. She skirted away from the subject of the prison camp. She may have wished to know, but she was wary. So was I. Nevertheless there was plenty to talk about.

I put on my veteran's hospital dressing gown, and slippers. We walked outside. Servicemen and girls were sprawled over the lawns, some quite close to each other. A few men sat around miserably. I understood their misery. Life was quite a problem for some of them; for others it was just empty. You knew that by the way they stared. Sometimes I too had stared. So we walked to the gates where I would bid her farewell. We moved along the walkway, talking quietly. She linked her arm loosely with mine, and her hand rested along my elbow.

I was quite shocked. Far from being horrified I was pleased, but then I had not expected that touch. The shock was faint, but it was there, a lingering tingling. I thought, 'That is a very gentle, sensitive touch.' The thought was pleasing. Then I thought, 'It is not an invading touch, but a gentle one. In fact it is timid but reassuring.' I heard her chatting away, but was not with her. At the gate we parted with a few sincere words.

I walked back to the ward. When I went in, the ward sister, who was about my age, eyed me sideways. 'Oh!' she said knowingly, and a little disappointed for herself (I imagined), 'So you've met Her, eh?' The sister was famous as a diagnostician, but then that had been in the realm of sickness. I stared at her in surprise, and a little absently. Suddenly it dawned on me what she meant, and it also dawned on me that once again she had made a brilliant diagnosis. I tried to keep my thoughts to myself, but when I left her she was still nodding to herself.

The touch had done it. It had put me into full contact with another human being, and especially a feminine human being. In due course it led me, inevitably, into marriage. Nor, over some thirty-five years, has that touch changed. It is evenly the same, and still most satisfactory. That then has proved to be a dynamic touch.

The apostle Paul had a saying: 'Touch not a woman!' He was a wise person. He knew how powerful a certain kind of touch is. It was the same man who said, 'To the pure in heart all things are pure'. He meant a pure touch was O.K., but an impure touch was not O.K. This could go for just about any touch.

'Touch' is also Australian slang for conning money out of a person. Someone will say, 'You know, that guy touched me for a tenner!' The indignation in the voice tells how that touch on the arm, and on the soft stupid heart, resulted in being conned. So powerful is touch.

Jesus had a powerful touch. One such action from him and a widow's son who was on his death-bier woke up and sat up. The mother was stunned, then overcome with delight and joy. On another occasion he touched the mother-in-law of his friend Peter, and she was healed of a fever. It must have been a gentle and cool touch to that woman. Some blind folk once cried out to him to have mercy on them, which he did. He touched their eyes and suddenly they could see. We are told that 'as many as touched him were perfectly healed', so that

theirs was a touch-in-reverse. The touch brought them into contact with his healing dynamism. One woman with an unstaunchable haemorrhage of feminine nature was suddenly healed by touching him.

Also they brought children 'that he might touch them'. What a memorable touch that must have been! They would doubtless remember it into old age. So many then, and so famous, were the touches of this wonderful man. After his resurrection he would not let Mary Magdalene touch him in the old way of friendship. He said, 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father and your Father, my God, and your God.'

He was really saying, 'Mary my dear, the old relationship, rich and good as it was for those past times, has to be transcended. A new relationship is yours now. It is a richer one. The touch must be different.' That was quite a liberating word.

Well now, this reverie on touch was really triggered off by the memory of a person who touched me in an unforgettable way. It was also a fecund touch. I mean it was fruitful. Indeed it was most fruitful. It has left one of those pleasurable and lingering memories in me, which, when recalled, makes the day quite rich. Some memories, even memories of touch, have the opposite affect. This memory is of a man who had a most remarkable touch. I often wonder how many men bring that touch to mind, from time to time.

My first memory of Bertram Cairns relates to Roberts Barracks in the Selarang area of Singapore Island—part of the complex of the Changi Prison Camp. Our part of that barracks was the surgical ward, which was a rather indifferent building, chock-a-block with wounded soldiers. They were the worst of the wounded in that hospital. Some had lost two limbs, and some three. It was commonplace to have lost one limb. Some had lost the top of the skull; others had bad

stomach wounds. All had that terrible 'surgical smell', for the days were hot and moist, they being so tropical.

When Bert Cairns first came into our ward he seemed very little interested in me. My wounded and smashed leg attracted his concern, for he was a surgeon to the core. But then I had not been brought into an Australian hospital during the action. I had been admitted to a British general hospital. He knew the men who had been brought to him during the battle. He had operated on them, but not on me. He gave me a vacant stare, patted my bandage absently, and passed on. My leg was in a splint. He was busy, and I was a bit of a stoic. I felt ashamed to admit to pain. He might have guessed that. He left me to my stoicism, when I would dearly have loved a pain-killing needle.

The next day he seemed to take more than a mild interest. His voice was sharp. 'You were complaining last night, sergeant,' he said, his lips pulled together.

I shook my head. 'Not complaining at all,' I said. 'I just have the notion that something funny is going on inside my bandage.'

The trouble was, it seemed, that my medical papers had not followed me from the makeshift hospital at the Fullerton Building in Singapore City.

He gave one of his curt nods, which even then I understood to be shy self-consciousness. 'Corporal,' he said to the ward orderly, 'untie his bandage.' The orderly had to take a long time doing that. When he got it off the major stared unbelievably.

'Good heavens!' he said. 'That is unbelievable!'

It was curious. Maggots—quite fat blow-fly maggots—were easing themselves out of the wound and tumbling onto the unrolled bandage.

The orderly puckered his lips in disgust. The major looked straight at me. 'What hospitals have you been in?' he asked. When I told him he nodded, pursed his lips again and then shook his head in disgust. I was staring, quite fascinated at

my fly-blown leg. The pain was of course intense, but then it had been like that all the time. It was just that it had felt itchy last night. Now I knew why.

I noticed now that the major's eyes were quite gentle. I also noticed they were light blue, deepening down into grey. Quite remarkable eyes, especially when they were gentle.

'Maggots don't do any damage,' he said. 'In fact they help to keep a wound clean.' He wrinkled his nose. 'Looks as though you needed them,' he said. He was a trifle grim. 'They don't seem to have cared for your wound very much.' He meant the medics, of course—not the blow-flies.

After that he seemed to take as much interest in me as in the others. I think he felt his attention was the first real care I had had. That wasn't strictly true, but I did feel confident in him. He was most fatherly for my 23 years.

We all looked forward to the pain-killers. The wounded don't just whimper. They scream and holier, and shout and protest if the pain gets unbearable. They are also cunning. A shot of morphia is delicious, to say the least. It puts you out for the night. The beautiful sensation one has as the pain dies away is not forgotten in nearly forty years. Anyway, we needed those pain-killers!

Then the drugs were suddenly cut off. Some patients went close to becoming berserk. I was horrified to know I was one of them. In fact at one time—before I met the major—I had been given lethal shots of morphine. For certain reasons the medicos thought it would be better for me to die. That had unwittingly helped me to get hooked on morphine. I had refused to die. I know now that I was going through what is called 'withdrawal'. I won't bother you with the symptoms, but they were quite frightening, especially when one didn't know what was going on.

All my 23 years, or at least in what I could remember of them, I was trained to be a stoic. I won't bore you with the details, but they would, I think, convince you. For this self-trained stoic to become suddenly crazy for morphine, and in

spite of a trained moral rectitude to lie, act, be devious-minded to get just a needle of the drug, was unbelievable. I couldn't believe it about myself.

One night the medical orderlies did not know what to do with me. They knew little if anything about withdrawal, and I guess I was the only one really hooked on the stuff. The others had their problem with the pain. So had I, but I was wholly hooked. Finally they did something they rarely had done. The ward-master sent an orderly to bring the major.

At first he was plainly stern. He looked down at me and went the closest to barking I had ever heard him. He was a man of gentle and gracious breeding. It seemed out of character with him. It had the effect of stiffening me. I had never been barked at. I was a person, and he had better know it. When he saw me stiffen he softened.

'Sergeant,' he said, 'you must just fight this. You are the same as the rest of the patients. They are learning to do without drugs.'

I shook my head. 'The pain never ceases,' I said. 'And one has to sleep some time.'

He nodded. 'True enough,' he said, 'a person has to sleep.' He turned to the orderly. 'Give him a sleeping draught,' he said. He noticed, I guess, that I looked a little wild. 'It will be enough,' he said, nodding to me.

I had a deep dread of placebos, although at that time I didn't know the word. I had seen the orderlies fill a needle with distilled water and give it to a complaining sergeant, who went out like a light. The orderlies chuckled over that. I dreaded being chuckled over with a placebo sleeping draught. I had an unbending pride, an extended sense of my personal dignity and integrity.

I said weakly, 'The draught won't take effect with the terrible pain.'

He looked severe. 'It will,' he snapped.

I felt my whole body tense again. It was tight pain through every nerve. My body was twisting. One of the symptoms of

withdrawal, of course.

It was then he put his hand on my right forearm. I had felt his touch rarely because the orderlies always handled the bandages under his direction. Once he had lanced an abscess, but that was under anaesthetic. He would swab my wound, daily, but that did not mean he touched me. Now he did, very specially.

I almost gasped. My whole being had been troubled. I had been so restless, so longing for the drug. For some strange reason the longing seemed to leave me. The touch had quietened me. There was a silence around the bed. 'Bring that sleeping draught, orderly,' the major said crisply. His eyes crinkled as he looked at me with quiet sympathy. His hand was still on my arm. I wondered what was in the touch that so calmed me. My mind flashed suddenly to one of our hands on our station back at home. Few could handle horses like him. A restive mare or a nervous thoroughbred would quieten under his hand, as I now did at the touch of this man.

He watched the orderly give me the draught. He kept his hand there. After a time he looked at his watch. Then he nodded and went away. I was almost asleep. When I woke next morning, the battle of the morphine was not finished. I knew, however, in the peace that was with me, that mopping-up operations were all that were needed.

I doubt whether the medical major knew the power in his touch. In fact I doubt whether anyone was wholly conscious about it. I know the men looked to his coming, and found his rounds in the ward a respite from their endless pain, thinking, and longing. I was glad of his coming, but already I had developed a plan to defeat the pain and the endless time. I would write four hours a day, read four hours a day, and think four hours a day. Sometimes anyone of these three could not be accomplished because of the pain, but I learned to cope to a large extent. Books were not easy to come by, although there was a library. Writing materials were not plentiful. Time to think was endless, but then there would be in-

terruptions such as dressings, the thin meals, visiting friends, and sudden tragedies.

My leg was up in an extension splint, with weights keeping the extension taut. The bed also was raised at the foot-end. So I lived with my head kept low. This went on for many months. Finally they levelled the bed. Then, after some time, they removed the extension. Next, they told me I would have to learn to walk. Firstly I had to learn to sit. Then I had to learn to put my leg over the side of the bed—a terrifying experience. Then I had to stand, an experience—in prospect—which filled me with both dread and delight. When I did I felt faint and fearful. I had been in bed over four months. I was like a little child. Also I was thin and fragile. The legs were thin, the ribs showed, and the head was like a skull wrapped tightly with parchment. The eyes had receded into sockets: hollowed pools of darkness in which very little shone.

Major Cairns was there when I made the first step. I sweated profusely, feeling the terror grip me. A faint cheer went up from the ward when I made that first effort. I almost fainted. The orderlies stretched me out on the bed again. A victory had been won. The major looked down and nodded. Also he gave a faint smile. ‘Very good, sergeant,’ he said. It felt like the king giving me an accolade. I lay in knightly pride, a glow spreading through me.

After the walking the attempt to get movement. By ‘movement’ we mean the movement of the knee, or rather, action at the knee. In other words, bending the leg at the joint. All those months in a splint had set the knee. ‘Set’ is a mild word for it. It was set hard. When the orderlies hung it out of the bed, splintless, I was terrified lest it break again at the fracture, some six inches above the knee. Miraculously it did not, but I thought it could happen at any moment. When they hung a weight on the ankle I was in an agony of fear, let alone of pain. With my stoic’s pride I would not let the fear show, nor, for that matter, the pain.

At least that is what I thought. The surgeon was a sensitive

and discerning person. He watched me, day by day. This day he knew how much fear was in me. After a while he spoke. This time he used my name, a thing he had never done.

‘Paul,’ he said, and he could have been my father, ‘I have something for you if you get that leg to bend to a right angle.’ It had only bent a few degrees. A right angle seemed to be an eternity away.

When I said nothing he went on, ‘I have a special copy of *David Copperfield*. I always keep it next to me. If you get that leg to a right angle I’ll give you my *David Copperfield*.’

I stared at him. Books were rare in our prison camp, and to own one even rarer. As for *David Copperfield*, well, I was not really sold on the Dickens’ character even though I sensed he was. I rather thought Dickens was old hat, especially after Virginia Woolfe and Ernest Hemingway. Somerset Maugham I could read and enjoy, but even he only made it by a narrow margin. Graham Greene I had just discovered. *David Copperfield* to me was not all that wonderful. Nevertheless I nodded my head gratefully. I could revert even to Dickens if the time were difficult to pass. At a pinch I could swap the book for some better title.

Some days he would say, ‘Getting closer, Paul. Almost to reading *David Copperfield*.’ He did not often allude to the book, but it was an edge to spur me on. Only one who has been through it will know how painful is the process, especially as it is coming close to the ninety-degree angle. The morning it came to it I had one of my regular attacks of dengue. Every bone ached; the fever was high. My organs rattled inside me, and the headache was torturous. Nevertheless the orderlies made me sit up, sweating as I was. It was their special day as much as mine. They had me sitting when the major walked in. Someone had a large book, to test the right-angle. He placed it under the knee, against the thigh, and the leg below it. The book fitted!

The major made them lie me down again. He nodded sympathetically. ‘Very good, Paul,’ he said. He went on his

rounds. He never visited the ward in the afternoons, not anyway until it was almost time for the evening meal. Then he would check one or two patients and be gone.

This day he came in the afternoon. He had the book in his hand. In fact it was wrapped. The orderlies gathered around. A number of men sat up, looking. He handed me the book with a quiet grin. I trembled when I took the package. I picked at the string, wondering where it had been obtained. I unwrapped the paper, then opened the book. The whole thing was a ritual, a memorable ceremony. For the orderlies and the patients it was a special event. On the inside cover I saw an inscription: 'To Paul Carn, with affection and admiration from Bertram Cairns.' The tears began to gather. Praise of any kind was untypical of our medical major.

I looked at the fly-leaf. The ink was somewhat faint, but quite legible. I read, 'To Bertram Cairns. First Prize, Sixth Form. For proficiency in English Literature.' At the head of the page was the school crest and motto. I could scarcely see it for the blur.

I sat back, panting a bit with the dengue fever. I was fiddling in my mind, wondering how I would cope emotionally with all this. I could sense all in the ward—the orderlies and the men—watching me. It had suddenly become public. I doubted whether the major wanted it that way, and I certainly did not. I began to shake a bit and was glad that I had dengue, otherwise it would have appeared as an emotional event.

As for *David Copperfield*, I had doubted whether I would read it. Then, at that moment, I knew I would. I did, later, and enjoyed, and became a lifelong fan of Charles Dickens. The rereading of that book opened up a new world of characterisation for me. It helped me with my own writing, but right at that particular moment I was enormously embarrassed, shaking with both emotion and fever.

Bertram Cairns, Major, saw the predicament. He could always read a man, and better for knowing him well through human affection. He leaned over the bed and said, 'Orderly,

this man needs a sedative.' He held my wrist, taking the pulse. That, I knew, was a cover-up. When I did not stop trembling, he put his hand on my forehead gently. I still do not know whether he understood the power of his touch. I did, anyway. It was not only cool and firm, but gentle, and healing. I stopped trembling. A calmness began to pervade me. It flowed in, controlling the trembling and then sedating it. It brought unusual peace.

It did more than that. It linked me with a new dimension, beyond that of ordinary human dimensions. You may think it fanciful to talk about Christ touching one person and bringing him to life, and then touching another and bringing him to sight, or yet another and bringing healing to him. Well, that is not fanciful. The same kind of power was there in the major's touch. In fact in later years I myself was to touch people and see them healed. Also I came to learn you can touch people with a voice. You can caress a wounded person with words. You can lay a gentle saying upon a troubled spirit. It now seems to me that touch is one of the great gifts the Creator gives to us. Also it is perhaps the finest given ability for true human communication.

Fanciful? I am sure it is not. It was not fancy that healed me that day of things which few would understand, except of course a man like Bertram Cairns. If I was in a position to give awards then it would be:

**First prize to Bertram Cairns, Major,
for proficiency in touching.**

What I forgot to tell you was that the major was a Christian. Not religious, just a Christian, but deep into it for all that. I think of him always as a quiet but firm believer.

Fancy remembering all that through about forty years! But then, of course, it was memorable.

Not Mindless Immortality

If there were but endless flesh,
No death to man, no sting,
But only the unending continuity,
Then what were life ?

Speculation on these things
Cogitation is pointless.
The facts are so, that death is death,
Though death from sin be other death.

Mindless immortality were hell
Or loneliness unending were the way
Of man within himself. True innocence recoils
From such concepting.

Truth is that death is death,
And death from sin. Sin's sting
The long and endless pain that death
Itself can never vanquish.

From death once died by Life,
And Life by resurrection
Old flesh dissolved: new flesh becomes
True life—not mindless immortality.

Then in the mystery of our godliness
Is praise for death. Doxology is due
For Cross and Tomb. No death, no sting,
But glory's immortality.

No mindless flesh, no endless doom,
No weary pointless questioning,
But deep assurance of the Living Love,
The Father's Face, the Regal Son,
And Noble Spirit's flowing.

Wild Budgie

Each morning she would sit staring into the sun from the eastern verandah. She would sit on her old cedar rocker, browned and stained as it was with the weather and the years. Her hands would be set heavily on her thighs. She did not rock the chair, but sat still in it. She kept staring at the sun, even when its dawn-light blazed into her eyes. It was as though she was glad of its blinding brilliance. Perhaps it kept her mind in a state of unseeing. He did not know. Each morning when he came from milking the house-cow he would see her sitting there.

Each morning he would say, 'Good morning, Sarah,' but she never acknowledged the greeting. His sympathy for her and her state never waned, but he kept his integrity. He would not agree with her anger. He had no less than average wisdom. He knew that grief born of anger can only destroy. Grief born of love can liberate a person and keep him free, even though the pain may not depart.

Agree with her anger or not, he loved her. It pained him to see her staring sightlessly. He knew she was turned into her mind and her memories, but then the anger had soured what could have been sweet. Things were sweet for him, even if tinged with the same pain that she knew. He could see Eddy as a golden-haired youngster, trotting behind him in the mornings when they went to the milking. There were many memories of the morning and the upward blaze of the dawn sun. There was the time Eddy clung to the back off side leg of the vicious Black Betsy, their unhappy Clydesdale-Shire mare. He had seen that from where he was crouched, milking

WILD BUDGIE

Tich the house-cow. He had feared greatly but Black Betsy had grazed on, uncaring, and after a time Eddy had let go of the great leg and trotted across to him. He had talked with Eddy about not going near Black Betsy and Eddy had agreed with a nod of his fair curls and a quizzical look at his father.

There had been other incidents such as the black snake near the henhouse, and the fall from the redgum near the house. These were minor incidents: all children went through them. There was the day the chisel slipped, the day when the sharp axe cut into his foot—the things that all boys know, and some girls too. They had not figured much in his thinking before the big accident. Then memory flooded into him: this morning, milking the cow they had flooded back again, but none of them hurt. He knew that Sarah could not bear one memory, especially not the sweet memories. They would taunt her, losing their sweetness and becoming the cause and occasion for deeper grief.

Midday she would move to the front verandah. She would try to look sightless towards the sun, but by this time it was overhead. In the afternoons she would move to the western verandah. In between the movements she would get the morning tea and the midday meal and the afternoon tea. It was late before she left the sun and cooked the larger evening meal. He was patient in it all, knowing that one day she must emerge from her grief.

Not all had the same faith. His sister Agnes on the next farm thought Sarah would go to the grave in grief. Most women agreed with her. Kramer, their family doctor, thought otherwise. 'Anyone can come out of grief,' he said, 'but her grief is unnatural. She's not grieving for Eddy but for herself. After a time she will think of herself in another way. She'll come around.' He had patted Andy affectionately, if a little awkwardly. The Kramers had lost two children over the years, through sickness. Harry Kramer knew all about grief. This had comforted Andy a little.

Even so she still sat without motion. What troubled him

THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

was that she was sightless as to him. He assumed she was angry that he had sired her boy Eddy. In a perverse way of thinking she must have blamed him for Eddy's death. Commonsense should tell her he had nothing to do with Eddy's death; only to do with his life. Eddy and he had lived close together. But then so had he and Sarah. Sarah, Eddy, Andy—that was how it used to be. They had funned it a lot. Sarah had had a rich, sudden wit. So had Eddy. He had often felt helpless trying to follow them, but he was never jealous of their oneness. He and Eddy had their times as they fenced on the farm, or went off into the Malice scrub, cutting firewood, trapping rabbits, bringing the horses from the eighty-acre paddock. They had been close enough.

Eddy's going to Vietnam had not interfered much with the family relationship. His marriage on return had been a natural thing. Diminutive Susan had been a happy enough bride until she had turned sour. Eddy had brought back his memories, but they were deeply down; well concealed. Even so the fault was not wholly on his side. He had tried to relate. Andy had seen the covered anger, the resentment against the eruption of hate in a land that should have been serene. It had all been new to Eddy. He had not known hate like that. Underneath it had eaten away. Somehow he could not give Susan what she needed, and after a time she had left him. The memories of the wedding, and the great crowd of visitors on the Malice farm, had become worm-eaten. He rarely recalled those memories. He had wondered why Eddy had not gone past the memories, defeating them, staying free for Susan's sake.

The memories were not all like that. Eddy seemed to have recovered from the hurt. Andy had seen the fun come back into him. Sarah had seen to that anyway. She never let up on her teasing. Behind the teasing she had good sense. She would talk about man on the earth. It was amazing what she had gotten out of her early church-training. Not that she had kept up going to services. She seemed to have extracted enough to

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keep her and Eddy going in life. Indeed she dropped morsels for Andy too, but always with a bit of a grin, as though she knew he had wisdom enough. Even so it seemed to help Eddy. It was a pity Susan had disappeared from their ken. She might have found a different Eddy if she returned. No one could be sure: Eddy might have reverted. It was hard to say.

Often he had tried to break through the grey barrier of grief. Not once had he succeeded. For the most part he would chat away to her as though nothing had happened. He never saluted her grief. He gave it no credence. It did not belong to the Sarah he knew. He knew it was there but he gave it no respect. It was better for Sarah to know he gave it no respect. His knowledge of Sarah told him the grief was a lie, a parasitic thing battenning on his woman. He wanted her back, and he was grim about the grief. Each time he had tried to contact her she had been unresponsive. Her dumbness had thwarted him. It was not that he had only used words. He had used signs—the signs of love—but if anything these hardened her more deeply in her grief. He had learned a large word, namely 'intransigent'. To him this meant unchangeable, resolutely implacable, fixed on one object and unswerving from it. She gripped her grief, holding it to herself. It was both torturing and anaesthetising.

It was when the sun was at its peak and she could not stare into it that he had brought her the little bird, the mauvish-pink budgie. Its colour was delicate, and its little body frail but resilient. She had scarcely seen it, yet he detected the faint flicker of her eyes. He set it in front of her, in its small cage. When he slipped away he heard the faint tinkle of its little cage-bell, and the tinkle was not tinny but silvery. He left it at that. When he returned for the afternoon tea she betrayed nothing. He said nothing, munching her warm butter-soaked

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scones. He did, however, look at the little bird, wondering at its tiny toughness. It was like a mocking, mimicking model of a true parrot. He let it be, but it kept flickering and flirting in his mind, drawing him back to the memory of Eddy.

Eddy had once owned a similar parakeet, a bright green budgerigar with yellow trimmings, its little face feathers tipped with blue. It had followed Eddy wherever he went. It went in short flutters because of a clipped wing. Eddy had taught it to speak and somewhere down in its depths it had ventriloquised him. The sound seemed not to come from the bird. Eddy had named it 'Clipsal' because it clipped its teeth together, flew and hopped with clipped measure. Also it would nip at Eddy's ear when it landed on his shoulder. After a time it was 'Clippy'.

It was the first great grief Eddy had known—the day when it was crushed in the top of the door. Eddy it was who had closed the door on it. Next time he had opened the door it fell to the floor. Eddy had looked at it, picked it up, and fled into the Malice gums. He had never said a word about it from that time. He refused the offer of another. The strange thing was that he had always called Susan, 'my little budgie'. Strange because of the association of his first budgie. Once Andy had asked him and Eddy had only grinned. 'Susan is like 'Clippy',' he said. 'She never leaves me alone.' Sarah would remember that. The new budgie would remind her of Eddy and Susan. Perhaps some of the human feeling would return. He did not know.

It was a week before she spoke. She said roughly, 'You'd better take that budgie back to the shop.' He knew she had not finished speaking. It was their first conversation in months. Like the budgie it was tiny and tenuous. He wanted the words to live. So he said nothing. He felt the irritation in her voice. 'Either take it back or get it a mate,' she said. 'The thing is lonely.'

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He felt the blood surge through his arteries. It was like pain after numbness, but pleasant for all that. He sat, hardly daring to break the moment. After a time he left. He mumbled distantly as he went, 'I'll see about that.' He must not betray his joy. That would make her angry. She would be silent once more, looking only into the sun.

The second bird was a replica of old 'Clippy'. The same brilliant colours. The same wild actions. It was uncanny. With this bird which was a male he had brought a larger cage. He took the gentle female from the smaller cage and liberated it to the new 'Clippy'. They fluttered about, eyeing each other nervously. Suddenly the green male was there beside his flimsy female companion. His eyes were bright with mating intent. He could have sworn there was a flicker too in Sarah's eyes, but they soon returned to their former glassiness. He was again shut out.

He noticed the daily change, grudging as it was. He saw the growing flickerings of interest. Small gleams of meaning would dart into her eyes, and then be gone. Then they would return. They came only as she looked at the two birds, and never when she looked at him or the sun. Her gaze could pass over him so easily. If ever she met him it was sightlessly. Her grief had hardened like old blood.

One day he had brought his portable work-bench to the verandah. He set it up on the grass below the steps. He had brought his tools also, some chipboard, and other materials from the shed. He sawed and chiselled, and shaped and hammered. When he finished he had a nesting box in his grip. He looked down at it. It seemed so small in his large hands flattened by years of work on Malice soil. These hands had held Eddy as a baby so that he seemed small in their palms. They had held his tiny hand when they had gone to the shearing shed, when—later—they had shared digging postholes, and straining wire. But then Eddy's hands had grown. They had gripped machine-guns, and lifted artillery shells, shoving them into the breech. They had handled a football well. They

had held Susan.

The nesting box looked so small in his grip, but he knew intuitively that this little nest-box would win Sarah or lose her forever. He knew it was a dry cliché, 'I have nothing to lose,' but since all clichés speak facts and that was the measure of it he shrugged his shoulders and left it at that. He was not skilful in attaching the box to the cage, but finally he succeeded. Amazingly enough Sarah's eyes were on him.

'You're mad!' she said, and he was grateful for that. It was the second sign significant of life in all this time. The first had been when her eyes had flickered faintly. He shrugged his shoulders, kept his counsel, and wandered off to milk the cow.

Without Comment they both watched the two birds. This would be at morning tea, at afternoon tea, and sometimes at lunchtimes. Sarah had not asked him, but she had sometimes brought the meal onto the verandah. They had not done that in years, not since the time when Susan had left them. When Sarah had heard about Susan being pregnant and carrying Eddy's child she had seemed almost to die. It was Eddy's death which had brought total death to her. That was when the silence had closed in around her.

Now she was looking at the budgies. Andy thought it must have been painful for her to watch the tiny parakeets as they mated, sometimes with fierce cries and bickerings, sometimes with shrill protests, but most times with coy cloying of their little heads and pliant necks. Then the male began feeding the female, and Andy knew with a great leap of his heart that somehow it was on: life must return to Sarah with the coming of the little lives of the nestlings. That was what he had hoped and planned for.

Suddenly, one day, Sarah talked to him. Her tone was sharp, sharper than ever he had heard it. It was like a cracked voice half-chirping from the dead. He was startled but kept himself still, very still.

'Where's Susan?' Sarah had demanded.

He stared at her. Susan? Why had she asked that question? He waited for a time. Then he spoke. 'They tell me she's in Adelaide,' he said.

She hesitated as though reluctant to break her long and rigid silence. He knew that if she spoke again, then the silence was gone forever.

She did speak. 'Why didn't Susan come to the funeral?' After a pause he said, 'She never knew. No one told her.' 'What about the papers? What about the advertisements in them? Hey, what about that?' It was as though she was accusing him. He ignored this in his sense of relief. Pain. Pain. Pain. But then life was returning.

After that she had not spoken. She had sought to return to her silence, but he knew she was defeated. Rather than humiliate her by being a spectator he left abruptly. It was time to milk the cow.

Next day she said, 'Is it all right if I look in the little box?' The little box was the nest. He had attached it to the side of the cage, and it had a lid one could lift.

He said, 'You have to be careful. They can slip out if you're not.'

'I wouldn't like that,' she said. Then she was wistful. 'I'd like to see what's going on,' she said.

An idea struck him and he went to the workshed. He ferreted around and discovered a small pane of glass from an old window. When he returned he slipped this between the lid of the nest and the nest itself. She peered in. Her eyes shone. There were six small nestlings. One was tiny, about the size of five cents. One was like a fifty-cent piece, fat and squirming on the hard floor of the nest.

When she bowed next to him, peering in, he smelt the old Sarah smell, the scent that had set his pulses racing so many years ago. His whole being trembled to drop the lid and the glass and take her to him. With enormous concentration he peered with her.

'Hatch out on different days,' he said, 'alternate days, you

know. ‘

She gave a gentle grunt. When she lifted her head she gazed at him. Joyfully he noticed the life in her eyes. The life went down, deeply into her true and essential self. He knew that she was not dead. However, he would be patient. He must not scare the newly returned life.

‘I had better build a bit of an aviary,’ he said. ‘These young ‘uns will need some flight.’

‘Of course they will,’ she said with some contempt, as though he had not suggested it in the first place. ‘Birds like that need a flight.’

She passed him his strong brown tea with sugar, and a plate of the buttered scones. The scones were faintly warm, but none the worse to his taste. ‘You can still cook a good scone,’ he ventured, knowing that she could easily knock him back.

She seemed not to hear the comment. ‘You need a flight all right,’ she said, ‘and it would be best for you to make it here, near the verandah.’ He wanted to ask her which side, but knew that might irritate her.

He went to pick up the bucket for the milking. ‘Andy,’ she said, ‘forget the milking for once.’ She seemed a trifle irritable. ‘Put the calf on it like you used to do in the early days. I want to talk to you.’

She hadn’t realised the calf was long ago weaned. He didn’t mind. He could milk Jenny in the dark if needed. He sat looking at Sarah.

Unbelievably she was saying, ‘You had better come this side of the table. I want you to look at those budgies with

He moved cautiously, but she pushed him into the chair, as though nothing had ever happened, not Eddy’s death or Susan’s going. ‘Look at that pair,’ she said. That little hen-budgie is Susan all over again.’ When he said nothing she said angrily, ‘Haven’t you an idea in that head of yours, Andy? Look at her. She’s timid, shy, and that male is wild and overbearing.’

He was surprised at that. No similar thought had entered his head. ‘I’m surprised,’ she said, ‘that you never saw it. Eddy was too strong for her. In coming back from Vietnam and all that. He was always wild. Never fenced but he worked into the night. Never sheared but he did it until he was ready to drop. Never loved but he loved her into the ground. No wonder she took flight. Look at that pair. I’ve watched them day by day. It’s a wonder the little thing doesn’t get angry with him, and push him away.’

Andy steeled himself not to grin. He knew the way of budgies. But then it was different to the way of humans; anyway, some humans. He put his huge hand over his mouth.

The gesture did not escape Sarah. She was so severe. ‘I understand why Susan went,’ she said. ‘I never really blamed her.’

Andy was by no means an inveterate gambler, but he risked all on his next comment, dry and covered as it was. ‘And who’s the wild budgie in our marriage?’ he asked, his head down.

For a moment he thought the work of months was gone for nothing. He was about to curse his own irrepressible sense of humour. Then a hand slapped him across the face. He noted it was a gentle slap. There was no sting to it. He feigned astonishment and indignation. He looked up at her and felt his face as though he had been badly hurt.

‘Me?’ she asked indignantly. ‘Me a wild budgie? Well, I never ! ‘

He scarcely dared look at her, but he saw the clouds gathering. Then they broke. The tears came streaming down, silently because as yet there were no sobs. When the sobs broke he drew her to him, and there was no resistance. Her head lay on his shoulder, letting the grief flow. He kept patting her hair, not knowing what else he should do. It was a long time before she subsided. Then she said humbly and weakly, ‘I have been a wild budgie. I was always wild. I don’t know why you married me.’

He did his best to sound dry. 'Like Eddy and Susan. One wild, one tame. Tame, that's me. I was always tame.'

She did not protest. In fact she nodded faintly in agreement. 'We must get Susan back,' she said, 'Susan and the child. That is if she hasn't married again.'

'She hasn't,' he said. 'She never could. It was just that she was frightened. Maybe she will come back.'

He knew it could easily be that way. If not, then that was fair enough too. He had come to terms with life decades ago, before even Eddy's years in Vietnam, and the ones with Susan. Long ago he had dropped the wild 'Why?' from his vocabulary. Somehow things were right as they were, even if they seemed not to be right!

'We'll see what can be done about Susan,' he said. 'We'll just hope for the best.' In his mind he was sure he could contact Eddy's woman.

He lifted the lid again. They both peered into the nest-box. Their heads were so close together. He kept wondering as he looked at the little chicks, squirming as though they were bloated witchetty grubs. Their little mouths kept opening, and their bulbous eyes peering as though sightlessly. Nothing very beautiful about them unless you think ugliness has its own beauty.

He kept wondering at the ways of feathered wildness and feathered domesticity, and then about domesticity itself. To save Sarah's dignity he did not laugh, but down within him, threatening to erupt, was a huge chuckle, and any moment it might burst and shower the both of them with pure laughter. Not knowing what might happen in such a case he kept staring down at the little creatures, the slightly feathered, bloated witchetty grubs, as they wriggled and squirmed and squirmed and wriggled.

The Easter Happening

THE CHARACTERS:

(1) The Narrator; (2) Simon Peter, (3) John; (4) Mary, the mother of Jesus; (5) Mary Magdalene; (6) Thomas.

Narrator:

Good Friday and Easter Day are almost here. Each year we come to these events, knowing that within them is the truth of our faith. We know that faith is a matter of life, obedience to God, and love to Him and others. However, if we do not understand the events of the Easter Happening, then we will not love God, and so will be weak in the life of obedience and love. Jesus said, 'If you love me you will keep my commandments.' John said, 'We love because He first loved us.'

Thinking this over, I thought it would be good if those who were at the events could somehow speak to us. I have therefore invited some of them—Peter, John, Mary the Mother, Mary Magdalene and Thomas—to give us simply some of their thoughts about those strange but wonderful days.

Here they are to talk to you.

Simon Peter.

My name is Simon Peter. I am sure you will know much about me, so I will not waste time speaking about myself, but rather will speak about him. If he had not loved and forgiven me I would blush to tell you of my boasting that I would

never leave him, of my careless sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane, and my impetuous cutting off of the ear of the high priest's servant. My denial of Jesus, brought home by the crowing of the cock, could also be a matter of blushing.

However, what I would like to talk about is the Cross itself. As you know, a Cross is reserved for criminals only. To see them take my Master and nail him to that Cross was horrifying. Our cause seemed so lost, so hopeless. Yet my own love for him was what made his agony so terrible in my eyes. I have to say my mind was too numb, too paralysed to try to understand it. In fact it was only after he had risen from the dead that I understood it. Now, looking back, I know it to be *the* marvellous event of history. How many times have I preached the glory of it, of Jesus 'bearing our sins in his own body on the Tree!' Can you imagine it! Every sin borne in his amazing suffering, until it is no more.

Of course the resurrection should have told me that immediately, but there I blundered as I had done elsewhere. John and I rushed to the grave. Straight away John believed, but I did not. Not until that night he stood in the room. Oh, my dear God! It was glorious! Suddenly I knew he was the true Saviour of the world. My sins too were gone: not only my foolishness, carelessness, denial of him, and my unbelief, but the very sins which others, like me, commit. I was free for the first time in my life.

John:

I suppose many have guessed that the beloved disciple was I, John, and that I leaned on his breast at the Last Supper. Certainly I loved him, but much of that love had selfishness mixed with it. I can remember watching them drive the nails into his hands and feet. It was horrible, but the way he suffered it was unforgettable. Fancy praying, 'Father! Forgive them for they know not what they do!' I can still hear the strong but gentle cry, and it made its impact on all of us. By

contrast the others crucified there screamed and cursed-not only at us, but also at him.

One event was unforgettable: that was when he turned to Mary and said, in effect, not to think of him only as her Son. I suppose he wanted her to think of him as her own Saviour. I have come to know that the aged Simeon, shortly after the birth of Jesus, had prophesied to her, 'A sword shall pierce through your own soul also.' It certainly did that day. However it was Jesus' committal of her into my keeping which was very moving. It showed me that his personal love for his mother was there, in spite of the terrible pain he was suffering.

I could tell you much about that Cross. Although at the time of watching the Cross I was wholly unable to understand it, something of what it was meaning came through in the seven times he spoke. After Pentecost, when the Spirit of truth came, it was easy to put it all together. I know now that what John the Baptist said was true. He was the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

The resurrection was thrilling. I could not believe what the women had said-that he was risen! Who would believe that, even if Jesus had told us time and again that this was what he would do? When we came to the tomb-Peter and I-we were running. I scarcely stopped, because when I did for a moment, I saw in a flash that he must have risen, because he had risen *through* the grave-cloths. I knew in a joyful moment that this man was stronger than death! Later I saw that that meant he was stronger than sin! How thrilling! For the rest of my life I just had to be telling that to the world.

Mary the Mother:

All mothers-and some fathers-will understand the joy I had when Jesus was born. Amazing events happened prior to his birth and even after it. I won't go into those now. It was as he grew that I knew he was indeed the Saviour of the world. I

suppose I was always a simple soul, believing anything that came to me from God. Nevertheless I had moments of deep feeling when I remembered the prophecy of Simeon that my son would be 'spoken against'. I knew that meant he would be opposed. That I found difficult to understand because he was so fine a boy, so steady a young man, and so holy a grown man.

I watched the opposition grow, but never would I have dreamed they would subject him to a false trial, and to a criminal's death. Judas, I could see, was a man not to be trusted, but even so I never believed he would have betrayed his Master.

I think I could not have watched that Cross and its terrible happenings had not the prophecies been given to me as a young woman—that he would be the Saviour of the world. In my special Song I had said that: 'My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.'

John has told you something of my feeling when from the Cross he called me, 'Woman!' Once before he had done that—at a wedding—and I understood what he was about. I was his mother, surely, but then I was also other than his mother. I was a woman needing his death as much as any other. That is why I appreciated his tenderness in providing for me in the person of John. My other children did not believe at that time, although later they came to believe, especially dear James, who was to lead the church at Jerusalem.

Well then, Jesus died. Ah yes, but he rose again. His death was effective because of his resurrection. I wish I could say that I understood all things as I watched him die. No, I did not! None of us did, but the day came when we did understand. It was the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit came—as he said the Spirit would. Oh, what a day! He came upon us all, in that Upper Room. Then suddenly, and in a wonderful way, we understood! Jesus, my son after the flesh, was indeed the very Son of God, and the Saviour of all the world!

Mary Magdalene:

You may say my love for Jesus the Lord was somewhat different from that of Peter or Mary or John. Peter and John loved him because he said he came from God, and was going to God. Mary loved him as a mother does her son. But I loved him because he liberated me from the evil of demons. You will never know the terror that I knew in life. At any time, at any moment of the day, they would grip me in their most frightful hold. They would come upon me, bringing first blankness of mind, and then horror of heart. I would feel their evil take me, and cause me to become a wild thing. I lost my sense of being human. It was as though I myself had become evil. I would shake. I would foam at the mouth. I would feel like something evil from the regions of darkness. My humanity would dissolve, and I would be that which my whole being cried against becoming.

Then he came. One day he stood before me and spoke sternly, not to me, but to that which was within me. 'Begone!' he said to these things. 'Go out from her and never return! Go to your appointed place of darkness!' Those horrible things broke away from me with shrieks of terror, and screams of dreadful hatred. At first I was thrown to the ground, but that humiliation was nothing at all, for suddenly I was flooded with joy. My eyes shone with joy as I suddenly saw the glory of the Liberating Man. I knew in that moment I loved him.

When we travelled around Palestine, and when at the last we set our eyes towards Jerusalem, every day was a day of wonder. I heard his beloved words. I watched his wonderful actions. I saw others become free from evil spirits. Yet others I saw healed of their bodily afflictions and sickness. To me the time was one of joy. I gladly helped the women to cook the meals. I washed his clothes and the clothes of the disciples. I lived in a wonderful heaven of my own. Not even when we came to Jerusalem did anything change. When they called him 'King!' I knew this to be true. So I followed him

gladly.

Then a kind of darkness began to cover our holy city. I knew men and priests, Pharisees and Sadducees, were plotting against him. When he raised Lazarus from the dead I thought they would acknowledge him—all of them—as the King of heaven, but instead they planned to bring him to death. The night they took him I became numb. I prayed that he would use his great powers to defeat them, but he did not. He let them take him, and in no way did he seek to destroy them.

I could scarcely believe the events of the unjust court trial, or the Governor—Pilate—as he said Jesus was innocent, and offered to release him in accordance with the custom at the time of the Passover. When they screamed, ‘Crucify him!’ I shivered with fear and horror, and when they took him up to Golgotha’s hill and crucified him, the bottom dropped out of my world. All night long I sobbed and shook, and longed to see him alive again. Finally, when morning came, I made my way to the garden where they had laid him.

When I look back I cannot believe those morning hours. There was an empty tomb. There were men in white, men who I came to understand were really angels. But then my face was red with weeping and my eyes blinded with tears. I longed only to see his dear body, and to help to embalm him. There was no body. Only an empty tomb, and men in white, and their words: ‘He is not here, but risen!’ Why did I not believe?

I turned because a man spoke to me. Through the blur of my tears I took him to be the gardener of that place. ‘Sir,’ I said, ‘if you have taken him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’

That man was not the gardener. He said only one word, ‘Mary!’ I knew the tone immediately. No one had ever said, ‘Mary!’ like that but the Master himself.

‘Rabboni!’ I shouted, and I threw myself at him. The rest you know. He would have none of my clinging. In a wild sort

of way I thought the old days were back again, and the old way of love was still there. He showed me differently. He showed me that he was now the Son ascending to the Father. In that moment he showed me that God was my Father, and he my Brother. I think the revelation was too much for me. I rushed back to the disciples, filled as I was with joy.

Now, you see, I came to understand him in those days, as did Peter and John and Mary his mother. A new joy was in our hearts. A great reverence gripped us. We lived in joyful awe. Everything was new for us. They were strange and wonderful days. I knew then that he had not only delivered me from demons, but from sin and death.

The day of Pentecost came—a day never to be forgotten. I was there with the others. We were one hundred and twenty in number. If you ask me how I came to fully understand the events of that Friday, Saturday and Sunday, then I tell you it was when the Spirit of truth fell upon us. Oh, what revelation! What understanding! Yes, and what love! Yes, surely I love him, but not as in the days of Galilee and Judea, but these new days when I worship him as Saviour and Lord!

Thomas:

I never feel proud to tell my story. Not the beginning and the middle, anyway, although the end was certainly different. You may not know it but we apostles were a fairly muddled lot. Most of what Jesus said passed over us, and that most of the time. We either did not fully understand him, or we misunderstood him. As for his parables, they were sometimes more difficult to understand than when he didn’t use them. However that is another story.

On the night that Jesus had the Last Supper I was there. At one point he began to speak of going away from us. We didn’t want that. We wanted him to stay and be the King-Messiah we understood him to be. However, he talked about going to the Father, and preparing places for us. We knew he

called God his Father, so we gathered he was talking about going out of this world altogether.

I said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going: how can we know the way?' He then said that he was the way. He meant the way to the Father, as also the truth of the Father and the life of the Father. None of us really understood him. Later that night Judas betrayed him to the priests, and Jesus was taken into custody. Of course it came as an enormous shock to us. We were dazed.

Next morning the events moved very quickly, and they sent terror into our hearts. I guess you know the trial was illegal—I mean the one before our own high priest. They lied to Pilate, saying Jesus was trying to be an earthly king. This meant, of course, expulsion of the Romans. Pilate was forced to judge him guilty and send him to the Cross.

Once I could never speak about that Cross. At the time I was too numb and dumb to understand what it was all about. To tell you the truth I was grateful for the great revelation we all received at Pentecost, where the truth of the Cross was richly revealed to us. However, I run ahead of myself.

None of us wanted to watch that terrible death, for terrible it was. I somehow got the feeling that instead of being a failure it was a triumph, but for the life of me I couldn't explain why, or how. We watched him taken down from the Cross and placed in the tomb, and we knew that was that.

Well, was it? On the morning after the Sabbath a strange thing happened. Some of our women came from the tomb with stories about the tomb being empty, an angel having rolled away the stone from the door, and a hefty stone it was. There was also talk that Jesus' body was missing, and that he had risen from the dead. Now rising from the dead is impossible. That is what I told myself, and the others agreed with me. All day most of the disciples were holed up in a room so that the Jews could not come and take them also. As a matter of fact I was away when a very strange event took place. At least the other disciples told me it took place.

The first part of the story is that two of our number said they had been walking to Emmaus and a stranger had joined them. He was a fine speaker, and they soon became absorbed in what he was saying. When he joined them for the breaking of bread, they suddenly knew it was Jesus. At that moment he disappeared. They hurried back to the room in Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. Scarcely had they done so than Jesus appeared amongst them all. They told me how afraid they had been at first, and then they had come into the most overwhelming joy. I could see they all had this incredible joy, and that they were changed men.

I'm afraid I have always prided myself on being a man who does not believe until he sees; so I gave a grin and said, 'Until I actually see him myself, and put my hand into the spear-wound in his side and my fingers into his nail wounds, I will never believe.' Fatal last words!

A week later someone appeared to us all, and I was standing there, flabbergasted. He looked at me and said quietly, 'Thomas, do just what you demanded. Put your finger here and see my hands; put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not be faithless but believing.'

I was stunned, of course. I was also ashamed. I did not need to use fingers and hands and touch that Adorable One. The whole truth of it flushed into my soul, and I fell at his feet, crying out with all my heart, 'My Lord, and my God!' Oh, I knew who he was, all right.

Then he said something which I would like to pass on to every human being who comes to birth, for it fits the events of those days, and remains as a principle for all mankind. I hope it fits you, too, in your present situation.

What he said was, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.'

Narrator.

Jesus often said they would not understand until after his resurrection, and not fully until Pentecost. How privileged we are to be living after the events, and are so able—if we will—to understand them. To us come all the fruits of those days in repentance, faith, forgiveness, justification and love. It may be, however, that one or another of us is like Mary, still wanting an earthly relationship, or like Thomas, not believing. Let us go home and ponder what we have heard, and if it has not yet happened, make the Great Discovery, and if it has happened, live it all over again, with refreshing newness. Let this be a great Easter Happening for every one of us!

You did it unto Me

Theirs was a candid stare,
Clean, guileless, not without puzzlement.
'Lord!' they asked, 'when saw we You?
When naked and unclothed were You?
When clothed we You, or saw
You hungry and supplied You food?
When saw we You in prison
Visiting and comforting You?'

'These others,' he answered, gesturing,
'They were the ones who were needy.
They took the gospel, spoke the glad Word,
They liberated in their prisons
The captives, gave the food of life
To the eternally hungry. Naked as Adam
The others cried for clothing.
They gave the robe of righteousness,
Set banquets of grace and love
Whilst were themselves without water,
Crusts or covering, made captive
In prisons of men's anger.'

Still guileless they stared—
These eyes of gentle candour—
And so they asked afresh
Deep in their puzzlement,
'When saw we You? Them we saw
As one with them. The little food, sparse water,

The sympathy and love, the spare support,
 Were but the natural order of the day.
 We scarcely thought concerning it.
 When saw we You, and where?’

Clear were his eyes, and shining they,
 And love flowed deep afresh
 Bathing their candour and the missing guile,
 The smile that hovered gently on his lips.
 ‘Love is not conscious of itself:
 Wholly unconscious gives itself.
 Joyously unaware it spills
 Where dry grounds cry their needs.
 So cried my brethren in their wants.
 Their pliant was mine, for I in them—
 As they in me—was hungry, naked, a captive, lone
 Until your love embraced me.’

Love is not conscious of itself.
 Guilelessly unaware it loves,
 Yet will to Will are locked as one.
 The will to love speeds love along,
 And nought in all the universe is truth
 But love alone.

The Concentration Camp

I cannot rightly tell what it was that set me dreaming, but there in that strange dream of mine I saw a man sitting in a prison cell. The bed on which he sat was short, hard and narrow. The man seemed somewhat grateful, as though having a place to sit was quite something in itself. On the other hand he seemed heavily oppressed as he sat leaning forwards, his elbows on his thighs and his head cupped in his hands. He was contemplating deeply, and was quite silent.

I knew by instinct that this man was in solitary confinement. The cell was narrow, barely fitting in the bed and a bowl of some kind in one corner, which was undoubtedly used for sanitary purposes. There was no window, but there was a kind of vent, high up, and the cell door, which was of solid metal, had a tiny spyhole. Escape from such a place would be impossible. The man was closed in to deadly silence. In that stillness he must have heard the sound of blood in his ears or the pumping of his heart, or both.

Curiously my dream was bifurcated. At the same moment that I was seeing him whom I called the Oppressed Man (hereafter called ‘the O.M.’), I saw also another cell, identical with the first, and in it another man whose tranquillity moved me from the beginning to call him ‘the Serene Man’ (hereafter to be known as ‘the S.M.’). I was somewhat astonished in the differences between the two men since both had identical conditions. The second man seemed utterly in repose. I waited to see the faces of both, and when I saw the first man as he lifted his face from his hands, I was greatly shocked.

Now in one sense I ought not to have been shocked, for the

face itself, though marred and scarred, had retained its human normality. It may have been the haunted and tortured eyes which moved me, or it may have been the hard and tensed muscles of the face. That face was surely cragged and rugged, but it was its hardness—almost to bitterness—that greatly disturbed me. I certainly felt for this man in his vast anguish, and found that my limbs were trembling, though to be truthful it was not so much from sympathy as it was from an inner feeling of shock and dread. I felt anxious for this person. Somehow he was not handling his situation very well. Not of course that I blamed him.

My gaze would often be rooted and fixed upon the first man, but when the tension became too great I would shift it to the second man. The sight of his face had not disturbed me: to the contrary. I was deeply moved by it. By contrast his eyes were calm, and his face in repose. Mind you, I could see that he had suffered greatly, and I was astonished that his suffering had not greatly lined his features, nor caused them to harden. Both men then affected me deeply, though in different ways.

Then an amazing thing happened. I suddenly found that I could enter into the minds of both these men and think their thoughts with them. It was more than sympathy, even more than empathy. It was identification with both men in their singular states. The experience was wholly new to me and greatly disturbing. Having lived all my life in a somewhat privatised existence, I had grown to be an awkward and eccentric person. Identification with others and discernment of their thoughts had been wholly foreign to me. Now, it seemed, this new gift had been thrust upon me. I did not welcome it and—had I been able—would have quickly freed myself from it. As it was I was bound to these two men, as though woven into the warp and woof of their beings.

Please do not think of me as having been a fool. In my time I had gathered a modicum of wisdom. I was an astute observer of others, but had never used my observations for

any useful purpose or to any great end. Now it seemed I was bound by a power outside myself to these two men, and that I was to observe them in their time of solitary confinement.

When I call the first person 'the Oppressed Man' and the second 'the Serene Man' it does not mean that the former was always oppressed and the second always serene. They both had alternating moments of these emotions, but quite definitely the first man was habitually oppressed and the second habitually serene. Each had an habitual attitude or reaction (or response) to his given environment. Reactions and responses could be said to be fairly predictable, since each man acted in character. It is about this matter that I wish to speak, because I believe that what happened to these two men is of the utmost importance, not only for them but for all of us human beings.

Regularly each morning the two men were fed. In both cases the food was identical. It was here the different responses and reactions could be seen. The O.M. looked at his food with loathing. The S.M. seemed grateful enough that food was coming his way. His gratitude—far from being priggish—was natural and healthy. He simply liked food!

I sensed that the food reminded the first man of his terrible plight. His body craved for it but his mind rejected it. He forced himself to eat what was laid before him, but with surprise I noted that he felt guilty at eating it. Was it because he had not earned it, or because the enemy was giving it to him? Such secret thoughts were beyond my detecting for I knew that not even the man himself knew why he felt guilty.

The S.M., as I have said, was delighted with the food, although of course it was plain and coarse. He seemed not to have enough, but gratitude was there and on consuming the food the man would pat his stomach or even rub it. In the gesture there was both sympathy and comfort for that organ. There was also a touch of dry humour.

Both men sat on their beds, under the bright light that was perpetually over them. Day and night it burned silently above

them. On some rare occasions it would be turned off, and then the men would be grateful. The O.M. had ambivalent thoughts. He loved the relief of darkness but dreaded that sudden switching on of the light. The S.M. had trained himself to take immediate advantage of the darkness. He would stretch out on the bed and go to sleep. When the light was suddenly switched on he refused to react. The O.M. would hold his head in his hands to prevent himself going crazy with the injustice of it all. The S.M. would draw on some inner resource to aid him. Not that he always succeeded. He was most human in his suffering.

The event of every morning was the arrival of the Inquisitors. They would bring with them their pain-machine. I cannot rightly describe this machine, except to tell you that it had wires and electrodes, and undoubtedly worked by electricity. So far as I remember the machine was never used inside the cells. It stood—a blocklike instrument—outside the cells, but in sight of the inmates, for the doors were left open. It was there, seemingly, to motivate the victims in the answers they were required to give. It was calculated to end quickly a resistant silence or stubborn refusal to respond.

I perceived by this new empathic power given to me that the O.M. spent the early hours of his morning working up to the event of the Inquisitors. So far as he knew he had done nothing against the system which was now interrogating him. Generally speaking he had a highly developed sense of right and wrong. He had a general sense of values which related to the whole community of man, and then a special sense which related to his own people and community, including his environment. He had never been a political man. For that matter his mind was not particularly *against* the system under which he lived. He had no conscious animosity towards it. Even so it was true that he did not love it. It was not a government which appealed to him, but his training was such—especially in the area of theology—that he accepted all governments, believing it to be his duty to obey them, even if

he were not captivated by their ideology. So far as he could remember he had never opposed the powers that ruled the community. This was what puzzled him. Why had he been imprisoned? Why were they making him suffer?

You could say that he did have a niggling sense of injustice. He was being unfairly treated. He had never been subversive. Because of his slant of mind he was unable to give answers to their questions, that is to say the kind of answers that they required. What he did not know was that they wished him to accept their tenets with his whole mind, and to be part of their system. They were confronted by his puzzled indifference to their earnest insistence upon his mind and heart loyalty, a loyalty which he was not giving them. He simply could not see why they should need such loyalty when he himself was resolved not to oppose them. Surely they could just let him be! Strangely he did not know he was inwardly resolved never to submit to their philosophy of life and government. His religious beliefs wholly forbade any such loyalty, especially voluntary loyalty. He suffered then, through their interrogation. He protested that he was not an enemy. He could not find the answers they wanted, nor would he invent them in order to escape pain. He was a man of legalistic and compulsive integrity.

The S.M. on the other hand could wholly understand the thinking of his interrogators. Their ways were doctrinaire. They never varied from the party-line, and he was intelligent enough to understand their ideology. He even knew why they thought what they thought. He understood what had brought them to this. They held to a political philosophy which had naturally arisen in history as an answer to the human dilemma. Being a student by nature of mankind, he could see sense in what they believed. He wholly disagreed with their arguments, their conclusions and therefore with their system. Like his fellow-inmate he was prepared to live with the system, and conform to it if by doing so he did not compromise his personal integrity.

Like his fellow-prisoner he held firmly to what he believed to be truth. In no way would he depart from that truth, yet he differed greatly from the O.M. in that he hung loosely to what he knew to be truth. Far from compromising what he believed he lived firmly in it, because he had no doubt whatever that it was the truth. Being free of dogmatism helped him to see that his opponents believed that what they held was the truth. He could see that they would never leave him alone until he changed his mind and he knew that by nature of the case this could never be. His predicament then was much the same as that of his fellow-prisoner. He could not supply the answers they wanted, but at least his mind was clear on what they were about. He realised he could not afford the luxury of feeling hurt, of being angry at injustice, and of storing up indignation. At all costs he must avoid any animosity towards his tormentors. He must never hate them. Indeed he must love them.

Had this whole happening not been in dream-form then emotionally I would not have been able to cope with it. I could not have identified with the torment of mind which I perceived in both men. They had many things about which to think, such as their families, the groups from which they came and the convictions which were theirs. Strangely enough I was able to be objective and even detached from the emotional turmoil into which they were plunged. It was as though some power was wishing to bring new patterns of thinking to me. I was discovering a world which I had previously ignored. I was being stirred out of my self-preoccupation. I found then that I was not caught in their emotions as a swimmer may be in a fierce vortex of currents. My mind was given a wider frame of reference than simply the thinking of both men. So much wider was this frame that it took me beyond local reference and saved me from going mad—for I must admit that in spite of my human self-preoccupation I have, deep down in myself, always felt for mankind.

I saw then in my dream the visiting of the O.M. by his unremitting tormentors. Whilst of course they knew their victim was tormented by their coming, they saw no reason why he should continue to inflict suffering upon himself. All he had to do was to come to his senses and see what the party was about and agree with it. Then he would be free, not merely from the cell but from the error which he held. Whether in prison or outside of it the man would be free in himself. Since they held the truth, they knew no man could be truly free until he agreed with them. Nor were they simply seeking agreement. They were honestly setting about to liberate unemancipated persons from their error. Of course they knew it would make things better for everyone, but that was not the reason they interrogated and sought to change the minds of their prisoners.

What came to me in my dream was that whilst the Inquisitors were dogmatically sure they were right, and entirely believed their political philosophy, yet in fact, deep down they were not wholly convinced. I am realistic enough to know that man can convince himself of anything which he wishes to believe. Perhaps I should say that he will believe what is expedient to believe. I myself doubt whether people genuinely hold to a general political view in any community. They accept the pressures that come upon them, hoping to avoid conflict. They believe that—for the most part—they hold a concensus with the general concensus. As a result of this compliance they somehow escape detection. The interrogators-to give them their due—were not of this compliant order. They were wholly fundamentalists. They were convinced they held to the party line, but that inner, hidden and unadmitted difference within their thinking made it compulsive for them to succeed in their interrogation and change the minds of their victims. Only then—it seemed—would they have inner peace about their ideology. By getting others to believe it they could more believe it.

What sustained the O.M. was the sure sense that he was

right. He was right in believing what he believed and in not setting out to oppose and destroy the system under which the happenings of history had placed him. Had he been in any way rebellious then he would have known that he was going against his own tenets of truth. This would have allowed some room for personal guilt, and all his Inquisitors wanted was to grip his conscience with guilt and so manipulate him, guilt being the power by which they worked. If he were to become guilty about anything then it would mean his own ideology was in some way wrong. However, the O.M. had a great ally in the injustice which was being wrought upon him. There is nothing like a sense of injustice to get the adrenalin flowing, by which man is sustained. He can regard all inquisition as wrong, and regard it as such from a lofty height, the place of pure justice. To tell the truth, this was what disturbed the interrogators. They were disgusted by the obscurantism of their victim, but baffled as to how to overcome it. They too had their measure of adrenalin issuing from righteous indignation concerning the truth. However they had trained to keep their feelings under control. They had been trained in the cold ruthlessness which comes from impeccable logic. Their victims were living in untruth. That justified their imprisonment. It also justified the measure the captors were using to bring them to the truth. Strangely enough the old cliché—'right is might'—was the basis on which both tormentor and tormented stood firm. It was this which caused the O.M. to sturdily oppose his interrogators and which never allowed him to see anything from their point of view. It is true that he could not afford the luxury of seeing anything from their vantage point. On the other hand it was precisely the same with them. They, too, were fortified by the knowledge that they were right. As I have mentioned, the only one of them all who was genuinely and wholly sure he was in the truth, was the S.M. Hence the compulsive conflict in all but this one person. It is difficult to show the difference between dogmatic certainty and inner personal certainty, but I am sure there is

such a difference.

Today the interrogators were unremittingly at their task. They asked, 'Do you still hold to your pitiful ideas? Do you still persist in your ignorance?' Such questions cannot be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no', because either way the person would incriminate himself. All he could do was stare at them.

Then they said, 'You are very, very wrong. Why do you go against your conscience?' When he told them that in fact his conscience did not accuse him because what he was doing was right, in that he was not being subversive, they smiled. 'Truth is truth,' they said. 'At last the whole truth has come to men. Man has been coming to it for centuries. Now it is clear to all men if they will only see it. If truth is truth then the conscience—properly rehabilitated—will correlate to the truth it knows. So then you must be going against your conscience.'

The O.M. shook his head. 'My conscience certainly knows the truth,' he said; 'but it is not what you call the truth, for that is not truth. So my conscience does not accuse me.'

They smiled with a mixture of intellectual indulgence and pity because of the conditioned ignorance of their subject. 'You will come to see the truth,' they said cheerfully; 'then you will repent. You do not admit it but you have committed many crimes against the State. You have committed these against the people. Your crimes are of omission because you have refused to move with the people. They are crimes of commission because you have resolutely gone your own selfish way. You have brought suffering to the community. Our people are a happy people, but you are not a happy person. It is a universal principle that every man should serve the people. Not to do this is to be a guilty person. It is to be unhappy.'

Here they knew themselves to be right. The O.M. was, if anything, an over-serious person. He pondered matters deeply. He had never given himself either to excessive humour

or inordinate laughter. He saw a loss of dignity in these. Today, however, he answered them.

‘A happy people?’ he asked incredulously. ‘A happy people? I see little true happiness in any of the people. If happiness is the idea then why do you make me suffer? Why am I not tolerated and allowed to be a person in my own right? Nothing I do interferes with your system.’

‘We are bringing you to be happy,’ they said tolerantly. ‘That is the whole point of this exercise. However you are a bad apple, and one bad apple, as you know, can make all rotten.’

He seized the point excitedly. ‘If I am a rotten apple how can the really good apples be infected? Such good apples ought to be resistant to the rotten one. They should be able to make the rotten apple a good one.’

They were delighted with his reasoning. ‘That is it!’ they cried. ‘We are the good apples and we will make you good.’ They chuckled again. ‘We will squeeze the rottenness out of you, then you will become good, both for your own sake and the sake of the people. After that we might put you with all the other good apples.’

It was always at this point that his understanding failed. He really knew nothing of their ideas, and always thought it pointless trying to understand. Since they were wrong, they were wrong. Governments—for the most part—had always been wrong. Yet governments came and went and the people remained. Surely they should let be. Yet the O.M.’s problem was—unknown to himself—that he was not sure of the bases of the truth he held. In life he had automatically taken them to be authentic. He could not imagine himself holding ideas which were unauthentic. He believed them to be authentic on two grounds: (i) they had been part of the culture in which he had been brought up, and (ii) from time to time he had been given good proof of them. To him they were facts.

The task, then, of his interrogators was to make him unsure of the bases of the truth he held. They must undermine him

until he felt uncertain and confused. Then they would grasp a point here and there by which they could induce guilt. They would make him feel uneasy about his ideas of truth when they unseated him in some of his propositional ideas. Having made some entrance via guilt they could then intensify it until the mind and conscience could no longer contain the guilt. The saturated solution—so to speak—would require only a special guilt-catalyst to crystallise the whole solution. The psychological technique of abreaction having been induced, the victim’s mind would be washed clean of its past ideas and standards. A total catharsis of old ideas would have taken place. It would then be open for the Inquisitors to re-educate that mind. The old religious fundamentalist would then be a New-Truth fundamentalist, one of their most dogmatic protagonists. As yet they had made little headway, but the end was not in doubt.

I then saw in my dream that because they had not made much evident progress they knew they should systematically subject him to the pain-machine. In doing so they were perfectly sure that they were not being cruel. The evil that was in the man required them to help him. This made their seeming cruelty to be as no cruelty in their own eyes. They took him to the pain-clinic, where they stripped him of his clothes, doused him with a strong and breathtaking jet of hose-water, and strapped him naked to the pain-machine. The spasms of pain alternately tensed and loosed him. This impersonal action of the electrical current was cold and terrifying. After a time he would lose body-control and bowels and bladder would be moved to involuntary action. The hose would sweep away the excreta. After being dried he would have to dress and he returned to his cell.

He would be laid on the bed in his weakness, his mind still writhing. He would try to have conversation with his conscience, but for some reason it would not answer him. It, too, remained cold and silent. This caused further indignation on his part and he would find himself shouting. At times he

wondered whether God were against him, but he dismissed that as a foolish thought. God must certainly be with him since he was homing strongly to the truth. His conscience must approve even though it was not vocal about his sufferings. A man parted from his conscience is not a full man. This he knew and he insisted, even in his weakness, that his conscience must surely approve.

In my dream I saw that they also came for the Serene Man. His serenity he kept to himself as though it were dangerous to parade it before them. He did not wish foolishly to anger them. He did not like the anger in them although he was realistic about it. Needless reaction from them would not help his personal cause. He was quietly calm, but not arrogantly so. Because of his attitude they had more hope for him than for his sectarian friend. The O.M. they knew to be a dolt. He had ignored history. Not this man; he was highly intelligent. He had studied history. He was objective. He had learned much. If they handled him rightly they would obtain good results and do so quickly.

They were pleasantly surprised that he so often agreed with them or saw the logic in their ideas. The thought sometimes struck them unpleasantly that he might be playing with, and even fooling them. They became suspicious. It even struck them that he was more intransigent than the other foolish prisoner. They could not be sure, but they steeled themselves against allowing negative reaction. There must be no weakness, no foolish displays of emotion. They were playing for higher stakes with this man. They must be wholly objective. In this way, they knew, truth always triumphs. In addition this objectivity would be a convincing weapon in their hands, a standard that their opponent would recognise.

'Today,' they asked, 'are you ready to hear the truth?'

He nodded. 'I am always ready to hear the truth,' he said. 'I want to know more of it. Please tell me the truth.' They

understood what he meant. He was not being ironical but sincere. He would believe the truth if they could convince him of it.

'The truth is this,' they said, 'that we are ruling. You will have noticed this.'

He shook his head. 'No,' he said, 'that is not the truth. That is a fact but not the truth.'

They stared at him, somewhat puzzled. 'Is it not true,' they asked cunningly, 'that we are the rulers?'

He nodded. 'Perfectly true,' he agreed, 'but only as a fact. Not as the truth.' When they kept staring at him he said gently, 'Facts are facts but they are not the truth. The truth is wider than that. The truth is things as they essentially are and not as they appear to be, or as we make them to be. The truth is God and who and what He is and does, is doing and has done, and will do. Everything has its relation to the truth in that context.'

They laughed at his words. 'Why,' they said, 'we are working out the truth in action. We have an ideology which is the truth, and our actions which proceed from it are the truth. You may not know it, but the outworking of this truth is built into the universe. It is part of the process of history. It must work out.'

He sighed gently. 'How I agree!' he cried. 'That is what I have just been saying.'

Their eyes darkened. 'You are wrong!' they said powerfully. 'We have come at the matter scientifically. We have examined the phenomenology of the universe. We have experimented, researched, investigated and come to our conclusions. They are all scientifically verifiable. We have applied them. They work. We are pragmatic, but only on the basis of reality. It all works. It is present. It is happening. It is the truth!'

He nodded quietly. 'What is is, and is allowed to be and to happen,' he said, 'but it may not be the truth. It may even be anti-truth. One day we shall see and know.' Having said this

he knew it would irritate them. They would call this sort of reasoning 'obscurantism'.

He was right. They had not followed his thinking, and anyway his mention of God made his proposition absurd. They knew the old superstition and were not taken in by it. Man's 'God of the gap' had long ago been put to death. He was the prop of weak minds. They said, as they had been taught, 'This God-thing of yours is an ancient fragment of superstition. If your God were true and as you suggest He is, then you would not be here.'

For a long time he said nothing but remained regarding them steadily. Then he spoke. 'I think that God being true, this is where He would have me.'

One of them thought he understood the trend of the statement. 'You mean that He has put you here that you might teach us!' he cried. His voice was filled with scorn.

The S.M. shook his head. 'Not quite,' he said thoughtfully. 'I have to put it this way: "Things being what they are—God being what He is, man what he is, the creation what it is, and time and space, contingent circumstances, environment, heredity and the like—nothing could be other than what it has been." God does not violate the wills of human beings. He allows them their sovereignty. That is why and how things happen. So here we are today.'

'Fatalism!' cried the cleverest of them. 'This is a foolish and unresolvable concept. I thought better of you than that.'

Still patient, the S.M. shook his head. 'The facts are one thing,' he said, '—and doubtless they derive from and fit the phenomenology—but they are not the truth. He who allows all things to be, and even contrary to His expressed moral will allows them to happen, still has destiny in mind and brings them to their destined end. No man has the way of life in himself. No man can know the true path from his own intelligence. We need to be led.'

They scorned that sort of abstract thinking, but they, too, were abstract thinkers, so they let him be. They always got to

their point. Every day they would lay about him with the hammer-blows of their questions. One they always asked—and now again they asked it: 'What have you ever done for the people? What did you do for them when you were free?'

He shook his head sadly. 'All too little,' he said, 'always all too little.'

They were too clever to sneer. They were far too subtle for that. They knew that any sign of persecution could bring comfort to their subject. They must try other ways, ways in fact which even said things they did not believe. Such means justified the end, the truth which they held, and which would inevitably resolve itself in history. They expanded their question. 'What of the sick, the suffering, the dying and the needy? What of them? What did you do? What did the systems do about all that? What correction did they bring, and what new hope did they inspire?' (In actual fact they were not really interested in these matters. They asked them in order to induce guilt in this subject.)

'All too little,' he said in his continuing sadness. 'How wrong we all were. How wrong I was. How much more we could have done. How much personally I could and should have done.'

'And have we not done much?' asked the chief interrogator. 'Have we not changed things radically?'

'Radically,' agreed the man, nodding his head. 'You have done much good.' He paused for a moment and then added, 'Much good; of course.'

'Well,' said the brilliant one, 'what do you make of that, eh?'

The prisoner remained silent. One of them said quietly, but with strong insinuating emphasis, 'Then you know you are guilty, eh? Is this not so?'

The prisoner nodded. 'For many things I am guilty. For many things—often differing things—we are all guilty. Some of us are hellishly guilty.' He paused and nodded. His voice

was a gentle sigh: 'But then there is grace...'

They had heard him use this word before, and they caught the general idea, but they were wholly scornful of it. In fact they now pounced on the word. 'What is this grace?' they cried. 'Does it excuse you from your crimes? Is it the easy way out of your guilt?'

He shook his head. 'What you call crimes, I call sins. No matter. But it is no easy way out. Grace is so costly to Him who gives it, and so humiliating to the one who receives it. No, it is the hardest way of all.'

One of the inquisitors had read the Bible. In fact he had once—in his ignorance—believed it. So he understood the concept. 'Only the President can have grace,' he said, 'and only he can give it. However he will not give it to cover evil. It is his grace that he does not destroy people like you. It is his grace that persists with you, trying to bring you to the truth.'

'Ah!' said the prisoner, 'you certainly make a very good point there.'

They were too clever to let him get away with that. They came daily as a group in order to defeat his singular cleverness. Now they pressed about him, insisting on his guilt, teaching him that there is no cheap grace where truth is concerned. Humanity is at stake where untruth is present. They refused him the escape route of his concocted grace. He, for his part, was careful to listen to every word, but in the end there was only the tired but patient smile upon his face. It was thus time for them to take him away to the pain situation, which they did.

This time they did not strip him naked. Instead they left him fully garbed. They doused his clothes and applied the electrodes to his clothes, for the machine was quite strong in current. Even so they knew he would have less pain, and they would appear to be kind. They thought it a great joke—that kindness of theirs! They knew all the lurks. This man would look to great pain so that he could satisfy his conscience for the guilt which they had exposed in him and to him. They

would deprive him of this painful masochistic satisfaction. They did not really understand him. He had in fact so little guilt. He was, in his own way, quite grateful for the lessened pain. With a wry inward smile he told himself that it was quite enough, anyway. He had never been fond of pain.

I must now take off a moment to tell you what happened to me through all this empathic sharing of the lives of the two prisoners. I began to see—and to my great surprise and shock—that I really knew very little about how the minds of men work. I realised that despite my good education I knew very little of human beings. I had been far too self-centred to think about others. Now I was forced to do so. I was quite amazed to find that somehow a man knows the truth, even if he does not care to live according to it. I saw the case of the S. M.—that he was gripped by the truth, and nothing would make him recant of it. The O.M., I saw, was equally insistent upon what he believed to be the truth. As I will later explain, I had my doubts that he really knew what he thought he believed.

The point which came to me with stunning clarity was that the Inquisitors had so much invested in what they would have called the rehabilitation of their subjects to the truth. I saw clearly that they wanted to believe that what they espoused as the truth was really the truth. Indeed they would have strongly insisted that they believed it. They would be in no conscious doubt about that! But I perceived that the steady unchanging mind of the S.M. was very confronting to them. They could write off the O.M. as an obscurantist—one who will consider nothing but his own point of view, and who will let nothing other than what he believes filter into his mind. The O.M. was no confronting problem, but the S.M. actually threatened them. I saw that if they were as wholly convinced of the truth as they claimed to be then they would either be contemptuous of the S.M., seeing him as a person ignorant of the truth, or they would be patient, genuinely wishing him to be brought to the liberation of truth. In fact I saw neither

genuine contempt, nor sincere patience. I saw that they were obsessed with him. They had to convince him they were right and he was wrong, or they would never have peace of mind about that which they claimed was the truth. I saw—with great amazement—that if they had been cynical about ideologies and political philosophies then they would have looked upon their rehabilitating exercises as a routine arising from their regime, but its success or otherwise would not have greatly mattered. The liquidation of two would—after all—be a minor matter.

No, they were unremittingly committed to changing the minds of the two men, and of the S.M. in particular. Until they did this they could not be truly at ease.

I myself was caught up in deep feeling for the O.M. To tell the truth he dismayed me. I had realised empathically that this man thought he believed what he claimed to be the truth, *yet he was not actually in the truth!* Not, I perceived, as was the S.M., who had no doubts in his mind. I realised that the O.M. had been quite well taught by his early mentors. They had in fact proved the matters of faith to him, and I realised at this point of my thinking that you cannot prove matters of faith. Such proofs simply make them matters of fact. When they sought to subvert the S.M. they simply confirmed his faith in the truth more strongly. When they sought to subvert the O.M. he took it as an attack upon his integrity and became more obstinate.

What to me was a most disturbing revelation was that the truth is the truth and nothing can change its reality. I saw that the truth needs no promotion to make it acceptable with the multitudes. It needs no defence, no protection. It is itself. It can never be destroyed. At the same time I saw that one either believes the truth because one wishes to do that, or one rejects or ignores it because one does not wish to believe it. I had the strange notion that everyone really knows the truth, that

deeply down that form of truth is present to every human being, but as deeply down lies human denial of it. Let me repeat: only those who wish to believe it, believe it.

I watched the techniques they used as they sought to capture the O.M. They alternated between pain and pleasure techniques. They were out to induce guilt, for guilt was their most powerful ally. One day they brought a young, beautiful and demure woman to him. She was sweet and obviously desirable, if not for sexual gratification then for personal companionship and human fellowship. He had been in prison for a long time, and he was very much a man. Even so, he fought his natural desires, knowing he could not afford such a relationship. He knew he might be seduced from the truth. He was a moral man and rejected seduction, especially seduction of the mind.

One day they took him to a room which was a pleasure room and not a pain room. There they placed a good meal before him and some cigarettes and drink. They were warmhearted and gracious and they told him to eat and drink and relax. They also joked with him in a most pleasurable way. They were warm and even affectionate. He even believed for a moment or two that they had changed. Yet he would not eat or drink. Myself, I would have urged him to take what was there and be physically fortified. Not he. He touched nothing. He had geared himself to the constant barrage of suffering. It fortified his sense of injustice. It kept the adrenalin flowing. It sustained him in his indignation. He was intransigent.

I noted that underneath this greatly angered them. They were tired of him, but in order to hasten his defection from the truth they used more subtle ways. They were careful not to destroy him, for that would have spelled defeat for them. They simply placed quiet, sensual temptations before him. These were difficult to reject, yet his victories seemed to strengthen him, so that in fact they were unwittingly helping

him.

One day they played a pornographic film which he was forced to watch. The film was not crude. In fact it was quite subtle. I realised—as they played it—that man has certain emotional needs. He needs both to love and be loved. One of the ancients observed that every man has a God-shaped blank within him which needs to be filled. Primarily it is filled through relationships. Ideally man should fill it with God. In practice the fulfilling comes through relationships with human beings. Man needs woman and woman man. Pornography is simply the demeaning of such relationships. It is male using female and female male without genuine and truthful relationship. I had learned that humans only truly relate to one another when they first relate to God. Through God they may then have true mutual relationships in the human realm. I could see that the O.M. was being drawn out to long for certain physical relationships which in themselves would be legitimate, but which—in the course of this conflict—he felt he must deny himself. I could not but admire him.

The tormentors, however, had not been without success. They had stimulated natural longings and physical desires in their subject. Touching him at his point of *need* they had aroused *both feelings and thoughts*. They now sought by their elements to instil heavy guilt in him.

They said to him, ‘Are you not ashamed of your lustful thoughts and feelings?’ He saw their trap and sought to avoid it.

‘Yes, I am,’ he said, ‘but then you placed me in a position which I did not seek.’

They laughed at that. ‘You ought to be prepared for every eventuality. You—as a man of truth—ought to be proof against everything. What is more, you are responsible for every thought and feeling that you have.’ Then they rounded on him, seeking to induce a double guilt.

‘Did not your God make men and women as male and

female? Is it not right to have physical feelings and desires? Why are you ashamed of being created the way you are—a physical being? You are really casting a slur upon God. You ought to be proud that you are a normal created being.’

I saw that he was greatly disturbed by this kind of reasoning. They had really accused him of being a perverted man, and he was quite bewildered. Suddenly he longed for the painmachine, that somehow he might be cleared of his guilt. They must have sensed that for they denied him pain-treatment. They kept shaming him that he was refusing to be a true human being.

‘We agree,’ they cried, ‘that it is wrong to kill a fellow human being. It is wrong to make the poor suffer, to exploit others of the human race; but is it wrong to eat and drink and be merry? Did not the Creator make us for this?’ They pressed their new advantage. As for there being a Creator, they had long ago rejected such a ridiculous thought.

‘You have really been ashamed of being a human being,’ they told him scornfully. ‘This is a real crime against the human race. Look at that dear woman we brought to you. How sweet she was. How innocent! Yet you spurned her. You rejected legitimate and helpful comfort which she wished to give you. Are you not an ingrate? What kind of truth do you hold to?’

The O.M. descended into great gloom. Somewhere, and somehow, they had brought him into guilt. Doubtless the theology he had learned as a child and a young man now left him in a dilemma. The doctrine of creation would clearly agree with their line of argument, as they had argued with him. The doctrine of man as a depraved creature would not. Caught between these two he was unable to resolve his problem. He lived in daily misery which brought him to something like despair.

Having gained an advantage this team of tormentors was quick to press it. They decided to give parallel treatment to the S.M. They sent the same demure and sweet young woman

to him. His response was to accept her graciously and enjoy the opportunity she afforded for companionship. He talked evenly with her. He was delighted by her, in fact. Doubtless he felt a desire for continued friendship, and when she left he seemed reluctant to see her go. The Inquisitors noted every detail of the interview and appeared satisfied with it. They believed they were accumulating evidence for their successful denouement with the S.M.

The pleasure treatment was accepted with alacrity. Not only did he enjoy the amenities, but he was most grateful for them. He had no doubts about their insincerity but that did not trouble him. He had always been realistic about mankind, accepting the human race as a mixture of good and bad. He thought the pornographic films were somewhat childish, but he endured them. He seemed to me to have that rare kind of a mind which can sift out the false and evil and accept the residue. Certainly he was not afraid to watch the film with open eyes.

Having built their basis for accusation they now began their treatment. It took them little time to see that he refused guilt in regard to his feelings, which he took to be normal.

‘Of course I enjoyed the company of the lady,’ he told them. ‘Of course I enjoyed the drink, the food, and the other amenities. Yes, I had certain sensations when I looked at your films, but why should I feel guilty? I am a normal human being. Sex and the like are natural to me, as to all. No, I can only thank you for a rather enjoyable experience.’

That only baffled them momentarily. They pressed forward on their alternate line of attack. ‘Are you not ashamed of taking bribes from the State? Does this fit with your idea of your so-called truth? Should you not have endured persecution and refused comfort from us?’ They noted that he did not smile, but also that he was not disturbed. ‘Are you not ashamed of having eaten and drunk, of having had pleasure when your fellow-sufferers for the truth denied themselves or had no similar opportunity? Was it not your duty to suffer

along with them?’

None of this moved him. ‘I took what you did at face value,’ he said. ‘One is grateful for what comes. No, I cannot justify what I did in the light of your clever questions, but I greatly enjoyed it.’

They knew themselves to be frustrated at this point, but not defeated. Like the O.M. there was no place for defeat in their order of things. Like him they stood firmly on what they believed to be the truth.

Yet I could see they were much in torment, even if they would not admit this to themselves. The S.M. was a continual and unavoidable confrontation. He was a threat. The more he refused to receive guilt, the more they felt forced to accuse him, and gradually they came to see that he—the Serene Man—had taken the initiative. They were coming to recognise that he was impregnable in his assurance of the truth. That meant that he unswervingly believed in the truth as it was truth to him. Within them was an accelerating compulsion to prove him wrong to himself. As I mentioned before, their own belief in truth as they saw it was at stake. In fact their own integrity was at stake, especially as they insisted that history was on their side. They believed that innate in history was the dialectic which would bring all human beings to the ultimate reality, the climactic fact, the essential truth. Of course they made allowance for the ignorance of ‘some human beings, but this man knew all the facts as they had presented them and yet remained immutable on his understanding of the truth. They were beginning to admit to themselves that they had used the wrong tactics in dealing with him, for time and again that compulsive insistence returned to them in their efforts to change him. He seemed unassailable, but they were not! But surely they would win.

I was more than a spectator, of course, because I empathised along with him. For me it was a most amazing

discovery of truth. I knew the truth which he held. In fact it was the same truth to which I held, and so to me, also, it had now become unassailable. I also had become one with that truth. In fact I was quite a new man. Even so I could see that his serenity was not a matter of temperament or disposition. I noted that he fought much harder than his inquisitors realised. He had to battle every inch of the way. He—like all humans—was open to more temptations than even they placed before him. In any case, the temptations were not grand matters. In fact they were often piffling and trifling things, like wanting a more tasty morsel of food, like wishing to be with his wife and children and being tempted to be angry and even to question God. I noticed in all this that he assiduously avoided asking any questions of God. He knew he must trust Him. But how often he was tempted in his mind to doubt God. Whatever temptations his oppressors put before him he took into consideration. He dealt with each matter—no matter how small—as he met it. In this way he kept his integrity and this was all he wished to do.

Then came the Inquisitors' masterpiece of operation. Although they had by this time made real inroads into the Oppressed Man, they decided to break the solitary confinement of the two men, and place them together. They reasoned that the O.M. would fasten upon the S.M. in his need and so would help to break the man who was tranquil. The O.M. would try to work through his guilt via his seemingly guiltless fellow-prisoner. A more personal relationship would develop between the two men, and the Inquisitors could then get to the S.M. through his friend. They would use every technique known in the realm of relationships. I personally thought this quite cruel, and would have judged them as evil men had I not realised their philosophy was that the end justified the means and that the means did not have to determine the end. I knew that the O.M. was a man deep in guilts, and one who always

saw his conscience not as a friend but as an enemy. For this reason he was a highly dangerous person, and I feared for the S.M. Soon, I thought, he also would be a man in turmoil. So I watched and waited.

I could not fully understand the position of the tormentors, or, if you will, the new ideological State under which these men lived. They believed their political system to be the true one. As we have said, they were sure history was on their side. Eventually all men must come to the truth they held, for scientifically and philosophically there could be no other. Man—as it were—had inevitably come to this immutable reality, even though his pilgrimage had taken tens of thousands of years. He had arrived at true maturity. It could now be seen clearly that the way of man is in himself, and not in any imagined god. Man was now entering into his true and inherent nobility of being. Those who insisted on living in ignorance of the truth needed to be helped. The twists of their minds called for untwisting. Only men of integrity, ie. men of truth, could do this.

In drawing the S.M. and the O.M. into this new and final kingdom of man the Inquisitors—or noble endeavourers—were faced with two other forms which claimed to be truth. The first was that of the O.M. This they thoroughly despised because it was sectarian. It did not even open its ears and eyes to the possibility that it was wrong, or that other insights might be enormously helpful even to its own truth. Given time they could wear this man down since he did not really have any kind of truth on his side. One day he would be on his knees begging them to allow him to enter the truth, to be part of the new and objective paradise of man. The O.M., then, was no problem.

The S.M. of course was a problem for the reasons stated above. Because he wholly understood the ideology they presented to him and could quietly smile at it as though it

were foolish, the Inquisitors themselves were under the temptation to question it. This of course brought an element of insecurity, and so anger. In one sense they were in a similar situation to that of the O.M. Perhaps they were intransigent, obdurate, even obscurantist! This, naturally enough, they would not admit. What made them even more insecure was the S.M.'s carefree admission that much in their system was good. He accepted many of its elements as valuable. He gladly admitted the good it had done, but of course he wondered whether even the good accomplished really justified the other elements which he saw as greatly deficient. At no point did he take a stance of superiority or they would have had him immediately on the matter of human pride. No, he was a man prepared to admit to being weak and unsuccessful as a person. Indeed he called himself 'a grace man', meaning that he was hourly in need of grace to keep him buoyant as a person. He welcomed this grace no matter where it came from—the tormentors, the President, or God!

Because of this, then, they had to undermine him through another person.

I wish I could give you a happy ending to this dream, but often dreams have a habit of not ending happily. They frequently have suspended endings, leaving things dangling and unfinished. From one point of view our dream had a sad ending, but from another point of view quite a triumphant and memorable conclusion. It happened this way:

When the two men were brought together it was by a gradual process. They were first placed in cells that were side by side, separated only by the one wall. It was generally supposed by the inquisitorial team that they would seek to communicate, which of course they did. It did not take them long to work out a system of code-taps. By means of these they were mutually encouraged. Even so there were elements of guilt at doing something they supposed was forbidden by the

authorities. Having effected friendship through their illicit tapping, the two were quite surprised when they were put together.

The cell in which they were placed was larger, but with the same space per person as in the small cells. Strictures of silence were placed upon them in the early days of this new confinement. The oppressors did not wish to appear as being kind to them. In fact it was a technique to cover up their intentions. After a period the men were grudgingly allowed to speak, and they took immediate advantage of this, much to the satisfaction of their captors.

Each was subjected to the pain-machine on alternate days. This increased their mutual sympathy and so built up their friendship, as their interrogators had intended. Occasionally they were permitted to be in the pain-room at the same time. This further increased their comradeship and their inter-dependence, which was a cunning move by the interrogating team. Doubtless you will be wondering by now why the team did not just inform the President of the whole matter of the two intransigents and so cause them to be executed. Even so, the death of the two men would have meant an admission of failure on their part. Since man—in their sight—has the ability, to come to the truth from himself, a helpful correction would ensure the discovery of that truth. For them not to be able to correct the two men would have meant not only a personal failure but the failure of the truth. In their opinion *the very truth itself should make a man free.*

Now you will agree with me that the strange thing about what we call the truth is that the person holding it will not budge from it. This one believes himself to be right and all others who disagree with him to be wrong. Such an attitude is sectarian. Even so it is universal. They who are sectarian accuse their opponents of this intolerant spirit. In fact so rich is the truth to him who holds it that he feels he must get others to see it (his way) and also to espouse it. Hence the spirit of crusading. Hence also high messianic and utopian preten-

sions. Hence the most dangerous of all human creatures—the crusader for the truth! This is the one who is compulsively driven to make all men see the truth as he sees it. I imagine that the genuine man of truth rests on the truth and feels no compulsion to force others to accept it. The truth, he feels, will draw men itself. Hence he can afford to be calm about the whole matter. It is such serenity which is the hallmark of true integrity.

I came to see that those who crusade their so-called truth will do anything to impress it upon others. They will use cunning, deceit, and in particular the technique of brainwashing. They look upon human beings as *objects* upon which to work. They ignore the sacredness of the human personhood. They see invasion of the sovereign will of a person as quite permissible because it is—they say—in the higher interests of that person. In doing this they betray themselves because they insist that they are the redeemers of the universe, and that no Deity has the wit or the capacity to accomplish what they are doing.

What the Inquisitors did not know is that the inducing of guilt into a person does not always serve the inductors. Even false guilt can unwittingly be an aide to its subject. Guilt can be a most useful thing. In practice it acts much in the same way as pain operates in relation to the nervous system. Pain alerts its subject to the fact that something is wrong. In the human moral system guilt alerts a person, for the conscience is saying that something is wrong. The O.M. for most of the period of his imprisonment had been kept alert by the guilt they had induced. Far from getting to him and changing him they had alarmed him and kept him on the *qui vive*.

When then the O.M. and the S.M. met, the O.M. was quite alarmed by the tranquillity of his new friend. To him it seemed wrong, even immoral and scandalous. The Serene Man did so many things that the Oppressed Man would not

do that it further startled the latter.

‘Underneath,’ he said to his friend, ‘you must have enormous guilt. You must do something about it. It is there, hidden in you, and they will ferret and ferret until they dig it out. Then you are a goner. You are a sitter for their abreaction techniques.’

The Serene Man did not agree. ‘What you fail to see,’ he said, ‘is that I do not have guilt hidden away. When I see I am wrong I admit it. When I am not wrong I do not admit falsely to anything. My peace of mind does not spring from my own actions or works. They are never perfect, never dependable. No, it has to do with grace. I have to rely on that.’

His friend was rigidly severe. ‘Follow the dictates of your conscience,’ he said, ‘and you will cope. Grace is no excuse for failure.’

The S.M. sounded a little dry. ‘Conscience generally speaks after the event,’ he said. ‘If it is not living in grace then it becomes a monster. It eats up guilt and grows on it. One must remain tranquil in the presence of grace.’

The O.M. shivered. ‘You could be right,’ he muttered. ‘I rarely if ever get free within myself.’ He paused and said wistfully, ‘I hope you are right.’

The S.M. nodded. ‘Being in a concentration camp, and being the victim of inquisition, is no new experience for you. It seems to me that you have always lived this way, even when you were not a prisoner. Maybe you have always had that mindset.’

‘Always?’ echoed the O.M. He shivered again. ‘By golly,’ he said, ‘you could be right.’

Even so my friend the S.M. did not tell him the story which was in his mind. He almost commenced it, but bit his lip and held it back. I noted in my dream that he pondered the whole matter. His meditation that night filled out the story he was to tell the next day. This happened immediately after they had returned from the pain-room. Evidently he had thought about it over a long period of time, for it contained a prin-

ciple which was to have a profound affect upon his friend.

I saw in my dream that the O.M. was under heavy pressure that next day, especially following their combined visit to the pain-room. Perhaps he was at breaking point and sensed this. He had flung himself upon his bed in a strong emotional storm. His was the sighing of a baffled man, and one who was angry to boot. The S.M. regarded him for some time. Seated on his own bed he leaned forward.

'Listen,' he said, 'I have a fascinating story to tell you.' The O.M. was deep in his own troubles, but story-listening is as ancient and universal as story-telling, so he widened his eyes a little, stifled his feelings as best he could, and listened.

The S.M. quietly began his yarn.

'THE CONCENTRATION CAMP.'

'At one time, in a certain country, there was a concentration camp. It was like most concentration camps, for human beings, when herded together, form certain regular patterns of reaction and response. These are fairly uniform and stereotype models, and they also seem to induce fairly predictable patterns of behaviour in their captors. When one group of human beings is put over other human being, then authority-submission modes of behaviour regularly emerge.

'This particular camp was not altogether a concentration camp. To be honest, only some people thought of it as such. Others simply regarded it as a place to live, for they had never been informed that it was a place for prisoners. For the most part they did not think of themselves as captives. They even acted as though they were not prisoners. The others, however—those who were in the know—certainly understood where they were. For this reason they called the place, "The Concentration Camp". For their sakes, then, we will refer to it that way.

'Those who were sure they understood the true identity of the Camp also knew (or believed) that head over it was a person whom they called "The Judge". That person had rarely—if ever—been seen by any of the prisoners, but they

certainly knew what he must look like. He would be tall, distant and remote as a person, grim-visaged, always remaining serious. His eyes were certain to be impersonal, piercing, and perpetually serious. His dress would be sombre, and probably he was always black-suited. He would walk with head set high, his gaze fixed before him. His tread would be measured. Should he chance to meet anyone, then he would act impersonally, barely exchanging a greeting. Certainly there would be no warmth in his communication. The Judge, naturally enough, would have a certain hauteur. After all his task was a high and lofty one and his responsibility far-reaching.

'People knew this was how he would have to be. A different and warmer person could never hope to keep his charges in order, for such would certainly take advantage of any weakness in him. This was why he must keep himself apart from them. As we have said, he was a remote man. You might even say he was drearily sombre. Yet only he who has seen the Judge could really know.

'Those who were truly in the know were aware that the Judge had a whole host of people under him. Doubtless a large proportion of these were secret police. To tell the truth they were so 'secret' that no one had ever actually identified them. That did not mean they did not exist, and no inmate worth his salt would have doubted their reality. Naturally enough the task of the police was to inform the Judge of what was going on in the Camp. Not, of course, that the informants went directly to the Judge, for in the Camp there was a kind of hierarchy. You approached the Judge only through a bureaucracy. The police must have given their information to another group of clerks and bosses who then stored up such information on appropriate files and dossiers so that the Judge—when he required it—had the whole material at his fingertips. None doubted but that the Judge felt his responsibilities keenly. He would—no doubt—be ever at his files, devouring them, storing these great amounts of information in his alert mind. The day would come when he would have to use much of it in judgements. That, of course, was what being the Judge was all about.

'The hierarchy with whom the convinced prisoners had to

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do was composed of lawyers, investigators, interrogators and even inquisitors. They had their ways and means of going about things, and doubtless they had strong connections with the hidden police. There must also have been spies and informers. It was difficult in fact to know who was who, and what was the appointed task of any particular person. Yet there was no doubt in the prisoners' minds that there was a host of oppressors and that they had to live with them.

'Every day was a prison day. The true prisoners understood this perfectly. They observed to their amazement that some of their fellow creatures treated the Camp as though it were not a prison but a free campus. They seemed to do as they wished, but the authentic inmates—those who were the oppressed ones—knew there was a coming day of reckoning. All the aberrations of their errant companions were being recorded. Nothing would be missing from those filed dossiers. The day of retribution was not far off. They knew that if they—the true inmates—kept their integrity by obeying the rules and pleasing the Judge, then they would be given a legal clearance in the day of the great judgement. To them obedience was almost pathological. They tried in every way to do the right thing. It is true that they had little joy from it, but they certainly had the satisfaction of knowing that their accounts—so to speak—were in the black and not in the red. They were quite proud of this fact.

'Sometimes they had a flash of envy for the people who went beyond the prescribed bounds and acted as though they were not prisoners but truly free people. They quickly stifled the envy, knowing that the Judge might come to hear about it and then much of their labour of obedience would be lost, and their credits be reduced. Having subdued their libertine imaginings they found themselves being judgemental about their wayward fellow-inmates. They even became contemptuous of them. For their own part they knew they deserved their bondage in the Camp. Perhaps the Judge was permitting them to suffer now so that they might eventually enjoy a deserved freedom. Of this they were not sure, but anyway they spent their energies doing the right thing, and accepting the conditions under which they lived. So much so did they train

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themselves that they often achieved a kind of satisfaction. At these times they permitted themselves to relax a little, losing their habitually serious looks. This was only momentary of course—as was fitting. They would soon return to their lugubrious and sorrowful appearance, as was also fitting. Life may have been ordinary and mediocre, but they sensed that the Judge would know their acceptance of it. Perhaps at times even he would permit a faint smile to play on his thin and pursed lips as he read of their good deeds and fair obedience.

'Now the curious thing about this particular Concentration Camp was that although there was this hierarchy of police, secret informers, lawyers, interrogators, investigators, scribes, clerks, overseers and the like, you never saw any of them. You knew they were there—of course they were there!—but you never knew who was who. You sensed their presence. Yet, to tell the truth, they were wonderfully subtle. Not for them the thumb-screw, the torture rack, the water down the nostrils, and the stomping on the distended, fluid-filled abdomen. None of this crude apparatus whatever. You had to give it to them—the hierarchy—that everything was done silently, soundlessly and secretly. They had fine and gentle ways of dealing with the inmates. They simply got to them through the mind. They read their thoughts. They carried on a quiet but steady subliminal mode of suggestion. They discovered what the prisoners were at in their thoughts. Everyone knows that it is not what you do that is so wrong—even though it too must be wrong. It is what you *desire to do* that is so dangerous. You can spend years of dangerous thinking, planning away as you do, and it is better for the corrective hierarchy to get to this state of mind and work on it, rather than allow it to develop along wrong ways.

'If you have a streak of humour, especially whimsical humour, then you might dismiss the whole thing as a laughable myth. Ah! There you would be wrong! Ask any authentic prisoner and he will tell you you are wrong. Mind you, he will look around, stare this way and that, look up and down and sideways before answering you, but he will answer you! He will tell you the facts of the matter. Everywhere these thought-penetrators, and thought-informers, and thought-

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manipulators are present. Don't let anyone tell you anything to the contrary. They are there all right. Oh yes, they are there!

'These dreadful interrogators asked the kinds of questions which induced guilt in their subjects. Come to think of it, they did not seek to induce guilt so much as to crystallise the guilt already there. They brought it—so to speak—into the light of day and the brilliance of reality. By these means the interrogated ones came to realise how dreadful had been their thoughts and attitudes, and even their actions. This way they would accept the rightness of their incarceration. It was due to them for their wrong and crimes. This power of guilt kept them from openly rebelling against the Judge. In any case they knew he owned the Camp and what he wished to do he was entitled to accomplish. They also knew they ought to be grateful for the remedial treatment he was effecting in their lives. Only the Judge—of all other persons—knew the truth. Indeed they liked to think of this truth as the Truth, and as final, and as the only truth which was authentic.

'Thus all their lives, 'from the Cradle to the Grave', these prisoners worked for the Judge. They knew that by nature of the case this was what they must do. At times they had had rebellious thoughts. They had had wild dreams of total freedom. Yet after a time they had come to see these as unworthy. Who dared question the Judge? Also these thoughts would be tracked down by the unseen interrogators with heavy consequences. Best to conform to the Truth, and do the Will of the Judge.

'Now the strangest thing about the Concentration Camp was that some who lived there did not see it as a Concentration Camp. They considered it quite beautiful. They were totally unaware of the various departments which the oppressed inmates claimed were present and operative. In fact they worked in all departments of the vast complex which the oppressed inmates knew as a Concentration Camp, but which they—the unoppressed—saw as a vast arena of life. However, they saw these departments only as appropriate and functional organisations for the benefit of all who lived in the camp. They concluded that the sinister insinuations of the oppressed inmates were without authentic basis. There may well have been

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those occasions when they thought of the one over them as Judge, but for the most part they thought of him as a benign and thoughtful King. They saw the provision of this vast Camp as coming from his concern and love for them. They even had titles for the one over them, such as "Mighty Monarch", "King of Love", and even, "Our Father". Doubtless such names must seem fanciful to many and the oppressed inmates scorned these titles wholly. They had opted for a grim Judge and so a grim Judge they had.

'You must not think that the unoppressed inhabitants of this great camp were perfect. In fact they differed little if at all from their fellow oppressed inmates. They too failed many times. They often thought wrong thoughts and did wrong actions. Their *thoughts, desires* and *intentions* were not always correct. They too felt guilty about their failures. Doubtless ideas of a Judge could have entered their thinking, but they had come to some amazing image of this Judge that whereas on the one hand he was truly Judge, on the other he was the Father-King. He had made some graceful provision for their many failures. In fact this provision was in the form of a Healing Balm. It was available here and there in certain apothecary shops, and those in need would make their way there to receive this potion of healing.

'Sometimes even these persons who had used the Balm fell back into despondency and despair. Life seemed little better to them than it did to the oppressed inmates. They would even see the Father-King as the Oppressive Judge, and would tend to set to work to please him by the so-called good things they did. After a time this futile exercise would seem fruitless and so they would abandon it. They would be drawn back to the Healing Balm. They would then marvel that they had neglected it when it was so renewing, taking away their despair and purposelessness, and giving them a fresh sight of the loveliness of their great Camp, and its benign and loving King.

'What is both fascinating and disappointing is the story of how—many years before—the so-called Judge, i.e. the Benign Father, had sent his one son to the vast Camp to let all inmates know the truth of the true Owner. For many generations he had sent servant-messengers and they had been clear enough in

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what they communicated. They had tried to show those who felt themselves to be oppressed that in fact there was no Oppressive Judge as such. True, he understood their failure, their weaknesses, their deficiencies, even their spasmodic evil, but he wished them to use the Healing Balm which was available to all. In this past time he had sent his son on the heels of the messengers, and the oppressed inmates had displayed a sudden and lethal anger. Apparently they hated the Judge—though they never dared show their hatred—and now they vented it upon this forceful and thoughtful son of the Judge. They killed him. As a matter of fact the killing was a depressing one, and only added to the fear of the already fearful inmates.

‘The upshot of all this was that certain new apothecary shops suddenly appeared, and the Healing Balm was there on its shelves. The oppressed inmates—still smarting from their recent murder of the Judge’s son—chose to ignore the Balm, and even to scoff at it, scorning its so-called good properties. They laughed at the ignorance of the other inmates who now believed more than ever in the one they called their Father-King. Indeed they had taken to calling themselves” sons of the Father-King”, which was obviously ridiculous and palpably the old trick of wish-fulfilment. The true prisoners knew this one was the Judge and no “Father-King”! Who had ever heard of anything so ridiculous? What irritated the true in-mates was that these foolish ones had set up a mythology—a religion if you like—which was in danger of becoming a Son-religion. To the disgust of the authentic prisoners, the Son-Father people were now making the claim that although the son had been killed he was resurrected from his state of death. This was an appalling matter, especially in these days of enlightened science. It bred further ignorance in people, and gave false substance to the heresies these pseudo-prisoners disseminated in the Camp.

‘What most disturbed the oppressed inmates was the thought that the Judge should have a son. If the one who had come and foolishly gotten himself killed were in fact the true son of the Judge, then there would be hell to pay. If the true inmates had any regrets about the death of the impostor-son, then it was the nagging thought that somehow he may even

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have been the Judge’s son. They refused, however, to accept this, preferring to slave away at pleasing the Judge. After all that was the only life they had known. They knew the claims of the libertine prisoners to be spurious. There could be nothing more disturbing to the genuine inmates of this vast Camp than to be told by heretics that their endeavours to please the Judge by their good works was a foolish operation and totally without point or useful result. This sort of teaching was highly dangerous and could only result in inflaming the imagination of decent and hard-working persons.’

I now have to report what was happening to the Oppressed Man. He was being powerfully affected by his friend’s narrative. (The story as I am telling it is a digest of the whole event. I am given to understand that someone has written a book on the new libertine religion, and others have then published commentaries heavily appended with notes, so that you can study the matter to your heart’s content.) The O.M. was deeply moved as his new friend talked to him and shared this delightful myth. Sometimes he would give his friend a quizzical look, as though he suspected his leg were being pulled, but the S.M. kept a straight face and the O.M. was gradually coming to the point where he was assured that the S.M. was genuinely certain that what he was recounting was true. If it were true, then the O.M. was being inducted into a whole new world. He had begun to be excited.

I saw then, in my dream, that the story being told by the Serene Man was drawing to a close.

‘One day a strange and unprecedented event happened at the Prison Camp. An oppressed inmate—one of the traditional and conservative prisoners—was within the confinement of his cell, waiting for the invisible yet real interrogators to visit him. One of the inmates walked in, bubbling with excitement. This interested the first inmate until he realised his visitor was caught in the new delusive religion. He scoffed at him. “Surely,” he said, “you don’t believe that tripe about a Father-King and a son who dies to liberate the true and traditional inmates of this great Camp!”

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‘His visitor brushed off his scorn. “Look here,” he said, “I believed exactly what you believe. I am one of the old originals. I would have none of their stupid myths until one day—after hearing their rubbish time and again—a thought struck me. I asked myself, ‘Is there indeed a Judge such as we claim?’ I suddenly realised that no one has ever seen him. I said to some of my friends, ‘Produce the Judge and I will continue to believe in him.’ They were naturally enough quite shocked and warned me against holding such thoughts. They showed me the danger I was in, but I persisted.

‘ “By this time I was quite aroused, enough indeed to listen to the people in the Camp who talked about the Father-King and his son. What they told me greatly excited me. They said all the talk about a Judge was rubbish. ‘Look!’ they said to me, ‘you just walk out of your confinement. See whether or not you can be at liberty by a free act of your will. Go on, walk out of your cell and be liberated.’

‘ “They had challenged me so I acted on it, mainly to show them how wrong they were. I said, ‘You watch this. When I attempt to leave this cell I will surely be prevented by the secret police. They will take me into further custody and I shall suffer for it in the courts.’ I then moved to the door. Strangely enough it was unlocked. I was uneasy as I opened it and walked out. No one hindered me. I walked across the Camp compound. I even walked out the gate, and saw no guards. Then I was on the highway. I thought that the secret police must be on my heels, but there were none. Suddenly I felt myself to be truly free. I jumped, I skipped, I laughed, I cried. I began to sing. I was in some state of delirium. Then I began shouting, ‘I’m free! I’m free!’”

‘The old and traditional prisoner was staring at his visitor with amazement and fear. Then he spoke. “You’re crazy,” he said. “You are stark, raving mad.” Even so he was deeply moved. The thought of total freedom was one he never allowed himself to think about. Such thinking was highly dangerous. Even now the invisible police would be listening, making notes, piling up horrific evidence.

‘His visitor shook his head. “None of this is dangerous,” he said. He looked earnestly at the inmate and said slowly, “You

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try it out for yourself. See if you can not be truly free.”

‘This presented no problem to the true inmate. He stood up, his face filled with scorn, and went to the door. It yielded to him, and he walked through, though not without trepidation. He then walked across the Prison compound. His knees wobbled with fear, but he was determined to show his visitor the foolishness of his claims. He walked on towards the guard-house near the gate. No guard was to be seen, so he walked through the gate. No one stopped him. Now he was walking on the road. No one was running after him. No one called out to him. Suddenly he knew that he was free. He had the mad impulse to walk and jump and run, to leap and cry out and start singing for sheer freedom. Instead he stopped and looked back at the Camp.

‘Something unusual was happening. Prisoners had been watching him, and now they were pouring out of their cells, rushing across the compound, through the gate, and were joining him on the road. Together they were shouting—quite madly of course—but shouting to their heart’s content.

‘He noticed something else. Others were not shouting. They had emerged from the cell doors and were fearful because of this breach of prison laws. They were watching the libertine crowd as it rejoiced with what they saw to be promiscuous joy. Their faces were grave. They dreaded what would happen to them from the authorities because of this break-out of their fellow-prisoners. Their eyes were filled with scorn and even hatred. After a time they re-entered their cells and doubtless some invisible guards turned keys in the locks and normalcy was re-established. However the free prisoners were still free. They were still shouting and singing in their excitement. Within the cells the true inmates thrust fingers into their ears so that they could not hear the blasphemies. They were in deep fear that the Judge would send his interrogators and the old suffering would recommence.

‘The rowdy ones on the road for their part were enjoying their liberation. For them the tale of the Judge was a myth. The new understanding of the Father-King and his liberating son was like heady wine. Doubtless they were excessively exuberant in their newfound delight, but then they were scarcely to be blamed.’

The story had come to an end. In their cell the two inmates were silent. The O.M. had been rapt in listening. Now he was thoughtful. He gazed earnestly at his friend. 'You are really telling me,' he said, 'that I am one of those true inmates. I am one of the authentic prisoners, believing in the Judge. Is that the case?'

The Serene Man nodded. 'That is the ease,' he said quietly. 'You have always been under a Judge. You have always lived in the deadening guilt of law. In spite of your claims to know grace you have never known it. You have always been the prisoner of your conscience.'

The Oppressed Man suddenly grinned. 'Not any longer,' he said, clapping his hands together. 'Of course there is no such Judge. Not like that one, anyway.' His face was smiling. 'How could I have thought about God like that, hey?' He slapped his thighs with joy. 'Fancy that, hey?' he asked himself, and in the little cell there was much joy.

The two sat in happy silence. The serenity of the S.M. was enlarging. Serenity was coming to the O.M. as he thought about a Father-King and a liberating Son.

That is almost the end of my dream. You will have seen for yourself that these two men were now one together. They had equipment by which they could fight any team of interrogators and inquisitors. Moreover they sat very lightly to punishment, being so richly gripped by the truth. The religious legalism of the O.M. was now destroyed, and the grace-freedom of the S.M. was, if anything, fortified. The little story out of his imagination had not only fired the former Oppressed Man but had re-fired the Serene Man also. So they constituted a formidable opposition to the team of Inquisitors.

In fact the Inquisitors, when they came to top off their work of many months, were horrified and enraged at the evident transformation of the two prisoners. It took only a short time for them to realise that they now had wholly intractable human material on their hands. They also had the insurmountable problem of their own relationship to the truth. This unknown and highly disturbing factor of unbreakable opposition was a threat to their understanding of the authentic dialectic of history. Far from remaining secure in the truth they knew, they flew into rages. Calmer minds than theirs insisted that this was not the way to deal with the problem. They must make some official decision about the two incorrigible prisoners, and that decision must be unimpassioned, impartial and calmly logical.

They came to their conclusion: the prisoners—for some reason or other—were out of their minds. Their crass obtuseness made them dangerous to other prisoners, so that an example must be made of them. It would encourage other inmates to come to their senses. The verdict of course was death, and little time was wasted on the matter.

Within hours the two men were led to their place of execution. Curiously enough their death called for a firing squad of twelve men. This was an example of the genuine mercy of the State. They must die without unnecessary bungling or pain.

And die they did. They refused the proffered blindfolds. In fact they were unusually calm and confident. So much so that the Committee who watched them was forced to give grudging admiration. So too the firing squad. In a way their death was a living witness. Two Serene Men stood and faced the rifles, and two fell to their death without fear.

In a moment, then, it was over, and the dream ended. The effects of the dream, however, are not ended. I need not tell you that these profound effects are working powerfully in my own life. And, I imagine, in the lives of others. The dream is never ended.

It just keeps going on. And on.

The Man and the Not-Man

His legs were astride the great machine. He leant slightly forward, and a little to one side as his right foot kicked the shining monster into life. It coughed slightly, then suddenly roared. It trembled like a thoroughbred which is tensed for the race. He throttled down to a gentle purr. That purr was deceptive. It gave you the impression that it was mild, yet behind the purr you could sense the power. Then as he opened the throttle it roared its desire, and rider and motorcycle swept off the gravel at the side of the road. They gripped the hard shining surface of the bitumen, and were away.

First he made his way through the city, the one thousand c.cs beneath him growling their impatience. The machine chattered angrily at the traffic lights, then hummed into fuller life as they left the city, sweeping up into the hills above the lower suburbs. The road was a hundred curves, climbing through eucalypt-clad heights, making towards the crests and the moulded peaks. When he had come to the hill-town he skirted it slightly and dipped into the cool and beautiful valley.

He knew where he was going. The great cycle beneath him trembled no less than he. It sensed its own power and was frustrated. He knew something, too, of his personal powers, but they seemed strong, somewhat away from him, not under his control. A tingling came to the back of his eyes, not from the cold wind he was cleaving, but from some inner wind, sweeping, so to speak, across some dismal moor of his inner being. He almost shuddered as he sensed the desolation and the bleakness. One phrase kept hammering at him: 'New life-

style'.

'New life-style!' The machine beneath him yammered, content in its present power. He was not part of it tonight, not attuned. The machine was a fulfilled creature. He sensed the continuing bleakness of his spirit. Where and how did one get a new life-style? What would a new life-style be? What could it be? Once it had seemed he lived with his machine, biting into life as now he was biting into these hills. He could dip and he could soar, he could build into joy as he swept-body flattened towards the road-around the curves of the bitumen. Now it was nothing. The machine had its own life-separate from him-exulting in its great potential. He felt it as a thing apart. The affinity was gone.

The stinging had brought tears, and a slight blurring of his eyes. There was no danger of course. The black coil of the road was still visible in the waning light. He could see the warm lights of the half-hidden homes, nestling as they were among the trees. The wooded hills had kept their ancient ethos, but tonight their magic, too, was gone. The dreariness seeped into him. He opened the throttle in a slight anger, turned his machine into a side road, and climbed towards his destination.

He was going to see a man, not about a dog but about a wife. The wife was Brenda; 'Bren' as he called her. He thought wryly that he was going to see about two wives really. There had been Roz before Brenda. Roz, he remembered with a pang, had always been there. She had been with him since the early days. First there had been kindergarten, and then primary school, and after that high school. They had always been meant for one another. He had had no thought for another girl. There had never been any point, really, in another person. He switched on his light as the blue evening began to descend. Sleepy soft clouds above him began to grey with the waning of the day.

Blue eyes, soft and silky blonde hair, fair skin, and gentle hands. He could remember it all. The quietness of her, and

yet the depth. They had shared life in an unselfconscious way. They had talked their way through life, right up to the wedding, always sharing. He could remember the pride in having her when others of the fellows looked enviously, and even, sometimes, angrily. They had both ignored these others for the most part. They had walked together towards marriage, walked unerringly, never doubting, and then one day they were married—young, untried, sure of joy, strong in a natural affinity of personhood.

The machine beneath him seemed contented enough as he drew into the drive of the white house. He could see through the glass front door a TV set and the voiceless movements of people on its screen. The engine coughed to a stop. The bike gripped the gravel of the drive as his foot was hard on the brake. He leaned the machine slightly, and flicked out the stand with his foot. He felt nervous as he took off his windcheater and slipped the gloves from his hands.

A man had come to the door. He felt slightly relieved as he saw the man was older than he had expected. He seemed to have a quiet, unassuming maturity. He felt a pulse of assurance awake somewhere within him. As they shook hands he also felt a faint twinge of alarm. He felt the urge to terminate the meeting then and there, but the twinge passed as he was ushered into a brightly-lit room. There was no TV in it. He liked the quietness, perhaps as a reaction to the noise of his vehicle. The man made him feel at ease. He gave a half-sigh as he leaned back in the comfortable easy-chair.

He began like all counsellors. 'Where do I begin?' he asked rhetorically, and the older man smiled.

'Everyone wants to know that,' he said. 'We all have so much that has happened,' he explained quietly. He stared thoughtfully at the cyclist. 'You could start where you are now and work back from that.'

Denny nodded. 'What I need,' he said suddenly, 'is a new

life-style.'

That did not seem to surprise his hearer. The older man nodded. 'A new life-style is always interesting.' His voice was dry, but not critical. 'The old life-style can sometimes be quite dreary.'

Denny stared in mild astonishment. The man seemed to sense his problem. Nor was there surprise in his eyes, only a quiet sympathy. It was the sympathy which did it. Denny felt a strong desire to tell him everything, and inwardly he marvelled. He had not known the man before, but then it did not seem to matter. He felt the rush of words from his lips, the flooding description of himself and his past. It was a steady torrent of description and explanation. He was surprised at his own unaccustomed fluency. The older man was relaxed, listening but missing nothing. Occasionally he would ask a question. His asking was gentle, but it was also always to the point. 'Most discerning,' the younger man thought.

First he talked about Roz. He relived the early years, and then the first year of the marriage. His impatience had grown in that year until it was almost anger. The bright girl he had known, and the fascinating power she had to attract him, had given way to a woman he could not understand. She had not grown less beautiful, less attractive. In fact she had blossomed out into a full sort of womanhood. Considering how young they had been, this was remarkable enough, but the old magic was gone. The thing which he had known as love had waned. The excitement had given away to a monotonous use of one another. It had seemed to satisfy Roz, but he knew he was, somehow, cheating her. They were just man and woman together in a house: nothing more.

He talked about the succeeding years. There had been no desire on his part for a child. Indeed he preferred to have no children. There had been a faint dread at the thought of responsibility so early in life. They had married at twenty-one, and at that time twenty-one seemed so old. The thought of family, however, had seemed all too premature. Yet it was

their bid to help the marriage, even to hold it together. They would have to have a child.

It should have worked. There had been mild interest on his part as Roz had filled out with the child. He always felt a curious surprise that she could be like that. He missed her as she in herself knew some secret contentment. He felt she was away from him, but then, too, that was a sort of relief. It gave him a breathing space. Even so he could not stir himself in those days from the inertia which had settled upon him. Each day he knew its deadening sensation. He also knew the puzzlement it brought. Then he knew that he did not want a child, that he was unable to take responsibility for it. Further than that his mind did not go. He did not seek the reason for not wanting to be a father.

The man he was talking to seemed in no way surprised or critical. It was as though he would be critical of nothing which he would hear. That gave Denny boldness to speak, so much so that he was surprised at himself. He knew how tight-lipped he had kept himself in life, never sharing his thinking, never telling another his problems. He had always sought to be self-sufficient. It had been something of a principle with him. Now, as he thought about it, here, in this room, he was wondering why he had always been that way.

He looked up, puzzled. 'I never share things with people,' he said. 'I have a thing about being an individual. I believe we should be that.' When the man listened but said nothing, he hurried on. 'Take Roz, now,' he said. 'Before we were married we had tons of fun. We were active. We did things. We enjoyed life. It was good. When we got married she just settled down.'

He frowned. 'She became dull,' he said. 'Nothing was exciting any more. All she wanted to do was be a wife, and then a mother.' As he looked up, he saw slight amusement in the man's eyes.

The man said, 'Some women find it fulfilling, and even find it exciting, just being that. Just being a wife and mother.'

They even find it terrific.'

Denny nodded gloomily. 'Me,' he said, 'I have to be about doing things.' His eyes brightened. 'I like sport. Like it very much. I like my motor-cycle.' His eyes softened. 'I get great kicks from it.' He paused a moment. 'I like my job too. I guess most of all I like getting around with people.'

When the older man said nothing the younger one proceeded. 'For all that I am not satisfied.' He looked up at the other man. 'I need a new life-style,' he muttered, with something of anger in his voice. 'I just need a new life-style.' When the older man remained non-committal, Denny went on talking in a level voice. 'I haven't just had one marriage,' he said. 'I've had two. The second is turning out to be the same.'

'And then maybe there will be a third,' said the counsellor, 'and after a time it will be the same.'

The first gleam of panic showed in the eyes of his counsellee. 'That's right,' he muttered. 'It seems like it will never change.' He seemed caught in his puzzlement. 'It is like fate,' he said. 'I can't break out of the circle.'

The older man nodded in agreement. 'That's right,' he said. 'You'll never be able to break out of it.' He stared at Denny. 'I counsel men and women on their third and even fourth marriage,' he said softly. 'Once I only counselled in regard to one marriage. At the very most two.' Then he looked gently at Denny. 'Most of them don't seem to mind. They think remarriage is the only solution they have.'

Denny said suddenly, fiercely, 'I'm so guilty. I feel so much guilt.' He looked a trifle wild. 'I can't escape the guilt,' he said.

'What was wrong with Roz?' asked the older man. 'What was wrong with the baby?'

'Nothing really,' the younger man said, with his habitual puzzlement. 'It was all just dull. That was what it was. Too domestic.' He paused and thought something through. 'I never put anything into it. I just let the relationship ride. I was

trying to get what I could, and after a time there was nothing to get. Not, anyway, what I wanted. So we had a divorce.' There was pain in his eyes.

When the older man did not comment he went on. 'Bren seemed different,' he said. 'She was strong. I went straight to her. I depended upon her. I liked that. I had had to make all the decisions with Roz, and I didn't like that. Bren was strong. So I guess I leaned on her.'

The older man thought, 'I am reading you now. You do not like authority. You cannot easily take responsibility. You are a playboy but you do not know it. You think you are serious but you want fun, not responsibility.' There was no trace of criticism in his thinking. Long ago he had given up criticising human beings. He was just realistic about them. What cheered him about the young man was his guilt. 'Thank God for guilt,' he thought.

The younger man was talking rapidly. 'Bren taught me to be myself and not lean on her. She changed things, and made me leader.' He leaned towards the counsellor. 'Now it is monotonous. It is the same as with Roz. She just acts as a wife.' He paused and thought. 'She's pregnant, and there's going to be another baby.'

The older man said quietly, 'Do you like the child of your former marriage?'

There was a gleam in Denny's eyes, a warm response. 'Yes, I do,' he said. 'Something is growing there. In fact quite a thing is growing. I love my son.'

They were both quiet for a time. Then the younger man sighed. 'I guess what worries me is that we took the marriage for granted. We coasted. I put nothing in. Bren put nothing in. Now there is nothing.'

'Only a child,' said the older man gravely. His voice was calm. 'Only coming responsibility.' He looked at Denny. 'You don't like authority, do you?' he asked.

Denny was surprised at that. 'No, not really,' he said. He sounded puzzled. 'I can't follow you.'

For a time they talked about his parents, and his reactions and responses in that past family life. The older man could detect no anger. There seemed to be an even level of memory. No shock, no trauma, no wounding was there. Only mediocrity. He was surprised. Yet he felt the anger in the man, low-lying, but there without doubt. Even so the very anger itself was mediocre. He knew that anger should be vicious, or grand. It should not be, so to speak, on the low simmer.

So they talked. An hour went by, and then some more time. They talked backwards and forwards until the counsellor had images of Roz and Bren. He was seeing Denny, too. He understood the irritation of the three. There was nothing of the grand passion in any of them. Yet he knew so well that man is made for grand passions. It must be great sorrow, or great hate; deep suffering, or high joy. Man needs the flood of something within his heart and mind. Nothing had happened, and this young man was growing irritated and frustrated. Yet his conscience held him. It seemed he was incapable of hard and vicious sin. He was restrained from crime. He could not break out and express the vastness of human evil. On the other hand he was incapable of great love. Something held him back.

He was back to his theme. 'I need a new life-style,' he was telling his older friend.

'Really,' said the older man, 'you need a new life.'

The younger man stared at him, a faint interest showing. 'You could be right,' he agreed. He nodded. 'That's it,' he said, 'a new life. That's what I need.'

'Anyone can have a new life,' the man told him. 'Anyone. But then you must have faith.'

A gleam of interest showed itself. 'Tell me about faith and a new life,' he was saying.

'It's a long story,' he was told. 'But I'll tell it if you can listen.' He looked directly at Denny. Then he began.

'A human being must have, at some time or other in his

life, the experience of total emotional fulfilment. Without this he is always looking and searching. If he does not find it he may give up. He may even commit suicide. In anger at being frustrated he may go into crime, or deep depression. We all need total emotional fulfilment.' When the younger man nodded in agreement, he went on. 'We all need to be loved. We all need to love. We need something to awaken our love, and that is by being loved and so loving the lover. Really it means mutual love. It means a human being is evoked into deep worship. Man must love, must worship, must adore. No human being can give that kind of love which totally fulfils. However he-or she-can give what appears to be great love.'

He smiled. 'For some that is enough for life. They think that is all there is. Others are simply awakened by it, and want more. If they cannot get it they try what is illicit. The illicit is exciting, or seems to be. Then it becomes addictive. The addicts must have the illicit. They must be promiscuous. They must even be, in some cases, perverse.'

The younger man was thinking, 'I have never known anything on a grand scale. Nothing! I don't think I have ever believed there is anything on the grand scale. I only know the suburban scale.'

He listened to the older man even as he was thinking. The man was saying, 'God is the great passion of man. That is how it has to be. You hear it coming through if you listen to men. You have it explicitly if you read the psalms, the expressed thoughts of passionate men. God is the grand passion without doubt. But then it is He who evokes the grand passion in men. He stirs and stimulates.'

'Recently,' he said, 'a man who had been a criminal came to me. He brought his third wife. He was her second husband. They wanted me to write a book about their lives. He had lived in crime from when he was a child. She had become a prostitute after the first marriage failed. They had had passion in a twisted pattern of life. Even so they were not mediocre. Then they had this amazing grand love event with

God. They felt the impact of His love just when they had nothing to live for. The woman had attempted a number of times to take her own life. He had even shot at her once in a drug-and-alcohol state of stupor and anger. God came to them and they felt His love. They began a new life.'

The counsellor glanced at his younger friend, making sure he was not uneasy because of the mention of God. There was no unease. He went on. 'It works like this. Man always gets an image of God from his parents. If he is an orphan he gets it from parent-substitutes, or images of parents he raises in his mind. We all see God as we see our parents are, and rarely are we satisfied. Few parents are capable of great love to their children. They may not be capable of great love for each other. Maybe they are emotional about each other or the children, but rarely is there greatness of love. What is more, the child never really sees its parents as they are. Not really. Not fully. So because it never has a rich image of God it never knows fulfilment.' He paused. 'Some children become very angry when they do not find fulfilment. They don't even know *why* they are angry, or even-in some *cases-that* they are angry. Then they live with anger all their lives.'

He looked across at Denny. 'You have some anger,' he said. 'But it isn't the grand passion. Even your anger is mediocre.'

Denny nodded. He was discovering something about himself. 'You could be right,' he agreed.

'Let's go back to the matter of images,' the older man said. 'When your image of God is not satisfying, then you must look for another. You simply have to have satisfaction, so you create the image you think will satisfy. You make an idol, and then you begin to adore it.' He smiled at Denny. 'You have had two idols. One has been Roz. The other has been Bren. In fact they were not great idols. They never held you fully. So you have supplied yourself with supplementary idols. Take your sport, your vocation, your 1000c.c. Suzuki.' He grinned cheerfully. 'We all have idols,' he said.

He went on. 'The trouble with images is that they aren't real. They have no true being. So we can never have true life when we relate to them. Most of them are outward projections of our inward desires, so they cannot be real. Only God is real. He is not an image. He is not an idea. He is True Person.' The man looked at Denny. 'Does that make sense?' he asked.

Denny nodded. It made good sense. What is more, it did not sound religious as such. It was really commonsense. In any case he believed in God. He remembered his training early on in life as a Catholic. He had sensed from time to time that most of his guilt came out of that training. When he nodded, the other man went on. 'The trouble with rejection of the image our parents give is that we have some kind of guilt, as though we were rejecting God. In a way, too, we are. Guilt brings desolation in our spirits, so we further reject the things of God. Guilt causes sin, and sin causes guilt, and so the whole thing compounds itself, and all the time we are not fulfilled. Less fulfilled in fact, becoming more angry and more frustrated.'

Denny felt the reasoning was fair enough. Where, however, was it taking him? Where was it getting him to?

The man was still speaking. 'We need a rich revelation of the true image of God. We need to see God, and to come to know Him. We need a new life from Him. Change your lifestyle and you don't change much. You revert, after a time, particularly as the new life-style becomes boring. Get a new life and you automatically have a new life-style.' He leaned forward. 'Denny, you can only have a new life from God. His is the life of love. He is the One who scrubs the past clean. He takes the monkey off your back. He lifts you out of your little passions, and mediocre loves. He gives you true identity. You really become someone, your true self, the person you have smothered by your dull, self-centred living.'

Five minutes before they had been talking about identity. Denny had thought you discovered your identity when you in-

sisted on your own individuality. The man had insisted it came when you didn't. When you shared with others you were more yourself than when you saw yourself over and against others. Now it was beginning to make sense. Running away from the Rozes and the Brens didn't do anything. It only made matters worse.

He looked up at the man. 'How do you get this image you talk about?' he asked. Then he paused and said slowly, 'I'm not sure, mind you, that I want it.'

'Quite,' his counsellor agreed. 'An image of God would be too confronting, too demanding.' He paused and then began to talk about the image of God. 'God showed Himself in many ways,' he said, 'and He still does. We needn't talk about that now. Primarily He shows Himself in His Son. Through him we see God as Father. What he does also tells us about the Father. It is the Father's idea that he suffer and relieve us of all guilt, all burden, and all defilement.'

He paused and looked keenly at Denny. 'I know this sounds a bit like theology,' he said, 'but then the facts are the facts. Your new life-style will operate under the old problems.' He waited a moment, and when Denny said nothing he continued. 'You would have the old residual problems you have always had. Many of them will have started way back as a child. No one can change them. Not even the best counsellor in the world. Only the Cross can change them. With your past scrubbed clean, the monkey off your back, and a transformation of yourself, you can have a renewed relationship with Bren, and a whole new marriage.'

Now Denny spoke. 'All of that sounds wonderful,' he said, 'but I'm not sure I want it that way. I've got this idea that somehow I have to go out and find a new life-style, live it up, go through it, and come out the other side. I've got to get it out of my system, so to speak.'

The older man sat staring at him. 'You know inside that you'll only repeat the cycle, don't you? You will divorce Bren, see another woman, and again be fascinated and

hopeful. Then you'll repeat your set patterns in which you have unconsciously habituated yourself.'

Denny knew this was true. He also knew that his restlessness to get away from Bren was his failure to face the truth of what he was, as well as what she was. He brooded over that, his eyes staring at the wall, fixing themselves unseeingly upon a framed picture.

Denny's counsellor stood and stretched his arms. They had been seated for almost two hours. The time had passed quickly. 'I guess you'll have to take all this away and think about it,' he said. Denny was startled. He had imagined his new friend would press for some climax. Surely he wasn't leaving the option open?

He was. He flicked three books out of his shelves. 'Read these,' he said. 'They may help you to see even more deeply. They may help you to make your own decision.' He smiled warmly. 'They may help you not to leave Bren and skirt your responsibilities. You may discover your true identity in a grand experience of God.'

Denny was thinking quickly. He had seen light somewhere. He had perceived the fact that there was a way out. Suddenly his need for excitement, and different new experiences, and an escape from two relationships seemed wan, pale, and pathetic. Something else promised a rich, red-blooded experience. It also promised a way out of his dilemma. He could even think—in a quick moment—that it would be good to get home to Bren. He sensed his gleaming machine leaning on its stand out there in the dark.

He found himself giving unaccustomed gratitude to the grey-haired man. He tucked the books into his brief-case, and fastened them on to the carrier. He looked up into the light at the man who had helped him. 'I really will go through all this,' he said, pointing to the brief-case.' He knew he meant it. He knew he would. He even felt the paling of the images, the old ones he had received, and the others he had created out of his needs. He sensed—with growing excitement—that

there was really something out there. In fact there was Some-One.

He swung his right leg over the saddle, leaning slightly as he manipulated the starter. Suddenly the engine was roaring beneath him. The magnificent machine was trembling under his touch, responding sensitively to the grip of the hand on the throttle. The roaring died as the clutch was put in, and the gear engaged. For a moment the machine moved slowly.

Up went the hand of the rider—a salute to age and wisdom—and the machine sped from the drive on to the road. Its rear light reddened with the applied brake, turning to yellow as it reached the road. Then there was a roar of triumph as it gripped the bitumen, and turned north to the city and to home.

All the time they rushed down the hill, dipping into the valley, he was thinking. 'There is hope. There is new hope.' He thought, 'Nothing really has to be hopeless.' He could feel again the grey eyes upon him. He could hear the firm but gentle voice. He knew what had been said to be true. He thought of the three volumes tucked away behind him. Suddenly he wanted to be home with Bren, and to see the rounded form of her, and think of the new day to come.

He sped. He sped into the night as quickly and carefully as he knew how.

The Derelicts

The Metho-Drinker

I would see him pass, mornings,
Like a slight hulk
Floating on grey waters
As the mist dissolved;
Head down into his ragged overcoat,
Hands deep in the pockets,
Lurching towards nothing.

Early he would leave his fellow-bibbers-
Addicts of the White Lady
(The infernal burning spirits)-
Receding from life on the flaming waves,
The guilt-induced myths,
The fragmentary escape
From the current loneliness,
Heading towards unchanging emptiness.

The Mindless One

Shuffling in his mind, if not in gait,
Low-heeled in heart tho' not in leather,
He made his way through broken thoughts,
The debris of his dreams, the dreariness
Of his own detritus
Accumulated through the mindless years
Like sere papers over broken glass
In an empty alley.

THE DERELICTS

I heard his drained mutterings,
The empty repetitions
Of a thin suburban mind,
Cliches and broken statements
Without a core to them. He vacant
Though his coffers fairly filled,
And no material need. He the derelict
Of empty aspirations,
Shuffling towards the blank of death.

Sludge Addict

His body was not derelict,
Nor yet his mind. Not yet.
He had a turn of phrase,
A turn of page, seeking with restlessness
The suggestive impurity, the scabrous pornographic
That stimulates the jaded senses,
Seeking in furtive futile addiction
The rustling sentences, the tides
Of swimming print, the sequence
Of mind-charging (mind atrophying) scenes,
Sex linked with violence, prurient vistas
That worked like lethal opiates
To render the spirit sterile.

He too had shuffling gait,
The shades of self-destruction
Ruthlessly enveloping
As groping in his self-created mind
He sensed his own vacuity,
Although with pride's mien
Insisting the failure was untrue.

Mind Slave

I knew it when he looked at me.
 That brilliance shone with cracked light,
 Parched restlessness like dry ice,
 Tongued like a darting reptile
 Over the ceaseless lips. I marvelled
 At the magnificent mind
 Crackling its quick cleverness
 In erudite accomplishment;
 An evident encyclopaedia
 Of gathered knowledge.

In one moment of deceived insight
 I thought he lived. I even wept
 (Caught in a moment of sheer simplicity)
 Thinking this knowledge a flowered thing
 And bound to fruit; until I pierced
 The depthless deeps of vast vacuity.
 The eyes were dead, though brilliant dry,
 Fraught with bright fever, portent itself
 Of soon departing life. Vestiges hung
 About the chattering voice, harsh mutterings
 Of worship at the soulless shrine
 Of mind-worshipping.

Conclusion

Others I have seen, same emptiness
 Of unfulfilment. Shrouded travellers
 Hastening intent, goalless for hope
 As though the mere travelling
 And the forward crouching thrust
 Of body and intent might make
 Its self some goalful goal!

This I have seen, that man
 Becomes the sad derelict, the mindless one-
 Though proud and princely to his empty end
 Since he has voided life of life-
 Shrugging his way through womb and world
 And work and deathful days
 As a trackless star, a futile wanderer
 In the wide darkness
 Of undiscovered being. The derelict
 Has lines of noble origin,
 High glimpses of a heavenly destiny,
 And these spurned for the petty pride
 Of imagined autonomy, the dry dereliction
 Of ultimate pointlessness.

Were there no ragged cross,
 No jagged timbers of stark Golgotha
 Then my mind—and with it my heart-
 Were defenceless against the crushing weight
 Of witnessed dereliction.
He knew and struggled with that weight
 In the wild wastes, the lonely alleys,
 The trackless despairs,
 And the vacuous cynicism
 Of the pointless prodigal.

He suffered the dry anguish, the waste spirit
 That the prodigal might dream again
 Of the Father's home, and the immutable warmth
 Of the Paternal love. Had there been no Cross,
 No pallet of cruel timber,
 Then derelicts must be forever
 Waves wildly foaming out their shame,
 And no return to the Bosom.

As it is all pointlessness is pointless:
 The Morning Star lights to the Eternal,
 And the embracing Arms of the Patient
 And the wholly Expectant.

The Interview

Down through the centuries the confessional, the pastor's study, the counsellor's couch, have been sacrosanct. Its revelations must remain with counsellor and counsellee, and not be shared with others. Without doubt the best stories ever told, and the most powerful incidents experienced, are within the counselling room. The counsellor must be a person of quiet but true wisdom. He or she must have experienced most of what life is, and must have sagacity to understand it. Only then can one help. Only then can one give advice.

Some pastors and counsellors think the last thing they should do is give advice. In fact they may be quite wrong if they work on this principle. One can give advice without appearing to do so. The person in need of help wants to hear from someone who understands his predicament, and—if possible—the way out of it. So wisdom is needed. So also is sympathy, and above all the counsellor must not be shocked by what he hears. Whilst he may personally disapprove of things which have happened, he must be neither surprised nor scandalised. The paradigm for such helpfulness is Christ himself. He accepted people as they came to him in their need. One of his followers said succinctly, 'He knew what was in man, and needed no one to tell him.'

How fascinating are some of the stories which could be told. That, unfortunately, would betray the confidence of the counsellee. Yet surely such stories are an encouragement and help to others. Certainly, in seeing the pattern of counselling, others could learn how to be helpful to those in need. For this reason I want to share a story with you. However it will not be a story of any particular person. It will be a composite crea-

tion, because it will embrace some of the elements which are common to almost every interview, and will employ various details which have happened from time to time. No one need feel he or she is portrayed in this story. Yet many may recognise the pattern which it sets out.

His name was Andy Dickerson. He was a man in his late middle-age. His features were keen. His skin had been toughened by hot summers and whipping winters. He had tried many things. Basically he was a farmer, and a dairy-farmer at that, but the visitations of drought and animal sickness had sometimes forced him off the land, even if only temporarily. Always he would return to the land—his first love. But life had dried him out somewhat. His humours were for the most part dried up. He regarded life with a fierce countenance.

I know why he came to me. His son had sent him, that is after Andy's wife had left him. That, to him, was a great shock. He 'had always worked hard for the family, and had sought to provide for them. One by one they had left home and married. So only Andy and Shirley were at home. The tensions of life had eased. Their income was a good one. He only worked a little, and this mainly to occupy his time. Drought seasons no longer touched him. He was proof of them. They had sold their farm, and had a goodly suburban home. He would help out a neighbour or here and there earn a little loose cash. It seemed strange to him that Shirley should leave him.

She had battled life for thirty-five years with her Andy, and loved few of them. In a way she had always been a woman of faith, but in the last ten years religious loyalty to Bible and church had changed into a more dynamic experience. Faith had come alive. She had begun to delight in home meetings, Bible studies with friends; rich worship in a church had been suddenly transformed. Life had become filled with unusual delights. The only hitch was Andy, who regarded this invasion of their relationship with both suspicion and dislike. In

fact he opposed it.

Shirley's problem was that she saw in the Scriptures what a husband ought to be, and she assumed that this was what he could be. In fact she believed, now, that it was what Andy ought to be. For her part, she became more tender, more loving, and more submissive. There had been great scope to develop submission, since the years of Andy's bullying had set her against his statutory authority. She had barely tolerated his bad moods, his demands, and his expectancy of obedience. Like the children, she had skirted around the reality of authority. Now she submitted.

Far from helping Andy it had increased his aggression and militancy. After a time she recognised it for what it was—something he thought was his right as a male, a husband, and a person. She knew it was hopeless and she quitted the home.

Underneath it, Andy was heartbroken. Somewhere out of the melee of his thoughts he fished up an idea. It was to come to me. When he sat down in my study, boiling with antipathy, self-righteous pride and aggression, I felt the matter was hopeless. I know that no counsellor is Mister Fixit, and had better not think he is. *He must have enough wisdom to know he does not have enough wisdom.*

I remained as mild as possible, knowing that he would despise what he saw as weakness. I knew I could tell him nothing.

So we proceeded. He argued with himself rather than with me. He didn't know why he had come. He wondered what there was to talk about. In fact he knew the solution to his own problems. Being a Christian he really could work it out himself. I let him talk on in this way. When I said nothing he seemed surprised and even a little angered.

'Don't you understand?' he asked. If I had not known it was the belligerence of insecurity I might have reacted.

'No,' I said, 'I don't understand. I can't imagine why you should have come to me. You seem to have your own

answers, so I doubt whether I could help.'

He looked at me with a trifle of suspicion. For all his seeming self-assurance he was in fact naive. He could not catch any dry irony in my voice and was puzzled.

'I need to get Shirley back,' he said, 'and I need to get her back quickly.'

I was glad I had not had anything to do with Shirley. In fact I knew little of his case. I would have to hear Shirley coming through what he told me, so I said, 'Tell me about Shirley. Maybe we can work out something together.'

He told me about Shirley. On the one hand he was bitterly critical of her. How could a woman leave a man like him—a faithful husband, a good father and an excellent provider? I wondered along with him, shaking my head as he had shaken his. 'How?' I asked, and in his naivety he still did not suspect anything.

He told me about the Bible studies. He told me about the mush that was talked in them, such subjects as love, forgiveness, and the grace of God. 'You'd think God was sloppy,' he said indignantly. His pronunciation of 'God' came through like 'Gudd'.

Then I asked him the question, 'What's wrong with love and forgiveness and grace?'

He stared at me. Then he said angrily, 'Pah! They miss the gutsy part of it. Okay! There is forgiveness, but what is that against the demands of true discipleship, the living of true lives, holiness and all that.'

That was when I became interested. He was a great one on 'Law'. He held the Ten Commandments in high esteem. He despised immorality. He also despised softness of any kind. It gradually dawned on me that he had over-masculinised God—if indeed you can do such a thing. He had a high regard for God because He was so strong.

• Curiously enough he had a tender view of Jesus. Jesus had done something wonderful in the Cross. But it seemed that was about it. Now Jesus was around to help people, but God

was the masculine One. In fact He was the Hard One. High and lofty, He had little regard for man except to save him from himself in spite of himself! Now this may have some truth in it, but it was by no means all the truth. So I listened on.

So many are the details in counselling, and so valuable. They are important as symptoms which reveal the ease. I gradually realised that he felt he had been a most masculine husband, father, farmer and citizen, and that such was O.K. I did not agree with him here, but realised overt disagreement would not help.

After listening for about ninety minutes I said quietly, 'If you are so fantastic a husband, father, farmer, and citizen—how come Shirley left you? How come your children rarely visit you? How come your neighbours—as you say—are critical of you?'

He looked at me sideways. 'You having a crack at me?' he asked.

I let my eyes open a little with mild surprise. 'Crack?' I asked. 'Not at all. I just want to see what conclusion we can come to from what you have said. It seems you alone hold this high opinion regarding yourself.'

His head slumped a little. 'Maybe you are right,' he muttered. 'There must be something wrong with me.' The last statement was like weak sunlight faintly filtering through winter mist. I saw some hope in it.

'Tell me about your father,' I said.

He stared at me in amazement. 'How did you know about my old man?' he asked.

'By the way you act,' I said. I then told him about his father, and their relationship.

'His eyes narrowed. 'So Shirl has been here, eh?'

I shook my head. 'It isn't difficult to tell about a father.' Then I added, 'Nor a mother for that matter.' I told him what his mother could have been like, and how his parents might have related between themselves.

It was that which did it. He looked at me with something like awe. He still could not understand how I could have made that assessment. Then he began to rub his hands together, folding tough fingers about tough fingers.

'I guess I've always wanted a father,' he said in a low voice. He seemed sobered..

'So then you are a Christian, and you have God as Father,' I said.

He stared at me in astonishment, but said nothing. 'Ever spoken to God as Father?' I asked.

He hesitated and then said with unaccustomed mildness, 'Only when I've said the Lord's Prayer.' He pondered that a moment. 'I've never really seen God as Father,' he added.

Now the strange thing about this man, and for that matter other men and women, was that although it is generally known that God is Father, it is a knowledge which does not seem to penetrate.* Without going into great detail, and the many Scriptures which support my contention, it appears that man from the cradle has a bias against authority and against God, and that he identifies God with his parental situation. In Andy's case there had been a severe and indifferent father, and a gentle but browbeaten mother.

'We get our image of God,' I said, 'from our parents. The Scripture says that God made man in His image, and made them male and female, and called male and female "Man". So that means that the total image of God is a male-female thing. To be a faithful and full representation of God the husband-wife (father-mother) need to have the relationship of love between them, and this they cannot have unless they both

{and as one} fully relate to God, especially God as Father.' I paused and looked at Andy. 'Does this make sense?'

'It's new,' Andy said, 'and it's different; but, sure, I can follow you.'

* For a more detailed explanation of this matter see the author's two books, *Father! My Father!* {Blackwood: NCPI, 1977}, and *Practical Christian Counselling* {Blackwood: NCPI, 1981}.

'Emotionally,' I said, 'we all need the parental love that flows primarily from the Father. It must come through the parents. Then we truly see God.' I paused, seeking to sense Andy's mind. His eyes had gentled down, and he was intent on what I was saying.

I continued. 'Everyone in this world needs accepting, encouraging, securative love. Everyone needs love which will not only protect but lead into life's vocation. We must have meaning to life, because man was created to be purposive.'

I sighed. 'Wherever did we meet love like that?' I asked. He nodded abruptly. He was now intent on what I was saying. 'The trouble is,' I said, 'that no parents are perfect. Neither father nor mother. Nor does any marriage have ideal relationships. That is what the Fall has done to our relationships with God and man. No child has ideal relationships and completely right attitudes.' I paused and asked him whether he had ever seen ideal relationships.

'No,' he said in a mild voice, 'I have never seen perfect relationships.' He also looked a bit wistful, as though he would have loved that.

'No one, I said, 'can understand the disappointment, the hurt, the anger at wrongful deprivation of love which the infant experiences. Out of this reactionary anger come the states of human living which affect us all as we grow to adulthood. Not even the best counsellor can straighten out those twists.'

For a time we sat in silence, both thinking on what had been said. Then I said gently, 'But the Father can untwist all things.' He made a move as though to speak, but remained silent. I said, 'When the image of God which comes out of our sin and the sin of our parents fails to satisfy us, then we turn to other images. We manufacture our own idols.'

I saw a gleam in his eyes, and knew I did not have to enlarge on the idols. We all know our idols. I guessed his had been his farm, the possession of his own earth, and his independence of both God and man which had gone with it. I

knew he could not work under a boss, and that at school and other places he had never taken kindly to appointed authorities. The legitimate occupation of farmer had then had its idolatrous elements.

'The idols,' I said quietly, 'never satisfy us. That is why Paul said, "There be 'gods' many and 'lords' many, but for us there is only one God—the Father—and one Lord—Jesus Christ". ' Now he was staring at me, and comprehension was dawning in his eyes. I said, 'Who suffered at the Cross?'

He said quickly, 'Jesus. Jesus suffered greatly.' He added with satisfaction, 'For us. for me.'

'What of the Father?' I asked. At that very moment the insight flashed into my mind. *This Andy thinks that Jesus saved him from God.^t*

Andy said, 'I have never thought about that. I guess He must have suffered, giving His Son.'

'Who initiated the Cross?' I asked. He looked at me as wonder dawned in his eyes. 'I guess it was the Father,' he said. There was a slight wince as he said 'Father.' To that point he had used the word 'God', pronounced in hard fashion, 'Gudd'.

I quoted the Scriptures which spoke of God initiating the work of the Cross. I also quoted Paul saying, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.'

'Somehow,' I said, 'the Father was in the Cross. Not that He was actually crucified, but in one sense it was His Cross.' I looked at Andy. 'You remember that the Son said, "My Father loves me because I lay down my life for the sheep." In one sense the Father overleapt the love He had for His Son to reach us and love us through that death.'

The leathery face seemed strangely softened. The bright brown eyes were more than a little moist. After a silence he said, 'I never saw it like that. I never knew the Father loved us like that.' He looked intently at me. 'The Father loves me,' he said, and all the crinkles of his face came together as his voice broke, and in a moment he was sobbing. The pent-up feelings

of many decades were loosed as he wept, and heaved and cried, and as he shouted his amazing joy, and expressed the incredible release which was now visiting him.

This I have seen many times. It is the holiest time of a person's life—when he truly comes to know God as Father, and has attending upon him the revelatory Spirit and the revelatory Son.

It is a holy time, and a wonderful time because the true forgiving love of God penetrates the heart and mind, and suddenly the person is intent upon repentance and forgiveness. Knowing God's love he loves. Andy was quite unashamed as he raised his tearful face. He said in broken accents, 'You know, my old man wasn't all that bad. He really tried his best.' He sobbed and sighed. 'He just didn't know how,' he said.

'So you forgive him, eh?' I asked. He nodded dumbly. 'And all the others?' I asked—because Andy had been the judge of almost everyone he had met in his lifetime. He nodded again in response. 'And you accept your own negativity and reaction in all those relations?' I asked. He said audibly, 'I do.'

'And now you love them all?' I asked. 'You love them with the Father's love?'

His grin was back again, a grin which must have endeared him at times, even to his enemies. 'I sure do,' he said, and he was at it again, rubbing and turning his hands, but with evident and high pleasure. 'What do you know?' he asked. 'I never knew it could be like this.'

We both sat for a time, in silence. Then he said suddenly, 'I'm going to see Shirl. I'm going to tell her what a so-and-so I've been. I'm going to ask her forgiveness. I'm going to ask her to come back.' He nodded fiercely. 'Then I'm going to the children, one by one. I'm going to tell them how sorry I am.'

We sat for a time before I began praying for him. After that we stood up, and I saw how gentle he had become. The

angry man, the self-protective cover he had had, and the suspicion which had covered his eyes, were all gone. He was released. You could describe him as a man floating on air. Even so—to mix the metaphor—he had his feet well on the ground. I could imagine Shiril's great joy when he asked her forgiveness. I thought for a moment about the new family that would emerge. I marvelled again at the quiet but mighty power of the eternal Cross—place of the love of the Father, His Son, and His Spirit.

We shook hands in joyful silence. Andy settled himself into his car. The tyres gripped, then slipped on the gravel. A cloud of dust and Andy was gone.

As I have said, Andy was real. He was, if you like, a composite of many men and women who have shared their anger and bewilderment, their sin and their failure, and who—in the ultimate—have come to see the love of the Father. I really don't know of any other message which will really and radically transform a human person. I know counsellors need great wisdom. This of course is *the* Wisdom. I imagine that is why Paul said, 'Christ...the wisdom of God.'

Reciprocity Undemanded

If you say that love
Is love only when the giving has receiving,
Is alive only in the true mutuality
Of the receiving and the giving,
Then you are wrong. You have failed to see
That love is the giving, the giving and the giving
All without asking return, without expecting
Or demanding of the response. There is no demand
For the joyousness and stimulation
Of reciprocal mutuality.

Love that will not receive, but only gives
Is likewise unauthentic love. It is
Not the true agape. Self less giving if not prepared
For the needful receiving, for the recognition
Of personal poverty, joyful acceptance of one's need,
Must find itself pridefully denying
The other's prerogative to give.

It is true that love's mutuality—
Love's giving and receiving, receiving and giving—
Is man's highest joy: God's too!
But the calculated mutuality,
Planned giving and receiving
(Like schemed Christmas distribution of gifts)
Is a mindful mindless thing,
An ungentle act both of giving and receiving.

True love is so unconscious in the giving–
 As also in the gracious receiving,
 The receiving and the giving (God being Source)–
 That it knows not—even faintly–
 Of the guilelessnesses of its own love.
 It is not deliberate anonymity
 Or veiled but subtle action,
 For it is the free movement
 Of the natural, unconscious moment.
 It is love on the wing,
 Swift-borne, and sweetly unaware
 Launched from its celestial lair!

The Hearing is the Doing

He thought, as he looked at her, ‘She is screening out the truth.’ His thought had come quietly enough to him, but then something flicked up in his mind and he was startled. ‘Screen out the truth’—what did that mean? He knew that he knew, but it was still strange. Why should one screen out the truth?

She went on talking, but his mind was elsewhere, his thoughts racing along. Myriads of faces flashed past. Eyes stared at him as he painfully sought to teach what he knew. He could see some of them looking at him, almost pitifully regarding him. It was not that they actually shook their heads, but he knew they were thinking negatively. He knew they were not wanting to hear what they were hearing, and, in a sense they were therefore not listening. His words tumbled into their minds, but then they tumbled out again, like a creek which churns over a bed of resistant stones.

‘I find her very difficult,’ the young woman was saying. Her eyes appealed to him. ‘Why do I find her difficult?’

He shook himself awake. ‘Ah,’ he said, trying to find time for thought. ‘I guess you see things differently. You are different people.’

Her eyes were bright, almost preternaturally bright. She shook her head. ‘We believe the same things,’ she said. ‘We teach the same things.’

‘Maybe you believe the same things differently,’ he said. ‘We can easily do that. Lots of people do that.’

She frowned. ‘How can you believe the same things differently? The same things are the same things.’ He was gentle with her. Inwardly he wanted to shout at her.

He wanted to awaken her to what she was, but then he was too young. She was only a few years younger. He wanted to be older. He wanted to have wisdom. He could not combat her immediate brilliance. He nodded to himself, inwardly. That was it, *she was brilliant!* The thought shocked him somewhat. He knew he was not brilliant. He recovered himself enough to answer her.

'I'm not sure. We hear differently the same messages. We even use words differently. They have different meanings.' He was searching for the truth of it all. Then, swiftly, it came. 'We only hear things as we wish to hear them,' he said.

She stared at him uncomprehendingly. 'Things are things,' she said. 'They cannot be one thing to one person and something else to another.'

He was gentle again, because he was sorry for her. 'They can, you know,' he said.

She seemed a little frustrated. She drummed her slim fingers on the Bible she held on her lap. All the time she was shaking her head. Then she gave it a final definitive shake. She jumped up, lightly. 'No,' she said firmly, 'things must be the same for all, for that is how they are. They are that, in themselves.'

He was not overpowered. 'Things *ought* to be the same,' he said in half-agreement, 'but then some people cannot tolerate them as they really are.' He paused and then added, 'I mean as they essentially are.'

She gave him a long, penetrating stare. 'Then you mean we screen out the truth of some things, sometimes?'

He was startled to hear his own thought-words coming back to him. He nodded. 'I guess that is just about it,' he said. 'Yes, we can screen out the truth, or at least part of the truth. We do that because we do not wish to obey the truth.' He added, 'The truth is not merely something you know. It is something you do!'

Her mind slipped away from what he was saying. He noted her facility for that. She was asking him a question. 'Why do

I find her so difficult?' she pleaded.

He braced himself to give the answer. 'I think,' he said slowly, 'that if you think about it, you will see it is yourself who is the difficult one. I never find her difficult. I find her marvellously simple.'

He expected anger to come, but there was none. She was nodding her head in agreement. She was pondering thoughtfully, slowly. Then she looked up with a sigh. She was gathering her things to herself. She sighed again. The sigh contained depth and a trifle of weariness.

She looked at him directly. 'You are right, you know,' she said. 'She is simple. She is true. That's what frustrates me. It takes my native wit to see things, and then I am delighted with myself. She doesn't even think about them. She *knows* them. How does she, eh? She is not really intelligent. She's just naive.'

'Simple, I would say,' he added quietly. 'Simple but profound.'

She gave him a stare in reply. She also nodded slowly. 'I guess you are right. She's a natural.' There was a whimsical curl to her lips. 'I'm an artificial,' she said cruelly. 'I might even be a fake.'

He saw the enormous hurt within her. He wanted to shake his head, and cry out that she wasn't, but instead he said nothing. On the one hand he couldn't hurt her more, and on the other he did not play with the truth. He watched her go and wondered whether in not saying anything he had, indeed, played somewhat with the truth.

She for her part knew he hadn't. His eyes had told her what she wanted and hated to know. She was 'an artificial' over and against Jenny's 'natural'.

He felt he had failed her pastorally. She was his assistant, his deaconess, as also was the other one, Jenny. Years later when he looked back with regret he knew he had not possessed the wisdom he needed at that time. He had to come to terms with that thought. Wisdom is something you gradually

acquire. You can be young and brilliant but it is not as easy to be young and wig. He had to come to terms with that, in retrospect. He had learned that no man is a Mr Fixit, and in fact is not required to be. Nevertheless he regretted, looking back, the lack of wisdom.

Now, as he thought about this dark-eyed brilliant young Rene, he was troubled. He thought of his role as peacemaker between the two deaconesses; the times he had been phoned by the Head Deaconess. She, for her part, was a spiritual giant, but she was also troubled. They had conferred. They had even planned lines of action, but the action rarely succeeded. Jenny would be visited with pangs of guilt for not making it with her sister-deaconess. Rene would be explosively remorseful, but in the next moment she would be strongly critical.

The Head Deaconess and he recognised some of the problem. Rene, it was, who felt inferior. With all her brilliance she was insecure. Perhaps she *had* to be secure. What can you do for human beings when they feel inferior? He had also noted that this came from lacking in the glory with which God had created man. That thought was elementary. It was the cosmetic life that humans lived which caused many problems. Even while he thought, he could smile at the devices he and others used to 'make-up' and 'cover-up'. Man was adept in the art of cosmetic living. True enough, women used chemical means of make-up, but then the whole human race—male and female—was versed in the art of general cosmetic living. Simplicity was too devastating for it.

He stood up, tidying the papers on his desk. He had better get out of his study. He had better visit his people. He had better have some pastoral ministry to the needy. Anyway, it would clear his head. It always cleared his head.

Thirty years later, when he looked back, the same sadness was there. How he had longed to heal the person of that young woman. Many times he had heard her speak and marvelled at the facility she had had. He had not envied her

because he knew the essential truth was missing. The form was there, but not the genuine substance. Yet her ideas startled him because they were correct. She had a genius for lighting up the insights of truth. Often he gathered her thoughts, and then later, used them. However he had to do something to them before they could come into usefulness.

What he could not understand was her inability to do well in her examinations. On her feet she was wholly competent.. True, he saw the tension of her body, the sense of stress, but then she was vivacious. She expounded with preciseness and wit. She was rarely wrong. Listeners, too, were gripped. He could see them marvelling. But he knew, at each point, that the wonder would die away, and nothing would be left. The rise in their emotions would know a corresponding fall. There would be a collapse. Indeed, no sooner was she finished speaking than puzzlement would find its way into their eyes. She too, after a slight heaving of her fine body would lose her excitement. The perplexity would return to her. The eyes would be slightly confused, and the old anger would have returned. She would be the sullen Rene, surly and suspicious. It was as though the addiction to exciting brilliance left her marooned in an unsatisfying world of her own.

Once he had recommended her to resign, and to go to another parish. 'You will meet an older man,' he said. 'He will help you where I cannot.'

She had bridled at that, flashing her powerful eyes at him. She had shaken her head vigorously. 'Never!' she had said. 'You are the only one I trust. You know what the truth is. I daren't go anywhere else. And I refuse to do so.' She was insistent, adamant, and angry with it, as though he ought not to have suggested the idea.

It had surprised him. He had not known she could have a loyalty. But the thought increased his perturbation. The truth she recognised in him had not really reached her. He sighed inwardly and let thing be.

'Very well,' he had said. 'We'll let things rest for the

moment. ‘

Sometimes, late at night, she had rung him. Other times she had come to the Rectory. The latter troubled him, for the area in which the parish was located was dangerous. It was not for women at night. Had she worn her deaconess uniform the matter might have been different. That was respected—at least in those days of thirty years ago. But it was not the danger that mainly troubled him. It was her incurable restlessness. She was looking for something. This he could not supply. Perhaps what she needed was not what she was seeking. He could assist her to what she needed, but not to what she was wanting. It took him those thirty years to understand this.

Things had climaxed that early morning. At least in principle they climaxed at that time. After their interview they seemed to proceed as usual, but that was only the outward appearance. He knew, and she knew, that nothing had changed. She had even recognised the danger, but would do nothing about it. It was as though she wanted that danger. She understood his warning thoroughly, but she would not heed it.

Five years had passed since that morning. He and his family had been in another country. Their years had been busy. They had also been fruitful. When he thought about them, even now, they came in satisfying retrospect. They were years of which he was not ashamed.

For her they had been years of passion. He could think of no other word. But then she had always been a passionate person. She had had passion in her teaching, passion in her relationships, passion in her brilliant insights and communication of them. She had a life of passion, and, almost, a theology of passion. She lived on passion like some drug.

They had arranged a meeting. He remembered it vividly. It had been in a park where people were crowded together. He

could see them now, reclining on the grass, eating pies and sandwiches and cream buns. They had drunk from carton cups. They had chatted merrily. He had been forced to face a tragedy and to live with it for an hour. In the noise and chattering they had withdrawn into a place of intimacy, of grave secrecy.

When she had come the sight of her startled him. He thought how fine she looked. She had made the most of her person, physically and otherwise. Her physical elements had never attracted him. Now he knew she was most attractive, but then not to him. He puzzled over that until he saw the matter was primarily cosmetic. Not just cosmetics, but cosmetic. She was brilliant but brittle, smiling but in despair. The physical was her cover-up, but with him she could not succeed. Nor, it seemed, did she wish to do so. It was as though she was relieved to be herself, to be real, even though her reality was not true reality. It was more honesty than reality.

‘It is really good to see you after all these years,’ she said, and it did not sound lame. She was genuine. She was even soft and gentle, elements he had not previously associated with her. He knew she had affection for him. He held her hands for a few moments, but did not reciprocate her greeting.

They sat on the grass. She was working and had her lunch. They nibbled for a few moments. Then she talked. He let her talk. When she did she spilled out the five years of her living. He marvelled at her fluency, but was not deceived. He knew she was signalling him, calling for help in what seemed a fairly blase account of the years which had intervened since that morning and now.

Finally she ceased talking. She had forgotten to eat. Her eyes stared down at the green turf. The pigeons whirled about them, or made quick, sharp movements of walking, trekking towards the crumbs and flicking away in gestures that seemed nervous but were not.

Then she looked at him. ‘So that is that,’ she said, not

flinching from his eyes. He noticed that they were not bold, not defiant, not angry, but genuinely sad. They were empty of vivacity, and even, of life. He felt sorry for her.

For a time he did not speak. His sadness was deep. He also knew that, as yet, he had nothing to say. In truth he had plenty to say, but she was not ready for it. Against his better judgement he began to say it. She listened. Her eyes were wistful. Often, too, she nodded. She even accepted the substance of what he was telling her. At times she would nod. He knew, with a sense of despair, that she would not argue against his words. She knew the form of them. She had often used them, even more competently than had he. Now her mind was at the old habit. She was shaping them afresh, seeing the effects and affects they would have on her own audiences. She was not hearing him. Finally he ceased speaking.

Her eyes held something like pity. When she spoke she said, 'I really do love you. No one has ever accepted me as you have. Not even the men I know in these days.' She paused for a moment and there was bitterness in her eyes, as in her voice. 'Of course they do not accept me,' she said. 'Rarely does anyone accept anyone.' She stopped and stared through the lunchtime crowd, as though it were not there.

'That Jenny,' she said softly. 'She accepted me. That was what used to make me angry. I hated her for it. I didn't know then why I did, but I have seen since. She accepted me for myself, when I wouldn't do that. I never accepted myself.' She looked at him in misery. 'Now it is more difficult than ever to do that. Especially when you have let down the side. Let down yourself and the side.'

Time passed as we sat apart from the crowd, the sad thoughts gunning in on us.

'There is a way out,' I said. 'Just see the love and grace of God and come into it. Renounce your present way of life. Repentance is really sweet, not harsh. God's love has never changed.'

She was angry. 'I *know* that!' she almost shouted. 'I know

all those things, but then they are not real. They are words. They are theology. But they do not really figure with me. They are true, but they are empty.'

We debated for the remaining minutes. I knew then that we would get nowhere. She knew it too. The old phrase I had had in my mind, years before, was again with me: 'Screening out the truth.' I realised with a sudden shock that where true listening is not present, *the truth screens itself out of the mind of the listener!*

She left her hand in mine for some time. The noises of the city came back into consciousness. They flowed about us. Some were standing, shaking crumbs from themselves. The park was being deserted. The later lunch hour was fading away, almost finished. Her eyes still held empty despair. The sick feeling was in the pit of my stomach. Perhaps I should have trusted the grace of God more deeply, but then I was faced with human anger, human rebellion, and all of it under the guise of passive acceptance of the truth, but disobedience to its promises. I knew she loved something else more than the God of her theology. Perhaps I should say, 'the god of her theology', for I knew she did not really know God. She just knew lots *about* Him.

That was the puzzle. She gave me a light, honest kiss and was gone. She walked quickly, flicking in and out of the coming stream of humanity. Then she had disappeared, hidden forever.

I walked away, wondering whether I would ever see her again. The one thought that cheered me was that God has His emissaries everywhere. No one is God's only or best emissary. Certainly I had no illusions about myself. I also remembered the wise words of an old friend: 'It is the last chapter that counts.'

I must take you back to that morning when she came to my study. I must explain what happened. Not only to satisfy any

curiosity you may have, but also to share the warning Rene had received.

When she came in she was flushed. From being a trim, competent deaconess, she had become a wild-eyed, bedraggled person. Her hair straggled across her forehead. She pushed it back, and I saw an element of fear in her gestures.

She used my Christian name, the only time she had ever done that. Soon she lapsed back into the more formal, 'Rector.' When I nodded she went ahead.

'I had this dream,' she said. 'This terrible dream. I was in a large church. There was a large congregation. I was thrilled; I had always wanted a large congregation. Now I had it. They were all sitting there, looking up at me. They were waiting. I knew there was no problem in preaching. I knew I could preach.'

She paused and I saw that her face was glistening with fine droplets of perspiration. She pushed her hair back with a gesture. 'I opened my Bible,' she said. 'I wondered for a moment what I would preach about, and where I would begin. Suddenly I remembered that you had preached on Sunday evening from Romans chapter six. I whipped over to that passage.'

She stopped. She looked up at me. Her head craned forwards so that she could better communicate. Then her voice faltered. She licked her lips with her tongue. Her voice was

dry, harsh with fear. 'It was gone,' she said, almost shouting. 'What was gone?' I asked.

'Romans six!' she shouted hysterically. 'The chapter was a blank in my Bible.'

I froze with sudden understanding, but I said nothing. She went on. 'I began to fear a bit, but most of my confidence was there. I remembered that at the Tuesday night Bible study you took Colossians chapter three. So I whipped over to that place.' She stopped and gave me the same wild stare. 'It was gone too,' she said; 'it was another blank.'

For a moment she was silent. Then she said simply,

'Nothing was there. I did a real panic. I went from passage to passage, but every time it was gone.'

We let the silence come again. She sat there, crouched in fear, and I felt fear also growing in my own heart. 'What does it mean?' she asked quietly.

I knew what it meant. One part of me was afraid to tell her. The other was urging me. So I spoke.

'It means,' I said, 'that none of that has ever been real to you.'

She shook her head angrily. 'That's not true,' she said. 'I know it thoroughly. I could expound it any day.'

'But you couldn't expound it last night,' I said. 'It was a blank to you then.'

She nodded, but she was adamant. 'I know it,' she claimed. 'I know it!'

I shook my head. Then I quoted, 'Take heed *holy* you hear; for from him that has not shall be taken even that which he *seems* to have, and to him that has more shall be given.'

She kept her eyes on mine, angry and indignant. 'What do you mean, "*seems* to have"?' She battered her knees with her fists. 'I have. I have,' she said vehemently. Then she went into a fit of insistence, still battering her knees. 'I have! I have! I have!'

'You haven't. You haven't. You haven't,' I said slowly and emphatically. 'You only have when you obey what you hear.'

That got to her. 'What?' she almost shrieked. 'You only have when you obey what you hear?' She became breathless.

'The parable of the sower,' I said. 'What did Jesus say about that? He said that only one soil was ultimately useful. It was the soil that truly heard. All the others heard, but nothing came of it. Nothing came *because they never obeyed?*'

When she tried to interrupt, I waved her off. 'Do you remember,' I asked, 'that Jesus said at the end of the parable, "He that has an ear to hear, let him hear."?' I went on. '*All* heard the words he said, but only the truly willing—those

prepared to obey—truly heard.’

The point had gotten home to her. Her defiance was gone. Her anger had dissolved. She sat, listless and pitiful.

‘You mean...’ she began, and then lapsed back into silence.

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I mean that he who hears obeys. He who obeys truly hears. Otherwise—nothing!’

She was stunned. I seized the moment. ‘Do you remember that the disciples asked him what was the meaning of the parable?’ She nodded. I went on. ‘Jesus seemed amazed. He said, in effect, “If you don’t know what that parable means, then what do you know?”

She nodded. ‘They always knew very little,’ she said. ‘But then he said something else,’ I told her, ‘something which fits your case, Rene. He said, “To you—as disciples—it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that *seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.*” ‘

Rene sat there, and all she could say, over and over again, was, ‘Oh, my God!’

When she had lapsed into silence I said, ‘Jesus told them the story of the man who had lighted a lamp, and had hidden it. It was then he said, “Take heed *how* you hear.” He meant, “Light given must be displayed. Truth received must be lived. Otherwise it is no true light; no real truth.” ‘

She sat without movement. I pressed in on her. ‘He also said, “Who is my mother, and my brother, and my sister? He who *hears* the word of God and *does* it.’

She sat there, listlessly. Then she began to speak, slowly. ‘So you are saying that I have never really heard the truth because I do not obey it when the words of it come to my ears. ‘

‘Practically that,’ I said. ‘To hear is to obey. To obey is to hear. ‘

She stood up. She seemed tired, and almost paralysed.

‘You mean,’ she said dully, ‘that truth must be in your heart, and not just in your head.’

‘Both,’ I said. ‘It must be in both. If it is not in your heart, then it is not truly in your head.’

She was muttering. ‘How can you hear and not hear?’ she was saying, almost as though to herself.

‘You screen out the truth of the truth,’ I said. ‘As it comes to you, you reject that which is demanding. You notionalise it. You store it in the brain cells, but first you strip it of its demands, its confrontation, its reality.’

She looked up at me. ‘We do, do we?’ she asked helplessly. ‘Yes, we do,’ I said. Then I stared hard at her. ‘God is very good to you,’ I told her.

She looked uncomprehending. ‘He is good?’ she asked in wonder.

‘That’s right,’ I said. I kept nodding. ‘Very good. He has warned you. He has given you an opportunity. You can repent. You can really open your ears. You can obey. You can obey out of grace and love.’

I understood her bewilderment. The fine edifice she had built had tumbled about her whole being. She was sitting in the midst of a collapsed kingdom. She just could not handle the matter.

When she said nothing I told her the principle that had come into my mind, months before. ‘We screen the truth out of the truth when it comes to us,’ I said.

She nodded in listless agreement. I ached for her. ‘Then don’t screen it out,’ I said. ‘Heed the warning and receive it.’

‘Yes,’ she agreed. She sat thinking. After a time she lifted her head. ‘So God has warned me?’ she asked. When I nodded she nodded too. ‘So I must really hear, eh?’ I nodded again. She shook her head. ‘So then I have never really heard, eh?’

I didn’t say anything. I was not too sure that she had *never* heard. After a time she stood up. ‘I think I’ll go now,’ she said. ‘I

have so much to think about.'

She looked tired, dazed, and ever so listless. She picked up her deaconess hat, and held it in her hand.

Before she went out of the study she said briefly, 'Thank you.' Then she gripped her hat a little tighter, and with it her handbag. She almost tumbled down the steps as though she was in deep thought. At the bottom of the steps she waved up

at me, and she gave a faint, tired smile. 'I'll think about it,' she said.

I watched her whilst she paused at the tram-stop. I heard the Bay tram swing around the bend, and saw her get onto it. She waved again, fairly weakly, and the noisy vehicle rolled down the street.

When I went back into the study I was thinking deeply about her. Of course I was marvelling at the dream, and the very personal nature of God the Father. I was also thinking about the stubborn human heart, having had personal experience of the same thing.

What, of course, I did not know at that time, I learned later. I knew that we can screen the truth out of the truth when we do not hear. What I did not know then was that the truth itself screens itself out when we refuse to hear. In a way that is God's method of keeping His truth holy and inviolate, just as He keeps Himself holy and inviolate.

Even now when I think about it, it still comes with a sense of shock. It sobers me, and I keep praying for Rene. I keep thinking of all the joy, serenity and love she has been missing, and I keep hoping she will find it. But then I am not sure. I am not sure at all.

To the Pure All Things Are Pure

Were heart and mind but innocent,
How would we see what is
And know that what is not,
Is not? How would we know
What purity alone can know?

Were guilt *non est* in human heart,
And cowering fear a phantom wraith
Banned to the outer shades
Of non-existence; then were the clear
Eyes of the heart and conscience pure
Monitor and radar, both, of joy.

Is purity a mindless thing,
A basic obscurantist, refusing
The reality of evil? Scarcely so,
Since purity alone can truly know
The fact of sludge, the unreality
Of the pureless, the seeming verity
Of the pure defiled.

All is illusion until innocence
Reclaim lost chastity, and this
No human power can do.
Takes it a Cross-defilement's deluge
Poured on the pure conscience of the Holy One

Where filth is seared and sludge destroyed—
To liberate new chastity.

Call it you may, 'the holiness',
'Purposeful purge', 'the justifying grace'
That grips the recoil of the mind
And blasts the dark to death,
Effecting the blazing of the day,
A whole new programme of the mind and heart
As pristine innocence afresh
Lights up its conscience-home with joy,
And snuggles up to God.

The Class

He loved every one of them, the whole class in fact. He let his eyes rove over them as they wrestled with their pens and pencils, their papers, and the text books, as also the Bibles. He watched them keenly as they settled themselves into their chairs, and the small arm desks attached to them.

Within him the life was rising. It was the teaching life, and he knew it quite well. His mind slipped back for a few moments to the past decades of years when he had taught. It had not always been as it was in these days. In the earlier days he had been afraid, unsure. He had seen the class mainly as an enemy, or rather some of the students as enemies, and the others as allies. He had, so to speak, circled warily around them, moving in between friends and foes. Sometimes the friends were stepping stones across a deep and treacherous river, and if he missed or miscalculated then he would be in that river, struggling.

He chuckled. It had always been good, trying to deliver the goods to recalcitrants, reluctant dragons, suspicious pupils. The chuckle gurgled throatily within him. Man was a curious being. One side of him struggled powerfully to receive teaching, and the other snapped back fiercely, afraid of being caught in the truth, scared of reality as though it might unmask what a man is and change him. He gurgled more. How many times he had made his sudden pass, his deft turn, and had caught a struggling soul. How beautiful to catch a man or a woman in the truth, young or old! How good for them! His eyes smiled across the sea of faces. He made a quick estimate. About forty of them, if a person, was his estimate.

He looked down at the desk, the shiny lectern, and the

bright paper and the typed black words. He felt the microphone clipped to his tie, and the buttonlikeness of it. So solemn was the man recording the message! So amazing was it that every word was kept for posterity, and all. He sensed the vivid awareness of the students. They did not know they were playing an age-old game, the game of listening, and also not listening, the catching of what they wanted, and the screening out of what they did not want. Words were so powerful! They could catch a man for ever, especially if they were truth. Oh, truth was so powerful, so very powerful!

He looked down at them with the awareness that a hunter has as he circles to catch his prey. But then what joyful hunting! The rules were set. The game was fair. If he did not catch them, they then would catch him. His chuckle came back, a joyous, confident chuckle. How he loved this class, every one of them having a charisma of his own, or her own. Some had hooded their eyes, that the inner desire be not seen. Some had agonies of yearning. They were fierce for truth, but then often they had snapped at a bait which was no-truth. It was a shiny attractive fly, an artificial promise of the reality, and they had been hooked on no-truth. He felt for them. Indeed he ached for them.

How carefully he had—these many years—screened out that which purported to be truth but was not. He knew you could shape truth to be attractive, when indeed it was not truth because of the cunning shaping of it. He himself had been caught, many and many a time. So he had become endowed with a holy cunning. He would admit nothing that was not primarily of God. Oh, how he loved God! He loved Him fiercely and gladly and deeply. He drank long, long draughts with joy. He ate hugely of the Bread of life. Nothing could go wrong here if he kept doing this.

Of course thing could go wrong. Men would hate him, as they had always hated him. At first that had bewildered him. When he had taught he was holding out to them great life. Some had taken it, only to be caught in fierce fire. Their own

souls were not true. It was not all-truth they wanted, but just enough truth to handle. Truth catches a man in the inner person, in the strong gut. It holds him forever, but in holding him it makes high demands. A man must flow with the truth, go along where it takes him. He must give the truth reverence in his' spirit, and obedience in his will. So some had hated him for the catching that had come to them. They wanted the truth, but yet they did not. They did not want its undeniable demands, its unchanging commands. They had planned to shape life more after their own whims and desires.

Sometimes the years passed before their hatred would show. They would remember that he had brought them along a path they must follow, but their will was not in it. To go back would be some sort of apostasy, but to go forward would be intolerable. So they hated him.

He did not hate them. Secretly he wept for some, and for others he ached deeply, whilst for others he feared with a holy fear. The Lord had spoken of the Kingdom, and of laying a hand to the plough, and of yet turning back. He shivered at that thought. He prayed for them. Not just on his knees in his study, but in the bottom depth of his heart wherever he walked in life. No one knew how much he prayed, and for the most part he knew many of them would return to the truth, angry but intrigued, fiercely fighting but wanting to surrender. Indeed most of them came, and they did not know why they had hated him.

He ceased his chuckling. The class was silent before him. He smiled at them, and some smiled back. Others did not, out of nervousness, or concealment, or some such thing. So he began to speak. He began to feel them, each one. There was an old couple, wise from much hurt, many mistakes, still carrying bruises and scars but delighted with the way God ran His world. They were confident, humble, waiting, hungry. Then there were the sullen ones. Salvation had come to their heads, but little of it had spilled over into their hearts, or pervaded their souls. They were waiting for something more.

More there must be, and they knew it. Others were neutral, stepping daintily wherever they went lest suddenly the truth should break.

Some were dispirited. He loved these ones deeply. How they castigated themselves! How their personal warts and moles multiplied before their self-deprecating eyes. He stared shrewdly at them, knowing a miracle lay ahead of them. Soon they would turn a bend in the road, a turn in the forest path, and the miracle would confront them, and overcome them, and they would be wild with delight. There were others too, but he had better not discern anyone of them consciously. He would just feel them, gently, firmly, strongly, and seek to minister to them.

His spirit swam in the given humility. He was better than none, and higher than none, yet everyone was for his teaching, and they would know it. He bowed to them in his spirit with elegant graciousness. Let them know he loved them, even as he cut some of them down with the words of truth, wounding them unto life, and snatching them from death.

This night the subject was *justification*. He kept mouthing the word to them. Some stared back uncomprehendingly. It was a theological word. As yet it was a name a scientist in religion had given to one of the specimens he had captured. Genus truth, species personal liberation, sub-species eternal strength and joy. He grasped the subject, tossing it up like a ball, time and again, and every time catching it, and holding it with sheer confidence before their wondering eyes. Again the hooded looks from some, the sullen no-comprehension from others, and the bewilderment of the truly simple. He was filled with joy.

The struggle went on. Some tried to entice him into the byways of the subject. They were interested not in the major principle, but the small dependencies, the little things that en-

tranced them, or even his own *obiter dicta* that forever were slipping out of his mouth. He was wary. He was practised. He was tutored in true tutoring and would not let them catch him, if only for their own sakes. He kept to the main theme.

‘Everyone of us,’ he told them, ‘must live under wrath, the wrath of God that catches us in the conscience. As Augustine said, “Man carries about in his conscience every day a testimony to the wrath of God.” ‘ He showed them the man under wrath, the man in anguish of a spirit and heart dislocated, disjoined and awry, pulling away from the functional harmony God had created in His universe. He told them how a man lives in guilt, and so does not live at all. He showed the pitiful existence of a sinner, and how puerile and piffling is sin, and what men call *great sin*.^t Some of them stared at him with wonder as he demolished sin. Not of course its devilish evil, or its black and sullen nature, but the very essence of it. That was what he showed was so wrong, because it was not of anything God had created. It was the negative of the glorious positive, the empty shadow of the rich reality. He took them through to a new view of sin and evil until that very thing lay in unmasked discredit.

Then he spoke about grace. This was when some of them tried to take flight. They would willingly have walked over broken glass, lain on beds of nails, worn undershirts of rough hair, and paid off a fierce and instant deity as he demanded the sorrows and sufferings which would make their religious egos and their pietistic flesh tingle with ascetic pleasure, and help them along their way of manned endeavour. How the hackles of their deadly flesh rose at the mention of grace! Keep it as a theological word and they would be pert with an easy description of grace—‘God’s unmerited favour’—but the truth of it they would not have. It was the cat amongst the pigeons, the lion amongst the antelope. They scattered far and wide.

He would not let them escape. Give grace its scope, its true description, its rightful work, and he would bag a brace of

shattered souls, stunned by the wonder and glory of the matter, a brilliant revelation of the holy loving Father who easily graced them out of their sins.

They stared at him, wondering. For some the old wariness returned, strengthened in manifold ways, multiplied in its defences. For others who teetered on a new world of total forgiveness, obliterated guilt, and joyous acceptance by God, it was a moving moment. Some believed not for fear, and some believed not for joy, but all were aware of the brilliant drama being played.

For himself he was back at his old wonderment. How many times he had tried to escape into his world of thinking, his delightful and private woods of reading the saints. How he loved the great minds as they played at theology or practised it. He understood every one of their moods. He knew the gay deceivers, the plodding dullards, the adroit brilliant one, and the ones with happy holy reverence. They all taught him and he would rather sit at their feet than have others sit at his. Sometimes he would weary of the battle, and almost be daunted by the savage spirits of his students. But he loved them, every one, and he must persist with them.

The older couple were laughing. Not aloud, but on their faces. They knew the sheer commonsense of what he was saying. God, the Holy Father, could forgive no one. He could not go against Himself, and His glorious law. Judgement must come to all sin, and God could issue no *fiat* of forgiveness, no proclamation of total forgiveness. He must first send His Son. They must enact the reality of propitiation. They must light the fires of the Eternal Wrath which is upon all and every sin of all creatures and every person. At this Golgotha they must take the sin of the world into the body and brain and spirit of the Son, whilst the Spirit aid, and the Father stand by supplying nothing that any man might not have, but which this Man must have beyond all men.

He traced the titanic struggle against pain and evil. He spoke of the searing wrath, and of the love that spread the wrath about until the Son drank it to the bitter dregs and into nothingness so that the whole race might live again, and live in grace it had never properly known. He led them to the great outpouring love of Calvary, and of the blazing mystery of love, the heart of the Eternal opened for all men to see.

Sometimes, when he spoke like this, people sobbed. Men caught their breath. Women felt the tears forcing themselves upward from the heart and through the channels of the eyes. Yet he was careful, like Paul, not to woo their wills by cunning use of words, pleading eloquence, a net of phrases that softened the spirit, but bypassed the true mind. He always let that love speak for Itself, and Its words were more moving and catching than his own.

Some of them had come out of their jungles. Awed, they at last knew what they had more than half-suspected—that God is love! The phrase they knew. The formed sentence they had accepted. The axiom they had known to be truth, but the warmth and the reality and the substance of it—beneath the gracious form—this they had not truly known; not really, until now!

He never tired at seeing the eyes widen, the spirit leap, the heart begin to throb in unaccustomed joy. He never wearied of the confidence the revelation brought to the stammering spirit, the stuttering heart, the fearful soul. He loved the wide-eyed wonder. Oh, it was worth all the struggle!

He could not keep them in these emotional fulnesses. They must see that one held the truth in faith, and faith alone. They must not ask to *feel* all the time. They must not ask for a world of perpetual sight. The world wanted its world this way, and in a false way it was always a sightful world. They must habituate themselves in faith. They must know that the great truths of love and forgiveness, of justification and ac-

quittal, of the erasure of guilt, and the purging of pollution, were the true things of truth, and that God had not over-reached Himself in the liberation of man. It was all as good as God had made it by His word and Son and Spirit. They must lose their ambivalence—loving and hating grace at one and the same time. They must come to love grace alone, and to be subject to it.

He knew that one lesson would not be enough. Others must come and reiterate this very truth, or he must come back to them, time and again, until one thing was settled deeply in them. They must not be persons of natural spirit. They must not wait for the tides to rise in themselves of *the natural spirit itself*. It must be of grace and not of nature. So the mind must be informed, the heart tutored, the spirit habituated in the life of grace, and the exercise of faith, guided by the Spirit and constantly motivated for these by the pure love of the Father and the Son.

Often he would come back to find that they had lost ‘the first fine careless rapture’. He would not rebuke them, nor chastise them. He knew how easily man’s flesh—even his redeemed flesh—will veer towards life’s legalism. He knew how men get captured by sullen nomisms. How they grow weary, unable to believe the good of God for His creatures, unsure of the undyingness of His love. He knew how a man doubts that love could go so far, and never, never retreat. So he would be patient, time and again, until the form of grace was caught in their inner souls like the image on a photographic film, etched into it for eternity, until the homing soul wheel out of its dark skies of terror and come flighting home to the arms of the Father.

‘How great,’ he would say, time and again, ‘that unchanging love.’ Time and again he would quote the prophets. ‘I will love you *freely*,’ and, ‘I am the Lord. I change not!’ The children may fail, or err, or even fall into grievous sin, but where such sin abounds grace doth much *more abound*. Its million-metre high waves toss the trivial things of evil until

they become pathetic chips bobbing up and down on the glorious tempests of grace, so weak are the sins which great grace defeats.

What if he left them breathless? They would come again! The old games might be played many times. Indeed he might be dead before they were expended, but then others would be there to play them out to their termination, and win men and women into the joys and the serenity of the Kingdom. Meanwhile he would practise, more and more, to catch men in spite of themselves, and for themselves. He would be ebullient with the huge joy of Godly liberation. He would witness to its lovely emancipating power. Exaggerate he could not, because one cannot enlarge grace, or speak of it being greater than it is, or less great than it must be, by nature of the case!

Always the lecture would come to an end. Part of him would know a physical weariness but then he was not wholly tired. He was exalted. He exulted. He looked into their surprised eyes, their shining eyes, their rising spirits and was gratified, satisfied. He never despaired when some were puzzled. Puzzlement meant they would not rest until revelation came. He was not hurt by anger or even rejection. These were proofs of reasonable polarisation. Some time—maybe days or months or decades away—they would know. Not everyone was ready for the truth at this time. By nature of the case some come slowly, aware that the truth is great and may not be taken in mediocre acceptance.

He watched them depart. He caught up the coat he could never wear whilst teaching. In it he was hampered. But now he would wear it as he departed. Slipping into it he still had an eye for each of them, smiling his secret smile of joy, knowing that his failure to grip all was no failure when God loved them. He—the Father—would get to them, and if they resisted then they would not be shrugged off. At the most they could shrug themselves off.

‘Oh!’ he thought as he went, ‘How great is this God we adore!’

And then as he was on his own: 'How great a privilege to teach the sons of men!'

And because he was a realist his mouth twisted a little awry. 'And what effort,' he added. Then, wryly, 'What toil and struggle.' Finally with all the seriousness that constantly visited him, 'What responsibility.'

As he tucked himself into his motor vehicle he knew that he would have it no other way.

The Return of Peace

He lay there in the unchanging darkness of the night. There was no movement in his body. The woman who was his wife lay beside him, sleeping peacefully. She was a vibrant person when awake, but when sleeping she was calm. She easily shed her daily fears and troubles. Also her joys and triumphs. Neither affected her when she slept. These nights she had part of her mind for the invalid lying next to her, but then she surrendered him, and sleep would enfold her as a warm and gentle blanket.

For the first few hours he slept well. It was like clockwork, as though he had an inner alarm which checked him out of sleep into thinking. Movement was impossible. The heavy plaster cast on his right leg would not let him move. It was a white anchor beneath the sheets and the warm woollen blankets. He liked the warmth, but not the waking. He was, as he lay there, helpless. Not only was he weak from his recent weeks in hospital, and unsure of the leg which was slowly knitting but also being habitually active he found it difficult to accept the constraint of powerlessness.

Had he wished he could have reached up with a hand and touched the light button. Warm and gentle light would have flooded him. It would be partly shielded from his wife, but not wholly, so that she would wake. Her waking would be slow and reluctant. In a sudden moment she would remember who it was beside her. She would ask soft questions, anxious to help, hoping the pain was not intolerable. He did not wish for that. Let her sleep on.

Last night he had switched on the light. She had stirred and

awakened. Somehow he had persuaded her it was all right. 'Go back to sleep. I'll just read a little.' Even reading was not easy. Somehow he dragged himself into a higher sitting position. Then he began to read. What he read was good. It was not only attractive; it was rich and full. It was truth which was rounded out. The man who was the writer was a theologian whose theology lived. It might be good to read him again, but there was the woman next to him.

Tonight he would not switch on the light. He would try to defeat the regular visitation of awakening. He smiled tiredly. How many people he had helped who were insomniacs. He had told them about relaxing, about regulated heavy breathing. He had gone back to the thing which had troubled them, and so helped to heal them. Often a person would flash him a quick smile of gratitude. Sleep had come. Sleep is always a healing thing. It is the genuine rest we deny ourselves in our busyness.

So then his smile was a trifle wry. I want to go to sleep, he thought. Also I want to break this cycle of sleeplessness. Of course I can sleep during the day. At this time I do not have to work.

During the day he would be stretched out in the Jason rocker. His plastered leg would be raised on its platform and be supported competently. He would look into the open hearth fire. He could go back to childhood, seeing the visionary pictures of castles, and secret halls and dungeons, all aglow with mystery and beauty. After a time he would sleep. So then he had all the sleep he needed within the twenty-four hours. If he did not sleep at night it did not greatly matter.

It did matter: he knew that. It was not for now, but for the days, weeks, and years ahead. He had to have a quiet mind. Whilst his brain was not racing, it was alert and vividly imagining. It was thinking without cessation. His mind was covering so many persons, so many situations, so much creative writing. Somehow it had to cease to do that. He did not quite know why it should, or why it was wrong to be busy

thinking the thoughts which tumbled into him, and then out of him, for few of them stayed in order to share in a conclusive action. They were always there—the symbols and actions of his compulsive restlessness.

He remembered the hospital sister. She was very warm and human under her sister's cap. Night after night she had given him tablets to make him sleep. Perhaps she thought in her kindly way, 'Dear old man. He needs the sleep.' Perhaps she simply cared for him. He was not old, but knew he looked quite aged. So he had taken her tablets and slept well. When he was leaving in the wheelchair she gave him a bundle of tablets in bottles in a clear plastic bag. 'You'll need them,' she assured him. When he had shaken his head and explained that he slept well at home she also shook her head. 'Not at first,' she had said. 'It will be strange. Also the leg will feel heavy, like something foreign. No, you'll need your tablets.'

Well, he had taken the tablets. Using them was a bit against his pride. Most of his life he had rather looked down on what he called 'drugs'. The word was a demeaning word. He tended to despise drugs, although he differentiated 'drugs' and 'medicine'. Now, lying on the bed at home, he smiled at himself. For years he had rejected painkillers when they would certainly have lowered his pain levels. He sighed, careful not to wake his wife. He sighed at his own foolishness. He had quickly cut himself off the sleeping aids. There were still plenty in the bottle, wrapped up in the clear plastic bag, but he was not going to use them.

Tonight, somehow, he would work it all through. He would discover why he was waking regularly in the early morning of each night. Whether he would succeed or not he did not know. In hospital he had had no choice. They had insisted that he be helped to sleep. Here he could battle out the matter.

Staring up in the dark to where the ceiling was, he did not know what the solution would be. He began his round of prayer for the family. One by one he went through the

children. Sometimes he would wince at a thought, or grimace in the dark when he remembered the problems of his married children or their children. Having done this he would think about his wife. He would think about friends. Most of all he would think about the work. Books he had written would come to mind and he wondered whether they were being silent messengers to their readers. He wondered how the audio-cassettes were sounding to varied listeners. He thought of the two new books newly noted down but not written, the notes themselves nestling in the clip-file at the side of his bed. His mind began to race ahead to the chapters he would write.

Sometimes a criticism from the past would visit him, piercing like a sharp lancet. He wondered how it had come. Who directed such memories? Who aimed such accusations? Sometimes a flood of despair would tumble over him, bearing him down a little. Then he would remember how he had come to terms with the hurt and anger, and how he had forgiven and so covered the event. It helped to dim the stabbing memory but it did not fully obliterate it. He wondered at that, too. After a time he would hope that sleep might come, for some time had passed since he had awakened.

Good memories also came: pleasant memories of love, of success, of well-being. Sometimes a host of people would pass him, not looking at him, not even knowing he was there, but he would see them, and smile happily. They were ones who had been helped by his teaching. Some of them had come into amazement. In fact he had invented a word for that state of astonishment. 'Astoundment,' he called it. It brought again the faint smile as he remembered. So there were things good and bad which visited him, but both seemed to keep him alert whilst he wished for sleep.

After some time the notes he had made on his latest book began to visit his mind. He had a faint sense of awareness. Somehow, he felt, the answer lay in this new book. It was a book about serving others. 'By love serve one another,' had been the basic verse which epitomised his thought. He

remembered the impossible verse of St. Paul, 'Consider others better than yourself.' That verse had deterred him many times in life. It had temporarily arrested him before, and each time he had shrugged it off. It had always been a puzzling verse, and even a troubling one. Did any human being, really think another better than himself? Hardly likely. The superior would never admit to another being superior, and the inferior—battling always for self-esteem—could never possibly admit it. He chuckled as he thought about that.

He had a good memory. Paul's other words came to him: 'Let no man think of himself more highly than he ought to think. Let him have a sober estimate of himself.' In this idea there was neither place for being superior nor inferior. Doubtless, since every man is unique, none is higher or lower than another. What then did Paul really mean?

The answer flashed home. 'Put others before yourself!' Why, of course that was it. 'Treat the other as better than [ie. before] yourself.' He could understand that. Who, then, had ever done this? He remembered great souls who had gladly sacrificed themselves for others. Jesus had said it was a matter of love to lay down one's life for one's friend. Even so it was no easy matter.

Some other words of Paul clambered into his mind, as though through a window. They looked down at him. 'Look not every man to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.' Well, that was clear enough. That was what he had been doing. He had been thinking about others. Somehow his mind remained uneasy, as though somewhere a small maggot was stirring. It brought the faintest dis-ease.

More words tumbled about his mind. 'Have this mind among you which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant,

being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.' These words did not, at first, trouble him. He was trying to grasp them. The picture was clear enough. Christ, the Son, had not thought it a thing to be grasped at to remain in the glory with his beloved Father. He had come to earth as a man, having emptied himself not of his deity but the claim and prerogatives of that deity. Also he had refused to draw upon that deity in order to fully effect his own manhood.

This had never ceased to be a thing of wonder to him. Years ago a man had taught this passage to him, quoting a poet as saying,

'He walked as though he were *Godhead deposed.*'

The thought was beautiful enough. Christ walked royally and regally in his manhood, thus displaying his origins. Even so the poet was not correct, for:

'He walked as though he were *Godhead exposed.*'

Ah! That was a better thought! His manhood exposed his Godhead. He showed men what it was like to be God as a man. In human ways he showed Godly ways. Yes, the thought was better.

The maggot stirred even more, though still at the back of his mind. Some thought was trying to penetrate. Jesus had really been man. That is to say he had been a man. As he thought about that a brilliance blazed in his brain. Of course, he had really been *man*. He had walked *as a man* ought to walk. He lived as a true man lives, and so lives truly. At that thought his pulses quickened a little. God had sent His Son down to show Who and What God really is.

Of course! No man has seen God at any time. The Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed Him. Yes! Yes! Jesus was Godhead exposed.

Then—so to speak—the maggot got through! At least it was a grub or a caterpillar. In an instant it had gone into a

change of being. It had cocooned itself. Then it had suddenly metamorphosed itself. That is it had become transfigured. It had changed into a very beautiful thing. Before his astonished eyes it had emerged, bringing with it sheer and pure thinking. It was truth itself. He heard himself saying the amazing words:

'He walked as though he were *manhood exposed.*'

Of course! Of course! That was it! To be as Jesus was to be truly man! He had taken *the form of a servant*. He had been born *in the likeness of men*. He was found *in fashion as a man*. Of course! To be a man is to be servant. Man is essentially servantly. Why then is he servantly? Because God is Servantly. To be a true man is to serve. 'By love serve one another.' Of course! It is *truly* human to put others before oneself. It is *authentic* humanity which looks to the interests of others, serving them. It is *true* human love to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Mother thought impacted him. His mind had asked the question, 'Did he *like* to become man?' He thought quickly, 'Why, yes!' He asked himself again, 'If you were God would you wish to become man?' He knew the answer a fallen human would give, namely, 'No! Not at all!'

He said it to himself, slowly, so that he could know what he was thinking. 'To be God is to become man.' Perhaps that would seem ambiguous to some. He restated his thought. 'God cannot be God and not want to become man so as to redeem him. In God's thinking had always been the idea that to be God was to become man.' A related verse came to him. It concerned Jesus. He was quoted as crying, 'I delight to do your will, O God!'

Quickly came his thoughts in rapid succession, tumbling over one another. 'He said that to his Father. This was the great. love—laying down his life for his friends. He treated them all as friends. Love has no limits. Also it has no degrees. To truly love is to lay down your life for others. That is what

a human does. He loves. He serves. He serves even to the death.'

Now he felt exhausted. All this time his wife had not stirred. Yet the most powerful thought which can ever come to a man was racing through his mind. Finally, when his brain came to a halt the truth was there. It was simple. It was distilled. It was this: To be truly man is to love others, to put them first, and to serve them. *Not to do this is not to be truly human.*^t

He lay there with that breathtaking revelation. God had come to be man for that is the true nature of God. He came to serve. He came to serve unto death. His service was love.

Now he knew why he had been profoundly disturbed. This had rarely been his own experience. All his life he had fought to prove himself. When he had come across the amazing truth of justification he had tried not to justify himself to God or man. He had tried to live freely. Had he, however, truly lived in freedom? Had it been total freedom?

Then the confrontation of truth came to him. Being justified by faith he had yet sought to justify himself to others. Primarily this was to his enemies. He had worked hard to prove to them that he was right, that his faith in action was truly of God and His Word. He had set out to love, and he had loved. He had loved all men, both friends and enemies. And yet he had not. He had loved them because that was right to do. He had forgiven them, for that is what one ought to do. Had he, however, really served them?

At this point came the moment of clear truth. He suddenly realised that night after night when he had awakened it was to think about *his* wife, *his* children, *his* writing, *his* preaching, *his* fellow teamworkers, and *his* work. Everything was his. How much was *theirs*?

The words came back again. 'Think not every man on his own things. Think also on the things of others.' 'Consider others better than [before] yourself.' 'By love serve one another.' Other verses also came: '...let each of us please his

neighbour for his good, to edify him.' '...Christ became a servant to the circumcised...' 'I am among you as one who serves.' 'He that would be greatest among you, let him be servant.' 'I came not to be served, but to serve.'

Now he felt the first wavelets of joy, portents of the breaking waves to come. To be truly human was to serve. One first served one's enemies. One loved and forgave. One prayed for those who despitefully used them. Then one prayed for others—not within the circle of '*my* wife, *my* children, *my* fellow-workers, *my* writing,' and so on.

This was what he began to do. At first it seemed a trifle strange to him. Then it seemed so authentic, so congruous with the truth. Although this truth had been long hidden it was now clear. It was quiet, grave, unostentatious. It was just truth. He began to pray for people in the past who had hurt him, who had acted unjustly. They seemed to him less dreadful, less cruel. Indeed he felt a gentle (though uncondescending) pity for them. He had a rich sense of peace and personal fulness. He was being a man. He was serving others. It was like—so to speak—being like God.

He felt himself drowsing. It was as though he were sleeping peacefully, without the necessity to keep awake and think about his own things. Being occupied with the things of others his tensions had gone. As he drifted off into a deep sleep he knew with conviction that the cycle of sleeplessness and intensity had been broken. He promised himself vaguely that when he awoke he would have time for serving his enemies and his friends without drifting into sleep. Now, however, he must sleep. And sleep he did!

When he awoke it would be to a full life of serving others in love. Also he would be served. That was a delight which would come freshly to him.

All in all he had stumbled across the most liberating of all truths. Yet, in another sense he had not stumbled across it by himself. His hour had arrived for the Father to show him, and he had been pleased to listen, to see, and to understand.

There is no Ordinary

This they call the ordinary—
 The place where the goats run,
 The red gash of the earth with the ochred clay,
 The black-and-white goats with the pure white
 Grazing ravenously. These things they say
 Are ordinary, the everyday ordinary.

The long rows of strong vegetables,
 Strawberries serried in their winter garb,
 Golden flash amid tired green,
 And the death-brown of the dead leaves;
 These are the things we daily see,
 Calling them ordinary.

Also the long rows of the rich vegetables,
 Themselves tucked up with the cold
 Of the inhospitable winter.
 The cabbages Compact in individual loneliness;
 Each a unit in the military precision
 Of its platoons. Each garden plot a platoon
 Of the silent sentinel battalion.
 These are the ordinary things.

Old pumpkins on the iron corrugations
 Of the old cemented tank, preserving the hot hours
 Of the sultry summer. Heat absorbed is frozen
 In the golden brown of their autumn flesh
 Encased in the shining rind
 Awaiting the times of soups and roasts.

These, of course, are the ordinary things
 I see from my bedroom window
 In the gentle hours of dreamy convalescence.

Lately I have looked at all these things
 Astounded at what is the mediocre,
 The daily run of each light-round,
 The unexceptionality, the almost bland
 Facets that compose the whole, constitute reality,
 But reality unseen to the conditioned eye,
 Verity unappreciated, taken for granted
 Where man is impatient at the given real,
 Despising or shrugging away its fact
 In his hunger—even his quick passion—
 To acquire the unusual, the special, the exceptional.

As for me—who am again absorbing health
 Like some inflowing natural power—I am
 Feeling the unseen hand that gives richly.
 I sigh in the newly-found healthfulness,
 Certain that there is nothing bland, nothing mediocre,
 But that all is unusual, all the quiet miracle
 Of the sustaining Provider, the giving God.
 Happy for the new fleshed wonder
 Of the wholly ordinary which is
 The true extraordinary, 'the way things are',
 And it would seem, will always be.

He then who misses the ordinary glory
 Misses the continuing verity. Perhaps he needs
 The sick-bed, the sudden accident,
 The approach of unremitting death, the visitation
 Of the forced sabbath rest. He needs
 The renewal of living through suffering
 To see the unusual ordinary!

Immanuel

How hot can the sun get, especially in a land like Sindh, that southernmost portion of Pakistan? Long ago the Moslems had said, 'When Allah made Sindh, what need was there for him to make hell?'

Well, it was hot. Under the shade of an acacia, the missionaries sprawled on their *charpais*, the loose-stringed wooden frames supporting them, and letting the hot air circulate around their bodies. The midday sun throbbed, and the land almost gasped. Had the hot north wind, the *loo*, not been blowing, the whole land would have been an oven.

'What effect has temperature on communication?' drawled a North American missionary. 'Do Eskimos hear the gospel more or less than Pakistanis?'

They all grinned. 'Let's forget the extremes,' suggested someone, 'and get to the norm.' There was a lazy hum of voices at that, which finally died away to silence. The *loo* swept on, over them, bringing some relief, yet also some dehydration to their bodies.

'I guess there isn't any norm,' said one. 'You just get through when and where you get through, and that's that.'

A missionary wife had drifted near, in search of her husband. She had found him, and the conversation. 'You just love 'era,' she said confidently. 'Then you communicate.'

'Love takes many forms,' her husband said loftily, with slight disdain at her simplistic approach. 'It means you will do almost anything, at almost any time.' He eased himself from the *charpai* and followed her, almost meekly, as they made towards their tent, and their hot children. Gradually the post-noon sun drew them into silence, and then sleep. The acacias

sought valiantly to maintain the shade. Only the goats and a few pariah dogs ventured out into the wind-swept desert.

Not far from them were the Marawaris, the low-caste Hindus with their colourful clothes. The women were voluminously garbed, insulated against the heat. Even they had succumbed to the hour of siesta, and so the whole camp was in silence. Later, at mid-afternoon, they would all awake, and the meetings would begin again. Then after the meeting would commence the evening meal, in which the missionaries and the tribespeople would join. Scalding tea, with its leaves, sugar and milk all boiled together, would be lifted from the tureen, and with the tough, flat wholemeal *chapattis* and a hot vegetable curry the meal would be complete, satisfying.

Meetings were not really of the cultural order of the tribe, not, anyway, to include both men and women. Because of tribal laws certain men and women who were related could not look at each other. Women would shyly veil their faces with their head covers, hiding their features from any inappropriate look. When a speaker asked a question the women would be silent. Only the men would answer, and then generally the older men. After all, they participated in the tribal councils, the *pahaunchiat*. They were the men of wisdom.

The men were not used to sitting for great lengths of time, particularly if the material of the addresses was heavy. They would get up and wander around, returning uneasily, and squatting again, on crossed legs. Sometimes they would smoke a cigarette or place a wad of prepared betel-nut in one cheek. Whilst listening to the speaker they would chew over the betel-nut with unconscious regularity.

How did you communicate with people of this disposition? How did you contact them, in the depths? How could you relate to people of different cultural thought patterns? You had the disadvantage of not knowing all the culture.. You

could easily make a mistake with a custom, or with words. Your illustrations would not always be apt, and sometimes even unconsciously offensive.

This night the petrol pressure lamps were bright and hissing. The insects gathered, jetting in to commit insect harakiri. The north wind was bringing some relief because no longer as hot. Flowing across the quickly cooling desert it also had become cool, reducing discomfort. The children submitted to being put on the *charpais*, and covered with the *chader*, which served as a sheet or light blanket. Then the parents returned to the meeting, attracted by the throb and beat of the *tubla*, the male and female drums. Someone had a *sitar*, and another a *cungaree*, the equivalent of a Western tambourine. The singing was getting underway.

The speaker was not exactly apprehensive. He knew he would communicate, but he had the same unease that the apostle Paul must have known, 'in weakness and fear, and much trembling'. It was the age-old responsibility of telling the message of the Cross, the message that never failed to arouse the motions of inner human guilt. It had to do this in order to destroy that same guilt. The moments of aroused guilt, however, are never happy ones. In fact they bring deep personal discomfort. He looked around, scanning the gathered Marawaris and missionaries. They seemed happy enough together. They were friends.

There flashed into his mind another occasion, his very first in this land when he had had to speak, even before he knew the language. It had been in a large Christian village. At least it was Christian in name. Many of its inhabitants were even hostile to the foreigners who came to share the message with them. They had gradually evolved their own brand of the faith, and liked it best that way. At the time he had not known that. He had just wanted to share with them the truth which he had always found amazing. It never lessened in its

power to affect him, and he always carried that impression of astonishment with him.

He had rounded a bend in the grey sandy track, as their Jeep bore down upon a vast mud-walled village. He caught a glimpse of young men, lounging on the edge of the village as 'hoods' do in some Western counterpart of this culture. There were the young women, graceful, carrying pots of water on their heads. Near the entrance gate were small children, many naked, or near-naked, their faces not altogether dean, their hair untidy. The old men were gathered in some sort of council as they drove up the main road of the village. They looked like patriarchs, characters out of some Bible scene. He had suddenly felt incapable of communicating.

'Lord,' he said, almost protestingly, 'how do I get it across?'

The calm, quiet reply: 'Speak to their hearts, and not just to their heads.' Somehow it had come through. The translator, of course, had been excellent. It had come through wonderfully. He had seen eyes light up, laughter come at his illustrations, tears at his descriptions of the Cross.

And now here was another group. They knew the language he spoke, the *lingua franca* of this country, yet it was not their own tribal language. This made it more difficult. He waited until the singing had been succeeded by prayer, and the time had come for him to speak. The leader of the meeting smiled at him. He opened his Bible with its large black scrawls, twists and wiggles of this Eastern language. He began to read.

There was the usual restlessness: one man getting up and going out to attend to nature's call. Another suddenly had to light a cigarette. He knew he could not smoke in the meeting, so he departed. There was a man with a racking cough. He had coughed in meeting after meeting. His cough seemed to rasp, setting nerves on edge. The restlessness became something beyond the usual. The words which seemed so

thrilling to him, the speaker, were being bypassed. There was restlessness and inattention, because of the distracting cough.

‘I say,’ he said to the man with the cough. ‘Would you like me to pray for the cough, that you be healed from it?’

‘Master,’ said the Hindu respectfully, ‘I would certainly wish for that.’

The preacher moved forward, through the squatting group of listeners. There was silence now, or at the most a faint hum of excitement. He laid his hands on the Hindu man. Suddenly he felt a revulsion within. It bewildered him. He heard himself saying, ‘Satan, leave this man!’ Then he felt surprised. The man who had been tensed now relaxed. He smiled. He had ceased to cough. A total silence reigned in the meeting. He prayed for the healing of the cough. It was soon obvious to all that the cough had been healed.

Now there was attention when he preached. All seemed to hang on every word. There was an eagerness in their eyes, a parting of the lips which signified expectancy. When he came to speak of the Cross he saw tears. The women had forgotten to veil their faces. Their head-cloths hung loose. Their large liquid eyes were on him. After the final prayer there was only a hush. Somewhere, over by the *charpais*, a child cried. A mother stood up to attend to it. Then the crowd melted away. A Marawari who had recently become a Christian began to talk to him, rapidly.

Ray, his special American friend, helped to get him a *parata* and tea for his breakfast. He led him away to a quiet place.

‘Do you know what happened last night?’ he asked. ‘You know, in the meeting?’

He nodded. Of course he knew. The man’s cough had been cured, and the people had listened closely after that. ‘Do you know why?’ his friend asked.

He shook his head. ‘Not if it was something else,’ he said. ‘It was,’ said Ray. ‘When you prayed for that man, Dam-ji

the tribal leader and a Christian saw a snake come away from him; a black snake. He tried to grab it, but his hand went through it. You see, there was something about this we do not really understand. They did not even tell me. I heard them. I was asleep, so they thought. But I heard them discussing it. They say you have the great power of God. That is why they listened.’

The great power of God! Well, was not that what Christ had promised? ‘You shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me...’? The word attested to by signs and wonders?

The two men remained in silence for some moments. Then Ray said, ‘Do you remember the meetings last year, at the Convention?’

He nodded. ‘Yes. You mean when the whole place shook as we prayed and sang.’ His eyes were dreamy as he remembered the event. He had preached from the fourth chapter of Acts, where the shaking of the house in which the church had prayed is recorded. He had told the audience that it could happen that night, in that place, also. *And then it had happened.*

‘Do you remember,’ he said, his eyes twinkling, ‘how we explained it in the first few moments by every rational reason we could muster? Dizziness, blocked sinuses, over-medication, and the like? Then suddenly we knew it wasn’t any of these. The thing had actually happened.’

‘Yes,’ said Ray, ‘and the next day we read that an earthquake or a heavy earth-tremor had taken place.’ His grin was wide. ‘Saved our sanity,’ he said with fine irony. ‘We needed an explanation like that!’

The other missionary was grinning now. ‘The trouble with that,’ he said ruefully, ‘was that folk outside felt no shaking of the earth whatsoever.’

‘The reason for reminding you,’ said Ray, ‘was that the people suddenly cried out, “Why, God is with us! He is here! He has come among us!” ‘

‘That’s right,’ said the other missionary. ‘Suddenly God was real. They were feeling Him.’

‘That’s how it was last night,’ said Ray quietly. ‘God was suddenly the living God. That’s why your words were alive. God Himself was coming through.’

It was the final meeting. The young convert who had talked to him last night was going to witness to Christ when the meeting ended. He was going to tell the story of his life as a Hindu, worshipping idols until he had met Jesus and his life had been changed. He sat in expectancy. For that matter, all were expectant. Since last night everything had changed. No one felt nature call him out of the meeting. None wanted to smoke. No cough was heard. The heat was heavy but none drowsed. The speaker remembered what had been said about Eskimos and Pakistanis. He smiled faintly.

Then he began to speak. His message received rapt attention. There was no longer a veil over eyes. Frankness had replaced the age-old passivity of his hearers. They agreed eagerly with his revelations. They were hungry for more. It was nothing for an hour to pass as the Word was being preached. Then suddenly the message was finished. Some were in tears.

‘You may want to share what you have seen, or experienced,’ he said to them. He looked around for the young Marawari. The man was shaking uncontrollably, as though impelled by some strange unseen force. He seemed to be in some kind of a trance. He was away in a world all of his own, and that world was a strange one. Some of his tribespeople had a look of fear in their eyes. He sensed that they thought the man was in a demonic fit.

‘Don’t be afraid,’ he cried out. ‘This is not of Satan, but of God!’

The alarm died away, to be replaced by a general eagerness to witness. An old man stood to his feet. ‘I tell you,’ he said,

‘that we have been hearing the words of God.’ He raised an arm dramatically. ‘Jesus is Lord!’ he cried majestically. ‘We believe he is Lord of all the earth!’

‘Lord of all the earth!’ echoed the words inside the speaker. He knew the power of the Spirit of God about them. He listened as these humble people spoke of giving their crops to Christ, the flocks to Jesus, themselves to the Father. All the while the young man shook as though in an ague. Only when the testimony had finished, and the final blessing was uttered did his shaking still to quietness.

His eyes opened, and he saw the speaker. ‘Oh sir,’ he cried. ‘Oh sir. I saw him!’

The speaker nodded. A strong, strange feeling had gripped him around the heart. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I believe you did.’

‘Oh sir,’ said the man. ‘He was on that Cross and, oh sir, I felt so unclean. As you preached you disappeared, and only he was there—on that Cross. Sir, my heart was black, my whole being submerged in my own dark evil. I felt horrible, wretched, polluted.’ He paused, pain in his eyes at the memory. ‘But, oh sir,’ he gasped, ‘as he looked down at me, from that Cross, his eyes were filled with love and pity. Then his blood began to drop on me, drop after drop, dripping onto me.’ His face glowed. ‘Why sir,’ he said, with awe in his voice, ‘he washed me. He washed me from tip to toe. He made me white as snow.’

‘White as snow.’ The man had probably never seen snow, but it was a word he knew. Everyone knows that snow is beautifully white.

The missionary suddenly felt helpless. It was a feeling he did not oppose. Indeed it filled him with a wonderful warmth. He felt helpless concerning the great power of God. The tears began to rise up within him, and to spill out through his eyes. Later he said to Ray, ‘What do you think of that?’

‘Aren’t we crazy?’ said Ray, throwing his arms wide apart. ‘We write our books on communication. We work out our techniques, we research our principles. And all it is, really, is

Immanuel. ‘

‘Immanuel?’ said the missionary. ‘Immanuel?’ Then he paused and nodded. ‘Oh, I see,’ he said. He nodded in agreement. ‘I guess that’s right,’ he added. ‘Yes, Immanuel. God with us. God with us. Of course. Of course.’

He felt awed by it all. He also felt an incredible joy as his new Hindu friends flocked around him, eagerly asking questions about their new faith. Some of them—the older men of the tribal council—were asking him about baptism.

‘Immanuel,’ he kept saying to himself. ‘Why, of course, “God with us.” However could it be otherwise?’

Suddenly, in spite of the intense heat, the floating dust, and the hot *loo* blowing, he felt the life about him. It was strange and yet wonderful to be in the centre of God’s own eternal life.

Death comes so Gently

Death comes so gently.
I hear the quiet footfalls,
Not light pattering—as though inconsequential,
Nor heavy padding as foreboding,
But gracious unintruding suggestion
Of one coming purposefully.

Often when long shades have fallen
Over the obsessive busyness
And the compulsive accomplishing
I have paused in the sudden quietness
Wondering why I am visited
By this soft stranger.

Never in these visitations
Has there been fear.
Nor has the bland confronted me
As though of no point (blank guilelessness),
But a clement spirit has met me
And grown into me as a dear friend
Accepts the welcome but does not invade.

At that moment I wonder concerning life.
The harsh dryness fades, the gentle
Lines of a new comprehension
Grip me within. Life’s brilliance
Softens to mild and lenient colours:
The whole ameliorates. Not wistful,

Not sorrowed in sudden bursts
 Of plaintive regrets, but assured
 It was all as it was to be.

There is no need for sighing,
 Nor last petulant passionate whimsy
 For the real has come. This substantial
 Is not now insubstantial, the reality
 Has not become shadows. Life and death alike
 Are the true real, the authentic moments
 Portending the useful eternity.

The gentle footfalls have ceased
 Receding into the misted distance,
 Quietly passing over the plains
 And the blue ranges, not retreating
 But withdrawing. My spirit sighs
 Not with relief, nor yet impatience.
 Tired though it be it has received
 The same mild life, the gentle-hearted,
 The tractable and docile serenity
 Of the new life.

Come then again this receding death,
 I am quietly prepared, not anticipating
 And not dreading. Where stingless death approaches
 So does serenity, not as anaesthesia
 Or needed sedating, but as quiet assurance.
 Death is not death, but God
 Coming for His own, His Father's arms
 Reaching to His beloved. His quietude
 Surrounds where fear might invade
 And Love gently claims
 That which was always His.

The Rim

Running out of a dream, or in a dream, running; the swift flashing strides that take you towards inevitable doom. So does a man hurry to his death, gloriously, as the scribes say, for their fearful imaginations reckon man's destiny as no less wonderful, and the power of his doom majestic.

And yet in a soldier running there is no conscious thought of glory or power or dominion, or world without end, for that matter, because the trained mind has accepted the minor responsibility of death, and the major fact of courageous living, although, God knows, there are many types of courage.

This type, for example—the terrific upsurge of joy, an Olympian grasp of power, heady and dangerous as the wine of the gods; and with a sacrificial tendency. So we ran; so they ran; so I ran. And the lips of all of us that had been stopped with the strong realisation of impending doom were suddenly unsealed, so that we babbled and shouted and some of us sang. We ran to the enemy shouting as though we believed the words we uttered.

In the lives of all men there is a desire for greatness, whatever form it may take, and if the chances of greatness are rare, they are greedily snatched at when the time arrives, and so it is, or was, with us—the fighting soldiers. As in the same dream we see what we shall never see again: a thought to carry us through the years which never again will be as brilliant or filled with the same solitary purpose that makes life at least comprehensible. Or as a poet of ours says, 'You shall know what you know, and that will be your reward.'

As we ran there was havoc about us, the havoc of war which is a background, and which fearfully oppresses the mind, weighs it down with perpetual questioning. Back in the native kampongs, and back in the big city itself—couched, smoking Singapore—there is wonder as every bomb drops whistling and every shell shrieks doom to flesh. If these are words of power, then even more are the thoughts powerful, for with all, everywhere, is life loved and death hated, except in those strange moments which come to man and for ever lift him from the ruck and the rut. It is for others to argue whether it is worthwhile when all is said and done.

So we ran towards the Japs, and their guns sang, a yammering, rising, falling sort of song that has never died away, and the singing guns had deadly beauty, as the men who ran and died seemed to have beauty, whereas in ordinary life they were hated as well as loved, despised as well as adored, merely tolerated by some and really admired by few. Certainly not as we admire them now at the setting of the sun and in the dark-blue husk of early night. Nor do the hymns we sing have much to do with them, but there was something unforgettable in their hurried rush to death.

The gun near to us seemed like a challenge, not of impersonal menace, not of hot steel—although in our minds it was clothed something like that. Rather, it was a challenge of intense personality, as real as anything living, for indeed it seemed to live. I hated it as I have never hated an animate being, or life itself, and with the others was determined to get it. So we ran, and for the first time found that time did not exist—not, anyway, in the ticking seconds or the prolonged minutes; but time was like wind falling through a valley, or rushing through a cavern; it was the gentle sun over fields, mild for the moment, stayed in the air.

Time, then, was every thought recollected as though man were gathering about him, with dignity, the clothes of his thoughts, the garments of his entire recollections. He was girded with dignity, co-ordinated beyond any measure hither-

to known. So he rushed at death, or the gun, or the other enemy soldiers with the conviction that his destiny in that moment was godlike.

What then, if in other years he should see this a splendid lie, as falsehood now proven, as not worth the candle, as irrevocably wrong? For the moment it was altogether true, so true that today's doubt fights against revised certainty.

Yet the gun was impervious to threat, insensible to the charge, without fear and undefeatable because it could not die. Its song might cease in its throat, but the famous moments of that charge might never be recalled—the dead men uprising into life and the shadow of breath indrawn into the nostrils. Yet we charged it, and with the rest gloried in what may seem an idiocy of the gods.

Then the gun wounded. I felt a fury of shock, the left leg buckled and I plunged to the ground. The sustained glory of the moments before, on the waves of which fear rode faintly, was suddenly ended. The wind in the valley rushed on and was no more heard, and the glory of the sun in the light air was stopped, and the old reality was there—a wounded man on a smooth black road, a leg smashed, blood running, and the cries and sounds of war again about the ears. The threatening drone of a 'plane, the explosion of mortars, the incessant shrill shells.

These words as thoughts are hated in peace, whether rightly or wrongly is not easily decided, but hated they are, for one thought is that another's courage is to be hated, his experience to be considered a threat to the vanity of those who have not fought, and yet that is wrong, for all is not vanity with humanity, notwithstanding the ancient. Vanity dies when true pity or sorrow enters, for that is the lesson of pain.

Pain is personal, and yet a man in pain believes it is a thing, a living experience parasitic on the body, challenging every thought. Thought, too, seems to be a battle, a struggle up-

wards to regain normality, as though this battle is unfair, pain having the inescapable hold. Yet in that moment it was not to measure pain against the experience of charging, and find on what side and in what direction the scales were weighted, but to see your leg twisted beneath you as though another being almost, which has become dislodged from the extraordinary person which was formerly you.

As I lay there, there was no more running, no more men dying, none fighting, and the hated gun had to be silenced, its threat stuffed back into its flaming throat. Yet the damage had been done, not only to the leg, but to all the men who lay, and all were dead there except those, possibly, in cover. And if other noises still raged, and earth was churned with mortars and exploding shell, there was also a strange silence which meant to me that life was withdrawn, not from the body but from round about. Easy to wonder if the dead men were already risen, clothed in spirit, and looking down on me; but when I lay, not daring to twitch for fear a Japanese bullet might find me, I saw a sniper in a tree. His face half-hidden in the leaves must have been watching me for movement.

Yet, I thought angrily, what would I matter now with a leg smashed? If the enemy came through they would bayonet me, that being their terrible sort of mercy. If I moved I would be shot, if I did not move the blood would flow, and that would be another to join his comrades, the gathering roll of dead who have never been understood.

Yet the sniper did not move, either, as though for a few moments his thoughts were mine; as though in spite of language differences we knew the same words.

If he were motionless, so was I. If he strained not to twitch, then I was as the other dead men. The rifle had fallen along my body with me, and its small muzzle pointed at my head, so that it would not have been a great effort to raise the rifle and fire. Yet it would have been dangerous, for one slight move-

ment would have brought a bullet, although, too, I might have managed a first shot, but then vengeance was not a thought now, for had we not invited death as they also, in a way, had asked for it?

Nor was it a survival of the fittest or the unfittest, for in these moments even crippled man gains a stature which is beyond meanness. No, there is no easy explanation of why a man should think to shoot at that moment.

Then I thought he would surely get me, and if he did not, then his fellow-soldiers would, so it would be best to end my own life, denying a certain satisfaction to the sniper whilst I would be out of the reach of torture. But to fail to shoot myself properly might bring greater agony, and would be foolish. There might never be an end to the terrible seething of pain, and better then to do nothing, for as people say at some time or another, 'While there's life there's hope.'

And there are dreams as well as hope, dreams of recuperating, dreams of kindly nursing, and of basking in a kind of heroic convalescence, very comfortable to think about; of the relief of shedding a tremendous burden. These are the dreams, and if the voice that says 'Thou shalt not kill' is strong, the dreams are stronger.

Yet the little sniper remained motionless, an almost indifferent spectator to these thoughts. It was as though his arms were folded and he were waiting patiently until all reasoning had reached its conclusion and it was again time for action, time to suddenly shoot me, and so start one upon the business of whatever is beyond death, that which is woven irrevocably with the fabric of life. I could not bring myself to hate him, because it was his business to be a sniper, just as I had made fighting my business.

If he had the upper hand, then that was fair enough in war, and in any case he did not necessarily have the upper hand. If I had been able to banish my pain, fight against that hot flood

of agony, and in normal manner lift my rifle, I could have killed him with the same amount of opportunity. Of course he had the advantage of having his face leaf-hidden, and I would not be able to read his thoughts, nor even watch some of his movements, especially the hand that gripped the rifle.

The rifle was not aimed at me, but pointed near me, and could easily be moved. How was I to know, anyway, that the rifle which I held in my left hand might not be too heavy for me, the strength having flowed out with that thick blood seeping down the road? Yet my brain was clearer than ever before.

The thoughts came in a constant rush as though the loss of blood actually stimulated them. It was as though, too, there was a power left over from the amazing experience of running and charging, to remain co-ordinate, as though I had lost that wretched sense, present in most of humanity, of never knowing why we live, and move, and have our being. No, I was quite clear in thought, relieved of actual worry for my life and responsibility for others. At last I had handed over, as it were, to the reasoning of the brain, and it in its turn had a calm acceptance of the situation.

So that I can say I was not fearful of the sniper, nor yet had I that sort of hopeless fatalism, familiar enough in danger, that what would be would be. I almost felt then that I would defeat the sniper, either by my death or, perhaps, his, and I did not know then how close I was to the truth.

The sniper was by no means insignificant, but the thought of death was. Nor did death have an anaesthesia which prepared me for leaving the body, for I had no desire to leave it, any more than I feared to live.

Instead, the very agony in the leg made me take in, in detail, all about me—the smashed bracken, grey with dust up-thrust by bursting shells and mortars; the wheeling ‘planes above, seeking out positions to bomb; the valley which dropped away from the road, some of its bracken still green, some of it gold, but everywhere the ground gouged and torn;

the sunken figures of the killed almost hidden by the tangle of fern and grass and soil; the tall jungle giants towering above the sedate rubber-trees, in one of which was the watching sniper.

Then the gold and grey of the bracken, the pure blue of the sky, the colour of the trees and sun were gradually blotted out as the thought gave way to swirling greyness, a new silent world pivoting, it seemed, on the very pupil of the eye. Then the grey closing in until it reached the pupil-point, needle-fineness, and quickly thought and sight were inverted, and everything became nothing, yet nothing continued to be something as though the thought of life and death and the sniper were not far away, a being still existent, carrying on a greater and more powerful struggle than before.

When I came to, Gerry was beside me. Gerry had run with us, but had dropped behind into a drain. His commonsense was greater than our foolish, or splendid, courage. To us the moment had been desperate, needing desperate measure, but to him the moment was never that way, and life would always be ahead, and other times when, possibly, desperate action might be warranted. He had not died like Larry and Ted and the others. Here he was alive, much more alive than I.

Then I remembered the sniper. It suddenly became wrong for that sniper to be looking at us. Nor did I feel very philosophical about death. Gerry had brought me back vividly to the life which I purposed to hold, to which, anyway, I had returned, as a man does who walks along the rim, the very border of death, who stares, even, with mild eyes, into the valley below.

‘There’s a sniper in that tree, Gerry,’ I said urgently, and I dared not even point.

Gerry was alarmed, but in an instant the alarm had died. ‘Over there, eh?’ he asked, and he pointed to the tree where the sniper was: where he had been, for the sniper was no

THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

longer there.

'You shot him, Gerry?' I asked. It did not seem to matter because the past was already becoming unreal, more unreal than ever it would be in retrospect.

'No,' he said, shaking his head. 'I've been watching him. He's been dead all the time. Then he fell out of the tree.'

I did not want to sit up because of the leg, but for a moment I was able to raise myself enough to stare across at the dead sniper, lying at the foot of the rubber-tree. He seemed stiff on the ground, his face set, and his eyes probably staring up at heaven. I could not see his eyes, but I did not care then whether he looked silly or dignified in death. Nor was I relieved.

'You thought he'd got you, eh?' said Gerry solemnly. He lowered me slowly.

To me it was like a story unended, and yet I could not get it out of my mind that he had understood my thoughts as I lay there, that his eyes had been watching mine, which, of course, they could not have done. Nor do I mean by that that there was some mysterious secret, half-revealed to me, of what the senses may accomplish even when death has come. I looked up at Gerry, grateful at least that my dreams would now come true, but at the same moment here was an overpowering wistfulness, as though, almost, I had lost something, as though, as I said, it was like a story not quite ended.