RELIGION: ITS MODERN NEEDS AND PROBLEMS . . . No. 6

THE FRIENDLY CHURCH

BY

ARNOLD H. LEWIS

B.D. (Lond.)

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Each writer is responsible for the views expressed in his contribution to the series. No attempt has been made to limit freedom in the effort to impose an artificial uniformity. Yet a certain unity of outlook does make itself evident, and this is all the more valuable because unforced.

RAYMOND V. HOLT

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TO THE MEMORY OF

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A Minister of the Grace of God.

Hanc ex diverso sedem veniemus in unam.
Æn. II, 716.

SYNOPSIS

CHAP. PAGE

I. THE ALLEGED DECLINE 13

The decline in church attendance during the last fifty years is not due entirely to an increase in the number of non-churchgoers, but in part to a reduction in the average number of attendances by individual persons. This in itself does not imply a lessened interest in religion, but may be due to an altered conception of the nature of the religious life. Current plays and books often deal with religious questions, and there is less open antagonism to religion. This supports the view that while there is disaffection on the part of many towards the churches, it does not follow that men are becoming more indifferent to religion itself.

Free choice has a larger part in such religious observance as there still is.

II. ARE PEOPLE TOO FREE? 17

But if the decline is due to the greater measure of freedom enjoyed, it may be asked whether it would not be better if more persuasion were exercised. Have parents and teachers left the matter too much to the discretion of the young? Should church attendance be urged as a duty?

On the other hand, have the churches failed to make their services sufficiently attractive?

Is the future of religion imperilled, or only the future of the churches?

III. INDIFFERENCE, OR DISAFFECTION? 23

People stay away from church usually because they do not want to attend. This may not prove indifference, but it does suggest disaffection. But when we try to learn the grounds of the disaffection, we gain little help from the absentees. Much criticism is local and particular; and some objections cancel others.

The reasons alleged may disguise, rather than lay bare,

CHAP. PAGE

the real cause of disaffection. This may be the sense of frustration of those who assume that they are naturally irreligious, because conventional forms of worship do not meet their needs.

It might be well if we could convince them not of paganism but of faith.

IV. WHY SOME STILL GO TO CHURCH . . . 27

But some still go to church, and find satisfaction in so doing! What, stated in the broadest terms, do such people find? What single benefit could we find in every church, if we made a transdenominational survey?

Especially, why do those who are normally non-attendants desire that religious offices should accompany marriage and burial, and the dedication of infants? May not the communion of saints be a widely generalised form of friendship?

In life's supreme experiences, human fellowship helps us to be assured of the love of God.

V. WHY CEREMONIES ARE VALUED . . . 31

How, especially, in the most general terms, do we find comfort in a religious ceremony of burial in particular? In trying to learn this we must avoid the intellectualist fallacy of supposing that rites signify only what their wording expresses.

Ceremonies are often valued, not for what words do but for what words cannot convey. This is equally true of public worship.

The supreme virtue in a church is a collective sympathy which I call *friendly*.

VI. ON WELCOMING STRANGERS 35

By the Friendly Church the writer does not mean one where the technique of sidesmanship is most studied, and where the chance visitor is assailed with a bout of communal handshaking. This is more likely to result from the stress of competition than from a real reverence for the visitor's personality.

Friendliness itself forbids the attempt to inveigle any into obligations without his deliberate consent.

It would be both politic and gracious if churches could encourage experimental, or exploratory, visits from those who are not regular churchgoers; so that such people may be left in no doubt as to the church's respect for their freedom and conscience.

CHAP. PAGE

VII. INDIVIDUALITY AND FRIENDSHIP . . . 39

A discussion of individualism of outlook in modern life. If our personality is not more valuable, we attach a higher value to it.

Friendship, in some form, recognises our individual being and is increasingly necessary to increasing numbers. Thus a friend can give to our lonely individuality a higher value, and even a higher social value, but is thereby obliged to be natural and sincere.

VIII. FRIENDSHIP AND PERSONALITY . . . 43

Continuation of discussion of our need of friendship, with illustration of the ways in which our self-consciousness is developed.

It might be supposed that the growth of individualism of outlook would foster church attendance, since organised religion has usually drawn those who were conscious of a valued personal life; but this will only follow if church attendance is still found to concede the value of the personal life. It must not disable the private person's conscience, or discountenance any honest scruple. Friendship does not ask us to cease to be ourselves.

IX. TRUTH IN FRIENDSHIP 47

If the church is to be friendly to us, it must deal truly with us, both in respect of candour and proportion. Tact is as needful as honesty. The doctrine of human depravity is open to attack in both regards—if it were true, it would seldom be timely; if it were half true, it would seldom be expedient. It is psychologically more constructive to emphasise the good in humanity than its evil. Whatever view the church takes of Man is likely to fulfil itself in the event.

Illustration from the play, *Dr. Knock*.

X. VALUE AND SCARCITY 51

In the economic world, a restriction of output may result in a rise of price, for buyers compete for what is rare. But the world generally might be the poorer for such restriction.

CHAP. PAGE

Similarly, a church which limited its services to particular sorts of people might be the more highly regarded, but would it render more service to mankind? Exclusiveness, on principle, may heighten price but diminish service. A contingent acceptance may act exclusively in practice. After all, any honest scruple, whether objectively reasonable or not, is a part of a man's total present personality—a part of the offering he will wish to make to God.

XI. THE DOORKEEPER'S FUNCTION 56

In thus asking that the doorkeeper of the church shall exercise a friendly inclusiveness, no objection is made to the segregation of particular groups. All have not the same immediate needs, either theologically or liturgically.

Such groups, however, should not be competitive, but based rather on expediency than on claims to absolute superiority. It is not friendly in a church to demand a fateful and definitive choice on points of doctrine on which responsible thinkers still differ.

By being tolerant of variation the church may enrich her own resources; but such toleration should be a matter of principle, not merely a working compromise. Love, rather than knowledge, or agreement, is the supreme Christian virtue.

XII. ARE OPEN DOORS DANGEROUS? 60

There would be no danger to the health of the church in the adoption of a non-credal basis of membership; for churches which already have such a basis are as free as any from those who come from irrelevant, or dishonourable, motives.

There is more than compensation for any risk in the truer emphasis on the affections and loyalties of men, rather than upon their beliefs and opinions. Experience ranks higher than the formulation of experience; agreement comes not from pressure but from the mutual approach of all unconstrained seekers. Divergence is not viewed as schism. Agreement does not involve the victory of this and the defeat of that; since all alike are more concerned to learn than to score points.

But true freedom is secured by conceding it to others, not simply by grasping at it for ourselves. It is a condition of the adventurous and experimental view of life, in which no one is likely to be utterly wrong unless it be someone who thinks that he is absolutely right.

CHAP. PAGE

XIII. THE FRIENDLY CHURCH 66

Such a basis of union would seem to be required if mankind is to be led into complete spiritual fellowship. And it has been tried already, though not generally understood, or in the most favourable conditions.

Coming, for the first time, to a church that had fully embraced the *friendly* principle, a visitor would note the absence of some features that have long been familiar, in particular the assumption that there is one special group of beliefs, clearly revealed and unquestionable, the acceptance of which gives access to everlasting life.

Then he would miss, with relief, the air of trepidation, strain and effort, that has so long been regarded as inseparable from piety. Then he would notice that, just as he was, doctrinally and morally, he had a place within the church. He would not be asked to standardise himself, or to pretend to anything that was not his own. He would not feel that he was debarred from anything, or committed to anything without his concurrence. He would not be asked to sacrifice knowledge to faith. "Difficulties" would not disqualify, or divergence alienate.

He would begin to understand the catholicity of the thought, "All things are yours," he would find himself in fellowship with *all* the saints, and with Jesus of the new covenant.

THE FRIENDLY CHURCH

CHAPTER I

THE ALLEGED DECLINE

ONE of the portents of these interesting and puzzling days is the marked change in the church attendance of the population. Even those who have no brief for the churches may well wonder what are the deeper causes of the change, and what are likely to be its consequences. And those who are strongly attached to the church, and deeply interested in its welfare, naturally view the change with concern if not bewilderment.

It is important to note, however, that the apparent decline in attendance is composed of two elements, which require separate consideration; each of these is a fact, but both are not perhaps equally portentous. On the one hand, there is probably a diminution of the number of people who attend church at all; and, on the other, there is a decrease in the frequency with which churchgoers attend public worship. For those who are absent from any one service include some who never attend, and others who may attend at other times. The habit of being present at two or more services, or meetings, on one Sunday has ceased to be a characteristic of the average churchgoer; but the churches still maintain as many services as ever, and have many more engagements during the week than were common, say, thirty years ago.

We must distinguish between the two movements, which

give us, respectively, a group of persons who are not inclined as their fathers were to spend any time in public worship, and another group of persons, who may be entirely sympathetic towards organised religion, but are not disposed to spend as much time at church as their fathers did. These two classes of persons should not be confused. They do not necessarily represent different stages of the same tendency. Life is much fuller now of competing claims on leisure time; attendance once in these times may involve a much larger sacrifice of conflicting interests than two or three attendances would have involved in the 'nineties.

It is salutary to remember that, while the church must endeavour to meet the religious needs of its own time, it need not provide for those of an earlier generation, and that there is no special sanctity in a certain number of services, or in certain hours of meeting. The calendar of our religious functions goes on, almost unchanging, from generation to generation, in spite of alterations in the secular and social life of men, which call for the revision if not the adaptation of our methods. But this calendar is not to be regarded as setting forth the unalterable conditions of useful spiritual work in all times: it was framed to meet the higher expediencies of a past generation—it has no sanction other than that it used to be approved—and it should be reconsidered in the light of the higher expediencies of these days.

And the conclusion of this is that we must not group in one indiscriminate mass these two classes of persons which jointly produce the effect of a large decline in the habit of attendance at church.

But it would be foolish to overlook the possibility of the one class going to swell the other: the Once-a-Sunday person may become a still more occasional attendant; the practice of absence may increase stage by stage. But, on the worst supposition, the occasional worshipper cannot be charged with downright "indifference" as the Compleat

Absentee often is. Let his occasional presence encourage and stimulate all masters of assemblies!

It seems then that we might be mistaken in deducing from our greatly reduced attendances the conclusion that there is a much larger class than formerly entirely outside the church (except perhaps for attendances at weddings and funerals); while it is undoubtedly true that many regular worshippers attend less often than of old.

It becomes evidently dangerous to assume that our reduced congregations owe their depleted condition entirely to a wave of "indifference," an unreligious state of mind in a large section of the community. This seems doubly hazardous when we reflect on the disappearance of aggressive, self-satisfied atheism: the kind of hostility that was the natural reaction of some kinds of temperament to compulsory religion; and again, when we notice how many books and plays treat of the great questions which are central questions for religion. It would be wiser to ask why so many people, who are apparently not indifferent to religion, seem to be indifferent to the churches. In any case it is better to view the reluctance of *those that are without* as due to disaffection for the churches, rather than to hostility, or indifference, to religion.

The answer to the question above may well be fateful in its practical consequences, not perhaps for religion, but for the churches as servants of religion. The issue that the present writer envisages is not whether men shall or shall not be completely secular and unaspiring, but how the churches may become spiritual rallying-points for all humanity, the joy of the whole earth. They include considerable resources, in material, prestige and ability, both enthusiastic and intellectual; and such resources should be of value—of greater value—to the community. The world would be poorer without them; but, with them, it might be much richer than it is.

We may do an injustice to our own times if we overlook the fact that much more pressure was exercised in favour of church attendance, say, forty years ago. When we institute contrasts between these days and the 'nineties, we are trying to compare incomparables. The relative absence of compulsion to-day, which is deplored by some, at least saves the church from the accusation of making people behave hypocritically under duress.

Now, when people wish to stay at home they stay at home, and an indulgent society does not judge them harshly; but now when they go to church, it may be presumed that they go because they wish to go—a presumption that would have been reckless a generation past. If a volunteer is worth ten pressed men, there may be as much true, spontaneous devotion in the depleted churches now as there was in the larger assemblies of the last century. I do not suggest that most of the church attendance of the 'nineties was made protestingly by those who acted under pressure; but it was not in fact free; society did not permit the individual to judge whether it was worth his while to go to church. Until absence is a real option he can hardly consider that question without bias.

The greater liberty of people to-day gives them the opportunity of considering whether or not it is worth their while to go to church, without feeling that the question is prejudged by public opinion. While compulsion was present, the church had no opportunity of showing men what it was worth. Now the opportunity has come. Any support that the church can win now, if it be won without resort to unfair spiritual coercion, or unworthy bribery, will prove its true value to man, as that could never be proved when men's submission could be gained without their inward approval.

CHAPTER II

ARE PEOPLE TOO FREE?

BUT it will be said that so much freedom is a mistake; that men are not yet noble enough to use it well; and that it was better when people were compelled or persuaded to do what was for their good. Church-going is a good habit, it will be said, and children should be trained in it. Society should uphold it, and the church impress on men's minds that it is a sacred obligation.

To this we should be obliged to assent, if the nature of religion was to mould human conduct, enforce outward discipline, and secure uniform practice. We know the tendency of statecraft to view *all religions as equally useful;* and the church itself has sometimes supposed that its chief work was to rule rather than to serve.

But if religion at its best be the willing service of an unrestricted choice, it can be rendered only by those who have learnt, in freedom, what is good in its own right—a much greater achievement than to do what is called good by an extraneous authority. Two splendid possibilities lie before us; either of them would justify all the price that we pay for liberty; and both of them together would greatly surpass anything that could be achieved by the most enlightened and persistent discipline ever exercised. One of these possibilities is that men, after perhaps a period of neglect, will discover that the church is worth while, because of its value for human life, and will return to it, but then no longer under compulsion but by deliberate purpose. And

the second is that the church, learning insight and a sense of values during this period of neglect, may strive to make itself more than ever of service to man, and may attain to worth that it would never have sought after or even dreamt of in the days when compulsion ruled the situation.

Many good people regret the days when parents would boast that, if they did not go to church themselves, they made their children go to Sunday School: when all wishes in the matter were subordinated to a sense of duty: when disinclination was often camouflaged as submission to a higher obligation. But the old days of unreflecting acceptance of unquestioned "duties" have gone; people ask why they should go to church, why they should refrain from games on Sunday, why the clergy should decide for them what is right or wrong; they wonder if unreflecting obedience is the foundation of virtue, for may it not make them submit to false gods as readily as to the true?

Of course, an autocratic church may rule irresponsible people better than they can rule themselves—better, that is, from a public standpoint. But such rule inevitably keeps them at the irresponsible stage: obedience alone will not make them fit to rule themselves. Hence it follows that a church must decide whether it shall aim at being the ruler of servants or the friend of friends. The Christian ideal, in this regard, seems to be sufficiently expressed in the words, "no longer do I call you bondservants, for the bondservant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends." By such an attitude only can the church further the growing responsibility of its members to truth and its supreme Lord.

The wise parent tries to employ the child's time of tutelage in such a way that at length the child shall be able to direct himself; and the wise church will encourage its members to regard themselves as sons of God, and to regard religion as their *reasonable service*, not as unreflecting obedience.

If numbers and discipline were the only tests of a church's success, it might safely adopt the outlook and behaviour of a *Mr. Barrett of Wimpole Street;* for the occasional loss of a rebel would not outweigh the submission of the rest. Most people would rather submit than rebel, if the authority be sufficiently imposing.

But the autocratic church loses a slave in every one who rebels, and loses a son in every slave that submits! However willing the servitude may be, what can it profit such a church to have so many servants at the sacrifice of so many children?

The compulsion, which was more powerful in the last century, took various forms, and was exercised in various degrees. It included the mere fiat of social custom. It was the right and proper thing to go to church. It included some proportion of social tyranny, exerted through the value of the squire's custom to the tradesman, and the superior prestige of *church* over *chapel* for the social climber. But it also included darker things than these, of which the threat, or fear, of God's displeasure, or of eternal punishment, gave an immeasurable ascendancy to any authority which could gain recognition. Can we even wish that these nightmares should come back? But, without them, how can men ever again be induced to submit so willingly?

We must acknowledge that unreasoning service is not entirely valueless. It is probably better, from a public point of view, that people should feel the strong hand of authority upon them, and not indulge too freely subjective dreams of good. Probably the meaningless repetition of prayer formulas gives moral strength to those who use them—at least so our Suggestion-psychology would lead us to expect. And the greater number of people may prefer to be told what they ought to do, rather than be thrown back on their own discretion.

But the bare, unreasoned *duty*, unrelated to a practical end, cannot be expected to remain as an effective moral principle through periods of reconstructive thought. There is a story of a little Chinese girl who, impelled by scepticism, furtively kicked the household idol, and then, as no thunder clap supervened, proceeded to steal its rice. Duties that are imposed under the categorical imperative alone, or by unreal sanctions, are always in danger of being abandoned in times of experimentation; and the wheat is as likely to be uprooted as the tares.

Church attendance has been discontinued by many in this way. It used to be urged as an unreasoned duty, a sheer, unrelated obligation; or was sometimes guaranteed by sanctions, temporal or eternal, that can no longer be maintained as of old. The boy who played truant from Sunday School did not fall into the river; and, now that he has grown up, he does not expect to go to hell because he stays away from church. We need not stop to apportion blame as between him and the writer of the tract which proved too much. Our business is to make it worth his while to come to church for better reasons: not to attract him at any cost, but to make it worth his while, whether he comes or not. We must deserve the success that we cannot command.

It might be possible to organise such pressure as would create a new habit of regular church-going in the majority of people. A deliberate and well-considered plan, in which all the churches joined, might inflict something like moral outlawry on absentees. Our actions are only partially rational at the most; and the steady pressure of a unanimous purpose, exercised through modern publicity methods, might establish the feeling of an imperative obligation, more effectual than any reasoned aim. But we may well doubt whether moral suasion of this overbearing sort is less dishonouring to the church than recourse to civil coercion or spiritual tyranny (such as the threat of withholding absolu-

tion, or the promise of indulgence). Is not any attempt by the church to abrogate the individual's claim to be master of his own life an attempt to render to God the things that are Cæsar's ?

In our personal relations, we recognise gladly that some people are attractive; and we may feel a disinterested admiration for their attractiveness, as for something fair and gracious. But we do not greatly respect self-conscious efforts to attract. We are repelled by the attempt to bring us under personal influence, partly because we wish to preserve our freedom, and partly because we feel that attractions should not be exploited for ulterior ends.

The church should not indulge the hope of first attracting men and then doing them good. It is laudable to wish that men may be attracted; it is not laudable to attempt to seduce them from their own ways by bribes. If a man says, I do not come to church because I want to be happy; and we know that his scale of happiness is too short and simple; our proper answer is, There are more kinds of happiness than you recognise at present! but not, We are trying to make our services bright and attractive; for by so saying we raise hopes in him that we cannot fulfil, and we throw dust in his eyes as to the real function of the church, which is, of course, to make people happy (among other things), but not to make them happy as *a good show* and an oyster supper may.

Religion is not a dismal matter, except when it becomes unnaturally sombre, or its friends try to present it as " Always merry and bright." Religion should be attractive, but there may be something meretricious about its laboured efforts to attract, if religion can make such efforts.

Church attendance, I repeat, should be attractive. I would not write a word that seems to deprecate the provision of good music, interesting discourses, or beautiful

buildings, for the purposes of worship. Nothing less than the best of every sort should seem good enough; though, as in all things, we must sometimes be content with something less. Worship should not be a weariness either to the flesh or to the spirit.

It is fully time that religion arose from the dust of her long subjection to gloom and morbid fear, and put on the beautiful garments of true faith and joy; but her beauty should be intrinsic, and her attractions a revelation of her real character, not a disguise. It is futile as well as insincere to make services, "brief, bright and brotherly" if we still think of religion as inherently suspicious of the joy of life and condemnatory of the natural impulses.

Religion is not inherently suspicious and condemnatory; but she has so long seemed so, and has for so long been accepted in this character by her friends, that her real nature is forgotten and the very word "religious" has a kill-joy and misanthropic sound. There is widespread revolt against religion-as-thus-misrepresented, not because men have become irreligious, but because they do not know of religion in any more acceptable presentation, and when they see it they do not think of it as religion. Before there can be a reconciliation of men to the church, they must be persuaded that the church presents a faith, or indicates a way of life, that they can accept without the denial of their own sense of right and wrong. This is why I say that what is at stake is not so much the future of religion, which is secure in the unchanging needs and dispositions of mankind, but the future of the churches as modes or accessories of the religious life.

We cannot bribe men into the acceptance of that which they inwardly suspect; and the attempt to coerce them would only deepen and justify their suspicion.

CHAPTER III

INDIFFERENCE, OR DISAFFECTION?

We may assume that the chief reason why people stay away from church is that they do not want to go there. This may not be attributable to indifference, but it must be due to disaffection. But when we try to discover the reason for such disaffection, we are met by the difficulty that the disaffected do not state the nature of their dislike; nor, when they express criticism of the churches, is their objection important enough, or sufficiently unanimous, to be taken as representative. The witnesses do not agree among themselves, and their allegations often relate to local or sectarian peculiarities.

Many familiar criticisms would balance out if they were allowed to do so; as, for instance, where one man stays away from church because the vicar is ritualistic; and in the next parish another man remains at home because his vicar is an evangelical. It might be thought that both could easily meet their objections by a short journey every Sunday. But, no! Both absent themselves from church and cherish a grievance.

Some are alienated by modernism, others by fundamentalism; the higher criticism drives some worshippers away; plenary inspiration, others. Or, at least, so we are asked to believe; for the wide variations in religious forms and teaching appear to have created the impression that everyone's idiosyncrasies must be conciliated at any cost.

No imaginable ordering of Public Worship would fore-

stall every criticism of this sort, however honestly it be felt. We are driven to the supposition that the objections disguise the real cause of alienation, and that the criticisms are in fact what psychology calls *defence reactions*—ostensible substitutes for deeper, but unrealised, objections. It is common enough for us to say to ourselves that we dislike the manners, or the clothes, of So-and-so, when a deeper insight into our thoughts would show that it is his wealth, or success, or popularity that we find distasteful. We would rather think of ourselves as too fastidious than as envious.

Furthermore, we often rationalise our states of feeling, viewing them as reasonable judgments, when in fact they indicate causes that lie deeper than argument. We do this most commonly where personal love, or hate, threatens to intrude on relationships that we wish to keep dispassionate; in such conditions, we explain our admiration to ourselves as cool and detached approval, and our dislike as impartial criticism.

So it may be, I think, with many who remain detached from the life of the churches on ostensible grounds which seem insufficient. If the actual reason for alienation were in fact rational, nothing would be gained by disguising its character: we rationalise our loves and hates, but there is no point in rationalising our reasons!

Similarly, if anyone constantly asserts his indifference to this or that person, cause, or institution, we may take leave to think that perhaps he protests too much to be as indifferent as he claims to be.

All this brings to view the possibility that the disaffection of the multitude for organised religion is not due to hostility towards religion, but to a frustrated interest in the things for which religion stands. The person who says that he cannot do with religion may be embittered because he cannot do without it. Organised worship does not seem

to promise him satisfaction, and he would indignantly deny that there was any love lost between the churches and himself; but he does not simply turn his back and forget! His indifference is too studied to be quite dispassionate.

A part of the trouble may be that "religion" is used in so restricted a sense that many people mistakenly think themselves to be naturally irreligious because they miss from their thoughts the conventional signs of conventional devotion. The churches have for long sought to persuade men that they are by nature lost, and at last men have come to believe it, at least to the extent of supposing that they have no vocation for what they consider to be a devout life. The nemesis that waits upon hyperbole is not that people will detect the exaggeration, but that they will accept it as true.

Churches tend to pray for progress while deprecating change; and it may be that the most useful task they could undertake in these days would be to explore new modes of expressing the religious impulse, modes which might prove to be more natural to the ordinary person of our time. Perhaps we attach undue reverence to familiar forms, instead of reviewing them from time to time. We suppose that they are accepted because they are the best, whereas they may seem to be the best only because they are so familiar. I do not undervalue the hallowing effect of time and custom, or wish to alter every accepted usage; but when ninety per cent. of the population is without, it seems more important to reconsider our methods than to persist in them regardless of the needs of the time.

If churches have been too little willing to see the religious problem as from the standpoint of the ordinary person, it may have been from the pardonable—almost admirable—motive of wishing to preserve the sanctity of the church. Naturally we think that the medium of our own religious culture is the best medium for all, and an impulse of com-

mon gratitude rebukes, as a kind of treason, the suggestion that any other form of worship, doctrine, or devotion can be comparable with it. The religious enthusiast, like the young lover, feels that so wonderful an experience as his must be almost unique, and any divergence from it must be a decline. But both are mistaken.

The practical response, then, that we should make to those who say, or at least feel, that they have no use for religion or the churches, is to endeavour to find common ground with them; to convict them, not of paganism, but of faith; and to assure them that the church exists for them as well as for its present members. We might do this without becoming all things to all men in any unapostolic sense. It need entail no paltering compromise, but a new manifestation of the spirit of Jesus, who was able to call men to him the more persuasively because he first came to them.

There is, as we have noticed, much less open criticism of the churches than was common fifty years ago; but there is much more practical alienation from them. This does not necessarily condemn the churches as having failed, but it does challenge them to determine that no undue conservatism of thought or practice shall exclude them from the wider ministry they ought to exercise.

CHAPTER IV

WHY SOME STILL GO TO CHURCH

It is pleasant to turn from varied attacks on the churches to inquire as to the reasons why their members still value them. For there are still those who value them! It is refreshing to recall that there are still people who frequent public worship from choice, and experience satisfaction in so doing—a satisfaction which is not merely a sense of duty accomplished or habit fulfilled.

What do they seek? What do they find?

Individual answers might give the bewildering impression that there are as many different reasons for going to church as for staying away; because the conscious, or avowed, reasons would be coloured by local, historic, or personal particulars, which other worshippers might not share.

If we are to discover any general values in church attendance, it will be well to avoid statements of its value which depend on the acceptance of particular views of the church's function, or of what we may call private theories of the religious life. We are not concerned to know what the good Catholic finds which the good Quaker misses, or *vice versa;* we are concerned to know what they both find alike, despite the utter dissimilarity of their ordinances.

At the same time, we may ask why so many who do not frequent public worship nevertheless value religious ceremonies for the dedication of infant life, and at marriage, and in bereavement. Here, again, we should avoid the acceptance of explanations which are too particular to apply to all cases.

The church may, or may not, be the divinely appointed repository and interpreter of truth, the sole channel of sacramental grace, an ark of refuge for an imperilled race, and so forth; but it is not any one of these things to all who value its ministrations.

By avoiding explanations that presuppose a definite formal view of the church's functions and powers, we do not deny that it has such powers; but we may thus gain a general idea of its value, which many may think inadequate but none will violently repudiate. We shall not attempt to say all that the church may be: we shall attempt to say what it sometimes is to the most varied and divergent types of worshipper.

But it is almost as difficult to say *what it sometimes is* with sufficient generality. On occasions it reconciles us again to life, assuring us that our difficulties are not as exceptional as they seemed, nor as insurmountable; on occasions it gives a form to our mute dissatisfaction with ourselves: on other occasions to our appropriate joy in living. Sometimes it gives us a clue to the meaning of things, and sometimes impels us to strive to give more meaning to our own lives. Now it gives enlightenment, now consolation; but who can say that any one of these functions is the church's salient characteristic? There is not one of these that we can single out as the *differentia* by which the church stands out from among other societies, without doing injustice to other of its equally important properties.

It seems, then, that we cannot arrive at an indisputable statement of the nature of the church's value to men, either by *a priori* deduction or by inference from particular experiences.

There is, however, one invariable characteristic, I believe, which marks the satisfying experience of collective worship, which I can describe only as *friendliness*. I do not mean that it always gives a conscious sense of a human, beloved com-

munity; or that it always makes us aware of a Divine Person; but that it does us a friendly office, it helps us to feel that we are not alone.

This friendliness is not conditioned by the numbers of the worshippers; for it may be felt as deeply " where two or three are gathered together " as in the largest concourse. Objectively stated, it is the Communion of Saints, something reaching back into the past, and out into the present; it is more than the solidarity of contemporary mankind; and this suggests one reason why time-honoured formularies so readily become its vehicle.

Most people value the religious ceremonies that usually accompany bereavement. At such times men feel in varying degrees a personal loss, and a sense of human mortality. It may be questioned whether the forms of the most timely and sympathetic burial office, in themselves, either soften the bitterness of loss or reconcile us to " the Shadow feared of man "; and yet, unless we have an anti-ecclesiastical bias or scruple, we all wish that burial offices should be used at the death of our friends, and at our own decease. May this not be because we feel that the darkest aspect of death is its loneliness, and that the church—little valued perhaps at other times—brings a friendly assurance that we are not alone. Something of the patience of the countless years of man's fight against mortality is in it, and something of the dignity of his unconquerable spirit. But it is essentially *a friendship* rather than counsel, or doctrine, or hope, that thus stands by us when we are most in danger of believing that man loses his ultimate battle.

Far be it from me to suggest that the church is nothing more to us, at such times, than personal friends are, though they are often much. I am thinking rather of a timeless Friend, who brings to our help the experience and the stability of the centuries; who, more than any individual poet can, keeps watch over man's mortality, and after a

million years knows that all is well. If the church does not come in this character, the burial office is nothing but a handful of dust; but, if it does, what can we call it but *friend*, although we would almost rather borrow the Johannine word *paraclete*—if that were permissible—because of its twofold import of helper and representative.

I am not prejudging all those questions which naturally and properly arise as to the objective efficacy of prayer, of the sacraments, and as to the fact-reference of specific beliefs : I am not suggesting that any of these questions are unimportant for the religious life. But my purpose is to ask what most endears the offices of religion to us, at life's memorable hours of sorrow or joy, at the grave, the altar, or the font, and this fact emerges, that—if we put aside all answers which apply only to a limited number of instances, and survey the widest variety of facts—it is its friendliness which most endears religion, or the church, or that is most regretted when it fails to appear.

The sense that religion brings to us a larger fellowship, with its comforting assurance that we are not in fact alone or helpless, is an indispensable part of the ministry which can make hope, happiness, or grief, sacramental. We cannot but feel rebuffed and chilled, if at such hours religious offices leave us without some consciousness of a friendship with us that is more timeless and universal than the fellowship of the known and visible community; because without a sense of the encompassing love of humanity it is difficult for us to feel the love of God. We wish to feel that the church accepts us and understands us, in our joy or sorrow. The God whom we seek is a friendly presence, and His church must be of like spirit and character.

CHAPTER V

WHY CEREMONIES ARE VALUED

THE argument does not involve a morbid view either of religion or of the church. It is not the chief, or characteristic, function of either this or that to " teach the rustic moralist to die," and special reference is made to funeral rites only because these are the most generally acceptable form of the church's ministrations.

There is no suggestion here that it is the chief business of religion to ensure that we shall pass out of life under good auspices, or any hint that this life can justly be regarded as simply probationary or preparatory. If faith does not give poise and tranquillity here, we may well doubt its promises of another life. Religion is not a *deferred annuity*, and the church is not a composite of the activities of Noah and Charon.

It does not become us to defend, or glory in, the superstition that may impel some to resort to religion in their hours of darkness who give little thought to it at other times. The whole intention is to elicit the nature of that quality in the offices of religion which gives them value to the greatest possible number of people. And this, I believe, is that they are felt to be *friendly :* they have the power to reassure of the guide's voice through the mist, or the mother's touch in the darkness. Men feel that they are known, accepted despite their weakness, understood; and they are comforted, not simply consoled but *comforted*—fortified by union.

It is easy to fall into the intellectualist fallacy when we are considering the value of rites, forgetting that the effect is to

be judged at the recipient's end, not at the sender's. It is erroneous to assume that the words of an office necessarily indicate the kind of help the office gives. To acknowledge so much is not to imply that the office is a meaningless incantation, from the recipient's point of view, but that he takes it as a gesture and not simply as a form of words. Who would ever write a letter of condolence, or of congratulation, if he thought that his words would be taken as fully presenting the meaning of the communication? We do not condone laxity in verbal expression, or plead for the retention of outworn forms; but it would be uncharitable to suppose that people who still use them take them at their face value. The happy parent does not think of baptism as a Noah's ark, or a passage of the Red Sea; but nevertheless welcomes the feeling that the church accepts and supports his ineffable hopes and desires. He values the ceremony, not for what its words signify but for what words cannot express.

The same holds good of public worship. Those who use it most, and especially those who conduct it, know how inadequate are any verbal forms to signify the nature of even a tenuous faith, or a halting apprehension. However carefully forms may be devised, they can still be little more than projections of the inward experience—symbols which disregard one dimension. Thus it comes about that a form can easily be deduced from an experience, but the reality of spiritual things cannot be built up from the forms in which others have tried to express them.

Again, we do not imply that forms do not matter, or palliate carelessness or disingenuousness in their use; but with the utmost candour and the most earnest thought, forms cannot express the inward experience itself. What then do they betoken? Surely, that the worshipper is accepted, and understood; that his need, whatever its precise character, does not leave him outside the mercies of God or the charity of men; that his thanksgiving, however inarticulate, his vague

doubts or nebulous hopes, bring him more fully into the communion of saints who themselves suffered from like infirmity. What does religious association ever yield more wonderful and heartening than the feeling, the conviction, that we are accepted, and that neither our common human traits nor our individual experiences can separate us either from the love of God or from human fellowship ?

Let the church but give us this, and we shall not need its mantic powers or its mediation. If it give us less, its most stupendous claims will fail to convince.

Let the church give us this, and then it may proceed to speak with the tongue of men and of angels, manifest all knowledge, and all faith; and each new gift of the Spirit will excite in us fresh wonder and gratitude. But, if this be lacking, the utmost documentation will fail to reinforce its message, and the most clamorous popular approval will fail to overcome our doubts.

That which the conscience of men everywhere assents to be true of the individual is true also of the group. If love is the supreme virtue in a person, implying the hope of all other virtues, and irreplaceable by any other, its collective equivalent must appear in any society which is to make good a claim to represent God to man, or man to God. And the collective equivalent of individual love is friendship, an attitude and practice of trust and solicitude. A *friendly* church is the only adequate organisation of persons in whom is found that love which is the fulfilling of the law and its transmutation into free service.

I am anxious not to attribute to the ideal church any quasi-personal attributes which would be too fanciful, or to fall into the sentimentalism of speaking of it as *loving*, since love connotes feeling-states which can scarcely be experienced in a group as such, for a society can have no " common sensorium "; but the word " friendly " is not too fanciful to describe the attitude of a group towards man and men,

since an unfriendly group-attitude is so common, unhappily, and so easily to be recognised where it is present; nor would the use of the word as a predicate be so suggestive of an effusive manner as a similar use of "loving" would be.

But, let it most emphatically be stated, by *friendly* I do not mean of an officious and forward bearing towards men. The truly friendly church will not misrepresent itself by truckling to human weakness with the wiles of the flatterer; it will not try to overbear men's hesitancies by gushing protestations of regard; it will not assume a stagy attitude of welcome, a practised smile, a declamatory appeal. It will show its friendship first by reverencing men's reserves as much as their avowals, and by seeking candour within rather than a showy persuasiveness.

Such a church will be concerned not to overstate its prerogatives, or to usurp the right of private judgment. It will aim at having the *mind of Christ* rather than any formal authoritative status. Its greatest pride will be to receive and to serve the children of men; neither to repel them with onerous conditions, nor to lower in their favour its own great rule, that love must be supreme. It will not feel any pride in exclusiveness, social, spiritual, or ethical; and its only boast will be that none who come unto it will it in any wise cast out.

And this church, let it be added, is not a figment of the imagination, for it is sketched from the life. Let him that readeth understand!

CHAPTER VI

ON WELCOMING STRANGERS

In Chapter III, something was said about typical grievances against the church, with the remark that some of them are too local or sectarian in their impact to be taken as representative of the feeling of any large group of persons. With such local criticisms we may class the time-honoured accusation, "I attended that church for three months without anybody speaking to me."

I have no intention of espousing the cause either of the accuser or the accused, in this charge of shyness levelled against unnamed fellow-worshippers. It is no part of our present concern to discuss the unwritten law by which it seems any person who enters a place of worship has an implicit right to a handshake and a few well-chosen words of welcome. The church is the only place where the existence of such a right has ever been suspected; and it is always possible that people may wish to enter and leave a place of worship without being involved in conversation with some unknown human associate.

This somewhat frivolous criticism is mentioned here only that I may repeat that it is NOT in such superficial matters that the church is to show itself friendly. I do not think that it is to be wished that entrance to a church should obliterate all those habitual reticences that we observe elsewhere towards those whom we do not know. If we do not speak to any stranger, it will always be found that the stranger has shown no apparent desire to be addressed. There are persons in

attendance at every church who are fully willing to talk to any visitor who seems to be in the least degree approachable; and when such contacts do not take place, the probability is that the visitor gave the impression of not desiring them.

It is quite possible that some people, whose minds dwell on the surface of things, may take some isolated expression about the friendly church to be meant as a general plea for a new campaign of fussy solicitude to strangers, as though one could suppose for a moment that the disaffection of the people could be cured by attention to the technique of sidesmanship, or a bout of community handshaking!

Most church members are already sufficiently pleased at the prospect of gaining new adherents to make the way to acceptance easy for any new-comer. We do not need more of the indiscriminate urbanity of the shop-walker, to make men feel that the church is their friend. Such an attitude belongs rather to an anxious competitor among rivals, and is found most conspicuously in churches where the pressure of rivalry is felt most vividly. The effusive handshake and the breezy word of welcome mark the church where the stress of competition is most oppressive; in the mental background there is another church which may capture the wanderer if we do not.

It is possible, of course, to welcome the stranger without the intention of waylaying him; and much quiet kindliness is practised by those who wish to assure visitors that they are gladly received. It may be practised without loss of dignity and without intrusiveness; but it is not by the presence or absence of such offices that the church in any large degree proves, or disproves, itself to be the friend of man. Such proof or disproof comes from different causes, and is manifested in subtler ways.

Indeed, I think we may say that the truly friendly church would be most reluctant even to seem to lay snares for the capture of the occasional worshipper; it would not forget

that he is entitled to reserve his self-committal until he is fully persuaded; and that some people prefer not to be engaged in chit-chat immediately after acts of self-scrutiny and Divine worship.

If the churches are to win, or to recover, the affection and confidence of men, they must studiously avoid the suspicion of spreading toils and snares for the casual visitor. The *rapprochement* is likely at the best to be slow: we must be prepared for many tentative approaches and experimental visits before a new habit can be set up. Nothing could be more discouraging to the experimental visitor than to gain the impression that the church regards him as the spider in the nursery rhyme regarded the fly, or has a trap ready for him when persuasiveness shall have overcome his suspicion. The idea of being swept into a movement, only half-consenting, is repellent to the average man, whose reluctance to be caught off his guard is natural and honourable. If the church wants conscripts, he will resist to the last; and if he thinks it is attempting to win an unconsidered allegiance by blandishments, he will turn away with abhorrence. If the church does not look for his reasonable service, he will not allow himself to be involved in unreasoning servitude.

Some churches might learn both tact and expediency from those enlightened business concerns which encourage the examination of their commodities "without obligation to purchase"; and we, who would strongly resent the dishonest attempt of a tradesman to saddle us with a contract against our will, should not be surprised if other practical and fair-minded people dislike the thought of being inveigled into religious obligations without their free consent.

"Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" has a legitimate application to the task of evangelising the people, but it scarcely justifies the procedure of a church that stretches out the right hand in a welcoming gesture and conceals handcuffs in the other.

Some progress might be made in the conciliation of the disaffected if the churches could in some way make it clear that their primary intention is not to gain nominal adherents at any cost but to merit the confidence and the attention of men. If we could but induce them to worship with us as and when they will, until they know us better, and refrain from trying to haunt them with the ghosts of imaginary duties, the time would surely come when they would offer freely what we can never successfully extort.

There is, of course, no duty which lays on a man the obligation of attending services which do not meet his needs; and until he is persuaded in his own mind that we can help him, there is something presumptuous about the attempt to overbear his hesitation.

It is doubtful whether any detail of the parables of Jesus has been dislocated and misapplied more unfortunately than the words, "Compel them to come in!" This has been taken as in commendation of undue influence in filling the church, although in the parable of the Great Supper the compulsion was meant to overcome the natural diffidence of the poor, halt and blind, not to coerce the reluctant. The unwilling, in the parable, were not compelled to come in, they were left to their chosen destiny. No objection could be made to a church which strongly urged to come in, men who refrained only because they felt themselves to be unworthy, or doubted their welcome. And this, as we shall see later, well becomes the character of a truly friendly church.

CHAPTER VII

INDIVIDUALITY AND FRIENDSHIP

THE spread of education and the concurrent lengthening of the period of economic infancy have resulted in an increase of self-consciousness among the people. The average member of the community has now a stronger feeling of distinctive individuality, although objectively he may resemble others as much as his fathers resembled their contemporaries. Mass education may not easily arouse a marked individuality of experience; but the postponement of subjection to business or industrial discipline undoubtedly permits of a growth of the individuality feeling.

In the old days the average child passed at the age of puberty directly from one subject-condition to another, and never ceased to be a dependent member of society. But now he is permitted to spend some of the wonder years of adolescence in an intermediate condition, in which he may learn to be grown up before he feels the heavy responsibilities of the adult. With increased mental and physical powers he is granted leisure during which he can think of himself, and of the world, more directly and deliberately.

We may very strongly doubt whether he is any more free from the power of herd suggestion, or whether we should wish him to be so; but he is probably much more concerned about his selfhood, and more wishful to choose his own lot, even though the wish is often expressed rather by refusals than acquiescences; and, further, he shows his

individuality usually by obedience to the fashions of his class or calling. This is not a paradox, because the pressure of fashion is interpreted by the man as the unconstrained expression of his personality.

Although a true individuality is as rare as ever, individualism of outlook and sentiment is much more widespread. Without necessarily being more capable than our fathers of exercising private judgment intelligently, we feel more than they did that it is important that we should exercise it.

But we need not be discouraged because wisdom comes more slowly than the need or the desire for it. Without some probation in which the right of private judgment is more sought for than the power, it is unlikely that the power will ever arrive for people in general.

Other things being equal, an educated person will exact more from his friends than an uneducated. He will bring to the relationship a more definite, and a fuller, sense of the service that friendship can yield to him, not simply as a being but as a self-conscious person. Aware of the complexity of his developed powers, and valuing them proportionately, he will expect his friend to value him for what he is as a differentiated person, and not merely as an undistinguished member of the human race.

Everyone must have experienced a shock, at some time or other, when an intimate friend or close relative has momentarily forgotten who he was, treating him *as though he were someone else*. One of the tacit, but unvarying, conditions of friendship is that within its boundaries we shall not lose our identities, or be treated as though our personalities were of no account. If it would be embarrassing to be addressed by a stranger as though we were intimate, or, as we say, *too familiarly*, it is still more embarrassing, or painful, to be addressed by an intimate as though we were strange; for we expect a friend at least to regard us always in our unique selfhood.

There cannot be an entirely selfless attitude in any friendship worthy of the name; for although one of the partners to the alliance may be conscious of a greater benefit, he cannot wish that his identity should be forgotten. For it would seem that one of the greatest advantages of any close human partnership is that it assures each member that the value that he has for himself is shared by another, and that this fact gives an objective validity to that reverence for one's personal identity which otherwise would be entirely subjective.

We can never admit even the closest intimate into the recesses of our inalienably personal experience; but the true friend respects that experience although he cannot share it: having him, we possess ourselves in a more incontestable, and less subjective, way.

It would be foolish to suggest that the capacity, or need, for friendship has developed with the spread of education and the extension of economic infancy; for men and women have always manifested both the capacity and the need. But I think it is certain that there has been a growth and wider diffusion of a conscious demand to be understood and valued; for the more people are possessors of a valuable inner life, the more there will be who see friendship, as I have described it, as justifying and confirming their self-valuation.

By self-valuation I do not mean anything egotistical, or invidious. I am not thinking of the attitude of a person who tries to prove himself to be better or cleverer than others; but of the perfectly modest attitude of the person who feels that his experience is incommunicable, and yet is grateful when others can show that they acknowledge its existence in him. This, surely, becomes more common as education and increased leisure enrich the inner life of a larger number of people. More and more individual people, though with little more individuality, perhaps, than their fathers exhibited, become self-conscious of their personality.

Thus it is that, amid all the selfhood-effacing uniformity

of our convention-ridden life, in which men, at least, dare not wear unusual garments or do unaccustomed things, we cling through thick and thin to a friend or lover for whom we have personal distinctiveness. We may never earn a paragraph in "Who's Who," or even in the local paper, but if we have made a friend or two we know what it is to be valued personally. It is not vainglory or self-conceit which revolts us at the thought of being nothing but single organisms among the uncounted millions of earth's teeming progeny. May it not be somewhat of God's image and likeness that impels each of us to make the claim, "I am," a manifesto which seemingly no lower being than man has either the power or the wish to make?

Persons of exceptional mystical experience may find attestation of the statement in private ecstasy, but the average person will seldom feel that it is more than a gratuitous philosophical dogma or a hazardous inference, except when he looks into the face of his friend. There he learns that his selfhood is of the very essence of his being.

Sensible people will value such a mirror of the soul too highly to cloud its reflecting surface with the breath of flattery or pretension. They will not attempt to establish their friendships on a permanent basis of artifice; they will not expect invariable approval, or offer insincere praise. Sympathy will not always induce agreement; and it will never extort its profession. But the true friend will recognise the inescapable loneliness of the individual life, and will in some miraculous fashion transmute it for us into dignity, and responsibility, and self-reverence.

CHAPTER VIII

FRIENDSHIP AND PERSONALITY

To put the matter in a more concrete way, I value my friend, in part, because he does not fail, either in practice or in thought, to acknowledge my distinctive personality. I may be an entirely commonplace person, who would appear from a distance to be simply one of the mass products of an age of standardisation. I may have no claim to any kind of eminence, or distinctive regard, or any fleeting wish to put forward such a claim, even in my secret thoughts.

But as a self-conscious human being I feel that my unimportant personal experience, which is in no way exceptional, has a unique value for me because it is mine: a certain preciousness attaches to the remembrance of my first tailor-made suit, and a hundred trivial events, which are not memorable events but are yet remembered because they are mine. And one reason why I dislike the thought that I shall some day die is that I do not want this concatenated series of events to come to an end and go into oblivion. It seems a pity that the nice little story should some day be known to no one, and fade into a mere conjecture, if so much.

Part of what I mean when I say, "I am," is that I know, and no one else knows, how a little boy of five once felt as he looked out on Plymouth Sound from the Hoe. Many a little boy, of our island race or of other stock, has been rapt with wonder at such a place and time; but that particular experience is unique and incommunicable, because no one would be in the least degree impressed if I said, I tell you, it happened to *me!*

The same is true of the personal experiences contributed by education. Many of us can look back on periods in our lives when for a time we lived in a spiritual environment created by some writer, composer, or painter; and can readily recall how some poem, symphony, or picture has been invested with a timeless and inexpressible glory; and these things are wonderful to us because we were the recipients of their revelation. They may not be so wonderful to others, but then others do not know what they were to us!

It is of such concatenated memories that the inner life of a civilised human being is decorated and furnished; they give one's unimportant personal annals a value for oneself; they give self-regard a content of meaning. I am not, of course, praising an introverted personality, or defending a Narcissus-like habit of mind; self-regarding thoughts may, and should, have but a small part of our thinking time; but it is by such memories that the personal life is integrated, and its distinct value-for-self created. And it is with such phenomena in view that I suggest that there is in these days a much wider diffusion of self-consciousness.

When we try to correlate this wider diffusion of self-consciousness with the problem of reduced church attendance, we are met with the impression that it can tell us nothing, because persons of individuality have largely formed the class from which church-goers have been drawn in the past. The churches have always made their strongest and most effective appeal to persons of a valued inner experience; so that we might expect a wider extension of this to provide a larger number of those who are antecedently fitted to become church-goers. Such an extension should result in an increased habit of church attendance; and the nonconforming bodies might be expected to have made large gains, since they are naturally attractive to people of independent thought.

But it is important to remember that until the beginning of the present century, religious questions were still regarded

as beyond the judgment of the layman. Individual opinion might be indulged elsewhere, but this region was reserved. There have always been some who could not easily accept their doctrines ready formulated; but, until the present generation, the prevailing attitude and practice of the laity in doctrinal questions was to believe the Bible because the clergyman told them to, and to believe the clergyman because the Bible told them to, or because they thought it did. Now they do not read the Bible, and they do not hear the clergyman.

On the other side, there are Roman Catholics and Fundamentalists, unlike in many respects but alike in discouraging private judgment, and in believing in an objective orthodox body of beliefs, guaranteed by God, and endorsed by the true church always and everywhere. The spokesmen of both alike declare that the province of the individual judgment is limited to the acceptance in entirety of a system of belief that owes its warrant to an authority that is altogether external to the believer. Thus we have two irreconcilable teachings, each of which disables the inquirer from examining them except in ways which presuppose acceptance. Judging by the numbers of their respective adherents, there are still many who are content to acquire convictions without first being convinced.

It has been necessary to make reference to these two diverse groups, because of their numerical importance; but their members obviously are not to be reckoned among those who are disaffected and detached from organised religious life. They probably feel that their church is friendly towards them because they have accustomed themselves to thinking of their duty to God as involving utter subjection to it. We may reasonably suppose that, when they find rest and comfort in such subjection, they have achieved a dissociation whereby religion and all that pertains to it, in thought and practice, are effectually cut off from the play of the critical judgment.

Some psychic disintegration must be accomplished before superb faith in either church or Bible can be trusted to maintain itself above the tide line of history and criticism.

Is there no satisfying religious society for those who, without intellectual arrogance, yet feel that they must *prove all things* before they can *hold fast that which is good?* Of course there is, and many there are who rejoice in it. But there is one indispensable prerequisite of such satisfaction, the church's warrant to those who wish to love the Lord with all their mind, as well as with all their strength. The church must show itself to be a friend in the fullest sense, indicated earlier in this chapter, by valuing the personal being of everyone, by recognising the distinctive personality of each, and honouring the value that he has for himself. It must not deride, or discountenance, the scruples which cause many people to withhold assent from credal formulas; it must not suggest that intellectual disagreement is a form of moral recalcitrancy; it must not belittle the individual judgment, however uninstructed, as a thing of no account; because any one of these acts would be a denial of friendship, since a friend does not forget or disparage his friend's selfhood. It will show reverence for each, whether it accounts him right or wrong, good or bad, wise or foolish.

CHAPTER IX

TRUTH IN FRIENDSHIP

FRIENDSHIP rests on truth, and truth has two aspects, candour and proportion. Candour alone is not enough, because the relationship requires a veracity that is timely and considerate, not a mere correspondence with facts. A person who is habitually, or characteristically, insincere will fail to maintain friendship, but not more certainly than the person who with self-satisfied rectitude calls himself a *candid friend.* He who cannot understate at will is almost sure to exaggerate oftener than he knows. A softening of the outline of facts is sometimes as necessary to truth as to charity. For proportion is as much a part of truth as accuracy.

The church which would be the friend of man must remember that its message should manifest equity as well as law, kindliness as well as accuracy. It must manifest truth in love, as St. Paul recommended; for to make the attempt without love is ultimately failure to manifest truth at all.

What is the church's speciality? In what region is it an expert and authoritative teacher—evil or good? The impression has long been abroad that it exists because of the badness of the world, to be for ever rebuking sin. And the impression is supported by much unconsidered and disproportionate condemnation.

A few morbid people may go to church prepared to welcome diatribes against others, or invective against the

vanities of other social classes; but a much larger number, surely, would welcome rather more about what is good, and rather less about what is not. I do not suggest that preaching should never be directed to the eradication of specific evils; but a ministry of habitual wrath and warning owes more of its inspiration to John the Baptist than to his greater kinsman; while the general conversion of the hearts of men to higher loyalties and nobler purpose must be sought rather by the praise of goodness than by the denunciation of evil.

People, ordinary people, who are neither self-satisfied nor morbidly conscious of inward corruption, know quite as much as they either wish or need to know about the darker side of moral experience, and they may be excused for doubting the value of persistent efforts to convince them that they are worse than even their own humility suggests.

There is little invective in the extant teaching of Jesus, and that little was directed against those who discouraged or oppressed their fellows; whereas his habit was to speak words of hope and faith even to those whom he regarded as faulty or weak. Everywhere he went about lifting up the depressed, manifesting an unconquerable faith in the good in each, and suggesting the progress he desired rather than the possibility of further decline.

In past ages of the church there may have been some excuse for those who preached a message of retribution and denunciation—doubtless God overlooked those times of ignorance; but in these days, when it has become an axiom of elementary psychology that every suggestion accepted by the imagination tends to bring about its own fulfilment, we may surely add that *now He commandeth that they should all everywhere change their minds*. Now we have not even a short-sighted expediency to justify preoccupation with shadows, to the neglect of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Warnings against ill may provoke the very evils they are

intended to avert; while hope " creates from its own wreck the thing it contemplates."

There is a clever and amusing modern play called, in the English translation, *Dr. Knock*,[1] which indicates what might happen if an unprincipled medical man used the acknowledged powers of Suggestion to increase the number of his patients. The doctor enters upon an idle and unlucrative practice, resolved that he will very soon turn it into a more profitable one, and proceeds to persuade a large number of quite healthy people that they are suffering from various inconvenient, or dangerous, maladies. If this were considered as descriptive of medical procedure, it would be an absurd libel on a high-minded profession; but it is neither far-fetched nor libellous as a parable of the church's persistent attempts to make man feel depraved.

People who recite the General Confession, or sing, " I am all unrighteousness," may be quite sincere in what they think they are saying; but we take leave to doubt whether either declaration is objectively true of the most abandoned. It is biassed by the notion that the more undeserving we are in our own sight the more mercifully God will deal with us. The much-misquoted text, " All our righteousness is as filthy rags," was never meant as a general description of the moral condition of the human race; and it is inconceivable that the God whom Jesus called Father could look upon humanity and reflect that there was no health in it.

Even if the church's accustomed diatribes against human nature were justified by the facts, they would not always be timely, and to repeat them mechanically at every diet of worship is to lose all proportion, which, as we have said, is as much a part of truth as accuracy.

Whatever Doctrine of Man were professed by the friendly church, it would be restrained by its friendliness from the frequent publication of its darkest suspicions; but it would

[1] *Knock, ou Le Triomphe de la Médecine*, by Jules Romains.

be swift to seize upon every token of human goodness, and thereby exhibit a better psychology as well as a better Christianity.

Most of us probably value personal friendships so highly that self-interest, as well as regard for our friends, makes us cheerful in their presence. Though we feel that we could safely ask them to share our trials with us, we avoid over-straining their sympathy by the continual recital of trifling complaints; and we might tire of an associate who became parasitically dependent on our courage and hopefulness. The true friend will endeavour to confer as much cheerfulness as he receives.

Churches would do well to remember that men and women are not proof against the discouragement of hearing much about the alleged corruption of human nature and little about its potential goodness. The doctrine of Depravity was always a philosophical hypothesis rather than an inference from the facts; and when people profess it to-day it is either from sheer force of example or under a sort of academic compulsion. But however little true conviction may accompany its recital, it does not fail to be enervating; and if we did not think of it as a slander it would still be an incubus. Even if it were true, it would seldom be timely; if it were supported by evidence, its reiteration would usually be inept.

The church must rid itself of the feeling that evil is a more important fact than good, and that gloomy animadversions on human frailty and vanity are somehow truer than the expression of love, appreciation and confidence towards mankind.

CHAPTER X

VALUE AND SCARCITY

It is well known that a limitation of output sometimes raises the market price of products. It is important to remember that it restricts their total value. An author may elect to publish five hundred copies of a work, at two guineas each, when he might publish two thousand at half a guinea. The comparative rarity of the exclusive edition may establish a high market price for copies, but it will be accompanied by a reduced circulation and influence.

We remember the story of Tarquinius Superbus and the Cumean Sibyl, when she offered the king nine Sibylline Books for three hundred pieces of gold. On his refusal to buy them, she destroyed three of the nine, and then offered the remaining six for the same amount of money. When he once more refused, she burnt three more, and then offered him the last three at the original price. Then Tarquin came to terms, and bought the three at a cost which would earlier have purchased nine. The three remaining books had become rarer during the negotiations, but they had not become more valuable.

But the church must not use the methods which befit the publisher of engravings. It must not cultivate exclusiveness, with a view to appreciation; for its mission is to be of the highest use to the world, not to gain *un succès d'estime*. It is much more important that it should be of value to men than that men should value it.

The claim to be the One Church, to have peculiar powers

and authority, to derive directly from Christ and the Apostles, to mediate forms of Grace unobtainable elsewhere, all add to the estimation in which some hold it. Who would join a church which was simply one among a number, when he might be received into the one and only true church? Suggestible people like the assurance of those who claim to be possessors of a sole agency, to be authentic and correct. They rejoice to hear the tone of authority in which the claim is asserted, for it makes argument needless, and silences that question at the heart.

But, however successful exclusive claims may be in gaining and keeping modern descendants of Tarquin, and people who like to buy limited editions, such claims seriously limit the scope of the service that a church can yield. It limits it by the very exclusions that seem to enhance its valuation. Its claim to be exclusively catholic and authentic marks it as unapostolically restricted and sectarian.

When the disciples rebuked the exorcist who used the name of Jesus, but followed not with them, we need not suppose that they were actuated by the meanest sort of professional jealousy. Their motive may have been a misdirected impulse of loyal championship for their master—a desire to guard his rights against infringement. But Jesus corrected them. It was no part of his plan to gain the adventitious authority of the patentee or the monopolist. If another was able to do good, he was welcome to the use of the wonder-working name.

The good motive at the best extenuates, and does not justify, the use of inappropriate methods. A church that limits the range of its service unduly may be condoned by charity, but cannot be justified on the ground that the motive of such restriction has been loyalty. Loyalty has been accountable for as many crimes as liberty: either must be served with understanding as well as enthusiasm.

He who aspired to "be a doorkeeper in the house of the

Lord" has been too greatly concerned to guard it against intrusion, and too little to express the universality of its welcome. He has been very jealous for the Lord, but too illiberal. The door has been a thing to shut rather than a thing to open: a barrier rather than an entrance.

And if the doorkeeping of our metaphor has been a diffused influence, an unwritten law, rather than a formal regulation, it is none the less effective in discouraging those whom it tends to exclude. Civilised human beings, with the heightened sensitiveness to rebuke which civilisation imparts, seldom need physical restraint to exclude them from societies which do not welcome them. A cool reception discourages further approach.

The temporary use of a sitting and a hymn-book will not convince anyone of the friendly character of a church if he is allowed to gather from ceremony or discourse that he is not properly qualified for admittance on equal terms with others. Let a person receive the faintest hint that he is not *persona grata* with the authorities, and it will need no armed guard to keep him from coming again. And the hint may not spring from any intent to be exclusive or exacting: it may be implicit in the liturgy, or in the preacher's unrealised prejudice; but it will be enough, if it lodge the suggestion that the visitor's presence is not contemplated by the unwritten law.

Nor is the hint any less discouraging because it is contingent, or accompanied by a conditional offer of welcome. We go to church, and learn in the course of the service that we do not conform to certain specified conditions of approval, but we gather that we may become qualified to be received by merely changing our views on this or that matter of belief or theological speculation. "This church," so runs the hint, "is for people who believe this and that, which we take to be essential to a true religious experience and life. You have put yourself in a false position—quite unintentionally, of course. But the matter can be adjusted satis-

factorily. Accept our teaching, and then you may feel that this is as much your church as anyone else's."

This attitude on the part of a church may be conciliatory in its form but is unfriendly in its implications, because it implies that our dissent from its position is due either to our ignorance or our obstinacy. The claim of a church to be altogether right is overbearing, in a world and at a time when good men, of equal learning and devotion, are often widely separated by diversity of belief on questions of philosophy, of criticism, and of church polity. It is a pity that a sense of humour does not restrain people from declaring that *all the others* are out of step.

The suggestion that, if we would, we could readily surrender our own opinions and adopt those of others affronts the moral as well as the intellectual self-respect of any serious person: it disfranchises the intellect and insults the conscience. Whether we, who happen to dissent, are right or wrong (absolutely), at least we regard our honest disagreement as a reputable part of our present character. Others may be nearer to absolute truth than we are—who can say?—but we are as near to it as we can be at present. We cannot believe in the friendship which demands the emasculation of our intelligence and the outlawry of our honest scruples.

Our respect for friendship is revolted by the thought that it can extort such a price, or accept such a sacrifice. If a church does not welcome us except under degrading conditions, it cannot be our friend. If it does not want us with our personality intact, in our integral self-respect, and would rather have us less ourselves that we may be more amenable, our friend it cannot be.

The church is named *Christian* after one who looked upon a youth who rejected his teaching, and nevertheless loved him. We cannot imagine Jesus desiring the sacrifice of that which gives personality a distinctive utility and value. He may have taught that it is better to enter into life maimed or

sightless than not to enter in at all, but he did not urge the hamstringing of the conscience or the blinding of the intellect; which would be a strange fulfilment of the prophecy, " Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened . . . and the lame man leap as an hart."

To sum up, when a person goes to church he wishes to be received as a person, with every idiosyncrasy, with every peculiarity that has at the time a necessary place in his total character. Many of his opinions may be mistaken; but until he can learn better, even these are a part of his value, for at least they suggest vigilance in the keeping of his citadel. His affections may be misdirected, his enthusiasms may be imperfectly related to real values; he may in some respects allow mint, anise and cummin to outweigh graver matters; but, such as he is, he is an honest man; he cannot believe that he would be worth more dishonest: he cannot think that the surgical removal of an error, or the artificial introduction of a " truth," can compensate him, or society, for the loss of his integrity.

And when the church, in effect, says : You may enter in if you will first rid yourself of your individuality, he is likely to be more dismayed at the unfriendliness of the proposal than at its utter inexpediency.

CHAPTER XI

THE DOORKEEPER'S FUNCTION

No objection is here entered against the segregation in particular groups of those who are akin in theological complexion or liturgical preference. It is convenient that those who profit most by a wealth of symbolism should be able to worship with others whose outward religion is similarly conditioned; and that those who call themselves evangelical, because they attach central importance to the reception of a message, should find their fellowship among the like-minded.

But it is injurious to a good religious sentiment in the community generally when such highly differentiated groups claim a higher status than their collaterals. Probably each of the many sects may claim to have made, or to be making, or to have in readiness, some peculiar spiritual contribution to society. Otherwise its appearance would be merely sporadic, and its disappearance imminent. The prism throws many colours, but none of these can without colour-blindness equate itself with the complete spectrum.

Such pretension in church life foments antagonism between sect and sect, until the murmur of jealousy, if not the noise of actual strife, drowns the echo of the voice that said, " One is your master, even Christ. All ye are brethren." The ordinary man has little ability and less inclination to adjudicate upon the various claims to eminence of the " Two and seventy jarring sects "; he has all the cut-throat competition that he needs between Monday and Saturday. He cannot feel that the church is friendly in its disposition towards him when it

makes the preposterous demand that he shall decide on the objective validity of claims that involve some of the most disputatious and speculative opinions of expert disputants, in history, language, or doctrine.

It is not friendly to place the average man, or the well-informed student of Divinity, for that matter, in so false a position as to expect him to commit himself to a definite judgment, for or against, say, the tripersonality of the Godhead, the Virgin Birth, the physical Resurrection, or the double Nature of the Son. These are questions on which anyone may claim the right of a reverent faith to be silent, feeling that in such matters knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. Those who have settled convictions on these points may, at their own discretion and at their own risk, give their opinion one way or the other. But such an expression of opinion should never be extorted from the undecided or the unwilling.

What should we think of a personal associate who, as a condition of friendship, demanded that we should commit ourselves to a definite judgment as between the corpuscular and the undulatory theories of radiation? That would be unreasonable, of course; for personal friendship can tolerate and transcend disagreement on many points more vital than the manner of light's transmission. It is the charm of friendship that it can discover a unity that links wide difference, and can even rejoice in the divergencies that enrich unity.

Similarly, differences of opinion in the church should enrich without imperilling its unity. But are not the churches more tolerant than they were? Perhaps, in practice. But while they still assert that doctrinal consent is vital to the spiritual life, and that a person's religious standing is chiefly determined by his assent to dogma, we may fairly doubt whether their practical charities are accurately described as "tolerant." Perhaps *lax* would be the better word.

We do not regard it as friendly in the church if it says,

"You are doctrinally unsound, and this is injurious to your spiritual life. Theoretically, you should not come into the church at all; but we will be generous, and let you in"—and then proceed to say or sing the Athanasian creed. We do not regard it as friendly; it degrades us, in the literal sense of the word. We are not allowed to sign on as members of the crew, but are permitted to make the voyage as stowaways, with the connivance of the third mate.

It is unfriendly to suggest that divergence on matters of doctrine involves the moral culpability, or the intellectual inferiority, or the spiritual insubordination, of one or other of those who disagree. And the unfriendliness is felt, whether the church excludes us when we wish to enter, or admits us in defiance of its own principles. We do not wish to suffer for our integrity; but we do not wish to profit by the inconsistency of the church.

We ask the church finally and publicly to renounce its subjection to creeds and articles of belief, to relegate these to their proper position among the variables of the religious life; and to let the light and air play about their body of doctrine, since light and air will prove if there be life in it or no. Such a course would, I think, prove to be as expedient for the church as it would be gracious to those who are still, perhaps unwillingly, without. I am writing as from the standpoint of such persons, and indicating what I take to be the ideal that they might fitly entertain for the church of their dreams. Expediency for the church hardly comes within this scheme; but I may point out in passing that the church is committed to an enterprise, not merely a beatific but static condition; and that an enterprise is best furthered by those of common affection and purpose, rather than by those merely of intellectual similarity. This is one of the things to which the wise and understanding are sometimes blinded by the prejudices of their class.

But the mere prospect of such a throwing-open of gates

may fill with dismay those who are accustomed to think of an obligatory creed as the necessary safeguard of the church's sanctity. We refer them simply to the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, because we think that in that chapter we have the simplest and clearest statement of the Christian mode of thought and practice. There, and in the previous passage, we are told that we do well to seek the gifts of the spirit, especially those of greatest worth, but that supreme among the attributes of the religious life is love, which is greater than any of the rest, surpassing them in present value and in durability. These are of contingent, temporary utility; but love never faileth.

Need we hesitate to watch, without fear, the process of the years by which the perishable returns to its dust, when the emergence of the enduring becomes more evident thereby? Need we tremble with the things which can be shaken if the things which cannot be shaken remain? Need we suppose that religion will go to the grave with every outworn theory or doctrine if love remains to us the more incontestably secure for every change that it outlives?

Is it *faith* that so perturbs good people in every time of change, or masked distrust? Even if it is a trembling, apprehensive kind of faith, is it either expedient or kindly to expect others to share it whose faith is of a robuster kind?

But what would be left? What would remain, to keep alive a vital loyalty in the minds of men, to recall them ever and again to that Source of all truth and power by which alone we live, to give continuity to the effort of succeeding generations as they move forward to new tasks, new glimpses of Reality, new trials of their faith and courage?

CHAPTER XII

ARE OPEN DOORS DANGEROUS?

OUR lives are more secure to-day than they would have been in the times when people went about with body-armour and a sword. The territories of the United States and Canada would not be rendered safer if their common frontier were lined with a double row of forts and garrisons.

What danger of intrusion would beset the church which confidently opened its doors, without any inquisition into the fitness of those who wished to enter? There are churches which by covenanted obligation decline to ask what beliefs or opinions candidates for membership may hold; and these churches are as free as any from the presence of members who have desired admission from irrelevant, or dishonourable, motives.

The maintenance of creed subscription as a qualification for membership would not debar a hypocritical person who affected a regard for religion for some ulterior purpose. It would be easier for him to recite the necessary symbol than to sit through a service that did not interest him deeply. The only people whom it could effectually exclude would be honest doubters, well-disposed persons who from an intellectual or moral scruple found it impossible to conform.

It is not simply that creed-imposing churches strain out gnats and swallow camels; for the candidates that it rejects are needed by the church itself to deliver it in every age from the perversion of faith into superstition, and the uncritical reiteration of obsolete formulas. The church should be the

spiritual rallying-place both of the little children in the faith, who can believe much and easily, and of the more exacting and self-responsible who are less easily persuaded. Indeed, under the Spirit of God the church may thank a watchful criticism, within and without, if it does not become the last sanctuary of outworn errors, premature generalisations, immature fantasies.

But, much as the church may lose in active personnel by the imposition of creeds, it may lose still more in character by the displacement of its reverence from the affections, sympathies and desires of men, to their beliefs and opinions. I know that it will be said that creeds were at first imposed to safeguard the intents of the heart from wrong purposes and a misplaced trust; but, adequate as beliefs may be as indicative of affections when they are first drafted, they become increasingly misleading as time passes and intellectual ideas change.

Such displacement of emphasis and regard becomes greater with the increasing difficulty of imposing obsolescent symbols; because good men, from a motive of sheer loyalty to what they imagine to be the substance of the faith, indulge in *tours de force* of advocacy and give the impression that nothing matters so much as to believe the inconceivable.

What would a church be like which—as some churches already do—set aside all attempts to exact or standardise doctrinal assent, and threw on the candidate for membership responsibility for his own beliefs? What would that church be like which acted as well as repeated, Whosoever will, let him come?

I will try to sketch it from life.

In the first place, it is a church where the formulation of experience is relegated to a lower place than experience itself. The members feel that their common ground is the religious life as such, not the accident of their agreement in theoretical divinity. If they happen to achieve agreement on any point of doctrine, they do not suppose that this is of any great

spiritual advantage to them, because they know that a common enterprise may flourish while considerable differences of opinion mark off one from another. They do not suppose that consent brings them much nearer together, or fear that divergence in opinions would drive them apart.

Where they do agree in doctrine, such agreement is the natural result of free and independent search, and is proportionately valuable as agreement; for there is no tendency for either to be overborne by the other when both may freely express opinions without fear of censure.

In such a church there is no ordinance, or personage, or unwritten mandate to tell the members that they ought to believe this or that. When they agree, it is not as of duty, but of their individual freedom. In practice they agree the more readily because there is nothing to tell them that they must. Some Act of Uniformity lies at the root of every unnecessary schism, some little tyranny at that of all heated theological disputation. How can a person keep his eye fixed on truth when influences around him foster the impression that disagreement with Authority is wicked, not to say foolish?

In such a church, where there is no such mistaken confusion of the intellectual with the moral judgment, agreement comes as the natural sequel to honest searching. If for a time it be deferred, there is no anxious heart-searching: no uncomfortable feeling *that there is guilt somewhere* attaches to the fact of dissentience. When agreement comes, after delay, there is no impression that someone ought to apologise and the other to feel a justifiable pride. Being right is one of the stages on the soul's way, and being wrong is another; to be over-elated at the one is as foolish as to be too much depressed at the other.

Hence, the members, who have discovered in their freedom that it is more difficult to be right than merely to be orthodox, do not hasten to declare their convictions on controversial

matters, or betray much anxiety to put others right. This reserve is not due to indifference to their neighbours, but to respect for them, and to the knowledge that others are more likely to become right if they are not prematurely urged to change their opinions. And if any important divergence of view forced itself on the notice of the members, the strongest opinion might be expressed in the words of Voltaire, "I do not agree with a word you say; but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Most happily, whatever divergences might appear, members will not doubt their right still to have a place within the community, or question the same right in others. The basis of their society is that each should accord as great a freedom as he wishes to claim.

The desire to be free oneself may lead to the casting-off of restrictions, but it will not lead to the establishment of such a community as this. The more generous desire that others may be also free can lead to it; the man who has faith in liberty will not readily use his freedom to lessen that of others.

The dissenting movements which have arisen in Britain have for the most part demanded certain particulars of freedom, such as freedom from episcopacy, from state control, or from particular articles of belief. They did not all look, with John Robinson, for "more light and truth to break forth"; and in some instances they restricted the footsteps of their followers within the borders of their own pathway. They may be said to have believed in liberty to a certain extent, and some of them prescribed what extent that was. But others, from the Reformation onward in growing numbers, have hailed freedom of belief as a necessary condition not only of the search for truth but of a truly Christian fellowship. They had not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but the spirit of adoption, and they claimed for themselves, and accorded to others, liberty, as a mark of the

spiritual inheritance of the sons of God. They were too filial to wear bonds and too modest to forge them for other men. They trusted the spirit of truth to lead them, with or without the sanction of authority; but they did not so distrust it as to lay down for posterity the limits of free inquiry. The breadth of their faith appears in the undogmatic constitution of the Society of Friends, and in the group of non-subscribing churches organised in the recently formed General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. In both movements, the standardisation of belief is discountenanced, not only for convenience but as a religious and civil principle.

Only those who have lived happily in a church of this sort know how delightful a spiritual fellowship can be that is liberated from the strain of impossible demands. The energies of this member or that may occasionally run down, but they never manifest the fretful and spasmodic response of a spring that is usually overwound. Their righteousness is not of law but of grace, and escapes being either vainglorious or apologetic. Their worship is not the periodical treatment of a recurring disease, but the exercise of healthy thought and feeling by those who are not beset by morbid fears or nervously apprehensive of change.

But perhaps their greatest privilege springs from a frank and open-eyed acceptance of the adventurous and experimental view of life. They do not *know* in an absolute meaning of the word; and their faith is not something to be protected, but something to expose to tests. If they find that they have been mistaken, they will learn better.

This frank repudiation of any claim to possess the truth gives a value and sincerity to their fellowship that would be impossible if it were precariously held while the spectres, Heresy, Apostasy and Blasphemy, lurked in the arras. If a doubt occurs in the mind, there is no need to pretend that it is not there, repress it, or regard it as a sin. Misgivings are

not uncommon among the adventurous; but the habit of misgiving ill becomes them. They accept risk as part of the adventure. Fellowship has no stronger link than the common acceptance of an acknowledged hazard.

Their refusal either to wait for complete certitude or to feign that they have it sets them free from much unreality and stiffness. Their discussions need not begin too late—after all conclusions have been prearranged, or end too early—before the survey has been fair and thorough. Such freedom of habit and spirit, if it yield no large supply of confident dogma, at least conduces to the comfort of mind and mutual respect of those whose fellowship is not imperilled by archæological discovery or the spread of education. Those who frankly recognise that they may be mistaken, but honestly endeavour to be right, so far as in them lies, may at least be said to worship the God of truth, who will not be served with self-deception and is not honoured by sophistry. There is some grace, if only that of modest self-knowledge, in the refusal to know *all* about the Eternal, the Immortal, the Invisible.

In the last place, such a church, set free from preoccupation with theological subtleties, and embarrassed by no doctrine of inborn sin and universal human depravity, can become a light in the world, and set before men the things that are true, honourable, just, pure and lovely; for it will be the rallying-place, not of men's terrors but of their faith, courage and enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FRIENDLY CHURCH

SUCH a church as I have tried to sketch would seem to be necessary, if civilised human beings are again to be united in a common spiritual fellowship. And this would be a consummation great enough to justify many experiments (of which some might be disappointing), and a large degree of mutual accommodation and compromise on non-essentials. In practice it might prove that many things are not essential that are at present so familiar that we scarcely dare to think of their removal. Much that is divisive and selective would be put aside, necessarily, before the disaffection of the majority was turned to affection and faith; for men will not again, in large numbers, commit themselves to a system that sacrifices minorities to majorities, or pillories independence of thought.

The experiment of conducting churches without the standardisation of belief, without the imposition of creeds, has been in progress now for centuries; but not as yet on a large enough scale to put its claims or demerits to the proof. Groups that are relatively small in extent, such as the Society of Friends and the churches usually called Unitarian,[1] cannot readily keep their message before the people, and can but slowly influence the thinking of the community. It is to be regretted that centuries should have passed without the fact, or the nature, of so important a movement being known and considered by the mass of men. It is not an esoteric move-

[1] The word *unitarian* by its form and by analogy suggests that these churches are based upon a doctrinal agreement; whereas they are in fact based on the refusal to demand such agreement.

ment, and its appeal is to what all people have in common, not to idiosyncrasy or the distinctive characters of the few. Indeed its aim and spirit are catholic in the original meaning of the word, because it bases its hopes on what is universal among men, irrespective of their dogmatic or historical opinions.

When an important experiment is conducted on so small a scale, the average man without direct knowledge of it has no opportunity of judging its value, and may know of it only from sources which are uninformed or unfriendly. But time is on its side, and we may count on a growing interest in it with the wider diffusion of a still better education. And meanwhile we must be patient with all those whose knowledge of unitarianism is comprised within a couple of misleading lines from a two-and-ninepenny dictionary.

The average man, or any exceptional person, for that matter, coming for the first time to a church that was loyally carrying out the experiment, would miss some things that have long ranked almost as the *inseparable accidents* of religion. He would miss the suggestion that the clergy are on terms of peculiar intimacy with the Deity, and the assumption that there is a special group of beliefs, which together constitute orthodoxy, clearly revealed by God, which everyone ought to believe, the acceptance of which, subject to certain ritual conditions, provides access to everlasting life. These things he would miss at once.

As he found his bearings, he would miss yet more, and with greater relief, the anxious trepidation, the impression of strain and effort which have for so long been regarded as a proper part of serious piety. He would wonder what was wrong at first, until he discovered that he was in the presence of those who thought of faith not as a heavy responsibility but as a quiet confidence merging into the love that casts out fear.

But what would cause him most surprise would be that he would not feel that he was out of place in such an assembly. He would find himself where he was accepted, just as he was, and that not in a spirit of condescension but with a welcome that he could receive without shame and without misgiving. It would surprise him, as a man without any pretensions to piety, not other-worldly or specially devout, to discover that his case was precisely contemplated in the existence of such a church. For such a church would presuppose that the common man, as such, was of some value to God and to its own life.

He would hear no suggestion that his acceptance was probationary, or conditioned by stipulations. He would not be asked if he believed, or had any expectation of believing; his will to enter would be accepted as his sufficient warrant.

He would not be bothered and baulked by the sort of dualism which regards spiritual things as apart from, and generally antagonistic to, material things. Reference to his daily work, his food, his recreation, his social enjoyment, would be natural and unconstrained, and would convey no hint of derogation from these things. His presence at this church would not mean that he was expected to feel penitence for his carnal dependence on the bread that perishes, and achieve a feat of psychic dissociation to enable him to forget that he had ever been to a football match or played cards. He would be received as he was, without a suggestion that he could better his state by pretending that he was somebody else altogether, and somebody much more spiritual, much less vital, much less useful, and (to his mind) much less interesting; but much more "religious" in the old, false meaning of that epithet.

He would learn with gratitude that his presence there did not put him out of place, or oblige him to assume a false position. He would not feel that he was committing himself

beyond his knowledge or expectation, or that his action bore any unmeant implications. He would gather that at last a man who wished to worship might do so without involving himself in all sorts of related or unrelated obligations.

He would not be perplexed by hearing those furtive attacks on science, which had always seemed so insincere, coming from clerics who themselves found the use of modern inventions very convenient. He would not be bothered by the suggestion that knowledge has a deleterious effect upon the faith of men, and that they can be more religious if they live in the relative mental darkness of the Middle Ages. He would not hear these things because the minister of such a church would be under no sort of compulsion to say that black was a deep shade of white, or to think that the ark was likely to fall off every time the vehicle of progress moved.

Gradually a feeling of spiritual ease would possess him, as he realised that there was no need for him to play a part, and that his fellow-worshippers enjoyed a like freedom from constraint. The old, familiar "difficulties," the recurring doubts about God, and the Future Life, and other matters, might be still present, but they would not be felt to disqualify. He would not hear himself described with detached sorrow as an unbeliever. He might be honest with his own thoughts without the feeling that he nursed a guilty secret that merited shame and exposure.

The thought would enter, and take root in his mind, that here was a church that had room for him as he was; a church that would value his peculiarities as a part of the reasonable service that he might offer; a church that accepted with thankfulness the rich variety of the human species, made no doubt in God's image, but by no means in one another's. That dumb amazement with which he contemplated death, for instance, amazement which he had been accustomed to regard as a denial of the doctrine of the resurrection, would seem now to be quite a common experience of men, neither

to be praised as rational nor censured as infidel. It was simply one aspect of that total being that he might offer to God and use in His service. He would find a new fullness of meaning, a new variety of application, in the stupendous declaration that nothing can separate us from the love of God; and among the principalities and powers, things present and things to come, he would range the little eccentricities of his belief and disbelief, confident now that they had no power either to win or forfeit the Divine approval.

He would feel sympathy about him, when the preacher had occasion to speak of our difficulty in formulating adequate thoughts about the mysteries around us, or prayed for light in our darkness; and he would find it hard to believe that, if God in truth looked down upon the little congregation, He would say, "Ninety-nine believers and one unbeliever"; for he would feel that he was among those who would share with him the stigma of unbelief, if needful, and would be reluctant to think that they had any necessary qualification for the favour of God that he might lack, or to claim precedence of him in entering into the Kingdom. And it would be as though God said, "You had forsaken the assemblies of those who worship because you thought that you could bring no faith to offer. Come now and lay your unbelief upon My altar. I need that too. It may help to save those who believe; as their faith will help to save you who doubt."

In the friendly church, he that gathers much has nothing over, and he that gathers little has no lack. By foregoing any attempt to standardise the religious experience, or stipulate a minimum amount of positive faith, it makes possible the freest sort of interchange of gifts, without invidious comparisons or contrasts. Thus, the visitor who entered would find a ready expression of thought, in an unaffected manner, because the people were not tongue-tied by the obsession that it is sinful to be mistaken.

Furthermore, such a visitor coming to such a church

would find that his moral nature was respected. His virtues and his sense of failure would alike be accepted, and regarded sympathetically, as normal human experience. He would not be undervalued nor overvalued; he would not be confronted with the ten thousand commandments of censorious rectitude nor flattered by extravagant expectations. He would not be branded, he would not be haloed, but treated with respectful sincerity by those who were readier to find good in others than to claim it for themselves. In such a company, success would not engender pride nor disappointment lapse into despair.

The broad sympathy and tolerance of the community would give a new value to the past. The undying words and deeds of the heroes and saints of other lands and times would be the more resplendent because admiration was not restricted to those of similar thought and belief. The splendid intuition, *All things are yours*, would make them freemen of the divine realm; and it would be their pride to be fellow-citizens with all the prophets and saints, not those of Christendom and Israel only. Even the casual visitor might soon discover that he had come to the city of the living God, and to the spirits of just men made perfect—and surely also to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant! He might not be conscious of a personal presence in the midst, or catch a mystical vision of the form and lineaments of him who had walked in Galilee; he might not find his Lord incarnate by a miracle at the sacrament; he might not hear a voice that said, Lo, I am with you alway; but, as surely as Jesus desired that his followers should keep his spirit of love for men, and his sublime confidence in the final worth of the human heart, the visitor would find him there leading them from invidious judgments to the universal love that manifests God and saves mankind.

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