

Church Unity

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Catholic & Truth & Society.

CONFESSIO VIATORIS.

Unum scio, quia cæcus ovis essem, modo video.

[BY C. KEGAN PAUL.]

In my early childhood I knew of no church other than that in which my father ministered, and was vaguely conscious that from it there were some dissenters. These were spoken of in the county as Ranters, in the town as Wesleyans and Quakers, the only sects with which I was, however slightly, brought in contact.

The village in which we lived was in the Somersetshire coal-field; the fabric of the church was disgraceful, but no one had dreamed of restoration, the communion-table was a plain four-legged piece of carpentry without a cover, such as might have stood in our kitchen, the whole Service, when there was no Communion, was read in the desk, the Sacrament was administered about four or five times in the year; the surplice was a full white gown unrelieved by any stole or scarf. My father's reading of the prayers was grave and dignified, his doctrine old-fashioned orthodox, his sermons moral essays far over the heads of

his congregation, his parochial ministrations above the average of those days.

We were wont to move into the neighboring city of Bath for the winter, where we attended the Octagon Chapel, later Margaret's Chapel, and, on very rare occasions, the Abbey. I believe my elders found something in the Services which aided their piety, but I remember nothing which helped my own. I loathed church-going, but was not an irreligious child. My mother always prayed with her children, and till long after I was grown up always came to me after I was in bed and read me a chapter in the Bible. This nightly reading is among the happiest memories of my youth.

In Bath there were still persons who retained some of the traditions of the High Churchism of Queen Anne's time, and we learnt from them that it was an old and pious use to attend Services on Wednesday and Friday. There was even one chapel attached to a hospital for old men which retained daily prayer. There also lingered the tradition that it was well to practise some self denial in Lent. An old physician who was very kind to us as children then gave up snuff, and it was the only season in which we could approach him without sneezing.

The first time I was conscious of a dignified Church beyond the Anglican, and no mere body of Dissenters, was when my mother went one Holy Thursday to the Tenebræ Service at Prior Park, and gave me an account of it. She had made acquaintance, how I do not know, with a certain Father Logan, who preached the Three Hours' devotions on that occasion. I think

my mother went to Prior Park at times for some years, and all that she told me impressed me deeply.

This was first when I was about ten years old, and then also, or soon afterwards, I found in my father's library a work called *Downside Discussions*, and read it with profound interest, though as may be well imagined, with little understanding. Some Protestant controversialist had challenged the Downside Fathers to a public argument on the points of difference between Rome and the Protestant Churches, and, strange to say, the challenge was accepted. A public disputation took place, and the matter ended as such encounters usually end, without apparent result. I do not remember any details, but it was clear to me that the Protestant champion had not answered all that was said on the other side.

When I was twelve or thereabouts, two books fell in my way which would have done much to make me a Catholic had there been any one to guide me; but the impression left on me by them was quite indelible. One was the well-known tale, *Father Clement*. In his recently published life of Mr. Philip Gosse, the naturalist, his son, Mr. Edmund Gosse, tells us that the reading of this work gave his father the strong abhorrence of Rome which remained with him all through his life; and no doubt such was the effect intended by the author.

On me the influence was quite the other way. The Protestant clergyman in the book, a Presbyterian, but put forward as a type of a Protestant minister, is asked where was his Church before the Reformation. His answer is at once so evasive and so fatuous that it was, to me, impossible to accept it for a mo-

ment, while the practices of piety inculcated on the young Papists, and held up for scorn, such as veneration for the saints, fasting, the sign of the Cross, &c., seemed to me meritorious, or at least perfectly innocent. And in so far as the hero, Father Clement, had Protestant leanings, he appeared to be leaving the more for the less worthy course.

The second book was *The Nun*, published anonymously, but known to be written by Mrs. Sherwood, the author of *The Fairchild Family*, *Little Henry and his Bearer*, and other books of a vehemently Protestant character. It is of high literary merit, and is far more true to fact than *Father Clement*. Subtracting certain absurdities of nuns kept in dungeons for heretical opinions, and secret meeting in underground chapels, when the Bishop urges putting a recalcitrant nun to death; "when a limb is affected with gangrene, my daughter, no ideas of false compassion should prevent our cutting it off;" convent life is not ill-described, as seen through distorted spectacles.

This book had been given to my mother by her dearest friend, and for that friend's sake it always lay on a table in her room. I read it for its literary charm, till I knew it almost by heart, and here again my sympathies were wholly with the orthodox Nun Annunciata, the Abbess, and the Bishop, who were not, I was sure, guilty of the deeds attributed to them, rather than with Pauline and Angelique, who escape in the Revolution troubles to become wives and mothers. But there was no one to deepen these vague impressions; and Roman priests and nuns, however interesting, were much like the characters in my fairy

tales, denizens of a world into which I never expected to enter.

From the age of eight, when I went to a private school, till my entrance into Eton at thirteen, my school life had little influence on my religious life. Such as it had was harmful. Crossman's Catechism, which we learnt, is to me now a mere name. The head master and his wife, who gave us religious instruction, were cruel in temper and disposition, so that many of us were set against all that came from them, though I have no doubt they meant to teach us aright.

At Eton much was changed. There, for the first time, I heard a chanted "Cathedral Service," and week-day prayers in church without the weariness of a sermon; there, in 1841, such of us boys who were inclined to think, and who read the newspapers, became conscious of the great stir in Church matters which was going on at Oxford; a few of our masters were falling under the influence of the new theology, and this could not be without its effect on the boys.

It had its bearing on our minds, but to an extremely limited extent on our lives. There are lads who, by the grace of God, have in them a natural and ingrained purity of soul, and a revolt from every wrong word and deed, an instinct against evil, which preserves them in ignorant innocence through the perils of boyhood; but as a rule an average English lad is neither ignorant nor innocent. When he ceases to say his nightly prayer at his mother's knee, there is no one who enforces on him the connection between religion and morals; no one, except from the distant

pulpit, ever speaks to him of his soul ; no one deals with him individually, or attempts to help him in his special trials. A father is, as a rule, shy of his son, tutors are apt to treat all moral transgressions as school offences, and are unwilling to see what is not forced on them, so that the boy's soul shifts for itself, and for the most part fares badly. I can truly say that for the five years I was at Eton, between the the ages of thirteen and eighteen, no one ever said one word to me about my own religious life, save always my mother, but she could know nothing of a boy's dangers, and was as one that fought the air.

But as a mere matter of intellectual opinion, Church questions were extremely interesting. The *Christian Year* became known to me almost by heart ; it, and still more the *Lyra Apostolica*, Miss Sewell's books, and among them especially *Margaret Perceval*, put before me the Anglican Church theory, which I accepted with eagerness ; nor was my pleasure and acquiescence in it disturbed even by the caricature of it which I found in *Hawkstone*, a foolish and impudent book, though written by a very able man, Miss Sewell's brother, the Rev. William Sewell, soon to become my tutor at Exeter College, Oxford.

I went to Oxford prepared to be a very High Churchman, and matriculated at Exeter, then a High Church College, the Rev. Joseph Richards being Rector, and Sewell senior tutor. A first cousin, who had obtained a scholarship at Trinity the year before, was already among the very highest of high undergraduates, and I became intimate also with a set of Christ Church students greatly under the influence of Dr. Pusey ; so that on the religious side of Oxford life there was much to affect me.

My most intimate friend among the more thoughtful men in College, had brought up to Oxford far more definite Church tradition and practices than I. Had Sewell not been my tutor, I should have been, no doubt, wholly and completely a member of the High Church party ; but no man ever made a serious cause more ridiculous than he. To a minute and scrupulous insistence on ritual, as then understood, and a burthen-some and penitential life urged on all without reference to previous training or individual fitness, he joined a distrust and horror of Rome that were comic in their exaggerations. It was said that, like the old lady in *Cranford* who rolled a ball under her bed each night, and only when it came out on the other side, was sure no burglar was concealed there, Sewell looked in the same hiding-place to find a Jesuit ; and it is certain that even Eugene Sue's belief in the machinations of the Society was not more intense than his.

The set with which I mainly lived was not a religious one, but rather the cricketing, boating, and riding set, men of good morals for the most part, but who were in no degree devout. In more serious hours, however, my sympathies were all with the High Church party. I was careful to attend any church at which Dr. Pusey was announced to preach, read Newman's sermons to my mother and sister in the vacations, and, unknown to my Oxford friends, endeavored to do some little district visiting among the poor, in a fitful way, under the direction of the Rev. William Knott, Fellow of Brasenose, afterwards Vicar of St. Saviour's, Leeds.

In my third year I knew well a lady living in Oxford,

who was herself in the habit of going to confession to Dr. Pusey, and was by her introduced to him. He invited me to see him, and I came to know him fairly well, but was never attracted by him, and should not have dreamt of making him my confessor or my familiar friend. The lady in question, much to her husband's annoyance, fitted up an oratory in her house, in which she had strange Services, more Roman than Anglican, but I never attended them, nor could I enter into her feeling when on meeting her one day in the street, she said, "Oh, my dear friend, the Father (Pusey) tells me we may not go to Rome." I assured her that I had no intention of going, but that, if I had, the Father's saying I was not to go would have no great weight with me. I am afraid she never forgave me, though I remained an intimate friend of her excellent husband rather than of herself during the remainder of my Oxford career.

In my vacations, more than in Oxford, I saw the High Church party at its best. Much of my time was spent with the family of a member of my College. They indeed "lived the life," holding much Catholic doctrine, adopting many Catholic practices with a simplicity, earnest piety, and thoroughness very beautiful to witness. The eldest daughter was then an intimate friend of Miss Sellon, taking much interest in the attempt at the revival of Sisterhoods in the Church of England, and is now a Catholic nun of the Order of St. Dominic. The remainder of the family are still satisfied with their half-way house. I should probably have been more closely identified with them and their opinions but for the influence on my life of one of the most remarkable personalities I ever met, who drew

me off for some years in quite another direction.

This man was Charles Kingsley. When I first knew him he was about eight or nine and twenty, in the full vigor of his manhood, and had just become celebrated among us young Oxford men by the publication of *The Saint's Tragedy*. I first met him at a breakfast given by his old schoolfellow, Cowley Powles, one of our Exeter tutors. Kingsley and I, Powles being engaged with his lectures, walked to Iffley on that morning, and the geniality and versatility of his nature impressed me as I had never been impressed by any other man, save one who in a degree resembled him in his enthusiasm and high-bred courtesy, James Brooke, Rajah of Sarawak.

Kingsley had come to Oxford to see some young men who were intending to take Orders, one of whom might serve him as curate at Eversley. He selected one of my old schoolfellows, whom I visited in the following summer. The curate's lodgings were limited in accommodation, and I had to sleep at the village inn. We dined with the Kingsleys on the first evening of my stay, and early next day I received a note characteristically dated, "Bed, this morning," asking me to transfer myself and my baggage to the Rectory. I did so, stayed weeks instead of days, and for some years thereafter Eversley Rectory became to me a second home.

A large part of Kingsley's character, and a charming description of his life, is given in the Memoir by his widow. The defect of the book is explained by the fact that it was written when the sense of her bereavement was very recent, so that the work is pervaded by a certain solemnity and gloom which were

quite alien to the nature of the man as his friends knew him. No doubt like most persons of exuberant temperament, Kingsley had his moments of deep depression, and he was towards the end of his life a disappointed man, but at the time of which I speak he was characterized by a sunny joyousness, an abounding vitality, and a contagious energy which were most attractive. He was in no sense a learned man, nor a sound scholar, nor a deep theologian, nor a well-read historian; he knew more of science than of all these put together, yet was not really scientific. But on almost all subjects conceivable he had read enough to talk brilliantly, without any inconvenient doubt of his entirely sufficient equipment.

To young men, still in course of formation, this coruscating person, ten years older than ourselves, but young in mind, and a born leader of men, came as a kind of revelation. We had never met any one like him, nor indeed have I ever since encountered any one so impressive to the young. What was most attractive to me, and of course not to me alone, was that this man, so varied in knowledge and so brilliant in talk, athletic in habits and frame, a first-rate horseman, keen sportsman, good quoit player, was also a man of prayer and piety, filled with a personal, even passionate, love to Christ, whom he realized as his Friend and Brother in a fashion almost peculiar to the saints.

His reading of the Bible, whether at family prayer, or in church sounded like a true message from God; his sermons, thoroughly unconventional, written in admirable English, were vigorous, reverent, and inspiring. He knew every man, woman, and child in his

scattered parish, and, with less effort than I have ever seen, with less sense of incongruity, could pass from light badinage in any casual meeting to deep religious talk on the state of his interlocutor's soul. He was, theology apart, the ideal pastor of his people, living among them and for them, rarely in those days going beyond the bounds of his parish, wholly devoted to what he believed his divinely given work.

In his opinions Kingsley belonged to what was called the Broad Church school, though he disliked the term, and never would allow it to be used. The Athanasian Creed was not recited in Eversley Church in those days, though Kingsley joined a society for its defence towards the end of his life, and the absence of anything which now would be called ritual was remarkable.

I remember that when the curate preached, and Kingsley's part of the Service was over, he was wont to put off his surplice, and take his place in his usual dress in the pew, under the pulpit by his wife's side. When the sermon was ended, he would stand up there in the pew and give the blessing in his cut-away coat, without vestige of ecclesiastical garment.

But the Services, if unconventional, were reverent, and whatever deductions might be drawn from his omissions, Kingsley's teaching was sound on the great doctrines of the Christian faith, as expounded in the Anglican formularies. He was kind and tolerant to Nonconformists and their doctrines, and the whole vials of his wrath were reserved for Rome and the priests of Rome. On the Catholic laity he looked with compassion as foolish souls beguiled by liars. In

his first novel, *Yeast*, he introduces a priest named Padre Bugiardo.

A man of this vehement and vigorous nature could not but have great influence on young men. My own desire for many years had been to take Orders in the Church of England. But my career at Oxford had brought doubts about religion, still more about my own fitness for the work; the High Anglican theory had broken down, and with it had gone much of my childhood's faith, no authoritative interpretation of Scripture had ever been presented to me, and I was attracted by the plausible ingenuities of German criticism. I began to wonder whether there were indeed a Divine message for men, and if there were, whether I had the skill or the worthiness to hear it and deliver it again. The formularies of the Church had come to seem fetters on free research, which, as I now see, means only that each man may think what he pleases.

Kingsley, who mixed with his religion eager democratic politics, a care for the poor which verged on socialism, and a strong hatred of shams, endeavored, and with success, to persuade such as I, that work brought the solution of all doubts; that not in cut and dried forms of theology, but in a zeal for God, lay the motive power of a parson's work; that if the Church of England needed widening, it was to be done from within. I was moved with his enthusiasm, and felt with his feelings; to be a parson after his pattern was my aim, and a desire to help my fellow-men seemed as a call from God. My mother had always wished to see me a clergyman, and her death, with the deeper feelings it brought, gave me a push forward in the

same direction. I accepted the curacy of Tew, in the diocese of Oxford, and was ordained deacon in the Lent of 1851.

Though Tew was a small parish, the work was considerable. Like most young clergymen of that date I had absolutely no theological training, and the mere duty of preparing sermons sent me to a course of reading which kept me well employed. When I consulted Kingsley on what to read, before my ordination, he advised me to read the Bible, without note or comment, and to let it tell me its own story, and Maurice's *Kingdom of Christ*. That seemed to him sufficient theology for the task, and the Bishop's requirements were hardly more. It is difficult to recall with precision what books were my study in my year and a half at Tew, but it was in a degree systematic and thorough, and gained me some grasp of scientific theology.

The clergy around were High Churchmen, some of them extremely so, and it soon became plain to me, that whatever the doctrinal teaching, the whole work of a parish, to be effective at all, except in the hands of a Kingsley, must be conducted on Catholic lines. And so, putting any deep thought aside under the stress of work, I became a more decided High Churchman in practice, and in some points of doctrine, while in others I remained latitudinarian. The standard of parochial work was high, and the clergy were kept up to the mark in this by the Bishop. Samuel Wilberforce was never to me an attractive person, indeed I disliked and distrusted him, but there has rarely been his equal for impressing a uniform stamp on the men who came under his sway, and for exacting to

the full the tale of mechanical work. As all readers of his Life now know, he was always intensely Protestant, and his gross unfairness to Rome made me more tender to her supposed errors. But in Oxfordshire, as in Somerset in my youth, I knew no Catholics, and the murmurs and airs that reached me from the Church soon died away.

After eighteen months at Tew the work grew lighter; the schools had been organized, the church at Little Tew was built, mainly through me. I knew every soul in the two villages, and wished for a larger parish. The Bishop came to Tew for a Confirmation, and asked me to take charge of Bloxham, a large and neglected village a few miles off, close to Banbury, a charge which I accepted with pleasure.

The circumstances of the parish were remarkable, as showing what was then the state of the Church in some bye-places of England, even in so stirring a diocese as Oxford. The incumbent was ninety years old, but hale and strong. He had been appointed to the living more than fifty years before, in exchange with a man who had died soon thereafter, so that Eton College, with whom rested the patronage, had in fact been kept from its exercise for half a century. His neglect of the parish had been scandalous; the Communion was administered but thrice a year, on Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Easter Day.

Not long before I became curate, the wine for this rite, which was always set on the table in a black bottle, was unopened. The Vicar turned to the communicants and asked "if any lady or gentleman had a corkscrew;" one in a pocket-knife was produced, and the Service proceeded. The curate was over

seventy, but in much feebler health, and not more active than the Vicar. The scandals connected with the Services, and the neglect of parochial visiting became so flagrant that the Bishop suspended the curate from the exercise of his functions, and made the Vicar place the whole administration of the parish in the Bishop's hands, in consideration of which the Bishop promised not to proceed against him. It was a somewhat high-handed and arbitrary measure, but no doubt substantial justice was done.

On the day my ministry at Bloxham began, the Vicar died suddenly, but as the Provost of Eton at once announced his intention of offering the living to a gentleman who was chaplain in India, it was clear that six months of work lay before me, and I turned to this with a will. Never did a neglected parish respond so cordially to what was done for it. The Bishop made a great point of my endeavoring to know all the parishioners, to revive the schools, which had dwindled almost to non-existence; he insisted on frequent services, celebrations of Holy Communion monthly, and announced a Confirmation, for which I had to prepare the candidates. The people welcomed zeal, often I fear without knowledge, and the duties were so incessant that there was no time for thought, or for reading.

At the end of six months the living was filled, and, somewhat overwrought by a spell of exciting and laborious work, I accepted a tutorship to teach two little boys in a family who were going to reside in Germany for at least a year. We went abroad in the late autumn of 1852. I had now settled down into that phase of thought which seemed to satisfy me. I

was a latitudinarian in teaching, and a High Churchman in external observances; the controversy between the Churches had ceased to interest me, and there was no reason to suppose I should adopt other opinions than those into which I had drifted. The friends with whom I was travelling were themselves average English Church people, with a strong desire that they, and especially the children, should not lose touch of English ways. We had, therefore, our own Services each Sunday. I rarely strayed into the Catholic churches, either at Carlsruhe, or at Constance.

I made the acquaintance of no or but few, Catholics, and the tuition of the boys, and my own German studies, left scanty leisure for much else. It was a dreary, stagnant time, in which I found no intellectual companions, and at Constance, in the following spring, a long and serious illness left me weak and prostrate. *Pauci infirmitate meliorantur*, says Thomas à Kempis, and his words were found most true. I began to pine for some real work in my clerical capacity once more.

This came in most pleasant shape. My old tutor became Head Master of Eton, and, always one of my kindest friends, wrote to tell me that a conductship or chaplaincy at Eton was vacant, which might be mine for the asking. This involved Services in the College chapel, and also the curacy of the parish. I accepted the work gladly, and entered on it in the autumn of 1853. My tutor had wished this chaplaincy to be a stepping-stone to another post, which he was soon able to offer me in conjunction with it; that of Master in College, in which I was to have the supervision of the seventy scholars on the foundation, my rooms adjoining and communicating with the boys' buildings.

In dealing with this task, very arduous, but at the same time one of exceeding interest, the necessity of one of the main practices of the Church soon became manifest to me, though I was far from grasping all that it meant. To direct a boy's conscience, to aid him to resist sin, to gain his confidence, without any fear that his transgressions would be considered as school offences, and with a certainty that all he said was absolutely inviolable, it was necessary that something very like confession should enter into the relation between many of those entrusted to my charge and myself.

It was certainly a help such as they had never before, one for which I had sighed in vain in my own school days, but even when I saw the blessing I recognized only the human side of it. It was a relief to tell another person all the actions and all the thoughts which interfered with a holy life, and the fact that the recipient of the tale did not turn away, but rather gave sympathy, advice, and consolation, became a sign and pledge that God, more loving than man, would not reject the penitent, and induced those who might have despaired or become hardened, to cast themselves on the mercies of God. But there was in all this no belief and no teaching of true sacramental confession, itself the access to God, followed by valid absolution ratified at the time in Heaven, thus, and thus only, communicated to the sinner.

There were those among the authorities, both Fellows and Tutors, who objected strongly to the influence I gained over some of the boys, and to my supposed High Church teaching and practices, but the Head Master gave me his full sympathy, and his en-

tire sanction for coming as near to the administration of the Sacrament of Penance as in my position, and in my ignorance, it was possible to come.

But I was far from being a High Churchman in creed. Neologian criticism, which I read more and more, took increasing hold on me, and I had got completely on the wrong path. The traditional teaching of the Church once set aside, or rather never understood, the student necessarily dwells on the human, to the exclusion of the Divine, element in Holy Scripture, and wanders in the Bible like the Ethiopian servant with no man to guide him. My reading taught me to minimize dogmatic teaching, to hold the least possible doctrine compatible with a love for a somewhat stately ritual, chanted Services, and frequent celebrations of Communion, in which pious remembrance of Christ's Death, for it was to me no more than this, there seemed for myself and others great help towards a spiritual life.

The work among the boys was thoroughly happy. Some of those who had been at the head of the school when I was first appointed Master in College returned to work as Assistant Masters, and with these I lived in pleasant, elder-brotherly intimacy.

But the Head Master became Provost, and I was not on the same terms with his successor; the rooms appointed for the Master in College were no longer suited to the needs of my family; it was necessary to think of a change.

A College living in Dorset was offered to, and accepted by me, and I left Eton once again, with regret for the past, and hope for the future. I remembered Kingsley's happy work at Eversley, and hoped to

carry it out in my own sphere. He however, had believed with all his might the faith he professed, I was soon to find doubts and perplexities at every turn.

The chaotic state of parties, dogma, and discipline in the Church of England was forced at once on my attention. For many years, up to about four before the time of which I am now speaking, the Vicar had been non-resident, and the curate in charge was a pronounced, even extreme, Low Churchman. On the death of the Vicar, the living fell into the hands of a very prominent member of the ultra-Tractarian party, who at once established daily Services, and ornate ritual, restoring the church well, and contradicting in his every word and deed the teaching and example of his predecessor, who moved only to the next parish, and did all that in him lay to neutralize the work of the new Vicar.

When this gentleman was preferred to a benefice in another county, the Bishop frankly told me he wished for no Broad Churchmen, and would, if it were possible, have refused to accept a man of my opinions, which had become known by various essays contributed from time to time to current literature. But as he could not help himself, he trusted I would at least continue the outward character of the Services now fixed in the parish, which indeed was quite in accordance with my own intention.

It struck me, however, as most grotesque that the chief pastor of a diocese should have no voice whatever in the selection of the men appointed to serve under him, no power to inhibit what he considered false doctrine, and should have to appeal to the forbearance and good sense of his clergy to hinder a com-

plete reversal of an established ritual approved by himself. The failure of his attempt to declare Dr. Rowland Williams an heretic, one of the writers in the then notorious volume, *Essays and Reviews*, brought it to still greater prominence the weakness of the Anglican Episcopate.

All through the ministrations of the three clergymen, Low, High, Broad, the villagers, the farmers, and in great measure the few resident and educated gentry were scarce aware that there were any other than outward differences in the mode of conducting worship; these, and not the doctrines, were points to which objection was occasionally raised, and provided the parson went on the principle of *quieta non movere*, he might preach what he pleased, orthodoxy or heterodoxy, the doctrines of Rome, or Wittenberg, or Geneva.

Yet again, for some years, my doubts were silent. The work of a parish was once more profoundly interesting, and the social problems which faced the worker in Dorset were so pressing as to throw for a time intellectual problems into the background. The condition of the agricultural laborer, then *adscriptus glebæ* almost as truly as any serf of old; his wages, sometimes as low as eight shillings a week, with a dole of mouldy corn, and, if he were a shepherd, the chance of a joint of "braxy" mutton from a sheep which had died; his cottage, in which decency was impossible, cried aloud for reform, and made a parson who did his work into an agitator rather than a theologian.

Then came the great wave of the Temperance movement in Dorset, and the splendid crusade against

drunkenness in my immediate neighborhood by one of the bravest and best women it has been my lot to know. The Laborers' Union and the Dorset County Temperance Association, added to my parish work, and to the preparation for College of pupils under my roof, made acquiescence possible in formulas, which if they did not appeal to me as absolute truth, seemed at least a plausible statement of all that in this life we could attain to know.

But the Laborers' Union accomplished its intention, raising wages by a dead lift at least two shillings a week, while public light, turned on the cottages, brought about there also a reform. We had done much for the Temperance organization, the parson's social and political work had been carried as far as possible; but meantime faith had not grown firmer, rather it had insensibly slipped away.

It is always difficult to say at what moment an intellectual position, long held with loosening grasp, becomes untenable; it is so easy to acquiesce for awhile, so hard to deny what after all the heart continues to desire when the intellect rejects it; but at last I had to face the fact that I could no longer use in any honest sense the Prayer Book of the Church of England, nor minister at her altars, nor preach a definite message when all my mind was clouded with a doubt. I resigned my living, and came to London to take up a literary life.

Now, for the first time during many years, I was able to consider my position calmly and fairly. While doing my duties as best I could, it had not been easy to realize how completely I had fallen away from the faith. Now, as a layman, with no external obligation

to use words in which it was necessary to find some meaning consistent with my opinions, the whole Services of the Church of England seemed distasteful and untrue. The outward scaffolding on which I had striven to climb to God, every sacramental sign under which I had sought to find Him, had crumbled into nothingness. I was in no conscious relation to Him, God had practically no part in my life; though I did not deny Him, nor cease to believe that a First Cause existed; simple atheism is a rare, and perhaps an impossible position. I was content not to know, and to wait.

But in the meantime certain things were abundantly clear. Human relationships exist, the family, society, our country, the race; towards all these we have duties which must be organized; some conception of history, philosophy, and science must be framed, if not depending on God, at least in relation to man. The system formulated by Auguste Comte had long attracted me on its historical and social sides; a friend who, in and since Oxford days, had swayed my life more than he knew, had found it sufficient for himself, and he placed before me the religious side also of this grave and austere philosophy.

It is not a paradox, but sober truth, to say that Positivism is Catholicism without God. And it does, after a fashion, give order and regularity to life, inculcates simplicity of manners, aims at a certain amount of discipline, and caricatures, unconsciously, and with some effect, the sacraments, the *cultus* of Saints, the place of our Lady in worship, making Humanity the ideal woman, the great Mother and Mistress of all.

It should in fairness be said that in this faith, if so

it may be called, men and women live high, restrained, ascetic lives, and find in Humanity an object, not self, for their devotion. Like the men of Athens, they would seem ignorantly, and under false names, to worship God. And for myself I may say that I doubt if I should have known the faith but for Positivism, which gave me a rule and discipline of which I had been unaware. The historical side of Comte's teaching still remains in large measure true to my mind, based as it is on the teaching of the Church. Comte had the inestimable advantage of having been Catholic in his youth, and could not, even when he tried, put aside the lessons he had learnt from her.

But Auguste Comte did more for me than this. It may seem strange, but, till I did so under his direction, I had never read the *Imitation of Christ*. Comte bids all his followers meditate on this holy book, telling them to substitute Humanity for God. The daily study of the *Imitation* for several years did more than aught else to bring me back to faith, and faith back to me.

So long as my Positivism lasted, I brought into it a fervor and enthusiasm to which I had been a stranger, and I was therefore long in discovering that these were unreal and forced. On many Sundays, when the Service was over, I was wont to walk home with a younger friend, whose experiences had been largely my own, save that his loss of faith had arisen from revolt against the extreme Calvinism which had been presented to him in his youth. He also had wandered out into Agnosticism, and discovered that he needed an external rule against the temptations of life, which for awhile he thought to find in the Religion of Human-

ity. In long walks across the park homewards in summer and winter noons we both found that the fervor of the Services evaporated, and left nothing behind them; there was none of that sense of a power abiding within us, which the Catholic worshipper brings away from before the Tabernacle, even if he cannot always maintain the intensity of devotion which has been granted him during the action of Holy Mass, or in the Benediction Service.

Once more I saw that my soul was stripped and bare, when it had seemed fully clothed. Such also was my friend's experience; and God has given him grace to find, as I have found, the truth after which we both were seeking. Positivism is a fair-weather creed, when men are strong, happy, untempted, or ignorant that they are tempted, and so long as a future life and its dread possibilities do not enter their thoughts; but it has no message for the sorry and the sinful, no restoration for the erring, no succor in the hour of death.

In the training of my intellect and literary faculty, such as it is, one man had always held predominant sway. Those young men who entered on their Oxford careers towards the end of the decade 1840-1850, found that one prophet at least had gained honor in his own country, even if he had experienced also scorn and rejection. John Henry Newman was a moving intellectual force along with Tennyson, Browning, Ruskin, and Carlyle. I came to know the two poets, as I know my Bible, if it be not irreverent to say so, in such a way that after a time I needed no longer to read them, because the exact words surged up in memory when thought was directed to them, and

there was no need of the printed page. Ruskin and Carlyle delivered their message, and passed on, but Newman abode, and his intellectual influence developed into one that was moral and spiritual, preparing my soul for the great grace and revelation which God had yet in store.

Like Thomas à Kempis, so Newman, studied day by day, sank into my soul, and changed it. Since Pascal none has put so plainly as he the dread alternative, all or nothing, faith or unfaith, God or the denial of God. I had not denied Him, but had left Him on one side, and now, as it were, God took His revenge. This is no place to explain in detail how in sorrow and desolation of spirit God left His servant alone for awhile, to clutch in vain for some help in temptation, for some solution of doubt, and find none, if it were not God and the old creeds. It were to lay the secrets of the soul too bare to declare minutely, how each hesitation to submit to what was becoming intellectually clear, was followed by some moral or spiritual fall, as though the Father would allow His child to slip in miry ways, if nothing else would teach the need of guidance.

But apart from the direct leadings of God's grace, and the general effect of the *Imitation* and Newman, it may be well to specify more closely some of the arguments which weighed with me to accept the faith I had so long set at nought.

First, and above all, was the overwhelming evidence for modern miracles, and the conclusions from their occurrence. A study of Pascal's Life, when I was engaged in translating the *Pensees*, directed my special attention to the cure of Pascal's niece, of a lachrymal fistula, by the touch of the Holy Thorn preserved at

Port Royal. It is impossible to find anything of the kind better attested, and readers may judge for themselves in the narrative written of the facts by Racine, and the searching investigations by unprejudiced, and certainly not too credulous critics, Sainte-Beuve and the late Charles Beard.

Next in importance were the miracles of Lourdes, one of which, as wrought on a friend of my own, came under my notice. I do not mean, especially in the former case, that these facts proved any doctrines; that the miracle of the Thorn made for Jansenist teaching, or those at Lourdes for the Immaculate Conception; but rather, that the Thorn must, from its effects, have been one that had touched the Sacred Head, that the spring at Lourdes could only have had its healing powers by the gift of God, through our Lady. It was not that miracles having been declared in the Bible made these later occurrences possible, but that these, properly attested in our own days, and times so near our own, made the Bible miracles more credible than they were before, adding their testimony to that which the Church bears to Holy Scripture. And it was on the testimony of a living Church that I would accept the Scripture, if I accepted it at all, for surely of all absurd figments, that of a closed revelation, to be its own interpreter, is the most absurd.

The books which mainly aided me at this period, when I had accepted, in a more definite way than ever before, the being of a God, who actively, daily, and visibly interposes in His creation, were the *Grammar of Assent*, by Cardinal Newman, and *Religio Viatoris*, by Cardinal Manning. Both works postulate God and

the Human Soul, and on that foundation build up the Catholic faith. They are very different in their method, and, perhaps, as a rule, helpful to different classes of mind, but both aided me. The re-reading the *Grammar of Assent* as a theological treatise, and with the wish to believe, was quite a different matter to my earlier study of it on its publication, when I regarded it only as an intellectual effort, interesting as the revelation of a great mind, but not as yet recognizing that it had any special message for me. But in these later days it proved to be the crowning gift of the many I received from that great teacher, who had been my guide through the years of my pilgrimage, little though I knew it.

It is not possible to state precisely the moment at which definite light came upon my soul, in preparation for the fuller day. As Clough says truly of earthly dawn:—

“And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.”

About 1888 I had light enough to attend Mass pretty frequently, but even then was not definitely Catholic in my belief and sympathies. There was one of my own family, having a right to speak, who distrusted my evident leanings, not so much from want of sympathy with religion, as from a fear that as my opinions had been so long in a state of change, this also might be a passing phase. I said to myself, whether rightly or wrongly I cannot judge, that a year should elapse before I made up my mind on the question, though I began to see which way it must be answered. This was

in the spring of 1889; but so weak is memory that towards the end of the year I was misled by a date, and supposed it had been in the late summer.

In May, 1890, I went for a short tour in France, as I had done for some years past, and a profound sense of dissatisfaction with myself filled my whole soul. In other days the cathedrals, and their services, the shrines and their relics, places of pilgrimage, venerated images, had all been connected with a faith in which no one who studied the workings of the human mind could fail to take an interest, but they had no relation to my own soul. Now it seemed to me that I was an alien from the family of God, unable to take a part in that which was my heritage, shut out by my own coldness of heart, my own want of will. And as had long been the case, what attracted me most were just those things in the cult of Rome which most offended my companions.

A distinguished ecclesiastic was talking in Rome with a lady who while in England had shown some disposition towards the Church, but lamented that in the Holy City she had seen much that was to her disedifying, and quite unlike the pious practices she had known at home. He replied, "Ah, madame, il ne faut pas regarder de si près la cuisine du Bon Dieu." It was this which interested me and drew me to it. At Tours, the heap of crutches in the house devoted to the *cultus* of the Holy Face, the pathetic agony of the engraving of the same, seen in so many churches of that diocese, appealed more to me than the celebration of High Mass in the Cathedral; the rude image of our Lady at Chartres more than many a fairer statue.

At Beaulieu, near Loches, the end came. We had

walked there from Loches, and while my companions were resting under the trees in the little *Place*, and taking a photograph of a neighboring mill, I remained in the church in conversation with the Curé, who was superintending some change in the arrangements of the altar. We spoke of Tours and St. Martin, of the revived cult of the Holy Face, of M. Dupont, "the holy man of Tours," whom the Curé had known, and at last he said, after a word about English Protestantism, "Mais Monsieur est sans doute Catholique?" I was tempted to answer, "A peu près," but the thought came with overwhelming force that this was a matter in which there was "no lore of nicely calculated less or more;" we were Catholics or not, my interlocutor was within the fold, and I without, and if without, then against knowledge, against warning, for I recognized that my full conviction had at last gone where my heart had gone before, the call of God had sounded in my ears, and I must perforce obey. But when?

The promise which I had made to myself that I would wait a year was binding on me as though made to one for whose sake I had made it, and the date at which the promise would expire seemed far off. But early in August I discovered that I had been in error as to the time, and that I was already free. On the 12th of August, at Fulham, in the Church of the Servites, an Order to which I had long felt an attraction, I made my submission to the Church, with deep thankfulness to God.

It was the day after Cardinal Newman's death, and the one bitter drop in a brimming cup of joy was that he could not know all that he had done for me, that

his was the hand which had drawn me in, when I sought the ark floating on the stormy seas of the world. But a few days afterwards, as I knelt by his coffin at Edgbaston, and heard the Requiem Mass said for him, I felt that indeed he knew, that he was in a land where there was no need to tell him anything, for he sees all things in the heart of God.

Those who are not Catholics are apt to think and say that converts join the Roman communion in a certain exaltation of spirit, but that when it cools they regret what has been done, and would return but for very shame. It has been said of marriage that every one finds, when the ceremony is over, that he or she has married another, and not the bride or groom who seemed to have been won; and Clough takes the story of Jacob as a parable representing this fact. We wed Rachel, as we think, and in the morning, behold it is Leah. So the Church bears one aspect when seen from a distance, *ab extra*, another when we have given ourselves into her keeping.

But the Church is no Leah, rather a fairer Rachel than we dared to dream, her blessings are greater than we had hoped. I may say for myself that the happy tears shed at the tribunal of Penance, on that 12th of August, the fervor of my first Communion, were as nothing to what I feel now. Day by day the Mystery of the Altar seems greater, the unseen world nearer, God more a Father, our Lady more tender, the great company of saints more friendly, if I dare use the word, my guardian angel closer to my side. All human relationships become holier, all human friends dearer, because they are explained and sanctified by the relationships and the friendships of

another life. Sorrows have come to me in abundance since God gave me grace to enter His Church, but I can bear them better than of old, and the blessing He has given me outweighs them all. May He forgive me that I so long resisted Him, and lead those I love unto the fair land wherein He has brought me to dwell ! It will be said, and said with truth, that I am very confident. My experience is like that of the blind man in the Gospel who also was sure. He was still ignorant of much, nor could he fully explain how Jesus opened his eyes, but this he could say with unfaltering certainty, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

