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MASTERING LIFE

By

PETER FLETCHER

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By the same Author

MASTERING 'NERVES'
LIFE WITHOUT FEAR
IN SEARCH OF PERSONALITY
SOME THREAD OF LIFE

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PREFACE

By writing this book I have placed myself under obligation to many people who have, directly or indirectly, helped me to bring it to completion.

Of the personal narratives which I have used to illustrate my theme at many points in the text, one or two are imaginary; the rest, like the stories we read as children, are "founded on fact." The material for them has been gathered together in the course of my therapeutic work at the London Clinic for Religious Psychology, and from my observation of the conduct of people I have met here, there and everywhere.

In every instance I have taken care so to alter or "camouflage" the details of "cases" and incidents described that neither the persons concerned nor their friends will be likely to recognise the portraits I have tried to paint. Nevertheless I am grateful to all those who, by permitting me to enter with them into the secret places of their hearts, have made it possible for me to gain some understanding of human nature and pass on

MASTERING LIFE

to others, for their help, a part of what I have thus learned.

This book would not have been written without the incentive of encouragement given me by Mr. W. E. Boardman, the Editor of the series of which this volume is one. I desire to express my thanks to him for that, and to my dear friend, Mrs. Alice Pawson, who read the manuscript, for making many helpful suggestions.

I hope that the usefulness of this little volume will justify the help I have thus been given in writing it.

PETER FLETCHER

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London, W.C.1

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PART I
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING OURSELVES TO OURSELVES

So many books have been written on the art of living, and so much of wisdom and experience has gone to their making, that it may well appear redundant, if not presumptuous, to attempt another on the same theme. Indeed, if I supposed that in this book I were required to speak as one who has already mastered life, I should lay down my pen without more ado ; for I confess that I have known far more of failure than success, and have felt far more of perplexity than certainty about life and its meanings during my forty years of adventure and trial along the road of experience. Of course, if it is true that we learn more by our failures than by our successes, some measure of competence to write on this theme is given to us all ; and that, at least, I can claim without reservation ; but I should not regard such a qualification as adequate for the task of instructing my fellows in an art that we are all alike trying to learn.

But it is not my purpose to do that. Rather, I would be to the reader as one who

accompanies another along a road to a common destination. To both travellers the way that lies ahead is new and strange; but the journey is made pleasant and companionable because each in turn takes occasion to direct the attention of his fellow to certain features of the landscape, shortenings of the way, subtle harmonies of composition in the changing scene, which either one travelling alone might have missed, but which are now the more enjoyed by both because the pleasure of discovery is shared. On any such adventuring there will be occasions when either one of the wayfarers will have an advantage over the other because of some past experience or discovery from which he alone has learned. If then he should say some word of warning or encouragement, or should be able to advise some change of course, he will be heeded, not because he is wiser than his companion or more familiar with the road they both must take, but because he has passed through a country that to the other is unknown.

So I would have it be with the reader, and if the circumstances of our journey together make the conversation rather one-sided, I

can only hope that when we part company he will be satisfied to agree with me that the disadvantage is mine—and yet not wish that we had not met.

Without presuming, then, to suggest that I have succeeded in mastering life, or even in understanding it very clearly, I will ask the reader to take the road with me. We will look at life together and ask questions about it, not with any expectation of solving its ultimate mystery, but surely with a modest hope of learning something of its meaning for ourselves, and of the parts we may be destined to play in the moving drama of this rich and complex civilisation in which we find ourselves.

But do we find ourselves, or do we merely accept ourselves as part of life, taking it as it comes, and caring nothing to inquire for what reason we are here or whither we go? That is, I think, one of the important questions we shall have to ask and somehow answer in this book if it is to have any of the value suggested by its title.

As I write these words I am sitting on a bench beneath the softly shading foliage of an old plane tree in a public garden that forms

the centre of one of London's quiet residential squares. It is a little oasis of natural beauty, close to the bustle of busy streets, yet somehow remote from it. Over yonder in the corner of the square a housemaid is busy on the verandah of a house, cleaning windows. A few yards to her right a gang of sturdy labourers is laying a huge electric power-cable in a roadside trench. A policeman stands over against the garden railings, gazing in. He looks hot in his heavy uniform, and is probably wishing he could come inside and take a nap under the trees. Somewhere behind me a long-suffering teacher of music is trying to persuade what must be a very unsatisfactory pupil to master some thoroughly untuneful exercises for the piano. At intervals I hear the shouts of hawkers, the clatter of masons at work on a distant block of flats, and, once in a while, the bang of a closing door.

The attention wanders from one to another of these distracting sights and sounds. It is pleasant to contrast one's own sense of quietness and repose with the haste and activity in evidence all around. How busy and preoccupied all these people seem to be!

As one thinks of them and allows the imagination to play about them one feels like a privileged spectator of a procession. The work of the world passes before one, but leaves untouched the seclusion of the garden, and one's own.

So far my musing goes, and then it stops ; for, in truth, I am not a spectator of this play, but one of the actors, and my part is not less a working part because, for the moment, I seem to be idly aloof from the busy goings and comings of the street. Just now I am a looker-on, but soon these thoughts of mine, trivial as they are, will be on paper and in type. They will occasion the roar of machines. Tin from Cornwall, wood from Canadian forests, steel from Sheffield, oils, dyes, clays, resins and a hundred and one other varieties of natural produce from the ends of the earth will be brought together to play their appointed parts in the strange enterprise of making these my words into a book. And later, the co-operation of a vast army of men and women : miners, electricians, sailors, railwaymen, engineers, typists, postal workers, coalheavers, accountants, shopkeepers, clerks and many more skilled and

unskilled folk, will have to be enlisted in order that the words I write shall be set before the eyes of you, who read.

Even while I seem to be unconcerned with it, my thought makes me a participant in the life and activity of the world around. Between it and me there is the reciprocity of a mutual dependence. I derive all that I have from life as it is lived about me. It derives from me something that helps to make it what it is and to mould it into what it may become.

So it is also with you, and with all your fellows and mine everywhere. We are part of life, the Reality we are trying to understand. Life, too, is part of us; and though we are often compelled by the limitations of our thought to turn in contemplation from the world to ourselves or from ourselves to the world, the separation is no more than a temporary device of imagination that at length we must try to resolve.

Indeed, the foregoing little pen-picture, evoked by the allure of a sunny garden, is a parable. It epitomises the direction our thought must take as we embark upon a quest for some clues to the mystery of life.

First, we must set ourselves over against our environment and try to see ourselves apart from it. We will examine our own human nature and endeavour to probe some of its depths, seeing it for what it is "in itself." Then we shall look away from ourselves to life, and inquire what is this environment in which we live and move. What is its effect upon us? How does it respond to us and how can we respond to it in order to elicit its essential good?

But then there will come a moment when we shall have to leave the quiet precincts of the garden. It will occur to us that both we and our surroundings are segments of a single whole, and with that realisation another question will confront our minds: what is the meaning of the whole which includes ourselves, the world in which we live and all else beside—earth and heaven, the things that have been, those that are, and others that are yet to be?

Here, then, is the plan I have chosen for the arrangement of this book; and the three following sections represent the three divisions of our thought as I have outlined them above. There are other ways, and doubtless

better ways, in which the subject could have been tackled, but this method of approach has at least one advantage: it enables us to look at human nature and at life "in the round." Our discussion will not be confined to individual problems of living, but will attempt to come to grips with its subject in a manner to afford some help to all who read, irrespective of what may be their own personal attitudes and difficulties in the hazardous yet blessed task of "Mastering Life."

At this point I am going to take the risk of offending the reader by asking him to become self-conscious; but let me hasten to add that I do not mean by this word the highly uncomfortable feeling, compounded, probably, of a mixed sense of inadequacy and fearfulness, to which as a rule we refer when we use it. What it means to feel "self-conscious" in that way most of us know to our cost. Being placed in some circumstance where the attention of others is directed upon us, we suddenly become intensely aware of the fact, and an acute disturbance of mind assails us, akin to panic, until we wish the ground would open and swallow us up.

We call that feeling "self-consciousness," but the word is not a very satisfactory definition of it, for our awareness then is not so much of ourselves, as of what we think is the impression of ourselves made upon others.

The kind of "self-consciousness," or, to use a better expression, "self-awareness," that I want the reader to feel is something quite different from that. It is a sense more rare and very much more important, that we should do well to cultivate more consistently than we do. Perhaps I shall describe it more adequately as an awakening to a vivid realisation of our own "aliveness" as sentient creatures in active participation in the adventure of being.

I find it curious to notice how many of my fellows seem to go through the months and years without ever coming to terms with themselves in this way. They rise, work, eat, talk, laugh, play and sleep, day in and day out, passing in their course events and experiences of the supremest wonder and the richest beauty, without ever, apparently, pausing for a moment to realise with intensity of feeling the surge and throb of vitality

within themselves. They ask questions about everything under the sun except the one thing that we should suppose to be of the most immediate concern, "Why me?"

Of course it is inevitable that for the greater part of our time we should be more concerned with life than with ourselves; but the Master who said, "He that loseth his life shall find it," did not mean by those words to enjoin us to browse through life as cows browse over a meadow, insensible of their own reality, unaware of any meaning for themselves in the existence they maintain by an intense preoccupation with the cud they chew. Indeed, the imperative condition of "losing life," in the meaning of Christ's words, is a keen realisation of the fact that we have a "life" to lose; a sense of our own reality in a world of active personalities; an assurance of our own power, first to apprehend, and then to mould into a pattern, the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

It is this kind of "self-consciousness" we lack, and for want of it find it possible to drift along the stream of time apathetic and somnolent, finding only dullness and hum-

drum monotony in a succession of experiences no whit less rich in possibilities of thrill and adventure than any of which we may read in books of history or romance.

As a result of some obscure but profound changes in the climatic conditions of the region, there is occurring in Western Canada a strange phenomenon that may most aptly be called "The Creeping Desert." Whole tracts of land that once were fertile and cultivated, bountiful in their gifts to man, have become completely arid. What was once the scene of intense and fruitful agricultural activity is now waste land on which nothing but cactus will grow. Once flourishing farmsteads have had to be abandoned and left to crumble into ruin.

Slowly, but relentlessly, the area of desolation is growing, and year by year more and more farmers are being compelled to give up their lands and homes, and retreat before the irresistible encroachments of an invisible foe which is setting all their labours at nought, as, acre by acre, the area of aridity spreads like a dry rot over the fair face of the land.

This creeping desert is a parable; a picture of one of life's commonest tragedies. As we

grow older, most of us become what we are pleased to call "disillusioned." Our response to life is no longer eager and adventurous, but timid and perhaps rather cynical. We find it more and more difficult to arouse and sustain the zest and enthusiasm which, in our youth, made every new experience a source of spiritual delight.

It is a deeply sad thing to see men and women losing their sensitiveness in this way ; to watch the leaping flames of vitality slowly dwindle and sink to the dull glow of cooling embers. Like the man with the muck-rake, these folk drag their weary way through the years with their eyes forever on the ground. In the richly colourful drama of human being and doing they see nothing but "the daily round and common task," monotonous and dull. Because their expectations have sometimes been unfulfilled they refuse any longer to be expectant. More and more every year they become dependent upon the artificial stimulants of civilisation for the titillation of their jaded faculties. More and more they find themselves becoming impotent to squeeze some meagre drop of interest or enjoyment even out of the miracu-

lous scientific gifts of this intensely vivid age.

There can be few of us who do not feel that life has in some measure thus played havoc with our souls. Indeed, did the reader not feel that something of the kind had happened within him, he would probably not be reading this book. As a great Canadian preacher said once in my hearing, "Familiarity breeds, not merely contempt, but indifference." The relentless flow of time finds us becoming less alert and sensitive to the simpler joys and satisfactions of life; more and more prone to rely upon external aids to stimulate and sustain our interest in the passing pageant of the world. When we think back along the years that have gone, we remember a time when it was so much more thrilling to be alive; when our capacity for filling each unforgiving minute with vivid experience was greater than it is to-day.

In his story of the life of the White Ant, Maurice Maeterlinck describes how secretly, silently and cunningly a myriad of these creatures will go to work, eating away the wood, from within a tree or a house perhaps, until nothing but a thin shell remains, and

yet by no outward observation can the inward havoc be detected. Maeterlinck says, "An Australian planter returns to his home; all is as it was, nothing seems changed or suggestive of enemy occupation. He sits down on a chair: it collapses. He tries to catch hold of a table: it falls flat on the floor. He leans against the beam in the centre: it comes away, dragging the whole roof down in a cloud of dust. . . . All this destruction is accomplished by Termites, commonly called white ants. . . . These insects have the genius to work so that no-one can see them."

In some such way does life itself tend to degrade our enthusiasms if once we allow the process to begin; and it is an invaluable discipline to stop sometimes and take stock of ourselves, for it is only by a periodical probe into the recesses of our minds that we can forewarn ourselves of the encroachments of disillusionment, and restore to our spiritual perceptions the freshness and vividness of early years.

So far as I can trace to its origin in myself this disposition to become apathetic and insensitive to the spiritual impact of life upon

my personality, it lies in a failure to become aware of myself, to achieve a true self-consciousness. I tend to assume, as I think we all do, that the world around is altogether independent of me and of my thought upon it, and will go on being what it is no matter what my attitude to it may be. But that is not true. I know from my most ordinary encounters with people that their disposition towards me can make the most profound difference to my own response both to them and to all experience. As it is with people, so it is also with things and events. What they are and what effect they can have upon us are determined far more by the way we approach them and think of them than by what they may be in themselves. And, in the last analysis, the quality of our living will depend upon the quality of our being. What we think of life will depend upon what we think of ourselves.

I shall be grateful to the reader, therefore, if at the very outset of our travelling together he will take the trouble to spend some short space of time in coming to terms with himself. To do so will be, I think, an imperative condition of any understanding he may hope

to acquire of life, and the ground of any expectation he may cherish of mastering it.

For—let us be quite clear about it—life, as we are using the word, depends on the quality of our experience far more than upon its breadth. It has much more to do with the vividness and intensity of our perceptions and appreciations than with our length of days. Some people experience more of life's essential reality and meaning in an hour or a day than others do in the span of three-score years and ten. To paraphrase an Italian proverb, "It is more fun to be a man for ten minutes than to be a tortoise for a hundred years."

As David Christie once put it, "Life is what you are alive to." Our "aliveness" is not merely existence—so that one either has it or has it not. It is measured by the extent to which we realise our capacity for rich and varied experience; so that, in fact, when we have to confess that we know to-day less than once we did of the sense of wonder, less of the spirit of adventure, feel less zest and enthusiasm, or less capacity for educing satisfaction from the infinite variety of life's experiences, we are only saying, in words

which have the uneasy virtue of obscuring the truth, that we are less alive than we were in the years that lie behind us.

Perhaps the very realisation that this is so will put an edge to our resolution to have it so no longer than we must ; and thus provide the spur we need to quicken self-awareness.

I would recommend you, therefore, to make this beginning without delay. Indeed, you will find it worth while to do it now, putting down this book for a few moments in order to devote yourself to the task. Turn your thoughts deliberately and with intentness upon yourself until you are looking at yourself mentally, as it were in a mirror, and say to yourself, "Lo, here am I: behold, I am alive." Feel in your very bones a sense of your own "livingness," your own reality in the midst of a larger whole that you call your world. Hold yourself in the mood until it becomes vivid, calling to your aid your resources of memory and imagination until you become intensely awake to the fact of your own being and acutely aware of the reality of the people and things around you. As you do this you will find your spirit quickening with a strange intuition of mystery. You will

begin to feel the wonder of the fact that you are indeed alive ; perhaps it will occur to you to inquire of yourself by what miracle you happen to be so, a self-conscious, self-directing compact of strange powers and energies, discovering itself just in this place at this time ; come you know not whence, going you know not whither.

You may be one of those in whom this intense and very stimulating sense of self-awareness is evoked most readily by solitude, perhaps at night under the stars, or on some windswept heath where cloud shadows play hide and seek among the gorse. If so, find an opportunity to go to such a place and there make this self-discovery. It may well turn out to be one of the most significant adventures of your life ; for such an experience does not end with the increasing awareness of one's own reality which is its beginning. It quickens the spirit to a greater acuity of perception of its surroundings, so that the most commonplace and familiar things are seen with a new discernment and appreciation.

Indeed, this is perhaps the most important reason for undertaking such a mental experi-

ment as I have suggested. The price we pay for failure to realise ourselves is failure to appreciate the world we live in. We are persistently blind to the beauty and interest of the familiar. As the preacher said whose words I quoted a moment ago, "Familiarity breeds indifference"; for what do we mean by "familiarity" but the gradual withdrawal of our interest and attention from people and things we have already come to know?

The reader will doubtless remember a story told of the landscape painter, Turner, who is famous for his genius in depicting on canvas the glory of setting suns. It is said that some person watching Turner at work remarked to him in a tone of disparagement, "I've never seen those colours in a sunset." Whereupon Turner replied quietly, "Perhaps not, but don't you wish you had?"

We are all rather like Turner's companion. Most of us have never seen a sunset, an opening flower, the face of a child, or even the rooms we live in and the work we do, with eyes more than half open, minds more than half awake to the strangeness that lies beyond their familiarity, the beauty beneath their drabness or the potential good behind their

common seeming. A tree, we understand, has a brown trunk ; we look at a tree once, see a vague brownness, accept it and leave it at that. Then, when some poet or artist shows us trees with trunks empurpled in a sunset or flushed with the pink of roses, blue with the sky or dappled with silver and gold, we think he is mad. We have never seen trees like that ! Of course not. We have never been alive enough to look, or awake enough to capture for ourselves the living beauty of common things.

Something must happen within us to remedy that, at least, if we are ever to come anywhere within reach of life, even to know it, before we begin to think of mastering it. The first stirring of that " something " in our souls will come when we begin to discover ourselves, as creatures capable of entering into an infinitely colourful and varied world of experience, to derive from all our encounters with it a rich and blessed satisfaction.

Do not, therefore, allow yourself to be deterred from making your own acquaintance, in the simple way I have suggested, by any fear of becoming introspective, or by any of that false modern " practicality " which

shirks creative thought. Accept the assurance of one of the greatest of modern psychologists, William McDougall, that you run no risk. On the contrary, as he says, "There is no avoiding the necessity of cultivating the power of reflective self-criticism, of making it a fundamental part of the art of living, if in this so complex modern world we would choose wisely our goals, strive effectively to attain them, shape our characters nobly, live usefully and happily."

The first step in such an activity is to achieve self-awareness. Self-knowledge starts from that.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCING OURSELVES TO OUR WORLD

IF our power to overcome life is, on the one hand, conditioned by our willingness to come to terms with ourselves in awareness and understanding, it is also true that, on the other hand, a necessity no less urgent is laid upon us to come to terms with the world we live in, because the quality of our experience depends upon the quality of our response to our environment. If we are afraid of it or in revolt against it, sooner or later it will oppress and overwhelm us, no matter how bitterly or tenaciously we strive against it.

This is the more true to-day because the civilisation we live in is so rich and complex. During the past century the fertility of scientific invention and discovery has been amazing ; perhaps unparalleled in history. Genius has lavished upon the race in bewildering profusion gifts of an almost miraculous kind. Whilst they afford us the means of vastly enlarging the horizons of our experience, and so are potentially blessed, the very magnitude of the power they place in our hands becomes

to us a menace because we feel our inability to conserve and direct it aright.

Just as a child, let loose to play in the toy showroom of a modern Department Store, would be bewildered and baffled of enjoyment by the very profusion and variety of the play-things among which he might disport himself, being unable to decide which to choose ; so we find ourselves distraught amidst the multitude of our possessions.

As Sir Richard Gregory, the distinguished scientist, said recently in an address to the Royal Association, " It is an ironical comment upon modern civilisation that the social reaction to the gifts of plenty made possible by the progress of scientific knowledge is not a corresponding increase of human welfare, but distress and unemployment and the prostitution of scientific effort to purposes of destruction."

The ever-widening span of human knowledge also tends to impoverish us in the same way. The more we come to learn about our world and the cosmos, the more intensely we feel our own littleness in the midst of incomprehensible immensities. Our ignorance is thrown into sharper relief with every new-

acquisition of knowledge. As the shining of a star makes the surrounding darkness seem more profound, so the light of every new discovery of truth makes us the more sensible of the profundities of mystery behind.

Thus, the very brilliance of human achievement and the speed of our progress in the mastery of material things, so far from enlarging our capacity to live, tend to cramp it. We become oppressed with an increasing sense of personal futility. Confronted with responsibilities that seem altogether beyond our power to assume, we are tempted to cease from striving, surrendering ourselves to the whim or impulse of the moment, hoping to find in the material satisfactions that lie nearest to our hands some surcease from the devastating sense of worthlessness that our own erudition has created.

Our "disillusionment," as we call it, does not, however, improve the situation; indeed, it makes it progressively worse; for it compels us to surrender more completely to the dominion of our material possessions and puts their control the more securely into the hands of those who, lusting for personal power, ruthlessly turn them to destructive ends.

To-day most of us are paying, in one way or another, the penalty of our spiritual inadequacy. In themselves, our scientific tools and intellectual discoveries are neither good nor evil, neither constructive nor destructive. Their worth depends upon the purpose for which they are used, and what that purpose will be depends upon us ; the esteem in which we hold ourselves, and the spiritual motive which becomes the dynamic of our living. If, then, we are to emancipate ourselves from our despairs, throw from off our shoulders the weight of oppression we feel, we must find some way of educing from life an assurance of our own worth ; a conviction of the essential dignity of our human nature, and of its power to give us supremacy over our environment and the tools we have for its moulding.

Our failure to do this is, as I have already suggested, due in part to our unwillingness to realise ourselves ; but it is made doubly certain by our refusal to face the spiritual imperatives with which life continually challenges our complacencies.

I suppose that for most of us there are times when, feeling more than usually impotent before the complexities and incon-

sistencies of this modern world, we look backwards along the years and wish that we could have lived our lives in some age of a simpler and more primitive order than our own. How much easier things must have been, we imagine, for our grandparents and great-grandparents or those who went before them, when the pace was leisurely and men had room to breathe. The individual counted for something then. There was scope for the exercise of personal discrimination, time for the cultivation of personal taste. To-day, life is one long rush. The pressure of economic circumstance compels men to conform to a pattern; makes insistent demands upon their time and energy; forces them to accept modes of behaviour in work and play that they would not have chosen; and thus, despite themselves, breeds in them the sense of personal inadequacy which at length destroys both their humanity and their freedom.

But is it really so? Granted that when, in certain moods, we make a comparison of our present world with the past, our disposition is to long for a return of the "good old days"; does not a closer examination

of the circumstances in which men then lived soon disclose other conditions with which they had to contend, different no doubt from those that menace us, but hardly less potential of disaster? They were ravaged by diseases of which we know nothing. They lived in constant peril of persecution by fire and sword. The gloomy terrors of ignorance and superstition harried them from the cradle to the grave. They became inured by custom to extremes of poverty and pain beyond anything we are ever called upon to bear. When the whole story is told of other times and manners, it becomes at least doubtful whether our forebears found life any simpler or easier to manage than it appears to us, and there are many who, having weighed dispassionately the pros and cons, are ready to affirm with stout conviction that we have the best of the bargain.

Moreover, it is impossible to evade the witness of history that even beneath the weight of the grossest oppression, in circumstances of the starkest hardship, when no glimmer of hope seemed to pierce the darkness of circumstance, men and women have succeeded in living triumphantly and wit-

nessing to the unconquerable supremacy of the human spirit over every travail and hazard. Such lives are a rebuke to our complacencies and a challenge to our despairs. They remind us that our power to make life worth living lies, not in our circumstances, but in the disposition of our souls ; not in the tools we may find to our hands, but in the purposes for which we determine to use them.

Indeed, our forgetfulness of this truth is the cause of our present distemper. It is not the multiplicity of toys in our emporium that makes us surfeited : it is our unwillingness to decide upon the game to play. We have failed to discern that life does not consist in the number of our possessions, but in the use we elect to make of what we have.

So far as my experience enables me to enter with sympathy into the lives of my fellows, I judge it true of them all that circumstances have in themselves little power either to educe their capacity for making life rich and blessed or to confine it. One of the most happy and contented persons I have met recently is a charwoman, the wife of a labourer. Having eight children of her own, she some time ago co-opted into her

family the orphaned daughter of a neighbour, and now works her fingers to the bone to bring up her little flock of nine to be good men and women. The most miserable human being I have ever met was a woman who carried about on her person, as jewellery, more wealth than the charlady could hope to handle in a lifetime.

I do not suggest that our independence of circumstance is complete. To retrieve life from despair under the conditions in which some of our fellows have to exist must be a work of superhuman courage and endurance. But it does appear that for most of us, and certainly for most of those who will read this book, the extent to which circumstances do control our lives is out of all proportion to the pressure they exert upon us. If they bring us to the dust, that is because we are willing to let them, far more than because they must.

The truth we are reluctant to learn is, I think, that what we call "circumstance," the environment to which we must adapt ourselves in order to live, is not the larger world of affairs, the greater flux of human activity and progress, but a lesser world of our own ;

one which orients itself around our personalities and in which we stand, unique and alone, as masters or slaves.

It surprises me to discover time after time how few of the men and women I encounter come to terms with this fact, that, essentially, each one of them lives in his or her own "private world," as I like to call it. It is the world of thoughts, events, things and people through which they alone move, and which they alone see in one particular way. Just as a pebble, dropped into a still pool, sets into motion a series of tiny waves which flow outwards in ever-widening circles from the point where the stone dropped in, so each one of us is at the centre of a series of experiences which are exclusively our own. If, having dropped one stone into a pool and set the water moving, you then drop in another at a place somewhere near the first, a second series of circular waves will begin to flow; but if you watch carefully, you will notice that the concentric rings flowing outwards from the spot where the first stone dropped do not in any way interfere with the movement, or distort the shape, of the rings started by the second stone. The one series

may overlap or flow through the other, but neither has any power to interfere with the other; and if, instead of two pebbles, you throw into the water a dozen, each will create its own series of perfect circles, all intermingling yet all independent.

Our private lives are very much like that. Each one makes its own impact upon the still pool of circumstance, causing change. Other lives make contact with ours, and there is constant overlapping and intermingling of life with life; but every one of us is at the centre of his own personal world, to make of it what he will in quality. For this world we are responsible. In this world we can be what we choose to be; we can make of it what we elect to make. It is our true "environment."

That this environment is indeed uniquely our own is beyond question, yet we fail often to realise that it is so. The simplest example of our confusion of thought about it may be seen when we think of a family of children. They grow up to be completely different in temperament and character, and when our attention is drawn to the great differences between them we express surprise. "Dear

me," we say, "how strange that they should be so unlike! They were all brought up in the same environment."

But they were not brought up in the same environment. Jimmy, the eldest boy, was brought up for at least five of his most impressionable years in an environment of people which included, beside himself, only mother and father, whose interest and attention he commanded almost exclusively—or so it probably seemed to him. Then, out of the blue, there landed in his world a new person, his sister Jane, whose arrival suddenly diverted from him all the interest to which he had been accustomed, and compelled him to make a completely new adjustment of his thought to strange and, for him, perhaps alarming conditions.

Jane's environment, on the other hand, included, from the beginning, mother, father and an elder brother, whose attitude towards her was not one of unalloyed satisfaction; on the contrary, he often made it as clear as he could that in his opinion she was a lot more bother than she was worth.

Jimmy's environment, then, contained a father whose strictness he feared, a mother

whose indulgence he could count upon as necessity arose, and a sister who had to be taught not to take advantage of her youth and femininity. Jane's environment included a father whom she could coax into obedience, a mother who could see through all her little tricks, and a big brother who was sometimes loving and sometimes teasing, and who always seemed afraid that she would get more than her share of life's good things—a nuisance and yet a useful protector at times.

One could go on at length, pointing out one difference and another in the environment of each child and of each of their parents. To say that all these people lived in the same surroundings is true only in the most superficial way. Actually the differences in their several environments were far more important than their similarities, and if those differences were reflected in the adult characters of two children brought up in the same home, it is not surprising, but altogether to be expected.

The fact is, as I have suggested, that for each one of us the world we live in is, in a profound sense, our own possession. Our eyes see it as no other eyes ever do. Our

thoughts play upon it as no other person's thoughts ever can. Our activities in it have upon it a unique effect, and it has a unique effect upon us ; depending, not upon what that world is, in itself, but upon what we decide to do with it and make of it.

It is well to remember, then, that when we talk about "mastering life," the life we have to master, the world we have to win or overcome, is this exclusive life, this "private world" which is inescapably our own. Its breadth of interests is always within the compass of our powers because we decide how big it shall be. Its possibilities for rich experience, for self-fulfilment and enjoyment are limited only by our limitations of will and energy. Its boundaries mark the end both of our responsibilities and our privileges. It is ours, and it is all we have. What we make of it depends upon what we are.

Indeed, the story of all human achievement, all mastery of life, is the story of the courage, faith and endurance with which men and women like ourselves have taken the unpromising material of circumstance—in their own private "worlds"—and have made of

it something noble that endures. The lives of all truly great men and women remind us of this. They became what they were, with few exceptions, not because their surroundings were pleasant or comfortable, but in spite of every sort of menace, hardship and handicap, because they determined to be the rulers of their own self-conscious worlds, making of life what they would, and refusing to let life make of them what it might.

If we ask ourselves what is the difference between those who, in such a manner, have achieved the mastery of life, and others who have failed, it becomes apparent at once that it does not lie in the propitiousness of circumstance, if they have found it favourable, nor in its hardness or complexity, if it has been to them antagonistic. Many upon whom life seems to have lavished all its gifts, mental and material, have signally failed to make their experience worth while. Many others, beset with every external handicap, have triumphantly "overcome the world." All thought and observation conspire to convince us that whatever the difference may be between those who do master life and those who are held in bondage by it, it is

not an external one. In ourselves, not in our stars, lies the secret of victorious living.

To grasp this truth and hold it fast is imperative for every one of us. Only by doing so shall we be able to emancipate ourselves from the sense of personal futility which is the greatest menace of civilisation to our souls ; and is so, not because it is really more complex or difficult to control than other civilisations in which our forebears lived, but because, knowing more about it, we think it so.

Our true concern is not with that greater world, except as it offers material for our moulding ; it is with the private world which is, somehow, all our own, to do with as we will. If we walk through this world in fetters, it is because we forge them. If its sky is overcast with the clouds of despair and disillusionment, that is because we let it be so. If it is a world oppressed with evil and embittered by malice or greed, that is because we have not brought it peace nor desired to give it life and love. If we tread this world as discoverers, as prophets, priests and kings, we do so because we will, and, being willing, find we can.

To put the matter in another way, the quality of our living, our power to draw from life its essential good, is determined by the spiritual allegiances we hold and the spiritual imperatives we acknowledge, far more than by the circumstances in which we find ourselves or the obstacles we may encounter as we pursue our earthly course.

We begin to rise to the full stature of our manhood and womanhood when we realise this; for then we no longer measure the worth of our achievements or the dignity of our nature by a comparison with others who may seem to be more or less fortunately circumstanced. We find another and a worthier criterion; measuring what we are only by what we have it in our power to become. The life we have to master is our own life. The world we have to conquer is our own world.

Our own; and yet, in a deep sense, not our own, for even here our power and our freedom are conditioned by laws that must be obeyed. We have liberty to make life rich and blessed or to mar it and turn it to destruction; but whether we do the one or the other will depend upon the extent to

which we acknowledge the laws of our being, physical, mental and spiritual. They operate whether we will or no, and by our acceptance of the terms they impose the quality of our living is measured.

I suppose it could be shown that, in the last analysis, all our failure to master the art of living is the consequence of our persistence in revolt against the limitations of our freedom imposed by the very nature of things; limitations inherent both in us and in the world of our environment. We are loth to accept the fact of our dependence upon something other than ourselves and greater than ourselves for the continuance and progress of our lives; and we do not cease from kicking against the pricks even when the persistence of our failure convinces us that we are wrong.

In the management of our physical affairs this disposition to obstinacy is less strong than in our ordering of our mental and spiritual lives. The well-filled appointment books of most members of the medical profession may perhaps suggest that we are not completely willing in obedience to the laws of bodily health; nevertheless, we do

acknowledge the reality of those laws even when we elect to disregard them; and we do not quite account it a mark of genius in a man that he should deny the existence of such laws and strive with zeal to attain physical fitness whilst deliberately flouting every canon of cleanliness and hygiene. We acknowledge that the continuance of our physical life depends upon our submission to certain laws entirely beyond our control; to certain limitations entirely without our power to change. Graciously or ungraciously, according to our mood, we bow to the inevitable, and by the measure of our obedience preserve or lose our health and energy. Our freedom to live is conditioned by our dependence upon law.

So it is also with the inner life of our spirits, but we are slower to acknowledge in this realm a dependence, as complete as it is in other departments of our being, upon the laws of an external reality. Yet here, too, our power to live is conditioned by our willingness to learn and to obey the ruthless, but beneficently ruthless, commands of something—call it God or any other name you will—which imposes the terms of our free-

dom to think or feel, to will or do, in the world of our experience.

If a man set out to train himself for an athletic contest on a diet of beer and plum-cake we should not think it remarkable that he found himself unable to stay the course when the moment of testing came. But many of us determine, as we say, to "make life worth living," and set out to do so, not merely upon a spiritual and intellectual regime of the beer-and-plum-cake order, but also with an obstinate refusal to perceive any reason why our method should not succeed.

Of course our attitude is absurd. We live in a world where it simply is not true that we can do as we like and still bring to pass the good we desire. As a man wishing to build a bridge over a river has perfect liberty to construct it of any material he may choose, and in any manner he desires, and yet will only succeed in making his bridge a bridge if he fulfils certain rules of engineering, so also are we free to choose our way of living—but we shall succeed in making a life only if we accept the conditions that life itself imposes as the price of our freedom.

The fact is that we live in a law-abiding universe. Our personalities are not exempt from an obligation that all other created things observe. We can never hope to master life unless we are willing, first to discern and then to obey, the spiritual imperatives which life itself lays down for our direction and succour.

PART II

MINDS IN THE MAKING

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERY OF PERSONALITY

THERE is one question that men and women have asked, and continued to ask ever since the human race began : What is man ? The same question has been framed in many different ways as age has succeeded age and one culture has given place to another. Many strange and surprising answers to it have from time to time been given ; but none of them has satisfied everybody, and very few have satisfied anybody. The mystery remains, and probably will forever remain unsolved. Nobody knows what a human being really is.

At first thought this may seem surprising, but really it is not ; for a similar statement would be just as true of everything else in our experience. We may get to know a great deal about the structure and activity of many things with which we have to deal in the course of our lives : things animate and inanimate ; but behind our knowledge of them there is always a vast realm of ignorance. The mystery of what they are forever eludes us. Perhaps the biggest mistake we make is to

assume that we do know all there is to be known, when, having discovered a little about the way things behave or respond to our touch, we label them with names and turn them to some use.

For example : the genius of many scientific workers has enabled us to discover some of the laws governing the activity of a force that we have learnt to call "electricity." We have harnessed some of its power, using it to drive our machines, light our houses, cook our food and do many other things for us. We have coined many new words to describe the ways in which electricity behaves : "current," "voltage," "amperes," "resistances," "flashes," "shocks," and so on. Certain people can tell us how to set about the business of taming the mighty power of electrical energy to make it obedient to our wills. Indeed, the whole science of electricity seems to be so orderly and consistent that we are led to think we know nearly everything there is to be known about it. Perhaps we do know a very great deal ; but what electricity really is, nobody has the remotest idea.

So you will also find it to be with everything else of which your senses make you aware.

Our knowledge is like a little light shining in a dark place, so that the brighter it becomes the greater seems to be the area of darkness around. The known shades off into the unknown. The more we learn about anything the more mysterious its reality becomes ; and it is our ignorance, not our knowledge, which sometimes makes us arrogant enough to suppose that we can explain the ultimate nature of anything in our experience.

This being so, it need not unduly distress us to have to admit that our own personality also eludes our attempts to explain it. So long as we acknowledge the limitations of our powers we are on fairly safe ground ; for then we can do with human nature what we do with electricity. Confessing our ignorance of what we are, we can try to find out something of how we behave, and by doing so, learn, perhaps, to harness our own energy to ends that are good and constructive, instead of wasteful, or powerful only to destroy. Our attempts at self-understanding will not be less valuable because they are made in a spirit of true humility which accepts its own conclusions with reserve, realising how great a difference there is between labelling a thing

in order to describe it, and claiming to know all there is to be known about it.

As a matter of fact, it is to such a spirit of humility that we owe the deeper understanding of the human mind and its working which the New Psychology is giving us.

Not so long ago, scientists reached a point where they began to think they understood human nature rather well. They thought of the mind as some sort of machine, and set about the task of separating its various activities as if they were so many cogwheels, labelling each part by giving it a name. They talked of "Instincts," "Emotions," "Reason," "Will" and "Imagination" as if each of these mental operations were distinct from the others and explainable separately.

Unfortunately, whilst this system had the advantage of looking very neat and tidy, it did not work. It is quite impossible to dissect a human mind in that way, because it is never possible to catch it in the act of working one part without the others. There is some element of instinctive behaviour, of emotion, reason, will and imagination in all mental activity. Every act of the mind is a sort of mixture of everything in it.

There came a time when the psychologists began to realise this, and, in a new spirit of humility, they started to think the matter out afresh.

One result of their thinking has been that nowadays we have given up the attempt to explain the mind in terms of what it is. We are trying to describe it, as a whole, in terms of what it does.

Now, as soon as one begins to look at the matter from this point of view, it becomes obvious that the one thing most characteristic of the human mind is just this: it is always doing *something*. It is forever thrusting forward into life, pressing ahead into the future, fitting itself into new circumstances, changing and being changed by its surroundings in an unceasing effort to become more and more completely at home in its environment. As Samuel Butler expressed it in his book, *The Way of all Flesh*,

All our lives long, every day and every hour, we are engaged in the process of accommodating our changed and unchanged selves to changed and unchanged surroundings; living, in fact, is nothing else than this process of accommodation; when we fail in it a little we are stupid, when we fail flagrantly we are mad, when we suspend it tem-

porarily we sleep, when we give up the attempt altogether we die. In quiet, uneventful lives the changes external and internal are so small that there is little or no strain in the process of fusion and accommodation ; in other lives there is great strain, but there is also great fusing and accommodating power. A life will be successful or not, according as the power of accommodation is equal to or unequal to the strain of fusing and adjusting external and internal changes.

In an earlier chapter I put the same thought, less aptly, in another way, saying that we are all trying to adapt ourselves to our environment, and that the quality of our living depends upon the extent to which we succeed in this strange enterprise. We are all engaged in the whole-time occupation of becoming.

But notice that we go about this task as complete individuals. Everything we do with our minds is somehow concerned with the activities of our bodies. Everything we do with our bodies is somehow managed and directed by our minds.

So we have to think of ourselves as unities : " body-minds " or " mind-bodies " ; it does not matter which way you put it. We are complete wholes, responding as wholes to the environment in which we live, and influenced as wholes by it. Nothing can happen

to our bodies without affecting our minds. Nothing can happen to our minds without affecting our bodies. The relation between the two parts of us is so close that nobody can determine where the boundary of either may be ; indeed, there is no boundary. Mind and body are two parts of a single whole, like the " heads " and " tails " of the same penny.

In common parlance, we use the word " Personality " to denote this body-mind unity ; a mysterious form of life, having amazing powers and potentialities, always changing, always striving to fit itself more completely and satisfyingly into the world of its surroundings—this strange, elusive something that you and I are.

Of course it is this fact of our unceasing changeability which makes it so difficult for us to ascertain what we were when we began. The successive experiences through which we have passed since our birth have been so many, and their combined effects upon us have been so great, that it is a most difficult task to discover how much of us, so to speak, was there when we started. If a new-born baby could talk, he might be able to enlighten us about this, but he cannot. So we have to

use what ingenuity we may to ascertain as much as possible about our own beginnings in order to answer the questions, What is the raw material of human personality? What equipment do we start with when we begin to be?

You may wonder why it should be desirable to make any attempt to find this out. What does it matter, anyway? you may ask. It matters because we know that many of our failures to live happily and usefully are due to what we call our "temperament." If we can discover with some degree of accuracy what makes our temperament what it is, how much of it is ours by native endowment and how much has been grafted into it as a result of our experiences, we shall at least be better able to accept our own limitations gracefully. Moreover, we shall know, with more assurance than we have at present, how far it may be possible to change that temperament of ours and make it more adequate for the business of living. We shall be better equipped to judge the extent to which we can improve our dispositions and remove the mental handicaps from which we all suffer more or less.

At one time, when the "labelling" psy-

chologists were busy tacking names on to every different sort of mental activity they thought they could distinguish, the popular idea was that the mind of a newly-born baby consisted of a sort of bundle of "instincts." It was supposed that we inherited certain definite traits of behaviour which would come into operation automatically and inevitably when an appropriate stimulus from outside set them going, just as an electric bell will always ring if you press the right button.

We were supposed to start out at birth with quite a number of these "instincts" all ready to begin working on the word "Go!" There were food-seeking instincts, fear instincts, herd instincts, sex instincts and goodness knows how many others. Some psychologists made longer lists, others made shorter ones. Unfortunately nobody could be sure about the real existence of any of these separate instincts, and to-day there is a growing disposition to question the usefulness of trying to sort them out and list them.

Of course, nobody doubts that we enter the world with some kind of native equipment for the business of living. What is in question is the classification. We do not really know

just how much or how little the hereditary part of us is. All we can say with certainty is that it is less than we used to suppose, and that it consists, first, of something that one can only call "energy"—the will to live and go on living ; secondly, of our physical structure ; and, thirdly, of a certain capacity to respond to our environment and to do so more readily and effectively as we learn by experience to know it.

All that may sound somewhat vague, and so it is, because our knowledge is vague. Of one thing we are sure ; that is, whatever may be the nucleus of mind with which we begin our earthly course, it becomes subject to a great many powerful forces as soon as we enter this world.

From the moment of his birth every human being comes within the orbit of a multitude of influences all tending to modify his behaviour and gradually to mould it into a pattern forming what we call the "character" or "personality" of the individual. Nurses, parents, friends, foods, games, books, work, houses, schools and churches ; pleasures, pains, joys, sorrows, hopes, griefs, failures and successes ; all have their effects upon the indi-

vidual, all play their parts in shaping personality and moulding it into what at length it may become.

Of course the individual plays his part too ; for what he becomes depends not alone upon the situations he meets as he lives and grows, but also, and perhaps more significantly, upon the way in which he meets them ; upon the kind of impression which he allows circumstances to make upon him, and the conclusions he draws from them.

I have for a long time sought some illustration that will convey a fairly clear idea of the growth of a human mind without involving scientific terminologies and the confusion that results when an attempt is made to dissect the working of thought-processes into parts as if they existed separately.

The happiest simile that has occurred to me, so far, is that of a flowing stream.

If you take a walk or a ride along the bank of a river, tracing it from its source to its mouth, you will observe that many changes affect the stream as it flows.

At first it is a tiny rivulet, bubbling and laughing down a hillside. Soon it is joined by one and then another tributary. The water

from the river's source mingles with that from the springs flowing into it, until very soon it becomes both deep and wide as it flows relentlessly on towards the sea. So the spring of a human life, the inherited " nucleus " of personality, starting as a tiny thing, is modified and strengthened by the first external influences that touch it. Their power augments it, and soon it becomes difficult to say how much of what the growing child now is, it was at the beginning, and how much has " flowed in " from outside. Whether much or little, it has become part of the one stream of life, which, like the river, flows on.

Follow the river farther. For some miles it wends its way across a quiet plain. The water seems still and smooth. As you look at it, you cannot be sure that it is moving ; but let a twig drop on the surface, and away it goes, floating with the stream, which flows on as relentlessly as ever. Continue to trace the course of the river. Very soon it is no longer quiet, but turbulent. A fall in the land sends the water cascading over stones in angry violence. The surface is troubled into swirling, tempestuous motion. The stream crashes downwards, roaring as it goes, hurling

great trees from its path, scouring the stones with whips of raging fury. Soon, however, it subsides again ; but now its flow is swift, for many more tributaries have joined it, and it is in spate. Here it swings round a sharp bend and the waters circle in menacing whirlpools. There it catches the prevailing winds and the surface heaves and swells in great waves.

So, ever changing, the river goes on ; yet the more it changes, the more it is the same ; for beneath all its vicissitudes is the energy of its motion, the relentless flow of the current towards the sea.

Do you notice that, as one describes the successive " experiences " of the river in its course, one gives them different names ? One writes of " quiet pools," of " rapids," of " whirlpools," " waves," " waterfalls," " eddies " and the like. These words each mean something different, yet they are all but varying aspects of the same thing—the current, the energy of the stream. We use different expressions to describe that energy as it reveals itself under different circumstances ; but it is the same energy from beginning to end.

Bearing the analogy in mind, think now for

a moment of the stream of a human life, flowing on from childhood to youth, from youth to age. The force of the current is the energy of life, the "will to be." In its mental and spiritual aspects we describe it by the word "motive," or "emotion." As our life-stream wends its way across the years it encounters many vicissitudes, and the waters are variously troubled by changing circumstances, turns of fortune, influences for good and evil that join the stream, swelling it, or diverting its course. Observing these successive changes, we invent many words to describe them. We talk of love and hate, of fear and anger, joy and sorrow, of benevolence, charity, trust and hope; of lust, greed, envy, malice or ambition; of courage, of cowardice; of failure or success. There are hundreds of such words, all used to express with some precision the many subtle variations of self-expression we may observe in people when their mode of response to life alters to meet different conditions, as the appearance of a river changes with the lie of the land through which it flows.

But, fundamentally, all these different words mean the same thing—emotion, the

energy of life, the will to go on being and becoming.

The questions we have to ask ourselves are these: Is that "emotion," that "energy of life" which takes so many different forms, essentially the same in all human beings everywhere? Are its infinite variations, as we see them in our fellow-men, the result of the impact of circumstance, as the different aspects of the river are the result of the contours of the ground through which it flows? Or are some men by nature good and others evil?

Perhaps we can never be quite sure; but there is a growing disposition to believe that, in its nature, the primal energy of life is always and everywhere the same; if it varies at all it varies, not in quality but in "quantity," if one may use that word; or "pressure."

Using the illustration of flowing water again, one may put it in this way. There are big streams and little streams. Some springs gush exuberantly from the mountain-side; some trickle slowly from a mossy bank. Some are strong, some are weak; but the water is the same.

Just so the energy of human life seems to be stronger in one person than another. Some men are more intelligent, others less so ; some have great capacities, others only small. Some have " ten talents," others have but one. Nevertheless, in them all the nature or quality of the fundamental " emotion " or " will to live " is in its essence the same, and it is best described by the one word " Love."

Perhaps the most significant contribution made to psychological thought in recent years is this suggestion, that the one native endowment of a human individual is a capacity for expressing itself lovingly in relation with its fellows. Our equipment for life is an intense urge to seek fellowship and communion with others of our kind, and order our lives so that this seeking finds its satisfaction. We are indebted for the clear statement of this idea in scientific language to the late Dr. Ian D. Suttie, whose notable book, *The Origins of Love and Hate*, describes the researches which led him to this conclusion.

The implication of this idea is that all human failure to live happily and effectively is the result of circumstances that have somehow stemmed the flow of " love-energy,"

or diverted it from its true channel. Just as a fallen tree or a boulder in a stream may turn some of the water from its course so that it becomes a stagnant pool, or a twist in the land may change the current from a smooth, even flow to a raging torrent; so also, it is suggested, the many evil and ugly emotions men may suffer, and the dreadful results they may have in action, are the effects of environmental conditions upon the pure emotion of love in human personality.

There is, however, this difference between human energy and the energy of a stream: the latter must go where the slope of the ground takes it. We have the power to go where we will. In other words, the effect that circumstances will have upon us depends not so much on what they are in themselves, as on the attitude we elect to adopt towards them.

Acknowledging that, then, let us bear in mind, as a fundamentally important idea for our self-understanding, this truth: the root-motive of every human life is "love-energy." It is not merely a "will-to-live," but a will-to-live-in-fellowship and companionship with others. Every personality depends upon the

loving ministry of its fellow-men for the continuance of its own life and the discovery of its own true environment; and every one requires conditions in which it can express itself lovingly towards others before it can bring its own powers into full and constructive use.

Implicit in what I have written so far there are two ideas that seem to me to be important for the purpose we are pursuing in this book. The first is this: if the "force" or "pressure" of the life-energy varies in individuals, we cannot all expect, even under the most propitious circumstances, to reach the same level of achievement. To do so would be as impossible as for a tiny river like the Nidd to become a Mississippi. If one realises that there are definite limitations to one's powers, one may learn to accept them gracefully, being content to make the best of what one has, rather than forever strive to become something one can never be.

Our everyday word for the "power" or "force" of our own life-stream is "Intelligence." We recognise that some folk are more intelligent than others, but we are

not altogether willing to acknowledge that we cannot become more intelligent than we are.

Many careful tests have been made from time to time to ascertain whether or not it is true that the intelligence of a person can be increased. All these tests point to one conclusion. It is that, from the cradle to the grave, the intelligence of any chosen individual varies only to the slightest extent. A system of intelligence grading has been invented. If you take a person whose "intelligence quota," as it is called, is 78 per cent., you will find that, no matter to what task you set him, what kind of test you make, or at what age you make it, that percentage represents very closely the limit of his capacity for achievement.

If that person does his level best at anything, the degree of his success will be about 78 per cent. of what, on the average, is possible. If he does less than his best, he will not attain that percentage. Of course, very seldom do any of us use our intelligence to the best advantage, and probably there is much room for our improvement in that

sense ; but even our best has its limitation. We should be wiser if we acknowledged the fact, for then we should not compare ourselves to our own disadvantage with those who excel over us, not because they are more industrious or sincere, but because they happen to be differently gifted, and so deserve no more credit for their comparative success than we deserve blame for our comparative failure—provided we have both done all we can.

The second idea we shall do well to keep in mind is this : if we recognise how much of human sin and failure is the result, not of native wickedness, but of circumstances through which the pure energy of human love has been prevented from finding its true channel of expression, we shall become less critical of our fellows in their distresses and follies, more willing to recognise the thwarted desires that have made them what they are, and therefore both more ready and more able to help them to change.

Moreover, we shall begin to look at ourselves with clearer understanding ; seeing what possibilities there are of moulding the “ raw material ” of our natural endowments

into a consistent pattern by controlling and directing the "motive of our being" into channels of expression where, in fellowship with others, its true nature is seen and its true destiny fulfilled.

CHAPTER IV

LEARNING TO LIVE

IN the earlier part of the last chapter I made the suggestion that we should think of a human being starting out upon the adventure of being, with native equipment consisting, essentially, of a physical organism, a certain mysterious energy of desire or "will to go on living," and a capacity to respond to the activities of the world around it.

We have given some thought to the second of these endowments, suggesting that it may most happily be regarded as "love-energy," an insistent urge for self-expression in fellowship. It will be profitable now to consider that third element in our nature, which I have tried to describe as "a capacity for responsiveness." What that phrase means, we may understand most readily by thinking of the first and simplest acts of life.

For the maintenance of its existence, a baby needs both protection and food. It enters this world helpless, completely dependent upon the love of others for the provision of all its necessities. Under normal circumstances the answer to its needs awaits its

coming in the person of its mother, who at once begins to tend it. At this stage of its life, the baby's dependence, or trust, is its greatest asset. The more readily it submits to its mother's various ministries, the more likely will it be to thrive and grow. The child's "capacity for responsiveness" consists, for the time being, in this very attitude of passivity or willingness to accept without question the attentions it receives. So, when mother makes it warm and snug, it sleeps contentedly. When she offers it her breast, it sucks.

The act of sucking, in answer to the offer of the mother's breast, is, indeed, the simplest active expression of the "power of response" with which we are concerned. It is as nearly automatic as anything mental can be. Yet immediately it is exercised, it has some results of a most interesting kind upon the mind of the baby. In the first place, a very primitive form of learning occurs. After its first few meals a child begins to suck more expertly than it did at first, and its skill continues to increase with practice. Secondly, the successful exercise of its power to suck brings the child certain mental satisfactions. Its feeling of

hunger is appeased. It experiences pleasure from the flavour of its food and from the physical sensations attendant upon receiving it into the mouth and swallowing it. To put the matter in another way, the child finds its first experience of joy in thus responding lovingly to its mother and in receiving from her the gifts she has to bestow.

Notice, then, three important effects of this simple activity of babyhood. A response of the mind to the stimulus of the environment is made with more and more ease as it is repeated. A successful response brings a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction, and that result makes the individual both more willing and more able to behave in that particular way.

The nature of our minds is such that they learn by experience, and they learn in two ways. Influences that are pleasurable and satisfying have a persuasive effect so that we desire to repeat them. Influences that are unpleasant tend to repel us, so that we respond to them by trying to avoid them. If for any reason we find some obstacle to prevent us from expressing ourselves in satisfying ways, somehow the love-energy within us is

“bottled up” and our feeling is one of unhappiness. If we cannot avoid unpleasant experiences we become ill at ease or afraid.

Now, it is not difficult to understand that among the experiences we encounter in the course of our lives, and especially during childhood, there will be many which, though actually good or beneficial in themselves, are for one reason or another made to seem unpleasant or harmful, either because they are wrongly presented to us by other persons, or because our own faulty understanding misinterprets their meaning. To such experiences we shall make the wrong kind of response, continuing to do so as they are repeated, unless some very strong compensating influence occurs to overcome the power of the first and convince us of our mistake. Some of our “pet aversions” are simple examples of such misinterpretations of experience.

Here are some other illustrations of the sort of thing that happens.

Mary was brought up “on the bottle.” Sometimes, when she cried at inconvenient moments, her mother would give her, instead of the bottle, a dummy teat to suck. The

rhythmic act of pulling away at the dummy very soon sent Mary to sleep. After a while she got into the habit of going to sleep whenever a dummy teat was in her mouth, and of refusing to go to sleep when it was not. To-day, Mary is ten, but she still clings firmly to the idea that sleep and a dummy teat go together. Of course, the teat has long ago been taken away from her, so now she uses her thumb instead! She cannot go to sleep unless it is in her mouth.

When Jimmy was four, he loved to sit and listen while his mother played the piano. She was a very competent musician. By the experience of pleasure he derived from this "stimulus of the environment" upon him, a "gift" for music was being awakened in the heart of Jimmy. After a while he began to feel a strong desire to do as mother did, and in his own way said he would like to learn to play. Mother was pleased about this, and she began to teach Jimmy his first pianoforte exercises. Unfortunately, her willingness exceeded her wisdom, for she would sit beside Jimmy as he took his lesson, and every time he made a mistake she would rap his knuckles with a wooden knitting-needle. The

blow was not intended to hurt very much, nor did it, but it was unpleasant. Jimmy soon began to be afraid of striking the wrong note, and the more he was afraid the more mistakes he made, and the more raps he got. Before very long the idea of playing the piano and the idea of getting rapped on the knuckles became linked up in Jimmy's mind, until at length he began to dislike playing the piano as much as he had previously desired to do it. Eventually, mother gave him up as a bad job—and to-day, at the ripe age of thirty, Jimmy still cannot play the piano.

Or consider Fred. Although he is now forty years of age, he still finds it a little difficult to remain convinced that women have much intelligence. He knows they are loving, well-meaning creatures, but he has to make a real effort to assure himself that their good intentions will be sensibly carried out. He was five years old when, recovering from a severe illness, he was asked by his mother if there was any plaything he would specially like to have to amuse himself with during his convalescence. There certainly was something. Fred had been playing some days previously with a boy of his own age who

owned a fine rocking-horse, which Fred had coveted very earnestly. So he told mother, in answer to her question, that he would like a rocking-horse, "The same as Billy Brown's." Mother promised that he should have one, and went out to buy it. Eager and excited, Fred awaited her return. She came at length, and so did the rocking-horse, but instead of being a *real* one that a boy could ride, it was a little thing, about a foot long, that you stood upon a table and rocked with one finger! Fred never got over that. Even now, as I have said, he finds it hard to overcome the impression made upon him by the swift childish conclusion he drew from an incident that deeply disappointed him. He "wrongly interpreted an environmental stimulus." Its effect has coloured his whole attitude towards the other sex ever since.

One could go on to give dozens of other instances of the same sort. Doubtless you could supply many more out of your own experience if you gave the matter a few moments' thought. They would all serve to indicate how our innate "capacity for responsiveness" constrains us to modify our behaviour in relation to the environmental

influences we encounter, and how the effect of those influences upon us depends upon the way they encourage or inhibit our expression of the "love-energy" of our life.

Let me try to make this point a bit clearer. When a child at the breast takes his milk readily, his mother croons over him, expressing in a way he soon learns to understand her satisfaction with his behaviour. He is appreciated. His tiny effort at self-expression wins approval : it is his love-gift, and mother's loving words and caresses mark her acceptance of it and response to it.

For a while, this happy and spontaneous relationship of love-offering and response between mother and child continues without effort or restraint on either side. But there comes a time, perhaps, when the child, without any intention to hurt mother or to do wrong, somehow makes a mistake. One day, let us say, he tugs at mother's frock as he has often done before, because he wants her to kiss him or take him in her arms. Unfortunately, it happens that on this occasion his little fists have come straight out of a coal bucket or a mud pie. It does not occur to the child that there is anything wrong about that :

but mother has other and very decided views, because the frock happens to be an expensive one and it is completely ruined. Therefore, instead of responding to her baby's love-gesture with the friendliness he has learnt to expect, she is angry and scolding; quite possibly she smacks his grubby hands.

To many adults such an incident might seem quite trivial, but to a little child it may be profoundly disturbing. For some reason altogether beyond his comprehension, his offer of love has, for the first time, been rejected, and he has no means of understanding why. All his ideas about the reassuring friendliness of his environment are upset. He feels completely unable to account for the enmity and hurt he seems to have brought upon himself. A new situation has arisen, to which he may find it extremely difficult to adjust himself.

Until now, the child was quite sure that so long as he expressed himself lovingly he would be loved. Indeed, the possibility of anything else happening had never entered his mind. Now, it appears, his love-offering is for no reason at all rejected. To employ an earlier illustration, a great big boulder has suddenly

been flung into the stream of the child's love-energy. At first, the stream is dammed, but soon, like the rivulet, it seeks a way around the obstacle. The child, first affronted, then frightened, begins to feel within himself a conflict of emotions. In ordinary parlance we should use words like rage, resentment or hate, to describe them; but their ingredients are: love-energy thwarted of expression; love-impulse misunderstood; love-offering rejected. In other words, the child's feeling for his mother is no longer one of free and spontaneous fellowship. The same energy is there; the "stream" is still moved by the same "current," but the waters are in turbulence.

From the moment of his first encounter with alien or adverse circumstances like that, a child's attitude to his environment begins to change. For the first time he becomes aware of his own inferiority in a world he cannot understand, and expectant of its hostility. He begins to be oppressed with a sense of his own weakness in the midst of forces he cannot control. The pure energy of his love is no longer poured out freely. An element of restraint and caution, a twinge of fear and

insecurity, comes in to change and colour the quality of the child's responses to every circumstance he will thereafter encounter. Sometimes the very first of such experiences will make upon the child's character a mark that persists until the end of life.

For instance, I have a friend who suffers from an intense fear of being left alone for any length of time. She does not feel unhappy in her own company when, by her own will, she chooses for a while not to seek the company of others. But if some loved ones whom she expects should happen to arrive at home later than for them is customary, or if they should go away on holiday, so that she has to spend a day or two in solitude, my friend becomes oppressed with an intense fear that she has been abandoned as an unwanted person.

Only recently was my friend able, by tracing it back to its origin, to relieve the severity of emotional tension which this spectre arouses. Her earliest recollection is of a certain evening when she was about three years old. She lived with her parents over a little general shop that they owned. After tea it was the custom for her mother to bath the little girl

and put her to bed, afterwards joining the husband in his service of customers in the shop.

On this occasion the mother bathed the child as usual, dressed her in her night-clothes and sat her up in a big chair, leaving her there for a moment while she went from the room on some errand. For some reason the mother's return was delayed, and it would appear that in her preoccupation with whatever it was that detained her, she forgot that she had not put the child to sleep.

Sitting alone, propped up in the big chair, the little girl waited. Soon she began to feel lonely, and started to cry. Still mother did not come. As the time passed, the child became more and more terrified, until at last, feeling utterly bereft and completely exhausted, she fell into a troubled sleep.

Do you see how the elements of that situation reproduce themselves in my friend's adult fears? In the childhood episode, an emotion that began as the expectancy of love was turned to stark terror when the apparent indifference of the parent to the child's appeals for succour created for the little one a situation of peril she was impotent to avoid.

In later chapters I shall have occasion to describe several more incidents of this kind, in order to help the reader to trace to their origins some of his own irrational mental states. For the present, my concern is merely to have him realise how many and how various are the effects upon the mind of even the apparently trivial circumstances we meet early in life. He will see how easily and how quickly the pure stream of the love-energy with which we are endowed can be changed, perhaps polluted, when through our innate "capacity for responsiveness" to our environment, it begins to fashion and shape our characters.

As I have said, a myriad such influences, good, bad and indifferent, begin to assail us from the moment of our birth. Their variety is infinite; yet, in their effect upon us, they tend to establish the formation of our disposition towards life in three main directions, corresponding to the three main branches of activity through which our emotional energy can find expression. If it will help you to have this idea in a pictorial form, think again of that first "motive," or spring of life, the "will-to-live," starting first as one stream,

then branching into three main channels. But if you do use such a picture, take the precaution of remembering that whilst, in one sense, these three main channels of self-expression may be thought of as separate, in another sense they are not. There is some interaction between them. They are all linked together, and the energy of any one may flow into the others, or reinforce its own power from the others.

The three fundamental channels of human activity into which the life-urge divides itself in every normal human being are : (i) The urge to maintain and develop the life of the self, individually. (ii) The urge to adjust the self to the social order or environment. (iii) The urge to exercise the sex functions and so maintain the life of the race through succeeding generations.

These three great tributaries of the main stream of life-energy or self-expression do not all branch from it at the same time. During the period of our growth we pass through three stages of development during which we are gradually learning to adapt ourselves to the three great aspects of our experience which these urges require us to

understand. From our birth until about the age of five we are preoccupied with ourselves. During those years our principal concern is to become used to the idea of ourselves as separate beings, to acquire some skill in the use of our limbs and the care of our bodies. From the age of five until we are about fourteen is the period of environmental adaptation. We are now less interested in ourselves, and begin to find satisfaction in the company of others; but principally, during this period, our interest is in things: the physical aspect of our world and the material we handle in it. Of course, the earlier process of self-development continues during this period too, but in a more constructive because a less self-centred way. The third great stage of our progress towards maturity starts at about fourteen years of age, when we enter the period of puberty. Then our sexual nature begins to assert itself, and with its awakening our true social development commences. We learn to enter into full association with others, accepting the discipline of ordering our lives in conformity with the laws and customs of society, and

gradually assuming the full responsibilities of manhood and womanhood.

The important thing we have to remember is that each one of these three stages of our growth has its own distinctive contribution to make towards the development of our adult character. During each period the world of our environment is having its effects upon us, and the special adaptations we make at each stage will profoundly affect our attitude to life when at length we enter our independent career as adult persons.

If, during the first period, our attitude towards *ourselves* is wrongly formed, so that our sense of inferiority or of dependence upon others is exaggerated, or our feeling of power is over-emphasised, we shall reach adult life still bearing the burden of that same sense of inferiority, or cursed with a disproportionate feeling of self-importance. If we are not enabled to come to right terms with *our environment* during the second period, we shall probably remain afraid of it or ill at ease in it. If the growth of *our social impulse*, our sense of responsibility in relation to our fellows, is not encouraged, or is somehow

prevented from finding satisfactory expression, during the period of its awakening, then the quality of our sociability will be marred, perhaps permanently.

In fact, very few persons reach maturity altogether free from handicaps resulting from faulty adaptations made during one or more of these periods of development. For most of us, therefore, the task of mastering life has to begin with some sort of self-examination of a retrospective kind, through which we may trace the sources of influences that are retarding our development. Although we are adult in years, nearly all of us are still children mentally in some ways. Either in our valuation of ourselves, in our attitude to the people and things of the world around, or in our relation to the opposite sex and the obligations of marriage, we remain immature, and therefore fettered. There is much we have to learn, and much more we must unlearn, before we can truthfully say that we have grown up in mind as completely as we have in body.

Let me illustrate this with a few examples from the lives of men and women. Their stories will be interesting in themselves ; but

also they will serve as indications of the sort of faulty traits in our own characters for which we may expect to find the causes in childhood and so learn to understand and overcome.

I have never met a woman so sorry for herself as Mrs. A. Although she has a comfortable home and a good husband, she always feels that the whole world is against her. She craves for pity even when nobody but herself can see what there is to pity her for. Her nose is always red with recent weeping, and she always carries in her hand a handkerchief for instant action when the least provocation starts a new flood of tears.

She is the youngest of four children. There is a gap of five years between herself and the youngest of her sisters. Whilst she was a baby, her mother and the others of her family pampered her and fussed over her ; but as they became accustomed to her presence in their midst, these special attentions gradually ceased, and after a time the little girl was left very much to her own devices. The other children, so much older, played among themselves. The parents were preoccupied with their own affairs. Missing the adulation

she had enjoyed in babyhood, the child at length became lonely, She began to feel she was the "odd man out." Then, one day, somebody told her or read to her a luridly sentimental tale about a poor little orphan whom nobody loved, painting in vivid colours the marvellous forbearance and sweetness of this child, who bore her many sufferings with such wonderful patience. "Dear me," thought the little girl who heard the story; "If people only knew, I am a sad little sufferer like that." The idea pleased her immensely, for it brought her both comfort and satisfaction to feel she had some personal distinction, if only that of being an object of pity. She wept and wept over the story, holding it in her mind and dwelling upon it, until she began to feel she really was in all respects like the orphan of whom she had heard. It was then only a step in thought to the point when she began to seek evidence of the truth of her idea in her own circumstances, interpreting every word and gesture of her friends as hostile, an excuse for tears. The mood has persisted. Mrs. A. is still trying as hard as she can to

assure herself that she is like a sweet little orphan, pitied by all.

Mr. G. is physically weak and timid. He cannot play outdoor games, and he always feels desperately uncomfortable and inferior in the presence of those who do. His health is a matter of grave concern to him. As a boy, he was "the apple of his mother's eye." She fussed over him as a hen over her solitary chick. "Don't do that, darling, you might injure yourself," she would say to him if ever he attempted anything venturesome. "You must never play with those rough children, dear. You might break an arm or a leg at a horrid game like that." Thus and thus the over-fond parent was forever enjoining the lad who became Mr. G. to avoid life's hazards. He is over thirty now; but one part of him has certainly not grown up. He has never learned the value of living dangerously.

At the age of twenty-five a certain young man still feels that the adulation of his mother and sister are together a sufficient satisfaction of his need for feminine society and companionship. He feels no desire to marry,

but he does begin to wonder why he finds it difficult to control certain selfish sexual indulgences. Mentally, he has not grown out of puberty. He will not be master of himself until he does.

Anne is a young mother, suffering from "nerves." She has lately begun to realise that her "nerves" are the result of her fear lest her baby shall die through neglect, because, in her heart, she does not think she is capable of looking after it. She has improved greatly in health since she remembered that, when she was a girl, her mother would not allow her to have dolls, because once, as a tiny child, she broke one and mother said, "You are not fit to have such things." By her discovery of the origin of her fears, this young woman is gradually growing out of them. She is deliberately giving herself the constructive education about life which she was prevented by her mother's over-cautiousness from having during her earlier years.

It would, of course, be wrong to form the conclusion that the harmful effects of our childhood training alone persist into adult life. The beneficent influences of early en-

vironments help to mould our character in precisely the same way ; indeed, their results have the more permanence. A certain little boy called William had a dearly loved nurse who would take him to play beside a brook that ran through the bottom of the garden of his home. Encouraged by this good woman, the lad learned to hear the music of the waters and to feel the mystery and beauty of the world of Nature in which he played. The boy became William Wordsworth, the great poet of Nature.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to point out that the single events I have described in various lives by way of illustration were not alone sufficient to produce in the adult characters of the people concerned the profound results they have had. In every instance there were other circumstances to emphasise the effects of the various incidents I have described, in those who suffered them. It would be necessary to devote a whole chapter to each case in order to give a full account of each individual's reactions to his environment during succeeding years. I have merely tried to show what was, in each instance, the significant beginning of a point of

view that was subsequently reinforced and strengthened.

For our purpose, that is enough. The examples show how strangely our interpretations of our childish experiences can affect our attitude to the whole of life, and so enhance or limit our power to achieve self-mastery ; and they make it plain that all our human strivings are somehow concerned with that threefold drive of our emotional nature which forever constrains us to find ways of adaptation to life in three fundamental kinds of activity.

To put the matter in another way, there are three things we are always trying to do, three things we must somehow succeed in doing, before we can begin to feel that we are satisfying life's demands upon our nature. We must make a right valuation of ourselves. We must achieve a right relationship with others, and we must find a right expression of our sexual and parental urges. If, in regard to any of these three fundamental requirements, education or circumstance has stemmed the flow of our energy, stunted our growth, we shall be so far limited in our capacity for living.

At this point I can imagine the thoughtful reader beginning to feel inwardly disquieted. Though he may not be able to frame it in words, there is a disconcerting query knocking with some insistence at the door of his mind. Let me try to put into a sentence or two what may well be the course of his reasoning.

“ I am prepared to accept your statement,” he would say to me, “ that the primal energy of human personality seeks its expression in life through the three main channels you have described. I can understand how the experiences of childhood may be significant enough to set the direction of those three streams, sometimes encouraging their flow, sometimes diverting them from their course, and perhaps in some instances damming them up altogether. Moreover, I should think it is true to say that there can be very few of us who reach adult life free from some mental handicaps or incapacities resulting from the faulty training we received as children, or from our own wrong interpretations of the meaning of events we went through.

“ We will not argue about that. The

question is, What are we going to do about it? You tell us that if we can take one of our mental kinks, an irrational fear or whatever other false attitude it may be, and trace it to its origin in childhood, we may be in a fair way to understanding and overcoming it. Very likely; but you cannot expect us to do that with every one of a host of queer tendencies within ourselves. We cannot work the whole of life backwards. For one thing it would take too long, and for another, we probably should not have the insight to discern the true meanings of our past experiences even if we could recollect them.

“Is there not some constructive way by which we can overcome the burden of past sins, follies and failures whilst getting on with the business of living, looking towards the future, rather than towards the past?”

My answer to that is, Yes; I think there is such a way; and the clue to it is to be found in the suggestion, made earlier on, that the stream of our life-energy is essentially *one* in its nature. The three divisions of it which I have described in this chapter are really but three aspects of the same thing—

the "will-to-live" which is the "will-to-love."

The mysterious something we call "love" is in its pure nature entirely unselfish. It is not something we get, but something we give. It is the emotion we feel when we are spending the energy of our being in the service of others; and what we call "fellowship" is the experience we have when, by the exercise of this power of self-giving, we find ourselves sharing the lives of others and having them share our life in return.

Accepting this definition, think for a moment of your own "self-urge." Is it not true that, at heart, your desire to find self-expression and self-fulfilment is really a profound constraint to try to become the sort of person who can serve your fellows by contributing to the common stock something that justifies your existence and makes you feel your right to hold your head high?

Is not your "social urge" a desire to find a circle of companionships in which you will have the opportunity to make that personal contribution, and in return to receive the support and encouragement you need to keep on doing it?

And is not your "sex urge" at its best but one special way in which this same will-to-fellowship may express itself, by providing the richest sort of companionship and the fullest sort of "environmental stimulus" to activity—the love of family and home—to complete the needs of your being?

If you will work it out for yourself, I think you will not find it difficult to accept a truth I will state dogmatically by way of conclusion to this chapter.

I have never yet come upon a neurotic condition, a human failure of mental adaptation to life, that was not, fundamentally, the result of an attitude to experience essentially self-regarding. In other words, the one mistake at the root of all our misinterpretations of experience, whether in childhood or adult life, is the idea that love is something others can give to us; whereas, in sober truth, it is always something we can give to them.

Therefore, the constructive way to redeem all life from its failures and futilities, and even to transmute into good the mistakes of our own past, is to start living as if we want to give more than we want to get, as if we

want to be loving more than we want to be loved.

To begin to do that, though but tentatively and timidly at first, is at once to transpose all the emphasis of our desire from ourselves, and so to produce a condition in which the stream of our mental and spiritual energy can begin to flow freely in creative activity. The words of our Lord, "He that loseth his life shall find it," are an expression in spiritual language of a profound truth concerning human nature to which all psychological discovery bears abundant witness.

We fail to master life precisely to the extent that we see life as an opportunity to serve ourselves. The gift of abundant life is something we only possess as we learn to give it away.

CHAPTER V

MINDS GROWING UP

HOWEVER various may be the ways in which a human being tries to express himself at different times in the course of his life, there is always a certain consistency or purposefulness in his behaviour.

A man's interests may be many, and they may differ very widely one from another, yet somehow they are all linked together in a unity. What we call his "individuality" underlies all his diversity of mood. You observe So-and-so, first at his work, then at play, and you remark upon the great difference you notice in his demeanour on those different occasions; but beneath all his changeability there is a fundamental "sameness." You recognise and acknowledge it when, describing the man, you say he is of such and such a character.

In people who have what we regard as a strong character, that deeper unity of purpose or motive is clear to discern; it makes itself apparent above all superficial diversities. In persons of a weak character it is more difficult to detect this underlying consistency.

Their enthusiasms wax and wane ; their motives vary from hour to hour and day to day. In a short space of time they may make us aware of so many different aspects of themselves that we despair of ever understanding them.

Nevertheless, beneath all their moods and vacillations there is, even in such unstable folk, a fundamental unity of purpose and singleness of aim. If they are consistent in nothing else, they are so in this at least, that they remain consistently inconsistent. If we had sufficient insight into the working of their minds, we could detect the underlying purposefulness of all such people ; and, when we found it, we should discover that it gave us a satisfying explanation of the vagaries of their behaviour, disclosing meaning and coherence in them all.

“ Character ” is the word we commonly use to describe what we believe to be the real meaning of a person’s thought and conduct, considered as a whole. We hear all there is to be said for and against him, then, summing it up, we give our verdict, judging his real worth as accurately as we can by our evaluation of his fundamental motive or aim—the

“ underlying unity ” to which I have drawn your attention.

Notice that all such judgments of character are made upon what seems to us to be the “ meaning ” of a person’s behaviour, or its “ motive,” far more than upon the success or failure of his several activities. A man may reach great heights of achievement and affluence, or may show exceptional intellectual power, and yet disclose a character that we cannot admire. On the other hand, a person may suffer many defeats and make deplorable mistakes, but still commend himself to us for a certain admirable quality of character that we do not fail to discern and appreciate.

There is within us, apparently, some faculty of intuition that gives us a sense of spiritual values to which we must hold allegiance and loyalties that must not be betrayed. We know that a person is good, he “ rings true ” as we say, when his living reveals a motive in which these values and loyalties are acknowledged. We, too, acknowledge them as imperatives, and even when we betray them ourselves we esteem those who do not.

It is interesting to observe one curious condition that seems to have been laid down by

nature, or God, to govern the formation of an admirable character. Such a character is never created by a deliberate effort to produce it. One cannot set out with the avowed intention of becoming a "fine character" and so achieve it; for as soon as one forms a resolution of that kind, one becomes pre-occupied with one's own progress, and the high resolve is irreparably marred at the outset by a motive which is essentially self-centred—and therefore lacks the one quality out of which a great or noble character can be formed: disinterestedness of purpose.

People who do compel our envy and admiration by the fineness of their characters seem always to be the least concerned to cultivate the very qualities we notice and esteem in them. Indeed, they are not concerned about themselves at all. Their eyes are fixed upon some far horizon of a destiny they would fulfil in the service of their fellows. In pursuit of that they are single-minded; and, somehow, out of their self-dedication to it their greatness or goodness issues spontaneously and effortlessly.

That this is so, you may confirm by any observations you may elect to make of the

lives of men and women whose characters have left a significant mark upon the sands of time. Our recognition of the fact affords us an important clue to the meaning of "character," and helps us to understand something of the circumstances in which it comes to be more or less good and desirable in various individuals.

You will recall that in the last chapter I described briefly three broad divisions of purpose, three stages of progress, in the career of a man or woman from infancy to adult life. During each of these periods the stream of human energy finds its expression in a characteristic way. As each period passes over into the next, the direction or "set of the stream" is changed—or should be changed if the right influences are there to encourage steady development.

During the first period we are exclusively concerned with ourselves. Between the ages of one and five years a child has only the slightest interest—and that a purely selfish one—in others. Even when it plays in the company of other children it shows no disposition to share its enjoyment or possessions with them. It will regard their toys as its own, fighting to retain them if necessary. All

its desires and ambitions can be summed up in the two words, " I want . . ."

Gradually, this supremely self-centred disposition undergoes change as the growing child begins, in or about his fifth year, to interest himself in his environment. Things then become attractive in themselves. A spirit of keen inquisitiveness is aroused, and the child will accept the co-operation of others in the business of finding out what materials and things can be made to do. Still, there is a predominantly selfish aim at the back of all the child's activity. People are welcomed only for their usefulness to the individual, who finds his satisfaction in demonstrating his power, and in using it to get things done.

The years pass, and at length the child begins to evince a new sense of responsibility. He slowly awakens to the realisation that other people are interesting for their own sakes, and no longer only for what they may mean to him. Satisfaction is derived not merely from getting, but also from giving. The exercise of power for selfish personal ends ceases to be a dominant desire. The individual begins to see himself as part of a

society, and becomes willing to use whatever power or ability he may possess in its service, contributing his part to its corporate wealth of mental, material and spiritual possessions, and finding life's fulfilment in so doing.

That is the course our development should take. Unfortunately it seldom reaches its consummation. The influences of our environment, so far from encouraging our mental and spiritual progress, often thwart and inhibit it. Continuing to grow physically and intellectually, we remain emotionally "backward," our motives remain immature, and our characters are formed around the dominating desires of childhood rather than the mature ideals of true manhood and womanhood. Indeed, I want to make the suggestion that the many varieties of human character may be classified in three main categories, coinciding fairly closely with the three stages of growth I have described.

Corresponding with the disposition of a child during the first stage of its career is the person who is completely self-centred. In its complete form, this type of character is perhaps seen only in the insane, who are always completely indifferent to everybody and

everything outside themselves. But there are plenty of sane people whose disposition is precisely similar to that of the child of five whose whole concern is to draw attention to himself, whose attitude to the world around is aloof; a "splendid isolation." We say of such people, "They are completely wrapped up in themselves." The intense urge of their dominating motive may enable them to achieve some importance or notoriety, but they are at heart anti-social. If they do not become criminals, it is only because circumstances have permitted them to retain their sense of self-importance in courses of activity that happen to be socially acceptable, although the prompting to engage in them is, in the people of whom we are writing, supremely individualistic and self-sufficient.

When spiritual development is for any reason arrested at the second stage of life's progress, the personality of an adult remains still essentially self-centred, but not exclusively so. The dominating motive of this type is power. He exults in the exercise of his ability or strength, finding his satisfaction in moulding things and people to his will, revelling in every achievement that gives a

sense of mastery and dominion, real or imaginary. Such a person sees his fellows merely as means for the fulfilment of his own ends. He uses them as things, sometimes exploiting them ; sometimes, being more subtle, persuading them ; but always employing them in the service of his driving ambition to exert his own authority, and so to feel his omnipotence.

People of this type are not always openly ruthless or aggressive ; on the contrary, they are often very clever in disguising from others, and perhaps even from themselves, the real motives of their conduct. For example, I know a mother of several married daughters who spends her time visiting them in turn. Her manner towards them is always sweet and gracious, yet she is always contriving by one means or another to wheedle them into accepting her guidance in the conduct of their affairs. She does not command. Her method is to be " deeply hurt " if they do not fall in with her desires. She is only trying to advise them for their good, she will point out, dissolving into tears at their " ingratitude " if in any particular they fail to fulfil her wishes. This mother belongs to the type of

character we are considering. Strip away the camouflage of grace and benevolence, and her conduct is seen as an insistent will to exercise authority, to feel her power over the lives of her children, whom she would bend to her obedience.

By contrast is the kind of philanthropist who, having first gratified the lust for power by amassing wealth, continues to exercise his passion by giving his money away to deserving causes. He demands homage and obeisance of those who need what he has to give. He compels them to minister to his pride by their humble acceptance of the terms, often very stringent, that he will lay down before he grants their requests.

All tardy givers reveal this same trait of character. The singer who will only perform for you when you have almost gone on hands and knees to persuade him, the woman who always contrives to keep you waiting, the church member who is so "sensitive" that everybody must be careful not to "tread on his corns," and the person who is always eager to lead an enterprise but never willing to follow in the footsteps of another: the conduct of each of these people is a

variation upon the same theme, a will to power.

In our third category are people who have completely grown up. They are in the minority. For them, life is "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." They embark upon the adventure of living with zest and courage, loving life and serving it, not for the sake of what they can get out of it, whether by way of wealth, position, fame or praise, but for what they can put into it of themselves. As an American writer expressed it, they are "go-givers" in a world composed, for the most part, of "go-getters." If the world applauds such people, they do not mind; if it ignores them, they do not care. They accept prosperity with grace and they bear adversity with fortitude. They ask least of life and give it most. They have attained the full stature of manhood and womanhood, and perhaps alone among their fellows they are wholly alive.

It is not difficult to find some of the reasons why the characters of men and women often fail to develop beyond one or other of the intermediate stages I have described. How often does one hear a mother say in the hear-

ing of her child, "I don't want my darling ever to grow up." Surround a boy or girl with many influences, all exerting upon the mind a constraint to "stay put," all discouraging any effort to grow and change because they all conspire to suggest to the child that he is already perfect, and almost inevitably the suggestion will be accepted. Protect a child from every hazard, safeguard him from every alien circumstance and lavish upon him adulation out of all proportion to his deserving, so that he finds in the very dependence of his childishness a satisfaction he should only derive from achievements hardly won, and quite naturally he will become content to take life at the valuation it has been given for him.

Just as a plant, nurtured in a hot-house, will come at length to require hot-house conditions in order to live, and will be made incapable of sustaining the rigours of wind and cold on the open heath, so also we may come to need circumstances in which we can continue to behave like children, when, as children, we are encouraged not to grow.

You will notice, if you observe the characters of men and women, that they manage

to achieve a certain contentment just to the extent that they willingly accept life at one or other of the childish levels of self-expression. At each stage of incomplete character development you will find persons who are apparently well satisfied with themselves. They do not want to grow up. They don't intend to do so. They are egotistical, yet unabashed. They are ruthless, yet unashamed. Conscience does not seem to trouble them. The tawdry and often undignified modes of gratification they choose do not cause them any disquiet. They have accepted life on easy terms, and browse through it with bovine complacency.

But there are others for whom it is not so. They are self-centred, yet never quite at home in their selfishness. They are ambitious, yet not content when their ambitions are attained. They crave adulation, yet never have enough to appease their appetite. They want to show their authority, yet always seem to be aware of an inferiority that no success enables them to overcome.

I make the suggestion that these unsettled, undecided folk are like children who want to grow up but do not quite know how. Cir-

cumstances did their best during childhood to convince these people that they need not try to grow up, but they were only half persuaded. They have caught some dim vision of the truth that life has nobler satisfactions than the self-centred ones of childhood. They are straining towards maturity, but they have never seen with clear eyes what is the demand life makes upon them as the price of the self-fulfilment they desire. So they are like sheep without a shepherd. They want to get somewhere, but they neither know whither they want to go nor how to find the way.

Perhaps the words I have written will help some of those who may be in this plight at least to understand in what direction they must begin to travel in order to fulfil their best desires.

It is true to say of most of us, I think, that we hover precariously and uncertainly in some vague no-man's-land between the second and third stages of personal growth. When we are at our best we accept the responsibility of our freedom as adult persons and give ourselves to life, trusting it and serving it. But we are not wholehearted in our self-giving. Ever and anon we return to the moods of childhood

and become demanding ; proud of ourselves when some little demand we make seems to be satisfied, timid and querulous when it is not met. Often we try to effect compromises with ourselves by dividing life off into more or less " water-tight " compartments. In our business or our church activities we find opportunities to exercise our childish lust for dominion and power ; in our homes we behave as adults, giving ourselves freely in loving and unselfish service. Conversely, we may allow our expression of our religious faith to become the means by which we reassure ourselves of our maturity, whilst our successes in work and play pander again to our childishness, blowing up the little balloons of our pride.

But compromises, however ingenious, never wholly satisfy. So we find ourselves displeased with life, or disillusioned, as we prefer to express it. Not being willing wholly to grow up because of the costliness of the effort ; and not being content to lose what self-respect we have and wholly " grow down," we live in conflict with life and with ourselves.

In this connection, the word " conflict "

is significant. The infallible sign of a character that is spiritually immature is an attitude of open or veiled hostility to its environment both of people and circumstances.

The child passing through the first two stages of its growth is made aware, by a multitude of happenings, of its own weakness and littleness. The sheer inertia of the physical environment is alone sufficient to awaken the young mind to a realisation of this, and the idea is reinforced by the inadequacy of the child to control its own bodily actions and through them to manage its surroundings.

It is not difficult to understand how a child who is not taught to value himself aright, failing to accept his own limitations, may soon begin to think that the intractability of his surroundings is due to their active hostility. "The cruel chair bumped my leg," a little boy will say. It may very well appear to him that the refusal of the chair to move at his touch is due to its obstinacy, and that the movement by which it falls over and hits him is an act of deliberate malice on the part of the chair. Indeed, in his formative years a child is sometimes encouraged to impute evil motives to inanimate things. Well-meaning

elders will say to him, "Naughty chair to hurt a little boy; give it a good smack," and he will pummel the unoffending furniture to punish it for trying to injure him.

When, starting thus, his friends continue through succeeding years to protect a child from all life's hazards as if they were his enemies, and persistently encourage him to account every responsibility a menace, every difficulty a burden, and every failure a handicap, it is not surprising if he soon regards the whole world of experience as inimical to his safety, comfort and well-being. To be reluctant to grow up is the only natural attitude he can be expected to adopt; to be at war with life is the only proper response to the situation that seems to be presented. It would be more than strange if the child reached any other conclusion.

Doubtless very few of us are altogether free from the disposition to think of life in this way. Perhaps that is the principal reason why we cling with such tenacity to our childish modes of behaviour. However that may be, it is at least not without significance that this attitude of antagonism to life is invariably to be discerned as a characteristic

of people who are suffering the mental effects of inward immaturity.

Like all our mental dispositions, this one betrays itself in diverse ways, some obvious, others well disguised, through our behaviour. Making us fearful, it may cause us to retreat from reality into a world of fantasy or it may evoke our aggressiveness so that we become snobbish, bumptious or unduly self-assertive. We may conceal our hostility beneath a cloak of carelessness and become cynical or critical. Robed in the sober habiliments of religion, the same mood may make us fanatical in defence of our faith or violent in assault against social habits and customs with which we do not agree. Some of us will declare open war upon the body corporate of our fellows and become habitual criminals; others will wage a guerrilla campaign, sniping with bullets of disdain and swift repartee from behind the fragile fortress of some trivial intellectual superiority we think we possess.

Infinite, almost, are the resources of our minds to afford us camouflages for the enmity we feel towards a world which, we come to believe, would encompass our destruction

if, by dropping our defences for a moment, we exposed ourselves to it. But behind all the devices chosen, the disposition remains the same.

Sometimes our ingenuities in defence seem to succeed. Sometimes they fail, altogether or in part. When that happens, we find ourselves suffering from some one of the many neurotic disorders so common nowadays. These, too, are as varied in their manifestations as are the weapons we choose for the warfare in which we engage; but beneath them all is the same spirit of antagonism created by our childish habit of thought, the notion that life is a contest, "Me versus the World."

This prevailing mood of hostility towards the environment is, as I have already remarked, the infallible sign of a personality that somehow has failed to reach maturity. Perhaps it is unnecessary to point out that it results from a conception of life's meaning and purpose fundamentally wrong because it is predominantly self-regarding. For proof of its wrongness we need not appeal to any external authority, whether a religious dogma or a system of philosophy. The error is

attested by life itself, which refuses to yield to us its spiritual riches so long as we persist in distrusting it.

So far as I know, there is only one way by which we can overcome this disposition to antagonism and the desperate evils it breeds in our personalities. That way is to repent—to “change our minds,” not superficially, but radically, by accepting the witness of all experience which conspires to convince us of the futility of all our striving for self-protection—and deliberately to take the risk of starting to live as if the universe were friendly.

Only by making such a decision can we arrive at the point where we begin to look out upon life with seeing eyes, to recognise as our opportunities the desires unsatisfied and hopes unfulfilled in the world of our own environment. To do that is imperative, for only out of our compassion—our willingness to live, serve and suffer in fellowship with our fellows—will there be created in us a motive big enough and unselfish enough to be the dynamic of a character truly good.

I do not suggest that this course is an easy one to take. It requires us to run the risk of trusting people whom we know to be as

unreliable as we are ourselves. It involves the hazard of believing in the ultimate goodness and beneficence of a world of experience that often seems to flout our faith and outrage our love. It demands of us all we have without promising anything in return. Doubtless the challenge seems a hard one for life to fling. So it may be; yet those who have dared to pick up the gauntlet have proved, to themselves by their experience and to us by the witness of their characters, that the mastery of life is not otherwise to be won.

CHAPTER VI

THE WAY TO MASTERY

BEFORE we go any further, it will be worth while to come to close grips with one fact about our human nature that, time after time, has thrust itself upon our attention in the preceding chapters. It is that our power to achieve the mastery of life and circumstance is conditioned by our willingness to forget ourselves.

Have you ever set out to spend an afternoon motoring without quite knowing where you wanted to go? If you have, and especially if you have had two or three friends for company, events have probably turned out something like this. You start, and after a while somebody says, "Why not try such and such a road?", so you set your course in the direction suggested. But you have not gone many miles before it occurs to one of your friends that if you turn to the right a mile or two on, you will come across a very pretty village that she has heard about. It matters very little where you go, so presently you take the side road your friend points out and follow it expectantly for a few miles,

until a somewhat hesitant voice exclaims, "I really don't think this can be the road I meant." "I don't think so either," comments another passenger, "I noticed that the signpost said that this way leads to So-and-so!" There is an awkward pause. Then you remark with some conviction, "I really do not want to go to So-and-so; it's a very dull place indeed. Let's take the first turning on the left and see where that leads us." Your friends express agreement with this suggestion, and you continue your journey. But it is not long before first one and then another member of the party brightly proposes various changes of plan, until, if your experience has been anything like mine, you finish up by not getting anywhere, and the whole party is heartily glad when at last the way home is found and taken.

Travelling through life with a self-centred motive is very much like that. Your "passengers" are those three fundamental branches of the life-stream, the deep, instinctual urges of which we have spoken. Sometimes the urge for self-assertion makes a claim and sets you striving for satisfaction

in a direction it dictates. Then some social compulsion assails you and diverts your energy into a new course. At other times the environmental urge becomes predominant, and in its turn demands expression. Thus, first in one way, then another, the personality is prompted to gain its ends ; but the motive is always a self-centred one, and its end is always self-pleasing.

Unhappily, the three " passengers in the car " are all intent upon themselves, all urging the " man at the wheel " to drive in different directions. If one is going to " open the throttle " to sexual self-expression, one must be prepared to forgo many social satisfactions. If one wants to find social esteem and enjoy social interests, one must forgo many selfish gratifications. So there arises within the personality a conflict of desires, the result of several incompatible motives all striving for predominance at the same time.

A situation of that sort very soon becomes unbearable, so means have to be taken to relieve its tension. Perhaps the simplest way to do that is to pretend to ourselves that some of the disturbing elements are not

there; and usually this is what we try to do.

Consider Mr. B. When he was quite a young man he had a strong urge towards the stage as a career. He believed he had it within him to become a great actor like Henry Irving or Forbes-Robertson. Probably he had real dramatic ability and would have succeeded in this profession had he given himself to it wholeheartedly. But he was afraid to do that, for he had been brought up by a fond mother to believe that anything associated with the theatre was wicked, and that her boy was far too clever and good ever to become anything so common as an actor. The opposing desires in the young man's heart—one to find self-expression through the drama, the other to live up to the reputation for goodness his mother had given him—created a conflict. The lad resolved it by becoming an adherent of a queerly narrow religious sect which gave him opportunities to spend all his spare time on open-air platforms declaiming against theatre-going and other "worldly" vices. To-day, Mr. B., now middle-aged, is a confirmed tub-thumper. He struts and postures before the crowd, now

haranguing, now coaxing the people to accept his religious faith; and in all his speeches he devotes much time to telling his hearers how much better a man he is than he might have been. But if you listen carefully and watch closely, you can see that in his heart Mr. B. still loves to imagine himself a famous actor, moving great multitudes by the power of his voice and presence. He has tried to satisfy two selfish desires by compromising with them both, but he pretends that neither of them is there, for if you ask him, he will tell you that he has "sacrificed everything to this world." So, perhaps, he has; but not quite in the way he thinks, for is he not rather as one who has bartered his birthright for a mess of pottage? I think you would say so if you saw him now.

Or meet Mr. S., who dislikes company. He spends all his spare time studying some queer scientific hobby he has made his own. He writes about it for the magazines. If he told the truth about himself, you would learn that he finds himself uncomfortable in company because some unhappy experiences of boyhood led him to believe that he would be disparaged no matter how much he tried

to make himself sociable. He compensates for his feeling of personal inferiority by becoming expert in a subject that few people are interested to study, and in his pre-occupation with it finds a good excuse for evading the social intercourse he fears. Yet he would dearly like to be a leader of men—and of course he has succeeded in becoming that, in a way: for he leads their thought by means of his contributions to the Press.

Another interesting person is Miss G., an enthusiastic worker for some local Purity League. It is her business in life to go around her district inspecting the films offered for public entertainment and reporting upon their suitability. She is strong in condemnation of vice, and lives a life of rigid propriety; indeed, her very goodness is sometimes rather frightening, and I fear she has few real friends. Her natural instincts for mating and motherhood were made to seem ugly and sinful when, as a young girl, she first became conscious of their awakening. Her curiosity about these things was rigidly repressed by prudish parents. Miss G. therefore pretends they are not there; but they betray their presence in her choice of social

work, and although it absorbs most of her energy, she lives always on the edge of a nervous breakdown because she has never quite succeeded in disguising from herself the true motive of her activities.

So many are the ways in which we mortals try to come to terms with the several competing claims of our own inharmonious desires that a whole book could be written to describe them. The illustrations I have given are ample to emphasise the point I want to make: that some kind of inward warfare is almost inevitable so long as the motive of our living is to please ourselves.

That warfare is accompanied by a sense of personal unfulfilment, as if the energy of our souls were, despite all our strivings, bottled up; so that even when every compromise has been made and every evasion effected, fullness of life still eludes our grasp, and a profound dissatisfaction gnaws at the heart.

The suggestion I offer is that this is inevitable, because life itself happens to be so ordered that a self-centred motive can never provide adequate self-expression. We are so made that we can find our fulfilment only

by an allegiance to something greater than ourselves outside ourselves. The story of lives that evade this imperative is always depressing ; for even when it is a tale of good achieved, it is also a confession of greater good unattained. If our friend of the soap-box had been prepared to lose himself, to "account himself of no reputation," as the Apostle puts it, how great a power might he not have become ! An actor with a vision can move the hearts of millions. I know of one such whose every performance in the films he chooses as his medium contains a message of divine truth as inspiring as many sermons. Nothing will convince me that this is accidental.

Let me try to explain what I think happens when a man or a woman takes life on trust, accepting it on its own terms. He looks out upon the world with eyes, not of enmity or fear, but of love. His whole being is poised, an instrument prepared. All the energy of his being is conserved, ready to be poured out as soon as there is revealed the vocation in which his personality can give itself to life in sacrificial service. One day the vision comes, and at once every channel of mental

energy is a medium through which the individual can express himself and find self-fulfilment by his allegiance to the destiny he has seen. In such a life there is no warfare, no competition in the soul, for all its powers are under one directing motive, all co-operate towards the fulfilment of the same end.

A young man, just become aware of his own awakening powers, walked one day into the market-place of a town in a southern state of America, and saw there a young negress being auctioned into slavery. Had the spectator been thinking of himself, he would perhaps have gloated over the public exposure of her lithe young body. Had he been concerned for the good opinion of his fellows, he would probably have weighed his personal prestige against their corporate will and decided to leave alone the evil that he saw, reassuring himself that it was no business of his, anyway.

But it happened that this young man had no care for himself. His heart went out in compassion for the poor creature in bonds. He felt in his own body her shame. He saw with the eye of his imagination the fate

she would endure. In his spirit he shared her sufferings and those of many others like her who were condemned to the same sad end. Then and there he resolved to give himself to life for the fulfilment of a task of emancipation that needed a man to undertake it. By his decision he brought all his powers into subjection, gave a direction to all his energies and released into activity all his spiritual resources. Abraham Lincoln came to life !

The wife of a provincial postman received a legacy of twenty-five pounds. Thinking of herself, she would doubtless have used the windfall to buy some little comforts for her home, or to set aside against a rainy day. She happened not to be concerned about herself, but rather for certain aged widows in her neighbourhood who seemed to be friendless and uncared-for. She had compassion upon them, and determined to use the money she had been given and her personal powers to make life worth living for them.

With the will to do this came both the opportunity, the energy and the ingenuity to carry out the design. She rented a small

house, suitably adapted it, and equipped each room as a small self-contained flat, nicely decorated and furnished. In every room she installed one of her widowed friends, so arranging matters that one, more able-bodied than the rest, in return for living rent-free, cooked and managed for the others, who each paid a modest rental, well within their means, the total amount being just sufficient to meet the expenses of upkeep. The scheme grew as its value and the need for it became more apparent. Soon the postman's wife had to enlist the aid of others to extend the plan. To-day there are many such "Homes" bearing her name, and hundreds of lonely folk have reason to bless the day when a working-man's wife forgot herself. She blesses the day, too, for she began to find life when she began to give it away.

A London journalist saw life waiting to be lived when, one day, seeking "copy" for an article, he went with some Salvation Army workers to succour people rendered homeless by the flooding of the Thames at Westminster. Of his experience he writes,

The story of the Westminster floods was full of what journalism is pleased to call "human

interest." It needed no elaboration; the stark horror, the sordidness of it spoke far more eloquently from the jerky account, hastily put together from a dozen sources by the evening paper sub-editor, than from the glib narrative of the descriptive writer.

Our journalist, reading the story in the train on the way to his suburban home at the end of a busy day, "suddenly found his attention gripped by the facts themselves, instead of by the mechanics of their presentation." He began to forget himself in his compassion for the hapless victims of the flood.

Seldom had he experienced anything like this. An impulse was upon him, so definite that it was almost a command—yet something gentler than a command—to turn back to town and make his way to the muddled streets of Westminster on the chance of finding a share in the relief work which he knew would be in progress. Against it there battled a selfishness, mainly physical, which told him that he was tired, after a crowded and exacting week. . . . He was doubtful if his better motives rang true.

Ultimately, the journalist turned back, and gave himself to the work he saw waiting to be done. His decision was the beginning out of which came a new journalism, a new ministry of the pen to people of the common sort, and

the first official acknowledgment of the spiritual needs of its million readers by one of England's great popular daily newspapers. Hugh Redwood found life when he gave himself to life. If you want the whole story, read his book, *God in the Slums*, from which the passages I have quoted are taken.

The first intimations of inevitable deafness came to Beethoven early in his career. It looked as if his career were soon to be irreparably marred, and at first he was in despair at the thought. "I must draw back from everything," he wrote; "the most beautiful years of my life will take wings without accomplishing all the promise of my talent and my powers." Then he determined to forget himself. He said, "I will seize fate by the throat; most assuredly it shall not get me wholly down." One of his biographers says of Beethoven, "We are eternal debtors to his deafness. It is doubtful if such lofty music could have been created except as compensation for some such affliction, and in the utter isolation which that affliction brought about." Self versus life . . . and life won.

Notice that in recounting these brief

stories of personal experiences I have used the word, "Compassion." I have done so deliberately, for there is no other word in the English language that so completely and accurately describes the disposition we must acquire in order that our varied powers may be precipitated into a coherent unity and made available for constructive use.

To have compassion means, literally, to suffer with others. It is to be mentally so aware of the living experience of our fellows that we feel it as if it were our own; sharing it, not because we must, but because we will. To have compassion is to range ourselves alongside other men and women as partners with them in the great enterprise of being; to rejoice with them in their joy, laugh with them in their laughter, toil with them in their labours and suffer with them in their griefs. It is to see life with their eyes so that we understand their follies and sins as if they were ours; indeed, it is to realise that, being our neighbours', these evils are already ours also, and to help to bear them because they are. Having such a disposition, we are always ready to succour, but never to condemn; always glad to serve, but never desirous to

rule ; always concerned to give, never constrained to take beyond what is our due.

This spirit of compassion is no less significant in secular than in religious experience. The very heart of the universe is instinct with it ; and out of something akin to it is born all human creative activity. There is no field of endeavour in which worthy achievement can be won without it ; there is no form of self-expression that can reach its highest fulfilment unless this passion be the motive that constrains. It is the pure essence of that " love-energy " which I believe to be the ultimate reality of the human nature.

The reader will forgive me if I repeat here words I have already used elsewhere to express my thought on this matter.

The desire to learn, the will to explore the mysteries of the physical world, owe their very existence to an inward compulsion essentially spiritual and essentially loving. Truth is only to be discerned when it is sought for its own sake and not with an ulterior motive of self-gratification ; in other words, when love of truth makes thinking, to the thinker, seem worth while.

In every variety of human creative activity called Art, the same energy of love is at work, urging, constraining the spirit of man to seek self-

expression in ever newer and lovelier ways. Let the technique of an artist be uniquely brilliant, yet he fails, and men perceive his failure to achieve the purpose for which that technique has been acquired, if there be not in him that indescribable urge, that eternally unsatisfied hunger of desire for beauty, which, to the extent that it informs his labours, dignifies them and gives them worth.

Take out of the heart of man that dynamic, creative spirit of unsatisfied desire, that passionate love of truth, goodness and beauty, and there would be no science, no art, no literature; no experiment, no invention; no exploration, no discovery; no philosophy and no religion.*

In that passage I used the word love; but I could have put "compassion" wherever the other word appears without in any way distorting the meaning I desired to convey when I wrote the passage; for the imperative condition of true self-expression is to live with and to live through the world of our environment, seeing it as part of us since we are part of it; not hating it or despising it, but loving it; not holding ourselves aloof from it as if its touch would contaminate, but entering into it and sharing it thankfully with God and our fellow-men.

The richest faculty we possess—that of

* *From Some Thread of Life.*

creative imagination—is brought into constructive activity only when we give ourselves to life in this way. This strange power we have of weaving thoughts into new patterns, as artists take raw colours and blend them into glowing symmetries of living light, is, of all our mental possessions, the most powerful for good or for evil. As long as we are at war with life, and so with ourselves, the imagination works only to establish the more firmly and reinforce our fears. Like the microscope which makes a flea into a fearsome beast, the imagination magnifies every occasion of difficulty into a monster of opposition terrifying to the soul, turns every trivial affront into a mortal offence and every slight into a gesture of deep enmity. “Where unknown, there put dragons,” wrote the old map-makers in their instructions to draughtsmen. “Where unknown, there put terrors,” is the injunction faithfully fulfilled by imagination when our attitude to life is one of “safety first.”

Imagination seems to have the power to stoke up the fires of the mind, releasing all our emotional energy to activity as the energy of water is released by the heat that converts

it into steam. It puts into our thinking the "drive" that converts it into "doing." So it is potentially beneficent or destructive, according to the disposition of the mind in which it is at work.

How many of us know to our cost what power the imagination has to fill the mind with dreadful spectres of horror when we allow it to seize upon some trivial fear! It will people the innocent darkness with horrid shapes and make even the clear light of day a menace and a shame. As a handful of snow, set rolling down the slope of a mountain, gathers weight and momentum until it becomes a roaring avalanche, so the imagination, given a single evil thought to work upon, will augment and strengthen it, reinforcing its energy in a multitude of ways until it drives the personality to destruction.

Yet this same power, so devastating when our minds are our slaves, is of immense value when some envisagement of good gives purpose and direction to our thought. Then all its resources become ours to use in the service of the ends we would fulfil. It sustains body and mind in endeavours of almost superhuman difficulty and danger.

It educes unsuspected capacities of heart and brain. It draws into co-operation all our faculties, and governs all our energies, so that instead of warring one against the other, they all find full and satisfying expression.

Nothing could be further from the truth than to suppose, as many do, that the power to transmute life from futility into blessedness by self-giving is the prerogative of the few ; or that the resources of the creative imagination can be employed only by exceptionally gifted folk who have some signal service to perform for mankind.

There is an art of living. It may be practised as well by the nonentity as by the genius. The artist who loses himself in the painting of a picture or the composition of a symphony, giving to it all he has, is doing in his own sphere of labour no more than the carpenter may do who makes a good chair, the mechanic who tunes a car into rhythm, or the shop assistant who dignifies a humdrum task by the way he handles the goods he sells. Each in his own way will find self-fulfilment by self-giving. Each in his own way may discover that when he allows himself to become " absorbed in his work " he does it as well as

it can be done by him, and in the doing of it finds life worth living.

To say that is not to affirm that the first simple job to which we may set our hands is the noblest we shall ever find to do. What that may be will depend upon the capacities we have and the sincerity with which we encourage their development by turning them to use. It is true, however, that our fitness for life's greater responsibilities is attested by the spirit in which we approach the immediate duty, however trivial it may appear. If we are unwilling to give ourselves wholeheartedly to that, it is quite certain we shall never be worthy of the greater opportunity when it comes.

PART III
OUR CHANGING WORLD

CHAPTER VII

FRIEND OR FOE ?

THE story of the growth of human society and culture from its primitive beginnings to the brilliance and complexity of modern civilisation is one of intense interest, because it reveals by what perils and travail the undaunted spirit of man has won successive victories over the natural world, taming its wild forces and harnessing its many powers to constructive and beneficent uses.

That work is not yet done. Indeed, in some ways the task seems to become more formidable as it progresses. The more we learn, the more it seems there is yet to be known ; and to-day, in the realms of scientific exploration and adventure, there seems to be room for the exercise of all the courageous inquisitiveness, all the dauntless eagerness to sail uncharted seas which, in an earlier age, sent men like Columbus out to the ends of the earth on voyages of discovery.

Nevertheless, we have come a great way, and life as we now live it is enriched with many blessings our forefathers never knew. We see the consummation of many of the

endeavours they began and enjoy the fruits of much of their toil. Looking backwards along the years, we can at least assure ourselves that not all they did was in vain.

If we use the word "environment" to include every material thing and every circumstance upon which the mind of man has exercised its powers through the ages, we can describe the age-long struggle of the race as a continued process of "adaptation to environment." All the work that men have sought to do, all the social structures they have created, all the ingenuities by which they have put to use the material resources of the world, these have been so many means by which they have sought to make the world a better and a happier place to live in, and to make themselves more capable of finding rich experience while living in it.

Indeed, this business of changing the world and changing ourselves is an activity so fundamental to the nature of living things that biologists define life itself as the power of adaptation to the environment. Wherever there is a living creature, however primitive in structure, this process goes on. Where it does not go on we have no evidence of life at all.

Yet to say so much leaves half the story—and perhaps the most significant half—untold ; for no creature could start to adapt itself to its environment, unless to begin with it found itself in an environment adapted to it. We are told that the simplest form of life is a unicellular creature called the “amœba,” and that it is out of the successive adaptations of such creatures through æons of time that all other forms of life have come. However true this may be, it is evident that the first amœba must have found itself in an environment in which it *could* live and “adapt,” or change ; otherwise it would not have continued its existence for long enough to begin changing.

What is true of the amœba is also true of us. Quite obviously life for every one of us consists in a process of becoming ; the successive experiences of life are good and useful to us as they afford the means by which we grow and thrive both physically and mentally. But it is equally obvious that unless we had come to birth in surroundings which were already fitted to receive us as we are fitted to arrive in them, no effort on our part could enable us to continue to live. If you want to

open a door you must have a key that fits your lock—but that is only another way of saying that you must have a lock which fits your key.

It is this simple truth that we commonly overlook when we talk glibly about adaptation to environment, as if the formula were a sufficient explanation of the origin of life ; an alternative to belief in God. The environment is adapted to life. The world in which we find ourselves living and growing has somehow been prepared to receive us and nurture us, as we have been prepared to enter into it and play our part in the strange drama of creation.

In the cosmic convulsion that from off the whirling mass of incandescent gas we call our sun threw a lesser whirling mass which at length solidified and became this earth ; in the cataclysmic heavings by which that earth took form and shape, becoming hill and valley, sea and land ; in the miracle that brought life to birth in the primeval ooze ; in the age-long travail through which life evolved until the continents were clothed with verdure and peopled with sentient creatures ; in the whole amazing story of mankind's evolution and growth, *Something* intelligent

and purposeful has been at work, ordering all things, preparing all things, against the day when you and I, arriving here we know not whence, should find in this world a habitation and a home.

It is unbelievable that this should be so, yet so it evidently is ; the truth of it attested by the fact that we are here, and by the equally obvious fact that it is possible for us to continue to be here only because of countless myriads of inter-related activities that are going on in this world and were going on for millions of years before we came. It is a mystery and a miracle. What it means is altogether beyond our power to explain. The fact is as real as we are ourselves.

And it is this fact, so seldom pointed out to us, that gives us the best reason we can possibly have for believing in the essential friendliness of our environment. For many reasons, some of which I have already suggested, most of us grow up with a very strong impression that the world is antagonistic to us. We think the universe is somehow arrayed against us and would harm us or destroy us if it could. Superficially there is some justification for that idea. The material world

is inert. Until we understand something of its laws, its very lifelessness makes it seem to be deliberately stubborn in its refusal to obey our wills. Yet when we do begin to handle it aright, how docile and obedient it becomes !

In truth, the antagonism exists only in our imaginations. Whatever appearances may say to the contrary, there is ample evidence, if we care to look for it, that we live in a friendly universe. Its preparation for our coming warrants us in believing that, and a multitude of ways by which it succours us confirm our faith, if we take the trouble to try to interpret our experience aright.

If you tell me it is extremely difficult to believe this in a world full of wars and rumours of wars, in a civilisation that compels millions to suffer the direst distresses of poverty and privation while others batten on their weakness ; in an age when lust and selfishness, hatred, greed and every other horror of evil sear the very soul of those who look at life with sensitive eyes ; I will not disagree with you. But before you blame the universe for that, I would ask you to inquire how much of it is the direct result of the very distrust

which sets a man at war with life and so with his fellows. If then you cannot begin to believe that the wrong lies "not in our stars, but in ourselves," I think you will at least agree that man's only hope of overcoming the evil he sees is to live as if the universe were friendly, whether in fact it is or not.

People whose business it is to make calculations about these things tell me that at the time of the year when the wheat harvest of the world is ready for reaping, the store of grain in the nations' granaries is sufficient to supply the needs of men for only six weeks. If the new crop failed to ripen, the human race would die of starvation within two months. For so simple a provision as our daily bread we are utterly dependent upon the orderly working of many forces altogether beyond our control. We are so well accustomed to rely upon the continued operation of these forces that we never give them a thought. We lump them together with many other forces upon which we also depend—our trust in them enables us to clothe our bodies, build our homes, travel by land, sea and air, make all that we make, do all that we do, and even think all that we think—and describe them as "Natural

Laws." But it is no more natural that these laws should continue to work than that they should cease to work altogether, or should act intermittently and capriciously. We expect them to be reliable, but that is no reason why they should be. If they are, it is only because the universe is so ordered that man may put his trust in it, learn to understand its ways and find that it is friendly when he does.

But I do not want to take the reader into the deep and turgid waters of philosophy. I have led our discussion to this point in order that we may be helped to realise one thing of some importance for our understanding of life. It is that, however difficult we may find it to believe in the friendliness of our environment, we have to come to terms with the fact that only so far as we do take the risk of trusting it can we come to master it at all.

You may take any realm of human activity you choose, and you will find in it a demonstration of this truth. Consider agriculture. The farmer tills his soil, sows his seed, manures his land and prepares for harvest. Everything he does is an affirmation of his trust in the good earth to bring forth her fruit in

due season. Every new experiment in cultivation he makes expresses his faith that Nature will respond to his increasing knowledge and reward it with richer abundance of crops.

The scientist, through many years of arduous experiment, patiently probes some mystery of the physical world or the living organism of man. He works in the faith that, as he continues to investigate, he moves ever nearer to the discovery for which he strives. He trusts the power of his mind to understand the laws at work in the physical thing he studies ; and he trusts the universe to be consistent in its working so that when he finds those laws he can always apply them with the same results.

The philosopher also, in his own realm of interest, lives in trust. He trusts his own insight into truth as the artist trusts his vision of beauty and the saint his experience of goodness.

So it is over the whole gamut of human thought and achievement. As men have learned to run the risk of trusting life they have come to understand it. Where they have failed or refused to trust they have failed to

learn. Everything we possess in this strangely complex civilisation is ours because, either in our own or in an earlier age, some men and women have ventured to have faith in life. They have dared to believe that it would open its storehouses of wonder to their knocking. They have trusted that it would reveal its secrets to their questioning. They have believed it would yield its goodness to their deep desiring; and life has responded, with overwhelming lavishness of giving, to their friendly importunities.

We have already remarked upon the fact that our personalities awaken to full possession of their powers only when our attitude to life is one of self-giving. Now it begins to appear that we have to take notice of this same law, working, so to speak, from the other side. Life responds to our self-giving by yielding up to us its secrets and its treasures.

In the first section of this book I referred briefly to this, when the occasion served to remind the reader and myself, how lightly we hold one of our richest mental endowments, the sense of wonder. As children, we walk through a world very much like the

Kingdom of Heaven, because our spirits are awake and alert to receive every impression our surroundings can make upon our senses. There is in us a real zest for life. We enter upon each new experience with eagerness and keen anticipation. Nothing is dull, nothing is humdrum, because there is expectancy in our souls. We can turn the commonest activity into a gay adventure because we have not yet acquired the unhappy art of taking everything for granted.

One effect of this expectant mood is that all our organs of sense are tuned up, like good instruments of music. Because we go about life unpreoccupied with ourselves, we are intensely aware of all that is happening around us, and our minds are receptive to every stimulus of the environment, which, responding to our friendliness, blesses us with many ministries.

The organs of sense with which we make contact with the world around us are the means by which we may garner the material of thought. They are our tools for carving out of the fabric of life a kind of experience that is rich in quality and varied in kind. It is almost a truism to say that we hardly know

how to use these tools. Having eyes we see not, having ears we hear not.

An idle poet, here and there,
Looks round him ; but, for all the rest,
The world, unfathomably fair,
Is duller than a witling's jest.
Love wakes men, once a lifetime each ;
They lift their heavy lids, and look ;
And lo, what one sweet page can teach
They read with joy, then shut the book.
(Patmore, *The Angel in the House*.)

That is because, growing out of childhood, we have also grown out of love with life as we have become more intent upon ourselves. Our self-centredness seems to have this deplorable effect: it degrades our enthusiasms, and gradually destroys our ability to educe from experiences the abundance of joy that the simplest of them could give if we were truly awake to them.

This truth has nowhere been expounded more forcefully than in the Bible story of the Prodigal Son. He went from his father's house richly endowed, but, wasting his substance, he came at last to the place where life held for him nothing but husks—the bare shell, empty of everything that made it fit for human nature to enjoy.

Our own civilisation is suffering desperately from a spiritual hunger which it is vainly trying to satisfy with the husks of experience. We rush from one excitement to another, from one distraction to another, always seeking in novelty something that we hope will afford the repletion we crave. Ingenuity is piled on ingenuity to minister to our jaded appetites, yet every new thing palls as it becomes a commonplace, and our hunger remains unsatisfied.

It forever will, if we persist in our expectation that, whilst remaining interested only in ourselves and therefore out of step with life's purpose, we can yet wring out of it the satisfaction of our desires and a potion to allay our fears. The universe is friendly and prompt in response to a spirit of co-operation born of trust ; but it is adamant, even ruthless, in refusal of its gifts to those who would wring them from it by force. Even when life seems to surrender to the dominant will, the very fruits of conquest turn to dust and ashes in the mouths of its enemies. As Dean Inge once said, " Nothing fails like success." There is no disillusionment more bitter than that of the man who, having pitted

himself against the world, seems to have overcome it, only to discover that the very means he used to achieve his ends have made him incapable of deriving satisfaction from them when they are attained.

Of this tragedy we have all experienced something, even if our particular kind of covetousness has made the result seem more farcical than dramatic. The late Stacy Aumonier wrote one of his best short stories on this theme, entitling it, if I remember correctly, "The Octave." He sketched the characters of eight men in an ascending scale of power and affluence. From the lowest, a tramp on the road, to the seventh in the series, every man was consumed with envy for the one above him. The eighth man, a wealthy commercial magnate, lived in opulent luxury surrounded by every circumstance of ease. But he was as discontented as the rest ; for he coveted with all his heart the care-free existence of the tramp at the bottom of the scale.

In the course of my daily work I am often consulted by young men and women who are somewhat at odds with life ; and most frequently, in course of conversation, they

tell me of their dissatisfaction with the job they happen to be doing. Some complain that it is too monotonous and humdrum. Some are equally distressed because their work is too varied and exacting. Others find their task unworthy of their talents. Occasionally such objections are justified, but in nine cases out of ten the fault lies, not in the work, but in the worker. He wants a job made to his measure. He needs to be made fit to measure up to the job.

I have a vivid recollection of one such visitor to my rooms, a young man in the early twenties. He had been apprenticed to a great London Department Store. As part of his training he was for some months appointed shop-walker, and given the run of the place so that he could get to know something of all its activities. He complained to me of unutterable boredom, because, as he said, from morning till night he had nothing to do but walk about. He looked as miserable as if he were carrying all the burdens of the world upon his shoulders.

Nothing to do! Yet that young man spent his days in a veritable Aladdin's Cave of

romance. Gold, silver, glass, wrought metals, perfumes, books, furniture, silks, satins and all manner of rich and lovely fabrics ; meats, drinks, luxuries and necessities of every conceivable kind, had been brought into that place from the ends of the earth. Had he taken the trouble to inquire into the history of almost any one of the thousands of things that surrounded him, my young friend could have found enough material for the making of a fascinating book. The place was thronged with people. Saints and sinners, successes and failures, geniuses and dullards, fools and knaves, rubbed shoulders as they passed along the aisles of the great emporium. Every sort of human comedy and tragedy was represented there. If my friend had been sufficiently alive to read only those stories that were plainly written upon the faces of some who passed him as he went about his work, he would have had a wealth of education in the art of understanding human nature.

All these things and all these people were my young friend's concern. It was required of him only that he should interest himself in them and his fellow-employees who served

them. What a thrilling life he might have had! He succeeded only in being bored and cynical—as he would doubtless have become in any other work he had undertaken—not because there was anything wrong with the work, but because there was everything wrong with him.

Boredom and the cynicism that usually accompanies it are unfailing marks of a personality cowardly at heart and at enmity with life. These traits are “grown-up” manifestations of a mood of childhood. It is the foolishness that leads a child to put out his tongue and shout rude epithets from a safe distance when his elders will not accept him at his own valuation. The cynic is afraid to get his feet wet in the waters of life, so he stands on the shore and cries disparagement at those who man the ships and sail the seas. The bored individual is like the fox that cried “Sour grapes,” not because he thought the grapes really were sour, but because it was easier to have them so than to acknowledge his own inability to jump.

At the heart of all such dispositions there is fear of life; fear of its supposed enmity,

coupled with an inward reluctance either to acknowledge that the imagined opposition is not there, or to prove its reality by facing it. The individual takes the line of least resistance because it is easy, and then complains that the world refuses to accord him the chaplet of heroism.

For, let us not misunderstand each other, to affirm that the environment, life, the universe, whatever you like to call it, is friendly, does not mean that it offers any premium to cowardice. On the contrary, the mark of its true beneficence is its unqualified refusal to accept the homage of timidity.

The mother who ministers to every whim of her child says she loves it so deeply that she cannot help giving in to its wishes ; but in truth she loves herself more than the child, and she will allow the child's character to be irreparably marred rather than suffer the personal inconvenience of rightly training it. The parent who truly loves his child will one day put into its hands a knife, and leave it to run the risk of cutting its fingers ; not because it pleases the parent to see the child hurt, but because he knows that unless the

hazard is taken the child will never learn to use a sharp tool.

So life sets us in many situations that are perplexing and maybe dangerous. They teach us to use our tools, and if sometimes we find the process of learning a painful and slow one, we may discover in time that it is all very well worth while. Most of us learn more by our failures than by our successes.

But there is more in it than that. We happen to be made in such a way that we need the incentive of difficulty to sharpen our wits and give us energy for the work life sets at our hands to be done. There is at the heart of us a divine discontent. Our natures refuse to be satisfied with the trumpery victory, the easy attainment ; somehow, there is far more happiness to be found in a magnificent failure than a cheap victory.

One of the characteristics of all living creatures, even to the unicellular amœba of which I have spoken, is what the biologists call "Irritability." It is a will to strive against the adverse circumstance until it is overcome, as the oyster strives against the particle of grit that enters its shell, until the grit has been rounded and smoothed into a pearl. This

“irritability” lies behind the whole process of evolution. It prevents stagnation. It encourages the effort that brings change and improvement. To its existence we owe the distinctive qualities of self-consciousness that make us human, and because of it our lives have purposefulness and direction.

By evoking the response of the creature to circumstances apparently hostile, the environment woos it to fuller life. Rightly regarded, then, the reluctance of life to yield its treasures at our command, the apparent antagonism of circumstance that puts all our qualities to the test, the perils and pains through which we must pass in order to experience life’s deeper joys and satisfactions—all these are gestures of goodwill. They are the means by which the friendly power behind all being seeks to draw into expression the best we have, and out of it to mould something even better than the best we are.

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, in his book, *The Secret of Victorious Living*, writes :

In our time there can have been few men who saw more trouble, looked on it more intimately, felt it more deeply, than Cardinal Mercier ; and of all his difficult days, I suspect, none could have

been harder to endure than the one in Rome when the news reached him of the burning of Louvain and the subsequent bombardment of Malines—the nave of his own cathedral a mass of debris, his home torn by shells, one-sixth of Louvain gone, the priceless books of his library burned, and already the bodies of his peaceful students being cremated. Now, Cardinal Mercier was no quiet pool. He had in him tremendous capacities for resentment and indignation, and those who were with him say that in the first minutes of his misery the complaints rose deep out of his wretchedness. “Why all this sorrow, Lord? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Then, they say, his eyes fell on the crucifix, and the stormy man grew still as though once more the Christ had calmed a tempest, and they heard him say, “A disciple is not above his Lord.—We will rebuild!”

In the presence of a scene like that how petty we appear, claiming that life must be just to us, our little egos screaming with resentment when it is not. No, expect trouble. Take it in your stride. Never ask of life that you be spared it. Ask that when, in due season, it comes, you may handle it well. And sometimes, when there are tasks to be done which will cost the sacrifice of things you love and the bearing of burdens you hate, walk straight into trouble; deliberately choose it. Of all the shining instruments that life put into the hands of Jesus with which to change the world, nothing remotely compared with the cross.

They say that Thomas Edison searched the world for some filament that would glow

to incandescence when an electric current was passed through it. He tried nearly a thousand different substances, and failed with them all, before he found one suitable for his purpose. I do not know what arduousness of spiritual training Edison had to undergo before he found the quality of patience that enabled him to "keep on keeping on" at his experiment until he brought it to a successful issue ; but the result was worth it.

The result always is worth it. Not for what material achievement a man may make as the consequence of his striving, but for the kind of man the striving makes. Whatever of nobility and sacrifice, whatever of goodness, truth and beauty this world possesses, it owes to such men and women. They have seen the love behind life's austerities ; they have wooed it and won its gifts.

If there is one quality above another that we need to cultivate in order to enter into a right relationship with our environment to discern the friendliness it hides behind its inertia, that quality is a sense of humour. I am sure that our portentous solemnities blind us to life's real goodness more effectively

than many of the impetuous sins we more readily condemn.

Humour is to living experience what symmetry is to architecture, balance to engineering and composition to graphic art. It is a willingness to establish a right relation between events and circumstances by seeing them in true proportion one with another. Humour has for its aim the discovery of truth about nature and life by observation tinged with sympathy and understanding. It is a gift impossible to acquire while we remain self-centred, for its first object of entertainment is the self—and we cannot be amused at ourselves so long as we take ourselves more seriously than all the rest of the world put together.

The only people completely devoid of a sense of humour are the insane. That fact alone should warn us to beware if we find ourselves losing the desire for spontaneous laughter. It means that we are thinking more highly than is good for us of our own importance. Our vision of life's meaning is becoming distorted because we are looking inward instead of outward.

Folk of a religious turn of mind seem to run closer to this dangerous mood of false solemnity than most others. There is something seriously wrong with our ideas about God if we find it difficult to worship Him and still preserve our power to laugh. Even Paul, for whom life was a very serious and arduous business at the best of times, credited God with a sense of humour, for he speaks of God "winking" at many human peccadilloes which were the result of immaturity and ignorance rather than deliberate will to evil.

I confess that often enough, after attending some religious gathering where the atmosphere grew tense with emotion, speakers and hearers alike becoming heavy with conscious solemnity, I have come out into the open air and heard the voice of laughter sound like an anthem of praise more sacred than the worship I had left. There is always something faintly ridiculous about self-conscious sanctity.

If you would master life, take everything else in it seriously, if you will; but never yourself. Run the risk of trusting the friend-

liness of your world, and live in friendship with it. To do so is to woo out of life all its latent goodness, all its joy; and to find strength to bear its adversities and pains with a stout heart and a good courage.

CHAPTER VIII

MINDS IN CONFLICT

A USEFUL, though rough-and-ready, distinction can be made between personalities, according to the attitude they adopt towards life—the manner in which they elect to respond to the environment in which they happen to be. There are some who ask, in effect, “What am I going to do with life?”, and others who inquire, “What is life going to do to me?”

People of the first of these two types have discerned life's true meaning. They are not concerned for what they will get out of it, but for what they can put into it. They do not stand with their backs to the wall, setting themselves over against the world to fight it. The world is their oyster, to be opened and explored for the true riches it holds. Accepting life on its own terms of friendship, they will be friendly with it and constructive in their attitude towards it. They see that “private world,” of which I spoke in an earlier chapter, as their possession. Upon its far horizons they gaze with eager eyes, and their hearts beat faster at the thought of

the adventures it holds and the hidden treasure they may discover in it.

So these folk enter life joyously and trustfully. They know they can do with it what they will, and because they are in love with it, their will is goodwill. They will succour their world by ministering to the necessities of their fellows. They will bless it by adding to its store of spiritual riches. They will heal it by giving of their strength to answer its needs. They will redeem it from its fears and futilities by transmuting its ugliness into beauty, its hatred into trust and its pain into victory. So, for them, life will be sacramental, and the very dust of busy streets will become as gold wherever their feet may tread.

People of the second sort are not interested to inquire what they shall do with life. Their whole concern is centred upon what life is going to do to them. They are afraid, with a fear born of distrust.

In any situation that evokes an emotion of fear there are usually two ways of facing it. One is to stand up and fight. The other is to turn tail and run away. So there are two means by which people who are

antagonistic to the environment try to deal with it, and the "set" of their characters varies according to the course they choose.

The "stand-up-and-fight" folk are at war with the rest of the world, and they don't care who knows it. They make up their minds to what they want and go after it—and woe betide anybody who gets in their way. These are the pugnacious people, and the form their pugnacity will take depends upon what it is in their environment that seems to be most set in opposition to themselves.

It may be society; if so, they will become gangsters, burglars, or criminals of some other sort. It may be convention; then they will do their best to smash the particular social or moral code that seems to menace them most. The revolt may be against authority, whatever form authority may take in relation to the person concerned; then he will strive against that. The bullies of this world, the arrogant, independent, self-assertive folk, all belong to this company. Perhaps there are times when we all belong to it. Our ambitions or our whims seem to be opposed, and we fly into tempers, spank the children,

write violent letters to the newspapers or make what the reporters call "magnificent fighting speeches." Society is sometimes foolish enough to pay homage to this kind of behaviour when it seems to succeed. If a bully is bully enough to earn the title of "Dictator," the world may call him a success. If we can work off our fear by being violently energetic in some public "anti-this" or "anti-that" crusade, we may win great applause for it. That does not prove our righteousness. It only demonstrates the fact that men and women have not yet learned how impossible it is to win others to allegiance by opposing them.

People of the "turn-tail-and-run-away" sort try to deal with a life that seems too big a menace for them in a more peacable way. Smashing things to bits is not in their line. "Peace at any price" is their motto. Many and various are the ways in which they seek to withdraw from life's hazards and responsibilities, but from all of them the personality suffers damage.

The more obvious of these "flights from reality," as the psychologist calls them, disclose their purpose at once. The most

extreme is suicide. Drug addiction, alcoholism and the "don't-care-a-hang" sort of disposition, are others. There is nothing subtle about these attitudes. They say quite plainly, "I give it up," and that is precisely what they mean.

Comparatively few people take extreme measures of this sort. More commonly the personality withdraws into some sort of retreat, building around itself a mental "wall of protection" from the hazards it fears. Many and ingenious are the devices employed to this end. One will become "exclusive," avoiding life's "hard knocks" by associating only with a little coterie of people amongst whom he will always find agreement and sympathy. Another will adopt a permanent mood of suspicion. Some will hide behind a real or imagined disability, that may be mental or physical, making it an excuse for the evasion of responsibility or difficulty. Many people, using guile, will "project" on to the world the faults they discern in themselves, blaming their friends or their circumstances for their own failures.

Let me give you a few pen-pictures of such personalities, so that you may see some-

thing of the mental mechanisms behind their behaviour.

Mr. X. is a professional man of capacity perhaps slightly above the average. To look at him, you would suppose him to be as strong as a horse and as contented as comfortable circumstances, a happy home and a thriving professional practice should make him. Talk to him, and he will tell you he is hampered a good deal by persistent ill-health, though he will perhaps be a bit vague about its exact nature if you inquire too closely. Get to know him well, and you will discover that Mr. X. is always in the hands of one physician or another. He goes from consultant to consultant, sampling in turn the ministrations of osteopath, faith-healer, dietician and gland specialist, never remaining for very long content with any, but always being under the directions of one or another.

Encouraged by an over-fond parent, Mr. X. grew up to believe supremely in his own brilliance. "If my boy doesn't get to the top of the tree it won't be his fault," his mother used to say, and he heartily agreed with her. But that sort of tree-climbing proved to be harder than Mr. X. bargained

for. Other men managed to beat him at examinations, and later on succeeded in handling with credit professional cases that Mr. X. was unable to tackle.

Mr. X. refused to accept the witness of experience to his own limitations. He remembered the saying that if he didn't get to the top of the tree it wouldn't be his fault, and, believing it, came to the conclusion that circumstances must be conspiring against him. There must be something physically wrong to account for his failure. Indeed, now he came to think of it, he hadn't been feeling very well for quite a long time. Better see a doctor.

And so Mr. X. has been seeing one doctor or another ever since. His persistent ill-health is his way of escape from a sense of failure. It enables him to go on believing in his own genius without having to do anything to prove it.

Mrs. A. is a woman who has, as she often explains to her friends, sacrificed her life for her children. Both she and her husband have for years scraped every penny, denied themselves every luxury and sometimes necessities, in order to give their two boys a first-class

education. When the elder boy failed to "make good," Mrs. A. had a nervous breakdown, and even the later success of her younger lad has not completely compensated for her disappointment. She will "never be the same again," as she says.

Her friends have never quite understood the intensity of purpose with which Mrs. A. has followed the careers of her sons, nor the profound effects that their successes and failures have had on her. That is because those friends do not know the bitterness that came into Mrs. A.'s heart when her own father laughed at her for marrying the sort of fool he said her husband was, nor the insistence of her desire to be able, one day, to point to two brilliantly successful sons and say to her father, "Now who's the fool?"

The truth is that Mrs. A. has been at war with life ever since her father's comment on her husband gave her the idea that the world would ridicule her for marrying him.

Mr. Z. believes his fellow-men despise him, and he hates them for it. He has become an evangelist, and it would be difficult to say whether he gets more satisfaction out of telling his hearers exactly what he thinks of them, as

he does when he discourses upon Sin ; or out of feeling his power to bend them to his will, as he does when he brings them to the penitent form.

“ Conscience doth make cowards of us all,” says Shakespeare. At first glance, that statement seems to have little to do with my friend Miss R., a presentable young woman of some twenty-four years, who is desperately afraid of the dark—or was, until with some assistance she was able recently to recollect that once, as a little girl, she was on the point of stealing some sweets from a dimly lighted corner of a shop where she had gone on an errand for her mother, when the manager, coming upon her suddenly out of a dark doorway she had not noticed, caught her in the act. Her fear of darkness was fear of guilt unacknowledged.

“ Mary ” is only ten years old, but already she has begun to build a wall of protection around herself against what she doubtless feels is the enmity of the world. Her father, foolishly enough, makes a lot more fuss than he should of her younger sister. Mary is jealous and resentful, so she has withdrawn from life into a world of her own—a fantastic world of imagination, to which the doors are the

covers of a book. Already her parents begin to find it difficult to bring Mary away from her daydreaming, for which she neglects both schoolwork and play. Mary does not understand herself—but in fact she is in retreat from life.

Notice that in all the instances I have given of flights from reality there are two motives governing the individual's choice of expedients. One is to evade the "hard knocks" by which the environment hammers character to fineness and tempers it like steel; the other is to provide a situation in which the individual can pretend that he has achieved the position, the power, the conquest or the esteem which he has always desired but never deserved.

With a fair degree of success do many people ensconce themselves in mental fortresses that fulfil both these requirements; but more often their devices are only partially effective. Then there is trouble. For example, if you elect to avoid life's hazards by "enjoying ill-health," you may at length find irksome the "rheumatism," or "nerves," or "indigestion" or whatever it is you have chosen as your excuse. If you determine to

fight life with might and main, you will suffer deeply if you come up against some circumstance which, despite your best endeavours, refuses to yield to your will.

The most cunningly constructed fortress will not withstand the siege of life completely ; somewhere, somehow, we must all meet life and face its imperatives. Sooner or later something occurs : a great crisis, a moment of slackened vigilance, an unexpected change of circumstance, a personal bereavement—any one of many unforeseen events may happen, and willy-nilly we are brought face to face with reality. Our walls of protection are battered down, our trumpery armour is stripped away, and we stand alone in our naked poverty.

There is no lasting security for anyone in any expedient of evasion ; and the more effective the expedient seems to be, the more devastating is the damage wrought upon the personality when its defences are undermined.

Indeed, the sense of precariousness is always lurking at the back of the minds of those who would run away from life. It is an insistent menace to their peace of mind, and because of it they are always trying to build

their walls higher. They sleep badly. They get "all on edge." They suffer anxiety out of all proportion to the cause if any trivial event gets "under their guard." In all sorts of unhappy ways they pay the penalty of their cowardice; life exacts just recompense for their distrust.

It will be clear from the examples I have given that the victims of this disposition to enmity with life are not always to be held wholly responsible for it. Indeed, one is never disposed to blame them, for even when they deliberately choose a course of conduct that is a retreat from life, it is often true to say "they know not what they do." Their personal responsibility begins only when they see their own motives clearly, and thus have an opportunity to change them if they will.

There are, however, some important lessons we may all learn from the lives of these people as we have studied them. The first is, if we want to master life let us be quite ruthless in the exposure of our own motives. The game of "let's pretend" is somewhere at the root of all our enmity with life and the desperate evils it breeds. As soon as we begin to imagine we are other than we are, or better than

we are ; as soon as we pretend that we are kind when we are selfish, clever when we are stupid, brave when we are cowardly, we lay the first brick in the unstable fortress of evasion. But a determination to be honest with ourselves is a probe that goes very deep into the secret places of the heart ; and even when we have for many years kept up a pretence with ourselves, a thoroughly sincere self-examination will usually disclose the real motives of our behaviour and show us how to mend it if we will.

A second thing worth remembering is this : the burden of our fears is grievous largely because we persist in trying to live three lives at once. To the real difficulties of to-day we add the memory of all our yesterdays and the imaginary troubles of all our to-morrows. For some of us life is so full of ghosts from " the years that the locust hath eaten," and apprehensions for the years yet to be, that we have hardly any energy left for playing our part in the reality of now.

Time after time I catch myself in a pre-occupation so intense with what has been or what may be that the present day's duties and privileges are only half lived through.

Yet the present moment is the only reality we have. To let it pass unfilled with vivid experience is to forsake the substance of life for its shadow, to make vain imaginings a substitute for creative living.

This is one reason why there is no relief for us from the chains of evil habit or the burden of past guilt in a persistent mood of penitence. True penitence is not a mood. It is a moment of clear insight into our own motives and their effect, resulting in a sincere decision and a deliberate "change of mind."

Continued indulgence in a mood of penitence is a harmful and dangerous practice. A feeling of guiltiness accompanied by persistent shame is a very subtle form of self-centredness. Its first effect is to enhance a sense of personal inferiority or inadequacy which is already too acute, and so may create a feeling of hopelessness that serves only to forge more securely the fetters by which we are bound. It is one thing to acknowledge failure frankly as a preliminary to further constructive effort, and quite another thing constantly to reiterate to oneself the affirmation, "I am a failure." In the mood of penitence and shame, that is what we do. The

suggestion reinforces itself as the imagination dwells upon it. It emphasises our sense of weakness and inhibits our energies, until it makes almost inevitable a repetition of the very wrong we seek to avoid.

But a sense of shame or failure which is allowed to persist has another way of playing havoc with our personalities. It becomes an excuse for retreat from life just as powerful as the other evasions we have been discussing. The person who begins by being ashamed of himself will before long get sorry for himself as he seeks one excuse after another in mitigation of his conduct. Then, shame and sorrow mingling, together denude the personality of energy and become the expedient by which further effort is postponed or avoided altogether.

We should all do well to remember that life, more gracious and forgiving than we are ourselves, never bears malice or resentment. Its forgiveness is contingent only upon our willingness to be forgiven—a willingness that is attested in us by our refusal to remain pre-occupied with ourselves, even in an activity of self-recrimination. To accept life's forgiveness for failure by forgiving ourselves is

an imperative condition of wholesome living.

Why this must be so becomes clear as we realise how much of pride there is in our self-blame. If we had a true humility we should accept our own failures gracefully, because we should acknowledge our imperfections. It is only when we have an opinion of ourselves so high that we cannot bear to contemplate the possibility of folly or sin or weakness in our personalities, that we are disposed to blame ourselves too bitterly for the mistakes we make.

There is a good deal of this same pride, too, in our over-readiness to sit in judgment upon others. If, seeing some other person a victim of sin or folly, we are willing to say, "There, but for the grace of God, go I," because we know our own weaknesses and limitations, then we shall find it very difficult to condemn our fellows. If criticism and condemnation come easily to our lips, we shall do well to inquire what lies behind the self-righteousness that makes it so easy for us to see the faults of our fellows. If we are honest enough, we may discover that we discern most clearly in them the flaws we

know to be in our own character but do not care to admit, because we are afraid.

The wholesome personality is swift in forgiveness both of itself and its fellows. It does not condone its own faults either by minimising, or by dwelling upon them. It is prompt to take constructive measures to remedy wrongs done to others, and then to make its own new beginnings with energy and determination. But it refuses to mar the possibilities of the present and the future by forever dragging around the burden of its own past mistakes.

For equally good reasons, the wholesome personality does not make over-much of its successes. Preoccupation with one's achievements can become an excuse for cessation of effort nearly as devastating as over-concern about one's faults. The desire for praise and the unwillingness to do one's best without due acknowledgment and reward are destructive traits of character, prolific in breeding neurotic disorders. They lead directly to an indulgence of the imagination all too common as a way of escape from life, about which it is perhaps worth while to say something here.

Daydreaming is the name we give to an activity of the imagination through which we make a play of the mind a satisfying substitute for constructive activity in the world of reality.

In any of the three main channels through which our life-energy or emotion can be given expression, successful activity is accompanied by a sense of pleasure and satisfaction. But we are so made that some measure of satisfaction can be derived from the contemplation of such an activity. The pleasure of anticipation is, indeed, one of the incentives to effort. As I have already pointed out, the imagination seems to "stoke up the fires" of the mind and create or conserve the requisite energy for the task to be performed.

But it is possible to allow the pleasure of anticipation to "exist in its own right," so to speak, and become, not an incentive to effort, but a substitute for it.

There is a stimulus to indulge this habit wherever a personality is at war with life, because then the satisfaction which should attend real effort is marred by the strain of apprehension. Under such circumstances

the building of castles in the air very quickly becomes habitual; the victim withdraws himself from the real world into a realm of fantasy in which all things are made to appear as the thinker desires them to be.

Sometimes these dream worlds are filled with imaginary joys, as when the dreamer thinks of himself as a great success or a great martyr. Sometimes they are nightmare worlds of lusts and evil desires.

Daydreaming is a dangerous habit because its growth is insidious. To spend an idle moment weaving airy threads of gossamer seems an innocent enough occupation. To imagine ourselves winning this coveted prize or occupying that place of esteem is apparently a very mild indulgence of fancy, and perhaps it is only when the gossamer has become a hempen rope that we realise how tightly we are gripped in a bondage of thought that imperils our very life.

It is good to have your head in the clouds only if you take care to always keep your feet on solid earth. Check up your aspirations with your actualities; measure the worth of your dreams by the extent to which they empower you to convert them into realities.

Realise your own limitations and accept them gracefully. Refuse to acknowledge the portrait of yourself that your imagination would paint for you until you have compared it with the individual you know yourself to be.

By such disciplines the imagination can be directed and trained as a servant. Without them it will make you its slave.

My purpose in this chapter has been to show in how many ways a disposition of mistrust towards life reveals itself in activity governing our choice of work and play, the course of our reasoning, our judgment of the meaning of events, and, most of all, affecting our attitude towards our fellow-men.

To conclude this part of our study, I would draw your attention to one condition under which a fundamental change can be brought about in us so that we are no longer at war with life, and therefore no longer bound by the limitations imposed by our own antagonism.

That condition is our willingness to forgive life and people for any real or fancied wrong they have done to us, blotting it out from our memory and living as if it had never been.

What I like to call "the mechanism of forgiveness" is of the greatest importance for our self-understanding. There have recently come my way two interesting people, outwardly quite unlike in their mental characteristics, yet having in common an attitude to life which, by its results, aptly illustrates the spiritual principle involved.

The first of these folk to whom I would draw your attention is a presentable young woman of some twenty-four years, who serves in a showroom of one of London's department stores. She sought my advice recently about some spiritual difficulty, and in the course of our conversation remarked, *apropos* of nothing in particular, that she rather dreaded getting married because she hated spoilt children, and yet was quite sure she would spoil her own.

It occurred to me that there was perhaps more in this casual statement than met the eye, and so I began to ask a few questions, with the result that at length I elicited from my friend this information. She was the child of an unusually possessive, power-loving mother, who had evidently ruled her household and her husband with a rod of

iron. The husband, I gathered, had succumbed to the inevitable, and meekly obeyed his wife's commands, becoming silent, inoffensive, timid, "a perfect doormat, poor dear," as his daughter described him.

The girl, fond of her father and deeply resenting her mother's regimentation, had early determined upon a policy of revolt. Open defiance would only precipitate interminable rows and add to the unhappiness of her father. Avoiding that course, therefore, she adopted a plan of passive resistance, and seized every opportunity of asserting her independence by doing exactly the opposite of what she believed her mother would require.

Now, the trouble with a habit of that sort is that it grows on you, and the desire to defy does not restrict itself to the person for whose "benefit" it was originally planned. It becomes second nature to be "opposite" and to see the motives of an enemy in every circumstance that seems to require one's submission. Before very long, if one is not careful, one finds oneself under a compulsion to behave contrariwise even when one has no conscious desire to do so.

Something of this sort has happened to my young friend. She knows she will let her children do exactly as they like, when she has them, because she has reached the point when her own judgment has fallen under the dominion of her wish to assert at all costs her independence of her mother.

My other acquaintance is a young man of average intelligence who is always getting into difficulties with his family and friends because he cannot be persuaded to keep clean. He hates washing. He will even meet his best girl with his hair unbrushed, his hands grubby and his clothes dusty and awry.

He, too, I find, is in revolt against his mother, but in this case, not because she is too harsh and domineering, but because she twitters and fusses around her son until he feels a perfect fool to be the object of such lavish ministrations.

His refusal to wash, at first a conscious assertion of his own will, a protest against the weakness and inferiority his mother's care has made him feel, has become an habitual disposition; a symbol of what he would like to feel is his freedom.

Here, then, are two people, both victims of unhappy mental tendencies they would like to overcome, yet both held in firm bondage by fetters they have forged for themselves. They have revolted against authority, but their very resentment has bound them the more firmly to the authority they have wanted to break.

The boy determined to assert his freedom to say, "I will not wash," and so has lost the freedom to say, "I will wash." The girl wanted to say, "I will not do what you want," but now her life says in effect, "I can't help doing what you don't want." Both people have merely exchanged one bondage for another. They are as far from true freedom to-day as ever they were, because they sought freedom in the wrong way. I have told both these young acquaintances that they will discover a way out of their afflictions only when they will accept both the privilege and the responsibility of their manhood and womanhood by being willing completely to forgive their parents for any wrong that the children feel, perhaps rightly, has been done to them.

They must do that, not because they are

under any illusions about the motives of their parents, not even because they expect any change to occur, as a result of their forgiveness, in the dispositions of their parents, but because it is the mark of a mature personality to "love its enemies," realising that "love" is not something we take, but the expression of the best that we can give of the energy of life which is our birthright.

Forgiveness of that sort is the only thing that will free my young friends, first from their compulsions to be contrary to life, and secondly, from the sense of bondage to their parents. They will no longer feel under an obligation either to obey or to disobey them. They will be willing, out of their sense of personal freedom, to serve their parents lovingly and graciously; and yet preserve the integrity of their adulthood to order their own lives as seems good to them, and make their own decisions according to their personal insight.

But until they do forgive their parents and life itself, in that way, the disposition to antagonism will always be in them. They will never have clear judgment about anything; they will never be able to manage

their own affairs as responsible persons, because their whole outlook and disposition will be warped and biased by a half-conscious resentment that will infect all their joys and distort all their decisions.

I have called this mental activity "The mechanism of forgiveness," for the stories I have told are no more than a commentary upon those words in our Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." Even God Himself cannot make the way of our life clean and straight until we forgive those who seem to have injured us, because the unforgiven act, being resented, becomes in our personalities a chain that binds us to our enemies.

On the other hand, to forgive is to be forgiven, for the act that breaks the bondage of our resentment breaks also the chains that bind us to the mental compulsions and fears they have bred in our souls. It makes us for the first time wholly free personalities, and releases for constructive use the mental energy we have consumed in inward strife.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said,
An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth ;

but I say unto you that ye resist not evil. . . . Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you ; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.”

This is a spiritual and psychological principle without obedience to which mental freedom is impossible.

CHAPTER IX

VICTORIES AND DEFEATS

FOR the observation of human nature " in the raw " few places offer more advantages than the consulting-room of a psychologist. It affords material for reflection in some respects more interesting than the physician may encounter in his surgery or the hospital ward. He sees men and women labouring under the strain of physical illness and may mark their courage or their cowardice, their patience in suffering, their fortitude in sorrow and their calmness in the shadow of death. The psychologist sees something of all this too ; but in addition it is his privilege, and often his burden, to observe his fellow-men and minister to their necessities in mental and spiritual distresses that appear to have no external occasion.

He sees men and women ravaged, not in body, but in soul ; injured, not by some physical accident or disease, but by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune ; bruised and battered, stung into revolt or broken to abject submission by ghosts from the past or shadows of things to come. The

patients of the psychologist are obsessed by nameless fears, tortured by persistent doubts, harried by dark compulsions they can neither understand nor overcome.

In one respect especially the lot of these tortured souls is more pitiable than that of any sufferer from physical disease. They cannot be protected from any extreme of misery by the comforts that money can buy, nor by any ministry to their material necessity that charity or compassion may provide.

Moreover, it is apparent that no degree of affluence or prestige will confer upon the individual any "immunity from infection," if one may use the phrase. Nervous disorder is as common among the rich as among the poor; it often happens that a man's very wealth or position will bind him the more securely in bondage to his fears, even if it be not the circumstance that has made them a menace to his peace.

I sometimes think one could have no more striking commentary upon the folly of human striving for wealth, position or praise than is afforded by the narratives of those who seek psychological treatment; for among them are men and women who have all these, and

their plight is no whit less extreme than that of others possessing none of their so-called advantages. Rich and poor, clever and stupid, learned and unlettered suffer alike, and must seek their healing in the same way.

That is why it is my custom, when talking to those who enlist my help, always to ask one question, "Why do you want to be well?" Perhaps it will not surprise the reader to learn that almost invariably I receive one answer, "I do not know," though it may be differently phrased by different individuals.

The longer I live, the more astonished I become at the number of people who appear never to have asked themselves what seems to me to be the most important question in life. They have never made up their minds what they are alive for, and it does not occur to them that the inquiry is a necessary preliminary to wholesome and constructive living.

Some time ago a man called to see me who said he was down and out. The story he told me was to the effect that until about six months ago he had been a partner in a thriving business out of which he derived an income of some seven hundred pounds a year. Then some entirely unforeseen circumstance had

arisen, resulting in the bankruptcy of the business and the dissolution of the partnership. Having spent his money as he earned it, and being unable to find a new position, my acquaintance very soon reached the end of his resources, until, on the day he saw me, he was, so he said, without a penny in the world, and homeless.

The story was a highly circumstantial one, probably untrue from beginning to end. For the moment, however, I gave my visitor the benefit of the doubt and asked him what he proposed to do next. Within five minutes he made it perfectly clear to me that he had not a single thought to spare for anybody in this world but himself; and that whether down-and-out or up-and-out, his supreme concern in life would be to take very good care of his own skin. I am sure he was thoroughly shocked when, having heard him to the end of his remarks, I asked what led him to believe that, under these circumstances, the continuation of his life could be of the slightest importance to anybody, including himself.

Dr. Stekel, the German psychologist, raises a pertinent question in one of his books. He says in effect, "Here is a man suffering from

certain nervous disorders that make him partially incapable of expressing himself. His energy is wasted by inward conflicts, his powers are inhibited by fears. He desires me to release him from his bondage. But he is self-centred now, and he will be self-centred when I have cured him. If the only result of my therapy will be to make him more effective and energetic in the pursuit of selfish ends, and therefore a greater menace to society than he is already, is the end worth the means ? ”

We all desire to make life worth living ; we want to know how to master it, we say. That is very good, so far as it goes, but it does not go very far unless the mastery of life we envisage has for its end and aim some purpose in harmony with the meaning of the whole of which we are but a tiny part.

Throughout this book I have tried to give a number of reasons why I believe this universe to be friendly in its disposition ; to put it in another way, why I believe that God is Love. But I should be evading my responsibility if I tried to delude you into believing for one moment that life offers any hostage to cowardice, any lasting recompense to selfishness, or

rewards with any security or immunity from hazard the kind of goodness that sets a price on itself, like the little boy who will behave at the promise of a piece of cake.

As I see it, the friendliness of life is of an order entirely spiritual. It encourages man to strive that out of his struggles he may educe a quality of spiritual vitality and insight transcending the material; an order of personality greater than human, and unlimited by the span of earthly life. To the man who accepts life on those terms God holds out His hand, the world yields its secrets and reveals its treasures. To the rest life must forever seem an illusion and a fraud.

So far as my observation enables me to judge, the universe, or God, does not evince any profound concern for human life, regarded as mere length of days. It does not appear to be very important whether the individual lives ten years or a hundred, whether he passes his days in ease or hardship. On the contrary, the operation of the laws governing the continuance of physical and mental life is so consistent, and the results of disobedience of these laws are so devastating, as to suggest that, from the point of view

of God, the swift removal from life of those who transgress its ordinances is a consummation to be desired.

If the response of life to the creature, as we see it manifested around us, is anything to go by, the extreme anxiety of men and women to be comfortable at any price, to be healthy at any price, and to live to a ripe old age at any price, is singularly beside the point. Whether I live to be ninety or die in ten minutes or so, whether I achieve fame or remain a nonentity, whether I pass my days in comfort or hardship, wealth or poverty, is of the least importance.

The one thing that does seem to matter is, what is to be the spiritual effect of the impact of my life upon circumstance, and what is the spiritual effect of circumstance going to be upon me, as the abiding, permanent result of my living, during the longer or shorter period of my sojourn in a human body and through the vicissitudes of my earthly pilgrimage?

To the blessed business of carving out of the unpromising fabric of my human nature something permanent and eternally real, life seems to bend its energies with unceasing

vigilance and zeal. To my co-operation with it in that strange task it is unreservedly friendly. If I accept life as the Divinely appointed means to that end, it responds to me with every resource of succour and encouragement. If I refuse life on that basis, it averts its face from me and leaves me utterly bereft.

So I am constrained to ask those whom I encounter in any distress of mind, body or estate, this question that seems to me to be of ultimate importance, "Why do you want to be well? What will you do with your health if you win it? To what end will you use your security if you find it? To what purpose do you propose to devote yourself if by some divine ministry you become mentally whole?" My conviction is that until a man or woman will seek and find an answer to those questions, and an answer which satisfies the divine imperative implicit in the very nature of things, true healing is impossible, and would be worthless even if it were not.

Not only for achieving the mastery of our own lives must we come to terms with that divine imperative. Our willingness to do so will afford us the only clues life gives us for the solution of its greatest mysteries: the

problem of evil, the injustice of suffering and the inevitability of death.

Many months ago, dark tragedy fell, swift as a thunderbolt, upon a Welsh mining town. Fire broke out in a colliery at a time when hundreds of men were working at the coal-face. Inflammable gases were ignited, and explosion after explosion in a few moments made the dark mine a raging inferno of flame and poison fume from which only a pitiful remnant of the working party escaped alive. In a few hours all attempts at rescue were abandoned as futile. The blazing pit was sealed with two hundred and sixty men entombed in its bowels, while hundreds of bereaved mothers, wives and children sobbed in the bitterness of their grief.

On the very day of that tragedy a letter from a friend brought me news of another no whit less poignant. A father had had occasion to seek the advice of a specialist concerning the health of his son, a little lad seven years old. He had been told that the boy was in the grip of an incurable disease and could live only a few months more.

The Welsh colliery disaster appalled the world. The whole nation entered into a

fellowship of suffering with the bereaved town. The stricken father wept alone and carried the burden of an anguish that daily grew more acute as he watched his little son sink day by day until he passed through the gates of death. Yet the tragedy of his waiting grief is being re-enacted even now in thousands of homes the world over. Every day in every town burdens like his are being borne. Many of those who pass us in the street are suffering as he did.

The coincidence of these two human tragedies impressed itself upon me because it happened that, in the second, a question was asked that well might have been asked also in the other ; doubtless was. When the father of the dying lad heard the doctor's verdict he cried, "O God, why should this have happened to me and mine?" Many upon whose loved ones the hand of death was laid in Gresford must have asked the same question. We might have had to ask it. Suppose it had been my son, or yours, over whose body the keen eye of a physician had seen the shadow of the dark angel? Suppose it had been our parent or our brother whose mangled body lay in the darkness of that pit, and

whose loss meant for us not only bereavement, but hardship and want?

If we are ever to have answers to such questions, we should seek them now. It is because we do not face them with courage in the days of our peace that they bring us to despair when the moment of crisis comes. Life's suffering is always fraught with peril for the soul to those who only see it when it stands knocking on their own threshold.

Consider the incidents I have described. Because the blow felled many together, the whole nation felt the tragedy of the blazing pit. But hardly a day passes without some miner in some coal-pit suffering the loss of life or limb or sight. Do we remember that when we discuss the price of coal?

Because the shadow of death overhung his household, a father cursed life and God. Yet he prayed his prayers and sang his hymns with fervour until that hour, whilst all around him other men and women were suffering as he suffers now. He cried, "Why did God let this happen to me?" It did not occur to him to cry, "Why did God let this happen to them?"

The point I am concerned to make is this. Most of us are content with a facile and comfortable faith in life and in ourselves. It serves and satisfies us because we blind our eyes to reality and live in a dream-world of our own creation. Then, one day, the inexorable logic of circumstance shatters the bubble of our illusion. We stand naked and fearful before stark imperatives that we had tried to delude ourselves did not exist.

There is in us all very much both of selfishness and cowardice. We shrink from the discomfort of entering into the fellowship of the world's suffering because it would cost us much. We refuse to see life's austerities too clearly because they challenge our facile thinking. But we pay the penalty of our self-indulgence in unpreparedness to meet adversities when they come. Because we have not been willing to ask out of our love for others, "Why does this happen to them?" when we see them racked with pain or buffeted by misfortune, we have no answer to give, no power to save ourselves from despair, when life compels us to ask, "Why does this happen to me?"

Indeed, just this impotence is the dark

tragedy of all selfishness. By refusing to give ourselves to life in loving compassion that shares both the joys and the sorrows of others, we deny to ourselves the only power that can ever enable us to overcome, when we in our turn are assaulted by suffering, hardship and sorrow. Only in self-giving do we learn self-forgetfulness, and only through self-forgetfulness can we discover the secret of life's true meaning and purpose, through which the mysteries of pain and sorrow, life and death, may at length be understood.

Surely that is why the replies of philosophy, logic, or even conventional religion seem so arid and comfortless when a soul wounded by grief or adversity cries aloud its deep, despairing "Why?" Those who have an answer to the question have found it through no book-learning. They have hammered out the steel of truth on the anvil of their own pain, suffered not of necessity, but by choice, because they have elected to keep their spirits exquisitely attuned to the lives of their fellow-men, whose burdens they have shared.

I confess that I do not know a satisfying answer that can be given to the problem of human suffering and evil. It is doubtless

true that our perception of the magnitude of pain is distorted ; that in fact there is no more pain in the world than the most that any one soul can suffer—because the pain is not multiplied arithmetically when many persons suffer it. It is doubtless true, too, that freedom to do good implies also freedom to leave good undone, or to choose evil. Let all be said that can be said about these things, and a mystery remains. Life as we live it leaves despairs unanswered, aspirations unfulfilled, injustices unremedied.

E. Stanley Jones, in his book *Christ and Human Suffering*, says :

“ All this pain seems to be necessary if character is the end, for a bird cannot fly except in a resisting medium, and we cannot rise except we rise upon something defeated.”

I am not sure that this sentence does not sum up most of what man has ever been able to say on this deep problem ; at least it expresses the one attitude towards pain through which we may find strength to bear and overcome it.

So long as we stand aside from the flux of life, as if we were spectators at a drama in which we do not participate, its dark tragedies

of travail will baffle our understanding and numb our spirits to impotent despairs. But when we enter the arena to share the suffering and toil, we become aware by experience of a transcending justice and an over-ruling love. The tragedy, we find, is not in the pain, but in the way the pain is borne. The hopelessness is not in the situation, but in the disposition of those who are living it through.

Indeed, I would go so far as to say that we have no right to form a judgment about the ultimate problems of pain and evil until we have made a spiritual choice by which we become sharers of life with our fellows.

It is apparent that a vast proportion of human suffering is avoidable and would be wholly prevented if we were all willing to bear it. If we were sensitive enough to feel the anguish of the man, living just around the corner, who sees his children hungry; if we were willing to suffer the daily heartbreak of those who watch their loved ones go into the perilous mine; if we felt a tenth of the bitterness of those who must pass their days in enforced idleness, their lot would not for long remain unrelieved.

So long as we can sleep undisturbed while

these injustices persist, so long as we can live untroubled by the hardships our fellow-men suffer, we have no right to sit in judgment upon the universe, for part of the responsibility of its injustice is ours, and we arraign ourselves when we accuse the world.

The reader will perhaps have remarked that until now I have not in this book entered into any discussion of sin. That is because I believe we use this word too loosely and too glibly. We have our little codes of morality and rectitude, and we are dangerously prone to describe as sin any conduct on the part of our fellows that transgresses the particular formula of righteousness we have accepted for ourselves.

To do that is the more easy because it enables us to avoid any recognition or acknowledgment of sin in ourselves ; sin which I would define, not as an activity in any particular sort of indulgence that transgresses a code of conduct, whether of our own or another's fashioning, but as that disposition towards life which is essentially self-centred, and therefore antagonistic. Sin, I believe, is that way of looking at life which sets us over against our environment as if we were some-

how independent of it, so that we see ourselves, not in intimate fellowship with others, sharing the blessings of life and its pains with them, but in opposition to them, judging them in relation to ourselves rather than to God, and judging ourselves by them.

Our indifference to the perils and sufferings of our fellow-men has its origin in this self-centred antagonism. It makes us both unwilling and unable to be spiritually sensitive. Thus the very device by which we would protect ourselves reacts to our injury; for as we refuse the responsibility of feeling with others, so we damp down and incapacitate the very power through which our own richest joys may be derived. Being reluctant to accept life on its own terms, we become at length unable to live satisfyingly on any terms. The intensity of our desire for self-preservation brings to pass our self-destruction.

Life is persistent in confronting us with its own imperative. Character is not educed by ease. Circumstance is not mastered by evasion. We struggle, sometimes with almost superhuman tenacity of purpose, to achieve dominion over life on the terms our own selfishness would impose, but the end of all

our strivings is futility and bitterness of heart.

Our supreme need is faith ; a quality of trust in life and the imperishable value of the spiritual qualities its adventures may create in us, through which alone we shall find courage and strength to take the risk of living dangerously.

To do that will not enable us to solve the mystery of pain or of evil ; but it will make us fit to share the one and do our part in redeeming the world from the other. We may not have the capacity to do more than that ; but to do less than that is to be untrue to ourselves.

Life demonstrates its friendliness because it is the expression of Divine Love. Even its obstacles and perils reveal to us the spiritual quality of that Love, for they require us to think of life and of ourselves not in terms of time but of eternity, because we are part of an eternal reality.

PART IV

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

CHAPTER X

MEN AND GOD

FITZGERALD's translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is, on the whole, very pessimistic in its philosophy, but there is in it one stanza that I often remember as expressing a profound truth which we too easily forget. The lines run thus :

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and saint, and heard great argument
About it and about : but evermore
Came out by the same door as in I went.

We are persistent in confusing our theorising with our living. We go to our philosophers, our teachers and our books to inquire how we should live ; and they tell us all they can. We hear what they have to say, accepting or rejecting their ideas until we are able to carve out for ourselves a philosophy or a theory of life ; then we come away from our schools and find that, with all our theorising, we are as ignorant as ever, for life cannot be taught, it must be lived, and only in the living can it be known.

As I meditate on the activities of my fellows I am often astonished at their, and

my own, reluctance to learn wisdom in this matter.

Often I see men and women pursuing with furrowed brows the nicely balanced arguments of one philosopher or another, talking far into the night about the respective merits of this book or teacher and that; weighing the pros and cons of conflicting theories about life and its meanings. They pursue their studies with tireless zeal year after year, they become more and more learned, yet they seem to be no nearer to the discovery of life at the end of their researches than they were at the beginning. Their spirits are not gay at the adventure of being alive. Often they are fretful and timid, not given to spontaneous laughter, not at peace with themselves or with the world. Sometimes, indeed, their very preoccupation with their studies about life seems to make these folk less capable of living the longer their investigations are pursued. They walk through the world with unseeing eyes, as if, being in it, they were not of it. They become disillusioned and *blasé*, cynical and "superior" with intellectual pride. All around them life is waiting to be lived, but they never enter into

it to share either its pleasures or its travail. They are so immersed in their thinking about life that it passes before they have found time to begin to live it.

So long as they are protected from life's greater hazards, people of this sort go on happily enough perhaps, finding in their day-dreams some measure of content. The ignorance beneath their learning is disclosed when some great crisis of experience comes and compels them to encounter the reality about which they have for so long been weaving their webs of theory. A great love, a great grief or some other noble challenge of experience catches them unawares like a storm, blowing their cloak of erudition to the winds. Then at last they learn how poor a substitute learning is for living, and sometimes in that poverty they find salvation.

It constantly surprises me that we are so slow to learn the truth that life is only known in the living. Should it not be abundantly clear to us by what we see of the experience of our fellows that "nothing fails like success"? How many people do we all know who, having everything that wealth or talent can give, are yet filled with many cares ; and

how many more do we see who, possessing little of mental power or material security, are yet blessed with a genius for living? Should we not be convinced by the witness of such people that the secret of life's mastery is not to be found in any book-learning?

There died some time ago a man who, in his day, was accounted one of the greatest psychologists; an expert in human nature. The human heart was to him, you would have said, an open book. He knew its vagaries and its possibilities. Men distraught by perplexities and fears would go to him for healing and direction.

Judging by his erudition and his achievement in the branch of science he had made his own, you would have concluded that he had mastered life. Had he not at his finger-tips profound knowledge of human nature? Would he not, of all men, have learnt how to live?

So you would have thought; but you would have been wrong, for in the very midst of a brilliant career that man destroyed himself.

In the preceding chapters of this book I have tried to pass on to the reader, for his help, some things I have learnt about the

working of the human mind ; some of the pitfalls we may encounter in our journey through life and some suggestions to enable us to avoid the disillusionments and despairs by which so many of our fellows are beset.

But I have been conscious from the beginning that not all the information I, or others cleverer than I, can give in this matter will enable anyone by reading to come one step nearer the mastery of life, unless in the reader himself there is something that no learning can give him : something I understand by the word " faith."

It is true of us, as of all men everywhere, that we live by faith ; and in the last analysis, the quality of our living, our power to mould the experiences of the common day into something good and of abiding worth, is measured by the quality of our faith, and by nothing else beside.

If you will analyse any of the stories I have narrated in this book about people who, in one way or another, have failed to make life worth living, you will find in all of them a demonstration of this truth. Their poverty was poverty of faith. They distrusted God, they distrusted life, and so came at length to

distrust themselves. As their faith grew dim their power to live grew less.

So I want at this point to set down my own firm conviction that beyond all that human knowledge may do to help a man to "see life clear and see it whole," there is something that God must do to make the mastery of life possible for any living soul. His power alone can confer upon human nature the quality of responsiveness which is the Divine gift to those who live by faith.

One of our most stimulating and provocative religious writers has lately pointed out an important distinction that should be made between the ideas that a man may have about God, and his personal experience of God as a living reality. When we worship, this writer reminds us, most of us are content to pay homage to certain notions about God that have formed in our minds as a result of the age in which we are living, the religious training we have received, and the particular intellectual capacities with which we happen to have been endowed. With these ideas and others akin to them, we fashion for ourselves an image of God, before which we bow down.

But God Himself, the Creator and Father of our spirits, is always and everywhere the same. As we are beloved by Him as children, so, because of the infinity of His love, our power to know Him and to live in fellowship with Him will not depend upon the particular way in which we happen to express our thoughts, or upon the particular definitions or creeds by which we try to put our experiences of God into words. Indeed, our experiences of God will have nothing essentially to do with our formulas ; it will be manifested by the quality of our experience of life. In other words, God will reveal Himself to us in the midst of life, and our power to find Him there will be measured, not by the excellence of our education or by our skill in understanding the mysteries of the physical world, but by our willingness to acknowledge and obey those deep compulsions of our souls which are the witness of Divinity to us. It is this willingness that I call faith.

There is an illustration that I find helpful when I am trying to understand this matter, so difficult to explain, yet so simple in itself. Have you ever tried to make another

person understand what you mean by beauty?

You may describe with every care a certain beautiful thing you have seen, pointing out this delicate gradation of colour and that subtle curve of form, hoping that your friend, having seen what you see, will feel its beauty as you do. But what you mean by "beauty," or what is the nature of the feeling it arouses in you, you cannot put into words.

The same difficulty presents itself in relation to all our immediate experiences of the world. Try, for example, to give a blind man an idea of what you mean by "blueness." It cannot be done. The knowledge you have of what the colour "blue" is comes to you only because you can see it. There are no words by which you can describe your experience, and you have no means of knowing whether "blueness" means for any other person exactly what it means for you. Indeed, there is every probability that blueness means something different to every person other than yourself, who sees it; certainly there are some people in the world who dislike the colour blue as much as you,

perhaps, like it. Their idea of it must be very different from yours.

Now, you could, if you were so minded, write a book on your ideas about beauty? Many people have done so. Possibly you could also write a book on your ideas about the colour blue; but you could not say one word to describe what you mean by "beauty," or by "blue." The difference between our ideas about God and our experience of God is exactly the same as that. Men have written libraries to impart to others their ideas of God, but they have known the reality of God by personal experience alone. That experience is, as I believe, part of our human birthright. We may all possess it if we will, and in it find life's fullest meaning disclosed and its richest purposes fulfilled.

I am finishing this book as I began it, in a sunlit garden. While I sit meditating upon the thoughts I want to set on paper, my senses make me aware of a myriad activities going on around. I seem independent of them, and yet I know that they are but a part of a greater whole upon which I am utterly dependent for the continuance of my life and all the deep satisfactions it can bring

to my soul. The rhythm of day and night, of seedtime and harvest, that begot and nurtured these trees and flowers, also occasioned the growing of grain, the ripening of fruits, the spinning of silks, the bursting of cotton pods—in short, all the material necessities of my world, the multitude of things, animal, vegetable and mineral, that minister to my various needs from the cradle to the grave—owe their being to the activity of something greater than me over which I have no control.

I am accustomed to take for granted the reliability of the laws behind the natural world as I take for granted also the laws governing my own physical organism. In company with the rest of my kind, I learn about those laws and use them trustfully. But when I ask myself why they are as they are and why they continue to be, I find myself at a loss, unless I accept the witness of the reasonableness and the trustworthiness of the laws themselves, and see in them evidence of an intelligence greater than mine behind them, and a trustworthiness greater than mine upon which I rely when I go

about my small affairs confident that to-morrow will be as to-day.

In my garden the leaves of trees clap their hands to the touch of the breeze ; the warmth of the sun caresses my skin ; the scent of flowers mingles in my nostrils with the fresh, clean smell of grass. To me, all these things are lovely. Their beauty is a benediction to my soul. I wonder why I should be aware of them to feel this strange elation of spirit which the sense of beauty evokes. There is no reason why my soul should respond so to masses of brown wood and green leaf disposed in such a way, or, as at some other times it does, to certain notes of music making harmonies, or to pigments cunningly arranged. I cannot explain why I regard certain things and certain experiences as beautiful. Yet I know that their beauty is the most real thing and the most important thing about them. The intrinsic value of a common flower, of the paper and ink with which a poem is written, of the canvas and paints that make a picture by Da Vinci is but a few pence. But because of their beauty all these creations of God and man have a

worth that cannot be computed in coin of the realm. Why is it that something so subtle and elusive that I cannot describe it, or point it out, or explain it, should mean more to me than anything I can touch or use? Why is it that for you as for me life holds certain intangible, indescribable experiences, certain meanings in truth, goodness, beauty and love, so precious to us that without them we should not want to go on living, but nevertheless so subtle and intangible that we find it impossible to explain what they are?

There is no answer to such "Whys," unless it is true that these qualities we discern in our experience are as much a part of reality as we are ourselves. They are immediate apprehensions of God. Through them He reveals Himself intimately to our souls.

Some months ago, in Canada, three men were paying a visit of inspection to a mine. Whilst they were in one of the underground galleries a sudden fall of rock entombed them alive. The story of their plight soon became known, and was flashed across the world. At once hundreds of volunteers

came forward to join in the desperately difficult and hazardous task of rescue. By day and by night relays of men worked themselves to exhaustion, tearing their fingers to the bone in their haste to clear a passage through which the prisoners might be released. For days on end, in imminent danger of life and limb, these men toiled arduously, until at last their labours were rewarded, and the whole world breathed more freely when the news of rescue became known.

The men for whom this epic labour was undertaken willingly by so many were not distinguished by genius or achievement. There was no suggestion that their living or dying would make any signal difference to the advancement of science or the course of history. They were ordinary folk like ourselves. Yet nobody doubted the essential rightness of spirit of those who were willing to risk their lives in order to save these three. The whole world recognised the worth of the spiritual compulsions which led the volunteers to offer themselves for the work of rescue, and accounted it both good and precious that human nature should evince such qualities.

The crises of everyday life that most of us must encounter may seem trivial in comparison with adventures of this sort; yet is it not true in our experience, too, that when these occasions arise they compel us also to acknowledge an order of values of transcendent worth? The man who will spend himself to give to the world some new discovery, the doctor who will risk his life to save a child of the slums, the wife who will bear adversity with fortitude for the sake of her husband—all these and many unhonoured heroes proclaim by their lives a truth we all acknowledge in our best moments. There is something greater in life than its expediencies, something more worthy of pursuit than the prizes of success.

Why should these things be, unless at the heart of man there is a spiritual compulsion to recognise as true and real the qualities and allegiances of which they are evidence? And how could those qualities ever come to be, if they are not fashioned out of the very fabric of reality—unless, in short, these too, like our intimations of beauty and truth, are intimate whispers of the voice of God to the souls of living men?

So long as we are true to ourselves, the demand upon us of compulsions like these is inescapable. Only by being untrue to ourselves can we evade them. Can they be other than God's revelation of His own reality to us, His children ?

God reveals Himself—that is the point I want to make. It is not through any discovery of our own that we receive intimations of the beauty in the world around ; we do not deliberately choose truth to pursue ; not by any exercise of reason do we elect to find satisfaction in seeking good and living lovingly. Life itself is so governed that we have power to experience its fullness only to the extent that we seek it along these ways. There is a constraint in us not to be denied. No device of our reason ever succeeds in convincing us that evil is better than good, falsehood better than truth or hatred lovelier than love. The universe is so ordered that it can only be discerned as these qualities are discerned in it as part of it. Life can only be lived as we accept it on these terms. What we discover of life's deep meaning in our experiences of goodness, truth and beauty we discover because it is already there,

created not by us, but in us ; not found by us, but revealed to us, given by the grace of God, His witness of His own nature to our humanity.

I think we are unjust to ourselves in our failure to realise this. We ask ourselves, " Do I believe in God ? " answering yea or nay, according to our mood. But deeper and truer than the answer of our lips is the answer that our spirits give ; for often, even whilst we are denying our faith in God, we are holding firm allegiance to our faith in the value of those ultimate realities of goodness, truth, beauty and love which it could never have entered our minds to conceive, and which would not be, unless behind the tangible things of the physical world there were the unseen spiritual life of God.

Our fault is that we have not taken the trouble to account for the faith we have in life. We take it for granted that there should be in us a certain passionate desire for truth, a capacity to discern beauty, a spirit of reverence for good, and, enfolding all these, a disposition to love. It does not occur to us that the meaning and blessedness life has because of these values, it has only because in

them is the very fabric of which its reality is fashioned ; so that our very experience of them is our experience of God ; so that if God were not they could not be. Thus we find it possible to live our lives through in the very temple of God, thinking His thoughts after Him, feeling the impact of His reality in every intuition of mystery, sacredness and love in our souls, and yet deny that He is there.

We are like a blind man who sits in his room before a fire. Its warmth unfailingly comforts him. Day by day he is tended, clothed and fed. Day by day his needs are met as he makes them known. A voice reads to him, music is played to him and loving hands minister to all his necessities. His every experience witnesses to the reality of some living person upon whose care he utterly depends ; yet persistently he says, " I see nobody. Nobody is there."

So also we, having the witness of God's presence all about us, fail to discern it for what it is, and so lack reverence even for the instruments of His spirit, our own human personalities.

Our supreme need is faith that will enable

us to extend over the whole of life the trustfulness we show for part of it ; willingness to believe that since God has put worth and meaning into all that we see around us of His handiwork, so also He has seen worth and meaning in us too ; and will educe it, even in our limited environment, as we become willing that He should.

That is why I say that we are unfair to ourselves. Counting our lives of little worth, we squander them in trivial preoccupations. Having no reverence for the mystery of our own being, we cease to reverence all else beside ; and the folly of our blindness is made plain to us in the discontents we suffer and the unnecessary burdens we carry through the dismal years.

I know of no alchemy but the alchemy of faith in God which has power to redeem a human soul from this despairing, or rescue it from the slough of this despond. But let that faith be as a grain of mustard seed, and it will come to flowering in a life sensitive to beauty, faithful to truth and rich in the blessedness of its loving. It will prove the reality of God by the spiritual quality of its own character, by the triumph of its own

spirit over the hazards of living and the travail of dying.

To live thus requires of us no special talents, no favour of circumstances. Whether lettered or unlettered, whether set in high station or in places of unimportance, we have within us the power, through faith, to live lovingly if we will, and so, if we will, to redeem our world from its ugliness and hatreds, its futilities and fears, its grief and suffering. To us, every one of us, is given the supremely blessed opportunity of making life worth living, for others and for ourselves, by making it worth loving. By our willingness to do that our capacity to master life is measured.

I am sure, too, that even the shadows of the valley of death are dissolved for a man who will have faith in God.

To discuss this subject fully would require a whole book, but I cannot forbear to include here two reflections that may help some who read.

First, I would affirm that of the people I have met, only those are afraid of death who have failed to come to terms with life, and it is in the discovery of what is our true disposition towards life that we may discern

why we are afraid of death. I commend this course to any reader whose mind is assailed by this fear.

Secondly, our reasons for having faith that the event we call death is no more than a transition or change of environment are to be found in the nature of life itself.

If we are not deluded by the deepest intimations of our spirits which assure us of spiritual realities, if we are not wrong in our conviction that life has worth and meaning, if the whole of it is not a chaos of fraud and illusion, then the very reasonableness and trustworthiness out of which this conviction is born are the best assurance that beyond death we shall continue to be. If there is meaning, purpose and worth in the universe, there is meaning and purpose and worth in us. If there is meaning and purpose and worth in us, then what we call "life" is the condition in which that meaning will be fully disclosed, that purpose fulfilled and that worth realised. The span of our earthly career is too short for the consummation of those ends; therefore, since they are ends, life must go on, and personality must go on to their completion.

I do not believe that the richest and most blessed experiences of life will be wasted. I do not believe that the God who reveals His order in the least as well as the greatest things in His creation, has set disorder at the heart of it. I do not believe that the beauty and truth and love I see at work in life, fulfilling its highest tasks, are the only incoherencies, the only futilities in the cosmos. I believe in the self-consistency of God as I believe in His love, and because of that faith, I have no doubt at all that human personality survives the event of death, and beyond it will find means and opportunity to fulfil the purpose of its being and see the meaning of its experience as part of the life and being of God.

CHAPTER XI

“ I AM THE WAY ”

AT last we have reached the final stage of our journey together, and soon we must part company. Looking back along the way we have come, I wonder whether my fellow-traveller is as clearly aware as I am of the things I have left unsaid that would have been worth saying, the many problems of life I would have liked to discuss, but could not because of the limitations imposed both by the compass of this book and my own powers.

“ Living,” someone has said, “ is a whole-time job.” For fitness to meet the many vicissitudes through which we must pass in the course of our days we need a measure of understanding and care for our bodies as well as for our minds. I should have been glad if space had permitted me to remind my reader of the intimate correlation of his physical with his mental organisation ; of the importance of paying due regard to the needs of both in order that either should serve him well.

There are in every life critical periods of transition in which new responsibilities have

to be accepted and new obligations undertaken. The transition from childhood to manhood or womanhood; the beginning of married life; the coming of children; the profound change of physical rhythm which takes place in the years between forty and sixty—all these occasions make special demands upon our nature, and we are fortunate if when we meet them we are aided by the advice and encouragement of those who have already gone some way along the road we must now take. I would have liked to say something in this book about these matters too. But many people, wiser than I, have written about them, and no person who is willing to accept help in such crises need lack it if he will take the trouble to inquire what sources of information are available to him.

One thing I have desired to do in these pages, and in that I hope I have not wholly failed. It has been to convince my reader that the mastery of life is within his reach, however deficient he may be in those mental powers that might enable another to achieve other ends, of less worth, but often more highly esteemed. If you measure life by success, by wealth or by superiority of intellectual

ability ; if to live means, for you, to wrest from the unwilling hand of circumstance some prize of human applause, to climb to some place of eminence from which you can look down upon the struggling mass of your fellows, then I have no counsel to offer you, no hope that in any word of mine you will find the talisman you seek.

But if to live means for you what it meant to One who passed along the road before you, beneath Whose feet the very dust of the roads turned to gold, Whose voice turned strife to peace, Whose eyes saw the truth beneath every garment of falsehood, Whose hands had healing in their touch, Whose laughter made children sing ; then you, like Him, can master life, and, like Him, make the least experiences of the common day to become through you more significant in their power to redeem the world from its ugliness, sordidness and sin, than all the conquests of armies and the might of kings.

I dare to hope that in this book some word or phrase may have helped you thus to distinguish the real imperatives of life from the expedients by which we would evade them ; and to see that as life itself is a process of

becoming, so our hope of mastering it depends upon what we elect to become.

It is here that the limit is marked of the help that any human adviser can give in the art of living. Many may be willing to show us a way of life. Only we can decide whether we will take it.

Mr. H. G. Wells has made this abundantly clear by a parable in his story, recently filmed, of *The Man who Could Work Miracles*. It recounts the adventures of a middle-aged shop assistant upon whom, all unawares, the gods, by way of experiment, conferred an amazing power to make the physical surroundings obedient to his will. Lamps would burn upside down, food and money would appear from nowhere, people would be transported to distant places, the face of Nature would be instantly changed, at his word of command. He could mend broken limbs, cure illnesses and perform all manner of wonders by merely expressing his wish that the thing he desired should occur. But there was one miracle this strangely endowed man could not perform. His magic was impotent to change a human heart in its disposition. If it hated it would go on hating, if it loved it would go on loving,

despite all his endeavours to bend it to his will.

So it is with us all. Whatever may be the limit or expanse of our bodily and mental power, there is within us all this ultimate freedom to choose what we will be, what manner of spiritual response we will make to life as it stretches out before us, an untrodden road.

Yet even this freedom is governed by law, a law that we can express, although we may little understand it. A man will become what in his heart he desires to be; or as our Lord expressed it, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

There is nothing more amazing, or more disconcerting, about the mind of Jesus Christ as we see it revealed in His recorded sayings, than the precisely scientific accuracy with which He described the working of the human mind. The most careful researches of psychology serve only to confirm the discoveries He made about personality and the laws governing its activities. One of the best examples of this profound insight is the sentence I have just quoted.

Do you remember, as a child, reaching a

stage of development when you became interested in people and indulged in what is called “ hero-worship ”? You met some person whose character captivated your imagination, or maybe you read in some book of some man or woman no longer living whose qualities awakened strange desires within you. Your mind was held by that person, for whom you had unbounded admiration. You would watch him, or meditate upon him, noting his manner of speech, his response to this circumstance or that. Perhaps by night you would even dream about him.

If such an experience was ever yours, you will recollect how, effortlessly and imperceptibly, yet almost inevitably, you soon began to reproduce in your own character the qualities you admired in your hero. Your thoughts would be like his thoughts, you would become interested in the things that interested him; in all probability your very expression and gestures would reproduce his, unawares. As you thought in your heart, so were you! Where your “ treasure ” was, there your heart was also!

You will find, if you care to think about it, that something of this kind goes on through

every part of your personality. Without any deliberation or conscious effort on your part, you tend to bring to pass the things you desire. You tend to reproduce in your own character the dispositions you admire in others.

There is a mental law at work here that has some rather startling possibilities, for it seems to be effective both to build up and to break down. Probably you have had some painful experiences of its power in the wrong direction. You have had some task to perform at some time in the future, and you have looked forward to it with apprehension. Possibly it was a public speech that you have had to make. Weeks before your ordeal you began to dwell upon its terrors, seeing yourself fearful, awkward, stumbling over words and generally making a hash of it. At length the evil day came, and the event proved the justice of your imaginings. Of course. You prepared the way for your own failure ; made it almost inevitable by envisaging it. Next time you have a duty of the sort to undertake, use your imagination constructively. Picture yourself behaving as you would like to behave, and see what a difference it will make.

As in such little things, so also in the grave concerns of life, this strange law has great power to make or mar our achievements according to the way we use it. What we become is determined far more by our desiring than by our effortful striving. Always our tendency is to reproduce in our own lives and characters the qualities we esteem, always we tend to bring to pass what we most earnestly want.

That is why, as I pointed out in an earlier chapter, our true character is seen more clearly in our spontaneities than in our deliberate actions. The things we do unthinking and unawares proclaim aloud what are our deep desires, reveal to the world what is the reality of our being in the secret places of the heart.

Thus, as life itself is a “ becoming,” so also it is true that in a sense we are always becoming what we already are. In the freedom of our spirits we have chosen a pattern of what we would become, and willy-nilly all our powers conspire to mould us into what we desire to be.

So, for the mastery of life, we need what the psychologist would call an “ envisage-

ment." Our aim should be to paint upon the canvas of our imaginations a living picture of what we would become, and by the kind of reverence we have for that picture we shall measure our desire and our power to mould into the common clay of our humanity the reality of the vision we have seen.

We are not likely to find within ourselves a "pattern for our becoming" big enough and true enough to command our whole allegiance. We are too well aware of our own faults and weaknesses to be able to trust our native endowments or our own insights to give us a vision of good worthy of our worship and emulation.

The story is told of a young country lad who was learning to handle a plough. The farmer who was instructing him said, "If you want to drive a straight furrow, keep your eye on an object ahead of you all the time." The farmer went about his business and the boy whipped up his horses. After a time the farmer returned to see how his pupil was getting on, and found to his dismay that the lad's furrows ran hither and thither in irregular sweeping curves, twisting and turn-

ing in their course like bridle-paths over a hillside. “ Good heavens ! ” said the farmer. “ Whatever have you been doing ? Didn’t I tell you to keep your eye fixed on a distant object ? ” “ Yes, sir,” replied the boy, “ I did.” “ Show me the object, then,” retorted the farmer. “ That there cow in the next field ! ” the boy replied.

We are like that boy when we think to discover within ourselves, or even in other human beings some “ envisagement of good ” that can become in us the pattern upon which life will be well fashioned. We need something greater than ourselves to set our heart upon, for our own loyalties are vacillating, our spirits are wayward and prone to easy change.

I know no character stable enough, or good enough, or great enough, to be a Pattern upon which human nature can mould itself, except the character of Jesus Christ, and I commend Him to you.

It is not my business here to discuss theologies, nor to engage with you in any controversy concerning creeds. Indeed, I am not desirous to require of you any definitions of your faith nor any statement of what you

may believe about the humanity or divinity of Jesus.

Speaking as a psychologist, I know that the mastery of life by any human creature depends in the greatest measure upon the envisagements he chooses to set in his imagination, the desires he cherishes in his spirit. I know that inevitably the quality of his living will depend upon these things, and his allegiance to them will be revealed in his behaviour. Therefore I am quite sure that the most important choice a man can make is this choice of his loyalties, of the kind of character he will admire, the kind of imperative he will serve.

Knowing this, I affirm with the fullest conviction that a man may search the world, its history and its literature, and in the whole of it not come upon another character that will bear comparison with the character of Jesus Christ for completeness, integrity, in every spiritual quality that makes humanity worthy of reverence.

I do not ask you to take my word for this. Indeed, I would prefer that you test my words for yourself. Embark upon a search, if you will. Scan your history and your biography,

question whom you will. Go from the realm of fact to fiction and seek there. Go to any people of any age, and if anywhere you can find the record of a personality whose response to life was half as adequate, half as courageous or as sacrificially loving as that of the Man of Galilee—then learn of him and tell me of your discovery.

But if you fail in that, look again at Jesus of Nazareth, not because He is called “ Son of Man ” or “ Son of God,” but because by the witness of your own insight you have seen in Him a quality of love and a quality of life worthy of your deep desiring.

You will do well to mould your life to His pattern, to be like Him. Not by slavish imitation to shape your personality to His, to try to be the person He was or do the things He did ; but rather, by your allegiance to the faith that was His faith, the truth that was His truth, and the love that was His love, to make your personality as responsive as His was to everything in human experience that has upon it the touch of the living God.

To live so is to find in life not only conquest, but salvation, for it is to fulfil in the common-

est task and the most humdrum circumstance the eternal law of creative being, "He that loseth his life shall find it."

If, however timidly and tentatively, you will begin to take that way of living and make it your own, you will not be long before you discover, perhaps to your surprise, how many things there are in life more worthy to be treasured than the possessions most men set their hearts upon, and the achievements most men strive for.

It may well be that when you do begin to learn the truth of these things in your own experience, and remember again through Whom you came to know them, it will occur to you to wonder who was this Man of Nazareth, in whose heart was set, like a jewel, the secret of life's meaning. Knowing Him as man, you may begin to inquire how and why Manhood like His could come to be; whence came the spirit and the power that made Him what He was. If at length you find yourself baffled by that mystery while still it captivates you, perhaps then you too will discern the divinity in His humanity, and find both Lord and Saviour where at first you saw

only a Friend. Then you will understand a little of what He meant when He said “ I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

It is said of Socrates that after walking one day with his friends through the busy streets and market-places of his native city, seeing there displayed a myriad treasures brought from the ends of the earth, he remarked, “ I am glad to discover that there are in the world so many things I do not want.”

We too shall make that discovery, and make it with gladness, as we learn to demand of life only those gifts and possessions which all men alike may own. These may be ours in the fullest measure. No limit is set upon our power to love and serve ; no barriers can hinder us from giving of our courage and our faith ; no inadequacy of talent can impair our capacity to reverence truth and seek goodness, to rejoice in beauty or to laugh through our tears as we share by compassion all the burdens of the world.

To do these things is to live.

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