

Chapter ONE

When one stands at last upon high ground, it is extraordinarily difficult to trace the road behind by which one has approached: it winds, rises, falls, broadens, and narrows, until the mind is bewildered. Nor indeed do the comments of friends and critics shouted from below tend to clear the situation.

I have been told that I became a Catholic because I was dispirited at failure and because I was elated at success; because I was imaginative and because I was imperceptive; because I was not hopeful enough and because I was too hopeful, faithless and too trusting, too ardent and too despairing, proud and pusillanimous. I have even been told, since the first publication of these papers, that I have never truly understood the Church of England. Of course that is possible; but, if so, it is certainly not for lack of opportunity. I was brought up, as will be seen presently, in an ecclesiastical household for twenty-five years; I was a clergyman for nine years, in town and country and a Religious House. My father was the spiritual head of the Anglican Communion; my mother, brothers, and sister are still members of it, as well as a large number of my friends. I was prepared for orders by the most eminent Evangelical of his day. I ended by becoming a convinced High Churchman.

It seems, further, now that I have my pen in my hand, that I never before really attempted to disentangle the strands, and that it is rash of me to attempt it now. It is full of danger. It

is extremely easy to deceive oneself, and it is extremely hard not to be self-conscious and complacent, not to see only what one would wish to see; and, above everything, one is afraid that, after all, it is bound to be very unconvincing to other people. For you cannot trace the guidance of the Spirit of God or diagnose His operations in the secret rooms of the soul: He seems at times to let good go and to bring instead good out of evil, and light into voluntary darkness. . . .

At the best, therefore, all that is possible is to describe the external features of the country through which the soul has passed—the crossroads, the obstacles, the ravines—and to give some sort of account of the consultations held by the way. Faith, after all, is a divine operation wrought in the dark, even though it may seem to be embodied in intellectual arguments and historical facts; for it is necessary to remember that two equally sincere and intelligent souls may encounter the same external evidences and draw mutually exclusive conclusions from them. The real heart of the matter lies somewhere else. . . . Catechumens, therefore, must remember that while on the one side they must of course clear the ground by the action of the intellect, on the other side it is far more vital that they should pray, purify motives, and yield themselves to God.

First, I think, it will be as well to describe, so far as possible, my original religious education and position.

I was brought up in the moderate High Church school of thought, and naturally accepted that position as the one most truly representative of the Anglican Communion. I learned—that is to say, so far as I could understand them—the tenets of the Caroline divines; I was taught to be reverent, sober-minded, anti-Roman; to believe in the Real Presence without defining it; to appreciate stateliness, dignity, and beauty in worship; to study

first the Bible in general and later the Greek Testament. It seems to me, if I may say it without impertinence, that my religious education was excellently wise. I was interested in religion; I worshipped in dignified cathedrals and churches; I was allowed to go out before the sermon; I was told the stories of Dr. Neale and the allegories of Dr. Wilberforce and the histories of the early Christian martyrs; and the virtues held up to me as the most admirable were those of truthfulness, courage, honour, obedience, and reverence. I do not think that I loved God consciously, but at least I was never frightened at the presentation of Him or terrified by the threat of hell. I think I accepted Him quite unemotionally as a universal Parental Presence and Authority. The Person of Our Lord I apprehended more from the Gospels than from spiritual experience; I thought of Him in the past and the future tenses, seldom in the present.

My father's influence upon me was always so great that I despair of describing it. I do not think that he understood me very well; but his personality was so dominant and insistent that the lack of this understanding made very little difference; he formed and moulded my views on religious matters in such a manner that it would have seemed to me, while he lived, a kind of blasphemy to have held other opinions than his. Certain points in his system of belief puzzled me then, and they puzzle me still; yet these no more produced in my mind any serious question as to the soundness and truth of his faith than intellectual difficulties in God's Revelation produce doubts in my mind at the present time.

He was, in the main, a High Churchman of the old school; he had an intense love of dignity and splendour in divine worship, a great sense of Church authority, and a firm orthodoxy with regard to the main foundations of the Christian Creed. Yet while he would say, partly humorously, yet with a great deal of

seriousness too, that he ought really to have been a canon in a French cathedral, while he would recite scrupulously every day the morning and evening prayer of the Church of England, while he had an intense love of Church history and a deep knowledge both of that and of Christian liturgies and the writings of the Fathers, yet, in quite unexpected points he would fail, as it seemed to me, in carrying out his principles. For example, there is no custom more deeply rooted in antiquity or more explicitly enjoined in the Book of Common Prayer than that of the Friday fast; there is scarcely any ecclesiastical discipline more primitive than that which forbids the marriage of a man who has already received Major Orders; there is nothing more clear, I should have thought, among the disputed questions of matrimony, than that the release of one partner, with leave to marry again, simultaneously releases the other partner from the bond.

Yet I am still wholly unable to understand, remembering his enthusiastic love of what I may call Church principles, how my father justified—as I am convinced he did justify—his attitude to those three points, for I never remember his abstaining from meat on a Friday or any other day, though I know that he denied himself instead in other ways; he raised no objections, except on purely private grounds, to Anglican clergy or bishops contracting marriage; and he held, I know, that while the guilty party, when a divorce had been pronounced by the law of the land, must not seek the blessing of the Church upon a subsequent union, the “innocent party” was perfectly at liberty to do so. Again, I never understood, and do not understand now, how my father interpreted the words “I believe in the Holy Catholic Church.” He would rule out, I know, from external unity those bodies of Christians that do not even claim to possess episcopal succession; he hesitated, as I shall relate presently, as to whether or no the

Church of Rome had forfeited, through her profession of what he believed to be heretical doctrines, her place in the body of Christ; yet he showed the greatest sympathy with and care for certain groups of Eastern Christians whose tenets have been explicitly condemned by Councils which he himself would acknowledge as ecumenical.

Again, I have never really understood his attitude towards such doctrines as those of the Sacrament of Penance. He held firmly in theory that Jesus Christ has given authority to His ministers to “declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins”; and, as a matter of practise, he himself, at a certain crisis in my life, recommended to me, when I told him that I wished to go to Confession, a “discreet and learned” clergyman to whom I had better apply; yet he never urged the practise, so far as I am aware, upon anyone, and never went to Confession himself. He believed, then, in the Power of the Keys; yet he seemed to hold simultaneously that this relief was to be sought only if peace of mind could not be obtained by other means, unless, indeed, he held, as I think possible, that the Power was effectively exercised in the public “absolutions” uttered in the course of the Church services. He appears, therefore, on the surface, to have held that the authority given with such extraordinary solemnity by Christ to His Apostles, was not in the least even *normally necessary* to the forgiveness of post-baptismal mortal sin.

Now I am perfectly convinced that my father did not believe himself inconsistent—that he had, in fact, principles which reconciled to his own mind these apparent contradictions. Yet I never knew, and do not now know, what they were. For, though he loved nothing better than to be consulted by his children on religious matters, as a matter of fact he was not very

approachable by timid minds. I used always to be a little afraid of showing ignorance, and still more of shocking him. Never once, in a genuine difficulty, did I find him anything but utterly tender and considerate; yet his intense personality and his almost fierce faith continually produced in me the illusion that he would think it unfilial for me to do anything except acquiesce instantly in his judgment; the result was that I was often completely at a loss as to what that judgment was.

Religion at home, then, was always coloured and vivified by my father's individuality. I remember even now the sense of finality and completeness which it conveyed: The morning and evening services, first in the tiny prayer room at Lincoln, where my father was Chancellor from my first to my fifth year, then in the beautiful minute chapel at Lis Escop, Truro, where he was Bishop until after my thirteenth birthday, and finally in the lovely chapels at Lambeth and Addington after his elevation to the see of Canterbury—these services, every detail of which was thought out by my father and carried out liturgically and reverently, still have a strange aroma to my mind that I suppose my memory will never lose.

Other ways in which my father influenced my religion were as follows.

On Sunday afternoons in the country we would walk with him, rather slowly and recollectedly, for about an hour and a half; and during these expeditions one of us would usually read aloud, or sometimes my father himself would read aloud from some religious book. I do not think that these books were very well selected for a boy's point of view. The poems of George Herbert were frequently read on these occasions, and these very peculiar, scholarly, and ingenious meditations used to produce in me, occasionally, a sudden thrill of pleasure, but far more

commonly a kind of despairing impatience. Or, again, some interminable life of a saint or a volume of Church history would be read; or a book of Dean Stanley's on the Holy Land. Once only can I remember, with real delight, so far back as early in the eighties, how my father fascinated me for half an hour or so by reading aloud, as we walked, the martyrdom of St. Perpetua and her companions. I remember, too, the irrepressible awe with which I discovered presently that he had been translating aloud and at sight, in perfect English and without hesitation, from the Latin *Acta Martyrum*.

At the close of these Sunday walks, and sometimes also on weekdays after breakfast, we would go to my father's study for Bible-reading or Greek Testament. It is difficult to describe these lessons. For the most part my father would comment continuously and brilliantly, though often far above my capacity to understand, putting questions occasionally, showing great pleasure when we answered intelligently, or, still more, when we put reasonable questions of our own, and a rather oppressive disappointment when we were listless or stupid. It was all extremely stimulating to the intellect; it was, also, always somewhat of a strain; but I think now that its lack consisted in the predominance of the mind element over the soul. I do not remember that these lessons made it easier to love God; they were often interesting, and sometimes absorbing; but I do not, with all reverence to my father's memory, even now believe that in myself they developed the spiritual side of religion. For himself, with his own great spirituality, it was natural enough that his soul should find pleasurable activity in the intellectual scholarly plane; for myself there was a considerable tendency to think that intellectualism and Greek Testament ought to be the very heart of religion. For a child, I believe, there are other moulds more natural than that of

the intellect in which spiritual life may shape itself: little pieces of ceremonial, connected, for example, with the saying of his prayers, actions of reverence, such as the sign of the cross or the fingering of beads, symbolic objects of worship, such as crucifixes or statues, and, for instruction, an almost endless use of attractive and well-drawn pictures—these, I believe, are a better machinery for the shaping and development of a child's spiritual life than the methods of the intellect. I remember, for instance, that while George Herbert's poems usually bored and irritated me, I found a real attraction in the quaint devices of "Easter wings" or the "altar"—the outlines, that is to say, in which once or twice he prints his verses on the page.

As regards morality, I was also a little puzzled by my father's attitude. He had a very great sense of the duty of obedience, and this sense, I think, rather overpowering in its sternness, tended to obscure to some extent in my own mind the various grades of objective wrongdoing. Two or three sins stood out to me in my childhood, as extremely wicked—such things as lying, thieving, and cruelty. But beyond these practically all other sins seemed to me about the same; to climb over the wire fences that bounded the drive at Lis Escop by putting one's feet anywhere except at the point where the wire pierced the upright railings—(my father bade me always do this to avoid stretching the wire)—seemed to me about as wicked as to lose my temper, to sulk, or to be guilty of meanness. In this way, to some degree, one's appreciation of morality was, I think, a little dulled: since to forget an order, or to disregard it in a moment of blinding excitement, was visited by my father with what appeared to be as much anger as if it had been a deliberate moral fault. Once, later, at Eton, I was accused of grave cruelty to another boy and was very nearly flogged for it. I happened to be innocent and, ultimately, cleared

myself entirely of the charge after a very searching examination by the head master; but for the time, after the news of the charge had come to my father in the holidays while I was at home, I was very nearly paralyzed in mind by the appalling atmosphere of my father's indignation and wholly failed to defend myself except by tears and silent despair. Yet all the time I was conscious of a faint relief in the knowledge that even if I were guilty—and at the time so confused was I that I really scarcely knew whether I were guilty or not—my father could not possibly be angrier with me than he had been, for instance, when I threw stones at the goldfish in the pond or played with my fingers during prayers.

Such, more or less, was my father's influence upon my religious life. I do not, as I have said, think that he made it easy to love God; but he did, undoubtedly, establish in my mind an ineradicable sense of a Moral Government in the universe, of a tremendous Power behind phenomena, of an austere and orderly dignity with which this Moral Power presented itself. He himself was wonderfully tender-hearted and loving, intensely desirous of my good, and, if I had but known it, touchingly covetous of my love and confidence; yet his very anxiety on my behalf to some degree obscured the fire of his love, or, rather, caused it to affect me as heat rather than as light. He dominated me completely by his own forcefulness, and I felt when he died, as a man said to me of his own parallel experience, as if the roof were lifted off the world.

At my private school in Clevedon we attended a church rather more "high" than those to which I had been accustomed. It contained a dark, mystical-looking sanctuary, with iron and brass gates; the clergy wore coloured stoles, and Gregorian chants were in use. But I have not the slightest recollection of being astonished at any difference of doctrine from that which I had