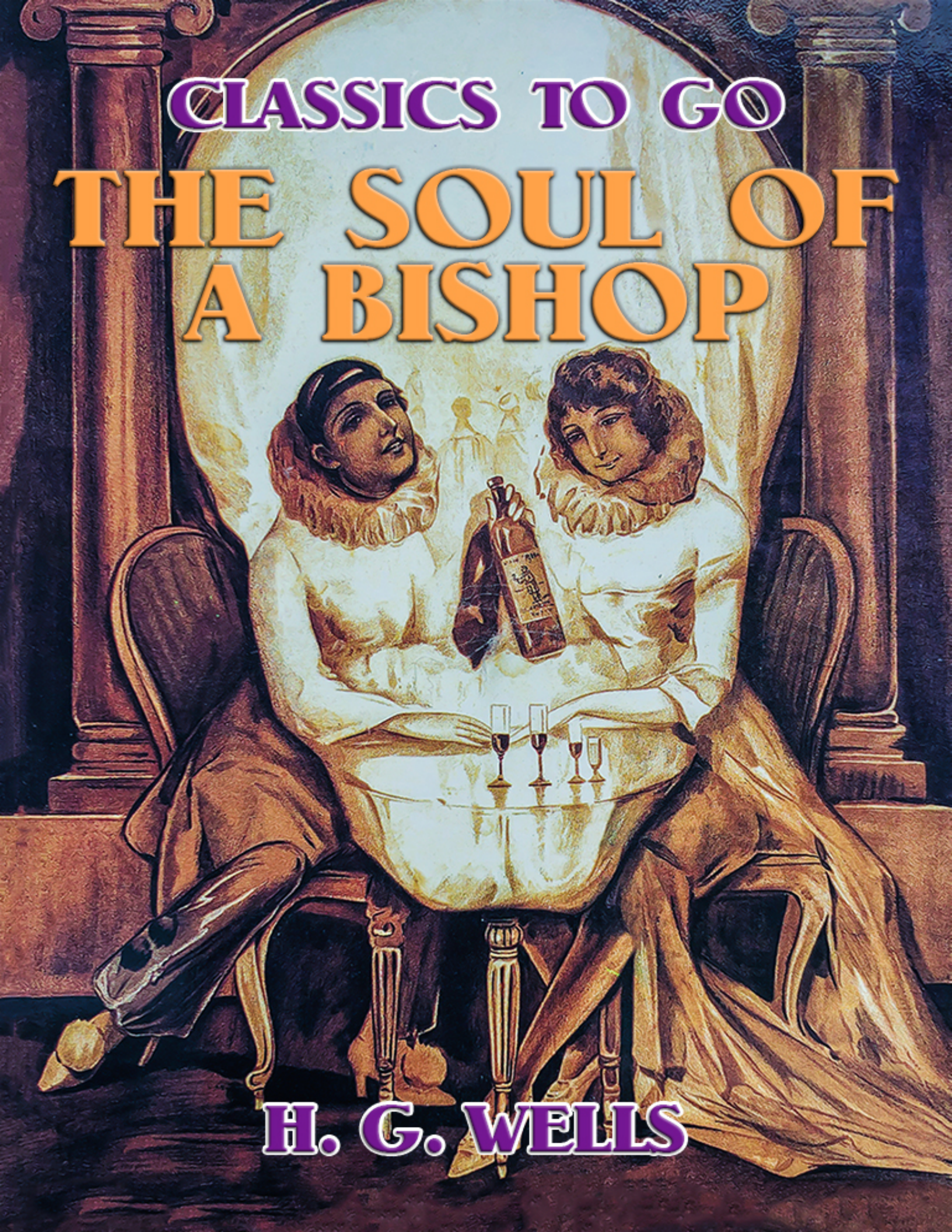
CLASSICS TO GO

THE SOUL OF A BISHOP



H. G. WELLS

The Soul of a Bishop

H. G. Wells

CHAPTER THE FIRST

THE DREAM

(1)

IT was a scene of bitter disputation. A hawk-nosed young man with a pointing finger was prominent. His face worked violently, his lips moved very rapidly, but what he said was inaudible.

Behind him the little rufous man with the big eyes twitched at his robe and offered suggestions.

And behind these two clustered a great multitude of heated, excited, swarthy faces....

The emperor sat on his golden throne in the midst of the gathering, commanding silence by gestures, speaking inaudibly to them in a tongue the majority did not use, and then prevailing. They ceased their interruptions, and the old man, Arius, took up the debate. For a time all those impassioned faces were intent upon him; they listened as though they sought occasion, and suddenly as if by a preconcerted arrangement they were all thrusting their fingers into their ears and knitting their brows in assumed horror; some were crying aloud and making as if to fly. Some indeed tucked up their garments and fled. They spread out into a pattern. They were like the little monks who run from St. Jerome's lion in the picture by Carpaccio. Then one zealot rushed forward and smote the old man heavily upon the mouth....

The hall seemed to grow vaster and vaster, the disputing, infuriated figures multiplied to an innumerable assembly, they drove about like snowflakes in a gale, they whirled in

argumentative couples, they spun in eddies of contradiction, they made extraordinary patterns, and then amidst the cloudy darkness of the unfathomable dome above them there appeared and increased a radiant triangle in which shone an eye. The eye and the triangle filled the heavens, sent out flickering rays, glowed to a blinding incandescence, seemed to be speaking words of thunder that were nevertheless inaudible. It was as if that thunder filled the heavens, it was as if it were nothing but the beating artery in the sleeper's ear. The attention strained to hear and comprehend, and on the very verge of comprehension snapped like a fiddle-string.

“Nicoea!”

The word remained like a little ash after a flare.

The sleeper had awakened and lay very still, oppressed by a sense of intellectual effort that had survived the dream in which it had arisen. Was it so that things had happened? The slumber-shadowed mind, moving obscurely, could not determine whether it was so or not. Had they indeed behaved in this manner when the great mystery was established? Who said they stopped their ears with their fingers and fled, shouting with horror? Shouting? Was it Eusebius or Athanasius? Or Sozomen.... Some letter or apology by Athanasius?... And surely it was impossible that the Trinity could have appeared visibly as a triangle and an eye. Above such an assembly.

That was mere dreaming, of course. Was it dreaming after Raphael? After Raphael? The drowsy mind wandered into a side issue. Was the picture that had suggested this dream the one in the Vatican where all the Fathers of the Church are shown disputing together? But there surely God and the Son themselves were painted with a symbol—some symbol—also? But was that disputation about the Trinity at all? Wasn't it rather about a chalice and a dove? Of course it was a chalice and a dove! Then where did one see the triangle

and the eye? And men disputing? Some such picture there was....

What a lot of disputing there had been! What endless disputing! Which had gone on. Until last night. When this very disagreeable young man with the hawk nose and the pointing finger had tackled one when one was sorely fagged, and disputed; disputed. Rebuked and disputed. “Answer me this,” he had said.... And still one's poor brains disputed and would not rest.... About the Trinity....

The brain upon the pillow was now wearily awake. It was at once hopelessly awake and active and hopelessly unprogressive. It was like some floating stick that had got caught in an eddy in a river, going round and round and round. And round. Eternally—eternally—eternally begotten.

“But what possible meaning do you attach then to such a phrase as eternally begotten?”

The brain upon the pillow stared hopelessly at this question, without an answer, without an escape. The three repetitions spun round and round, became a swiftly revolving triangle, like some electric sign that had got beyond control, in the midst of which stared an unwinking and resentful eye.

(2)

Every one knows that expedient of the sleepless, the counting of sheep.

You lie quite still, you breathe regularly, you imagine sheep jumping over a gate, one after another, you count them quietly and slowly until you count yourself off through a fading string of phantom numbers to number Nod....

But sheep, alas! suggest an episcopal crook.

And presently a black sheep had got into the succession and was struggling violently with the crook about its leg, a hawk-nosed black sheep full of reproof, with disordered hair

and a pointing finger. A young man with a most disagreeable voice.

At which the other sheep took heart and, deserting the numbered succession, came and sat about the fire in a big drawing-room and argued also. In particular there was Lady Sunderbund, a pretty fragile tall woman in the corner, richly jewelled, who sat with her pretty eyes watching and her lips compressed. What had she thought of it? She had said very little.

It is an unusual thing for a mixed gathering of this sort to argue about the Trinity. Simply because a tired bishop had fallen into their party. It was not fair to him to pretend that the atmosphere was a liberal and inquiring one, when the young man who had sat still and dormant by the table was in reality a keen and bitter Irish Roman Catholic. Then the question, a question-begging question, was put quite suddenly, without preparation or prelude, by surprise. “Why, Bishop, was the Spermaticos Logos identified with the Second and not the Third Person of the Trinity?”

It was indiscreet, it was silly, to turn upon the speaker and affect an air of disengagement and modernity and to say: “Ah, that indeed is the unfortunate aspect of the whole affair.”

Whereupon the fierce young man had exploded with: “To that, is it, that you Anglicans have come?”

The whole gathering had given itself up to the disputation, Lady Sunderbund, an actress, a dancer—though she, it is true, did not say very much—a novelist, a mechanical expert of some sort, a railway peer, geniuses, hairy and Celtic, people of no clearly definable position, but all quite unequal to the task of maintaining that air of reverent vagueness, that tenderness of touch, which is by all Anglican standards imperative in so deep, so mysterious,

and, nowadays, in mixed society at least, so infrequent a discussion.

It was like animals breaking down a fence about some sacred spot. Within a couple of minutes the affair had become highly improper. They had raised their voices, they had spoken with the utmost familiarity of almost unspeakable things. There had been even attempts at epigram. Athanasian epigrams. Bent the novelist had doubted if originally there had been a Third Person in the Trinity at all. He suggested a reaction from a too-Manichaean dualism at some date after the time of St. John's Gospel. He maintained obstinately that that Gospel was dualistic.

The unpleasant quality of the talk was far more manifest in the retrospect than it had been at the time. It had seemed then bold and strange, but not impossible; now in the cold darkness it seemed sacrilegious. And the bishop's share, which was indeed only the weak yielding of a tired man to an atmosphere he had misjudged, became a disgraceful display of levity and bad faith. They had baited him. Some one had said that nowadays every one was an Arian, knowingly or unknowingly. They had not concealed their conviction that the bishop did not really believe in the Creeds he uttered.

And that unfortunate first admission stuck terribly in his throat.

Oh! Why had he made it?

(3)

Sleep had gone.

The awakened sleeper groaned, sat up in the darkness, and felt gropingly in this unaccustomed bed and bedroom first for the edge of the bed and then for the electric light that was possibly on the little bedside table.

The searching hand touched something. A water-bottle. The hand resumed its exploration. Here was something metallic and smooth, a stem. Either above or below there must be a switch....

The switch was found, grasped, and turned.

The darkness fled.

In a mirror the sleeper saw the reflection of his face and a corner of the bed in which he lay. The lamp had a tilted shade that threw a slanting bar of shadow across the field of reflection, lighting a right-angled triangle very brightly and leaving the rest obscure. The bed was a very great one, a bed for the Anakim. It had a canopy with yellow silk curtains, surmounted by a gilded crown of carved wood. Between the curtains was a man's face, clean-shaven, pale, with disordered brown hair and weary, pale-blue eyes. He was clad in purple pyjamas, and the hand that now ran its fingers through the brown hair was long and lean and shapely.

Beside the bed was a convenient little table bearing the light, a water-bottle and glass, a bunch of keys, a congested pocket-book, a gold-banded fountain pen, and a gold watch that indicated a quarter past three. On the lower edge of the picture in the mirror appeared the back of a gilt chair, over which a garment of peculiar construction had been carelessly thrown. It was in the form of that sleeveless cassock of purple, opening at the side, whose lower flap is called a bishop's apron; the corner of the frogged coat showed behind the chair-back, and the sash lay crumpled on the floor. Black doeskin breeches, still warmly lined with their pants, lay where they had been thrust off at the corner of the bed, partly covering black hose and silver-buckled shoes.

For a moment the tired gaze of the man in the bed rested upon these evidences of his episcopal dignity. Then he

turned from them to the watch at the bedside.

He groaned helplessly.

(4)

These country doctors were no good. There wasn't a physician in the diocese. He must go to London.

He looked into the weary eyes of his reflection and said, as one makes a reassuring promise, “London.”

He was being worried. He was being intolerably worried, and he was ill and unable to sustain his positions. This doubt, this sudden discovery of controversial unsoundness, was only one aspect of his general neurasthenia. It had been creeping into his mind since the “Light Unden the Altar” controversy. Now suddenly it had leapt upon him from his own unwary lips.

The immediate trouble arose from his loyalty. He had followed the King's example; he had become a total abstainer and, in addition, on his own account he had ceased to smoke. And his digestion, which Princhester had first made sensitive, was deranged. He was suffering chemically, suffering one of those nameless sequences of maladjustments that still defy our ordinary medical science. It was afflicting him with a general malaise, it was affecting his energy, his temper, all the balance and comfort of his nerves. All day he was weary; all night he was wakeful. He was estranged from his body. He was distressed by a sense of detachment from the things about him, by a curious intimation of unreality in everything he experienced. And with that went this levity of conscience, a heaviness of soul and a levity of conscience, that could make him talk as though the Creeds did not matter—as though nothing mattered....

If only he could smoke!

He was persuaded that a couple of Egyptian cigarettes, or three at the outside, a day, would do wonders in restoring

his nervous calm. That, and just a weak whisky and soda at lunch and dinner. Suppose now—!

His conscience, his sense of honour, deserted him. Latterly he had had several of these conscience-blanks; it was only when they were over that he realized that they had occurred.

One might smoke up the chimney, he reflected. But he had no cigarettes! Perhaps if he were to slip downstairs....

Why had he given up smoking?

He groaned aloud. He and his reflection eyed one another in mutual despair.

There came before his memory the image of a boy's face, a swarthy little boy, grinning, grinning with a horrible knowingness and pointing his finger—an accusing finger. It had been the most exasperating, humiliating, and shameful incident in the bishop's career. It was the afternoon for his fortnightly address to the Shop-girls' Church Association, and he had been seized with a panic fear, entirely irrational and unjustifiable, that he would not be able to deliver the address. The fear had arisen after lunch, had gripped his mind, and then as now had come the thought, “If only I could smoke!” And he had smoked. It seemed better to break a vow than fail the Association. He had fallen to the temptation with a completeness that now filled him with shame and horror. He had stalked Dunk, his valet-butler, out of the dining-room, had affected to need a book from the book-case beyond the sideboard, had gone insincerely to the sideboard humming “From Greenland's icy mountains,” and then, glancing over his shoulder, had stolen one of his own cigarettes, one of the fatter sort. With this and his bedroom matches he had gone off to the bottom of the garden among the laurels, looked everywhere except above the wall to be sure that he was alone, and at last lit up, only as he raised his eyes in gratitude for the first blissful

inhalation to discover that dreadful little boy peeping at him from the crotch in the yew-tree in the next garden. As though God had sent him to be a witness!

Their eyes had met. The bishop recalled with an agonized distinctness every moment, every error, of that shameful encounter. He had been too surprised to conceal the state of affairs from the pitiless scrutiny of those youthful eyes. He had instantly made as if to put the cigarette behind his back, and then as frankly dropped it....

His soul would not be more naked at the resurrection. The little boy had stared, realized the state of affairs slowly but surely, pointed his finger....

Never had two human beings understood each other more completely.

A dirty little boy! Capable no doubt of a thousand kindred scoundrelisms.

It seemed ages before the conscience-stricken bishop could tear himself from the spot and walk back, with such a pretence of dignity as he could muster, to the house.

And instead of the discourse he had prepared for the Shop-girls' Church Association, he had preached on temptation and falling, and how he knew they had all fallen, and how he understood and could sympathize with the bitterness of a secret shame, a moving but unsuitable discourse that had already been subjected to misconstruction and severe reproof in the local press of Princhester.

But the haunting thing in the bishop's memory was the face and gesture of the little boy. That grubby little finger stabbed him to the heart.

“Oh, God!” he groaned. “The meanness of it! How did I bring myself—?”

He turned out the light convulsively, and rolled over in the bed, making a sort of cocoon of himself. He bored his head

into the pillow and groaned, and then struggled impatiently to throw the bed-clothes off himself. Then he sat up and talked aloud.

“I must go to Brighton-Pomfrey,” he said. “And get a medical dispensation. If I do not smoke—”

He paused for a long time.

Then his voice sounded again in the darkness, speaking quietly, speaking with a note almost of satisfaction.

“I shall go mad. I must smoke or I shall go mad.”

For a long time he sat up in the great bed with his arms about his knees.

(5)

Fearful things came to him; things at once dreadfully blasphemous and entirely weak-minded.

The triangle and the eye became almost visible upon the black background of night. They were very angry. They were spinning round and round faster and faster. Because he was a bishop and because really he did not believe fully and completely in the Trinity. At one and the same time he did not believe in the Trinity and was terrified by the anger of the Trinity at his unbelief.... He was afraid. He was aghast.... And oh! he was weary....

He rubbed his eyes.

“If I could have a cup of tea!” he said.

Then he perceived with surprise that he had not thought of praying. What should he say? To what could he pray?

He tried not to think of that whizzing Triangle, that seemed now to be nailed like a Catherine wheel to the very centre of his forehead, and yet at the same time to be at the apex of the universe. Against that—for protection against that—he was praying. It was by a great effort that at last he pronounced the words:

“Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord ....”

Presently he had turned up his light, and was prowling about the room. The clear inky dinginess that comes before the raw dawn of a spring morning, found his white face at the window, looking out upon the great terrace and the park.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

THE WEAR AND TEAR OF EPISCOPACY

(1)

IT was only in the last few years that the bishop had experienced these nervous and mental crises. He was a belated doubter. Whatever questionings had marked his intellectual adolescence had either been very slight or had been too adequately answered to leave any serious scars upon his convictions.

And even now he felt that he was afflicted physically rather than mentally, that some protective padding of nerve-sheath or brain-case had worn thin and weak, and left him a prey to strange disturbances, rather than that any new process of thought was eating into his mind. These doubts in his mind were still not really doubts; they were rather alien and, for the first time, uncontrolled movements of his intelligence. He had had a sheltered upbringing; he was the well-connected son of a comfortable rectory, the only son and sole survivor of a family of three; he had been carefully instructed and he had been a willing learner; it had been easy and natural to take many things for granted. It had been very easy and pleasant for him to take the world as he found it and God as he found Him. Indeed for all his years up to manhood he had been able to take life exactly as in his infancy he took his carefully warmed and prepared bottle—unquestioningly and beneficially.

And indeed that has been the way with most bishops since bishops began.

It is a busy continuous process that turns boys into bishops, and it will stand few jars or discords. The student of ecclesiastical biography will find that an early vocation has in every age been almost universal among them; few are there among these lives that do not display the incipient bishop from the tenderest years. Bishop How of Wakefield composed hymns before he was eleven, and Archbishop Benson when scarcely older possessed a little oratory in which he conducted services and—a pleasant touch of the more secular boy—which he protected from a too inquisitive sister by means of a booby trap. It is rare that those marked for episcopal dignities go so far into the outer world as Archbishop Lang of York, who began as a barrister. This early predestination has always been the common episcopal experience. Archbishop Benson's early attempts at religious services remind one both of St. Thomas a Becket, the “boy bishop,” and those early ceremonies of St. Athanasius which were observed and inquired upon by the good bishop Alexander. (For though still a tender infant, St. Athanasius with perfect correctness and validity was baptizing a number of his innocent playmates, and the bishop who “had paused to contemplate the sports of the child remained to confirm the zeal of the missionary.”) And as with the bishop of the past, so with the bishop of the future; the Rev. H. J. Campbell, in his story of his soul's pilgrimage, has given us a pleasant picture of himself as a child stealing out into the woods to build himself a little altar.

Such minds as these, settled as it were from the outset, are either incapable of real scepticism or become sceptical only after catastrophic changes. They understand the sceptical mind with difficulty, and their beliefs are regarded by the sceptical mind with incredulity. They have determined their forms of belief before their years of discretion, and once those forms are determined they are not very easily changed. Within the shell it has adopted the

intelligence may be active and lively enough, may indeed be extraordinarily active and lively, but only within the shell.

There is an entire difference in the mental quality of those who are converts to a faith and those who are brought up in it. The former know it from outside as well as from within. They know not only that it is, but also that it is not. The latter have a confidence in their creed that is one with their apprehension of sky or air or gravitation. It is a primary mental structure, and they not only do not doubt but they doubt the good faith of those who do. They think that the Atheist and Agnostic really believe but are impelled by a mysterious obstinacy to deny. So it had been with the Bishop of Princhester; not of cunning or design but in simple good faith he had accepted all the inherited assurances of his native rectory, and held by Church, Crown, Empire, decorum, respectability, solvency—and compulsory Greek at the Little Go—as his father had done before him. If in his undergraduate days he had said a thing or two in the modern vein, affected the socialism of William Morris and learnt some Swinburne by heart, it was out of a conscious wildness. He did not wish to be a prig. He had taken a far more genuine interest in the artistry of ritual.

Through all the time of his incumbency of the church of the Holy Innocents, St. John's Wood, and of his career as the bishop suffragan of Pinner, he had never faltered from his profound confidence in those standards of his home. He had been kind, popular, and endlessly active. His undergraduate socialism had expanded simply and sincerely into a theory of administrative philanthropy. He knew the Webbs. He was as successful with working-class audiences as with fashionable congregations. His home life with Lady Ella (she was the daughter of the fifth Earl of Birkenholme) and his five little girls was simple, beautiful, and happy as few homes are in these days of confusion. Until he became Bishop of Princhester—he followed Hood, the first bishop, as

the reign of his Majesty King Edward the Peacemaker drew to its close—no anticipation of his coming distress fell across his path.

(2)

He came to Princhester an innocent and trustful man. The home life at the old rectory of Otteringham was still his standard of truth and reality. London had not disillusioned him. It was a strange waste of people, it made him feel like a missionary in infidel parts, but it was a kindly waste. It was neither antagonistic nor malicious. He had always felt there that if he searched his Londoner to the bottom, he would find the completest recognition of the old rectory and all its data and implications.

But Princhester was different.

Princhester made one think that recently there had been a second and much more serious Fall.

Princhester was industrial and unashamed. It was a countryside savagely invaded by forges and mine shafts and gaunt black things. It was scarred and impeded and discoloured. Even before that invasion, when the heather was not in flower it must have been a black country. Its people were dour uncandid individuals, who slanted their heads and knitted their brows to look at you. Occasionally one saw woods brown and blistered by the gases from chemical works. Here and there remained old rectories, closely reminiscent of the dear old home at Otteringham, jostled and elbowed and overshadowed by horrible iron cylinders belching smoke and flame. The fine old abbey church of Princhester, which was the cathedral of the new diocese, looked when first he saw it like a lady Abbess who had taken to drink and slept in a coal truck. She minced apologetically upon the market-place; the parvenu Town Hall patronized and protected her as if she were a poor relation....

The old aristocracy of the countryside was unpicturesquely decayed. The branch of the Walshinghams, Lady Ella's cousins, who lived near Pringle, was poor, proud and ignoble. And extremely unpopular. The rich people of the country were self-made and inclined to nonconformity, the working-people were not strictly speaking a “poor,” they were highly paid, badly housed, and deeply resentful. They went in vast droves to football matches, and did not care a rap if it rained. The prevailing wind was sarcastic. To come here from London was to come from atmospheric blue-greys to ashen-greys, from smoke and soft smut to grime and black grimness.

The bishop had been charmed by the historical associations of Princhester when first the see was put before his mind. His realization of his diocese was a profound shock.

Only one hint had he had of what was coming. He had met during his season of congratulations Lord Gatling dining unusually at the Athenaeum. Lord Gatling and he did not talk frequently, but on this occasion the great racing peer came over to him. “You will feel like a cherub in a stokehole,” Lord Gatling had said....

“They used to heave lumps of slag at old Hood's gaiters,” said Lord Gatling.

“In London a bishop's a lord and a lark and nobody minds him,” said Lord Gatling, “but Princhester is different. It isn't used to bishops.... Well,—I hope you'll get to like 'em.”

(3)

Trouble began with a fearful row about the position of the bishop's palace. Hood had always evaded this question, and a number of strong-willed self-made men of wealth and influence, full of local patriotism and that competitive spirit which has made England what it is, already intensely irritated by Hood's prevarications, were resolved to pin his

successor to an immediate decision. Of this the new bishop was unaware. Mindful of a bishop's constant need to travel, he was disposed to seek a home within easy reach of Pringle Junction, from which nearly every point in the diocese could be simply and easily reached. This fell in with Lady Ella's liking for the rare rural quiet of the Kibe valley and the neighbourhood of her cousins the Walshinghams. Unhappily it did not fall in with the inflexible resolution of each and every one of the six leading towns of the see to put up, own, obtrude, boast, and swagger about the biggest and showiest thing in episcopal palaces in all industrial England, and the new bishop had already taken a short lease and gone some way towards the acquisition of Ganford House, two miles from Pringle, before he realized the strength and fury of these local ambitions.

At first the magnates and influences seemed to be fighting only among themselves, and he was so ill-advised as to broach the Ganford House project as a compromise that would glorify no one unfairly, and leave the erection of an episcopal palace for some future date when he perhaps would have the good fortune to have passed to “where beyond these voices there is peace,” forgetting altogether among other oversights the importance of architects and builders in local affairs. His proposal seemed for a time to concentrate the rich passions of the whole countryside upon himself and his wife.

Because they did not leave Lady Ella alone. The Walshinghams were already unpopular in their county on account of a poverty and shyness that made them seem “stuck up” to successful captains of industry only too ready with the hand of friendship, the iron grip indeed of friendship, consciously hospitable and eager for admission and endorsements. And Princhester in particular was under the sway of that enterprising weekly, The White Blackbird,

which was illustrated by, which indeed monopolized the gifts of, that brilliant young caricaturist “The Snicker.”

It had seemed natural for Lady Ella to acquiesce in the proposals of the leading Princhester photographer. She had always helped where she could in her husband's public work, and she had been popular upon her own merits in Wealdstone. The portrait was abominable enough in itself; it dwelt on her chin, doubled her age, and denied her gentleness, but it was a mere starting-point for the subtle extravagance of The Snicker's poisonous gift.... The thing came upon the bishop suddenly from the book-stall at Pringle Junction.

He kept it carefully from Lady Ella.... It was only later that he found that a copy of The White Blackbird had been sent to her, and that she was keeping the horror from him. It was in her vein that she should reproach herself for being a vulnerable side to him.

Even when the bishop capitulated in favour of Princhester, that decision only opened a fresh trouble for him. Princhester wanted the palace to be a palace; it wanted to combine all the best points of Lambeth and Fulham with the marble splendours of a good modern bank. The bishop's architectural tastes, on the other hand, were rationalistic. He was all for building a useful palace in undertones, with a green slate roof and long horizontal lines. What he wanted more than anything else was a quite remote wing with a lot of bright little bedrooms and a sitting-room and so on, complete in itself, examination hall and everything, with a long intricate connecting passage and several doors, to prevent the ordination candidates straying all over the place and getting into the talk and the tea. But the diocese wanted a proud archway—and turrets, and did not care a rap if the ordination candidates slept about on the carpets in the bishop's bedroom. Ordination candidates were quite outside the sphere of its imagination.

And he disappointed Princhester with his equipage. Princhester had a feeling that it deserved more for coming over to the church from nonconformity as it was doing. It wanted a bishop in a mitre and a gilt coach. It wanted a pastoral crook. It wanted something to go with its mace and its mayor. And (obsessed by The Snicker) it wanted less of Lady Ella. The cruelty and unreason of these attacks upon his wife distressed the bishop beyond measure, and baffled him hopelessly. He could not see any means of checking them nor of defending or justifying her against them.

The palace was awaiting its tenant, but the controversies and bitternesses were still swinging and swaying and developing when King George was being crowned. Close upon that event came a wave of social discontent, the great railway strike, a curious sense of social and political instability, and the first beginnings of the bishop's ill health.

(4)

There came a day of exceptional fatigue and significance.

The industrial trouble was a very real distress to the bishop. He had a firm belief that it is a function of the church to act as mediator between employer and employed. It was a common saying of his that the aim of socialism—the right sort of socialism—was to Christianize employment. Regardless of suspicion on either hand, regardless of very distinct hints that he should “mind his own business,” he exerted himself in a search for methods of reconciliation. He sought out every one who seemed likely to be influential on either side, and did his utmost to discover the conditions of a settlement. As far as possible and with the help of a not very efficient chaplain he tried to combine such interviews with his more normal visiting.

At times, and this was particularly the case on this day, he seemed to be discovering nothing but the incurable perversity and militancy of human nature. It was a day

under an east wind, when a steely-blue sky full of colourless light filled a stiff-necked world with whitish high lights and inky shadows. These bright harsh days of barometric high pressure in England rouse and thwart every expectation of the happiness of spring. And as the bishop drove through the afternoon in a hired fly along a rutted road of slag between fields that were bitterly wired against the Sunday trespasser, he fell into a despondent meditation upon the political and social outlook.

His thoughts were of a sort not uncommon in those days. The world was strangely restless. Since the passing of Victoria the Great there had been an accumulating uneasiness in the national life. It was as if some compact and dignified paper-weight had been lifted from people's ideas, and as if at once they had begun to blow about anyhow. Not that Queen Victoria had really been a paper-weight or any weight at all, but it happened that she died as an epoch closed, an epoch of tremendous stabilities. Her son, already elderly, had followed as the selvedge follows the piece, he had passed and left the new age stripped bare. In nearly every department of economic and social life now there was upheaval, and it was an upheaval very different in character from the radicalism and liberalism of the Victorian days. There were not only doubt and denial, but now there were also impatience and unreason. People argued less and acted quicker. There was a pride in rebellion for its own sake, an indiscipline and disposition to sporadic violence that made it extremely hard to negotiate any reconciliations or compromises. Behind every extremist it seemed stood a further extremist prepared to go one better....

The bishop had spent most of the morning with one of the big employers, a tall dark man, lean and nervous, and obviously tired and worried by the struggle. He did not conceal his opinion that the church was meddling with

matters quite outside its sphere. Never had it been conveyed to the bishop before how remote a rich and established Englishman could consider the church from reality.

“You've got no hold on them,” he said. “It isn't your sphere.”

And again: “They'll listen to you—if you speak well. But they don't believe you know anything about it, and they don't trust your good intentions. They won't mind a bit what you say unless you drop something they can use against us.”

The bishop tried a few phrases. He thought there might be something in co-operation, in profit-sharing, in some more permanent relationship between the business and the employee.

“There isn't,” said the employer compactly. “It's just the malice of being inferior against the man in control. It's just the spirit of insubordination and boredom with duty. This trouble's as old as the Devil.”

“But that is exactly the business of the church,” said the bishop brightly, “to reconcile men to their duty.”

“By chanting the Athanasian creed at 'em, I suppose,” said the big employer, betraying the sneer he had been hiding hitherto.

“This thing is a fight,” said the big employer, carrying on before the bishop could reply. “Religion had better get out of the streets until this thing is over. The men won't listen to reason. They don't mean to. They're bit by Syndicalism. They're setting out, I tell you, to be unreasonable and impossible. It isn't an argument; it's a fight. They don't want to make friends with the employer. They want to make an end to the employer. Whatever we give them they'll take and press us for more. Directly we make terms with the leaders the men go behind it.... It's a raid on the whole

system. They don't mean to work the system—anyhow. I'm the capitalist, and the capitalist has to go. I'm to be bundled out of my works, and some—some “—he seemed to be rejecting unsuitable words—“confounded politician put in. Much good it would do them. But before that happens I'm going to fight. You would.”

The bishop walked to the window and stood staring at the brilliant spring bulbs in the big employer's garden, and at a long vista of newly-mown lawn under great shapely trees just budding into green.

“I can't admit,” he said, “that these troubles lie outside the sphere of the church.”

The employer came and stood beside him. He felt he was being a little hard on the bishop, but he could not see any way of making things easier.

“One doesn't want Sacred Things,” he tried, “in a scrap like this.

“We've got to mend things or end things,” continued the big employer. “Nothing goes on for ever. Things can't last as they are going on now....”

Then he went on abruptly to something that for a time he had been keeping back.

“Of course just at present the church may do a confounded lot of harm. Some of you clerical gentlemen are rather too fond of talking socialism and even preaching socialism. Don't think I want to be overcritical. I admit there's no end of things to be said for a proper sort of socialism, Ruskin, and all that. We're all Socialists nowadays. Ideals—excellent. But—it gets misunderstood. It gives the men a sense of moral support. It makes them fancy that they are It. Encourages them to forget duties and set up preposterous claims. Class war and all that sort of thing. You gentlemen of the clergy don't quite realize that socialism

may begin with Ruskin and end with Karl Marx. And that from the Class War to the Commune is just one step.”

(5)

From this conversation the bishop had made his way to the vicarage of Mogham Banks. The vicar of Mogham Banks was a sacerdotal socialist of the most advanced type, with the reputation of being closely in touch with the labour extremists. He was a man addicted to banners, prohibited ornaments, special services at unusual hours, and processions in the streets. His taste in chasubles was loud, he gardened in a cassock and, it was said, he slept in his biretta; he certainly slept in a hair shirt, and he littered his church with flowers, candles, side altars, confessional boxes, requests for prayers for the departed, and the like. There had already been two Kensitite demonstrations at his services, and altogether he was a source of considerable anxiety to the bishop. The bishop did his best not to know too exactly what was going on at Mogham Banks. Sooner or later he felt he would be forced to do something—and the longer he could put that off the better. But the Rev. Morrice Deans had promised to get together three or four prominent labour leaders for tea and a frank talk, and the opportunity was one not to be missed. So the bishop, after a hasty and not too digestible lunch in the refreshment room at Pringle, was now in a fly that smelt of straw and suggested infectious hospital patients, on his way through the industry-scarred countryside to this second conversation.

The countryside had never seemed so scarred to him as it did that day.

It was probably the bright hard spring sunshine that emphasized the contrast between that dear England of hedges and homes and the south-west wind in which his imagination lived, and the crude presences of a mechanical age. Never before had the cuttings and heapings, the smashing down of trees, the obtrusion of corrugated iron

and tar, the belchings of smoke and the haste, seemed so harsh and disregardful of all the bishop's world. Across the fields a line of gaunt iron standards, abominably designed, carried an electric cable to some unknown end. The curve of the hill made them seem a little out of the straight, as if they hurried and bent forward furtively.

“Where are they going?” asked the bishop, leaning forward to look out of the window of the fly, and then: “Where is it all going?”

And presently the road was under repair, and was being done at a great pace with a huge steam-roller, mechanically smashed granite, and kettles of stinking stuff, asphalt or something of that sort, that looked and smelt like Milton's hell. Beyond, a gaunt hoarding advertised extensively the Princhester Music Hall, a mean beastly place that corrupted boys and girls; and also it clamoured of tyres and potted meats....

The afternoon's conference gave him no reassuring answer to his question, “Where is it all going?”

The afternoon's conference did no more than intensify the new and strange sense of alienation from the world that the morning's talk had evoked.

The three labour extremists that Morrice Deans had assembled obviously liked the bishop and found him picturesque, and were not above a certain snobbish gratification at the purple-trimmed company they were in, but it was clear that they regarded his intervention in the great dispute as if it were a feeble waving from the bank across the waters of a great river.

“There's an incurable misunderstanding between the modern employer and the modern employed,” the chief labour spokesman said, speaking in a broad accent that completely hid from him and the bishop and every one the fact that he was by far the best-read man of the party.