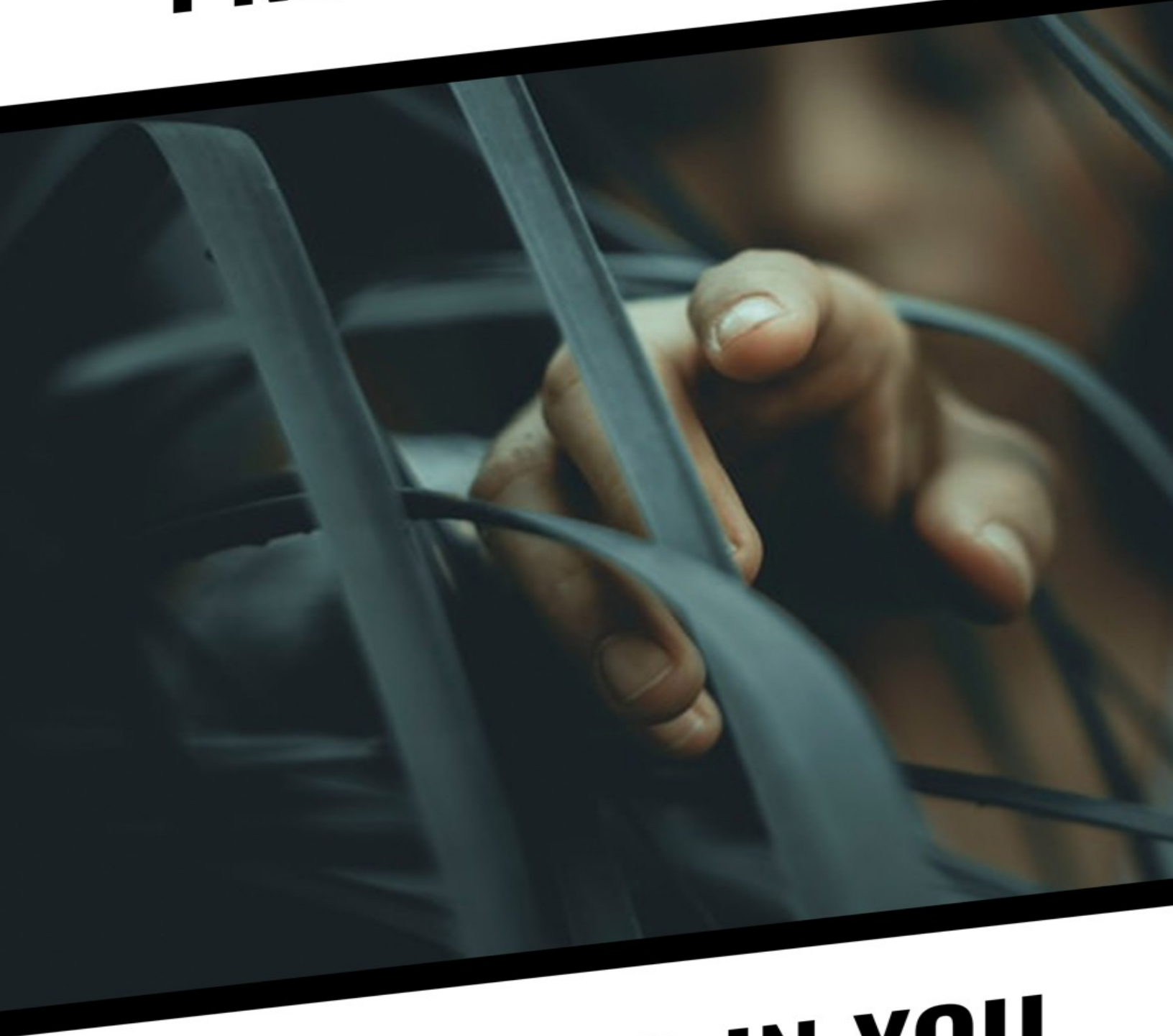




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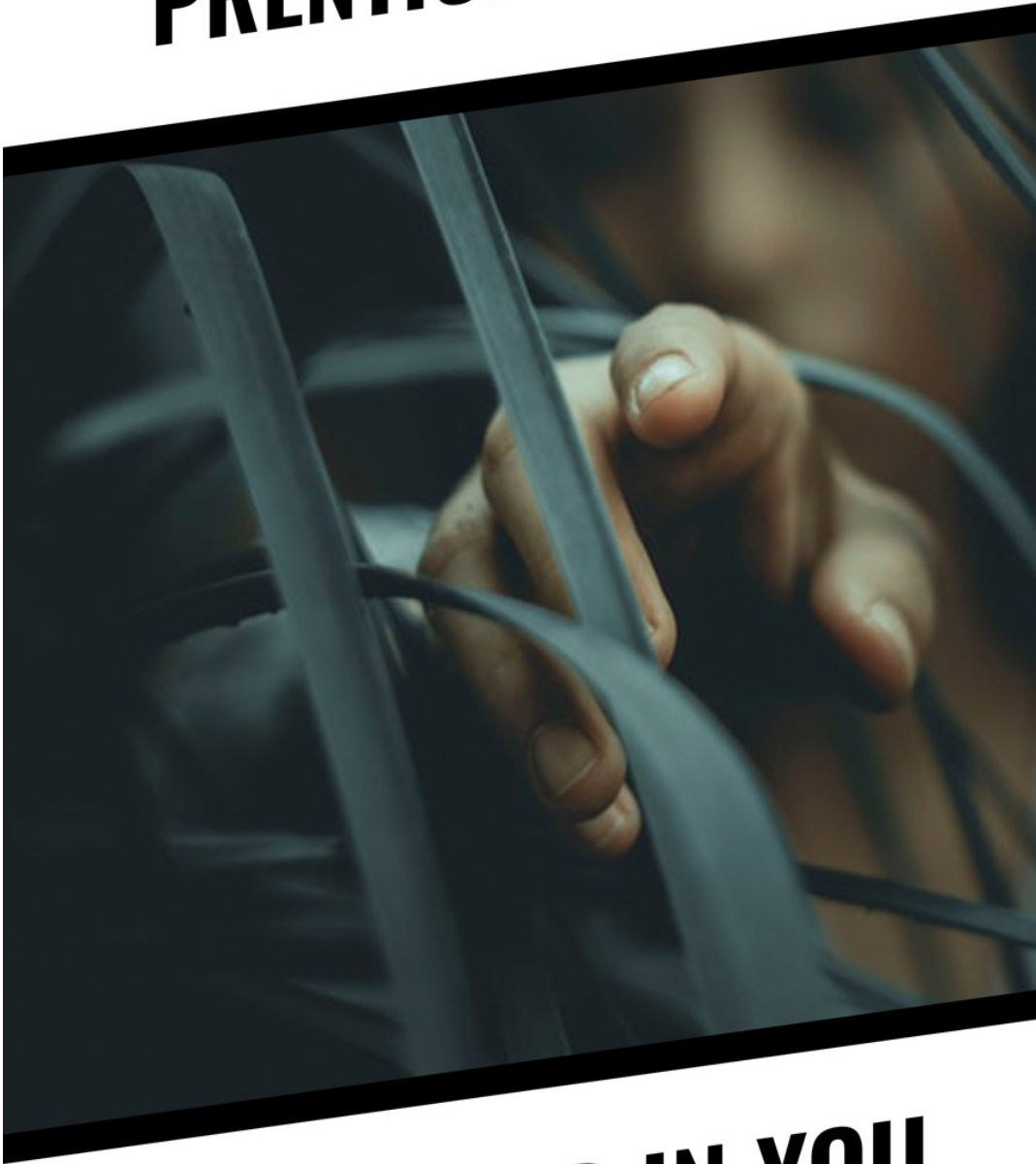


THE GOD IN YOU



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INTRODUCTION

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THERE is a gospel older than Christianity, older than Buddhism, older than Brahmanism, older than the classic religions of Greece and Rome, older than the worship of idols and the worship of ancestors. This gospel has been preached under varying forms and names, and with stress laid upon different aspects of its truth and its applicability to differing conditions of civilisation and to the different characters of the peoples to whom the message has been addressed. It is probably as old as the earliest traditions of civilised man, and the preaching of it becomes a periodical necessity through the very evolution and growth of civilisation itself. It acts as an alternative medicine, a corrective of the tendency inherent in civilisation to drift insensibly into channels of artificiality, to substitute the letter for the spirit, the creed for the life, the formula for the thing signified, habit for deliberate conscious action, the cant catchword for the life-giving principle, the spurious imitation for the genuine product. The Gospel to which I allude is the Gospel of the Return to Nature.

In every generation of the world's history since man was civilised, the realisation of this state has been the dream of a few idealists who saw it existing in the far distant past of the world's history in an allegorical form as the fabled Golden Age sung of by the poets. If it is older than all the religions, it yet takes its place as an essential element of all of them in the first stages of their existence. Jesus Christ struck the keynote in his preaching when he bade his disciples "suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," and again when he said, "Except ye be born again as a little child ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." And the refrain of very many

of his injunctions to his disciples was the adoption of what we should now call the Simple Life so much talked about but so little lived in these days of the twentieth century. Buddha gave expression to the same thought and practised it in his renunciation of his princely life and his adoption of the life of the wondering preacher, of the begging friar. The same truth was inculcated in China by Lao-tsze and again to a later age, in France, by Jean Jacques Rousseau in his *Social Contract and his Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men*."

Man is born free, and yet everywhere he is in chains." Such were the opening words of this inspiring message to the Peoples of the Earth. Man is born natural and civilisation makes him artificial. He is born in touch with Nature and life under the open sky and in the green fields. Civilisation draws him to courts and towns. Mankind is born to liberty and equality: civilisation makes him either a tyrant on the one hand or a slave on the other. The thought underlying this gospel, whether preached by Christ or by Rousseau, or today by Edward Carpenter in his *Civilisation, its Cause and Cure*, contrasted as the characters of the preachers will appear, is essentially the same.

Why were the Scribes and Pharisees hypocrites? Why, except because they had turned from the spirit to the letter, from Nature to artificiality? What was the crime of the French Monarchy but that it fostered and perpetuated unnatural conditions and artificial restrictions which froze the life-blood of the French people? What were the faults which Prentice Mulford saw in American civilisation, if they were not the faults which arise directly from the too rapid growth of the luxuries and so-called advantages which civilisation and commercial development bring in their train, and from the neglect of those forces which are inherent in Nature itself and without which the life-blood of a nation of necessity becomes contaminated and impoverished?

"You are fortunate (writes Prentice Mulford) if you love trees, and especially the wild ones growing where the great Creative Force placed them and independent of man's care. For all things that we call wild or natural are nearer the Infinite Mind than those which have been enslaved, artificialised and hampered by man. Being nearer the Infinite, they have in them the more perfect infinite force and thought. That is why, when you are in the midst of what is wild and natural, where every trace of man's works is left behind, you feel an indescribable exhilaration and freedom that you do not realise elsewhere."

This sentence seems to me to strike a note of the greatest importance in connection with all these "Return to Nature" movements in whatever period of the world's history they may have occurred. It is especially noteworthy how each movement of the kind has been followed by a great uprising of the life forces of the nation or nations to whom it was preached. It acts on the generation which listens to its preaching like the winds of spring on the sap of winter trees. It is the great revivals consequent on such preaching that let loose the pent-up energies of the human race and in doing so make the great epochs of history. Christianity was the result of one such great movement. The French Revolution was the result of such another.

The gospel of Rousseau was preached not to the French nation only. It was preached in France, it is true, but it was preached to mankind at large, and the fact that it was listened to by many nations outside France is more than half the explanation of the triumphs of Napoleon, the heir of the new French Democracy. In the early days of his triumph Napoleon came to the peoples of the other countries of Europe as much in the guise of a deliverer as of a conqueror. The soldiers that fought in the armies against him had heard the message of freedom and equality and were in no mood to contend with its conquering arm. The gospel according to Jean Jacques Rousseau was this life-giving force. Like a tonic

breath from the sea, like a draught of champagne, it was at the same time invigorating and intoxicating to its hearers. Prentice Mulford was right, the Gospel of Nature, wherever preached, "has ever made man feel an indescribable exhilaration and freedom."

Where Mulford differed from Rousseau was in seeing more clearly, more spiritually, what the Return to Nature really signified. That it signified the getting in touch once more i: with "the Infinite Force and Mind as expressed by all natural things." This Spirit of Nature, "this Force of the Infinite Mind," was given out, he maintained, by every wild tree, bird, or animal. It was a literal element and force, going to man from tree and from living creature. If you loved Nature, if you loved the trees, you would find them, declared Mulford, responsive to such love.

"You are fortunate (he says) when you grow to a live, tender, earnest love for the wild trees, animals, and birds, and recognise them all as coming from and built of the same mind and spirit as your own, and able also to give you something very valuable in return for the love which you give them. The wild tree is not irresponsive or regardless of a love like that. Such love is not a myth or mere sentiment. It is a literal element and force going from you to the tree. It is felt by the spirit of the tree. You represent a part and belonging of the Infinite Mind. The tree represents another part and belonging of the Infinite Mind. It has its share of life, thought, and intelligence. You have a far greater share, which is to be greater still--and then still greater."

And again:--

"As the Great Spirit has made all things, is not that All-pervading mind and wisdom in all things? If then we love the trees, the rocks and all things, as the Infinite made them, shall they not in response to our love give us each of their peculiar thought and wisdom? Shall we not draw nearer to God through a love for these expressions of God in the rocks and trees, birds and animals?"

Poets have told us the same story. Sir Walter Scott did so, for instance, in his beautiful lines in "The Lay of the Last Minstrel":-

"Call it not vain. They do not err. Who say that, when the poet dies, Mute Nature mourns her worshipper And celebrates his obsequies; That say mute crag and cavern lone For the departed hard make moan, And rivers teach their rushing wave To murmur dirges o'er his grave."

Wordsworth, too, understood the communion with Nature, as is shown by many of his verses, and most of all by his lines on the vision of the daffodils. The sight of the daffodils dancing by the lake was to him like the midnight dance of fairies or elves on the greensward, instinct with conscious vitality, and the impulse of contagious motion. This picture of the 'daffodils' delight in their own life and beauty recalled itself automatically to the poet's mind, and bade him join them in their fairy revels. No poet could have put the mood of communion with Nature in lines of greater felicity. They are, indeed, well known, but to the lover of Nature they will bear quoting again and again. The poet exclaims:--

" I gazed and gazed, but little thought What joy the show to me had brought. For oft, when on my couch I lie In vacant or in pensive mood. They flash upon that inward eye Which is the bliss of solitude; And then my heart with pleasure fills, And dances with the daffodils."

Other poets have voiced the same sense of communion with Nature in varying forms and degrees of intensity. A lesser known one of the present day has claimed poetry as Nature's mouthpiece, and condemned its neglect as a refusal to be brought into touch with Nature's many voices by the most articulate means at its disposal. Take the following verses as an example :-

"If thou disdain the sacred Muse, Beware lest Nature, past recall, Indignant at that crime, refuse Thee entrance to her audience hall. Beware lest sea and sky and all That bears