

were peasants—examined their prisoner more closely: scarlet, blue, gold, orange—a superb uniform; the breast and shoulders gleaming with decorations, badges, and prismatic emblems!

‘Here was no common soldier in grey field-clothes. Not so; unmistakably he had the air of a commander—a dreamy pathos, a disdainful scorn of their presence.

‘Their Gallic imaginations took fire. They whispered together.

‘Whom could they have captured: a general?—a prince?

‘He carried no weapons, but—that little black rod: he had kissed it!

‘Might it be——? [They had heard of scepters.] Might this really be—a king?—or the war-lord of some imperial principality, scornful of flight, grandly stoical in defeat?

‘Their peasant hearts fluttered.

“‘Who are you?” their leader asked in German.

“‘Who *I* am!” retorted the huge figure with

melancholy disdain. “My God! I am the Imperial Band-Master.”’

‘That anecdote,’ says Mr. MACKAYE, ‘cabled last autumn from the front to the American press, whether it be truth or fiction, conveys an apt symbol for the theme of this article. Those French peasants showed a subtle intuition in their awed estimate of their prize. They had caught—not King nor Kaiser, to be sure, but a far mightier personage.’

We need not consider Mr. MACKAYE’s proposals for using the Imperial Bandmaster in peace. They are the proposals of a dramatic artist. They demand a liberal recognition of the theatre. They are wholly absorbed in things spectacular. That is partly why the book is dangerous. But more than that, it is dangerous because it recommends a superficial satisfaction for a deep-seated desire, a purely secular attraction for an instinct which is given by God and can be satisfied only in Christ.

## The Bookshelf by the Fire.

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### I.

#### George Herbert’s ‘Country Parson.’

It is only a small shelf, but it has a character all its own. No borrowed books are on it, nor books about the war, nor any that are called ‘books of the hour.’ Nothing is there merely because it ‘ought’ to be there, because without it no library is complete, or because it has a place in one of those terrible lists of ‘The Hundred Best Books.’ It is not the rarity of the edition, nor the richness of the binding, nor the excellence of the printing, that has determined the choice. Indeed, some of those to whom have been given the chief seats in the book-lover’s synagogue may look but mean and ragged fellows. Why, then, are they there? They are there for their own sakes—for that and for nothing else. They have helped us in the past, and when we go back to them they help us still.

They are not simply friends or acquaintances; they are lovers. They may be of any age or any language or any Church. To others they may say nothing, and be nothing, and our friends may sometimes smile at what they think our foolish ways. It matters not; they have found us and that is enough.

It is of a few of these on my own bookshelf by the fire, and of the men to whom we owe them, that I am to write in these short papers. I begin with George Herbert’s *Country Parson*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The full title is *A Priest to the Temple; or, The Country Parson, his Character and Rule of Holy Life*. But as the subtitle is not only that by which the book is generally known, but is also much truer to its actual contents, I shall not hesitate to use it throughout.

## I.

Herbert was born in 1593, ten years before the close of the reign of Elizabeth. When he died, forty years later, the sombre shadows of civil strife were beginning to darken all the land. To many of us, indeed, the first half of the seventeenth century speaks only of ceaseless tumult, of angry voices and the clash of arms. There is peace neither in State nor in Church. Arrogant pretension on one side is met by fierce and stubborn resistance on the other. Over against Strafford and Laud stand Hampden and Cromwell. One party has its Star Chamber and High Commission Court; the other its Westminster Assembly and Solemn League and Covenant. Yet even in the seventeenth century, life was not all tumult. When the highways of England were dusty with the march of armed men, and the grass of its fields beat level with the drift of their life-blood, there were still quiet byways, haunts of ancient peace, where good men and women loved and prayed, waiting and working for the better day which they were sure would come again. It is a thing to remember and be thankful for that George Herbert and Izaak Walton and Nicholas Ferrar were all born in the same year, and were fulfilling their ministry of peace through days when, as we sometimes think, confusion and hatred dwelt alone in the land.

At first sight it seems not a little strange that the memory of a man like George Herbert should survive with such marvellous distinctness. A member of a distinguished English family, a student at Cambridge, then for several years the public orator of the University, a courtier in high favour with James I., he moved easily among the circles of the great, and counted among his friends some of the most famous men of his time, Francis Bacon dedicating to him his translation of the Psalms. Then, in 1630, largely, it is said, through the influence of Archbishop Laud,<sup>1</sup> he took priest's orders in the Anglican Church, and settled in the tiny village of Bemerton, near Salisbury. Three years later, before he had reached his fortieth birthday,

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Gardiner, however, is inclined to doubt the story (*History*, vol. vii. p. 268). If it be true, it is certainly to be counted to Laud for righteousness. On the other hand, it has to be remembered that if 'Laudianism' attracted Herbert to the Christian ministry, it repelled his greater contemporary, John Milton.

he died. In all this what is there, it may well be asked, to secure an enduring name and fame such as the world steadfastly refuses even to some of the most prominent actors on the bustling stage of seventeenth-century life? For, let it be said, Herbert is much more than a saint of Anglicanism. In England, in Scotland, in America, there are thousands who make but little of some things for which he cared much, to whom, nevertheless, his name will always be as ointment poured forth. To what is this due?

It is due in the first place to the exquisite *Life* in which Izaak Walton has enshrined his friend's memory, then to what he wrote both in verse and in prose, and most of all to what he was. Of Walton I hope to write another time. For the moment, it is enough to say that, of all that has been written about Herbert, his brief memoir still remains even for the modern reader the one thing needful. Of Herbert's writings we are concerned now only with *The Country Parson*; and from it we shall be able to learn both what he was and why so many to-day still hold his memory dear.

## II.

*The Country Parson* is Herbert himself. The ideal which he set forth for others was his own habitual practice. When he sketched these short chapters setting forth various aspects of a Country Parson's duty, he was writing all unconsciously the inner history of those three never-to-be-forgotten years in the Bemerton rectory. Let us trace some of the lines in this intimate self-revelation.

And at once the reader notes a certain delicate fastidiousness, both inbred and nurtured, both physical and moral. It shows itself in a dozen different ways. When he was a student at Cambridge, Izaak Walton tells us, his only fault in the eyes of his tutor were a proud reserve and an over-concern about his dress. The same habit of mind is revealed in the refinement and purity of his style. *The Country Parson* is both religion and literature. Why, one asks himself as he turns its pages, has theology not more often arrayed itself in white robes like these? Side by side with some of the huge tomes of seventeenth-century theology, Herbert's tiny volume shows like some fair garden, weeded and bright with flowers, on the edge of a barren wilderness. So likewise must everything in the life of the 'Priest to the Temple' be seemly and fair. 'The parson's apparel,' says Herbert,

'is plain, but reverend and clean, without spots or dust or smell; the purity of his mind breaking out and dilating itself even to his body, clothes, and habitation.'<sup>1</sup> So, too, 'the furniture of his house is very plain, but clean, whole, and sweet, as sweet as his garden can make.' And as with his own house, so also with God's. The parson takes order 'that all things be in good repair; that the church be swept and kept clean, without dust or cobwebs, and at great festivals strewed and stuck with boughs, and perfumed with incense; that all the painting be grave and reverend, not with light colours or foolish antics; that all the books appointed by authority be there, and those not torn or fouled, but whole and clean and well-bound; and that there be a fitting and sightly communion cloth of fine linen, with a handsome and seemly carpet of good and costly stuff or cloth, and all kept sweet and clean in a strong and decent chest, with a chalice and cover, and a stoup or flagon, and a basin for alms or offerings.' And again, 'at the times of the Holy Communion, he takes order with the churchwardens that the elements be of the best, not cheap or coarse, much less ill-tasted or unwholesome.' In all things he desires to keep 'the middle way between superstition and slovenliness.'<sup>2</sup> And this which he enjoins upon himself the parson exacts too of all who come to worship, 'by no means enduring either talking, or sleeping, or gazing, or leaning, or half-kneeling, or any undutiful behaviour in them, but causing them when they sit or stand or kneel, to do all in a straight and steady posture, as attending to what is done in the Church; and every one, man and child, answering aloud both Amen and all other answers which are on the clerk's and

<sup>1</sup> Cp.—

Let thy mind's sweetness have his operation  
Upon thy body, clothes, and habitation.

*The Church Porch*, st. lxii.

These lines are quoted in Wesley's famous sermon on 'Dress.'

<sup>2</sup> Herbert has the same contrast in his poem, *The British Church*:

A fine aspect in fit array,  
Neither too mean, nor yet too gay,  
Shows who is best.  
Outlandish looks may not compare,  
For all they either painted are  
Or else undrest.

As Mr. Shorthouse says, the religious fopperies of Romanism and the slovenly attire of Dissent:

so shy  
Of dressing that her hair doth lie  
About her ears,

are neither of them to his taste.

people's part to answer, which answers, also, are to be done not in a huddling or slubbering fashion, gaping or scratching the head, or spitting even in the midst of their answer, but gently and pausably, thinking what they say.'

From all this it might be concluded that Herbert was a seventeenth-century forerunner of the modern ritual-loving High Churchman. Mr. Gardiner is certainly right when he calls him 'a ceremonialist by nature.' Nor can there be any doubt of the sincerity of his devotion to the ceremonies of the Anglican Church. His whole ministry was built up within its appointed forms. Twice every day he read public prayers 'at the canonical hours of ten and four.' He expounded the collects and responses. The texts for his sermons he chose constantly from the Gospel for the day, 'and he did as constantly declare why the the Church did appoint that portion of Scripture to be that day read.' All holy-days had each its appropriate commemoration. Also he made his people to know 'why the Church hath appointed Ember-weeks, and to know the reason why the Commandments and the Epistles and Gospels were to be read at the altar or communion table; why the Priest was to pray the Litany kneeling, and why to pray some collects standing,' catechizing them from the pulpit every Sunday afternoon. All this notwithstanding, however, Mr. Shorthouse refuses to label Herbert a High Churchman.<sup>3</sup> And he does so with good reason. 'The Sacraments, not preaching,' we are told in the advertisement prefixed to the collected edition for the *Tracts for the Times*, 'are the sources of Divine Grace.' But this was not George Herbert's doctrine. When, whilst still a layman, he was made Prebendary of Leighton Ecclesia in the diocese of Lincoln, he had the reading-desk and the pulpit made of the same height and placed side by side, that 'they should neither have a precedence or priority of the other; but that prayer and preaching being equally useful might agree like brethren and have an equal honour and estimation.' 'The Country Parson,' he says, 'preacheth constantly'; he 'exceedeth not an hour in preaching' (!); nevertheless, 'the pulpit is his joy and his throne.' Still less after the manner of a High Churchman are his instructions concerning the frequency of the Communion: 'The parson celebrates it,' he says, 'if not duly once a month,

<sup>3</sup> See his introductory essay to *The Temple*.

yet at least five or six times in the year; as at Easter, Christmas, Whitsuntide, before and after harvest, and the beginning of Lent.'

But, name him how we will—and no one would wish to dispute about the proper label for a man like Herbert—he is an example to the ministry of every Church. He was a man of wide and varied culture, yet not of those who think that 'when they have read the Fathers or Schoolmen, a minister is made and the thing done.' Controversy he hated and would give it no place in his pulpit.<sup>1</sup> As little did he care for the vain speculativeness which so often in his day 'reasoned high' of what it did not and could not know, 'and found no end in wand'ring mazes lost.' Above all, he made it his aim to live well, because, as he said, 'we live in an age that hath more need of good examples than precepts.' As a pastor among his people there was no 'over-submissiveness and cringing' to the great, nor yet did he disdain to enter into the poorest cottage, 'though he even creep into it, for both God is there also and those for whom God died.' Is it any marvel that to such a man rich and poor alike did reverence, and that when his church-bell rang for prayers, the ploughman let his plough rest in the furrow, that he too might offer his devotions to God?

A life like Herbert's, so high and pure, so cleansed from all self-seeking, of such mingled sweetness and gravity, could hardly fail in any age to set its mark on the Church's life; it becomes still more singular in its impressiveness when we see it against such a background as is furnished by the England of 1630. The contrast begins in Herbert's own home. He was a younger brother of the famous Lord Herbert of Cherbury—deist, duellist, and worldling. The last century has shown us in J. H. and F. W. Newman, and again in R. H. and J. A. Froude, how by religion a household may be divided against itself, but never surely was the line of cleavage sharper than that which separated the rector of Bemerton from his gifted but light-minded and vain-glorious brother.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cp.—

Be calm in arguing: for fierceness makes  
Error a fault, and truth discourtesy.  
Why should I feel another man's mistakes  
More than his sicknesses or poverty?

In love I should; but anger is not love,  
Nor wisdom neither; therefore gently move.

<sup>2</sup> See Mr. Sidney Lee's edition of *The Autobiography of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury*.

Nor, if we set Herbert beside the average English clergyman of his day, is the shock of contrast much less. His immediate predecessor at Bemerton was content to leave the church in need of repair, the parsonage in ruins, and himself to live sixteen or twenty miles from his charge. In Richard Baxter's boyhood—he was born in 1615—the clergy of his neighbourhood, without exception, were ignorant or immoral men as unable as they were unfit to preach, who 'read Common Prayer on Sundays and holy-days, and taught school and tumbled on the week-days.' And even if we ignore the rank and file of the clergy, and turn to the highest ecclesiastic in the land, to Archbishop Laud himself, with his 'four surplices at All-Hallow-tide,' and all the other et ceteras of his devotional drill serjeantry, with which Carlyle made such endless play, how mean and poor does it all look beside the simple pieties and sweet charities of *The Country Parson*! And yet, perhaps, the comparison is not quite just. Remembering all that has come of it, one wonders if since Jesus finished His course and returned to His Father, there has been another such three years' ministry on earth as that which 'holy George Herbert' accomplished in his little Wiltshire village.

It has been suggested that Herbert's dedication to the service of the Church had its roots in disappointed hopes of preferment at Court. There seems no good ground for the suggestion, but there is ample evidence that the final decision was not reached without a sharp and prolonged inward struggle. In a time of retirement shortly after the death of James I., Walton tells us, Herbert 'had many conflicts with himself whether he should return to the painted pleasures of a Court life, or betake himself to a study of divinity and enter into sacred orders to which his dear mother had often persuaded him.' Nor were counsellors wanting who sought to persuade him that the ministry was 'too mean an employment and too much below his birth, and the excellent abilities and endowments of his mind.' These he silenced, but the 'conflicts with himself' were another matter. As he lay upon his death-bed he put into the hands of a visitor the manuscripts of his poems, saying to him, 'Deliver this little book to my dear brother Farrer<sup>3</sup> and tell him he shall find in it a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed between God and my soul, before I

<sup>3</sup> i.e. Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding.

could subject mine to the will of Jesus my Master, in whose service I have now found perfect freedom.' It is not for any man to pry too curiously into words like these. Yet Herbert himself has made it plain to all observant and understanding readers that there was an old unregenerate self to be tamed and subdued in him, even as in others. Fierce fires smouldered beneath that outward calm. His brother, Lord Herbert, says of him, that though 'his life was most holy and exemplary . . . he was not exempt from passion and choler.' He speaks himself in one of his poems of his 'fierce youth.' And when in *The Country Parson* we read that the pastor's 'aim and labour must be not only to get knowledge, but to subdue and mortify all lusts and affections,' that 'the greatest and hardest preparation is within,' we know that what we are reading was written with the pastor of Bemerton's own blood. Thus, and thus only, did George Herbert come to sit with them that are clad in white raiment.

### III.

A word must be added concerning the ideal of life which *The Country Parson* illustrates and commends. Of its noble severity and delicate purity there is no need to speak. So inexorable in its demands, yet so winning in its beauty, it is as far beyond our praise as it seems beyond our reach. There are two criticisms, however, which will suggest themselves at once to most readers.

In the first place it must be admitted the Country Parson of Herbert's book is a little too suggestive of a visitant from some other sphere who comes to right the wrongs of our poor world; he condescends at times, somewhat too obviously, to men of low degree; we should like him better if he were a little less of the ministering angel and a little more of the brother man. The fault, if fault it be, is readily explained; it was due both to the circumstances of Herbert's early life and to the position of most of those among whom his brief ministry was spent. But however we explain it or judge it, most readers, I think, will be conscious of its presence.

A much more serious blemish in the book is its undue emphasis on asceticism. 'The Country Parson,' Herbert writes, 'is generally sad, because he knows nothing but the Cross of Christ.' 'My Saviour banished joy,' he says elsewhere. Even in its happiest tones, says Mr. Gardiner, Herbert's

melody has always something sad and plaintive about it. He was a married man, and his marriage seems to have been ideally happy; yet he says flatly, 'Virginity is a higher state than matrimony.' This, again, is how he writes of fasting: 'To eat little, and that unpleasant, is the natural rule of fasting, although it be flesh. For since fasting, in Scripture language, is an afflicting of our souls, if a piece of dry flesh at my table be more unpleasant to me than some fish there, certainly to eat the flesh, and not the fish, is to keep the fasting day naturally.' Once at least he borders on the grotesque:

Look on meat, think it dirt, then eat a bit,  
And say withal, — 'Earth to earth I commit.'

All this, of course, raises large questions which cannot even be glanced at here. I will only say that sayings like those I have just quoted seem curiously remote from the spirit and teaching of the New Testament. Some of us think we can imagine with what scornful impatience Saint Paul would have heard men discuss the kind of diet by which they could best commend themselves to God. And as for Herbert's praise of sadness, well, we remember again that, as Dr. Denney has finely said, the book which reflects the life of the first believers 'does not contain a querulous word from beginning to end. It is the book of infinite joy.' And we are content to think this the more excellent way. No; if the whole gospel was not made known to the Puritan of the seventeenth century—and it was not—neither was it made known to the Anglo-Catholic. Other hands were to take away the veil which still lay upon his heart, and to recover for the humblest believer the lost joy of salvation.

Nevertheless, whatsoever be its limitations, let every man who counts himself *separated unto the gospel of God*, betake himself straightway to Herbert's little book—'A book,' as Izaak Walton says, 'so full of plain, prudent, and useful rules, that that Country Parson that can spare twelve pence and yet wants it, is scarce excusable.' And when he has read it, though he knows no more of its author than it will tell him, he will begin to understand why George Macdonald said that amongst the keener delights of the life which is at the door he looked for the face of George Herbert, with whom to talk humbly would be in bliss a higher bliss.