

MEDITATION

BY

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SUPPOSE one of the things the importance of which seems to be everywhere recognised is the extraordinary way in which human beings are subject to their environments, are influenced and affected by them. Some sort of subconscious power registers all sorts of details which we didn't know we had even noticed and years after some insignificant act or word comes to life. A name in a newspaper brings back an old world, just the chance hearing of a name and back out of the past springs vividly to our imagination just a scene, and we realise from that how very much we are under the spell of circumstances. At times it would seem that we owe to heredity all that we are, not necessarily to our immediate parents but to our ancestors in the past, a throw back, and now all that idea is given up and what people do think a great deal of is surroundings, the lines in which our lives are cast. Take any biography: they speak of the home circle which surrounded him when he was born, the school to which he went, the friends he made and of what he grew up out of their influence. We are at the mercy of those we live with, not the blood of our parentage but the parents we lived with, the school we were at, those who taught us, someone about us. We are tossed between rapid and rapid, driven in opposite directions, always enormously influenced, more especially by those we have consciously lived with,

Now supposing we consciously lived with God, would not that enormously influence our lives? We are very much at the mercy of God; why not consciously live at the mercy of God? Hold God before us, keep ourselves face to face with God, *that is* religious life. In some vague way we have on the whole tried to live our lives under God's eyes, used imagination to hold God down in front of us and tried to bring him steadily in front, that gazing on him we may be affected by his presence. Mass, Office, Rosary, that is what they are all for. We have seen the advertisement at which we are told to gaze long and steadily and then to look upon the ceiling where we find we can still clearly see the same picture stamped. So we may see God on the souls of others, on all round us. The things that influence us most are the things we have thought of most intensely,

¹ From notes of a Retreat given at Edinburgh, July 1932.

and so if we think *most* intensely of God that thought will influence us. An intensely conscious act of the presence of God will make a profound impression on our lives.

When we are fond of anyone we don't consciously say, 'I am going to do this to please you', we are just fond of them and so we do it, or we give up something for their sake, not deliberately but almost unconsciously. The greater love drives the lesser love out. An intense act of God's presence and God's love is far greater and more powerful than any resolution. He never appealed to the resolution business but he did appeal to love. 'Follow me.' He is the blazing Light, him we follow. A sheer act of faith, conscious act of God's presence just at morning or night or middle day, out of that will come resolution. Not practical? There is an awful danger in being practical. It is the dreamers who help most—at least help other people most—the visionaries, the dreamers help us most, though they may make a mess of their own lives seemingly it is the practical people who really make a mess of theirs.

What moments in the day help us most? Meditation? Mass? Well. I think so. Meditation is a time when I set about seeing how I can apply myself to God, not what a mess I have made of things but just realising the fact that someone is perfect and that perfect as he is, *he loves me*. Just before the business of life, almost at dawn we talk to him. Think of that wonderful saying of St John's, 'and when morning was come Jesus stood upon the shore'. In meditation try to get a thought that will bring God's presence vividly before you, God himself. At Mass this is even easier. We fancy meditation to be an enormous and elaborate argument; it isn't. It doesn't matter how you climb the mountain as long as you climb, it doesn't matter what ladder you use provided you reach the height, it doesn't matter what your means of transit are provided you scale the hills at last, pushing up into the sky. And so we just use whatever may help us individually, not mistaking means for ends, not bothering about set order. but I have reached the height I tried to climb. I am in God's presence.

What is he like? What has he said of himself? Simple things such as our Lord has put into every hand. Our spiritual lives do not depend upon the enormous number of volumes poured out, but on the strong eternal things, the simpler things. We realise as we grow older that the simplest things of all are the best. What God has spoken—his own life and words. So for meditation we choose something that starts us, gives us a glimpse of God, opens up to us vast stretches of God's being—hold that in front of us. This is what we mean by lifting up the mind, some truth, some mystery of God.

man's destiny. This is faith working. The mind holds that before me, I *must* go on to love God. Anything does, a knowledge of birds—the strange shape and colouring of shells—can surely teach us of the wonders of God. So it doesn't really matter very much what we use—thing—person—or God himself. *Look* closely at it and get a glimpse of God's power, wisdom, love. Our heart doesn't *feel*, it is faith that matters. I really do *want* to know his power, that's love, not complacency, not emotion, 'not he that saith to me "Lord, Lord"', but he that doth the will of my Father shall enter into the kingdom of heaven'. The will of the Father, doing what he asks of us.

Make *sure* of this that we are looking at him steadily, steadfastly, seeing him present in the world, in our lives, in our fellows. Consciously live with him. Remember we can't touch pitch without being defiled, so we cannot live with Holiness and not be holy. St Peter required a vision on the housetop to teach him that nothing made by God was unclean. People in religion sometimes disgust us, what *God* has made let no man call unclean! The one we dislike may be a masterpiece of God. If I have driven in in the early morning hour the thought that God is as much present in the storm cloud as in the sunset, in the factory as in the flower, in pain as in happiness, in the spider or the child, that nothing is unlovely except sin will be a natural conclusion. St Francis realised this in the pain and fire which burned his eyes, all were creatures of God. Mass makes this startlingly clear, death our brother, pain, blood, ransom. Think of Judas, the only one who really knew him called him 'Friend'! Neither you nor I know, God knows. It will be heaven when we have found God, that *is* heaven. Meditation carries us into the presence of God.