

God the Invisible King.

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THE publication of this book¹ is an interesting and significant event. It is not an event of the first importance at all, but interesting and significant. Interesting—because Mr. Wells has not been a conspicuously religious figure, and now he is nothing if not warmly and even passionately religious. And significant—because here is a clever and thoughtful and wideawake literary man who in the midst of the great war and because of it has found God. God sometimes speaks by strange and unusual voices. And I feel convinced that there is a real message in this book for us in the Christian Church.

The glimpses we got in a previous book, *Mr. Britling sees it through*, of the way in which Mr. Britling came to his faith in God were promising; and when it was announced that the author was writing a whole book to expound his new religious experience it was expected with impatience. Not for years have I opened a book with more eager anticipation, and I think only once in my life have I found a book at the first blush so disappointing. The thinking in it is of the thinnest kind. It is full of contradictions and of positions that demolish each other. Its theology is that of a mere beginner. It is full of ignorant misrepresentations. And, worst of all, its spirit is not very different from that of the old secularist societies who published cartoons of the most sacred Christian beliefs in order to bring them into ridicule. Mr. Wells cannot discuss Christian doctrines with dignity or fairness. He employs vulgar Billingsgate as his favourite weapon.

Why discuss the book then? Because with all this there is a real message in it and a real experience; because the writer is in earnest; because he has a testimony to utter; and because the big fact he has got hold of is something for us to think about. I will try first to get at the heart of his testimony that we may see what the book contains of value. And then I will venture on one or two comments.

EXPOSITION.

The God whom the writer has found is a finite God. There is Another, the unknown, out of

¹ *God the Invisible King*, by H. G. Wells (Cassell; 6s. net).

whom all things have come. Mr. Wells calls Him the 'Veiled Being.' He is the Creator, but we know nothing about Him. The God of our knowledge is a Redeemer; He is a God in our hearts. He is neither all wise nor all powerful nor omnipresent. But He is a Person, a God of salvation, loving and lovable, inspiring, existing in every human soul. He is within us. He is our Captain. He is boundless love, boundless courage, boundless generosity. He is our Friend and brother and the light of the world. He fights against the evil in the world. He struggles with us against it. He is near us and sympathizes with us. He had a beginning, but He will have no end. He grows with the growth of humanity. He is the best in all of us. He is love, yet an austere love, a love that does not 'coddle' us but asks the hardest things, sacrifice, even death. We cannot use Him as Christians use their God. He uses us. We have to give up all to God to be used. He will tolerate no rivals. His authority is absolute—so much so that we must give up putting the heads of kings on our coins and postage stamps, and put His instead. [How, Mr. Wells does not explain.] He is not meek like Christ. He is a fighter, a militant God.

How this loving, helping, human God is to be found and known is an important point. There is only one way. He is never found by logic or argument. The real believer never argues, he testifies. God is found directly in experience. Listen for Him in the silence and you will inevitably hear Him. To find Him is conversion. It is a discovery. The usual process is, first distress and then discovery. The cardinal experience is an immediate sense of God and absolute certainty which nothing can shake. You not only know God's reality thus by an immediate perception, but you know His will in the same way. As soon as you know Him you know His purposes. No argument is needed or possible.

Religion, then, is the recognition of God, and of His authority and claims. It is the turning away from self, the discovery that the goodness I thought was in me is really above me. It is no longer that I choose to give time and pains to the service of

others, but that I have come under a divine imperative. 'I am a humble and willing servant of the righteousness of God.' If only all sincere men would see it, what is meant by duty and service is just God. 'Without God the service of man is no more than a hobby or a sentimentality or an hypocrisy.'

The world is to be a theocracy, a government by God directly in all spheres. Religion is bringing every department of life—public and private—under the will of God and recognizing Him as the invisible King. God takes all—our life, our possessions, our energy, and those of the state and of the whole world. He is King.

And what does He do for us? He gives salvation from self. He leads us through a dark jungle to a great conquest. He gives happiness and victory over sin, and a free and splendid life.

Salvation is a great word of this religion. It is salvation from sin, from fear, from all weakness. It is got by repentance and faith. And it is immediate. 'Believe, and you are saved,' Mr. Wells says. Sin cannot damn a man who has found God. . . . The moment you truly repent and set yourself to such atonement and reparation as is possible, there remains no barrier between you and God. 'Though you sin seventy times seven times God will still forgive the poor rest of you. . . . A man with the light of God in his heart can defeat vicious habits, rise again combative and undaunted after a hundred falls.' Only 'blindness of the spirit can shut a man off from God.' 'If you but lift up your heart for a moment out of the chaos of madness and cry to him, God is there, God will not fail you.'

How is this religion to be maintained and propagated? Every believer is to be an apostle. No Church is necessary. Indeed, the Church and Sacraments have been the disease of Christianity. And yet there is no objection to an association of believers. By all means have an organization under God. It may help you to 'shout out' about God, or to work better by working in a gang. Collective action under God may be a good thing. Indeed, there is sure to be a number of associations under the new religion for all kinds of purposes, to shout out about God, to work for God, to make shrines, praying places, temples, retreats, and so on. Men may multiply their use by union.

Such is the substance of what is true in this remarkable book. It is, as the author says, 'a

religious book by a believer.' He claims that it is the religion that modern men and women are coming to believe. Let us consider what it means.

COMMENT.

1. *It is just Christianity.* When we put aside all the book's invective against the Christian doctrine and Church, all its vulgarity, all its misrepresentations and contradictions, and present only its religious message, we can see at once what Mr. Wells has found. He has found Christ. What his book describes is the typical Christian experience. His religion is the religion of Christian experience. The presentation is unconventional and often beautiful and touching. But it is just the gospel, not in its completeness perhaps, but in its essence. His finite God is Christ. What could be finer as a mere statement of the Incarnation than this: 'For the purposes of human relationship it is impossible to deny that God presents Himself as finite, as struggling and taking a part against evil?' A finite God, limited, growing in knowledge, near us, in us, knowing us and sympathizing with us, our saviour, our captain, our leader, a fighter with us against evil—what is this but the Pauline Christ? or, indeed, Christ as He was on earth and promised to be for all time?

And religion as surrender to this Big Brother and Leader, as self-identification with Him, as the achievement of His Kingdom in our hearts and in the world, as forgiveness and help and victory, as the free pardon of the worst sinner, as prayer, as surrender of all to His will—what is all that but a fine picture of the really Christian life and the Christian attitude to Christ and the world?

Even the Church is first kicked and then found to be essential. Even symbols that are first scorned are at length seen to be inevitable.

If Mr. Wells had set out to describe the essential Christian facts he could not have done it better. And he has done it so well because he has experienced them. He has described real Christianity from the inside without knowing it. That is the real value of his book.

This is not made any less significant by his invectives against Christian beliefs. He scorns them, and then quietly describes them as his own belief. For example, he will have nothing to do with the Omnipresence of God. That would make Him infinite. But he says of his God, 'God

is everywhere and immediately accessible to every human being,' and again, 'He is in immediate contact with all who apprehend Him.' I do not want any more omnipresence than that. That is what omnipresence means. He scorns a Church, yet says an association may be useful if it helps men first to shout out about God, and next to work better for the world—just the two reasons, worship and service, for which the Christian Church exists. He abuses the Christian God as a 'bickering monopolist' who will have no other God but Himself, and then says of his God, 'It is plain He can admit no divided control of the world He claims.' He scorns the Christian worshipper for heaping gross praises on his God, but one of the chief uses of his associations that are to replace the Church is to help the new believer to shout out about God. And his own heaped up, repeated, thrilling praises of his God outdo the praises of most Christians. He rejects all symbols, and then says these new associations will erect cathedrals shrines, and such-like things.

Nor is this book any the less significant because of the constant and grotesque misrepresentations of Christian beliefs and practices in which the book abounds. These are truly amazing. It is obvious that Mr. Wells does not know the Bible at all, and does not know what ordinary Christians believe. The misrepresentations are so gross as sometimes to seem intentional. But this makes the experience he gives as his own all the more powerful a witness to what all Christians believe and have experienced.

Nor does the vulgar abuse of Christianity, and the Church, and Christians take anything from the value of the testimony he utters. You may deem it surprising that I should say such a man has found Christ, a man who throughout his book indulges in abuse that is not only unfair but unspeakably gross, and in statements that can only be described as patent slanders. But there are two things to be said about this.

First, I have often noticed that a convert, even a convert to Christ, is at the outset of his religious life characterized by an extreme intolerance. He is always wanting to set people right and deal with people from whom he thinks he differs. It is a curious fact that sudden and complete conversions are often followed by this kind of uncharitableness. But in Mr. Wells's case there is a second reason. He is clearly in a state of

honest panic lest he should be treated as a brand from the burning, lest the Church should rejoice over this prodigal and fall on his neck. So he proceeds to kick the Church and Christianity and all connected with it to make it quite clear he is no trophy of grace for them. This is the secret of much of the Billingsgate that the book contains. But if one realizes this and puts it aside, the fact that what Mr. Wells has experienced is just the reality of Christ stands out more vividly than before.

2. But secondly, this new religion is just *the old religion without its background, its foundation, and its strength*. What would Christianity be as a gospel without the infinite God in it and behind it? What would the love of Christ be without the greatness of God? An amiable emotion that could do nothing. Mr. Wells's special hatred, special contempt, is the doctrine of the Trinity. But at any rate this doctrine of the Trinity secures the essential divine background for Christianity. Christianity is a power if the infinite God is in it. Without that Christianity is a pleasant amiability. Mr. Wells says his modern religion knows nothing of the Great Being whom he calls the Veiled Being, who is the source of all that is. Even his God does not know much about the Veiled Being. The Veiled Being is the ultimate Reality. And the finite God of Mr. Wells is quite separate from Him. The finite God is within humanity over against this Great Unknown. What kind of theology is that? Is it conceivable that any thinking person will be satisfied with such an absurdity? Mr. Wells pours contempt on the Trinity, but he leaves us with a duality, with two gods, one near us and the other as far away as possible. They are unconnected. Well, a Trinity is far more reasonable than a dualism, because it at least unites the two separated members. It is a real indication of the theological or philosophical calibre of Mr. Wells's mind that he should actually present this dualism to people as his theology.

What Christianity does is to bring these two together—the finite God of Mr. Wells's experience who is Christ, and the Veiled Being who is the infinite Creator and Father. They are One. God is in Christ. Christ is God limited, human, growing in knowledge, within humanity, our Captain. But behind Him and in Him is the eternal, and all Christ's love and pity have the infinite greatness of God as a background, and that is what makes them a gospel for mankind. Mr. Wells's God,

divorced from the infinite and eternal God, is a futile God. He can do nothing. He can lead us nowhere. There is no certainty at all that He can go anywhere. How much Mr. Wells unconsciously feels this is shown by the fact that after rejecting omnipresence and infinity for his God, he makes Him present everywhere, with a vital relation to every soul in all the world. He has to bring this infinite element back in order to get his God to be anything worth our faith. What his experience needs in order to be a real gospel is to take more of the infinite God into it as a background. But then he would be under the necessity of having something like a Trinity. The simple fact is that the God of Mr. Wells's faith and theology is helpless to achieve anything certain.

Mr. Wells has had a vivid experience. It is so real that no one can doubt it. It is, I believe, a Christian experience. All it wants is the Christian theology to make it rational and to make it a message. I hope Mr. Wells will get this. I hope he will not let his terror of being embraced by the clergy prevent him from going a little further into the truth. We really do not want to embrace him. He will probably do far better work for God outside the Church. I hope he will form his association that is not a Church, to help believers like himself to shout out about God (not of course to worship) and work better because in a gang (not of course for Christian service). We will promise solemnly not to fall on his neck or to mention such a thing as a brand.

3. I come back to this cardinal fact that here is a real experience. The book is, as he says himself, 'a religious book by a believer.' What he records is a genuine spiritual vision. And such a faith is never the result of argument or logic. That is what the writer is specially urgent about. He will have nothing whatever to do with such intellectual processes. Listen in the silences, he says, and you will hear God. God is a discovery. I think that statement is one of the hall-marks of a true experience. That alone would show that his faith is a real one. He goes too far in repudiating intellectual process. But the emphasis on direct spiritual vision is the important thing. Here is a man who has found God, a God not to be distinguished from Christ, and who has seen the great truth that in this God is an immediate salvation, that there is welcome for the vilest sinner, that repentance leads to immediate forgiveness and acceptance. And he says: This God is within you. Listen and you will become aware of Him. He is the best that is within you. What you call duty, the ideal, is just God in you. Open your eyes and see Him, and then come and give up all to Him that He may use you and fight with you and on your side against evil and for the Kingdom of righteousness and love. That is Mr. Wells's evangelistic message. It is Paul's and the Church's. And if Mr. Wells brings it home to souls whom neither Paul nor the Church can reach, well we shall all (as Mr. Wells puts it) 'shout out' about God, or in our less ecstatic language we shall bless His Name.

In the Study.

Lot's Wife.

A STUDY IN DETACHMENT.

'But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.'—Gn 19²⁶.

'Remember Lot's wife.'—Lk 17³².

THERE is a strange abruptness about the manner in which Scripture disposes of some events and their consequences. In the case of Lot's wife we have no record beyond these two verses. Not even her name is given, nor are we told of her first entrance into the sacred narrative. Yet, brief as the record is, it contains some important lessons.

There are people, no doubt, who scoff at the idea of learning anything from it, because, they say, those old Bible stories are not history and cannot be depended upon as having ever really happened. But 'The Prodigal Son' is not history. And it was He who told us that story of 'The Prodigal Son,' who also recalled that older story of 'Lot's wife,' and told men to 'remember' that also. And if He bade men remember it, it must be worth remembering.

As to the matter of its being true, the real trouble is that it is too true. There come to all of us crises in which we have to make an instant choice.