

THE GOSPEL OF SACRIFICE
FROM THE NOVELS OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE BY ROBERT HUGH BENSON

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Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts
of the University of Ottawa through the
Department of English Literature as par-
tial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts.

Ottawa, Canada, 1955.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was prepared under the guidance of Dr. Emmett O'Grady of the English Faculty of the University of Ottawa. Gratitude is here expressed very sincerely for his invaluable assistance.

The writer is also very grateful for encouragement and guidance received from the Oblate and Jesuit Fathers of the Manitoba Province, as well as from the Sisters of her own religious congregation.

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INTRODUCTION

During Robert Hugh Benson's life, the historical novels, which dealt mainly with the Catholic viewpoint of the Reformation days, because they were more carefully written than his later works and because of his own charming personality, were read by a wide circle of critics and admirers. Later, the two novels of the future, Lord of the World, painting the world one hundred years hence and showing the ultimate result of the progression of "modern thought", and the Dawn of All, picturing life sixty years ahead if "ancient thought" were prolonged, gripped the interest, imagination and enthusiasm of the public. The novels of contemporary life, in which Benson denounced some of the tendencies of his day, and, as a convert, sought very perceptibly, to bring others to the Catholic faith, did not prove as popular. However, since they were written for his own time and people, many a one reading about "an average man", a "conventionalist", a "coward", or a "sentimentalist", recognized himself and tried to lead another kind of life. After Benson's death, while the interest in the historical novels was retained and that of the future novels decreased somewhat with time, the novels of contemporary life were read very little. The author wrote them in feverish haste, taking no time to revise his work, and his purpose, for which he devoted himself, stood out very clearly almost on every page. Therefore, those who sought for delicate and

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lasting craftsmanship, Protestants who immediately took the defensive stand, and even Catholics, who did not expect to be preached at so loudly, went away disappointed. Yet, there are many lessons in the contemporary novels which may be of great value even to the people of our own day.

The important aim of this introduction is, however, not to discuss these lessons but, to acquaint the reader with what has been done thus far to bring out the gospel of sacrifice. Of course, Father C.C. Martindale's : The Life of Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson, is undoubtedly the greatest work about Benson, in which is shown not only a record of events but also the surrender of a creature to the call of God, by turning to a life of greater perfection and divine union through a conversion from the Anglican to the Catholic faith. May Bateman in the article: "Growth (The Life of Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson by C.C. Martindale, S.J.)" has analyzed Father Martindale's biography and shown how Benson's life exemplified the development of sacrifice. In other articles, such as "The Catholic View in Modern Fiction" and "War and Pain", she has pointed out how Benson, in some of the contemporary novels, has demonstrated the value of obscure sacrifices and dealt with sacrifice as a vicarious surrender. She has likewise examined the pagan views on the purpose of war and pain and compared them with the Christian attitude.

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Although valuable work has been done, there has been no epitome of the novels of contemporary life considered as one group of Benson's writings and no discussion of the general notion of Christian sacrifice along the lines of its development in the lives of the principal characters of these novels. That is the contribution of this thesis. The writer has endeavoured to extract the gospel of sacrifice from each one of the stories of contemporary life. In each novel, one or two important characters pass through a sacrificial process. In each story, the message is partly contained. Because to preach a message of sacrifice in a manner which will result in conversion of soul, one must have practised it in his own life, the author's background, consisting of the philosophical movements of his day, of the personal philosophy developed in his home and in educational institutions, must be carefully studied. From all these influences will grow his own philosophy of life. This is sketched in Chapter I of the thesis. The next four chapters deal with the development of the gospel of sacrifice in the plot of each novel, under the following aspects: vision, struggle, surrender and reward. What the vision was for each important character and how it is outlined by Benson is presented to the reader in Chapter II. How each struggle is portrayed by the author, as well as the conflicting elements which go against the acceptance of the plan of life, stressing those of conventionalism and emotionalism, is the

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matter treated in Chapter III. All the events culminating in a crisis are picked out from the contemporary novels and included in this chapter. After the crisis follows the surrender, which is described in Chapter IV. In Chapter V is explained the nature of the reward which Benson gives to those who have made the surrender to God. The whole gospel is summarized in the last chapter of the thesis, with particular emphasis on the spiritual and moral lessons it contains.

CHAPTER ONE

LIVING HIS GOSPEL

The strictly theological definition of sacrifice will not be adhered to in this thesis, but it will be applied to Robert Hugh Benson's novels of contemporary life in its broad sense, namely, that

the idea of sacrifice lies in the self-surrender of man to God, not with the object of (symbolical) self-destruction, but of final transformation, glorification and deification¹.

Man, who is a creature of God, must, in profound humility, submit his will to the Will of his Creator, because he is made to live with Him in glory. This, however, cannot be attained unless he is purified and changed to become God-like. The sacrifice is found in the submission he makes of his will, in the removal of the obstacles which stand in the way of his surrender, and in detachment from creatures which prevent his union.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how Robert Hugh Benson passed through a sacrificial process which, later, enabled him to preach so enthusiastically and so convincingly to others. A well-founded principle of daily life assures us that before anyone can preach effectively, he must, first of all, practise his own doctrines. Benson's gospel, with its

¹J.Pohle, "Sacrifice", in The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol.13, 1912, p.320, col.2.

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background of theology and philosophy, developed and broadened as it embraced more and more elements of experience. To understand it well, it is necessary to review some of the religious and philosophical movements generally accepted, but contrary to the notion of submission, to present a biographical sketch of the author, in two quite distinct periods of religious perception,—one, with Anglicanism, the other, with Catholicism—so that the reader may view his training and growth in living the idea of self-surrender from earliest years, and, finally, to outline the method by which he preached the gospel of sacrifice in the contemporary novels.

A few decades before Benson's time, his country had been stirred by an upheaval which would influence him eventually in the development of his personal notions of sacrifice. There had been the Oxford Movement, the most striking illustration of the principles of authority and submission, as opposed to individualism, in matters of religious thought, a movement which shook the pillars of Anglicanism and gave the intellectual activity of Englishmen a decidedly theological trend. Of course, England had been suffering from individualism for a long while. In the very beginning of Protestantism, Luther had argued that the Church cannot teach with authority the revelation of Christ. The Christian suffices unto himself to know his faith from the Sacred Scriptures. Individual interpretation was the foundation of Protestantism. It is not

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surprising that there is the almost classical example of an Anglican minister teaching that Christ was God and his confrère saying that He was not. When the Bishop was appealed to, he said, Yes ; when the Archbishop was asked his final opinion, he answered, No². The result of this and of other philosophical doctrines of the middle of the nineteenth century was liberalism, defined by Cardinal Newman as " the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another³", and modernism, or the doctrine of immanence, which rejected the power of reason to know God and metaphysical and moral truths and maintained that religious sentiment, which proceeds from the depths of the subconscious, establishes religions and dogmas. Thus, in the 1870's, the fundamental error of Dollinger, professor at the University of Munich, who wanted, instead of authority, a collectivized individualism, insisting on a collective conscience, could likewise find ready adherents in England.

In ethics, the philosophy of Hume, with its moral distinctions being determined by the sense of the agreeable and pleasant, instead of right and wrong, and the utilitarianism of Bentham, that the end of morality is the greatest happiness

²Mercier, S.S.le Cardinal, Le Modernisme, Sa Position Vis-à-Vis de la Science, Sa Condamnation par le Pape Pie X, Bruxelles, L'Action Catholique, 1908, p.43.

³W. Barry, "John Henry, Cardinal Newman", in Publications of the Catholic Truth Society, Vol.13, 1895, p.5.

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of the majority, had spread far afield. Things of the spirit were excluded from man's consciousness; only material things were important. Prudence and benevolence were considered to be the only virtues. What was right, too, was what was approved by social conventions and traditions of each family. The beautiful, artistic, sensible, agreeable, suitable—these were the qualities which predominated over the ugly, unpleasant, disagreeable, painful, spiritual and supernatural.

Into this world of materialism, Robert Hugh Benson was born on November 18, 1871, at Wellington College, Lincoln, where his father, Edward White Benson, was headmaster. The next year, the father became Chancellor of Lincoln Cathedral. Very early in childhood, the boy learned from his father the details of the life of his patron, St. Hugh of Lincoln, and it is probably from this saint that "Hugh", as he was affectionately called by his family, obtained the gift of loving the Carthusian life of solitude and silence and possessing innately a desire of being a contemplative. When he was six years of age, his father became the Bishop of the newly-formed diocese of Truro, and then, in 1882, as Archbishop of Canterbury, brought his family to live at Lambeth Palace and at Addington Court, near Croydon.

In whatever surroundings the family found itself, the atmosphere of the home was ever the same. While it was deeply religious, it was dominated by the father's strong, imposing,

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dictatorial personality and tempered by the mother's gentleness and sweetness. The father was a fervent High Churchman with a staunch belief in the fundamental principles of Christianity, a great respect for the authority of the Church of England, and a love of dignity and splendour in her services of divine worship. The mother, Mary Sidgwick, a highly educated woman, sister of Henry Sidgwick, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge, was the wise and sure adviser of her husband and the personal tutor of her brilliant sons. For her family, she was a valiant mother, who always understood, sympathized with and penetrated into the depths of a soul in doubt, difficulty, or sorrow. Her firm Christian faith stood her well at times when others came for advice, comfort and encouragement. She obtained her courage, self-control and self-forgetfulness from a daily habit of meditation and silence. What Hugh learned and loved about the life of the cloister, about the need of quiet to commune with God, he saw put into practice by his own mother.

However, that is not all which led the small boy to understand how important religion should be in one's life, how prayer and self-denial ought to be practised, for, in the home, life was organized chiefly around religion. Morning and evening services were conducted by the father in a reverent manner, with great scrupulosity in following liturgical details. On Sunday afternoons, there were regular walks in the country,

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during which religious books, on lives of the Saints, Church History, or travel in the Holy Land, were read. At other regular times, lessons on the Bible and Greek Testament were given. Hugh remembered that these were brilliant expositions of knowledge on the part of his father, but, while they appealed to the mind, they did not touch the heart and failed to make him love God. In fact, God appeared as a Universal Father, who inspired neither love nor fear. The boy knew He was there but there was no vitality, no sense of responsibility in his relationship to Him. The moral training received in the home was grounded on the duty of obedience. In punishments for misdemeanours, there was no degree of seriousness, no less or more. Every act of disobedience, voluntary or involuntary, received about the same punishment. Hugh was brought up, then, as a moderate High Churchman, with such an awe and respect for what his father represented, believed and demanded, that it would have been almost blasphemous to act contrary to his beliefs, desires, or commands. Yet, although Hugh was very submissive to parental authority, he was intelligent enough to notice that there were inconsistencies between his father's beliefs and the practice of them by himself and the advice he gave to others.

School life took Hugh, although not completely, out of the family circle into contact with other beliefs and moral standards. In 1882, at the preparatory school at Clevedon,

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Somerset, where there was a church "higher" than his, he was left completely indifferent. At Eton, where the religious services were formal, academic and aesthetic, he was wholly unimpressed. Indifferentism surrounded him and took hold of him in such an absorbing manner that he stopped saying his prayers and later remembered only faintly the circumstances of his Confirmation and Communion. At Eton, also, there was no common standard of morality. Morals were dependent on individual opinion.

Up to this time, religion had held out nothing personal for Robert Hugh Benson. He had found nothing in it to stimulate and encourage him, to supply the wants of his inner life, to offer him an ideal to attain. It was only after he left Eton that he experienced a realization that, in religion, there was something that could be applied to the individual. There were two events which effected this change. The first was the fascination caused by the beauty of music and worship at St. Paul's Cathedral, the second, the reading of J. Henry Short-house's : John Inglesant. Through one, he obtained a glimpse of the spiritual, through the other, the unveiling of the secret of the religious ceremonies hitherto attended and an absorbing personal attraction towards the Humanity of Christ.

Then came Cambridge and all interest in religion faded away once again. In spite of this, one is surprised to find that Hugh, in October, 1890, began the study of theology. But,

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it was to please his father, and he explains : "the simplest solution of the problem of my future⁴". It was a life which "seemed to me to offer the line of least resistance⁵". The least sacrifice was entailed. It would have him drift along, without any peculiar effort, nor disturbance of the conventional and traditional atmosphere of the life at home, in the continuation of things as they were.

During a year and a half, Benson remained with Dean Vaughan at Llandaff, studying, composing sermons, attending services. The climax of Benson's religious experiences as an Anglican was reached through the instrumentality of the Dean who preached beautifully and inspired all who heard him with a love and devotion to Christ. He it was who led Hugh to find in Christ an ideal, One to love and imitate in the love He bore towards His Father. After a retreat spent in great mental agony, Benson was ordained deacon by his father in Croydon parish church. Later, he was able to depict mental struggles with such acuteness because he had been through this experience. He notes :

It seemed to me, after a day or two, that there was no truth in religion, that Jesus Christ was not God, that the whole of life was an empty sham, and that I was, if not the chiefest of sinners, at any rate, the most monumental of fools⁶.

⁴R.H. Benson, Confessions of a Convert, New York, Longmans, Green, 1913, p.28.

⁵Ibid., p.28.

⁶Ibid., p.33.

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One month after, at a retreat preached by Father Maturin, a Cowley "Father", Benson was deeply stirred. He tells us about the preacher and the effect of his words :

he caught up my fragments of thought, my glimpses of spiritual experience, my gropings in the twilight, and showed me the whole, glowing and transfigured in an immense scheme, whose existence I had not suspected. He touched my heart, also, profoundly, as well as my head, revealing to me the springs and motives of my own nature in a completely new manner⁷.

The outcome was that Hugh was more determined than ever before to follow in his father's footsteps, according to High Church teachings. Enthusiastically, he went out to devote himself to works of zeal at the Eton Mission amid the poor workers of factories, and, in complete happiness, he was ordained a "priest" of the Church of England. Then, overwork and the shock of his father's death in 1896 determined him to go to Egypt with his family for a rest.

Now, the second period of his religious perception began, for it was while he was in Egypt that the first claims of Catholicism asserted themselves. In Egypt and in the Holy Land, he realized how provincial the Church of England was and this made his soul restless. Work as assistant curate at Kem-sing, and even life in the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield, rendered him happy, but not satisfied. He became increasingly convinced that in the Church of England there was

⁷Ibid., p. 35-36.

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no authority to be relied upon in order to meet new problems of the times, no unanimity of teaching and ceremonial.

Personally, he believed that the Catholic Church consisted of the Christians under Rome, Moscow and Canterbury. When they agreed, the Holy Spirit spoke directly ; when they disagreed, that was matter of private opinion. His was what he himself called the "Church Diffusive" theory. It was one which led him to embrace, without difficulty, almost the whole Catholic doctrinal system, except infallibility. But, it was a belief which brought him misunderstanding, argument, doubt, and conflict. His superiors accused him of pride in deigning to prefer his own opinion against that of men, such as Dr. Pusey and Mr. Keble ; on the other hand, modernism, in its beginnings, was showing its head, holding that the subjective evidence is the only rule of truth and that the soul must find in itself the object and motive of its faith. It is a fact that Benson wrote to Tyrrell, an English convert, Jesuit, who was at that time deeply imbued with the spirit of modernism, and who, not long after, fell into Dollinger's error and left the Church. Benson, seeking authority for all the beliefs he professed and willing to submit when that authority would be found, got a very disappointing answer from Tyrrell, and his principles that the interior life of the faithful is the directing standard of beliefs and dogmas, that the code is variable because the dogmas change with the times, that the spirit

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of democracy must be the basis of religion, could not, at any time, appeal to Benson's soul. On the other hand, he did obtain aid from two books, which completed the work of grace within him: Mallock's Doctrine and Doctrinal Disruption and Newman's Development. The first made Benson's belief about the Church Diffusive crumble to ruins, for it showed that the Church Diffusive rejected its own authority. Newman's book, Benson affirms, "like a magician, waved away the last floating mists and let me see the City of God in her strength and beauty⁸". Benson entered the Catholic Church in September, 1903.

In Benson's progress towards conversion, one finds the story of a man who was called to a special vocation, one whose call demanded a great spirit of sacrifice. There was a gradual, slow advance towards the apprehension of truth. His early life amid religious surroundings, his restlessness, his groping in the darkness, all these were followed by the complete vision of the City of God. There was a struggle, too, in the many days and weeks of mental anguish, or argument, as well as in the result of advice from superiors, relatives and friends. He saw that his choice lay between the Church of Christ and the Church of England. A day came when Benson was convinced that submission to the Church of Christ was a duty, so he made his

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Ibid., p. 105.

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surrender and, with it, accepted all that would follow, accusations of disloyalty, new adjustments amid other circumstances. There was no emotional attraction, no illusion, according to his own account : " 'I have nothing more', he wrote on September 23, 1903, to Mr. A. C. Benson from Talacre, 'than the deepest possible conviction—no emotionalism or sense of relief, or anything of that kind⁹' ". There was, on the contrary, a heavy, stifling lethargy which followed the struggle of a whole year. But, the reward was not long in coming. It was a deep, universal, inward peace —no overflowing, overwhelming happiness — but a peace founded on the realization that one has come home and the Star of Faith is brilliantly shining ahead. The year spent in Rome fortified this conviction and showed him the Catholic Church in all its pomp and strength. In fervent words, he could exclaim : " He has brought me out of the mire and clay and set my feet upon the rock; He has lifted me from those straying paths that lead nowhere, on to the broad road that leads to Him¹⁰". The days of life that remained for him he would spend in gratitude by inducing others to find the road leading to the Church of Christ and, ultimately, to their Maker and Lord. The words of the

⁹C.C. Martindale, The Life of Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson, London, Longmans, Green, 1916, Vol. 1, p.255.

¹⁰R.H. Benson, Confessions of a Convert, p. 162-163.

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poet best describe his final welcome and reward :

Ah, see ! Christ stretches forth His hand
 A Maiden-Knight to bring
 Unto His own — His promised land,
 For visioning¹¹.

But, Benson was yet in the world. It was as a Catholic that he wrote his contemporary novels. As a Catholic priest, by means of his books, he was determined to lift his readers above the irreligious and materialistic atmosphere in which they were immersed. In his own life, he lived the notion of sacrifice in the sense of self-offering ; he would present the same lesson for their imitation.

In each story, one can see plainly his manner of delivering his message. One or two main characters are chosen for the various stages of his teaching procedure. He makes them see the vision of something better. Then, as the vision becomes more perceptible, a definite plan emerges. It is upon this plan that the person is to build his future. It is a vocation to which the person is called, a way of life upon which his own happiness and, ultimately, his union with God, usually depends. The plan must be meticulously adhered to, even if it appears difficult and involves removal of something very dear. Because, at this stage, the notion of sacrifice is clear, and

¹¹ J. Corson Miller, " In Memoriam — Robert Hugh Benson" in The Catholic World, Vol. 102, No. 607, issue of October, 1915, lines 25-28.

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because there is demanded a complete reversal, or a change in the life hitherto led, the result is a decisive struggle. A crisis and a final test comes, but it rarely brings joy. Instead, the person is confronted with seemingly insurmountable difficulties. However, content and happiness come at the end when the sacrifice is wholly made. The results are incomprehensible according to worldly estimation ; they are to be judged according to Christian principles. Very often, Benson leaves his readers to find the true message by themselves.

Having now given the definition of the idea of sacrifice, outlined the intellectual and ethical tendencies of the world which Benson entered, shown how the gospel, which he was to preach in his novels to his contemporaries, evolved in his own life, it is time to pick out definite, specific instances of the method of delivering his message from the nine books which are being studied. This will be done in the chapters that follow by reference to the plot of each story, for it is in the plot itself that is found the thread which binds the gospel of sacrifice into a complete and unified whole.

CHAPTER TWO

OUTLINING THE VISION

Generally, Benson presents the vision of sacrifice to one or two important characters, not in blinding clarity and suddenness, but by making the hero of the story catch a weak glimpse here and there, by showing him a little more of the light in successive happenings until, one day, there comes the realization that one is faced with a plan quite definite and complete. The vision is usually intellectual and of a religious nature. The plan of life is aureoled with a glow of happiness because its final purpose is the personal "transformation, glorification and deification" of the individual. Since, in all stages of the presentation of the problem of sacrifice, Benson remains an apostle of free will, in outlining the vision, he ranges his characters on opposite sides. There are some who are faithful to every faint ray of the light, by following what it inspires, and others, who are unfaithful, not by any gross infidelity, but by fragmentary driftings and compromises, thus obscuring the vision for themselves. This chapter will deal with the two classes, namely, those for whom the vision becomes brighter and clearer, and those for whom it darkens and even fades away. In the novels of contemporary life, there are found persons who are called to embrace the Catholic faith, to follow a religious vocation, to make the sacrifice

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of their lives for their neighbour's spiritual good, to overcome certain fears and dreads, in order to attain perfection. The details of each vision from its faint beginnings until its culmination in a scheme will now be studied by reference to each story.

An Average Man is a satisfactory novel to begin with since it describes two persons whom God is calling to join the Catholic religion, one, faithful to the light in its initial gleams, the other, endeavouring to get away from its steady beckoning. The author sees fit to sketch the vision by contrast, something which he enjoys. Percy Brandreth-Smith, an "average man", is deeply stirred by a sermon, which is very different from anything he had hitherto experienced. It was on the love of God and how necessary it is to the lives of all creatures, just as necessary to the life of human souls as the rays of sunshine to life on earth. The creatures must return this love and strive for union with their Creator. What impressed Percy greatly was that the truths explained seemed to be the woof and weft of Father Hilary's own life. The humble friar was the ideal personification of what he preached. Here was the notion of sacrifice presented to Percy by one who practised it. The effect was that, since this was a revelation of a new set of facts, it opened up a new vista of life which ended in a scheme contrary to his own. It made his past lose its solidity and equilibrium. What he considered of

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importance appeared insignificant and valueless. His

office work, his home—little imaginative dramas that he acted to himself. And all the things that had seemed unimportant—religious doctrines, the way he behaved, his attitude towards people, and, above all, towards the Personage whom he called God—these appeared vital, overwhelming and entrancing¹.

In the story, there is to be noted an interesting gradation in treatment, a growing perception of the vision, its doors opening wider and wider, letting more light into the mind of this average man, who sees the light in its appealing beauty of a belief and practice exemplified in the life of the preacher and who receives it with alacrity and joy. Yet, the Supernatural emerged even more vividly as Percy

began to perceive, incoherently at first, and more clearly later, that the things he did had become, simultaneously, of infinite value and weight and of no importance at all. It did not matter what he did, or what the outer details of his life were, so long as they were permissible by the New Law; it mattered vitally and eternally why and how he did them².

Benson is propounding an important truth of the spiritual life, how the love of God transforms all we do. It is the "golden touch" by which our ordinary thoughts, words and actions become precious pearls, sources of priceless merit for heaven. Through Percy, he wishes to teach his readers this basic, consoling doctrine, which will render their lives supernaturally

¹R.H.Benson, An Average Man, New York, Dodd, Mead, (1913), p.59.

²Ibid., p.60.

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valuable.

The increase of illumination is still more apparent in Percy's endeavour to understand the life of friars. Naturally, Percy was interested because of his admiration of Father Hilary. Benson, whose soul aspired to lead a contemplative life, would, once more, in the person of Percy, instruct his English audience, including Catholics themselves, so often ignorant of the requisites and advantages of religious life, if not entertaining falsified notions and prejudices against it, about the lives of monks and their austerity. When, from his friend, Reggie Ballard, Percy received the instruction on the vows, discipline and religious customs of the friars, it "did not seem to touch common life at any point at all; it appeared a kind of ideal existence in another state of being³". There is on the same page of the story, a beautiful description of a new world opened up to Percy's astounded spiritual gaze, the confirmation of the new outlook he was beginning to have upon life. Benson compares Percy to a child who beholds the unrolling of wide impenetrable gates, or the opening of doors in the side of insurmountable walls, and then, inside, there is revealed to his spellbound eye, a new world peopled with huge giants, tiny elves and airy fairy folk. Similarly, Percy could hardly believe that there were beings who confined them-

³Ibid., p. 79.

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selves willingly within cloistered haunts, who spent their entire lives and carried out a round of occupations in such glorious worlds. His imagination and emotionalism coloured all he saw within with an entrancing magnificent beauty, and offered this life to him in the Catholic fold as the embodiment of all he had learned about his newly-found faith.

It is, nevertheless, when Percy visits the monastery himself that he comprehends the full meaning of the vision, particularly when he sees one of the cells of the monks. Then, he knows that there is a life different in motive and in externals from the life considered to be normal and sane by the world, a life of poverty, chastity and obedience, a life of sacrifice inspired by love. The preacher, whom he looked up to as his ideal, was living this life. The question now was : Could he, Percy, live this life, too ? Yes, his programme was made. He would become a Catholic. And, then, when that was accomplished, in a year or two, he would become a Franciscan.

In the same book, along with Percy, is contrasted Mr. Main, the Anglican curate. While Percy intuitively runs to the Catholic Church with enthusiasm and exuberance, Mr. Main restrains himself, while the deepening conviction, born of a doubt which had begun many years ago, confronts him with its authoritative force. It had occurred first, when, not long after his ordination, he had visited a new Irish family and found a priest there. The courtesy and reverence which was

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shown to the priest started him to look for the secret of the respectful, yet familiar relationship between a Catholic priest and his people. Now, for the last two years and a half, the light had been drawing him steadily forward, pointing the way to the Church of Rome, but he had tried to argue himself out of following it, by searching for reasons against its acceptance. The light had gleamed very brightly when he read a book which endeavoured to prove why no sensible person should ever join the Catholic Church. Then, he read other books supporting the opposite view, and so it had continued, with reasons for and against, and with conviction following doubt, doubt following conviction.

The plan of life for Percy and for Mr. Main was to embrace the teachings of a new faith. Later, it will be seen how each one corresponded to the initial light of grace calling the soul. For Algy Banister, in The Conventionalists, there is revealed not so much a new way of life as Someone, Who is Infinite, in the imitation and union with Whom a soul will find happiness and salvation. Algy experiences a vision of a more idealistic nature, since, at the beginning, it has little to do with everyday events. When the introduction to Algy is made in the story, he is in love, not with a doctrinal system, not with a person, but with God. There had come to him, before his re-discovery of God, a clear glimpse of a Parental Heart, very closely associated with His vast and beautiful creation,

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intensely interested in the minutest detail concerning the creature. As he progressed along the road towards His Maker, he found that the great Being, the Infinite One, can render eternal and infinite everything He touches, all that He brings forth into existence. Algy came to believe that the material things around him, as well as space and time and moral actions, were all expressions of a general, pervading spirit, wishing for the culmination of a union with this transcendent Being, their Origin, their Providence. The end of sacrifice was being clarified for him. He saw that the human heart could not be an exception, and that is why, in it, there is found an impulse, a need to return to its Creator and Lord. Algy began to fit into this vast design that fact that, for instance, the painting of pictures, the composing of music, the writing of poetical verse, was only man's impulse towards Absolute Beauty in God and the need of expressing it, inherent in man. With the dawning of this perception, Algy turned to the habit of saying his prayers, of speaking from the heart to this great Being and found delight in this renewed practice.

His views of life broadened out to include, not only himself, but other people. As he looked about the society in which he moved, he found, as Percy had done, that it is possible to take two very contrary views of life, one, according to this great Being, the other, according to the creature. The people he knew, those he lived with, were surely not looking

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at life from God's point of view. And so, Algy was led to consider

first, that the important thing is to preserve the conventions, to box well, to be successful, to keep up appearances, to retain society in its conservative mould; and the second, that there is a mysterious quest to be followed, that there is a certain far-distant object to which way must be made, regardless of obstacles; and that if conventions fall in ruins about the trampling traveller, and the most precious domestic ideals be upset, yet that he must continue to trample⁴.

Then, one day, Algy got a practical realization of the same truth and was led to modify his views on life hereafter. His brother Theo was dying. Algy stood by his bedside and reflected that there was no common ground on which Theo and Death could stand. What a contrast there was between these two! Was there no possibility of a connection somewhere? He wondered. He could find none himself.

Death, to Algy's mind, roughly connoted the unknown, the mysterious, the delicate, the mystical, the spiritual; and Theo stood for shooting-gaiters, cigars, and the pedigree of dogs⁵.

During the Communion service, Algy's mind still pursued the same train of thought, groping in the darkness of grief and uncertainty for a Something, a Someone to bring Theo and Death on the same plane. They were so far apart.

⁴R.H. Benson, The Conventionalists, Toronto, Musson, (1908), p. 65.

⁵ibid., p. 91-92.

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Something was needed—something personal to unite with Theo, something infinite to complete the bridge on the side of death. A saint could do it ; or a vision, or a voice-- even perhaps some august mechanical ceremony that was its own evidence 6

As Mr. Mortimer, the clergyman, read extracts from the ritual, Algy listened intently to the words, studied the meaning and applied them to Theo. His conclusions were always at the same point of standstill. What did Theo know about this? The clergyman spoke of repentance, of chastisement, of Christ's words of comfort : "Come unto Me", but Algy could not reconcile the appeal of Christ with the response of a soul which knew Him not. Before him was a soul which did not desire to surrender itself to Christ. Then, Algy thought of himself and how unprepared he would also be to meet his God.

It was thus that Algy came to the conclusion "that the whole world's perfectly mad. There we are, fooling along" [...] "and making a lot of fuss about nothing at all—jawing, and going out in motors, and shooting⁷". In this way, by the lessons brought home to him at the time of Theo's death, Algy realized concretely what had previously been formulating in his mind. Attracted by the great Someone, he was lifted out into the Supernatural, a wonderful, exhilarating realm, where he could breathe a spiritual, invigorating air right in the midst

⁶Ibid., p. 104.

⁷Ibid., p. 118.

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of the atmosphere of materialism in which he lived. The whole vision was spread completely before him when he met Christopher Dell, a man of the world, now leading an exemplary, simple, monastic life. Mr. Dell, seizing the opportunity of Algy's question about the scheme of life which every person must work out, expounded to him the doctrine of vocation. What matters, he explained, is to find out what one must do, then, do it. His speech left Algy at a point where he, in spite of natural repugnance, was resolved to investigate what God wished him to do, for he knew that he could never fulfill the end of his existence by the life he had led thus far. There followed a period of pre-occupation and restlessness. Algy pictured to himself Christopher Dell, a man who had faced the same problems, but who had come out into the light and happiness. He had found his vocation ; he was happy because he was where God wanted him to be. Then, when Algy's friends very artfully showed him a Carthusian monastery, poor Algy realized that his vocation was not only to become a Catholic, but to become a monk.

Benson works on the same theme of a call to religious life in A Winnowing. There, Jack Weston, after his recovery from apparent death, believes that he has been given another chance. In the past, he had been indifferent, neglectful; he had worshipped God mechanically. During his illness, something had happened. In one instant, he saw that religion and

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its doctrines were true. That is why, after his return to health, he became feverishly eager to accomplish much in the time of life which remained. His wife and friends could not understand his fervour in the reception of the Sacraments, in week-day Mass attendance, in public expression of gratitude to God, in almsgiving and other charitable actions, such as, a substantial cheque for the mission, a donation of a piece of property on his own estate for a nun's convent, and an invitation to the priest to live in his house. But, the most amazing part of it all was that Mr. Weston desired to be a monk and wanted his wife to become a nun. When she refused, he kept up the various external religious practices as signs of his conversion. He seemed so resigned and so humble, ready to ask his wife's permission in plans and projects that concerned her. All the while, he wished to be free to continue in the pursuance of his ideal, which was to reform his life and to keep before him the facts of eternity : God, sin and death.

The reader can be very easily misled in his judgment of Mr. and Mrs. Weston. It is only later that he finds out that Mary, seemingly so helpful and obliging towards her husband, is really giving God half-measures. For, from the beginning of the story, Mary Weston has known what she must do. She had made a vow in order to bring her husband back to life and health. She must, then, fulfill her vow. That is the vision for her. But, she refuses, procrastinates, gives God

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other things in order to drown the voice of her conscience. Moreover, it is not at this time that conclusions from the previous circumstances are to be drawn, but even now, several points of interest may be noted and a comparison made between Mary Weston and her husband and Percy Brandreth Smith. In the first instance, emotions have been stirred at the time of Mr. Weston's illness and it was a crisis that revealed a brief, dazzling glimpse of a new way of life to both husband and wife. Percy was emotionally exhilarated on hearing a sermon which touched the depths of his soul and made him see the contrast between his life and the life described by the preacher. Mrs. Weston was inspired to make the sacrifice of her life and become a religious, in order to restore her husband back to life; he, on the other hand, had seen the vision of truth and wisdom with regard to the real value of spiritual things. He had resolved to abandon his usual indifference and turn a new leaf, to lead a life in which spiritual things would be of more importance than temporal, social things. Percy decided that he would become a Catholic and later a Franciscan to be like the friar he had learned to admire. All made resolves at a critical moment, although that of Percy was in a much lesser degree of intensity, and, therefore, one must wait, watching the daily progression of events and removing oneself to some distance of time, before judging the results.

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Whether there is an element of atonement in the story of A Winnowing is an opinion which is disputed. There are those who believe that, if Mary Weston became a religious to save her husband's soul, this point is not clear enough and is very unconvincing. Others think that no Catholic who accepts the doctrine of vicarious sacrifice would miss the lesson. But, there are two novels in which Benson sketches a plan of life of sacrifice for the sake of others very directly. One of these is None Other Gods. It is also a book which displays remarkably well how the understanding of the plan becomes clearer and clearer until the whole scheme is beheld. It affords a good instance of the gradual clearing up of the vision by one who is faithful to the light. At first, Frank Guiseley does not know what is demanded of him, but he feels attracted to a different way of life. He had, on becoming a Catholic, been disinherited by Lord Talgarth, his father, and, with the resoluteness of making his own decisions, which is so characteristic of him, he had "proposed to take his father at his word, sell up his property and set out like a prince in a fairy-tale to make his fortune⁸". He was really willing to give up his family relations, his wealth, his education, to become a poor wanderer of the countryside. Why he wanted to do this is the question. It seems that, at this time, Frank was following

⁸R.H. Benson, None Other Gods, St. Louis, Herder, 1911, p. 7.

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his natural inclination of being externally what he felt disposed to within, without ever stopping to think what it would lead to in the end.

Would it not appear also that Frank was making many sacrifices for his faith? When his reasons for becoming a tramp are known, it is plain that the elements of sacrifice are missing and Benson will make us realize later that the sacrifice had not really begun. For a long time, Frank had been thinking that there was something wrong in his life. Everything was so artificial, insincere, veneered. He often felt that he should come down from the pedestal and live on solid ground, so to say. This realization was truly the perception of a distant gleam. He now desired to break away from the past and try things out for himself. Since his life thus far had been so full of convention, it was useless and he must begin anew. The way to do this was to leave all that society prizes, all its possessions and positions, to make his life worthwhile, to be true to himself.

Until the time Frank met the Major and Gertie Trustcott, his attitude to many things changed. This is to be expected by reason of the different life and as a result of many unforeseen, unprepared experiences and sensations. The vital interest lies not so much in the physical adaptations he had to make, but rather in his spiritual adjustment, for, it was in his soul that the real change was taking place. He was now

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perfectly satisfied in having no plans for the future, in effecting so expertly an absolute break from the past, even from Jenny, since she would understand, in entertaining no intention of returning to his father, nor abandoning this life of his own choice. His soul was filled with serenity and confidence that something would turn up. Religiously, he was still steeped in the fervour of his conversion, and, what was somewhat remarkable, was that he became overwhelmed with an indescribable thrill of emotion every time he was in church and happened to see a priest vested going to the altar to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

When Frank found out that Gertie was not the Major's wife, he felt sorry for her. Little by little, his sense of Christian morality and charity asserted itself and he came to the conviction that he must stay with the couple for Gertie's sake. The confidence that all would be rectified, that the light would shine in all its brightness and splendour, did not desert him. Once again, since the circumstances had become modified, not being alone on his rambles, he perceived that inexplicable changes were occurring in his soul. He could not help coming face to face with the prospect of being misunderstood by the world of convention, which would prohibit his association with society's outcasts, but, when he did, his spirit of offering himself for a poorer and more miserable one, who seemed not even to deserve such pity, won the victory. What

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mattered if he would be despised ; it was the motive that counted. The plan in clearer and almost definite outline was before him. He knew his mission. He was to remain with the Major and Gertie until he was able to restore her to her parents. And, so it was that when Frank had the opportunity to spend a short while with his friend, Jack Kirkby, far from being dissuaded by Jack, who voiced all the opinions of the sophisticated, the suitable, the sensible, he was more than ever bent upon continuing what he had begun. From his manner, too, Jack sensed that a great sacrifice was in store for Frank. He wondered if it were the Catholic religion which inspired his friend with such exaltation and exuberant joy, for he himself saw only the incongruity and the incomprehensibility of the whole affair.

In this part of the story, Benson seems to exult in finding metaphors and comparisons of Frank's heroic manner and actions when faced with the prospect of sacrifice. He makes his hero rejoice in a way reminiscent of the early Christian martyrs singing on their way to the arena where wild beasts awaited them. At Barham, in the sacristy of one of the old churches, which used to be Catholic, he chooses to make Frank remove his gentleman's clothing and put on again the dress of a tramp. He throws a veil of dignity and sacred mystery over this very ordinary performance so that it appears like a vesting ceremony. For, it is to be surmised, the clothing of the

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poor beggar was like a vestment for one who was ready to brave with courage and fidelity all obstacles in the way of his resolution. Jack was so touched that he left Frank's presence. His heart was filled with reverence, as if it were too much for him to see the change actually made " and the garments of sacrifice put on⁹".

Later, when Frank described the states of his soul in a diary written for Dom Hildebrand Maple, he said that when his mission was completely understood, he realized that he had, up to that time, really made no sacrifice, that he had done nothing of any value in life. Because, he tells us himself, "nothing had really cost me anything;" ... " there was no real sacrifice¹⁰". The things that he thought worthwhile, important, the things which gave him satisfaction and contentment in the past, were only things which fanned his selfishness, his spirit of romance and his emotions. What if he had not done them? Ah, that would have been different. The element of sacrifice would have been there. But, in doing them, there was none. It was not a sacrifice, therefore, to lose his right to large estates, to education, to companionship and sympathy, for he had been considering only himself and following his self-will. The sacrifice would be found in surrendering himself.

⁹Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 310.

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Although Frank, in embarking upon the life of a vagabond, had no idea of a goal to attain, of a good to be accomplished, yet he had been led to understand that there was a plan laid out for him, a work for him to do, and a work which only he could do. His intellect had reviewed the scheme many times from various angles. The soul had been spiritually faithful to every seemingly insignificant touch of grace, to every scant illumination. True, mistakes had been made which theologians may disapprove. Did Frank take the part of the Major for Gertie's sake in going to prison for him? Also, he had remained with the Major for her protection and then had left her alone with him. But, through all, the will had remained firm in its purpose which was definite in his mind.

Frank's vision outlined for him what he must do for the sake of another. The ways and means of accomplishing his task are yet unknown. They will be shown in subsequent events. He has envisioned the plan gradually, little by little, until his intellect has grasped its full significance and his will is determined to carry it out, even at the sacrifice of his life. When this happens, Frank does not put off his plan. He is ready to follow the circumstances of its workings; he is pliable and submissive.

In Initiation, another novel of sacrifice for others, as Nevill Fanning and Enid Bessington discuss their personal beliefs in the first days of their acquaintance, it is evident

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to them both that there is something deeper than conventional religion. At this stage, they stand on the same footing as Algy and Frank and Percy when their spiritual vision began to formulate itself. As these two young people proceed in their reasoning, they agree that even dogmas do not really solve difficulties in life, but rather increase them, and they come to the conclusion that there is a secret which lies somewhere else. Is it in Pain? Instead of turning to Christianity for an answer, they prefer to be satisfied with the opinions of the world and even search paganizing influences, hoping to get away from a God, Who died on the Cross, Whose Figure they cannot bear to contemplate as He lies dead in His mother's arms. Joy, pleasure and health were important in life, not the cross. Of course, at this time, before the experience of intense pain initiated Nevill into a deeper and fuller life, he thought "It's a thing to be resisted. It's hateful and detestable¹¹". In this novel, Robert Hugh Benson expertly uses Mr. Morpeth, that truly Christian philosopher, to voice his own doctrines. Some people, according to him, have already been initiated by pain, others have not. Therefore, there are found two classes of persons along life's way. The first class is resigned, abandoned to what God sends, leaves the past alone, is not worried about the future, knows all

¹¹R. H. Benson, Initiation, London, Hutchinson, (1914), p. 37.

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will turn out well, looks at the general picture, even if all the details cannot be made out. The people of this first group are taking part in the drama, all is of vital importance to them, has a meaning, is of invaluable worth. The second class does not accept things immediately, is not certain that the past has gone, resents what has happened, and, while looking at the drama, sees only the details and knows nothing about the whole performance.

To tell us about the great act of charity, of justice, of atonement for others, there is the same spokesman. It is a law according to the Scriptures, old and new. It is a law of the Old Testament that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. " And the New Law says that the children ought to be ready to accept it, willingly. That is the whole idea of Atonement, is it not ?¹²". What Christian philosophy is likewise contained in the summary of Mr. Morpeth's own credo ! His daughter had just died and he could say :

I believe very strongly indeed in God's Divine Providence, and I see that sorrow and death are His usual instruments. It is natural that it should be so in this world, considering all circumstances. Very well, then ; I am content¹³.

There is admirable trust, confidence, abandonment and true happiness revealed in his gospel.

¹²Ibid., p. 64.
¹³Ibid., p. 136.

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Why should one be so interested in the foregoing instruction which Mr. Morpeth gives to Anna Fanning ? Has it any connection with Nevill's vision of the value of Pain ? Yes, as later Nevill's letter to Mr. Morpeth will testify. It was Mr. Morpeth himself who taught Nevill in the same way as he taught his aunt. If this philosophy is well understood by one who is faced with great physical pain and even death, will he not be ready and able to accept whatever God sends ?

Mr. Morpeth foresees great suffering, a great sacrifice for Nevill. According to him, it is God's plan for privileged souls and Nevill is one of these. He belongs to the group of happy optimists who never wish even to speak of pain. Their gaze is ever on the beautiful, the pleasant, the cheerful side of life. God has made such persons very happy. But, if they continued that way, they could not be saved. Therefore, they usually have to suffer and often more than others. Because they are naturally brimming over with sunshine, they can easily avoid pain ; they can ignore it ; they can bear it through pride. That is not what God wants ; "that will not do at all, if they are to be conformed to the image of Christ¹⁴". God will ask them to suffer and they must be prepared to suffer in a Christian manner. Mr. Morpeth believes that Nevill will suffer sharply, that he will suffer on account of Enid,

¹⁴Ibid., p. 231.

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that he will suffer for his father. If outwardly, this appears a curse, it is not so. It is the shadow of the heavenly Father's blessing.

He continues to explain to Aunt Anna that the law of atonement through pain

is not a vindictive law; it is a law of mercy ; that the love which should unite parents to children may do what love alone can do, and that is turn suffering into joy, and pain into atonement¹⁵.

He asks her : "Would it not be a noble thing if his son could suffer for him, and be himself transformed into --well, into a Christopher ?¹⁶". He guides her to understand what pain can do for the father, for his son, and for her. She must understand ; she must encourage him ; she must be brave ; she must accept and bear to see a loved one suffer. If pain, then, can do so much good, then, it is not to be considered as the greatest of evils, but a great blessing.

Although Initiation is a story in which the vision of a vicarious sacrifice is traced out, it cannot be entirely separated from the group of novels which follows, in which the heroic characters created by Benson have to fight against certain fears and dreads. To them, the vision of sacrifice discloses terrors which must be overcome before the new way of

¹⁵Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 233.

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life may be pursued. It was by means of pain that Nevill was able to atone for the sins of his father. And, it has been clearly shown that pain had no attraction for him, but he had to change his attitude and view it the Christian way. One cannot help recalling that Benson was haunted by some fears all his life. To his nervous, highly sensitive temperament, his keen imagination presented beforehand the details of bearing physical pain, until he shrank from it as unbearable : "sheer physical pain occupied a permanent place in Hugh Benson's imagination as terrible¹⁷", and

the notion of pain was naturally associated for him, while still a child, with that of knives and cutting; he therefore said that he felt it hurt him to have his hair cut, and asked if he might first have chloroform¹⁸.

Also, Robert Hugh Benson was afraid of being mentally disturbed, as his sister and brother had been, of being lonely, of having to face difficulty and danger. There is hardly a book of his in which description, or reference, to some terrifying experience is not made. So, as there is found in Initiation, a way of life leading through pain, in The Coward, there is fear of danger, in Loneliness, fear of loneliness, and in The Necromancers, fear of mental panic. Since Benson was so extremely sensitive to these fears, it is no wonder that he

¹⁷C.C.Martindale, The Life of Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson, London, Longmans, Green, 1916, Vol.II, p. 354.
¹⁸Ibid., p. 354.

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describes them so poignantly in these novels. If he himself were asked to make a great sacrifice, it would be to endeavour to overcome one of them. And so, that is what he asks of the characters in his books.

It is only at the end of the story of The Coward that Valentine Medd is conscious of the realization that his ideal is not to prove himself better and braver than his brother nor to live up to the proper, impeccable traditions of the Medd family, but to prove himself unto himself. He knows only then that he must fight against his imagination, his lack of self-control, by following the advice of Father Maple, by exercising his will. His was a keenly imaginative nature, and, because of what it represented, he could never face, or perform, anything that appeared dangerous. Each time, the circumstances would be so clear and the disastrous consequences so astounding that he would end by crying out, "I can't !" Father Maple explained to him that he would not be a coward if, after accomplishing a dangerous action, he would happen to break down under the strain. What counted was the intention of wanting to do it, knowing the danger. Val Medd sees the possibility of being brave and is determined to try at the next opportunity.

What about overcoming loneliness ? The novel dealing precisely with this topic elucidates this. It gives the story how Marion Tenterden had suffered from loneliness all her life.

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She had been an only child ; her mother had died at her birth; an aunt, who did not love her, had sent her to a convent. On holidays, she tried to be cheerful with her father, suffering from depression. That had been her life until she was eighteen, when her musical career had opened up a new life before her. Her father had been opposed to the plans for her musical career, but, he died and her expenses were undertaken by a friend, Maggie Brent, who saw a great dramatic soprano future for Marion and followed her to Munich. Maggie's hopes were well realized for the girl made rapid progress and now she was engaged to sing grand opera in London the following year.

Spiritually, just one year ago, Marion was a devotee. She had in religion the dominant romance of her life, and, at present, while the practice of her religion still remained, the romance had completely died and she even wondered how it had ever existed. Now, to answer Mass meant nothing to her. Even at night prayers, to which Maggie was always faithful, Marion was conscious that she had lost something which she once had. She considered all these devotions as domestic, rather than spiritual.

The entire centre of her idealism had shifted. She cared only for worldliness and fortune. Music was her all, and not only music itself, but all the incredibly exciting circumstances which, in her life, accompanied it, had flung open the doors of her soul and driven out that which had been within.

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At this time, in her life, the doors still stood open and she called to all the world to enter in.

Therefore, the vision of being faithful to her religion in the midst of her musical interests was fading away. Would Marion Tenterden and the others resembling her come to it again some time in life? Would there be a spiritual ascent, instead of a descent, some day?

The same questions may be asked about Laurie Baxter, in The Necromancers, who, shortly after becoming a Catholic, had thought of becoming a priest. True, he had been very disappointed when Father Mahon dissuaded him. When Amy died, he was inconsolable and could not resign himself to live without the girl he had loved. Maggie, his adopted sister, was the one who really perceived what was happening to him. He himself was too absorbed and plunged in grief and sorrow to be an unbiased judge. Maggie saw his astonishing selfishness, his fluctuating moodiness, his stubbornness. Laurie beheld only his need of his girl.

He would do anything, suffer anything, make any sacrifice, momentary or lifelong, if he could but see her again, hold her hand for one instant, look into her eyes mysterious with the secret of death¹⁹.

Then, after the visit of Mrs. Stapleton, a spiritualist, he read a book about spiritualistic beliefs and it brought him

¹⁹R.H. Benson, The Necromancers, London, Hutchinson, (1909), p. 20-21.

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faint hope to have his dream realized, even at the cost of the terrors of speaking and touching the dead.

There is an exception in The Sentimentalists, a novel in which Benson does not follow his customary procedure. It is usually to the principal character that the vision is revealed, but, in this case, Christopher Dell does not know what the plan is. It is known to Mr. Rolls, the mystic tutor, and vaguely conjectured by his friend, Father Dick Yolland. Chris Dell is, therefore, trapped, in a certain sense, for his own good. Mr. Rolls has seen the vision of the possibility of changing the sentimentalist, the dramatic, effeminate weakling into a man. His friend, Father Yolland, has yielded unwillingly to the proposal and he has been instrumental in bringing him to stay with Mr. Rolls. The latter believes that harsh treatment will be necessary. The poseur must be broken to pieces ! He must be forced to remain with his tutor until his training is completed. This will be done by an appeal to his personal pride, by humbling him even to the level of doing menial tasks. Thus only will the covering of emotionalism, which has encrusted his will, be removed, and the man of strong will, submissive and self-controlled, will be able to emerge from underneath.

What, then, have been the visions of sacrifice from the novels of contemporary life ? What have been the vocations, or missions, outlined for the main characters, and,

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through them, for the people living in Benson's day ? Of some, God demands the conversion to the Catholic faith, of others, religious life, or an act of charity for the salvation of souls, or the conquering of certain natural inclinations and fears found in themselves. Of all, He demands a change of life, a break from the world in which they move and breathe and carry on activities, according to its standards. More than this, some must sacrifice their wills, control their imaginations, their sentimentalism, their changeable emotions ; they must become strong characters. And, this will be accomplished by attacking first and foremost what they love most, that which brings them most suffering, that which will really cost something —that which means a sacrifice.

How Benson outlines the vision in the novels of contemporary life has been shown by picking out from each story those parts which refer to the process of gradual illumination experienced by each main character. It is in the plot that Benson shows how each succeeding event in a person's life is part of a plan, which, when beheld in its definiteness, must be followed, notwithstanding various obstacles and difficulties.

CHAPTER THREE

PORTRAYING THE STRUGGLE

Because the following of the plan of life may demand a complete change, or conversion, or a break from home, fortune and social position, or a renunciation of persons and things dearly cherished, it entails a struggle. At this stage, there is a realization that a sacrifice is required and a choice must eventually be made. Often, in Robert Hugh Benson's novels, the making of the final decision is put off, so the struggle keeps on. The resulting long period of conflict ends when the series of events culminates in a head, or crisis. The person is then faced with either the acceptance, or the rejection, of the plan.

In each story, the principal characters under discussion, pass through several kinds of struggles. Of these, divers classifications may be made, but, in this brief preliminary explanation, it suffices to divide them as spiritual, moral, emotional and physical. When the struggle is spiritual, there is experienced a longing, a desire for goodness, for perfection, an aspiration to a higher life, a dissatisfaction with the existing conditions of things, but the soul is reluctant while God urges it on. In a moral struggle, the person feels a sense of guilt and, while it would prefer to remain imperfect, the God of Purity and Holiness pursues it,

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asking it to purify itself before entering into a closer union with Him. Under the trial of illness, pain, sorrow, disaster or loss, or some other suffering, God may lead the soul to ask the purpose of life, or grief, or pain, and the person may make many errors before he finds the true answer by turning to the God of Suffering and Love. At times, the stress of the moral, spiritual, or emotional conflict is so great that the body reacts to the tension within in a purely physical manner. In each instance found in the novels, the elements are intermingled and overlapping ; it is not possible to say that in a certain story there is depicted a struggle of only one kind. Moral and spiritual struggles affect persons psychologically, while emotional and physical reactions influence the intellect and will. The struggle may take place in the mind, where the intellect tries to influence a strong will to action, or the emotions may blur the intellectual powers and tend to weaken the will.

It is very plain, nevertheless, that Benson, preaching a message of sacrifice to his readers, was not interested primarily in portraying the kinds of struggles which his heroes had to go through. He was much more concerned about showing against what contemporary tendency the struggle was waged, because that is precisely the purpose of his writings. As the novels of contemporary life are viewed in a general way once again, it may be seen that the conflict described is against

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two modernistic trends --conventionalism and emotionalism. Therefore, in this chapter, the stories will be grouped into two sections and the struggles of each character of importance examined according to this division.

Before beginning a detailed study of the novels in which Benson denounces conventionalism, it is very interesting to remember what the author personally thought of this tendency of thinking and living, as well as what he counselled to those who were afraid to break away from their rooted existence. His own working motto was that "Unconventionality is the spice of life¹". " 'I believe,' one wrote timidly to him, in later years, 'that if I could find myself in Catholicism, I could swim'. 'Then for God's sake,' he answered, 'jump !' 2"

In The Conventionalists, therefore, Benson wanted to demonstrate Algy Banister's struggle against the traditional, pre-established order of things done in the family. For the boy, affairs had become quite complicated. In the first place, to become a Catholic meant to readjust everything, to break up orderly, normal, conventional life, to reject experience, to give intolerable pain to those to whom he owed love, tenderness and filial devotion. Very clearly, he saw the sacrifices that

¹B.W.Cornish, Shane Leslie, et al, Memorials of Robert Hugh Benson, New York, Kenedy, (no date), p. 69.

²May Bateman, "Growth(The Life of Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson by C.C.Martindale, S.J.)" in The Catholic World, Vol. 103, No. 613, issue of April, 1916, p. 73.

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would be demanded of him. He must weigh carefully, consider both sides of the question. On one hand, lay the whole of normal life ; on the other, that strange thing called the Supernatural. He perceived that, also, to many people living around him, there came no such conflict. But for himself, he beheld, with perfect distinction, that it would have to be a choice. When the time came to tell his family of his decision, Algy experienced no conflict because his determination was so firm. It was afterwards that the real struggle took place. He realized that he had wounded his father. He began to rehearse to himself that he might, with the approval of practically the whole world and with that, likewise, of a good deal of his own moral judgment, become a sensible boy again.

Later, at a family council, with the Vicar present, his father told him that he could not remain at home as a Romanist. Then, he had torn himself away and gone outside to think. He reasoned within himself that, if he gave in, he would be a traitor, a weakling in the light of his own conscience. There, then, lay the two invitations —to be sensible, or to be conscientious. On one side, Conventionalism, on the other, "a Something", the Supernatural. Algy began to review how the Supernatural had come to him —a flash at Theo's death, the steady message of every day, the logic of the Catholic beliefs, the silence of the Carthusians, the sharp example of Chris Dell. It was all one and he heard its voice calling to his

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soul. At one moment, he made his choice and peace flooded in; at another, the invitation of family and convention called in its turn and his peace fled. In this part of the novel, follows one of Benson's most vivid descriptions of a physical struggle. It is only a reflection of Algy's cruel conflict in his soul as it complained against God, Who was asking, not for a mite, but for all.

He stood up ; he clenched his hands ; his eyes were bright with pain and fear; he took a quick step or two, this way and that. Then again he flung himself on his back Ah ! why could not God let him alone³?

But, when he rose again, his determination was made. He would leave the house the next morning ; he would become a Catholic.

However, Algy's troubles were not yet ended. His torment continued, for another struggle awaited him. This time it was about becoming a monk. The visit to Parkminster had frightened him and he had tried to put it out of his mind by arguing to himself that his duty was to stay at home. Chris Dell came into his life convincing him that he was resisting God's call. And Algy admitted that he had shirked it because of the many sacrifices. Of course, he was perfectly free, of that he was fully aware. There was no law to bind him to become a religious ; he could marry and settle down. But, he was

³R.H.Benson, The Conventionalists, Toronto, Musson, (1908), p. 223.

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not happy, not content at the prospect of such a future. After the convincing talk of Christopher Dell on vocation, his spiritual discomfort seemed to cease. The only Reality was the life awaiting him behind the silent, cloistered walls; all else-- his daily work and the people he met--belonged to Unreality. But, the moment of crisis was prepared for him by the untactfulness of Lady Brasted. She told him that Mary Maple was thinking of becoming a Catholic; she asked him to help her; she arranged that he meet Mary alone. It was at this time that the final struggle occurred. The Unreality became Reality again and his vocation receded in the presence of this woman, whom he had once loved and who now offered him her love. He beheld now what a religious vocation demanded and realized what he would renounce and what he would have to embrace. On one hand, his imagination pictured the domestic life, pleasure, love and comfort, on the other, the lonely cell, the mortifications, the silence, the darkness, chill and poverty of the surroundings. And this second vision was gradually receding as he hung in indecision and hesitation. Just at this moment, Dick entered the room and the spell was broken. It was followed by revolt against God, Who, Algy believed, demanded everything. Then came the calm of a resigned, final decision.

One who resembles Algy Banister is Mary Weston in A Winnowing, struggling against her vocation, as well as trying to hold on to conventional ways and the ordinary level of the

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spiritual life. Mary began by knowing her vocation but she endeavoured to flee from God. She refused to let her husband become a monk. She tried to convince herself :

we can just go on living here as before, only— only be pious too. It seems to me that your ideas are perfectly splendid ; the convent and everything. I can't imagine why we shouldn't, both of us, be really good Catholics, and yet go on here⁴.

Death, as to Algy Banister, taught Mary a lesson, for, when Sarah's mother died, she was led to reflect on the utter selfishness and uselessness of such a conventional life. The old woman had observed all the social proprieties; she had not violated any social laws; she had led a good life, according to suitable, worldly standards, but she had showed no love to anyone and her whole life stood out as a defiance of the Great Commandment. There had been no sacrifice in her life; it was a life lived entirely for self.

Finally, a day came when, to the Mother Superior of the convent, Mary revealed her prolonged struggle against her vocation. She told her that she had made a promise to God that if Jack could live again, she would consecrate herself as a religious to God and fulfill all He wished, perform all the sacrifices which would be required. Since that time, however, she had been fighting against it. She had persuaded the

⁴R.H. Benson, A Winnowing, London, Hutchinson, (1910), p. 206.

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doctors to pronounce the verdict that her husband had not died, then, she attempted to give God other things, smaller sacrifices, but not the one He was really asking. She tried to silence the voice of God, to blur the vision, to pay no attention to His persistent call. The Mother Superior explained to her that she would always be unhappy living this way, that she must tell her husband that she is ready to sacrifice him if he desires to be a monk, that she is ready to do anything he wishes, that she too has a vocation, or, at least, is willing to offer her life to God.

It is precisely when Mary Weston speaks to her husband about her vocation that one gets a surprise in finding out what has been happening in Jack Weston's soul. It must be realized again how Benson delights in creating paradoxes of life. For, while Mary had struggled against her call, all the while her husband had been apparently very pious and sincere in his conversion. After Mary had refused to let him enter religious life, he seemed to have been content to devote himself to many exterior practices. The realization deepens and one wonders at not becoming aware of this fact before in the story. Jack Weston had been struggling against God's grace, too, although Benson has cleverly concealed it under the veil of exterior religious performances. The truth is now evident. He tells Mary : "I've been playing the fool for months, footling along with things, and trying to be pious. I'm sick of the whole

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damned thing. It's all rot⁵ⁿ. And so, Jack Weston throws his religion to the four winds, so to say, and continues enjoying himself, not caring any more about the salvation of his soul, just as he had done before his illness.

With Frank Guiseley, in None Other Gods, after his break from conventional life, there is not much of a spiritual struggle at first. It runs more along physical and emotional lines as Frank meets with occasions and problems which are increasingly difficult. To begin with, physical discomforts caused him much suffering because he was not used to the life of a tramp. After he met the Major and Gertie, these physical unpleasant circumstances were more easily borne because they were shared by his travelling companions. What involved morality and caused him more trouble was the feeling of hatred and loathesomeness which overwhelmed him when he saw the kind of life these two were leading and particularly the way the Major acted and talked. He somehow overcame this feeling by considering that the reason why he loathed the Major was because he did not act like a gentleman, because he did things in "bad form". The only relief was that he could leave them whenever he pleased, but this was removed when he realized he must remain to save Gertie.

⁵Ibid., p. 255.

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The next series of events is so ordered that Frank is made to feel smaller and smaller. He passes through the way of spiritual purification. That is only just, for, one who has embraced sacrifice for moral reasons must himself be purified from all sense of moral guilt. Therefore, when he went to prison, instead of the Major, he remembered that he "felt really rolled in the dirt"⁶, and, then, when in the post-office, the clerk recognized him, this made him feel very low, so despised and unwelcome in society. A priest refused to help him, because he thought that, before him, there stood an undeserving beggar; a policeman turned him out of his work. As Frank thought of all this, he said that he felt smaller and smaller. But, all this time, he held on to two things, his religion and Jenny. And then, one day, Jenny's letter arrived. She told him that their engagement was broken off. She could not marry a man who had so disgraced himself as to have gone to prison. The shock was so great that Frank seemed to be in a sort of trance, not knowing, not caring what was happening to him. With Jenny gone, religion, too, seemed very useless. It offered no sensible consolation of any kind. He even considered how frightful it was that God had allowed this to happen to him. But, he felt no resentment, neither towards

⁶R.H. Benson, None Other Gods, St. Louis, Herder, 1911, p. 311.

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God, nor towards Jenny. It was thus in this marvellous way that he gradually passed through the purgative way of his life. His soul had been purified by detachment from all he held dear. To save Gertie, God was asking him to be humble and to sacrifice the one person, who, he always thought, would never turn against him, nor abandon him. Yet, Frank did not waver ; he clung to his resolve.

Percy Brandreth Smith in An Average Man had likewise no intellectual obstacles to face.

He had never even questioned the main dogmas of Christianity ; he had accepted them always, since they had been taught to him. So there was no intellectual struggle. It was simply that the great bare structure that he had called Christianity— an affair of poles and ropes and frames, barely disguised with a few sentimental wreaths here and there—had blazed out into fire⁷.

However, after this enthusiastic reception of the doctrines of the new faith, Percy became heir to a large fortune. And then, what happened ? He saw that the acceptance of the new faith would mean leaving his ordinary routine, his elevated position. Unlike Frank Guiseley, he began to put his faith aside, to work only half-heartedly towards his ideal, to give God, Who pursued him, only tidbits of what He demanded. The idea of being a friar clashed now with the plans of a lord of an estate. His ideal, therefore, retired a little. He thought then that

⁷R.H. Benson, An Average Man, New York, Dodd, Mead, (1913), p. 61.

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the higher life for him consisted in settling down on the property. After all, he said to himself interiorly, he could do more good there than in retiring to a monastery. His friar ideal seemed to him now a poor, nerveless kind of thing. His new responsibilities were so much more important.

In love with Gladys Farnham, his "religion seemed pale and colourless beside this passion⁸". Percy's will was weak; it was so easily swayed by his emotions. Another day, his religion appeared so magnificent and wonderful and God so good to afford him immeasurable joy. His relations with Gladys looked so encouraging, especially since she was to talk to Father Hilary about the possibility of instruction, not telling him, of course, about any intention of hers to re-marry. It would be so exquisite if they could arrange to be married as Catholics.

When Gladys asked Percy to marry her before she left for America, he was torn between his love for her and his conventional sense of duty. One can see quite clearly that, at this time, his love meant much less; he did not care for her as much as he used to. The glow of romance was wearing off. She was only an actress, after all. However, there was a struggle in his soul between his love for her and what outwardly he considered his duty.

⁸Ibid., p. 242.

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His soul was uneasy. Therefore, he showed unusual haste to be of service and devote himself exteriorly to works of zeal, for instance, when he met Mr. Main, there was a movement wholly instinctive and reactionary. Down in that sphere of himself of which he knew nothing, there was forming a conviction that he was behaving like a cad. When the idea showed its head, he tackled it by logic, so it fled down again and vanished. Yet, it was there— this uneasy sense that he was not really choosing at all between Gladys and his religion, but simply between Gladys and his own comfort. He fortified himself with words, reassured himself by argument, but his emotions did not help him. He leapt, therefore, at this opportunity of helping Mr. Main, as a kind of additional reassurance to himself that he was really a good fellow and nothing but conscientious. He became very satisfied with himself as a result. He had been of service to Mr. Main ; he had acted with singular resolution in the affairs of Gladys; he had talked to her about his grief, his desolation and the sacrifice he was making.

With regard to his instructions at this time, Percy still had the desire to continue. His convictions had become less emotional and he still intended to be one day received into the Church. He had an occasion to ask Father Hilary what the Church teaches about divorce and found it would be absolutely impossible for him to marry Gladys. Interiorly, he was

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filled with a deep sense of relief, for, as a gentleman, he could not marry an actress, and, as a Catholic, he could not marry a divorced person. But, exteriorly, he was heart-broken. Convention had combined with emotion to tell him to be miserable, to consider God very cruel. He looked upon himself as a martyr, clinging to his faith in preference to his love. He must be strong in the face of this sacrifice ; he must think of his duty and of his religion. What was pathetic is that Percy did not know, or realize, that he was deceiving himself. He believed he had passed through a struggle of indecision and had emerged victorious, a hero for his faith.

It is not surprising, then, in fact, it is something to be expected from Percy, that he was immediately drawn to Mabel's religion. It was a religion which demanded less spirit of sacrifice ; it was a religion which would enable him to continue without a break in the life he had been leading. It consisted in performing the duties of one's station and being good, kind and pleasant to others. For this, the reward of heaven would be given to everyone, as an extra bonus, so to speak. Percy was intelligent enough to know that this religion was open to many adverse and well-founded criticisms. It did not rest upon any solid foundation ; it was only an individualistic point of view. Yet, when he examined and contemplated it, it appeared singularly attractive, suited to his

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personal tastes and needs and just within the scope of his capabilities. The crisis of Percy's struggle came at this time. He saw that he must choose between this appealing religion and another, firm, unchanging, reasonable and outwardly grim in aspect. In both, he beheld the two ideas of Christianity, and he must choose one. On this side, there was Catholicism, that coherent system, so reassuring, yet so hard and incompatible with the life of the world ; on that side, the gospel just proposed by Mabel—so peaceful, suitable and lovable. It seemed to be just enough for his life. By following this creed, by being charitable and pleasant, could he not save his soul ? Was this not the great purpose of Christianity ? And, which one would Mabel prefer ? Which one would his mother wish him to choose ? Surely, neither one of them could be viewed happily against the background of Catholicism, but each one would fit in very admirably, simply and completely on the side of conventional individualism.

In the same novel, Robert Hugh Benson shows us Mr. Main fighting within himself the attraction to join the Catholic Church. Doubts had assailed him for a long period of time, and, now, as the conviction grew stronger, the chief obstacle was his bitter, biting, vicious wife, who would bring an increase of misery to his household as soon as she would know of his decision. What was worse, too, he foresaw that he would lose his position as curate and that his wife would have to support him

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by her writings. Let it be explained, however, that, although her writings were undoubtedly very clever, they were unkind, spiteful, caricaturing everyone whom she had known, sparing no one and nothing, even those who had shown her many kindnesses in the past. Poor Mr. Main ! He was so humiliated when they were published, so sincerely grieved at what his wife had done, so tormented about what they disclosed, that he could not bring himself to accept misery and humiliation by becoming convinced, once for all, that Catholicism and not Anglicanism were true. The torture of mind aggravated his sufferings caused by his wife's nagging and fault-finding.

In the second part of this chapter, it will be shown how Robert Hugh Benson tried to deliver a message against emotionalism by describing the struggle in the souls of his heroes. Even though he himself was of a high sensitivity and possessed a very emotional nature which recoiled from physical pain, his religion taught him that the Christian can be another Christ by pain. This philosophy may be found in Initiation. At the beginning of the story, how hateful pain is to Nevill Fanning and how he questions its purpose ! "Nothing but headaches," he said. "But why should I have them⁹?" At first, when he had them, he could see less distinctly, and, later, a veil seemed to obscure his sight. They continued until day

⁹R.H.Benson, Initiation, p. 22.

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after night, he was almost speechless with pain, murmuring about "horses galloping¹⁰" in his brain. Finally, the case was diagnosed as a tumour on the brain, cause of the headaches and the blindness.

Sir Nevill's life was closely connected with two other characters in the novel : Aunt Anna and Enid Bessington. The first, very delicate, sensitive and refined, extremely tender and kind; the other, whom he had loved, described as having an element of a "fierce, rending, tearing tiger that loved to wound and mar, that rejoiced in pain¹¹". Mr. Morpeth advised Aunt Anna that the best way she could help Nevill accept his pain was not to show him too much tenderness, no emotionalism ; she must be reserved, matter-of-fact, natural on all occasions. After the operation, Aunt Anna saw Nevill in great suffering, but she held on to what Mr. Morpeth had told her --that physical suffering is a blessing in disguise, that he was suffering for his father, that love meant suffering, that love meant joy, so there must be joy in pain.

Benson vividly depicts the pain after the operation.

The pain was a continuous pulsation, rather like the throb of a motor-engine, though far slower—a series of noiseless explosions from a point, like the bursting of a shell; and he perceived that the colour of them was a kind of electric blue¹².

¹⁰Ibid., p. 269.

¹¹Ibid., p. 253.

¹²Ibid., p. 339.

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Aunt Anna managed to tell him quietly that the whole tumour had not been removed, that it would grow again until the end, which was expected in three or four months. He would see, most probably, until the end. When Nevill came home, he acted as if he were completely well ; he wished never to speak about his approaching death. Aunt Anna thought he was very hardened because he did not come to her for sympathy and comfort. Once more, Mr. Morpeth gives us the clue about what is going on in Nevill's soul. He had turned to God and to the eternal truths for comfort, he tells Aunt Anna, and she must not be jealous of God. In addition, Nevill's own letter confirms this. He told Mr. Morpeth that he used to fear death. Now, physically, he still fears it and hates it, but, spiritually, he is strong. Through pain, both he and his aunt had acquired an admirable spirit of resignation.

In The Necromancers, Laurie Baxter's struggle began under the heavy stress of sorrow following the death of Amy, whom he loved. It is chiefly emotional and one has a very clear description of it.

His moods alternated with the rapidity of flying clouds, At one instant he was furious with pain, at the next broken and lax from the same cause. At one moment he cursed God and desired to die, defiant and raging; at the next he sank down into himself as weak as a tortured child, while tears ran down his cheeks and little moans as of an animal murmured in his throat¹³.

¹³R.H. Benson, The Necromancers, p. 20.

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His need of Amy was so great that it blinded him in his actions and thoughts. His obscured intellect caused the will to become misdirected, for Laurie Baxter was naturally strong-willed and determined in his purposes. All he now desired was to have some sign that Amy lived and loved him still. To gain this, he was willing to make any sacrifice.

The book on spiritualism influenced him not a little. He knew it was all very unconvincing and he argued within himself, weighing and repudiating and labouring to find plausible reasons this way and that, until his emotion overpowered him like a torrent. He decided that " he must have Amy, or he must die¹⁴". The book had also explained certain notions on will-power. Laurie, accordingly, went out into the darkness and willed with all the power he was capable of that she come to him. But, the darkness did not respond. In his determined misery, Laurie gave himself up to hypnotism. In this state, he revealed the secrets of his soul. The medium encouraged him to give himself up to obsession. Poor Laurie beheld the choice he was to make between two spiritual worlds, one, in which the loved one would appear in a rare, sublime, exalted vision, and another, in which it would take shape and form at will in ordinary surroundings. A choice between a world of God and just spirits in glorified, perfect form and a world of souls in the

¹⁴Ibid., p. 48.

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same form which they had while alive. When he considered that, in this way, he would behold Amy at last, his choice was quickly made and his determination set to go on, not to falter, when he appeared so near to the culmination of his inmost desire.

As a contrast, there is Maggie's will set in the right direction. For her weapons to deliver Laurie from his obsession, she used not only all the powers of her will, but added the weapon which wins against all evil, namely, prayer. The assault was made upon her will by the powerlessness to formulate her prayers ; upon her emotions, by the sense of terror; and upon her person, by the approach of the evil spirit upon her.

In The Coward, there is someone whose will is constantly influenced by imagination. This caused Val Medd many struggles to overcome his emotion of personal fear. Benson places him against a brother who considers himself superior and brings so much suffering to the highly imaginative Val. He puts him in a family where morality is replaced by tradition. " Now when a Medd has done a thing, deliberately and strongly, it naturally becomes impious for later Medds to question the propriety of his action¹⁵".

¹⁵R.H. Benson, The Coward, London, Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1928, p. 5.

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In the first chapters, there is described the futile effort of Val to beat his brother in riding and in mountain-climbing. Hand in hand with these attempts to surpass his brother was his desire to please Gertie. He had occasion, one day, during a ride with her, to save her from a precipice to which her horse was almost ready to plunge. Yet, he admitted afterwards, if the danger had been too great, he would not have done it. He showed some of the Medd courage, too, in Italy, but, when summoned to a duel, he refused to go at the last moment and behaved like a cur. Of course, Austin redeemed the honour of the family again and came home a hero. Val even lost Gertie who wrote that she could not marry him because "Marriage without love would be bad enough ; but marriage without respect far worse ; and I could never respect a coward¹⁶".

The struggle deepened for Val. He had disgraced himself before his family ; he had lost the girl he loved and his efforts to overcome his cowardice were so useless. When his own father called him a coward and showed contempt, there followed a period of discouragement, verging on despair. It even brought him to the point of attempting suicide to prove to all that he could do it, but, of course, he didn't. He reasoned within his mind that inside of himself he had been courageous to make all the preparations for death. Father Maple was the

¹⁶Ibid., p. 242.

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only one who understood him and what he was going through — that he wished to try once more to redeem himself and that, at other times, he thought it was of no use. It is natural to believe that Val followed Father Maple's advice, trying to attempt willingly dangerous actions to overcome his fear, until the day of his final test.

In The Sentimentalists, Benson shows us someone who is forced to have his will trained in order to control his general sentimentalism. It is Christopher Dell, a theatrical personage, always on the verge of some fervent, fiery expression of the emotion of the moment. As Father Maple had advised Val, Father Yolland told him to develop his will power by performing small, difficult actions, but Chris was insulted. And when Lord Brasted revealed Chris's unhappy past, Chris seemingly despaired of the forgiveness of God and man.

In Part Two of the novel, Dell was persuaded to live with Mr. Rolls in his clinic for six months. At first, he thought that he would be treated delicately as a patient during a sort of retreat. But, at the first opportunity, his words are taken literally. He is deeply wounded in his pride and has to accept to work as an under-gardener ! However, he would show Mr. Rolls that he had a will of his own ! When he thought of Mr. Rolls who had trapped him, his moods surged from pride, resentment and dignity to snubbishness and sadness like waves dashing ineffectively against a rock. That rock was Mr. Rolls.

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After a month, Dell wished to quit, but Rolls scorched him with a speech telling him he was a braggart, not a man. Following a scene in the village, Rolls even went so far as to reveal his past in public. What was significant, at this time, was that when Father Yolland wanted to remove Chris, the latter did not wish to leave. He said it was useless. Not long after, Chris attempted suicide but was caught in the act. All these incidents show how far Rolls went in his treatment. But, now, since Chris had shown himself such a coward, the cure was effected while he was in a receptive state. His will power was gradually strengthened so that he could overcome his emotions.

In Loneliness, it is not a struggle to build up a strong character, but one to overcome loneliness. Marion Tenderden had always felt the need for companionship, for another to share her thoughts and the ordinary events of life. It was Christ Who was thus pursuing her soul and she was running away from Him. Little by little, she lost the sweet childlike consolations she once had in the practice of her faith and became absorbed by other interests, especially those connected with singing. When she fell in love with Max, who was not a Catholic, she decided that she would not ask him to make the usual promises; she would not marry as a Catholic. There ensued a struggle in her soul, a realization of her cowardice, her lack of the true spirit of sacrifice, for, just as Percy Brandreth Smith in An Average Man, she tried to offset, or balance, this

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lack by arguing that the breach with her religion would not be final; it would only be temporary and external. She would continue to call herself a Catholic ; she would hear Mass on Sundays, and, after some time, she would see Father Franklin with Max. She gave large sums to charity to calm the qualms of her conscience and she went to attend worship of other denominations to show her broad-mindedness.

But, God pursued her soul. When she lost her voice, she complained about God : " God has not been fair to me. He took away all joy in my religion years ago. And now He's taken away everything else. But He shan't take away Max¹⁷". Instead, God took Maggie Brent, her only religious and financial support. In the legacy, Maggie stipulated that her money could not be used for anti-Catholic purposes. This made it clear to Marion that she could not have it if she wished to marry a non-Catholic. In the days that followed Miss Brent's death, Marion reflected seriously about the two choices before her -- Nature and Grace. She beheld the future and the loneliness again. But, now, she knew that it did not mean an absence, but a presence, in her life, for God would be with her always. From the reading of Maggie's diary, she found that only two personal ties had mattered in Maggie's life -- God

¹⁷R.H. Benson, Loneliness, London, Burns, Oates and Washbourne, (1915), p. 206.

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and Marion. It should be the same with her — God and Max. Therefore, she would find the door to complete happiness ; she would invite Max to come and enter with her.

The study of the definite events of each story has gone one step farther in the development of the idea of sacrifice. The period of the struggle has been quite clearly portrayed by Benson and shown his specific purpose in several of its aspects. Algy Banister, Mary and Jack Weston come face to face with conventionalism and the supernatural. In their lives athome, in the society in which they mingle with others, in the practice of their religion, they would be satisfied to carry on as in the past, as the rest of humanity, and would prefer not to rise any higher on the supernatural scale. Algy would rather live his life as the others members of his family, hunt and drive and fulfill exactly each iota of the family ritual ; Jack and Mary would like to be just ordinarily pious and charitable. But God asks them to break away from this usual round by becoming religious and they are fighting against His call. The God of Perfection and Purity beckons Algy to leave domestic joys, love and property and Frank to sacrifice love and social respect for the sake of a soul. For Percy Brandreth Smith and Mr. Main, too, the struggle involves detachment from the holding of possessions and prestige, namely, that of lord of an estate and an Anglican curate, which will bring with it many misunderstandings, difficulties and failure.

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while the silencing of the voice of conscience will ensure security in social circles and a sense of ease, pleasure and comfort. Also, in this chapter, there has been presented the struggle of other persons striving for self-perfection. There is Val endeavouring to exercise his will and Christopher Dell unwillingly trained, Nevill Fanning and his aunt learning the lessons of pain, Laurie Baxter and Marion Tenterden, because others made sacrifices for them, succeeding in coming back to God. Both Laurie and Marion pass through sorrow and disaster in order to find themselves on the true way of self-surrender to God.

In portraying the various struggles, Robert Hugh Benson concentrates his artistic, philosophic and psychological efforts on the fact that, through his heroes and heroines, he is fighting against 1) conventionalism, so satisfied to remain spiritually and morally in the pursuance of worldly interests, in following the crowd, in being moderate, suitable, always in good form, but ever mediocre, and against 2) emotionalism, tending to make of its victims weaklings, unable to face life's problems and leading them to assume biased attitudes and wrong decisions, even not according to known principles and personal convictions.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEPICTING THE SURRENDER

At this point in the study, it is well to stress that, although Robert Hugh Benson's clear purpose is to preach the gospel of sacrifice, as an author, he may do so either directly, or indirectly. Also, as an advocate of free will, he must let his characters decide for themselves. There are, accordingly, some who are faithful to God ; they choose to become more united to Him. There are others who are not faithful ; they separate themselves from Him. In the preface to Miss Mary Samuel Daniel's story, Choice, is found what may be considered a good summary of Monsignor Benson's beliefs about the human will. He writes, after referring to the intellect and the emotions :

the will is always itself—acting and choosing— and cannot cease : there is no such thing as indecisiveness in reality — it is no less than a rapid alternation of decisions. Ultimately, therefore, the rational soul becomes, not what it necessarily understands, nor what it superficially loves —but that which it chooses¹.

As was seen in the last chapter, the struggle has terminated in a crisis; now a decision has to be reached definitely. The movement of the soul may be that of an ascending

¹B.W. Cornish, Shane Leslie, et al, Memorials of Robert Hugh Benson, New York, Kenedy, (no date), p. 91.

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towards an ideal, towards God, or a descent, away from the vocation, away from God. This period in the sacrificial process includes all the adjustments which must be made to the new circumstances. For, it does not mean that storms of difficulty will abruptly cease to harass and toss the soul after it has made its choice. After some lapse of time, after a succession of events testing its decision, the soul will be more firmly established in its state of surrender. In the meantime, the faithful one must keep up its courage ; it must not redeem, or retract, its offering. The unfaithful one always has the possibility of making an alternate choice.

A quick examination of the surrender of the principal characters of the contemporary novels, of men and women who have gone through poignant, painful struggles, leads one to conclude that, either they have chosen to become more pleasing to God and contemned by the world, or they have preferred to become more respectable in the eyes of society and lost favour in God's sight. In this chapter, the discussion will be first about the novels where the surrender for religious motives is clear and the main result of the story. They are four in number : Initiation, None Other Gods, The Conventionalists, and Loneliness. When the decision has been made, there is no coming back. It is a whole-hearted, faithful giving to God which includes all the sacrifices of a minor nature.

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Initiation gives us a beautiful picture of Sir Nevill drinking of the Grail, the Cup of Sacrifice. One does not know whether he had a presentiment of what would come in his life when he played the game of looking for the Grail with Jim, his little nephew. Most probably, little did he think that God would ask him to drink it to the bitter dregs, but, he generously and nobly accepted the destiny, the plan that had slowly unfolded itself. Now, as he lay near death, he looked back and found that the design was nearly completed and his soul was nearing the end of its initiation. The sufferings, the pain, the disappointments, were all for his father and that was why he had asked and willed to be strong enough to partake of the Cup.

It is quite similar to see Frank Guiseley in None Other Gods, accepting to live the life of a vagabond, wearing old clothing, having no shelter, begging for food and for work, and, in addition to this, choosing to do it all for the soul of one who did not seem to merit saving. But, Frank knew, she had a soul for whom Christ died. Therefore, he told her that her parents wanted her back ; he encouraged her by saying she had much good in her. He inspired her with hope and fear so she would co-operate in being returned to her home. He made personal sacrifices to purchase new clothes for her, to pay for her journey, and, finally, he managed to take her to the very door of her home. After this, he heard the news that made him

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Lord Talgarth, but, he did not stop. He had to go and tell the Major what he had done to finish the job. What else did his surrender entail? While his friends made plans for his restoration to ordinary life, he was beaten by kicks and blows until rendered unconscious. And, all this on Christmas night!

What was the complete surrender of Algy Banister? It meant what Christ asks of all in the Gospel, namely, to forsake father and mother and lands and wife and children. Algy left all to give himself entirely to God. He even renounced all claim to his property. He would henceforth devote himself to a life of prayer. He would be a priest, but he would live quietly in solitude, out of the bustle and activity and noise of the world.

At the end of Loneliness, Marion Tenterden has decided to belong only to God. There is expressed a complete abandonment and surrender to God's designs in the words: "I am ready now²".

When Benson depicts the surrender of those who are not faithful, he deals with them in an indirect manner, by placing them in complete contrast with those who surrender themselves to God. After all, his purpose as a convert and a priest is always to bring others to the City of God, to lead them to make a sacrifice of all they are and have. There are two

²R.H. Benson, Loneliness, p. 287.

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books, An Average Man and A Winnowing, in which strong contrasts are found. Weak unfaithfulness is presented with an example of admirable fidelity. It will be profitable to study these instances at length since they are very apparent and illustrate the point appropriately.

In An Average Man, Mabel has just told Percy that to become a Catholic is to lower oneself. She gave him well-planned examples of a lord marrying an actress and Mr. Main sacrificing his wife and her happiness. This, she considered very selfish.

However, it is from Father Hilary that we learn how Percy was unfaithful to grace. He wrote to him to say he did not wish to continue his instructions, claiming that he had been too emotional in going thus far. Truly, it may be seen that Mrs. Brandreth Smith was successful in her management of her son and he was excessively pliable in her hands. On the day of his wedding, he felt very satisfied with himself. Of course, he had made mistakes, he thought. He had been very inexperienced. He had sacrificed Gladys for his faith, but she was only an actress ; he had sacrificed his faith for a Larger Life. After all, what was the faith of poor souls like Father Hilary, a friar, Mr. Main, an ex-curate, and Reggie Ballard, a clerk ? Yes, life was just to begin for him now.

Then, the author leads us to view the apparently secondary hero, Mr. Main, and to read what he himself, in the

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person of Father Hilary, thinks of him. One day, when, during a visit Father Hilary heard from Mr. Main all that he had been through, the priest got an idea what heroism lay in the soul of the awkward, obstinate, self-conscious man before him, who was not looking for sympathy. In fact, he would have willingly and patiently borne all his troubles and never spoken of them had he not been forced to tell them at last. The man had lost his curacy by reason of his new faith, and if he could not find work, he would have to be supported by his wife. He was, then, faced with the prospect of having to live with a wife who had no sympathy at all for Catholicism, to bear misunderstanding and even contempt from his old friends, to leave his old lodgings because of the high rent and to be without a job. Father Hilary felt very sorry for him and in a moment of tender pity, wishing to console him : " Mr. Main," he said, " Christ is laying His Cross on you — It is a great honour-³"

It is certain that Mr. Main though himself privileged to bear the cross, for, the next time we read about him, he is found in a darkened part of the church in Kensington. He meditated, as he sat in one of the seats by the pillar, that God had been good to him and his heart was filled with gratitude. There were two reasons for being thankful— his own money was not entirely gone, and a letter had come from a

³ R.H. Benson, An Average Man, p. 269.

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cocoa-firm in the City, telling him he could present himself as an aspirant for the position of a commercial traveller. This had been the last day of a novena for these intentions. His trust in God had been rewarded. He was so happy in his good fortune.

As he told Father Hilary about all this, the friar perceived and knew how loyal and convinced this man was of his faith. He did not become a Catholic to make a career of his earthly life. It was only his conviction that the Catholic Church was right that brought him to his conversion. At that time, his surrender was complete and it may be judged in the light of the events that followed.

It is in this way that Robert Hugh Benson contrasts the weakness and unfaithfulness of Percy with the strength and fidelity of Mr. Main. On one hand, he describes the picture of a wealthy, fashionable man of the world, heir to a large estate, unable to make the necessary sacrifices to embrace the Catholic faith and, on the other, a poor, despised, unattractive personality capable of making heroic acts of detachment from position, means of livelihood and even family happiness. What is paradoxical is that one who has surrendered all to the interests of the world seems very pleased with himself ; while one who has given up all seems to have no plausible reason to rejoice, but, on the contrary, to experience discouragement and personal shame.

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In A Winnowing, there is the same parallel in which Benson delights presented to us in the submission to sacrifice by Mary and Jack Weston. Jack went back to his same old habits of being negligent; he surrendered himself to his amusements and pleasures and left religion out of his life. Mary, on the other hand, at long last, gave her life to God as a religious.

There is some of this contrast in The Necromancers, in which novel Laurie Baxter surrendered himself to obsession. He thought it was the spirit of Amy Nugent which had entered into him, but it was the evil spirit to which he had really given himself. Then, Maggie, who loved Laurie, saved him by the exercise of her will power and prayer. She prayed in the presence of the spirit and was aware that it came upon her. It filled her with a powerlessness to pray, with a sense of dark, crushing terror, and it even tried to enter her soul. However, her will sustained by prayer won out.

In The Coward, there are apparently both elements, too, a giving and a taking back, combined in the person of Val Medd, who has acted that way all his life. He is placed against a brother who is not afraid of danger. The surrender of Val's will is made at the time of the fire, when he accepted to risk his life to save the family archives. According to the testimony of Father Maple, Val was a hero, for he knew it was dangerous, but after he had acted heroically, his courage broke

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down. To the bystanders and to all the members of the Medd family, he was a despicable coward to the very end.

In The Sentimentalists, weakness and fidelity are likewise combined in the person of Christopher Dell. Although there are not many details of his surrender in the story, yet it is plain in the last chapter that his cure was satisfactorily effected by Mr. Rolls. The test occurred on the occasion of the garden party in honour of Lord and Lady Brasted. When Father Benson saw Dell, he noticed the intimacy and sympathy which existed between Chris and his tutor and was amazed at the ease and naturalness between them and in the company of others. Chris still had the outward appearance of an actor, but a witness could sense that he was no longer dramatic, nor theatrical. He was even self-controlled enough to congratulate Lady Brasted, the girl he had loved, now the wife of another, without the least twinge of emotion or resentment, as naturally as if she had been a stranger to him.

The fragments of each story which have some particular relation to the surrender to sacrifice have been included in this chapter. There has been a brief outline of the manner of acceptance of discomfort, physical pain and even death by Nevill Fanning and Frank Guiseley, for the atonement of sin and the saving of a soul from an unworthy life, of the detachment from family and loved ones accomplished willingly, though painfully, in the case of Algy Banister, of the abandonment of

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Marion to God, after He had taken away, in a providential manner, her musical career, Maggie and Max. These persons have given themselves to God in a true spirit of sacrifice.

When Benson describes the worldly approval and the personal self-satisfaction of Percy, one is struck by the irony of his words. Benson is here decrying all those county gentlemen who were so deeply involved in affairs of wealth, social standing and family tradition that they saw nothing else of any value. They had no foundation for any standards by which to measure the true worth of material possessions and their daily round of formal duties. They looked down with contempt on all those who were not following social precedence and who were not of their strata in society. Percy's contentment is presented against Mr. Main's supernatural happiness and gratitude to God. By mentioning that he had just finished a novena of prayers which were granted, Benson is hinting gently that our requests are not always for our spiritual good and suggests that God may desire to give us something more beneficial.

As in An Average Man, so in two other novels, the author depicts the surrender to God of one character and places him side by side with another who gives himself to the pursuit of an unworthy ideal. Mary Weston makes a real sacrifice in fulfilling her vow and entering a convent, while Jack's surrender in the abandoning of his religion implies the rejection of sacrifice. Laurie dabbles in spiritualism, endangering his faith,

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while Maggie makes a sacrifice to deliver him from complete possession. Elements of true sacrifice to overcome their emotionalism are found in the efforts of Val Medd and Christopher Dell. Their surrender is not as clearly described. There is, nevertheless, the testimony of Father Maple in favour of Val's sacrifice and the account of Father Benson picturing the change wrought in the character of Christopher Dell.

It is to be expected that the Bensonian heroes and heroines freely choose either surrender to what God asks of them, or refuse the sacrifice of self, or the sacrifice of their wills in order to become better. In this chapter, it has been shown how each of the principal characters in the contemporary novels has done this. What is important, however, is that, in writing, Benson had in mind the surrender of the whole being to God, our Creator and Lord, no matter what obstacles and sufferings stood in the way of sacrifice, and in training the human will so that it could break away from conventions and control the emotions.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTING THE REWARD

What does Robert Hugh Benson consider an ample reward for those who have seen the vision of sacrifice, who have borne the brunt of the battle, who have surrendered themselves and their wills for greater perfection, who have, in short, made the sacrifices demanded of them ?

Think of Frank Guiseley once again. As one sees him on his bed of sacrifice, "august now with a strange dignity as of a white altar¹", one knows that his soul is in quiet submission to God's Will and that it is content. Frank had the satisfaction of having saved Gertie, of having accomplished his mission. Those who were present in the room did not fully understand. With Mr. Parham-Carter, some thought of the complete waste of a life for so little ; with others, some admired him and viewed the extraordinary life tinged with a certain light of nobility. All this time, the beaten man lay quietly. He recognized his friend Jack ; he asked for his rosary, for the priest. His reward was inexpressible inward peace. He waited for death to come as "some pleasant little event that will unroll by and by²"; he was at ease ; he was

¹R.H. Benson, None Other Gods, p. 474.

²Ibid., p. 476.

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happy. And so, he met death without a word, and entered the kingdom of the Great Peace beyond, where the final transformation would crown his sacrifice for others.

It is very much the same with Nevill Fanning. He was lying in the same bed in which his father died. His reward was to be united with the great Sacrificial Love, the model and inspiration of his own, which made him offer his life, with all the pain contained in it, as an act of atonement for his father's sins ; it was to be perfectly submissive to God's demands, no matter how difficult of realization they were ; it was to be able to drink of the Cup of Sacrifice and thus complete his initiation into the Kingdom of Love, where he would be united with God for ever.

In the stories which show surrender to a religious vocation, Mary Weston and Algy Banister truly receive the reward promised to those who embrace monastic life : a hundredfold. Algy, when visited by Father Benson was happy; he was filled with great content. His personality was in its proper place, perfectly adapted in every faculty of his being. He was in his vocation. And yet, he was so misunderstood by all the conventionalists who stayed at home, at Crowston. It was simply incomprehensible to them how anyone could enter a monastery and spend his life in poverty, humble submission and solitude. Of course, in the first place, they could not understand how anyone could abase himself so low as to become a Catholic. Mr.

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Banister summarized their thoughts about Algy by saying "he always was something like the fool of the family"³. Mary Weston, too, was in perfect peace. On the day of her entry into religious life, the ceremony was very bewildering to Sarah, her friend. She thought it must be a dream, an illusion, something out of this conventional world and the result of temperament. But, Mary Weston was happy. She had fulfilled her vow ; she, too, had found her vocation. In the novel, Loneliness, Marion Tenterden gave herself to God, also. She was ready for whatever He would ask. Whether she became a religious, or lived a secular life, one does not know. Benson does not tell how she realized her surrender and one may suppose that she entered some religious order. But, in very few words, the author shows the love, peace and happiness which filled her soul. Max had not accepted the surrender with her. Then, Jesus would be her Knight. She was satisfied that it should be so, for He would fulfill all her desires. With Him, she would be lonely no longer.

Living in the world and not enjoying any earthly reward is Mr. Main in An Average Man. He had just received a month's notice for his dismissal from the job of a commercial traveller. He had not the natural gifts needed, so he was advised to try something else. When he is seen at the end of the

³R.H. Benson, The Conventionalists, p. 343.

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story, he is trudging wearily home on a sultry August day. Although he is thinking to himself of what would be the best way to break the bad news to Marion, he is not unhappy. His reward is interior happiness, in spite of all disappointments, rebuffs and failures.

Mr. Main is so different from Percy Brandreth Smith apparently very happy according to worldly standards. On his wedding day, when he reviewed the past, he acknowledged that he had made mistakes, but he had arranged everything properly and suitably. He had exercised prudence in not accepting the beckoning call of a new faith, so hostile to his personal inclinations, and to the needs of his surroundings. He had shown self-control in not yielding to the desires of a girl, who had subsequently demonstrated that she was unsuitable for him in his new position.

Heaven therefore was rewarding him. Here he stood—a prodigal who had done his repenting comfortably at home—the heir of two houses and fifteen thousand a year, a reasonable, prudent, sensible young man, and the son-in-law of a peer⁴.

When he gazed out into the future, he was filled with excitement and exhilaration. Had not his father told him that Life was only beginning ?

In the same way, Mrs. Weston must be studied against the background of her husband, unfaithful to grace. One is

⁴R.H. Benson, An Average Man, p. 372.

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left in doubt as to his salvation. He had given up his religious practices and turned to the usual ways and habits. There was no sign of repentance, only the news of his death. What is astonishing is that Robert Hugh Benson does not tell his readers clearly what effect this had on Mary, whether it affected her happiness in some degree, whether she had any idea of atonement for his sins. This is an omission which the reader cannot understand. Surely, Mary Weston must have felt at least a little responsible for his change of purpose and return to laxity, for she had refused his demand to become a monk.

Now, what of those who have, without giving their all, made efforts to become stronger, more valiant and endeavoured to overcome great hindrances to perfection? Is there no reward for the struggle Val Medd has undergone during the past weeks to conquer himself, to exercise his will, in spite of the clear imaginings which always veiled his intellect and weakened his will? Yes, there has been a reward, according to the priest who understood him. Even his own mother failed to understand. She could not conceive of a reward, except one that was conventional and traditional.

According to Benson, therefore, it is possible for everyone to train his will in the acceptance of sacrifice; he even advises in The Sentimentalists, by the results of Mr. Rolls's training of Christopher Dell, that the very keenly

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emotional characters can master their emotions. The reward is success in the formation of a stronger character, a manly personality emerging from an effeminate weakling swayed by every gust of changing feeling.

And, what were the comments and stories and thoughts of the bystanders and the important personages in the scene of the garden party? Mr. Stirling, the minister, thought that the rejected Papist was very bold, indeed, to come and offer congratulations! Father Maples was amazed at the audacity of this man! Mrs. Ffoulkes hinted that she knew the whole story of his blighted past and was willing to tell Father Benson more the next time. The Vicar came with the news that Mr. Dell had risen in influence and respectability with Mr. Rolls. Then, finally, Father Benson got the true version, that of Dick himself and ended by meeting Chris in a very pleasant manner. All this shows that the change in Chris Dell was not momentary and spasmodic; it was sincere, serene and calm, that of an unruffled, steady person.

Maggie's reward for her sacrifice was a great content in following the teachings of the Church, which does not desire her children to meddle in the affairs of the preternatural. She gives them enough to work out their salvation in peace of mind and soul. But, more than this, Maggie knew concretely that the will is strong to drive away evil with the power of prayer.

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Once again, only the parts dealing with the reward were picked out from each novel of contemporary life for discussion in this chapter. This was done to provide a sufficient number of instances which would show that the reward of sacrifice is based entirely on Christian principles. It is a supernatural reward ; it is one which is not understood by a materialistic world. In most cases, to worldly judgment, it appears a complete failure, such as Mr. Main's inability to keep a position, Frank's waste of his life, Val Medd's cowardice to the end, Chris Dell's sinful past and consequent humble station. The same may be said of happiness in the religious life. It apparently fits well those who are fools, as Algy, or temperamental, as Mary Weston. Benson shows that it is not necessary to wait for "pie in the sky", but that all these persons may find a profound, inward peace in this life. They are happy because they have corresponded completely in the working out of the plan which God had designed for them. Those who have sacrificed themselves for others, too, find inexplicable joy. Examples were cited in the lives of Maggie, Frank and Nevill Fanning. Those who have made willing efforts to combat some faulty natural inclination are crowned with peace of mind and interior satisfaction. In some instances, a few friends understand the greatness of a life of sacrifice and make the cross easier to bear, so Benson has introduced an Aunt Anna, a Father Hilary, or a Maggie Derronais, but, in

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general, the Christian reward remains an enigma to conventional society.

Therefore, in summary, the reward has been undoubtedly true interior peace of mind and soul and salvation to those who have made sacrifices, as well as content and abundant satisfaction to those who have made efforts to conquer themselves. But, the outward peace and content of the worldly has been shown in keen contrast. Benson leaves the reader to judge for himself where true happiness lies.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARIZING THE GOSPEL

What is the complete message about sacrifice which Robert Hugh Benson preaches to his contemporaries in his modern novels ? There has been a study of it in parts from the plot of each story. Now, in this chapter, it will be pieced together and its spiritual and moral lessons summarized.

There are two particular spiritual lessons which are quite clear in these books. His readers must 1) turn to value spiritual things. The contemporary world is so material. It does not understand at all why one should become a Carthusian, a religious, why one should be ready to leave his property, his social position, his work, to become a Catholic. Why should one choose the harder, the more exacting way in life ? Why should dogmas and doctrines interfere with one's own happiness, or that of the members of one's own household ? Why should one deliberately choose to become poor, an outcast of society, despised, when one can be heir to a large estate ? Why should one prefer discomfort, difficulty, and even pain, to the ease, comforts and pleasures of established convention and the traditions of a family ? Why should one suffer from loneliness, fear, or pain ? What is their purpose in life ? Is it not better to work out one's salvation in the church, the social

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sphere, the surroundings, in which one was born and educated ? Is it not more important to be rich than to choose to be poor? to follow convention rather than break away ? to please others than to hurt them by sacrificing them for higher interests ? The answer to all these and similar questions cannot be found anywhere else than in the spiritual interpretation of things, as they are in the teachings of the Church. His contemporaries must learn that 2) there is no failure. That is the message whose source lies in the doctrines of One Whose death on the Cross was the consummation of a life of failure, according to the world. Therefore, Benson, following in the footsteps of Christ, tries to convince his superficial audience that in a life for God, there is no failure. There is no failure in the life of a tramp, a wanderer whose purpose is to save a soul, whose reason for continuing this kind of life is a spiritual one. It is true, the purpose Frank had at first is not clear. It was not a spiritual one, rather, it was just a determination to get rid of the stereotyped kind of life which surrounded him on all sides, in his home, in his family circle, with his friends, with his masters. It was a fleeing from convention for a while, but his vision broadened and he saw what was demanded of him. There is no failure in the lives of those who try to become perfect to please God— they leave family, riches, all they possess. There is no failure in the lives of those who are persecuted, misunderstood, who suffer

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pain, sorrow, disappointments, who are poor, who have no important social standing, no large fortune, no estates, no servants. There is no failure in the lives of those who sincerely and honestly try to overcome their defects. God looks at the efforts they have made to conquer themselves.

There is no success, on the contrary, in a life of "an average man", who refuses to co-operate with grace, who takes the easier way, who does not wish to disturb conventional customs and traditions, who is always suitable, always doing the perfect, formal thing, according to worldly sensibleness. He is perfectly well-dressed, but his soul is naked in God's sight. He has many riches and great possessions, but his soul is poor and starving, lacking the ornament of virtue. To be suitable, sensible, like Jenny, like Lady Brasted, like Jim and Sarah, like Sarah's mother, is it to be successful in God's sight? The lack of love is deplorable. Is such a life a success, if, as in the case of Jack Weston, it leads to the loss of a soul? One is not told about the ending Percy made but there is a suspicion that he did not have much time to devote to religion, busy as he was amid all the duties and pre-occupations of a lord. It is reasonable to believe that his easy, quietist gospel, without the least sacrifice, could not lead him to the Kingdom of the Crucified God.

Benson was even more interested in imparting moral lessons for the practice of the people of his day. Of these,

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there are several quite important. He tells them that 1) they must be faithful to the inspirations of grace. It is by fidelity that one will be prepared to make bigger sacrifices, for instance, those demanded by a conversion from the Protestant to the Catholic faith, those in connection with the following of a religious call. God's plan of life is revealed to us, also, little by little, in tiny glimpses of light, the vision becoming brighter and clearer the while, until one sees the whole plan ahead of him. It is not, of course, a complete revelation of the future. The events which will come in its realization are unknown to us. What is asked of us is that we be faithful to the sacrifices of the present moment.

2) They must break away from convention. How Benson comes back again and again on the same subject in all his contemporary novels ! In each one, he shows his heroes surrounded by conventional people, those who are always sensible, always doing the right, pre-ordained, pre-established thing at the precise moment, at the right opportunity. Jenny, in None Other Gods, Theo and Harold and Miss Maple and Mr. Banister in The Conventionalists, the whole Medd family, particularly Austin in The Coward, Jim and Sarah in A Winnowing, the family of Hamiltons in The Sentimentalists, and the whole world of An Average Man, as well as in Loneliness, in The Necromancers, in Initiation.

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3) In order to break away from convention, they must develop and train their wills. A weak will cannot make sacrifices. It takes a strong will to accomplish difficult things, to be determined in one's efforts to reach an ideal, to face opposition, to do what is not done by the crowd. The will must be exercised in small acts until the habit of its control is established. In The Coward, this is clearly expressed in the words of Father Maple : " I hold that a man is what his will is ; or rather, that he will become so¹". He believes that the will can be trained. One who puts off doing things because he does not feel he can do them, will never acquire a strong will. One must face difficulties, look them straight in the face, armed with strength of will and spiritual aid.

4) They must control the imagination and the emotions. For the first, it is well explained in The Coward. How difficult it is to do arduous, daring, dangerous things if one lets his imagination run loose and picture the scene in all its details before hand ! The mind cannot then think clearly, the will becomes paralyzed. The soul cries out in desperation : "I can't !" There must be, as in The Sentimentalists, a control of the other emotions of anger, love, hatred. These must be directed to serve the will, not the will to follow their fluctuating, stormy demands. In the other novels, also, the same

¹R.H. Benson, The Coward, p. 42.

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lessons are constantly brought out. In The Necromancers, Laurie is blinded by his emotion of grief and loss of Amy, his longing to see her only blinds him again to the truths of his faith. It leads him to obsession, anything, if only he can get his desires fulfilled. It is not that his will is weak, but it is certainly misdirected.

5) They must learn the many lessons in connection with physical pain and sorrow. Benson himself knew and had a terror of pain. But, he taught his readers that : a) The soul is purified by pain. It is by the loss of Jenny, the rejection, the imprisonment, the incomprehension, the disappointments, that Frank Guiseley is rendered humble and resigned to God's Will. It is by the loss of Enid, the blindness, the headaches, the operation, that the soul of Nevill is initiated into the understanding of the mystery of suffering. Others, like Mr. Main and Laurie, after their conversion, have sorrows and difficulties of all kinds placed along their paths of life. It is not a bed of roses for them, by any means. They are prepared, in this way, for greater graces. b) The soul turns to God. If Marion had not lost her voice, her operatic career, Maggie Brent, her friend, she would, perhaps, have not come back to the love of God, to the practice of her religion and the surrender of a true sacrifice. If Nevill had not had his suffering through Enid, his illness, he would probably have remained a Catholic, but a pagan at heart. What happened to

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Mary Weston would not have occurred, if her husband had not been ill. These are only a few of the examples found in these novels. c) The soul can accept to suffer willingly. There is no one better than Sir Nevill Fanning, who bears his sufferings with resignation, although somewhat in a stoical manner, not wishing anyone to mention his pain, or his impending death to him. As his initiation proceeds, however, his acceptance becomes more and more supernatural. And Marion, after God has tried her, accepts to lead her life of loneliness. She sacrifices the consolations of companionship to be alone with God in complete surrender. Mr. Main, bearing his cross in a heroic manner, feeling himself a burden and a failure, yet humbly accepting what God sends him, never uttering one word of complaint, an example of abandonment to God's treatment and design. d) The soul may offer its sufferings for others. The message of atonement for the sins of others, vicarious suffering, is preached in Initiation, Sir Nevill suffers pain and death for the sins of his own father. Frank Guiseley offers his life and his inconveniences, discomforts, loss of material goods, loved ones, for the salvation of a soul who is a stranger to him and when that soul seems to be so unappreciative, so ungrateful, seemingly so unworthy of such a heroic act of charity in its behalf. Maggie offers herself to save Laurie Bacter from obsession, by accepting to fight against the spirit of evil which is holding him captive. There is a

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lack of clearness, as was said, on Benson's part, not showing whether Mary Weston offered her life as a religious for the salvation of her husband's soul.

Robert Hugh Benson's gospel of sacrifice may be briefly stated as follows. The people of his time must learn that spiritual affairs are of more value than temporal ones, and, in that light, they must see that, in a life lived according to the true notion of sacrifice, there is no failure. The reward will certainly be given, but it will be a supernatural one.

In their practical lives, they must be faithful to the glimpses of the vision revealing the plan of life by following the inspirations of grace. They must break away from conventional ways and customs, even though a struggle is implied. To have sufficient fortitude in order to surrender themselves to God, they must exercise their wills, which may become strengthened by training. A strong will is necessary for the conquering of wrong natural inclinations and overpowering emotions. The last great lesson of Benson's gospel of sacrifice is that pain is a blessing in disguise and, when willingly borne, even for the sake of others, it purifies the soul and draws it closer to God. And this ultimate deification of man is the purpose of all sacrifice.

CONCLUSIONS

The gospel of sacrifice preached by Robert Hugh Benson in the novels of contemporary life is one which, in its spiritual and moral phases, is very timely and important for our day. Human nature is the same in all ages and it would much rather be undisturbed and standardized in its everyday, conventional and traditional habits than break away from them. Just as Benson's contemporaries, our moderns follow the crowd and the fashion. They do not wish to be different when sacrifice is involved. Because our world, as a result of modern improvements, inventions and conveniences, is easy-going, follows its emotions and natural inclinations, loves comfort, ease and pleasure, it is in danger of becoming weak in will and character. Therefore, it needs a message of strength and humble submission to the Will of God.

There are many other lessons which would be profitable. They could be derived by summarizing the message of the historical novels, or even the novels of the future. In the novels of contemporary life themselves, groupings may be made to study Benson's fight against conventionalism and emotionalism. All his novels may be viewed in the light of his apostolate of freedom of the human will, of his purpose in the manner of portraying certain classes of characters, and his penetration into various fields, such as science, spiritualism and history, to bring his message to the public.

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ABSTRACT OF

The Gospel of Sacrifice
from the Novels of Contemporary Life by Robert Hugh Benson.

As a result of preliminary research, it was felt that the whole group of Robert Hugh Benson's novels of contemporary life contained a message which had not yet been summarized and brought to the attention of readers whose interest had been mainly in the historical novels and the novels of the future. In this thesis, the gospel of sacrifice in each one of the nine books written for the people of his time is presented in a way to show the development of the notion of sacrifice from its faint, initial beckonings until its consummation in union with God.

How Benson himself passed through the sacrificial process is shown in the first chapter. The next four chapters are devoted to the various steps by which sacrifice is totally completed. First of all, there is the vision which is outlined in each story by the author. In the second chapter, the writer of the thesis has taken out only the parts of the plot of each novel which refer to the gradual clearing of the notion of sacrifice until the person sees a definite plan proposed to him. After a plan of life, which implies sacrifice, is known, there is usually a struggle against its acceptance. It is followed by a choice and a surrender with all its adjustments. The reward which finally comes is based on

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Christian principles, not on the standards of worldly judgment. The parts relating to the struggle, the surrender and the reward are picked out in the three succeeding chapters only with the specific purpose of showing the growth of the sacrificial notion in the life of one or two of the principal characters whom Benson chooses for his teaching procedure. The last chapter summarizes the spiritual and moral lessons of these novels which reflect his combat, especially against conventionalism and emotionalism.

The gospel of sacrifice is one which the writer believes is very practical for our own day and suggests other avenues of interesting research opened up by this topic. Some of these are Benson's apostolate of freedom of the will, of his purpose in various characterizations and his ventures into fields of scientific, spiritualistic and historical interest.