

TWO ESSAYS ON TWO GIFTS

I

CARROT PATCH OR GOLD MINE?

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PRECIOUS things are of little positive value if their worth be not realized. A fisher of oysters might bear in his net a fortune and yet not realize it. A broker might drop onto the market a few shares of stock which would make him a retired gentleman if he but realized their worth. So in the workaday world wealth and power pass men by and touch them on the shoulder, yet they do not know it. In the realm of the spirit too this is true. We who have the Faith live on ground which conceals a gold mine. Poor and patched, spiritual beggars, we plod along because the rich deposits which lie beneath the back yard of our lives remain hidden from us.

Faith is a wonderful thing, but to live by Faith is yet more full of wonder. When the waters of Baptism,—which we, perhaps, endeavored to augment with a flow of tears—were poured on us, the virtue of Faith sprung up in our souls, but not alone did it come. Every plant is endowed by nature with an apparatus by which to nourish itself and by which it is protected. Faith, too, blossoms and grows vigorous, is guarded against the blighting elements of life, by the gifts of understanding and knowledge.¹ To be conscious or unconscious of these gifts will be to use them well or let them lie in us but half used. Faith will be vigorous or dormant to the degree in which its attendant gifts are active.

It is not an unusual thing in life to meet simple people who somehow seem to exude a spirit of peace. Things do not bother them a great deal. Their eyes are restful; they look beyond you to something else. Mysteries of God seem less mysteries to them, and they speak of the truths of Faith with a certain confidence, as if they were familiar friends. This is the gift of understanding. People who have exercised it on purpose do much more than say "I believe." In a sense they do much more

¹ *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 9, a. 1.

than believe. They have penetrated to some degree the cloud in which the truths of God are wrapped, and they know more and more of them as life advances. With the ears of the soul they listen attentively to every note that sounds in the divine harmony. As through the chords of a symphony the mind of a music lover darts to build of the falling notes the vision of the artist, so through the sentences of the creed the soul slips to see behind the words the truth of God.²

Thus it is that the gift of understanding nourishes and develops Faith by breaking through the rind of divine truths and feeding on the rich fruit within. But always we have to live in the world of created things where passing beauties are apt to wrap an arm in ours and make us tarry with them, forgetting the greater beauty which is ahead. The things God has made tend to make us forget God for themselves. This is the problem of temptation which can fix on Faith and sap its vitality, eventually perhaps to kill it. Understanding nourishes Faith; the gift of knowledge protects it against the stings of worldliness.

Man's mind, weakened by the violence of original sin, is easily deceived and all too readily is blindfolded into running after the false. By the gift of knowledge ignorance is dissipated, things appear in their true light, truth is embraced. To judge all created things in their proper perspective, to measure everything created according to its correct value,—this is the function of knowledge. By it we see what we should believe, and through it are we impelled to follow those things which pertain to Faith.³

We shall notice that the people who best practice their Faith are the ones who gauge the happenings of life according to their essential value. Failures and difficulties are more calmly accepted by them, for they see their relation to the purpose of life. Money, position, fame, are not despised, for these too are the gift of God; but the light of knowledge shows them to be only a way to something higher. Indeed, the soul enlightened by this gift sees splendor and plainness, possession and poverty, sickness and health, as related in all things to the Eternal Father, since from Him they come and to Him they lead. Nothing is mean, nothing is low,—except sin. All things are good. The best are the things of God.⁴

² *Ibid.*, q. 8, *passim*.

³ *Ibid.*, q. 9, *passim*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, art. 4.

Where one of these gifts abounds the other is sure to flourish. Those who are steeped in the understanding of the mysteries of Faith, whose lives find their impetus in the Trinity, in the Son of God, in the Eucharist, these are the ones who can smile through the tears of sorrow, "God's will be done." One who has saturated himself with supernatural doctrine, can best accept the reverses of life; for he measures the temporal in the scales of eternity.

The value of these gifts which are our possession is incalculable. Yet they are ours to use or not to use. We can do with them what we will. But to let them lie slumbering in our souls while we go on about the ordinary business of living is to plant with carrot seeds ground which holds a deposit of gold. Faith is a beginning of the beatitude which is ours by heritage, but even here we can come into our patrimony through the gifts which disclose to us the treasures of God. It is foolishness to be satisfied with the tatters of an inoperative Faith when we have at hand the means to spiritual splendor.

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