



H. G. WELLS

Fantastica

GOD

THE INVISIBLE KING

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PREFACE

This book sets out as forcibly and exactly as possible the religious belief of the writer. That belief is not orthodox Christianity; it is not, indeed, Christianity at all; its core nevertheless is a profound belief in a personal and intimate God. There is nothing in its statements that need shock or offend anyone who is prepared for the expression of a faith different from and perhaps in several particulars opposed to his own. The writer will be found to be sympathetic with all sincere religious feeling. Nevertheless it is well to prepare the prospective reader for statements that may jar harshly against deeply rooted mental habits. It is well to warn him at the outset that the departure from accepted beliefs is here no vague scepticism, but a quite sharply defined objection to dogmas very widely revered. Let the writer state the most probable occasion of trouble forthwith. An issue upon which this book will be found particularly uncompromising is the dogma of the Trinity. The writer is of opinion that the Council of Nicaea, which forcibly crystallised the controversies of two centuries and formulated the creed upon which all the existing Christian churches are based, was one of the most disastrous and one of the least venerable of all religious gatherings, and he holds that the Alexandrine speculations which were then conclusively imposed upon Christianity merit only disrespectful attention at the present time. There you have a chief possibility of offence. He is quite unable to pretend any awe for what he considers the spiritual monstrosities established by that undignified gathering. He makes no attempt to be obscure or propitiatory in this connection. He criticises the creeds explicitly and frankly, because he believes it is particularly necessary to clear them out of the way of those who are seeking religious consolation at this present time of exceptional religious need. He does little to conceal his indignation at the role played by these dogmas in obscuring,

pervverting, and preventing the religious life of mankind. After this warning such readers from among the various Christian churches and sects as are accessible to storms of theological fear or passion to whom the Trinity is an ineffable mystery and the name of God almost unspeakably awful, read on at their own risk. This is a religious book written by a believer, but so far as their beliefs and religion go it may seem to them more sceptical and more antagonistic than blank atheism. That the writer cannot tell. He is not simply denying their God. He is declaring that there is a living God, different altogether from that Triune God and nearer to the heart of man. The spirit of this book is like that of a missionary who would only too gladly overthrow and smash some Polynesian divinity of shark's teeth and painted wood and mother-of-pearl. To the writer such elaborations as "begotten of the Father before all worlds" are no better than intellectual shark's teeth and oyster shells. His purpose, like the purpose of that missionary, is not primarily to shock and insult; but he is zealous to liberate, and he is impatient with a reverence that stands between man and God. He gives this fair warning and proceeds with his matter.

His matter is modern religion as he sees it. It is only incidentally and because it is unavoidable that he attacks doctrinal Christianity.

In a previous book, "First and Last Things" (Constable and Co.), he has stated his convictions upon certain general ideas of life and thought as clearly as he could. All of philosophy, all of metaphysics that is, seems to him to be a discussion of the relations of class and individual. The antagonism of the Nominalist and the Realist, the opposition of the One and the Many, the contrast of the Ideal and the Actual, all these oppositions express a certain structural and essential duality in the activity of the human mind. From an imperfect recognition of that duality ensue great masses of misconception. That was the substance of "First and Last Things." In this present book there is no further attack on philosophical or metaphysical questions. Here we work at a less fundamental level and deal with religious feeling and religious ideas. But just as the writer was inclined to attribute a whole world of disputation and inexactitudes to confused thinking about the exact value of classes and terms, so here he is disposed to think that interminable controversies and conflicts

arise out of a confusion of intention due to a double meaning of the word "God"; that the word "God" conveys not one idea or set of ideas, but several essentially different ideas, incompatible one with another, and falling mainly into one or other of two divergent groups; and that people slip carelessly from one to the other of these groups of ideas and so get into ultimately inextricable confusions.

The writer believes that the centuries of fluid religious thought that preceded the violent ultimate crystallisation of Nicaea, was essentially a struggle—obscured, of course, by many complexities—to reconcile and get into a relationship these two separate main series of God-ideas.

Putting the leading idea of this book very roughly, these two antagonistic typical conceptions of God may be best contrasted by speaking of one of them as God-as-Nature or the Creator, and of the other as God-as-Christ or the Redeemer. One is the great Outward God; the other is the Inmost God. The first idea was perhaps developed most highly and completely in the God of Spinoza. It is a conception of God tending to pantheism, to an idea of a comprehensive God as ruling with justice rather than affection, to a conception of aloofness and awestrking worshipfulness. The second idea, which is opposed to this idea of an absolute God, is the God of the human heart. The writer would suggest that the great outline of the theological struggles of that phase of civilisation and world unity which produced Christianity, was a persistent but unsuccessful attempt to get these two different ideas of God into one focus. It was an attempt to make the God of Nature accessible and the God of the Heart invincible, to bring the former into a conception of love and to vest the latter with the beauty of stars and flowers and the dignity of inexorable justice. There could be no finer metaphor for such a correlation than Fatherhood and Sonship. But the trouble is that it seems impossible to most people to continue to regard the relations of the Father to the Son as being simply a mystical metaphor. Presently some materialistic bias swings them in a moment of intellectual carelessness back to the idea of sexual filiation.

And it may further be suggested that the extreme aloofness and inhumanity, which is logically necessary in the idea of a Creator God, of an Infinite God, was the reason, so to speak, for

the invention of a Holy Spirit, as something proceeding from him, as something bridging the great gulf, a Comforter, a mediator descending into the sphere of the human understanding. That, and the suggestive influence of the Egyptian Trinity that was then being worshipped at the Serapeum, and which had saturated the thought of Alexandria with the conception of a trinity in unity, are probably the realities that account for the Third Person of the Christian Trinity. At any rate the present writer believes that the discussions that shaped the Christian theology we know were dominated by such natural and fundamental thoughts. These discussions were, of course, complicated from the outset; and particularly were they complicated by the identification of the man Jesus with the theological Christ, by materialistic expectations of his second coming, by materialistic inventions about his "miraculous" begetting, and by the morbid speculations about virginity and the like that arose out of such grossness. They were still further complicated by the idea of the textual inspiration of the scriptures, which presently swamped thought in textual interpretation. That swamping came very early in the development of Christianity. The writer of St. John's gospel appears still to be thinking with a considerable freedom, but Origen is already hopelessly in the net of the texts. The writer of St. John's gospel was a free man, but Origen was a superstitious man. He was emasculated mentally as well as bodily through his bibliolatry. He quotes; his predecessor thinks.

But the writer throws out these guesses at the probable intentions of early Christian thought in passing. His business here is the definition of a position. The writer's position here in this book is, firstly, complete Agnosticism in the matter of God the Creator, and secondly, entire faith in the matter of God the Redeemer. That, so to speak, is the key of his book. He cannot bring the two ideas under the same term God. He uses the word God therefore for the God in our hearts only, and he uses the term the Veiled Being for the ultimate mysteries of the universe, and he declares that we do not know and perhaps cannot know in any comprehensible terms the relation of the Veiled Being to that living reality in our lives who is, in his terminology, the true God. Speaking from the point of view of practical religion, he is restricting and defining the word God, as meaning only the personal God of mankind, he is restricting it so as to exclude all

cosmogony and ideas of providence from our religious thought and leave nothing but the essentials of the religious life.

Many people, whom one would class as rather liberal Christians of an Arian or Arminian complexion, may find the larger part of this book acceptable to them if they will read "the Christ God" where the writer has written "God." They will then differ from him upon little more than the question whether there is an essential identity in aim and quality between the Christ God and the Veiled Being, who answer to their Creator God. This the orthodox post Nicaean Christians assert, and many pre-Nicaeans and many heretics (as the Cathars) contradicted with its exact contrary. The Cathars, Paulicians, Albigenses and so on held, with the Manichaeans, that the God of Nature, God the Father, was evil. The Christ God was his antagonist. This was the idea of the poet Shelley. And passing beyond Christian theology altogether a clue can still be found to many problems in comparative theology in this distinction between the Being of Nature (cf. Kant's "starry vault above") and the God of the heart (Kant's "moral law within"). The idea of an antagonism seems to have been cardinal in the thought of the Essenes and the Orphic cult and in the Persian dualism. So, too, Buddhism seems to be "antagonistic." On the other hand, the Moslem teaching and modern Judaism seem absolutely to combine and identify the two; God the creator is altogether and without distinction also God the King of Mankind. Christianity stands somewhere between such complete identification and complete antagonism. It admits a difference in attitude between Father and Son in its distinction between the Old Dispensation (of the Old Testament) and the New. Every possible change is rung in the great religions of the world between identification, complete separation, equality, and disproportion of these Beings; but it will be found that these two ideas are, so to speak, the basal elements of all theology in the world. The writer is chary of assertion or denial in these matters. He believes that they are speculations not at all necessary to salvation. He believes that men may differ profoundly in their opinions upon these points and still be in perfect agreement upon the essentials of religion. The reality of religion he believes deals wholly and exclusively with the God of the Heart. He declares as his own opinion, and as the opinion which seems most expressive of modern thought, that there