

PARSIFAL.

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AMID the wealth of Parsifal literature there are two factors which have thus far not received the attention they deserve. In one sense these two factors are separate and separable—in another they are sequences of the same mental process on the part of the giant unit called the “Maximus Homo” or the Race-Man. And it is this mental process itself in its two aspects to which attention is here called.

We all understand that there is a certain law or rather a steadfastness of relationship in physics and in physical things called “the complementary.” Certain colors being given in nature and in art, certain other colors called complementary colors are immediately implied. Certain tones in the musical scale being given there is instantly created a tonal or harmonic relationship. Certain fractions being given in mathematics their “reciprocals” are implied. Certain angles being given in geometry there arise certain others complementary and supplemental. This series of fixed relationships transferred to the realm of physical forces, becomes yet more “rigidly relational,” if such an apparent contradiction of terms may be used. A positive force involves its negative; a direct force, a lateral, absence of resilience in muscle means compensatory hypertrophe of that muscle, and so on to the end of the chapter—and rather an extensive chapter it is.

This being true in the realm of matter and nature, there is no reason for conceiving of it as being anything but true in the domain of mental and spiritual things. By the side of every impulse there runs a restraint to give it direction; and behind each restraint lies an impulse or there could be no restraint. In the same way, beside every deprivation runs a compensation. And this series of activities and passivities runs a gamut, as extensive as that indicated along physical lines.

Now look into the story of Parsifal, or Perceval, and you have the story of the compensatory Christ. The reason for it is readily

intelligible. The Christian Church has passed through several easily recognizable stages. There was a time when the personal factor of the Christ was a very present factor, either a tangible, actual thing, as it must have been to the Apostolic Church, or as a recent and sharp impression upon the plastic substance of Race-Memory, such as was the case in the early Christian and Ante-Nicene Church. And gradually, as decade upon decade and age upon age throbbed backward into the unfathomable depths of the past, this impress grew more and more feeble—the vista, at the end of which stood the Christ lengthened historically, geographically. The Turk possessed the Holy Land and the Christian looked across vast reaches of space toward the Sea of Galilee, and across interminable ages of time toward the Star of Bethlehem. Social, civic, religious conditions all had changed. Feudalism and serfdom upreared barriers between man and man; the Church and State dug deep trenches between men and men; theology relegated the faint reality of the Christ to the unmeasured depths of mental space, to the great white Throne which stood apart from the turmoil, the discontent, the imperfection of life. The World, the Flesh and the Devil grew more and more real and present, while the Christ grew equivalently less and less near, distinct and present, by the very law of which we are here thinking. For “Much devil, little God” is but a simple statement of fact, of the fundamental fact of the law of compensation which sways the Cosmos. Add to this, that the story of Christ or the Bible was removed from the people, hidden away from the people both by their own illiteracy and by the literary ability of the clergy, which naturally took the book out of palace and hovel and made it a cherished thing in monastery and chapel. Out of the hand of king and serf, the Wonderbook which spoke of the real Christ drifted naturally and normally into the hand of cleric and monk.

Thus were the people deprived of the real Christ. What was the result? They built for themselves a compensatory Christ.

Trace this peculiar element a little farther into any one of the other departments of human activity. What, for instance, is the meaning of dialect? Dialect is the method of speech of the man who is deprived of the correcter forms of language. However and for whatever reason deprived he will build himself a language, which will be dialect. He will construct for himself a language cruder and less beautiful than that which his more favored, more cultured and more learned brother was able to rear into an edifice of etymology, of grammar, and of syntax,—a hardy, sturdy, coarse, serviceable thing, called dialect, because the more elaborate thing conceived of

culture and born of refinement was too fragile a ware for his clumsy fingers. The lips of the man who handles the pen frame language; the lips of the man who swings the pick, frame dialect. Not only is this true of High German and Low German; the French of Paris and the French of Gascogne and the Bretagne; of the Spanish of Madrid and the Castilian (what an odd inversion) of the sailor of the Armada; of the Irish of the Ancient Gael and its Norman-esque mockery, the Basque dialect. But it is true, as Diez and Canu show, of the "lingua Romana," the Latin "Romany"—the Latin of the common folk who quarried and carried the stone of the Capitol which differed from the Latin of the man who sat and ruled in the finished Capitol, as differs "Pennsylvania Dutch" from the language of a cultured denizen of Hanover. Side by side with the reality of language attained by culture runs the compensatory language dialect, which those must build for themselves who are deprived of the opportunities of learning.

Exactly so arose within the obscured and chaotic depths of the Race-Mind, in which the image of the real Christ grew daily and yearly, more remote and dim, another, a compensatory image, a Parsifal—the Holy Grail—the whole cycle of the Arthurian legends. It was the need of a heroic figure adopted to the semi-barbarism of mediæval days when hair-splitting theologians had deprived the masses of the real figure which pervades the New Testament with wondrous sweetness and persistency, and dangled before their unseeing eyes a theological question mark, a Son born from Eternity, whose relation to the Father of Eternity was either homoousian or homoiousian when the devotee was a Supralapsarian, a transubstantianist, a solifidian. We know that nothing so thoroughly crows the illiterate masses as these formidable marshallings of long words. Hence while the theologian of Byzanz hurled Greek anathemata at the devoted head of the Latins from behind battlements of grammar and exegesis-syllogisms, the common people strayed afield and built themacrudegospel out of neglected material and thus did Herzeleide give birth to Parsifal. Deep was their sorrow because of the deprivation and out of their own heart's sorrows (Herzeleide is German for "heart's sorrow") was the heroic figure born, which was to attain Mont Salvat—the Mount of Salvation—to go in quest of the cup.

Why the cup? Because the church gave the masses the bread, but deprived them of the cup. The people ate the bread, and the priest drank the wine. It was the cup, the cratella, the crael, the grail, of which they had been deprived, and by the weird law of compensation it was the cup they sought. And Parsifal seeking the

sacred cup on the Mount of Salvation became the compensatory Christ for a people from whom the real Christ had been removed by theological profundity and overzeal. The real Christ had become unlovable, so the people created a shadowy hero, a colossal figure, crude, fierce, hard, yet tender as were the people and the minds who conceived him. A simple man a "pure fool." Why? Why did the people build for themselves a stupid hero? For the same reason for which they constructed for themselves a stupid devil. For the devil of the monk was fierce; the devil of the masses a fool—feared by both but fierce for one, a fool for the other. Again, why? Because there is innate modesty in the mass mind, which recognizes keenly its own unwisdom, and therefore realizes that every figure it creates must be "a fool." But within that lay also the dim, almost subconscious recognition of that same mind of its own purity of motive, hence a "pure fool" is the outcome. And below the depth of these two confused consciousnesses lie the dormant abysses of race-subconsciousness; as inerrant and self assertive as individual subconsciousness; a wisdom too self-assertive to be gainsaid or concealed, hence a "pure fool born to wisdom."

And now to glance at the second feature of the process, the collecting of the symbolic data. Whether these be of Celtic or of purely Anglo-Saxon or of Germanic or of Norman origin, I would not venture to say; in fact, I should scarcely venture to deny any one of these possible sources the privilege of contribution. If Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Chrestien de Troyes, and Robert de Borran, and Sir Thomas Malory furnish the crude material for Tennyson and Wagner to work upon, why limit the symposium to these men? Why not admit an equally probable and equally interesting symposium of nations and of national origin? But aside from this comparatively secondary question of literary values, take the symbolic values themselves. As the uncultured man in the habitations of culture sits on the edge of the chair, fears to touch the fragile pottery and statuary, hesitates to use the glittering glass and burnished silver, so the unlettered man fears to boldly reach into the Gospel picture and take the central figure thence. That central figure, the real Christ, in his estimation the property of the Church, of the clergy, of monk and priest, of chancel and altar. Him he can not, dare not touch. Yet such a figure he must have. His heart is Christian at the core,—a figure in touch with the Christ he must have. And what he has been taught of the Christ is this: "We preach you Jesus and Him crucified." From every pulpit under which he sat devoutly was the crucified one preached to him; at

every solemn festival, when with bowed head and trembling heart he listened and looked, the stations of the cross were measured out before him; above every cathedral doorway and in every rockhewn niche, where his own piety had reached, hung the figure of the Crucified One. It was the Crucified Christ, and the figure he craved must be one near that Crucified Christ, hence "Joseph of Arimathea." And again, he needed a "side pierced by the spear," he fears to locate it too near the compensatory sacred figure of Parsifal, and lo, it is the side of Amfortas which is wounded by the spear. Dimly he realizes that just before the end, just at the dusk edge of the picture of the crucifixion stands the dual picture of the cup, the cup of the Holy Supper, and the cup for the passing of which Jesus prays in Gethsemane. And the shadows of a sacred cup or vessel or grail flits into the picture. And against the same faint background of natural theology looms the idea that this cup-struggle, the "quest of the Grail," the "struggle for the Grail," is a fulfilment of something ordained of old. That it involves a fall from heaven and a return to heaven, and lo, the stone of which the Grail is chiseled "fell from heaven in the dim days of the first fall of the angels." And with the idea of the struggle for the cup he must needs combine the idea of food, for in the feebly-illuminated recesses of his soul the cup of the Holy Supper hovers and the element of food spontaneously introduces itself.

Further detail seems unnecessary. Back of each of the wonderful typical figures of the Parsifal legend shines reality; back of the Temple of the Round Table glows the dim vista of the Temple of Solomon; back of Klingsor a suspicion of Judas Iscariot, back of Kundry the fatal dualism of man's inner and outer self, his love of God, the woman who is sweet and pure, and his love of self, the woman who is impure. Back of the Garden of Klingsor, two other gardens, the Garden of Eden where man was lost, and the Garden of Gethsemane where he was saved. So back of each of these candidly compensatory shadows lies the reality, the substance of the Wonderbook, readily seen, readily understood and very lovable withal.

And towering into bold relief in the compensatory Christ-Parsifal, we behold and feel the intense desires of the great mass of the people for a deified man, for a wonderful humanity which shall in some unfathomed and unfathomable way stand very close to Deity. And through the story of Parsifal weaves and throbs the deep and reverent love of God's untutored children for the God-Man, the Deus-Homo, Jehovah-Jesus.