

“WEIGH THE THOUGHT THAT IN MAN’S
HEART DOTHT FLOW . . .”

—*Fairie Queen*

The most serious evil which can menace anyone in life is that of having the natural swamp the supernatural. This is not merely a danger; it is almost unescapable. With the dawn of reason itself, down comes the visible, the sensible—that is the natural—on our soul like a great deluge. It proves too much for most of the children of Adam.

But suppose we happily survive the fulness of that peril, what then? Having risen above the destroying tide of irreligious or non-religious thought, and being set on a course which aims for the Heavenly Ararat, does the soul then steer undeviatingly on?

Unfortunately, no! The spiritual voyage—like that of true love—runs neither straight nor smooth. Happily, we have been preserved from catastrophe. We have made the supernatural our guiding star. We are in a fair way of speed. Therefore all should be well. But, whatever queer freak inhabits these poor bodies of ours, we do not seem to be able to do anything exactly right. Rebounding from one exaggeration, we race into the contrary one. Having averted our eyes from Scylla, we find ourselves in the deadly embrace of Charybdis. Like the pendulum, we swing from one extreme to the other, precisely as if the whole idea was to keep away from the centre point, the golden mean. But between ourselves and that pendulum there is this dif-

ference: thereby the pendulum accomplishes its purpose; thereby we tend to frustrate ours. That imp of extremism makes every circumstance of our lives its plaything, so that our progress is no straight line, but an eccentric zigzag. What is the opposite extreme to which we can swing when we have freed our souls from the grip of the purely natural and set up supernatural objectives?

Natural and Supernatural

It is to neglect the natural. We proceed to act as if the only thing that matters is to have the Faith, to pray, to perform religious duties, to avoid sin. So far so good; for these are basic. But that foundation laid, then any sort of superstructure will satisfy. We need not give the thought, we do not bestow the pains, that the children of the world would give to their employments. We behave as if religion was not only an excuse but a justification for all such defects. As we make life's journey, we are disposed to act as if the natural and the supernatural were two roads running side by side, say one a railway and the other an ordinary highway. If we are going by one, we mentally separate ourselves from the other road. Occasionally we may glance in boredom or in curiosity at it, but it has nothing to do with us.

Oh! but that is a lamentably wrong view to take of the soul's journey through life. The natural and the supernatural are not alternative routes where necessarily we have to depart from one when taking the other. On the contrary, they are two tracks, complementary to each other and essential to each other. A more exact image—in fact the true one—is the case of the body and the soul. These two are, so to speak, fused; each only acts by the other. Eliminate the one or the other, and . . . !

So with nature and grace. We must work supernaturally, but we have to work through nature, that is through our faculties, and thence through the people and circumstances around us. As you know rather to your cost, the Legion system has seized on that principle of the inter-dependence of nature and grace and based on it its insistence on perfection of method. It gives it somewhat of the wearisome treatment that the dog gives the bone. On every occasion you find it before you, until finally it begins to dawn on the most careless and gay recruit that there is something in it—which is just the idea that all the worrying and stressing had in view.

Running through the pages of the *Handbook* is the theme—taken from the Saints—that in all our Legionary endeavours we are to depend on the supernatural as though there were no such thing as the natural; and then we are to rely on the natural—that is on our own efforts—as if there were no supernatural. Our scheme of life must take in both at the same time—not separately like the person we picture above who may travel to-day by rail and to-morrow by the parallel highway. No natural act has any value except it be livened by the supernatural; and no supernatural act can be performed by us other than through natural means. Therefore both must be taken in, and the quality of each must be screwed up to maximum pitch.

I really think that Legionaries have well grasped that principle of inter-action. Generally, they try to clothe the supernatural spirit in a body of good methods and hard work, and I believe that somehow you have not struck too uneven a balance. Certainly you devote plenty of time at all your meetings, Congresses and Reunions to the perfecting of your instruments and methods of action. Indeed I imagine

that a voluntary organisation could not attempt much more in that direction than you are doing.

But besides our methods and techniques, there is another instrument of our action—one which we overlook. Yet it is the chief instrument, the one on which all the others depend. But because it is so intimate to us, part of our interior processes, we do not put it in the category of instrument at all. As a consequence we do not give it the attention which we lavish on the external instruments though it is the operating agency of them all. I refer to the *Mind*

The Place of the Mind

We take the mind for granted because it is part of ourselves. But were we to make the distinction in our intellectual processes, and view the mind as being but the instrument of still higher powers, there would still exist the practical difficulty: what are we to do about it? Even those who study the mind know little enough about it, and to the rest of us it is terra incognita—unknown, uncharted territory. We understand what happens directly as the result of the operations of our senses. But beyond that what idea have we as to what goes on inside the cranium? About the same as the average person knows of what takes place inside a wireless set! But if the mind *is* an instrument and therefore controllable, would it not be a gain, justly describable as immense, if we could form for ourselves some simple but expressive picture of its working? For understanding of the latter necessarily means potential control. It is something gained to learn how to alter the speed of an ordinary machine. Obviously, the slightest degree of additional insight into the functioning of the mind would place us in a better position for influencing the actions which follow on

the mental operations. Most human acts are unruly. The conduct even of the nobly-inclined falls distinctly short of their intentions. And take ourselves—the Legion. What tremendous good for souls there would be if we could only make ourselves more responsive cogs in our bold apostolic programme so that it be enabled to operate “according to plan”!

But here let me pause to reassure you as to my intentions. I am not attempting a disquisition in psychology; I am not capable of it. If that reason did not include all other reasons, a second one would be that the simpler I can be, the more effective I am likely to be. Main issues can be obscured by over-elaboration.

Neither is my aim to naturalise religion, but rather—in the approved Legion style—to try to supernaturalise the natural. I am going to suggest a few simple ideas for influencing the mind—of course with special regard to your own works and problems. Necessarily, such influence will be limited, verily a case of the remote control that the scientific world talks so much of. For, as I have already said, the mental processes are both obscure and complex. An inscrutable ferment takes place in the mind in connection with the simplest thought.

Now, if we could advance but a single step towards the regulation of that ferment, then indeed that single step would be like one taken in those seven-league boots of which we used to read in childhood days.

Devising a Mental Compass

For how often are our decisions wrong—or else feeble because they have so much admixture in them. Even when they are finally right, by what tortuous and torturing paths have they been reached—perils on the way and waste of

time and energy all along! Oh! if we could only devise a sort of mental compass which would give us right direction amid those mental wastes and darknesses, false lights and brainstorm!

A first step to such a device is to emphasise the mechanical character of what I am forced to call, for simplicity's sake, the mind. For the mind does possess many of the qualities of a machine. And among machines, what sort of machine may it be likened to? A weighing machine, I suggest; better still, a weighing scales, for the imagery I am going to propose to you is that of two opposing scales with a pointer which turns to the side that is the heavier.

Apply that image to the mind. According to the things that are piled into those competing scales by the senses, and subjected then to the processes of reasoning, prejudice or passion, will the indicator register a result. For our purposes that indicator means action, because in the normal course action will follow from the decisions of the brain. According to the swing of that pointing needle do we act—either one way or the reverse way—or perhaps not at all if the needle points inconclusively to neutral, showing that the scales are evenly balanced.

Weighing Motives

The bigger weights that go into the scales are our motives—good and bad. You know how in the detective stories they always probe for the motive when somebody is found done to death! Motives may be defined as the main principles of action. But they are far from being fixed ones. Still less predictable are the smaller weights, that is the less-thought-out motives, the emotions and fluid ideas of all kinds. These are, at the very best, only half-controlled. Like the wind itself, they can swing about with such rapidity and

impartiality as sometimes to give the impression of blowing from all directions at once. Based on all those shifting and uncertain factors, the mental processes are infinitely complicated. It is beyond the power of mortal man to sound their depths. But that impossibility does not prevent people from trying. The number of books which have been written to that end—if not as the sands of the sea—are at least many. But what have they really taught? Men are still struggling with the problem of thought. Yet after centuries of thinking how to think, is it not obvious that they were never doing it less scientifically; and that their judgments were never less reliable? They have cast aside the old Christian motives and standards of thought which once the whole civilised world accepted, and which were really scientific inasmuch as they were consistent and implied law, reasoning, orderly building. For this fine code there has been substituted a mental jungle-law, a nightmare conglomeration of regional, racial and personal whims which *cannot* be right, and which *must* lead the opposite way to civilisation. But this is only futile digression. Let us get back to our weighing machine.

One scale goes down as the net result of the weighing of the rival sets of thoughts, and a decision issues. But has the right side prevailed? Full well we know that more often than not it is (from the ideal or higher point of view) the wrong side. Furthermore, if the balance is even, does it prove that one side is essentially as good as the other? No, it only signifies that items have been placed in the opposing scales which appeal equally to the mind, but which may be very far from having equal value. For instance, if on ordinary scales are opposed lumps of gold and of iron of equal weight, the scales will assure us that they are identical. If we leave the mind to itself it will err in much the same stupid fashion.

But you object: it is going too far to compare the crude movements of a balanced beam to the intellectual operat-

ions. Yet I do not recant. Indeed I go further. It is safer to accept that iron *v.* gold decision of the scales than to accept the uncensored judgments of the mind. For the emotional and sensual things weigh out of all proper proportion in the mental scales. They overwhelm the intellectual and spiritual considerations, so that according to the scale in which they rest, they tend to settle the issue. Often they dictate it beyond question of yea or nay, and commonly in favour of the lower things. Even if they are on the right, or ideal side, that constitutes only a happy accident.

But our destiny cannot be left the plaything of accident—not even of happy ones. Therefore let us see if we can bring some law and order into the mental jungle.

Law in the Mental Jungle

I start with a few main points: *First*: The regulation of the mind can only be exercised indirectly. You cannot manage the mind just as you would turn the handle of a mangle, nor as you would guide a horse by his bridle. Control over the mind is far less direct, for it has a peculiar independence of its own. It is not the same thing as *you*. Procedure has to be by way of influencing it and not by driving it. That influence must take the shape of a sort of mobilising or planned handling of the motives. *Second*: That influence must be exerted inside the process of forming a judgment—and not subsequent to it in the mode of a higher court of appeal. For when the circumstances of a case have been weighed in the mind and a decision has been arrived at, it is often hard to intervene effectively. At that stage the mind is much in the category of the runaway horse or the avalanche. Therefore that stage must be anticipated.

Now, some cautions of what I may call a negative character. The emotional considerations must be controlled

or neutralised to some extent. I do not say "disregarded." That would be the old game of rushing from one extreme to the opposite one. One's emotions often play a useful or necessary part. Therefore the aim must be to allow them to exert a proper influence, and no more.

Another "negative" consideration is the fact that whatever is concentrated on is magnified. The more one surveys it, the more impressive it becomes. Therefore, do not over-dwell on the unpleasantness or the difficulty of a situation. If you do, that thought will dominate the scales, so that a worthy assessment is out of the question.

Think Positively

For us Legionaries, who are usually trying to handle difficult works, and nearly always unpleasant ones, it is a primary principle to think positively. We must be more concerned about the object to be attained than the obstacles in the way; and about the Cause to be served than the forces—exterior and interior—mustered against us. Big among these latter will be our old opponent—fear. He is one of the elementals of life. He lurks in every situation. Sometimes he shows himself undisguised, where we are crudely and violently afraid. From that it shades off into more refined and less identifiable forms. Among these take particular note of human respect, supersensitiveness about reputation, apprehension of failure, fake-prudence and other shapes. All of these are fear with a veneer, and often the more dangerous because of that concealment. You know, for instance, the incalculable harm that has been wrought in the world by that word "prudence," which as ordinarily applied means that you are to attempt nothing except you are sure of success—a diabolical rule of action which would ban every voyage of discovery, every grand enterprise, every venturing, most of the noble strivings of life.

Also in the negative order, that is to be guarded against, are prejudices of one kind or another. These are so attuned to our poor human nature that they will bulk large in whatever scale they lie and sway it to an incorrect result. For what is prejudice but another word for a false estimate? If we are prejudiced in favour of a person, it means that we will take a falsely favourable view of him; and, while that is a more charitable attitude than the reverse, it is no more accurate.

Side by side with the danger of incorrect decisions is one that many may possibly be described as even worse. "Irresolution," an old saying has it, "is the deadly original sin of the human mind." At least, the ideas or weights of commoner metal make up our minds for us, sometimes for the best. We have to be careful lest where we diminish their influence on the scales we lose the capacity to make up our minds at all; so that the balance is all a-tremble; the mind a jumble; we vacillate helplessly between two courses.

It is not for the best if undue time is spent in making up our minds. Presumably it is even chances that the state of indecision will end badly. Even if it did end well, there has been costly waste of energy. Then when circumstances have forced a hesitating acceptance of one course, what is the power behind it? There is no power, because there is no conviction. Automatically the resulting action will be hesitant, colourless, weak.

Four Ideas for Positive Action

Now for the positive elements in that mobilisation of motives. They are so simple that nothing could be more simple. They comprise just four ideas. The suggestion is that every time you find yourself in a position of fear, distaste or deadlock, you should give a few second's reflection (no

question of a formal meditation!) to each item on that list of four. If you do, I would venture to assure you that almost on the system of the penny in the slot the mind will yield up the right verdict and the strong action.

The items on the list are not exactly weights placed among the other weights (that is the motives and feelings) on one or the other scale of that weighing apparatus which we have been imagining. The list is rather an adjusting mechanism. When incorporated in the mental weighing operation, it has the property of reducing all those other incredibly diverse and numerous weights to their true value. The sterling ones are fully appreciated; the cheaper ones are given proper relation; the baser ones rejected.

This prospect is intriguing. It sounds like that wonderful thing: something for nothing. You are agog. But perhaps I have keyed you up too much, so that there will be disappointment at the unpretending things I have to show? One would have expected the Wise Men to be disillusioned when, after their long, miraculous journey, they came to Bethlehem and there discovered such simplicity. But they were not disappointed; and it is the very same holy, vital, simple things that they saw, and were pleased with, that I now place before you.

God—Mary—Church—Legion

The first one is the thought of God. But is it not another case of running to extremes to propose that we should thus think specifically of God in the thick of a work which was started for Him and is being done for Him? Surely God is effectively present to us all the time? Present undoubtedly! But only too often as nothing more than one of the motives, one of the weights in the scale—truly the golden weight among the big brass or iron ones, pressing down no more

heavily—perhaps less heavily—than the various worldly or even base ideas which form dynamic part of the weighing. If in that weighing we leave God indistinct, general, secondary, is it not improperly hopeful to suppose that His cause will prevail among those clamant, peremptory impulses which turn the mind into a whirlpool by their contendings?

We must give Him, *as an idea*, no less status than we allow those other vivid ideas. So, in these difficult moments when you feel you cannot drive ahead or when you do not know what you are to drive ahead at, take No. 1 on your list and think specifically of God in relation to your crisis. In a fashion which must be experienced to be appreciated, that chaos yields obedience, as if—to quote Milton—“confusion heard His voice, and wild uproar stood ruled, darkness fled, light shone, and order from disorder sprung.”

The second item on the list is the thought of Our Blessed Lady. Her cause is the cause of God; nevertheless she constitutes an additional motive, especially for you Legionaries whose consecration to her is supposed to be the real article, stipulating a union of hearts and action.

To think of God rectifies the motives in one way. To think of her will rectify them in a supplementary and necessary way, God having made it so. Moreover, she vibrates a different set of mental strings. To introduce her into our thoughts rearranges them in the supernatural light, which—like the X-rays—shows things as shadow that looked solid, leaving the essentials to stand out in bold relief.

Then item No. 3. It is the idea of the Mystical Body: God become part of His creation: Our Lord in the souls of those around us—to be seen by us with the vision of faith and to be served in a way which will not profane that sublime idea. Truly a compelling thought in the face of the situation which looks so formidable and against which our instincts rise up in sheer revulsion!

The fourth item is the Legion itself. Placed deliberately in the scale, it will bring into effective action our soldiership of Christ. Soldiers we are; and everything for which that word in its best sense stands will stir in us. We must rise to the heights to which the Legion summons us. We must be faithful to the principles which it proposes to us. Among these do not decry the more natural ones. These are—as already insisted—part of a whole, the groundwork of the supernatural qualities. Recall those words of the Legion Promise:

“Which binds me to my comrades,

And shapes us to an army,

And keeps our line as on we march with Mary.”

That binding to our leader and to our comrades has an expressive term to describe it—*esprit de corps*; that is loyalty to the regiment. We can mar what others have made. So let no act or thought of ours tend to lower the standards, dilute the quality, sap the spirit, break the discipline of the force.

Those are the items of the list; the little litany is quickly said. They represent, you see, certain primary spiritual principles which, applied to ideas, will reduce them to proper perspective. They all stand for the one thing—God; but none are thereby redundant. For each appeals to a different area of the intelligence. Each, like the facet of a diamond, looks in a different direction; reflects and responds to a different array of impressions. The light that each catches, it absorbs; so that the precious stone glows and sparkles in its depths with all those varied gathered rays; but only to give them forth again compounded into its own characteristic glory. That radiance issuing from the stone is an image of the flow of perfect, balanced thought from the mind.

Thus far, I have not spoken of grace, but in terms of mere psychology—that is the reactions of the mind to the impact

of ideas. But, of course, the ingredient of grace has not been absent. It has seized on those natural acts. In fact it needs them as a foothold, so to speak, for its own godlike movements. If it finds in them a firm foothold—that is a plenary human co-operation—it will elevate them to the highest supernatural plane and render them fit metal—as the above-quoted Legion Promise prays—

“To work Thy will, to operate Thy miracles of
grace,
Which will renew the face of the earth,
And establish Thy reign, Most Holy Spirit,
over all.”