

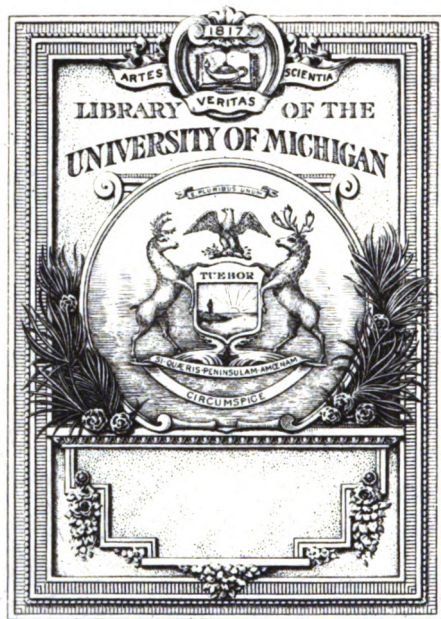
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A PASTOR LOOKS AT

Kierkegaard

WILLIAM T. RIVIERE



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The Man and His Philosophy

by
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P R E F A C E

LACKING any exhaustive or profound knowledge of Kierkegaard, and unable to read the Danish language in which he wrote, I nevertheless know him well enough to like him, to enjoy him, and to learn from him without surrendering to him. It is as an acquaintance rather than as an old college chum or teacher that he is herein presented to my fellows and my betters. The aim of this book is to say: "Reader, meet the distinguished Magister Kierkegaard."

Lecturing at the Sorbonne May 4, 1938, Frithiof Brandt said that from 1900, when international philosophy discovered Kierkegaard, his reputation began to grow, "first in Germany, then in France," and is still growing. "In France, with grateful joy a Dane finds the translations by M. Gateau and Ferlov, and those by M. Paul Tisseau, who by himself has published about fourteen volumes and (in a manner quite Kierkegardian), at his own expense,—sometimes doing his own printing" (*Revue Philosophique*, 1938, p. 257; Brandt's lecture was about real people and events in his countryman's works).

* * *

No one will know Kierkegaard without reading a great deal of what he wrote, and rereading part of it. This book may save you time if you want to get hold of his thought. This book may also help you to appreciate any one or two of his books which you happen to read. And, if you want to talk about him without

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reading him—too popular a custom in this hasty journalistic age—this book may keep you from some of the common errors. As for me, I plan to read more of what he wrote, and hope to know him better.

Some of the following chapters are easy to read, some hard. The writer is prouder of the Anglo-Saxon almost monosyllabic summaries put here and there than of complex phrases built with precisely used vocables of classical ancestry. Please excuse colloquialisms, odd allusions, and occasional anecdotes. A conventional book is a poor means of presenting so versatile an iconoclast and originator of method as Soren Kierkegaard.

Nearly anything worth saying can be said simply. But if you make Kierkegaard too easy, you don't have Kierkegaard. You have only a shadow of the real Kierkegaard. One prefers to speak in a few plain words, but sometimes our subject demands more. Also it may happen that some who are courteous enough to tackle this book will expect sesquipedalian scholastic jargon, related to their learned apperceptive mass by footnotes and references. Most of the footnotes and part of the text have been written for them. As much labor has gone into the footnotes as into any of the rest.

* * *

This book contains sketches of Kierkegaard from a variety of viewpoints, and in more than one style. An earnest (though perhaps presumptuous) effort has been made at times to match style to subject. The casual reader will not want to read more than chapters one,

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three, six and eleven, and perhaps chapter seven. Notes at the beginning of several chapters will warn off the wary.

While the method of this book is weakly imitative of some means employed by the talented Nordic genius about whom it is written, there is no attempt here at the Dane's early method, indirect communication,—though some dated chapters show the mists which increasing sunlight drove away. This little book is an attempt at gradual communication. The repetitions, however unwise, are intentional; the contradictions, chiefly relics of my slowness in catching on, are left deliberately; the arrangement is carefully planned, even for those who skip. The frequent references to Karl Barth are due to the real relationship between these two great Christian thinkers and also to popular misunderstandings about matters and methods common to both.

* * *

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Drs. Lee M. Hollander and Walter Lowrie, and to the Oxford University Press and the Macmillan Company, for permission to quote; to *Bibliotheca Sacra* for the use of copyright material; to Monsieur Paul Tisseau and Dr. S. M. Zwemer for encouragement; and to *The Christian Century* and other periodicals for permission to use articles that appeared in their pages.

* * *

The press and the radio remind us that we must reckon, as Kierkegaard tried to reckon, with the ugly facts of evil, disappointment, failure, and sin. They

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that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. And the more completely a patient can be made to realize the seriousness of his condition, the more likely can he be persuaded to take some heroic remedy and live by the prescribed regimen. Kierkegaard calls our attention back to dark things. He may also keep us from forgetting that God is light, and that into the darkness the light shineth.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING KIERKEGAARD¹

WHILE the late Lord Byron was still the idol of romantic youth, and while Marx was still interpreting history in the British Museum,—in fact was heavy with history,—a Great Dane bayed the moon between the Baltic and the North Sea. His career, like a shooting star, shone briefly on few, was seen but not noticed by more, and by most was unperceived. But latterly astronomical photographs, (his numerous books and long diaries), are being studied, and by some the little streak of light is catalogued among the great stars.

Opinions vary as to his size and candle-power, as to his distance from us, and as to the direction of his movement. Dr. Lowrie wrote a monumental book about Kierkegaard; but testifies that most of the time he had spent reading books about Kierkegaard was wasted. Kierkegaard is an absolute stranger to you until you read Kierkegaard. However, whether you read him or not, you may want to read enough about him to justify you in an occasional use of his name. It sounds scholarly and uptodate, whether you pronounce the last syllable “guard,” as do some Danish-Americans, or “gore” as we are told they do in Denmark. Yet if

¹ The Christian Century, September 27, 1939, p. 1164.

you do read him, you will have to read thousands of pages before you dare express an original comment. Having read some thousands of his pages in translations, plus a couple of thousand about him in four languages, may I hesitatingly pass a few impressions on to my brethren?

Soren Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen in 1813. Much of a large inheritance he spent during the last twelve and a half years of his life publishing almost innumerable books, much faster than their sale would have permitted from a profit standpoint. The profit motive did not control Kierkegaard. At times, when tempted to worry about what he would do when his capital was exhausted, he comforted himself by writing beautifully about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. One day in October, 1855, he drew his last money; on the way home he fell ill; and he died peacefully on November 11. Peacefully, and yet without the last communion; being engaged in an attack on the established church, he refused to take communion from a minister, and naturally there was no Lutheran layman to serve him.

As a romantic lover, Kierkegaard was the joke of the century. The brilliant and promising young man courted a nice girl. After they became engaged, his inner melancholy and some conscientious quirk caused him to jilt her. This somewhat artificial heartbreak of his he then sublimated into an immense literary production. The unordained theological graduate, the ex-lover who had spent evenings reading printed sermons to his sweetheart, still felt a pastoral responsibility for

her spiritual life, and tried to renew his friendship with her through her father. The latter, a state councillor, lifted his hat to the author but declined to converse with him. The former teacher whom she married, later governor of the Virgin Islands, also refused. So Kierkegaard still wrote about her in his journal, and many things in his books were aimed at her. You will not be surprised to know that as adventurer he stayed at home and let his mind go on far journeys of thought, into old countries like Greek philosophy, nearby lands like German philosophy, and into some unexplored lands which he pioneered.

As penitent he was original. They say that the early poetry of the Norse peoples lacked a sense of guilt. But did all the emotions of ancient Scandinavians find expression in those poems which have survived? Once a sermon was illustrated by "the corn-doctor's view of life": a solitary chiropodist lived by himself and met people only when their feet hurt, so he knew people only in their pain, disgust, and irritation. But if no other preacher ever used that unlofty illustration, does that mean that none of my fellow-pastors ever had corns? There is a terrible brooding melancholy which some of us have seen produce catastrophe in the lives of certain individuals from those northern regions. Soren Kierkegaard was overwhelmed to learn that his pious old father had been suffering guilty agonies for threescore years and ten because once during a hard boyhood he had dramatically defied God; and not only did Soren darken most of his own life by filially penitent melancholy, but one of his most power-

ful and interesting books (there are even two separate French translations) deals with inherited sin, and another with despair. To him Christianity was not like gravitation which makes ripe apples fall, nor like the mechanism which starts your car when you step on a gadget, nor anything else regular. He used mathematical illustrations, such as the square of consciousness, and the n th power; but if his studies included analytical geometry, he did not use the spiral. A spiral, around and around and wider and higher, suggests itself to Kierkegaard's readers; but it would not have suited him. The spiral in all its varieties progresses by a mathematical rule; Kierkegaard gave up the quantitative sciences for an emphasis on qualities, and preferred unmeasurable individual possibilities to general laws. For him the sinner is wretchedly separated from safety by a chasm. Only an incomprehensible and indescribable and not-to-be-reduced-to-rule leap can get him across. The merely human cannot help him. He needs something else. And though at times Kierkegaard's soul was at peace, often he felt in his heart what he finally cried aloud, that Christianity is *demand* rather than consolation and comfort. Therefore he attacked the Pharisaic complacency of us Christians.

As a stylist he is said to have done great things with his mother tongue. Barth used to quote him a great deal because he said things so strikingly. Even in translation, two great skills are manifest. One is a masterly interweaving of the several threads of a discourse, distinct threads which disappear and reappear, a characteristic that makes you think of an ascending

spiral. The other is his way of walking around a subject: every step or two he stops and tells exactly what he sees from that point; or what a certain kind of man sees from that place, and then what another sees from the next position; and so on. This method is applied in successive pages, or paragraphs, or chapters, or volumes. Thus, as Dr. Pauck warned readers of the *Christian Century* several years ago, it is not safe to classify Kierkegaard by one or two of his books with which you happen to be acquainted. Often instead of telling you what to think, or what he thought, he presents a manner of thinking which he wants you to try for yourself and reject, but which he presents as attractively as possible. He sees a great chasm between God and man; a chasm between time and eternity; a chasm between truth and error; a chasm between historical proof and religious certainty. But he emphasizes the nearness of God to man with his great phrase, "before God." That was a favorite phrase during his last eight years.

As a literary artist, he may be studied in his twin books about faith, written from two sub-Christian viewpoints. *Repetition*, soon to appear in English, is both a queer love letter and also a study of Job's faith under trial. Financially depressed, sick, bereaved of his children, advised by his wife to curse God and die, persecuted by the tactless sympathy of his argumentative friends, Job was tested as to whether his faith could live on against the evidence of his experience and the bad theology of his comforters. The companion volume (with a different pen-name) is a carefully reworked

and polished "dialectical lyric," *Fear and Trembling*, already published in English. In this book is presented Kierkegaard's carefully drawn distinction between the knight of infinite resignation and the knight of faith. Perhaps his contrast of their dancing is clearest: the former can leap up into the air and catch his balance when he comes down, but you see the effort by which he keeps his feet; the latter takes the leap of faith and goes on dancing without breaking time. In other words, faith is something far beyond merely giving up, and yet is so much a thing of the inner life that spectators do not know what the believer really is. (Elsewhere Kierkegaard supplements that.) This book deals with Abraham's faith: at the last moment Isaac was really spared. The sub-Christian definition of faith is believing that to God all things are possible. I have not yet succeeded in digging out Kierkegaard's complete doctrine of faith,—if he had one. He does not run to finished doctrines. But how that man can illuminate a saying of Jesus!

As psychologist, he read, observed others, observed himself, and used a fertile imagination. His own mind was his laboratory. He created his own types, instead of merely, like an objective novelist or a case-worker, interpreting what he could see of others. His books make some surprising states of mind seem real. His many pseudonymous characters are finely drawn. Victor Eremita is rather pagan and a bit of a moralist; Johannes de Silentio is not a Christian but is confident that he knows what Christianity is; Constantine Constantius is a calm and philosophical esthete, not so

selfish as Seducing John; Johannes Climacus is almost a Christian; Anti-Climacus is hyper-Christian. As for himself, Kierkegaard felt that he managed only to be quite a simple Christian.

As a preacher of Christian morals, he was frankly other-worldly. Of his father's old pastor, popular preacher and presiding bishop of Denmark, he wrote that in eternity (that is, in the next world) he will not be preaching; he will be judged as to what he preached in this world and as to his conduct. Kierkegaard saw beams in his own eye; he also saw beams and motes in the eyes of his contemporaries, and in those of Martin Luther. His emphasis was on individual responsibility before God.

In his winding dialectic way he honestly struggled for years to discover his own special task. He wrote marvelously about Christian love. Single-handed he challenged a comic paper which was satirizing nearly everyone whose head rose above the crowd in Copenhagen. The paper had been friendly toward him. Now it turned against him with wisecracks about his thin legs, cartooned his uneven trouserlegs until they were the laughter of the whole city, and had him mocked on the streets as "Old Either-Or." It appears that he was the winner: the paper ceased publication, its owner went abroad, its star writer left the country never to return. But the sensitive victor had suffered agonies which only his journals reveal, and had felt that he was unheroically being trampled to death by geese.

As a reformer, most Americans would call him a flat tire. He gave largely to charity but was not at all

interested in reform by legislation or by popular movement. He had no sympathy for Grundtvig nor for his popular and lasting success. To Kierkegaard the war of 1848 was just an unnecessary commotion and the inconvenience of losing the services of his valet. His admirer and translator Paul Tisseau explains Kierkegaard's own position: "The reformer is not the changer or bringer-in of institutions; he is the awakener of conscience, the giver of earnestness, the restorer of ideals, of the *ought*, of moral and religious demands, who thereby risks martyrdom." A martyr is more than a daring partisan who becomes an unwilling victim. Nowadays, says Kierkegaard, when the title of reformer is worn like a medal, "Communism is yelling that private property is theft; yes, and if people call you a reformer you are a thief too."

As a philosopher, Kierkegaard is not easy to classify. Harald Höffding put him among the philosophers of discontinuity. But Kierkegaard's emphasis on the leap makes him a philosopher of *discontinuity overcome*. He taught that sophistates learn to avoid inconveniences but do not have much fun. Labels are conveniences, but applied to Kierkegaard they do not give much help. He inclines toward the unique. Anyway, why go into his philosophy here? Our American colleges still crowd philosophy into a corner and let our courses in literature or history or biology or economics or perhaps religious education guide whatever integration of thought comes to the student before or after graduation. Some students get their widest and deepest view from

psychology; which may be good or bad. In that connection there is a remark of Tisseau's: "Kierkegaard will of course always be too much for the psychiatrists," (at long distance, out of reach of tests), "as he is for the psychologists." He adds that what in others would be neuroses, getting nowhere or producing erratic actions almost free from control by the reflective will, in Kierkegaard "occur in a shock where the soul's combined powers at highest tension come into collision. (That is *existing*, as Kierkegaard employs the term.)" Certainly Kierkegaard tried to take into full consideration some obscure and unpleasant phenomena of awareness which nice systematizers such as the Cartesians or Hegel lightly brushed aside. His method is about as far as possible from the clarity which Leibniz sought or the directness of Herbert Spencer.

To Kierkegaard the world as we can see it and live in it is not an open door toward God but a closed door. The door can only be opened from the other side. The door did open, and the gospels record what happened. This revelation reached Kierkegaard through the Bible. He humbly trusted his life and his soul to God, as he understood God and God's will. Unaffected by the beginnings of literary and historical criticism of the Bible, he would probably have remained unaffected today. To him, truth was subjective, but not all subjectivity was truth; and since he disliked professors anyway, one fears that the dialectic of criticism,—the historical Jesus, then the apocalyptic Jesus, and today form criticism,—would have caused him to remark that the very sayings outweigh the lucubrations of profes-

sors who dissect and expound the words in which the sayings reach us.

In his last violent polemic Kierkegaard charged that the visible church and its ministers are characterized by an absolute lack of Christianity: "Christianity is not there." We are too much interested in ourselves, our families, our institutions, our programs, our individualities and our herd-instincts, to hear the voice of an unimpressive Man, really the God-Man, who calls us to follow on the lonely road of suffering. Kierkegaard was an extremist, of course. So was Jesus, too. Therefore a good deal of the vitriol which Kierkegaard poured on his contemporaries in his native land ought to burn some of us American pastors: it has put some blisters on me.

POSTSCRIPT, October 28, 1939.—A month after this chapter appeared in print, letters about it were still coming in my mail. Here are extracts from the last two letters:—

1 — From a letter of October 25, written me by one of the most sincere, honest, and earnest thinkers that I have ever been privileged to know: "I might prefer tactics different from those in your first few paragraphs. You have been wrestling with this subject like another Jacob—and have been obtaining the benefits of that struggle in an ever deepening conception of what must be for you the main question: What is Christianity? I envy you this strenuous fight—for me it was like looking into the sun and becoming purblind in the end." To the reader that cry from a heart that has known anguish is offered as a warning. Do not make

friends with Kierkegaard unless you are willing to face the possibility of being disturbed. His path to peace may take you all around Robin Hood's barn.

2—A letter came today from an old friend of student and army days. On our way overseas, booted, pistol-belted, life-belted (as ordered), we and another shavetail used to sit on the *Mauretania's* deck and watch twilight settle over the ocean. Now, from a South Carolina farm, he writes of his family and his college teaching and his writing. After commenting on this article he rambled on: "Well, it isn't long after breakfast. Too early in the morning for philosophy—which goes better in the autumn evenings. But at least I can say with Peter: not drunk; it isn't yet nine o'clock."

This South Carolina friend fulfils my hope for an occasional individual reader who would apprehend some values in Kierkegaard and would personally evaluate their worth in terms of individual experience and reflection. "You told me that you had been studying Kierkegaard, and that you found him very stimulating. I knew the name, but not the man. A year, perhaps two years . . . and still I know the name but not the man. But especially since reading your article, I feel that I must somehow get around to Kierkegaard. He must say much that would clarify my own thinking, and stimulate it. For instance, his criticism of the complacency of the Church and so-called Christians, his emphasis upon discontinuity (and discontinuity overcome), his refusal to make things too clear. In all these points I feel something akin to him in myself. But, if I understand your comments, I think I should

disagree with him on some fundamental matters.” And he goes on to discuss whether there are really chasms running all through life, or whether we are blind to reality. Referring to “Kierkegaard’s idea that the world is a closed door toward God, not an open door,” he says that “God has to open the door, but He does not open it from outside.”

The passage about the closed door, “eternity’s door slammed shut,” is translated in the ninth chapter of this book. You may read the whole passage in *Purify Your Hearts!*, p. 109 f; *Purity of Heart*, p. 115. Kierkegaard’s notion is that a temporal order or world system which crucified Jesus Christ is hardly a revelation of the Heavenly Father.

CHAPTER II

SCRAPS FROM KIERKEGAARD

Picked out by me and completed September 3, 1935. This paper was published in "The Evangelical Quarterly," Edinburgh, the following January. As it is the first paper I wrote on Kierkegaard, it is left as written, except for omissions; the only additions are the footnotes.

SOREN KIERKEGAARD (1813-55), Danish writer, philosopher, and theologian, is just a name to most of us,—and no easy name, either. But this name punctuates many pages of Karl Barth, and may be found in Denney and Forsyth and Von Hugel. Harald Höffding (1843-1931), another Dane, in his delightful little volume on Rousseau, mentions Kierkegaard with Pascal, Rousseau, and Carlyle, as one of the subjective thinkers who consider the religious problem as personal; and adds in a footnote that Kierkegaard wants this purely subjective Christianity to be lived, namely, to be actually experienced in the inner life (de Coussanges' French translation, p. 66). Brunner, in *The Mediator*, answers (p. 222, note), a comparison of himself to Irenaeus by saying: "Between Irenaeus and the present day there have been Augustine, the Reformation, and Kierkegaard." Dr. Lowrie (*Our Concern with the Theology of Crisis*, p. 11) goes so far as to call "that tremendous Dane" the predominant intellectual force

in our century. That is going too far, but Kierkegaard's increasing renown and his growing influence on the Continent ought to make him an object of our interest.

Having rooted around in odd places looking for information about this queer melancholy Danish thinker, and for translations of his works into languages which I can read, I'd like to pass some choice fragments on to my brethren. The following pages may not be easy to read: blame me and my fumbling through the various languages that separate the author from me. But perhaps you will find a few nuggets, real nuggets, not merely fool's gold, among this gravel.

My task seems worth while for several reasons. This Danish prose poet, this son of a self-made man who had retired at forty and read Wolffian philosophy, this youth who studied for the ministry but never applied for a church, this Christian who died without the final communion that is so dear to Lutherans because he would receive it only from a layman, is being read, translated, and quoted, and his influence seems to be widening. The translation of his voluminous works and diaries into German has released his profound thought and brilliant style from their Scandinavian limitations. So many striking thoughts of today may be traced back to those books and diaries that one may risk a feeble jingle:

*Kierkegaard
Said it before;*

which, believe it or not, rhymes. There you have the correct pronunciation of the stressed third syllable of his name. A Kierkegaard fan seems to find his phrases

everywhere, perhaps in places not due to him (cf. the present difficulty of many "liberals," i.e. people who are stingy in the credence they give or the authority they allow to Holy Writ, who find it hard not to put a Barthian label on all supernaturalists, in fact on all who believe in the transcendence of God,—as if the divine transcendence were a new discovery!). Certainly we ought to have some acquaintance with the source of so many quotations.

Another reason is that Kierkegaard is very interesting. If these scrappy extracts fail to prove that, try the two hundred pages of translation, in longer selections, in Dr. Lee M. Hollander's *University of Texas Bulletin No. 2326*, reviewed by Dr. Rolston in the *Union Seminary Review* for July, 1933, vol. XLIV, p. 423 f.

A third reason is that such men as Harald Høffding, Professor Hollander, Dr. Lowrie, and Secretary John A. Mackay acknowledge their debt to him after wrestling with his thought.

A fourth reason lies in Karl Barth's avowed debt to Kierkegaard. American students of Barth sometimes miss what Barth means because they neglect his starting point. Barth's teacher, W. Herrmann, tried to make a sort of Hegelian continuity out of Christian experience and out of theology considered as the contemplative study of that experience. Barth became dissatisfied. So Barth "went Kierkegaard" with a vengeance.² And with powerful rhetoric Barth underlines both the posi-

² A somewhat changed opinion is expressed in chapters of this book which were written three years or more later.

tive and negative sides of Kierkegaard's infinite distinction of quality, a qualitative, not quantitative, distinction, between man and God. Along the negative aspect of this distinction, Barth is actually tracking Herrmann and refuting him.

Before going into that distinction, let me withdraw my unkind description of Kierkegaard as a "poseur" (*Evangelical Quarterly*, January, 1934, p. 62, note). Of course any diarist poses to some extent. Kierkegaard's unhappy love affair is ridiculously artificial. The incorrigible and original romantic introvert seems to have jilted his fiancée in order that, after she had finally married another, he might have a broken heart! (But on the other hand Tisseau of Lund, in the introduction to his French translation of *Repetition*, makes the love affair central to both the life and the literary activity of the great prose poet, so that most of Kierkegaard's books, small or great, become indirect love-letters or explanations to the placidly unconscious Regine: cf. Victor Hugo's adolescent *Hans of Iceland*). Even Professor Höffding admits the exaggerated character of his countryman's later accounts of his early literary activity, an exaggeration due to natural self-deceit rather than to hypocrisy. But I now acknowledge finding plenty of sincerity in Kierkegaard's introspection, in his self-criticism, in his prolonged effort to deliver a message to his fellow-Danes, in his restraint, even in his final polemics. There is a distinct element of self-sacrifice in much of his life. His vast literary work must have cost him far more money than it brought in.

DISCONTINUITY AND THE GREAT DISTINCTION

Höffding, in his book on *Soren Kierkegaard as Philosopher* (2d German ed., p. 76-8), says that there are two sorts of thinkers in the field of philosophy: 1) those who concern themselves with a real unity, with coherence, with continuity in spite of apparent opposition, with Hegelian evolution by the integration of opposites, in short with what he calls *quantitative* diversity. We may add that for philosophers who think this way, life is an adaptation of the will to live; man is like God, only smaller; therefore God is a quantitative enlargement of man at man's best. 2) Kierkegaard is one of the first in a series of thinkers who take the opposite side. They emphasize distinction, disjunction, difference, contrast, uniformity, what Höffding calls *qualitative* diversity. One thinks of the triumphant adolescent who has learned to generalize as contrasted with the riper adult whose sound judgment can discriminate.

For thinkers of this second sort, it may be added, life is something different, a plus of a different kind added to elaborate compounds of certain elements; and the distinction between the living and the not-living is more than structural. The soul of man may, as some Peripatetics said, include the central and controlling functions of the vegetative and the animal (Maher, *Psychology*, p. 546), but the human soul, aware of itself and of the world, wishing, hesitating, deciding, is of a different sort. God transcends man: we do not see Him in a mirror, not even a magnifying mirror with a selective lens in front

of it. God is above man, far up, out of sight. Some things about God we know as we know the saltiness of the sea, not by swallowing the ocean but by tasting a drop (see Principal John McLeod in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, July, 1935, p. 249). But God surpasses human understanding: Isaiah 40: 25, 28; Ecclesiastes 5: 2; Matthew 5: 45; I Corinthians 1: 20; 2: 14.³

Hollander, p. 167 ff, quotes at length Kierkegaard's argument that it is impossible to prove from history that Christ is God, because the conclusion, God, is in a different category. There is such an absolute difference of quality between the human and the divine that logic unaided by faith cannot cross from one to the other. Here is a very valuable truth, but it ought to be modified by some such line of thought as this: besides the definite category of the natural we have a vague category of the supernatural; the category of the personal lies between the equally exact category of the impersonal and something undefined but more than personal. Or, translating from an early book of Karl Heim's (*Das Gewissheitsproblem in der systematischen Theologie bis zu Schleiermacher*, p. 223 f): "A subjectivity-confined ego could already see the limit of this subjectivity, which makes it possible to infer a Beyond and thereby begets the conception of a Something that transcends subjectivity. For seeing

³ For a more recent statement about discontinuity, see Horton, *Contemporary British Theology*, p. 44. And compare his *Contemporary Continental Theology*, pp. xxi, 99, 101, 130ff. His fourth dimension is Chestov's third dimension. Barth speaks of the third dimension, "the dimension of mystery," in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. xi. Some other aspects of discontinuity are suggested in chap. ii of Dickie, *Revelation and Response*.

a frontier always means seeing a little beyond the frontier. Unless you see beyond the boundary, you don't see the boundary itself, that is, where you are seems unbounded, limitless, containing in itself everything that is or may come to be." The further development of this in an exposition of Matthew 11:25 to which Kierkegaard himself, I venture to hope, would not seriously object, is partially outlined in a sermon which appeared in *The Christian Observer*, Louisville, August 28, 1935, and in *The Presbyterian of the South*, Richmond, October 31 of the same year.

The pages of Hollander's translation of *Preparation for a Christian Life* just referred to ought to be read by everyone who wants to appreciate Barth. Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 331 f, on the incognito of the Incarnate Son, quotes the same important book of the great Dane: "The contrast between God and an isolated individual human being is the greatest contrast; it is infinitely qualitative . . . an incognito maintained by omnipotence. Indeed, in a certain sense, by the very fact that He permitted Himself to be born into the human race, He has bound Himself once for all."

THE POSITIVE ASPECT OF THE DISTINCTION

Lowrie, p. 58, Rolston, p. 30, and Zerbe, p. 7, quote from the preface to the second edition of Barth's *Romans*: "If I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard calls the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance" (Hoskyns' translation, p. 10). It

took me over a year to locate what Barth meant by the negative and positive aspects or significance of this distinction. The key to this expression is found on p. 84 f of Höffding's book, section 4 of the chapter: "Up to here we have been discussing the leap or jerk (*Sprung oder Ruck*) from the negative side; we have conceived the distinction only as an interruption. But can we not also give a positive description or definition of it?"⁴ Think of a break, of the discontinuity or unconformity that interrupts a smooth line of progress in thought: cf. Lowrie, p. 50, dialectic as "argument in broken lines." *Sprung* also means chink, crack, or fissure, which reminded me of the gap or chasm to which the Barthians so often refer. But in a letter Dr. Hollander kindly corrected me: the Danish *Springet* he translates by *leap*: "This term by the way is Jacobi's, who used it in a discussion with Lessing. It is quite literally a *leap*—not *Ruck*, *jolt*,— . . . a leap into the unknown, a somersault into a different category." See Höffding's *History of Modern Philosophy*, French translation, vol. II, p. 23 f; also page 21 on the horrible moat between philosophy and history which Lessing would have liked to leap but could not.

Höffding goes into the positive aspect of the infinite qualitative distinction by showing that Kierkegaard is set apart among philosophers by his effort to describe the gap which he has leaped. After crossing the unbridged chasm, he goes back and tries to figure out how

⁴ That jerk threw me off for a time. Fortunately my mistake, largely due to my insufficient knowledge of German, was corrected before the article was published.

he ever got across. "It is characteristic of Kierkegaard to break his bridge behind him, break it with the category of the Leap—but he cannot refrain from always hanging around where the break occurred. . . . He is so far as I know the only indeterminist thinker who has sought to describe the leap" (*Soren Kierkegaard as Philosopher*, passage last cited). This effort, which philosophically considered is rather vain, produces from Kierkegaard's pen some of the most penetratingly profound pages of introspective psychology that I have ever read. Whether Barth is as felicitous as his master⁵ in this positive part of his work, let those who have studied his doctrine of the Spirit say.

To Barthians let me remark that if they want that great preacher of the Word to state for them the task to which he finds himself called, let them read two sentences beyond the ordinary quotation from the famous preface, or even three: after quoting Ecclesiastes 5:2, Barth writes: "The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy. . . . The Bible beholds at the same crossroads—the figure of Jesus Christ."

The following sayings of Kierkegaard relating to this infinite distinction of quality between time and eternity, between man and God, I found in French:

From Ferlov and Gateau's translation of *Sickness unto Death*: "God and man are two different natures

⁵ Written in 1935; today I would modify the expression.

separated by an infinite difference of nature. Every teaching which forgets that is folly toward men and blasphemy toward God. In paganism man brings God to man (anthropomorphic Gods); in Christianity God becomes man (God-Man)—nevertheless for this infinite charity of His grace God makes one condition, just one, which He could not help making. The sorrow of Christ is precisely having to make this condition. He can humble Himself to the likeness of a servant, endure punishment and death, invite us all to come to Him, sacrifice His life—but the scandal of taking offense at Him, no! He cannot abolish the possibility of that” (p. 242). “The scandal that cannot be avoided is this infinite difference of quality between God and man” (p. 246). “As for him who is not offended (scandalized), his faith is an *Adoration*. But adore, which means believe, also means that the difference of nature (quality) between man and God remains an infinite abyss” (p. 247 f).

Again: “Man is a synthesis of infinite and finite, of temporal and eternal, of freedom and necessity” (p. 62). “God offers us reconciliation by remitting our sins. Yet the sinner despairs. . . . ‘No, sins are not forgiven, it is impossible’” (p. 224). “The doctrine of sin, individual sin, mine, yours, the doctrine that forever disperses ‘the crowd,’ establishes the difference of quality between God and man more firmly than ever” (p. 235). “Man is never so much at home with God as when he is far from Him, a familiarity which can arise only from the distance itself; near to God you cannot feel at home, and if you do, it is evidence

that you are far away.⁶ Man is so powerless before God!" (p. 225).⁷

On the distinction between time and eternity, let me refer to a paper of mine on *The Philosophy Underlying Barth's Theology*, where I tried to explain the Kierkegaard-Barth notion of eternity by the figures of a line in space and of a high wall with gaps.⁸ The distinction

⁶ Two other Christian paradoxes, truisms of theology and of popular preaching: 1) Christ won His victory by dying upon the Cross. 2) His followers win by surrendering to Him. For some remarks upon paradox and dialectic, see chapter five, paragraphs 14-16. Kierkegaard's favorite dialectic method advances by a zigzag, from one side to the other and back again.

⁷ A number of quotations, from the very limited amount of Kierkegaard then available to me, are now omitted. Instead, I insert the following from a letter written in April, 1939, to a religious weekly: "If one believes in the transcendence of God, a belief common to Kierkegaard, Barth, and Brunner, to Shedd and Strong, to Hodge, Thornwell, and Warfield, and held by them all along with a belief in God's immanence, one does not expect to understand God completely. To think of such a God you must start with something that you are acquainted with, be it time, space, world, emotion, or personality; and from the known try to think ahead or upward or beyond, toward if not to God. That remark applies to empiricism or natural theology, to tradition or revelation; to Wieman's approach, to Kierkegaard's, and to Paul's. Cf. Matthew 7:9-11. Some think of the beyond spatially, and say heaven; some temporally, and say eternity. It is my impression that when Barth asserts that God is always subject, not object, passing from space-time to grammar, he is carrying this a step further and averring that our mere human thought cannot encompass God; more exactly, God is too great to stand over against us where we can see Him all."

⁸ *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. xci, No. 362, April, 1934, p. 162 f. "Think of time as a straight line, which you may draw on the margin of this page. For convenience mark one point on the line, and count the years to the left as B.C., to the right as A.D. Go back in B.C. to creation: time prior to that was eternity past, which you may represent by a row of dots prolonging your line to the edge of the page and beyond. Follow A.D. to the right to 1933, add as many years as you please, ages and ages of ages; beyond that the line will dot out into eternity future. That is what eternity means to most of us. Now for Kierkegaard and Barth eternity is not only at the ends of the line but

of quantity and quality is not quite that of Canon Streeter's Bi-Representationism (*Reality*, chaps. ii-iv), but students of Streeter ought to find Kierkegaard a little easier to understand.

MISCELLANEOUS BITS FROM HERE AND THERE

From Gateau's French version of *A Seducer's Diary*, part of Kierkegaard's first great work, *Eiher-Or*, a contrast between the selfishness of aesthetic hedonism and a higher ethics: "What does love love? The Infinite. And what does it fear? Being tied down" (p. 233 f). "But what does it matter where I am? Finitudes of time and space, you are forgotten; nothing remains but the eternal, love's power, its desire, its satisfaction" (p. 236). The next day, having succeeded,

also above, below, behind, and in front. Eternity is not the unmeasurable ends of time but something greater than time, near to time as well as far away, enveloping time. A man lives in time, walking along by a high wall. At intervals (through God's grace as Barth says, for the wall is humanly impassable), there are openings in the wall through which the man may glimpse eternity and even enter eternity. More accurately, eternity may come through into time to him. Again I protest that the Dane & Swiss Co. do not interpret their own philosophy correctly; when eternity passes through the wall and enters time, is not the result an event in history? and will not history record something of value, even if not all? for the historian who has no glimpse through the wall can see that something happens to the man who stands by the opening and receives the impact of eternity. In a lecture delivered in 1920 (*The Word of God and the Word of Man*, ch. iii, *Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vistas*; p. 62) Barth illustrates the very thing I mean by his description of our curiosity when from a window we see people stop and look up at something hidden from us by the roof. We in our window cannot see what they see; but we know that they are looking, we know when and where they stand as they look . . . and we see the result Cf. Lowrie, work cited, p. 59 ff.

⁹ I should have translated that answer, "An end." Fick translates, "The end!" (p. 166).

Seducing John says: "All is over, however, and I don't want to see her again" (p. 237). The worst that can be said for Gateau's beautiful translation of this book is that one paragraph of his introduction suggests that Kierkegaard, if his secretary tells the truth, had a clean heart but a dirty mind. The conversations the secretary describes may be merely rebellious chastity."¹⁰ The book contains keen analysis of the immoral and poetical mind of the Scandinavian Don Juan whom Kierkegaard describes, but is free from slime.

From Kierkegaard's own *Diary*, 1849: "The ages from which you may learn about the ideal are the child, the youth, the young maiden, the old man—from the busy man, the bustling housewife, you can learn nothing of it. And why not? Because they are actually busy with purposes which pass away."

The following I chose from Lowrie's selections (work cited, p. 47 f): "In recognition of the contemporaneousness of Christ you discover that you never succeed in being like Him. Not even in what you call your highest moment. . . . The Example is that which makes endless demands upon you, and you feel terribly the unlikeness—then you flee to the Example, and He will have mercy upon you. Thus the Example is He Who most sternly and endlessly condemns you—and at the same time it is He Who has mercy upon you." "In order to gain courage to strive one must rest in the blessed assurance that all is already decided, that he has already conquered—in faith and through faith." That last

¹⁰ Perhaps one may discount the report of the secretary of so crochety an individual as Kierkegaard.

characteristic sentence, almost Calvinistic in meaning, illustrates Kierkegaard's stylistic trick of paradox; which is not the same thing as his dialectic paradox, argument by broken lines.¹¹

Fragments quoted by Höffding:—"A son is like a mirror in which a father sees himself; and for the son also the father is a mirror in which he sees himself as he some day will be." "To force a child into the distinctively Christian categories is an act of violence, no matter how well intended." "Luther, Luther, Luther: thou hast a great responsibility!" Later, at the time of his attack on the contemporary church: "Luther had Ninety-five Theses; I have only *one*: Christianity is not there." "Pain, suffering, begets an unavoidable illusion. . . . One is no true Christian unless he is found in the suffering and torment which are proper for true Christians in the world; and if one is in torment and suffering, then this illusion is unavoidable."

Höffding, p. 85, quotes this from *The Meaning of Anguish*¹² to illustrate the positive aspect of the time-eternity distinction: "The history of an individual life goes forward in a movement from one state to another. Each state is bounded by a gap. . . . Before every gap of that sort comes a state as nearest psychological approximation. This state is the object of psychology." "So the gap," Höffding continues, "lies between two

¹¹ He delighted in all sorts of paradox until he was defeated by the unlimited paradox that left him naught but the simple faith in Jesus Christ which is at the heart of the Christian religion.

¹² It is quite likely that this "anguish" will appear in English as "dread."

states. Or, as he expresses it more exactly elsewhere, it lies between two instants." Quoting further in the same passage from *The Meaning of Anguish*: "Anguish may be compared with dizziness. He whose eyes are caused to look down into a yawning depth becomes dizzy. . . . In this dizziness, his freedom sinks to the very bottom. Psychology can go no further, nor desires to. In the same instant all is changed, and since freedom arises again, it sees itself to be guilty. Between these two instants lies the gap which no science has explained nor can explain."

Some oft-quoted sentences from Kierkegaard:—"Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards. . . . Life in this temporal world can never be properly comprehensible, because at no moment am I able to attain complete repose in order to perceive and understand what the backward look shows." "The Absolute is cruel, for it demands *all*, while the Relative still contrives to demand *some* attention from us." "What is a poet? A wretched man who hides profound torments in his heart, and whose resonant lips are so made that the sighs and cries produce harmonious music as they pass through."

"Paradox is not a concession but a category which qualifies all thinking." "Paradox is thought's passion. . . . Every passion's highest power is that it wants to seek its own destruction. . . . So that is thinking's highest passion, to discover something that it cannot think."

Reference may be made to the passage, cited in Denney, *Death of Christ*, p. 216 ff, and more briefly

by Mackenzie, *Christianity the Paradox of God*, p. 188, where Kierkegaard says that the child naturally learns to trust God as Father; later in life he feels the need for something to bridge the chasm that he now discovers between himself and God, and finds it in Christ. This extract from his diary is autobiographical. It is also true of many of us who receive Christian nurture. It may also have some bearing on the question as to why Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, set to work to turn His hearers from the popular Kingdom-ideas toward trust in the Father.

Principal Forsyth, closing the preface to *The Work of Christ*, quoted, as extreme but timely, this saying of "that searching Christian genius Kierkegaard—the great and melancholy Dane in whom Hamlet was mastered by Christ." Kierkegaard wrote: "For long the tactics have been: use every means to move as many as you can—to move everybody if possible—to enter Christianity. Do not be too curious whether what they enter *is* Christianity. My tactics have been, with God's help, to use every means to make it clear what the demand of Christianity really is—if not one entered it." That warns us against an ever-present danger in evangelism.

GRAVEL AFTER GOLD — SOME OF MY OPINIONS

Kierkegaard wrote diaries, records of his thoughts, feelings, hopes, and despairs, which have been published since his death in many volumes. His pseudonymous works were so numerous and varied that he really did carry on his campaign of indirect communication

of his message by producing a literature within Danish literature. He wrote a book under the nom-de-plume of John Climacus; another followed under the nom-de-plume of Anti-Climacus, edited by Soren Kierkegaard. Constantine Constantius and even John the Seducer appear as authors, but they are also principal characters in *The Banquet*,—which ought to be in *The Harvard Classics* and in *The Modern Library*.

In his last work, a series of pamphlets called *The Present Moment*, Kierkegaard attacks the un-Christianity of the church as he saw it, and, to adapt Tisseau's words, pitilessly accuses the century in the light of eternity. Tisseau says that these nine pamphlets, assailing the hypocrisy of all times in order to save the world from complacent sickness unto death, are *The Provincial Letters* of the nineteenth century, written with as much vigor and imaginative warmth as Pascal's, "but with a pathos that is poignant in another way," for the issues are wider and deeper than "casuistry, scholasticism, and monks' quarrels."

The man died lonely and unhappy. He had created more than one tempest in Denmark, and the students made a demonstration at his funeral; but the systematic theology of his opponent, Martensen, became a standard text in Germany. It was long afterward that translation made Kierkegaard's works known beyond his native land and its Scandinavian neighbors. We Americans may have long to wait.¹⁸ This modern Zechariah the son of Jehoida may have been thinking of himself

¹⁸ The four years since that sentence was written have given us more translations than I dared hope for.

when he said to King Christian VIII of Denmark: "Your majesty is singularly unhappy, for your wisdom and prudence are too great and your country too small; it is hard luck to be a genius in Gopher Prairie" (or shall I say "in a hick town"? or, preferring tameness to a slangy anachronism, translate with dignity, "It is a misfortune to be a genius in a provincial place"?)

The gloomy Dane made so much of our duty to think of ourselves and Jesus as contemporaries that one may play with the calendar and shift a century. If Kierkegaard were here today, I think he would mock H. G. Wells and Brightman with their finite God; he would also pour out his scorn on both Wieman and Ames, and call them idolators. What fun he would make of the late Ivy L. Lee's press-agentry for his chief employer's preacher! He would have disliked Kirby Page's meagre theology and acclaimed much of his ethics, especially that manly editorial when *The World Tomorrow* died. Reinhold Niebuhr's paradoxical combination of international pacificism and a willingness to engage in class-war would be a target.¹⁴

Except for some books, the only objects in my comfortable study of which he would approve are the large waste-basket and perhaps the high-chair, relic of my early childhood, on which I sit to see and strike these keys. And yes, he would approve of the typewriting machine: about the time that Samuel Morse was getting

¹⁴ After four years, despite some changes in my views, the range of my information, and the views of some of these gentlemen just mentioned, I leave this paragraph unchanged except for the omission of two words: it is a dated comment, and there was some justification for every detail.

his invention ready to replace the semaphore telegraph which Napoleon had strung across Europe, Kierkegaard in his diary called the poet "a living telegraph between God and man." Therefore he would in general approve the positive and masculine preaching of Karl Barth, finger-post pointing to God. For I venture to assert that a ball, rolling smoothly downhill from Schleiermacher through Ritschl and Herrmann, if struck smartly with Kierkegaard as a bat, would fly straight outfield to the second edition of Barth's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*.

CHAPTER III

KIERKEGAARD FOR ROTARIANS

IN APRIL, 1937, I was working on some lectures entitled *A Pastor Looks at Barth and Kierkegaard*, for a ministers' and laymen's conference at Durant, Oklahoma, in May and June. An invitation to speak at the Port Lavaca Rotary Club near my home gave me an opportunity to practice about twenty minutes of my lecture material; and the courteous attention of those gentlemen and their guests of the choral club, and their subsequent remarks, encouraged me to go on with the lectures. The main part of the rotary talk ran about as follows:—

In the university of Copenhagen, Denmark, about a hundred years ago, there was a certain student. He was a student of the kind that fools along, that studies and attends classes, and that either doesn't graduate or graduates far behind his original classmates. He took the arts course, and then played along for many years with theology. With a good allowance from his father, he was quite a dandy in the drawing rooms of the capital; not a dandy in clothes, but in wit.

His father was a self-made man. At the age of twelve, cold and illclad, tending sheep on the pastures

of Jutland, he stood on a hill, shook his fist at the sky, and cursed God. Later he moved to town, worked and prospered, and retired in his forties with a comfortable fortune. He was very religious, and prominent ministers and professors and bishops were among the frequent visitors in his house. He married, and lost his first wife. Then he married his cook: the stork came very soon and returned quite frequently; but most of the children died young. Two survived their father, the one to become a bishop in the Lutheran church of Denmark, the other the victim of this sketch.

Soren Kierkegaard was the younger of these two sons. He was the wisecracking dandy, the drawing-room wit, the bright but lazy student. Then the old father seems to have called the two sons to him and confessed his boyhood sin against God, which still tortured his conscience. Poor old rich man! He was not Lutheran enough to feel sure of God's merciful forgiveness for that boyish defiance of so long ago. This confession was a terrible shock to both sons. The father's old age was a curse, it seemed, and not a blessing. His long years had let him bury two wives and child after child. The shadow of the father's misery seems to have hung over both sons as long as they lived.

The father died; penitent Soren applied himself to study and took his degree; he published, besides the thesis for his degree, an article jumping on the conceit of Hans Christian Andersen, author of those delightful fairy tales that pleased us so when we were children. Now he was ready to write, but lacked incentive. He

already had plenty of money: smoked cigars, haunted the cafes, attended the theater, kept all his rooms lighted at night, with pens and paper ready in every room. In that romantic age a broken heart seemed the proper push to start a man on a career of great accomplishment, so he acquired a broken heart. There seems to be something artificial in his love-affair. He courts a girl and they become engaged. Then he decides that he is too melancholy, and breaks it off. She comes to his room and makes a scene. Engaged again. Break off again. He begins to write prodigiously. She marries another man. Now his heart is really broken and he writes faster and better, concealing his identity under various pen-names, signing his own to a continuous series of religious discourses, and filling books and books with private diary entries;—every diarist expects someone to read his diary some day.

He began his first productive period of writing with a big work called *Either-Or*. It presents a choice between two ways of life. One is esthetic, even erotic, the search for pleasure. The other is moral, the path of duty, especially of duty to your fellow-man. The first includes, for instance, a cure for boredom: rotation of pleasures corresponding to rotation of crops in farming. This part closes with *The Diary of a Seducer*. A few years ago in upper New York state someone printed an edition of five hundred copies of this diary in English. I have it in French. But there is nothing lurid about the diary; the hero is just a yellow dog, but his diary is very nice. The second part of this work goes on with a fine essay on marriage. Naturally the

praise of marriage did not attract as much attention as the diary which came just before it.

Later Kierkegaard tried this again, in a book called *Stages on Life's Way*. The first stage is esthetic or selfish. Here is found a brilliant account of *The Banquet*, also called *In Vino Veritas*, which means *Drink and tell the truth*. The second stage is moral and ethical again, in praise of the joyful duty of matrimony; and the third is religious.

Meanwhile he wrote a bright little book, *Philosophical Scraps*, with such religious ideas as these: Jesus Christ produced certain effects on his contemporaries; to be His you must be a contemporary of His and have a vital contact with Him now; there is no such thing as a disciple at second hand. Again: God is a Teacher; He offers us a lesson; but we are too dumb or too mean to learn it, we can't learn it; so God makes a change in us that enables us to learn His lesson. During all this time our hero was also publishing edifying discourses. He also wrote some remarkable prayers. For instance, here is the opening prayer of a written sermon about the Day of Pentecost. I take it from the unpublished translation by Professor Hollander of our state University: "Thou Holy Ghost, Thou Which givest us life, bless also this our meeting, the speaker and the listener: fresh from the heart it shall come, with Thy assistance, and mayest Thou also cause it to go to the heart."

There was a comic paper in Copenhagen, *The Corsair*, which was making fun of everyone and his dog. The paper was friendly to Kierkegaard, but he

went out of his way to get into trouble. What he asked for he got, and plenty of it. When the dust settled, the paper had folded up and the editors were gone; but in the meantime, Kierkegaard had become the standing joke of the whole country. Everybody laughed at his spindle shanks; still more at the uneven lengths of his trouserlegs. He was so lampooned and cartooned that even children laughed at him on the street and called him "Either-Or." That title of his first great book, *Either-Or*, has since become a famous and valuable and popular expression in philosophy, ethics, and theology: it stands for a choice, a necessary decision: you must choose either this or that. But in the meanwhile, as object of a comic paper's ungentle humor, he felt all the mockery of the paper and of the public,—and being a sensitive man he probably imagined laughs where there were none. It made Kierkegaard feel that he was suffering the tortures of the damned. He decided that the crowd is always wrong and a majority is not likely to be right.

All this time he was using up his capital as well as his income; and was spending far more than the income from his books. One of his biggest books sold only sixty copies during his lifetime, and he seems to have paid for the publication himself. He did that with all his books* and came out just about even. That is, when he was forty-two years old, one autumn day he drew the last of his capital for current expenses and started home with the money in his pocket. An attack

* This statement turns out to be inexact.

of illness caused him to fall on the street, and within forty days he was dead.

But the last year or two of his life had brought him a new kind of reputation. He had finally graduated in theology but was never ordained, though he preached a few times, especially at Friday communion services. When he looked forward to the exhaustion of his fortune, he thought at times of taking a rural pastorate, but never did so. At least once he put out a feeler or two for a teaching position in the theological seminary, but got no favorable response. But his studies, his prayers, his meditation, his observation, and his listening,—for he was a regular church attendant and a great reader of printed sermons,—convinced him that the church was all wrong. Preachers talked about following Christ and imitating Christ, but neither they nor their people did so. He wrote something brilliantly sarcastic about how shocked a preacher would be, after giving his congregation a great sermon on taking Jesus Christ as example, if some man came around during the week and opened up a serious conversation on just how he ought to follow the example of Christ. The preacher would be startled, and call the man crazy. Kierkegaard said that even if we preachers do fall down on the job of imitating our humble and self-denying Saviour, we at least ought to admit our failure. We eat good food and get fat; we have a respectable position in the community; we ride, carriages in his day, automobiles in ours; we take life too easy for professed followers of One Who died on a Cross. I am afraid that there is a lot of truth in the charge.

But Kierkegaard picked out a peculiar place to begin his attack. Bishop Mynster, his father's friend and old pastor, a highly honored old man, died. Martensen, Kierkegaard's old teacher, preached the funeral sermon, and eulogized the departed bishop as one of the line of witnesses to the truth that ran back to the early martyrs and to the apostles. Kierkegaard was very indignant. He wrote what he had to say, but waited nearly a year before turning it loose, politely withholding his attack on Martensen until the latter had been appointed to the vacant bishopric. Then he let go. "Mynster a witness to the truth? In the line of martyrs and confessors and brave witnesses? That well-fed and respected man, clad in broadcloth, wearing a gold chain, well-wrapped in winter, riding in a carriage?" And he poured that sort of thing on the clergy of the established church where he lived and also on ministers and Christians all over the world. We pastors ought to read his vicious attack sometimes and examine our own consciences.

This accusation that there was no Christianity in the church stirred up a great deal of attention. Then he died. During his last illness he was too consistent, though dying in trustful Christian faith, to take the last communion: he would not receive the holy communion from the hands of a minister in the church that he was attacking. But at his funeral the officiating minister preached an ordinary funeral sermon. So at the cemetery the students put on a demonstration, and one of them made a speech and read some extracts from the dead man's recent remarks about the church

and the preachers. Now we Americans do not take student demonstrations very seriously, especially demonstrations and parades that involve cutting classes: we remember our own college days. In Europe students are probably more serious-minded than over here. But this student demonstration in the graveyard was the chief notice taken of this man's death.

Within two or three decades, however, the works which he wrote in his native Danish language began to appear in German. The thorough scholarship of Germany began to study him, partly as a peculiar specimen of human thought, partly because of some profound meditations that were gathered out of his journals and published as *From the Depths of Reflection*. A few English and Scottish writers began to notice bits of him in German. More and more of his many works began to appear in German.

He had laid himself out in an attack on the philosophy of Hegel. Hegel's philosophy involves the idea that all things are so connected that if you know one part thoroughly you can work out the rest. It lies back of Tennyson's lines:

*Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies—
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.*

Kierkegaard objected that things are not continuously connected: there are breaks and gaps. He recognizes that man is made in the image of God, but such a very

small image; and there are no lines going all the way to God. Thirty years ago we thought there were. People were happy and prosperous; evolution was the scientific doctrine, and evolution was confused with progress. Our ancestors had been monkeys, but we were better. Our ancestors may have been fish or worms, but we were almost at the peak of perfection, and still going: a steady, continuous upward progress, one thing leading into the next.

Then the world war made Europe realize that man is not so great. With all his cleverness, he is not only helpless in the terrible storms of nature, but also helpless against the artillery and the social and economic systems he has built. It took the depression to rob us Americans of our pride: but now many of us, like many people in Europe, are willing to listen to Kierkegaard as he tells us that we are smaller and weaker than we thought.

An important part of Kierkegaard's teaching about man's dependence upon God is given in his famous parable of the coach horses. Here is Dr. Hollander's unpublished translation, which I have through his courtesy: "Once upon a time there was a very rich man. He purchased abroad, at great cost, a team of altogether faultless and excellent horses which he wished to have for his own pleasure, to drive with them. About a year or two passed. If any one who had previously seen these horses now saw him driving them, he would not have recognized them: their eyes had become dull and lifeless, their pace uncertain and undisciplined. They could stand nothing, and hardly run a mile without his

having to pull up somewhere on the way; and sometimes they would come to a stand even while he was driving them. Also, they had acquired all kinds of crochets and vicious habits, and though they were, of course, fed abundantly they were getting worse every day. Then he bethought himself of the king's coachman to cure this. He drove them for one month: there was not, in those parts, a team of horses which carried their heads more proudly erect, whose eyes were as fiery, and whose carriage was as beautiful—there was no other team of horses capable of covering fifty miles, if necessary, in one day's journey without stopping. What was the secret? It is easy enough to see it: the owner who undertook to drive them without knowing how to drive, he drove them according to a horse's ideas about driving; but the royal coachman drove them according to a coachman's ideas about driving." Apply this to yourself. Is it better for you to run your life or to let God run it and you?

We are not smart enough to figure out God's purposes. A Portuguese proverb says, "God writes straight with crooked lines." And we do not really know enough about God to argue about Him.

That leads right into an important teaching of Kierkegaard's. We cannot mentally grasp God for purposes of argument. Let me illustrate in terms of high school math. You handle the equation x equals 5 without difficulty; you grasp it completely. You know how to deal with an unknown x and at last x is equal to 5 and 5 is a number which you can count. But suppose your equation is x equals *infinity*. While you can

perform operations with that, you do not really have the equation completely in your grasp. You cannot count *infinity*, though you have an idea what infinity is and you can even define it after a fashion. Infinity is both too vague and too large for our mental range. So with God. He is too big for our human comprehension. Of course we can understand what He tells us in His revelation. As a thrifty Scot says, you do not have to drink the whole ocean to know that the water is salt: one drop tells you what kind of water is in the ocean,—or in our gulf. God tells us what we need to know; but the greatness of God is really beyond our grasp.

Kierkegaard is reminding us that we are small and God is great. That is a needed corrective to our human pride and trust. God's sea is great; our boats are small. Kierkegaard is fond of saying that to trust in God is to launch your little kayak on deep water. That is why we pastors are finding his name and his ideas in the literature we read. God is so great and you are so small that when God speaks to you, you ought to dip in your oars and row.

* * * * *

That concludes the rotary talk. No reader would expect to find everything in this chapter. The Port Lavaca Rotary Club dines in a place which my good friend Mr. Frank Montier has made famous for its seafood, but I would not drive down there for enchiladas. In fact, there are a good many things that I have noticed about Kierkegaard which not only do not belong in this chapter but have no place in this little book.

But even an oyster-boat may tow a skiff. Let me tie the following, clipped from some periodical, probably *The Continent*, years ago, to the algebraic illustration that was inflicted on the rotarians of the town situated on LaSalle's Baie aux Vaches:

"What is religion? Anyone who is looking for an adequate definition may be interested in the following quotation from the philosopher Fichte's *The Way Toward the Blessed Life*. . . .

"'But herein does religion consist, that man in his own person and not that of another, with his own spiritual eye and not through that of another, should immediately behold, have, and possess God.'"

Barth seems to object to such strong verbs as "have" and "possess." Kierkegaard's emphasis on the insufficiency of human logic and reason probably helped Barth work out his own position; Barth equates our use of the word "religion" with Paul's word "law" in Romans. Kierkegaard would have enjoyed Fichte's "his own and not another" as much as I enjoyed a German correspondent's doubly happy reference to moving into "an own house"; but he would have questioned the security of the Fichtean having and possessing. One may be sure that the fish is in the net, and yet make a waterhaul.

CHAPTER IV

MAN'S TRAGIC DISTRESS TODAY

IN the fall of 1938 our Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary invited me to give three lectures on the revival of Calvinism in Europe. Unfortunately, the resources of my own little library¹⁵ were insufficient, so with the consent of the faculty one hour was devoted to Kierkegaard in connection with the current realization of man's tragic distress and need for God; a second to Barth and the Transcendent God Whose help is offered; and a third to our Southern Presbyterian heritage of theology, which contains most of the things which Kierkegaard brings back to our attention and practically all that some of our men are willing to take from Barth. This chapter is based on the appropriate parts of that first lecture, with amplifications.

¹⁵ I know of no better one within a hundred miles. A man far from great libraries who tries to be intellectually honest must spend time and energy and even some money in making sure of the accuracy of his quotations. And what an impression he gets of the intolerable laziness of a Van Dusen (e.g. *God in These Times*, p. 52; *The Plain Man Seeks for God*, p. 57), quoting Harald Höffding at second-hand instead of looking up the passages and verifying the quotation! If Professor Van Dusen is too busy, has he not students who will do a little work for him in his seminary's library? Where I am, it may be a choice between quoting second-hand or not quoting at all, as may be observed in this book. Besides that, the plan of this book calls for omission of references from certain chapters.

In 1920 when I entered upon my first pastorate, the world was optimistic. Or so it seemed to us Americans and Texans. There was danger in the current faith in evolution. Not in the monkey aspect, which was unimportant; but evolution was popularly understood, even by the learned, to be a scientifically proven doctrine of inevitable progress. This misunderstanding was so general and so serious that I worked out a standard treatment for my young University of Texas freshmen when they returned to Cleburne for the Christmas holidays. It was based on student reaction to a certain lecture about evolution which impressed all my freshmen. During a drive in my little coupe it was easy to start the student into a speech on evolution; and without fail the well taught lecture came point by point from the eager youth. As we neared the manse the student would reach the point in his lecture where came the emphatic assertion: "Darwin did not say that we are descended from monkeys." — "Excuse me for interrupting, but he did." — "No, Mr. Rivière, Darwin did not say that we are descended from monkeys, but from—" "Who told you that?" — Usually by the time that the student had named the instructor, we had reached the manse. The pastor would run inside, and from his study bring out a trained copy of *The Descent of Man* (not the earlier *Origin of Species*) which would fall open at the paragraph in which Darwin traced human ancestry back to a particular group of monkeys, and indeed much further. Of course I had little concern about apes or about anything more than a general awareness of current changes in Darwinian

theory; but perhaps it was healthy for young and growing minds to remember, from this bookish correction, that small town pastors are bachelors and masters of arts who may happen to know some of the faculty's lore, and that a preacher may have the right to speak with some authority in his own field. In fact, all through my ministry it has seemed to me that the most dangerous heresies are those which are easiest on human nature: they begin by underestimating the sinfulness of sin, and are too optimistic about man.

Today we are beginning to realize, as they have long realized in Europe, that pessimism may be nearer truth than naive optimism. Some dark future for our civilization is a real possibility. Not only did the "war to end war" not end war (whoever thought it would?), but it did not "make the world safe for democracy" to any permanent degree. Even though one might argue that there is as much democracy in the world in November, 1938, as there was in July, 1914, and that more people have governments of their own choosing,* we know now that democracy cannot be made safe from without. To ensure her own safety democracy must, among other things, be democratic: really democratic, with a broad educational opportunity, with majority rule, with respect for minority rights. Despite his final failure, typified by the way his second wife buried him in her church, not his, Woodrow Wilson was too great a statesman to expect to make democracy safe; his announcement was a policy of making the world a place in which

* My head has been hanging in shame for some time. But even if a page has been turned in God's book of history, this may not be the end of the chapter. December 31, 1940.

a democracy would be safe from without.¹⁶ This democracy must, to maintain itself, be a living and almost all-pervading thing. Under the conditions of our experience, life must be subject to change and must even possess a marked characteristic of instability. There are various possibilities, and the downfall of our civilization may be one of them.

We have debts and depressions. We have international problems, some of them full of peril. Despite the great ecumenical movements, there are also some great ecclesiastical dangers. Unemployment is connected with certain political unrests, and the scarcity of jobs produces among our students not only serious thinking but also unbalanced radicalism.¹⁷

¹⁶ Armistice Day, 1939, taught me some of these things.

¹⁷ Christendom, now published by the American section of the current ecumenical movements, in the autumn of 1939 number, brings us a voice from Paris: Berdyaev, the Russian philosopher in exile, in an article on *The Paradox of Falsehood*, says that "the modern novel reveals a very bitter truth about man . . . personality which has lost its center." Kierkegaard would have cheered when Berdyaev adds: "Conscience, the organ of moral judgment, is transferred from the depths of individual personality to the collective, to the dynamic of historical collectives"; a terrible fact, but sound rebuke is cause for joy. To illustrate and introduce this fact, Berdyaev had gone to Dostoevsky and to "the most truthful of all the world's great writers," Tolstoy. "The Grand Inquisitor, whose words are essentially those of everyone who attempts to organize a world order, recognized Christ's truth as destructive and anarchistic; and to organize human well-being he wanted to correct the work of Christ." Tolstoy, denouncing "the lies which form the base of civilizations and states and societies, challenges us to risk the truth, to risk everything that truth may prevail." But, he says, Tolstoy expected nonresistance to bring in the miraculous and immediate intervention of God. That sounds to me like the false theology of Job's comforters. That is just what Kierkegaard, in *Repetition* and also in *Fear and Trembling*, says that we may not count on. God can do anything and will do the right thing; but His time is not our time. Under circumstances

Influential writers in New York and New Jersey are now having more to say about our needs today. Dr. Van Dusen writes: "Beneath the thin veneer of satisfied self-assurance, the man of today is a strangely bewildered, frustrated, profoundly unhappy mortal." He put that felicitous and penetratingly accurate sentence into two different books.

At a conference in the fall of 1937, President Mackay of Princeton Seminary, who has lectured on Kierkegaard all over South America, built a stirring call and a cheering message on "the terrifying fact of disintegration." He spoke of disintegration in the realm of thought: the international public had believed in evolution, which was felt to guarantee a flowering, developing process, with much better days ahead; but now conflict and tension are the great words, and Hitlers and Lenins are being idealized instead of freedom and brotherhood. Disintegration in both individual and universal ethics; in the social realm; in politics, with new political systems that are at bottom religious faiths, so that Mackay foresees that the world may engage "in new wars of religion, more terrible and more challenging than anything it had ever known." And "beyond that *there is disintegration in the religious realm*. . . . Man has been unmasked afresh. We are all compromised. . . . All are involved in the terrible reality of sin which our generation is rediscovering afresh."

and in concrete situations where as a Christian I must not resist, namely, must neither speak nor strike, I endeavor to hold my tongue and withhold my hand; but that does not give me victory over anyone but myself.

Professor Tillich has been describing our situation as "an extreme example of a self-assertive, self-sufficient type of existence." Being a religious socialist, he denounces our modern economic system, capitalism, as the symbol of self-sufficient finitude.

How timely and how Christian is this prayer of Kierkegaard's: "Heavenly Father, what is man without Thee? What is all his knowledge, no matter how full, except a trifle unless he knows Thee? — Thee, the Only, the One, and the All. . . . Grant repentance, with the sincere courage to desire aright again. . . . Thou Who grantest to undertake and to complete, grant triumph in the day of distress, that this defeat which comes when desire is warm and resolutions firm may be transformed into victory for the repentent heart."

* * * * *

To the public, a man may represent a movement because he is its leader, or because he happens to be carrying its flag in the street parade. Kierkegaard, who wrote in a language which he himself called "a provincial dialect, for want of enough Danes to speak it," is certainly the banner-bearer in the contemporary movement that recognizes man's tragic situation.

A man's philosophical vocabulary and the direction of his beliefs are likely to depend upon his answers to these questions: 1) Does science begin with wonder, or with hunger? 2) Does philosophy begin with a restful pipe in your armchair after supper or with a nervous cigarette during a sleepless night? 3) Which is more important, the reality (if any) back of appear-

ance; or how we know, and whether we know, and how much; or what ought we to do?¹⁸

Kierkegaard's name is now receiving more and more mention for his appreciation of the human predicament, whether you call it pessimism or realism or both. In many respects he is also a real leader, for his influence is strong if not always straight upon many moderns who march in the procession of those who find humanism unsatisfactory. Kierkegaard manfully faced the facts of man's weakness, helplessness, hopelessness, dread,

¹⁸ An hour after that paragraph was written, the morning mail brought *The Key Reporter*, v. 1, in which J. H. Randall, Jr., discusses *The Paradox of Intellectual Freedom*:—

"Whatever intellectual freedom may be, it is clearly a social before it is an individual possession, the product of a complex and delicate cultural fabric. Unless the institutions of a society, from lowest to highest, are so ordered as to foster it, no mere guarantee of civil liberties will suffice. . . .

" . . . The last thing intellect is or can hope to be, is free. The fruit of intelligence and knowledge is not freedom, it is power, or it is understanding; and neither leaves the mind with any unfettered choice. For power is no liberator: it rather sets conditions and obligations of its own from which there is no escape. The more power we possess to do what we can, the more we are bound to conform to those conditions and to observe those obligations, and the more inexorably intelligence is compelled to seek what they are, and how what that power can do must be done. And the compulsion of understanding, though less harsh, is no less ultimate. For to know what is, and why it must be so, may indeed win us release from the vain endeavor to do what cannot be done; but in abandoning the illusion of external power, we are none the less bound to be what we are and do what we must. Neither with the power to do, nor with the understanding why, can the mind find independence of circumstance, or hope to legislate its own career. We are caught in the cruel dilemma: if knowledge be power, it brings no freedom; if knowledge brings freedom, it is at the price of impotence." "Freedom is possible only for the impotent." Of course, being an American, Randall has a way of escape; his way is reminiscent of Woodrow Wilson's *When a Man Comes to Himself*. See Professor Randall's full article, in *The American Scholar*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Winter 1939-40, p. 10, 11, 13; and his non-absolutist solution, p. 14-18.

guilt, anguish. He faced them, studied them, made what he could of them, and put his trust in God through Jesus Christ.

There is a genuine similarity between this whole approach and the method of the evangelistic "protracted meeting." Before the preaching of forgiveness and the invitation to believe and profess, come days and days of preaching about sin, to produce conviction of sin, and sometimes all these sermons are seasoned with startling remarks to attract attention to the message (and perhaps, unfortunately, to the messenger). The startling remarks are included in my analogy.

The war and its aftermath were far more serious in Europe than over here. Troubles turn some people to the Bible, some to the philosophies of Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, some to *Science and Health*, and some to bottles instead of books. Outward troubles produce inward trouble,—though that aspect of the matter may be overdone, as when one tries to date the psalms almost entirely on a basis of the outward fortunes of a nation, whereas many of them are among the most personal and individual writings in literature, the very reason why they grip our souls.

At least one book in English about Kierkegaard has tried to derive his melancholy from the political misfortunes of his native land and in this way has tried to explain his leadership in post-war German thought. That is silly. His appeal is more personal. Take his expression "the demonic" or "the demoniac." Tillich and Wendland and others are applying this term to the evil forces that seem to work against mankind today;

and such a usage can be justified from his writings, if I may rely upon some translations of certain books; but his pet use of "the demonic" was narrowly individual. It denotes a peculiar kind of dread or anguish which a sinful soul feels in the presence of goodness, in contrast with the fear that it feels in the presence of evil or danger. Kierkegaard goes back to the evil spirits that dreaded the approach of Jesus and cried out in protest. Tillich's employment of Kierkegaard's expression seems to sacrifice the inward and personal to the outward and general; whereas Kierkegaard's use of it fits in with his ordinary emphasis, on *a man by himself*, on a man alone among things or other people, on a man individual and solitary before God.

Kierkegaard does have a wide influence in the thought world of today, and we Calvinists ought to find him especially interesting to us. He was not a Calvinist. But he realized and analyzed human need, and our points of contact are inability and divine initiative. His insistence upon man's need of God, upon man's helplessness and despair apart from God and in the presence of God until he and God get together, has been an intellectual force pushing toward the Calvinistic doctrines of grace and the need for grace, of irresistible grace and effectual calling.¹⁹

Kierkegaard was a great voice on the free will side. But he was also, as Chestov says, a voice crying in the

¹⁹ Does any reader need to be reminded that Calvinists, like Calvin, hold to both free will and predestination, believe both in the efficacy of the divine decrees and that the liberty of second causes is not thereby taken away? That may be paradox, but it is fact. Kierkegaard insists that paradox is a fundamental category (his favorite term of classification) of thought.

wilderness; for he tells us of our twisted, distorted, crooked condition, and calls us to make straight the way of the Lord. People feel their need today. That is why, in the United States, we have a large share of what the late Thomas Cary Johnson called "modern isms"—we preachers ought to have given our countrymen better food. In Europe nations are afflicted with what Wendland calls "secular messianisms."

Individually man suffers from what Berdyaev calls "terrifying solitude," or from the effort to escape that solitude. Kierkegaard is a veteran banner-bearer among those who are aware of that need, and is actually leader of part of that army. But as leader he leads in an individualistic way; he does not offer himself as example nor his own experience as a norm. He leads toward recognition of what Chestov and Walter Horton want us to think of as the new dimension, the tragic dimension of terror or dread or pessimism, a part of life which we used to try to forget. Hear him:—²⁰

"There is a careful and experienced guide who makes the traveler watch out and be cautious; he is Repentance. . . . He follows slowly, sadly, but like a faithful and true friend. If you do not hear his voice, you are on the road to perdition: the disease is most to be feared when the patient that is perishing of weakness thinks himself in good health. So marvelous is the power of Repentance and so sincere is his friendship that there is nothing more terrible than complete escape from him.

²⁰ These quotations, like the prayer quoted above, are from Tisseau's French version of *Purity of Heart*.

"Over every man's life pilgrimage there watches a Providence Who gives two guides, of whom one calls forward and one calls back. . . . They always agree, for one calls ahead toward Right and the other, behind, urges away from Wrong. They are not blind, and it takes both to make the journey safe, vigilant on duty as advance and rear guard. . . . The speedy traveler who goes with light step does not learn the road as does the burdened pilgrim, nor the eager man as does the penitent; the former hurries from one thing to another and gets away from experience, of which the latter, coming behind, gets an ample harvest."

* * * * *

Any account of Kierkegaard has to go through the short list of events making up the visible part of his life. It is rather monotonous, because everyone has to say the same thing, except that one author speaks of Kierkegaard's bad taste in dragging his love affairs out before all Copenhagen in his books, and another replies that outsiders did not catch on to this indelicate exposure; or Bain says that Martensen's reply to Kierkegaard's open attack on Martensen's funeral eulogy of Bishop Mynster was "crushing," while Lowrie calls it "lame."

But the real life of this remarkable man was lived inwardly, in that queer, deep, persistent, doubting, trustful, contradictory, oscillating, dialectical, despairing, hopeful, active, moving, intuitive, reflective, penetrative, discriminating mind of a great genius. His brilliant spirit sought expression in a whole literature of

books published under various pseudonyms, and the pseudonymous authors may turn up elsewhere as characters in a narrative, as in the sparkling *In Vino Veritas*. The same reverent and devout spirit often published nourishing religious discourses (meat, not milk), bearing the author's real name. The same keen and earnest spirit, in the final direct assault on Christendom as the dilute result of mixing Christianity with history and human selfishness and sluggishness and sin, produced what a Gallic scholar appropriately calls *The Provincial Letters* of the nineteenth century, full of sharp missiles that should stir us Christians up today; and he took good aim at the ministry. Also that introspective spirit, one of the greatest diarists of all our recorded civilization, left not only long journals but also special works explaining the whole course of his authorship: portions of these last explanations were published during his lifetime at two periods when he felt that his task, as then envisaged, was about done.

This marvelous inner life, with its directness and its intricacy,—both parallel by certain stylistic characteristics which are apparent even in translation,—can nonetheless not be understood without some knowledge of Soren Kierkegaard's adventureless career: in which the mockery of a comic paper gave him a year of martyrdom; in which his deep love-affair was ridiculous or pathetic or both, as you please, but extremely either or both; in which grief over a father's boyish defiance of God gloomed a bright life with profound and persistent melancholy,—at times the reader feels that this modern literary prince of Denmark was both sad and

glad to be so sad; in which a wealth of thought and feeling was stored up for our century by a lonely soul; in which fatal illness struck a man, who had lived extravagantly and earned comparatively little, just after he had cashed the last dollars of his paternal inheritance; in which a religious man declined the last communion; and in which a rather quiet life was followed by a student demonstration that interrupted his funeral.

A very important aspect of his work is his presentation of Christianity as a hard thing. It is hard to enter and hard to keep up; hard to understand and hard to explain; hard to believe and hard to live.

Another aspect is the man's originality. He said so many things that others have said since; and often that others have been honored for saying. I have enough scattered notes for a couple of lectures on this subject. Here is one example, an anticipation of Bergson:* "Every moment, like the sum of moments, being a moving thing, no moment is present; hence in time no

* The proofs of these pages reach me while the daily papers are reporting Bergson's death. I salute the gallantry of his last public gesture, which manifests a fine solidarity with his own and a soul uncrushed by national disaster. Because of his eloquence, my fellow-students at the faculty of letters at Bordeaux used to say that there was no room for students in Bergson's classes in Paris: too many ladies crowded his lecture room. But I respectfully acknowledge a heavy debt for help which his early writings gave to one young minister's efforts to think. Perhaps my beloved Pascal's opusculum on the contrast between the geometrical spirit and that of finesse actually grandsired the distinction in Bergson's first great *Essai*, between our stiff geometrical thinking about clock-time and our awareness of duration. Bergson's brilliant spirit, favoring the vitality of life, was against the coldly intellectual, casual continuity, the deadly necessitarian interlocking, the gone-to-seed logic of such competent Hegelianism as H. Taine's *Les Philosophes Classiques du XIXe Siecle en France*, lucidly condensed on p. x and p. 371.

moment is either present or past or future. . . . *Spatialize a moment,—but thereby the infinite succession would be arrested*" (italics mine).

* * * * *

It would take us far afield to discuss the German existential philosophers who stem from Kierkegaard. But having made a careful study of a book by the Russian Chestov, I may be able to throw a little light on the Dane by showing how he is regarded by this Slav who has recently discovered him with such great joy. Chestov traces a line of necessitarian philosophy, which in a way that he calls illogical does admit free will, from Socrates and especially from Aristotle, through Origen and Augustine, through Descartes and the Cartesians who brought forth Wolff, through Kant and Hegel, but with special reference to Leibniz and to rational and moral truths considered as prior to the divine: then Chestov says: "To reason and its astonishment at uncreated truths, we must oppose the Absurd and its despair at the ravages which truths independent of the Divine Will commit in the universe."²¹ Does that make you young Texans think of E. S. Brightman and his finite God which he learned from Mr. H. G. Wells? You remember, the finite God struggling, with our noble aid, against a previously existing and resistant thing in the universe which Dr. Brightman christens "The Given."²² A Brightmanite would be able to say

²¹ Kierkegaard et la Philosophie Existentielle: Vox Clamantis in Deserto, p. 350.

²² Far be it from me to set up as an authority on the origin of Professor Brightman's theology. He may be indebted to a distinguished British theologian who, of course, has not the wide

that the Old Testament Satan, the Adversary or Resister, is a personification of this "Given." "God needs you, brother," says Brightman; "bestir yourself and help Him out." The lion is entangled in a net; bestir yourself, little mouse, and gnaw him loose. Chestov and Kierkegaard are unable to accept this account of a God bound by limitations.

To Kierkegaard God is not only too great for this particular anthropomorphism; He is also different. As you go up the scale, *mineral, vegetable, animal, human*, God is not just one step higher, *animal, human, divine*. God is not merely like man but greater, nor merely the best part of man enlarged. God may be all that, but also in addition and beyond our understanding, He is of a different sort or kind: he is what the philosophers call qualitatively different from us. A quantitative difference is merely size or number: it can be counted, or measured, or estimated and scientifically stated within a definite percentage of accuracy. A qualitative difference is like that between the taste of morning coffee, or the comfort of the pillow you have quit, and the glory of a sunrise or the clasp of an old friend's hand. Organic matter is inorganic matter that is alive and reorganized; but a mere study of the inorganic would not foretell all the qualities and rearrangements of the

circle of readers won by the romancer and novelist. Or if you are bumptiously American, look for the debt to William Jones. If you want to be historical, trace the doctrine back to an early Christian heresy, to be found in all the standard works. There is a suggestion of the doctrine in Zoroaster, but Brightman's Ahriman seems to be the weaker party, on the way to defeat.

One is tempted toward aphorism: Abolish God, get superstition. Abolish Satan, and into his place will creep bad luck, or the Given, or the demoniac, or some hated politician or party.

organic. A Martian, or Voltaire's Micromégas from still farther, might study the plant life of earth and infer the presence of another type of living creature, a type that breathes oxygen in and carbon dioxide out; but the planetary visitor would not, without further experience, anticipate the details of vertebrate anatomy or the difference between the eye of a man and the eyes of a fly. Read that little gem of Voltaire's again; there is more truth in it than the witty Frenchman would admit. Human psychology will not reveal everything about Him Who said: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8).

Take note that the Absurd means the not-reasonable, something beyond the reach of mere human thinking. Be warned that Chestov explains the Aristotelian catharsis as an acceptance of the inevitability of all that happens, including a retribution for sin that punishes the innocent with the guilty. Then, if you will read Isaiah 45:7, you are ready to follow Chestov's interpretation of Kierkegaard:—

"To Reason and its surprise at uncreated truths, we must oppose the Absurd and its despair at the ravages committed in the universe by truths independent of the Divine will. Uncreated truths, themselves dead, bring death to all that lives. From them comes sin. And salvation consists neither in the knowledge that all that does happen has to come, nor in the virtue which accepts what must come and submits *willingly*; salvation is faith in God to Whom all things are possible, Who created everything by His own will and in Whose sight

anything uncreated is only wretched and empty nothingness. That is the meaning of the Absurd toward which Kierkegaard draws us, and here begins the existential philosophy which, unlike speculative philosophy, is the Biblical revelation's philosophy."

Chestov's position is that speculative philosophy, be it Kantian, Hegelian, neo-Kantian, neo-Hegelian, or what not, is "born of the infinite dread when confronted with nothingness. The dread of nothingness forces man to seek a refuge, a defense." This man-made defense mechanism consists in working up some independent and necessary truths that can keep us from accidents and contingencies and indeterminacies.

The existential philosophy of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works replaces this mechanism with an offer of faith as a leap, a venture, a trust in the Absurd, in the contrary of reason, in the possibility of the impossible. Job trusted, and at last received double. Abraham trusted and even obeyed to the point of raising the knife to slay his beloved son, and Isaac was saved to him.

The Kierkegaard of the devotional writings gives us the other side, the personal trust, the trust in God and not in self. If you are in trouble, the birds of the air are the teachers to whom God sends you: look up to them and away from your trouble. The lilies of the field are other teachers to whom Jesus sends you: when you look at them, their beauty hides the very earth on which they grow. To all this you and I have learned to add the trust of a little child, who lets himself go and leaves the responsibility to the One Who carries him.

It humbles our adulthood to become childlike and dependent; we prefer to stand on our own feet, trust our own muscles and brains; but Jesus calls upon us to humble ourselves and become as little children, that is, to become trusting, teachable, willing to learn, ready to believe.

We have this trust because of the love that graciously forgives us. We need forgiveness. When Kierkegaard wrote in his diary in 1844 (Dru, *Selections*, p. 131; cf. p. 130), that "the consciousness of sin is the *sine qua non* of Christianity," he was stating a basic fact which underlay the preaching of Hosea and of John the Baptist, the message of Peter and Paul, and the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer. This basic fact is as fundamental to Fundamentalism and Catholicism as it was to Luther and is to Barth.

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Part of a review of Karl Adam's *The Son of God*²³ may give you a pastor's understanding of what the word *eternity* means as we keep encountering it in our efforts to follow the thinking of Barth and Brunner and Kierkegaard:—

"You and I and Karl Adam agree that there is a supernatural world. More than seventy-five years ago Mansel gave a warning not to substitute, for our legitimate notion of the *indefinite* that is beyond our limits of thought, a vain attempt to grasp the *infinite*. But, as the late Professor J. R. Howerton used to say, there are fashions in philosophy. This supernatural world,

²³ Union Seminary Review (Richmond), xli, 1, 70-73; October, 1934.

this unseen beyond, used to be described in spatial terms. It was above, in the heavens, *in caelo*. The much maligned hymn, *Beautiful Isle of Somewhere*, was an effort to sing about that better place, *jenseits*, yonder. The Greek *aion*, eon, age, used to be translated by our English word world. Nowadays it is stylish to speak of that mysterious beyond in terms of time instead of space. Philosophers have discovered that time is hard to understand. Augustine confessed the same thing long ago. Time is more difficult for Bergson than for Kant, and the study more fruitful; still more complicated for Heim and the group who have, as he says, removed the parallelism between space and time. They aim at a semi-Platonic teleology that makes Aristotle's *Telos* outweigh his *Arche tes Geneseos* or *tes Kineseos*. The only advantage, I believe, in using eternity as the name for the state that is free from space and time is the apparently fresher terminology. As a good theologian, Karl Adam is at home in the old and the new; so he uses heaven and eternity as synonymous.

"Unlike the dialectic school, he is free from haziness in his statements about the supernatural coming over to us. 'The intellect . . . can appreciate the Resurrection of Christ so far as this appertains to space-time experience, has, that is to say, an external history. It can also plainly discern the point where all possible correlations with normal experience are broken, where the vacuum yawns, where the unheard-of, the miraculous comes into sight; indeed, it can of itself attain the certitude that here and now there is present an operation which is not explicable by any natural series of cause

and effect, a dynamic supernatural intervention. It cannot, however, penetrate into the inner religious content. . . .' For this penetration, humanly speaking, there must be that religious emotion based upon the preceding intellectual judgment, the religious act of faith. More accurately, the way from heaven to earth is God's grace descending to our faith.

"Karl Adam and Karl Barth agree that the way is not from man to God but from God to man. This is also old-fashioned Christianity, especially Petrine, Pauline, and Calvinistic; see also John 3:16 and Matthew 11:27. Where Adam and Barth differ, the reviewer would often respectfully take A instead of B. Furthermore, while recognizing that what they call eternity is beyond our comprehension, he would maintain, as Barth almost said in 1920 (see *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 62-64), that if eternity breaks over into time the effects will be recognizable events in history, events that can be discussed, events of which the unusual and supernatural character will be apparent. A streak of lightning may dazzle you by its uncanny brightness, but you see something and know that it is more than a candle or a bonfire. The internal witness of the Spirit is decisive; but we have other evidence too."

Kierkegaard's profound and original book, *The Concept of Dread*, is a study of inherent or original sin. I was glad to read this book, because in at least part of its field I felt comparatively at home, and was not so much bothered by strange terms. Kierkegaard's doctrine is not completely satisfactory, but it is better than

Chestov's. For the federal theology the Dane used Cocceius as presented by Usteri. It would be interesting for some of you young Presbyterians to work out a comparison between him and Girardeau, say as found in the Columbia Theological Seminary *Semicentennial Volume*, 1881. Here Kierkegaard brings in a metaphysical relationship between species and individual that does not accord very well with his other views: not only is the whole species in Adam, it is also in every man. However, you have preached or will preach on the fall with the additional remark that the account is psychologically true, for sin comes to us in the same way: Matthew 4:1 ff; I John 2:16; cf. Micah 6:8; Matthew 23:23.

Kierkegaard was too individualistic to really take original sin in any such sense as Luther and Calvin acknowledged it, or even to admit Kant's radical evil which so many Kantian autonomists used to forget. Kierkegaard was as anxious to study about sin,—theoretically, not experimentally,—as any other philosopher. Like any other mere philosopher, he was whipped by the fall, in other words by the origin of sin. In this connection it is interesting to discover that the individualist Kierkegaard demands a good deal of conformity with parts of his doctrine here.

Some passages in this book of his on sin, especially a comparison of dread to the dizziness that sometimes afflicts a person who stands on the edge of a precipice, have a wonderful attraction to many readers and to many students of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's well known expression about the leap of faith seems to go

back to a conversation between Lessing and Jacobi, reported by the latter and mentioned in the second chapter of this book. Jacobi was trying to do a little personal work with his unorthodox friend. Urged to believe, Lessing said that he could not get his old bones to jump. Jacobi failed in the effort to get him to an elastic spot from which the leap would be easier. Lessing is the hidden protagonist of the books about faith which Kierkegaard published in October, 1843, or of at least some parts of those books; he is also in the background of the brief *Philosophical Scraps*, and is highly praised in the lengthy *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* thereto.

Since he was of the opinion that reason alone is insufficient to lead one all the way to the faith which he actually had, Kierkegaard made a great deal of paradox. A paradox is contrary to appearance; a paradox is against all seeming; a paradox is true but apparently not true. There are several kinds of paradox. A verbal paradox is one thing, a sort of pun. To illustrate: two men were on a streetcar which became blocked in a traffic jam. They decided to leave the car and walk; but after they had gone a short distance on foot, the streetcar passed them. One said: "I thought we would get on better by getting off, but we would have been better off if we had stayed on." It is possible to write pages and pages about paradox and yet fail to distinguish that kind from a paradox of thought. In *Sickness unto Death* Kierkegaard says that the nearer we get to God the further we are from Him; compare Paul, when he was close enough to the light to be able

to see all the little splotches, calling himself chief of sinners. Then there is the absolute paradox: the Son of God enters into human life incognito; and it is this lowly Jesus Who calls us to Him.

The Dane Koch, on page 167 of the French translation of his book about his fellow-countryman, calls attention to what may be an actual paradox in Kierkegaard's behavior (we Christians are never such good witnesses to the truth as we ought to be). Kierkegaard, the man of sharp decisions, *Either-Or*, surprises us by taking sides with Bishop Mynster, whom Koch calls "the living example of harmonious union of earnest Christianity with the cultural humanities," in an anti-pedobaptist controversy in February, 1843. Some Danish Baptists refused to let their infants be baptized; the parents held out for "believer's baptism." The bishop desired the pastor, Soren's older brother, Peder (future bishop, already equipped with a German Ph.D. degree), to christen them with police assistance. Peder refused to employ force. To our amazed chagrin, Soren Kierkegaard in a critical and not very fraternal letter seems to advise conformity with the bishop's purpose. I am reminded of some Arab friends in Victoria: they are brothers, born members of a prominent Quaker family in Palestine, a family that of course does not adhere to any form of water baptism; their baptismal regenerationist relatives in Palestine, either the Roman Catholic ones or the Greek Orthodox ones, used to kidnap each little Quaker kinsman in infancy long enough to ensure him against any *limbus infantum* by Catholic or Orthodox baptism. But perhaps, after all,

Soren was only ironical at the elder brother's expense: you may find the letter in Dru, p. 115 ff. Certainly Kierkegaard did not hesitate to salt his pages with wit and irony, and he deftly makes humor the neighbor of deep seriousness.

Kierkegaard has been called the master of paradox. But when you read him, you will often have occasion to recall some things that Paul wrote in I Corinthians 1: 18-25, perhaps also 2: 7, 14, and surely 3: 18-20. It may be that logical uncertainty is part of our contemporary cross. We do not find the Kingdom of Heaven on maps nor in celestial telescopic photographs. God and goodness do not appear in the fields of our microscopes nor do they flow up from oilwells or down from melting glaciers. The offense of the cross can only be done away by seeking some other way of salvation (Galatians 5:11) or by some illicit or irrational process. A world in arms as this is written today, or squabbling around some new Versailles tomorrow, is in need of help. A world rewhamming itself by some very new deal, wrought by propaganda and votes, still needs help (how many people expect this moving world to freeze into enduring perfection as soon as they reform it!). A world overwhelmed by propaganda fertilized by furtiveness (the reaction to suppression) needs help. A world upset by some demagoguery (fascist, ku klux, or pseudo-Marxist), by propaganda dependent upon group hatred, needs help. But a religious man whose heart is not stayed by faith is in even more tragic distress. After faith comes, as Paul tells us in Romans 5: 1-5, tribulation may be expected,

and faith married to tribulation begets long-suffering,—parts of the normal Christian experience that leads not only to forgiveness, peace, joy, and hope of the glory of God, but also to a love-drenched, love-dripping hope.

* * * * *

I advise you to read Kierkegaard if you get a chance; he is quite worth while. And now he is available to you in books written or translated by people of quite various viewpoints. The first American volume of translations was by a courteous gentleman of Jewish race, Hollander. Steere is a Quaker; Geismar was Lutheran, of course; Swenson was a Congregationalist and thoroughly evangelical; Lowrie is Episcopalian; Ferrie is a pastor in the Presbyterian Church of England; I am much indebted to the Huguenot Paul Tisseau. Dru and Haecker are Catholic, both laymen, I think; and Haecker presents the interesting thesis—for he does not like Kierkegaard's philosophy—that the real Kierkegaard is to be found in none of the pseudonymous works, but in the journals and most of all in the various series of religious discourses which always appeared under the name of S. Kierkegaard. Leaving it to Constantine Constantius, Climacus, Anti-Climacus and the rest—whether you take them for his artistic creations or his other selves—to give full recognition to the scandal and offense of the cross, this S. Kierkegaard is a simple, trustful Christian.

CHAPTER V

ACCRETIONS

(Historical and critical notes, about Theology and Philosophy.)

THE tail of a boy's kite is made of rags tied together. They help to keep the kite balanced. The following miscellaneous items are appended here because there is no better place to put them.

They are more or less like barnacles on a ship's bottom, not part of the hull but growths on the outside: so do not hesitate to skip them. But if you do read them, they probably ought to be read before chapters six and eight; and they may lighten some of the difficulties of chapter nine.

1. *Luther on Faith and the Absurd.* Before ever hearing of Chestov, I had copied the following in Latin from Heim, who quotes it from Luther's *Galatians* (Erlangen edition, 29: 328 f):—

“For faith speaks thus: ‘I believe Thee, the God Who speaks.’ What does God say? Impossibilities, foolish, base, absurd things (impossibilia, stulta, infima, absurda) Thus always God, when He hands out articles of faith, hands out simply impossible and absurd things (simpliciter impossibilia et absurda),

if you desire to follow reason's judgment. . . . On the other hand, faith destroys reason and kills that beast, which the whole world and all creatures in it cannot kill. . . . Thus by faith the pious destroy that beast which is greater than a world, and thereby manifest to God their most grateful sacrifice and worship."

If that line of thought is unfamiliar to you, read Hendry's *God the Creator*.

2. *Kierkegaard against Hegel*. Naturally Kierkegaard was only one of the comparatively obscure assailants of the all-powerful influence of Hegel. After Kierkegaard's main interest had shifted to another field, he became acquainted with the works of Schopenhauer. The latter's unsuccessful attempt, as a barely recognized university instructor, to get up a class in opposition to the great Professor Hegel's, a class meeting at the same hour, is well known. In later days, when Arthur Schopenhauer's name was becoming famous, that name was signed to pages that are more devastating in their attack on professors than any other pages ever written—except Kierkegaard's. Probably Schopenhauer was jealous of Hegel; certainly he invented a system and employed a method that are incompatible with Hegel's.

A few decades later William James fought Hegelianism because he thought that it paralyzed the moral will. He called it sterile, sanctimonious, rotten, charlatanish, and a desperate attempt to make a short cut to paradise. To him it was like the "pantomime state of mind" in which "all common things are represented to happen in impossible ways, people jump down each other's throats, houses turn inside out, old women become

young men, everything 'passes into its opposite' with inconceivable celerity and skill; and this, so far from producing perplexity, brings rapture to the beholder's mind." At best its insights make one feel "the immense sense of *reconciliation* which characterizes the 'maudlin' stage of alcoholic drunkenness" (Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, I, 728 f).

There is something similar in Professor Bréhier's account of the traditional rhythm of German philosophy, which from Proclus and Jacob Boehme derived "a restlessness of mind that keeps it from leaving things where they belong." German metaphysicians have "unequalled skill at putting unlike things together and separating things that are alike; the great post-Kantian metaphysicians especially leave the impression of a great overturn, where, on the ruins of the world as we know it, the mind rises up in complete freedom. Subject and object, the Me and things, mix together; philosopher seeks self in things as he seeks things in himself . . . what is German dialectic, the most characteristic product of this genius, except the endless alternation of suppressions and rebirths of this feeling of restlessness? Mind loses itself in things, then finds itself there to lose itself again" (*Histoire de la Philosophie Allemande*, 180 f). Bréhier objects on the basis of logic and common sense to the Germans being given over, as James puts it, to monism, monism in the depths.

Kierkegaard's chief objection to Hegel was not the direct moral one of William James, though he would have agreed with most of what James said about it. In the main Kierkegaard was closer to the position

from which Bréhier was to criticize. Kierkegaard saw Hegel making things that were not as if they were (or making as if things were that were not!), and going on and on. It was as if philosophy had all the truth she wanted and could easily get more. With its false method of claiming to reconcile opposites which nevertheless were still opposites, this security was like owning Kruger or Insull stocks.

Kierkegaard has his own hierarchy of values; some things were worth more than others, and the richest were often the hardest to disclose. But he tried to give the common man an opportunity to receive his message. In fact the skilful and genuinely learned Dane loved to weave humor, whimsical or sometimes almost broad, into the fabric of his deepest philosophical discussions. If philosophy is an erudite and esoteric system, by which the instructed see how mistaken the uninstructed are in taking appearance for anything like reality, he will fight the system. For after all, you may arrange ideas into some orderly system, but not life. Life will not be systematized. Surprises will come; he discusses them from one very special point of view in a series of paragraphs headed *The Demoniac is the Sudden*, in sec. 2, chap. iv, of *The Concept of Dread*. It is there set forth that the Sudden upsets any expected systematic continuity by breaking in with its surprise.

By the way, in his character of Vigilius Haufniensis, the pen-name that went with *The Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard is unusually inconsistent. Four pages before the passage just cited, he assumes such a continuity and likeness in human nature that travel to London and

Paris are not necessary for the psychologist: if the psychologist will be observant, five couples and ten children will be enough to show him all possible mental states.

3. *Four Viewpoints on matters at issue between Kierkegaard and Hegel*.—

A. *Presbyterian*: H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 110 f: "How thin and external many of Hegel's religious interpretations appear on second reading! This prescribed and rigid Monism has no place for the sense of God's 'otherness,' the ineffably internal relationship of children to a Father, the consciousness of guilt, or the need for humility and discipline."

B. *Roman Catholic*: Sheed & Ward's house organ, *This Publishing Business*, on Leen's *Why the Cross*: "The fall of man is a fact; and the most damnable effect of the fall is that our nature has received a twist, a kind of squint, which sets it passionately and feverishly looking for happiness where happiness is not. This is not simply theology but plain experience. Until this twist is straightened out, we shall not be happy. The cross—Christ's cross, our cross—alone will effect the straightening. Metal that has been twisted cannot be straightened until subjected to fierce heat. Our nature cannot be straightened without suffering."

Or see Karl Adam's contribution to *Germany's New Religion*, p. 126-134. On p. 10 f of the translator's introduction to that book (which is made up of the views of Hauer, Heim, and Adam), there is a good paragraph about immanence and transcendence in religious philosophy. A careless reading of that paragraph, accurate

though it is, *may* leave the reader under the impression that believers in transcendence habitually emphasize transcendence at the expense of Christian mediation. Unfortunately, many busy and hasty critics stub their toes on this sort of thing when they read what we slow and obscurantist and unscholarly Biblical theists write. Christianity and the Bible are full of reconciliation, mediation, and a Mediator. In fact, a sort of burden to this book of mine is the recurrent effort to remind the reader that, *while the gulf between us sinners and God is wide and deep, it is bridged by the Cross*. That is the consistent teaching of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, of Wesley, Spurgeon, and Billy Sunday, of Edwards, the Hodges, Dabney, Strong, Warfield, Machen, and Berkhof.

C. Professorial: J. Wahl, a professor in the French university system who is now, I believe, at the Sorbonne, has published a vast collection of his studies on Kierkegaard in one volume. On pages 159-171 of this book appears a communication which he made to the Hegelian Congress in Rome, April, 1933, on *Hegel and Kierkegaard*. He accuses Kierkegaard of stating some of Hegel's positions inaccurately; and gives lists of resemblances as well as differences. There comes to mind a passage near the end of *The Concept of Dread* where Kierkegaard wrote: "By faith I here mean what Hegel somewhere felicitously calls the inner certitude that anticipates the infinite." This communication to the Hegelian Congress is an informative paper, crammed with valuable insights and with important

conclusions and opinions, but it is too compact for any effort to condense it into a few lines here.

Kierkegaard's struggle against Hegelianism is discussed in the long chapter of Wahl's book that precedes the communication, which is supported by ten or twelve pages of prooftexts (from Kierkegaard's diaries and notebooks) in Wahl's two appendices. In that long chapter, p. 156 ff, Wahl says that some souls are made to receive unity; but others, made for unity, are not made to receive unity. He quotes Bäumler: Kierkegaard's dependence upon the Hegel whom he opposed is a fine example of the dialectic which for Hegel is the law of history. Wahl credits Kierkegaard with a more profound revolt against Hegel than William James's revolt to pragmatism and pluralism.

Professor Aubrey, in his *Present Theological Tendencies*, has some valuable statements about Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelianism, p. 60 ff. He refers to an article on *Hegel et Kierkegaard* by Wahl in *La Revue Philosophique*, vol. cxii, 1931, p. 321-380. This article became the long chapter on *The Struggle Against Hegelianism* in Wahl's big book.

D. Mine. Hegel reconciles opposites, or claims to; Kierkegaard accepts them, and insists upon their opposition.

Dr. Alfred Guillaume, in his 1938 Bampton Lectures, *Prophecy and Divination among the Hebrews and Other Semites*, reminds us that Semitic thought is not afraid of logical contradiction. Our most precious religious teachings come to us from Semites. "Logic does not rule men's lives," writes Guillaume, "Least

of all in the East" (p. 260). "The habits of thought of those who use a Semitic tongue are poles apart from those of a European. . . . Further, the first thing that a student of Semitic literature must learn is that no true Semite has any difficulty whatever in maintaining two irreconcilable propositions. Peoples who do not think it necessary to distinguish between causing, allowing, or permitting, an action to occur cannot be forced to conform to the rules of logic; nor can their thought, and particularly their religious imagination, be confined within rules invented by men of alien race and foreign logic."

In my seminary days there was a student conversation one day about a university professor who was reported to have said, in two different lectures, (1) that religion is of divine origin, and (2) that religion is the finest invention of the human mind. I argued that his Semitic mind—for he was a Jew—permitted him to hold those two contradictory statements together at the same time. He could accept them both as true. My argument was from the Old Testament; there are statements in the Hebrew Scriptures that may not readily submit to the routine procedures of logic.

But there need be no contradiction in the unexpected discovery of the nearness of two things that seemed far apart. Five and a half years ago in an article on *The Philosophy Underlying Barth's Theology*, which appeared in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April, 1934, and was reprinted as a separate pamphlet, I ventured to refer in one paragraph to Feuerbach, Barth, Schleiermacher,

Herrmann, and Baillie, then broke my chain of thought by this paragraph:—

“Let the weary reader now refresh himself with a draught of God’s Word. The seraphim in Isaiah’s vision cried one to another: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is Jehovah of Hosts’; that is, Transcendent, High and Lifted Up, Set Apart from Mankind is the Eternal. The praise of the seraph to his Maker and Ruler went on: ‘The whole earth is full of His glory’; that is, not only does His train fill the temple, not only do the heavens declare His glory and the expanse show the work of His hands, but the earth on which men dwell is upheld by His everlasting arms and He is not far from each one of us. God is both transcendent and immanent. God is far above yet very near.”

In that same paper I tried to say something about Kierkegaard. I thought of him as a forerunner of Barth and as an opponent of Hegel:—

“The most famous dialectic method in Germany was Hegel’s. Hegel sets two contradictory statements in opposition; then he goes on above or behind them to some higher synthesis of statement. Hegel illustrates what might be called the rhythm of German monism: there is one Absolute Reality, from which we come and to which we ultimately return.” That is also a rhythm familiar to students of Hindu pantheistic monism. Hegel’s special characteristic, among pantheists, panentheists, and other immanentists, is that for him the Absolute is not merely the beginning and the goal of the process, but is the very process itself. “Religiously, all started from God the Creator and we, separated

from God (by sin as Barth would say), seek to return to Him." See Isaiah 59:1 f.

"Hegel takes his start from the notion of being, of existence. We think in terms of being. A thing is, or is possible, or is hypothetical, or is impossible, or is large or small, or is present or future. That is his positive statement, a thesis. But Hegel finds contradiction there, the antithesis that nothing can be, nothing can exist, without being something. Unless a thing is something it is not anything; unless a thing is something it does not exist." If you state that a thing is, your statement is incomplete unless you tell what it is; there is no being apart from being-something. "Mere Being without being anything is Not-Being. Hegel goes on to reconcile this contradiction by the synthesis of Becoming. If a thing is in process of becoming, it both is what it is and also is not yet what it will be. The contradiction is resolved because it is and is not at the same time! And so Hegel goes on with more dialectic: thesis, antithesis, and solution of the contradiction by a synthesis which becomes the thesis of the next step.

"A century ago the intellectual world of Germany found rest in this kind of philosophy: only a few decades ago Hegelianism was riding high in England. Why, Bradley founded a system of philosophy on this principle: If a thing *may be* and also *must be*, then it *is*! May not one remark that speculative metaphysics is about as risky as speculative investment? Speculation is uncertain because it depends upon the way things look to the speculator rather than upon provable certainty.

"Now we come to Soren Kierkegaard. . . . He bit-

terly despised the popular Hegelian philosophy which goes on and on. His discourse on Abraham, in an original style imitated by Barth and Thurneysen in their volume of sermons (*Come Holy Spirit*; the German title is *Come Creator Spirit*), underlines the immense difference of quality between man and God, between time and eternity. . . . You cannot, he says, argue from man up to God without committing the logical error of passing over into a different category in your conclusion; you cannot have a conclusion different in quality from your premises. (Query: may you not argue toward if not to God?) Kierkegaard distinguishes between the world of matter, in which we live, and the world of spirit in which an eternal and divine order obtains. . . . He sees the gulf, not between matter and mind, but between (1) man, made up of both matter and mind and existing in time, and (2) eternity, the home of God and of spirit."

And also: "Barth classes him as a religious genius along with Luther and Ignatius of Loyola."

It is probably unnecessary to admit that most of my acquaintance with Hegel is second-hand. However, there is a good deal of cheap comfort for me in William James' admission, after struggling with Hegel and teaching philosophy for years, that he had never waded all the way through any complete work of Hegel's.

Returning to what I tried to say about Kierkegaard's antagonism to Hegel: "Kierkegaard found little hope of progress in the mind itself. . . . Evolution as a philosophy of progress would have found no welcome from him; he saw too many weaknesses in human nature

and in himself: 'As against God, we are always in the wrong.' A characteristic position of Kierkegaard's is that 'only that truth which edifies is truth for you,' which is almost exactly the Barthian position that Lowrie explains by quoting Coleridge on the truth which 'finds me.' " The reference is to Lowrie's book, *Our Concern with the Theology of Crisis*. George Henry Lewes in his *Biographical History of Philosophy* (vol. ii, p. 708), notes that many of Coleridge's "remarks, now famous, are almost *verbatim* from Schelling and the two Schlegels." But Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, p. 97, traces this saying about the truth 'finding' one to a discussion of the internal witness of the Holy Spirit in a book by Jurieu, 1686. Lowrie rather daringly (p. 160f) renders an expression "finds me" where Tisseau's French (*Pour un Examen de Conscience*, p. 61) simply reads "is addressed to me." Another translator habitually reduces Kierkegaard's "demoniac" to "interesting."

Going on with my quotation from myself: "Another position of Kierkegaard's is that the possibility of proof in religion is an illusion, and doubt cannot be overcome by reason. Still another is that eternal salvation cannot be based on any historical event (for a contrary view, see Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, p. 18 ff). This view goes back to the permeating influence of that many-sided genius Lessing. As for me, I do not see why an event of cosmic importance taking place in the Kierkegaard-Barth eternity should not produce recognizable historical events in time.

"Kierkegaard offers this great paradox of faith: Truth is not innate in man. . . . The Teacher has traveled

the infinite distance from God to man to reveal this truth. To get God's truth, he says, you must believe Jesus, the lowliest of men. Today as when Jesus was on earth in the form of man, faith is born of the same condition, 'the resolute acceptance by the individual of the absolute paradox.'"

This way of listing his positions one after another was very repulsive to Kierkegaard. In spite of the fact that there were systematizers among the imaginary characters whose names he affixed to some of his works, and in spite of his manifest skill in playing the scholastic game of divisions, subdivisions, and distinctions, Kierkegaard had a great horror of his work ever being analyzed into sections or numbered paragraphs. Such an over-simplification does forfeit a great deal of the warm and colorful fluidity of his thought.

4. *Barth on Reason in Religion.* Part of Barth's indebtedness to Kierkegaard is involved in his general low rating of argumentation as an effective means of persuading people to receive the Christian message. On the next to last page of *Nein: Antwort an Emil Brunner*, Barth says:—

"According to my experience, this is the best way to talk with unbelieving, intellectual, and modern youth: instead of going through a lot of questions about their natural capacity to accept revealed religion, deal with them quietly and plainly (in remembrance of this, that Christ died and rose again for them too), as if their gainsaying of Christianity is of no serious consequence. Then they can understand you, because they see you in the place where as evangelical theologian you insist on

standing, on the ground of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

"Then in preaching I have the strongest impression of reaching and interesting my hearers, if I count as little as possible on there already being a natural correspondence (or innate preparation) for God's Word, if I depend as little as possible upon the fact that the Word *can* be proclaimed, if I trust as little as possible in my own skill to reach the people by means of what I say, if, rather, I let what I say be moulded and stamped and made suitable by what the text seems desirous of telling me."

After finding these paragraphs, I presented them in one of our church papers as *Advice from Karl Barth*. At our next Texas young people's conference a talented student volunteer secretary called me aside to discuss that article. "If Karl Barth is right," she said, "95 per cent of our secretaries and workers with students are on the wrong track."

Being deeply impressed with the New Testament doctrine of witness-bearing in speech and behavior, I replied that a Christian's testimony may be conveyed by argumentation as a vehicle, but the form of discourse, whether argumentation, description, exposition, narration, or exhortation, is less important than the soul-to-soul *testimony of faith inviting to faith*. When the heart has something to say, it may speak in the language of the brain as well as in the language of lip or hand.

5. *A Futile Attempt to Label Kierkegaard*. Any philosophy or ethics holding to what Professor A. K.

Rule calls "complete immanent continuity," "perfect immanent continuity," is likely to find itself in opposition to Kierkegaard. But the matter is not so simple; to classify him by his relationship to other thinkers is to omit something important. You cannot squeeze Kierkegaard into a sentence nor fairly summarize his position by a phrase.

Today I would not try to classify Kierkegaard nor to pin a short label on him. But some five years ago, before learning better, I wrote something like the following into my notes, and it may as well appear here. Take it as a dated impression made upon me by what I had read by and about him early in 1935.

A. He is not one of those opponents of Christianity whose harsh criticisms can help us in self-criticism;

Neither like Karl Marx, calling religion an opium for the people and warning us against too much other-worldliness;

Nor like Nietzsche, calling ours a slave-morality, a Jewish revenge upon Gentile conquerors,—an accusation that nevertheless contains a bitter tonic to some of our ethical thinking.

B. Nor is he exactly one of those whose contribution was an ingredient of permanent value to Christianity:

Like Amos (worship is vain without conduct to match it);

Like John the Baptist (repent! do not trust race and descent; bring forth fruits meet for repentance); nor

Like Augustine (though the barbarians conquer, the real City of God stands unharmed); nor

Like Luther or Wesley.

C. Kierkegaard belongs rather in the series of extremists or radicals who go too far, but whose very exaggeration makes the rest of us stop and think. Thus, like enzymes, they have a sort of catalytic or solvent effect on some of the lumpiness of our mentalities. A list might include, with him:

St. Francis, with his voluntary poverty and the love that made him preach even to the birds;

John-Jacques Rousseau, with the mind and pen of a genius and the soul of a hired lackey, writing of Nature, which he saw unnaturally through a life of artificial and abnormal experiences;

The early Quakers, with their attitude toward the conventional forms of showing courtesy and respect;

Alexander Campbell, opposing denominationalism by founding a new denomination which, insisting upon unity, split on the question of instrumental music;

The Robert E. Speer of twenty-five or thirty years ago, urging that the burden of proof was on Christian college students to show why they should not be foreign missionaries;

Mr. Kirby Page, with the natural reaction of an ex-Y man of world war army days, going too far in a good direction, in his earnest and sincere effort to get as far as possible from his old unhappy position of auxiliary to the military,—although the Y. M. C. A. men gave full, fine, and helpful service, as I gratefully testify from seeing them at work, they received neither medals nor flowers, and are not eligible for membership in veterans organizations; and

Mahatma Gandhi, a non-resisting and non-resentful

Hindu patriot, wisely but thoroughly nationalistic, seeking his own country's ends and coercing the British by the threat of suicide or by the threat of such a suicide's violent consequences;—this gentle method of coercion by threat has points of resemblance in its coercive pressure:—

- (1) Not, of course, to a small child's planned tantrum to enforce its will;
- (2) But to blackmail, except for secrecy;
- (3) Or to kidnapping, except for the violence to the person of another.

6. *A Welcome Voice.* This seminary lecture and this batch of appended theological notes find confirmation in some of the diagnosis contained in *Modern Protestantism: Neither Modern Nor Protestant*, by Professor Joseph Haroutunian, on p. 479 ff of the autumn, 1939, issue of *The American Scholar*. This quite competent observer speaks of "the naturalist's despair in a vast universe in which he is but a speck; . . . his sorrow at the evil and suffering in the world; . . . his complaints about the selfishness and viciousness of man, his genuine shock at the disparity between facts and ideals; . . . the profound sense of the meaninglessness of his life which lies at the source of his ultimate moral indifference." But, says he, "modern Protestantism has been no cure for the disease destroying the vitality of the modern man." He mentions disbelief and disillusionment, the despair of the modern man, and inconclusive arguments for religion: "our apologist-theologians have produced a vast and dismal body of literature." The new orthodoxy, inspired by the crisis

theologians, has “rediscovered man the sinner (never quite forgotten by the ‘business man’)—the man whose virtue never displaces his self-interest.” But in his judgment this new orthodoxy, obviously inspired as it is by a realistic attitude toward contemporary events, is at bottom disillusioned and frightened liberalism, and is irrelevant to the popular mind. For neither liberalism’s flattery nor orthodoxy’s threat “touches the root of the modern man’s difficulty—his godlessness.” (Orthodoxy may well go back to Calvin, *Institutes*, III, iii, 2, and *begin her preaching with the gospel*.)

Professor Haroutunian offers this uncommonly un-superficial opinion: “That the ‘Crisis Theology’ was a blessing sent upon American theology and preaching can hardly be questioned. But also, it could not be Americanized without losing much of its initial power. It has been primarily a cathartic and a stimulant. More mildly, Kierkegaard and Barth offered themselves as spice or corrective.”

From Kierkegaard Barth adopted the figure of the corrective that goes one way and is itself subject to later correction; the implied philosophy of history is a movement that may be compared to the swing of a pendulum. This pendulum swing is history as we may see it now.

7. *Berdyayev on Kierkegaard*. Some of the ideas just mentioned are brought together by Nicholas A. Berdyayev, Russian philosopher in exile, in an article on *The Crisis of Christianity*, in *Christendom*, vol. ii, number 2, spring 1937, p. 229. If my typewriter had square brackets, I’d put a pair full of exclamation

points after the word “mechanistic,” though. The word *Angst*, which he translates by worry, usually appears in English as dread or anguish. I correct his spelling of the name Kierkegaard—Bréhier also misspells it the same way in his history of philosophy (II, p. 830-832 and in the index, but not in the bibliography on page 838):

“Nothing is more characteristic of Europe’s new mood than the rise of new pessimistic philosophies beside which Schopenhauer seems innocent and comforting. Such is the philosophy of Heidegger, for whom being is evil by its very nature, fallen but fallen away from nothing, hopelessly sinful although there is no God, and for whom the essence of the new world is fear and worry. Kierkegaard, mechanistic, dour and tragic, dominates the thinking of Central Europe today. His doctrine of *Angst* (worry) has become very popular, partly because it so well expresses the state of our world and the situation of man at this moment. In theology and religious thought in general, the most interesting tendency is Barthianism, with its acute sense of man’s sinfulness and its exclusively eschatological conception of Christianity. This is a natural reaction to the liberal, humanistic-romantic Protestantism of the last century.”

I have never been able to agree with those who find Barth too exclusively eschatological. Let them study what he means by eschatology. In fact many who are glibly fluent about eschatology need to study the Johannine viewpoint. The Johannine writings, while normally presenting eternal life as already present for the be-

liever, do not, of course, exclude a return of Christ at some future time, soon or late: for example, in John 12: 1-3; I John 3: 2. The Apocalypse may be understood as emphasizing the speed of the return rather than its imminence. If some Bible students among the dispensationalist group of premillennialists would make a close study of the Old and New Testament uses of the Bible words for latter days, last days, etc., they might welcome parts of Barth's book on I Corinthians, *The Resurrection of the Dead*.

8. *On Reform and the Inward Look.* Barth is more theocentric than Kierkegaard, who was a bit too auto-centric. Dr. C. C. Morrison (*Christian Century*, October 4, 1939, p. 1197), in summarizing Barth's two interesting articles that closed the uneven symposium on *How My Mind Has Changed in This Decade*, says that Barth "stabbed awake the easy-going complacency of that form of liberalism which has captured and held the mind of the Christian intelligentsia for the generation before him. . . . What Barth has done is to bring Christian faith out of its subjectivity and confront it with objective reality. . . . To have turned our eyes from looking within at ourselves to looking without at God is preeminently the greatest service any theologian has rendered this generation." He goes on to quote Barth as saying that the object, the source, and the criterion of his thinking is *the Word of God*, "which in the Holy Scriptures speaks to *man*." Kierkegaard would not have disagreed with that sentence, but he was far more consciously aware than Barth of himself as the glass through which the light shone into his

heart and soul. Barth's debt to Kierkegaard is less than I once thought.

That lovable chameleon Reinhold Niebuhr, who is too sincere to give overmuch concern to consistency, says (letter of September 7, 1939, on p. 1399 of *The Christian Century* for November 15) that "Karl Barth is trying heroically to undo the damage he has done in accentuating that aspect of Continental Protestantism" which Niebuhr calls "Lutheran pessimism, with its glorification of the power of the state and its indifference toward the problem of justice." In my humble and respectful opinion, that is a bit unfair at both ends to Barth. An interest in another world, whether you call it heaven or eternity, is not by any means conclusive evidence of lack of interest in affairs and duties here.

Niebuhr develops the same line of thought in *Radical Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 2, spring 1939, p. 3ff. One may say that probably Reinhold Niebuhr's record relieves him of John Steinbeck's gibe (*The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 447): "Reformers—but they don't bite deep enough into living to know." Some of us Southerners know things about Steinbeck's unfortunate migrants which Steinbeck has not found out—or has preferred not to tell. Curable social injustice calls for action, of course: for thoughtful, prayerful, wise, and unselfish action.

Now Kierkegaard had little or no interest in civic reform as such; and he had but slight first-hand acquaintance with poverty—except as an imagined possibility, which for his vivid imagination was almost first-hand experience. But you and I dash hotly about,

striving for reform in methods, and we run the risk of neglecting the spirit that governs our contacts with persons, and our application of our laws, and our reforms. Both are needed: reform and spirit. They interweave.

Furthermore, the detour may be the best road; which may be illustrated from Plutarch's *Paulus Aemilius* and *Marcellus*. Hannibal was a more able general than Scipio, than Fabius or Marcellus, and probably than Julius Caesar himself. Yet the Roman system produced not only the brave, clumsy consuls whom Hannibal defeated, but also those who defeated Hasdrubal in Spain, destroyed him in Italy, and finally crushed Hannibal himself at Zama. The same system also produced the alert junior officers who, by taking advantage of every little break in the victorious advancing Macedonian phalanx, won the decisive battle of Pydna. The flexibility of the legion and the high average military character of soldiers and officers gave Rome the conquest of the world. Weaknesses in that same character, produced by a variety of indirect causes, contributed to the cessation of the conquests and the final downfall of the empire. Do we need more congressional investigations, federal commissions, new laws, and official propaganda? Or can we, by individual work with individuals and groups of individuals, save the virtues of our American pioneer and inventive ideal and thus produce enough right thinking citizens and enough of high average leadership to ensure our country's future? Must all our lessons be ticketed with both ultimate and proximate aims?

9. *Paradox in Calvin, Barth, and Kierkegaard.* From an article on *Karl Barth and John Calvin*, written by request for *The Calvin Forum* (Grand Rapids; September, 1936; quoting from p. 39): "Barth is trying to expound and underline what Paul tells us about this holy, indescribable, and incomprehensible God. With marvelous command of a flexible language, with a studied effort to keep his fluid thought from solidifying into set forms of words, and with an intensification of Kierkegaard's use of paradox, Barth tries to direct his reader's attention to that which transcends both description and comprehension.

"Calvin and Barth have the same position about human knowledge of God. 'Those dote,' wrote Calvin, 'whosoever they may be, who insist that they know what God is. . . . The demonstration of God, whereby He maketh His glory apparent to His creatures, in respect of the brightness thereof, is clear enough; but in respect of our blindness is not so sufficient. Yet we are not so blind that we can pretend ignorance, to relieve us from the blame of naughtiness or perversity.' Barth, however, found himself called to proclaim God to a generation which in pride of human achievements had made God too comprehensible. Men were so sure of knowing God. Jesus Christ was so thoroughly understood by modern criticism, that men undertook to correct Him, to reshape Him, and to psychoanalyze Him. Therefore Barth stresses the inability of the human to grasp the divine. Barth goes so far in this direction that his very conception of revelation is rather vague and elusive.

"This vagueness is the chief distinction between him and Calvin. Calvin recognized the paradoxical character of much Christian truth. Calvin was one of the most perspicuous writers that ever lived. His Latin is generally admitted to be precise and accurate; his French contributed to form the clear and unambiguous prose which delights the reader of all great French literature. Calvin had such a mastery of paradox that his paradoxes are in chaste, simple, and easy prose, so that the reader is hardly conscious of any strain. For instance, 'we stand when by faith we lean upon God'; 'man was rich before he was born'; 'the life of the Law when it slays us'; 'more comeliness in a dead animal than in a living man.' To Calvin a paradox is a cord tied into a firm knot; to Kierkegaard paradox was like Will Rogers' famous rope, to be turned and whirled and shown off; to Barth the numerous paradoxes which fill his pages are like many turns of packthread wrapped round and round two heavy bricks in hope of tying them together. Erich Schaefer remarks that Barth's weakness is also found where his strength is, every time. Trying not to say too much, he says too little. He is so cautiously paradoxical that his meaning seems blurred and tangled. But as Zerbe says, 'Karl Barth is a genius, and no genius was ever consistent with himself.'"

10. *Possessor or Witness?* In a valuable paragraph on tolerance in H. Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, p. 208, occurs this sentence, which contains one of the best brief statements I have ever seen of Barth's positive contribution to the main line of agelong Christian teaching: "The possibility of

achieving the most dynamic form of real tolerance is to be found in the purely apostolic attitude of being an obedient and joyful *witness* and not a *possessor* of the truth that God has mercifully revealed, and entreating men to join in accepting and obeying it." Though I had not yet seen Kraemer's book, that notion of witness instead of possession, a thoroughly Barthian notion, was elaborated in my second Austin lecture. It is akin to Kierkegaard's denial of the possibility of proof in religion, but is not quite the same belief as Kierkegaard's.

11. *Knowing Kierkegaard—and Pretending.* In my youth old Aunt Mary Harden, who had been a slave in our family, often came to do house-cleaning for my mother. Aunt Mary had a song:

"Ev'ybody talkin' 'bout Heab'n ain' goin' dere,
Heab'n, Heab'n;
Ev'ybody talkin' 'bout Heab'n ain' goin' dere"

One is tempted to sing:

*Talk about Kierkegaard is not the same as knowing him,
Knowing, knowing.*

About five years ago there was a curious debate in *Christianity Today* between Dr. Donald Mackenzie of Princeton and Dr. C. Van Til of Westminster Seminary. They had much to say about Kierkegaard. At that time Mackenzie knew little about Kierkegaard and Van Til less. But in the midst of their thissing and thatting came a gleam of light.

This gleam came from a German study of the history of the notion of paradox by the Dutch Calvinist Dr. K.

Schilder. This exhaustive study, says Van Til, "seeks to prove that Kierkegaard introduced a use of the term paradox not current till his time." This change in the use of the word paradox is "radical because instead of using it to indicate the notion of something unexpected and strange or as something only apparently contradictory he has used it as indicating that human thought is really contradictory." Thus "Schilder has found a radical difference between Kierkegaard's use of the term and the use of the term in Reformed theology." He has something there. Nevertheless any effort to reduce Kierkegaard to a phrase and argue with that phrase is as futile as it is common. A simplified Kierkegaard is not Kierkegaard.

There is an interesting coincidence between some unpublished notes of Van Til's, which I have through his courtesy, and that brilliant philosopher and theologian John Baillie's latest book, *Our Knowledge of God*. Van Til's idea is that you cannot think straight without recognizing God. Baillie's is that you know God directly in the bottom of your heart, no matter what the top of your mind says. For both, a theistic idea is at the very bottom of human mental life. Of course Baillie's quantitative distinction between saving faith and common faith would be as quickly rejected by Van Til as by Kierkegaard. And if there was anything that Kierkegaard despised more than Hegelianism, it was directness or immediacy.

Baillie is an able exponent and reviser of the Schleiermacher-Ritschl-Herrmann tradition, from which Barth revolted during the world war. Baillie brilliantly

goes on and on, surpassing his teachers. He is a careful scholar, but not careful enough. Look at this last book of his:

It seems to me that despite Baillie's courtesy, his reference to Karl Barth's views on immanence (p. 237, note) lacks fairness. See paragraph 13 below, the last quotations from p. 34 of *Credo*, the very page Baillie cites. The words he quotes on p. 101 from Mackintosh seem to me to apply far more accurately to Archbishop Temple, as Baillie quotes him on page 97 f, than to the Kierkegaard whom Mackintosh misunderstood. Baillie is not dependent upon Mackintosh, however. He refers to J. Wahl, who with all these other writers on Kierkegaard is discussed in my ninth and tenth chapters. Baillie quotes Haecker twice on page 226 and also, without mentioning Haecker's name, on page 148—from the bottom of page 31 of Dru's translation of Haecker. This last use of Haecker on Kierkegaard may be inexact: see how Kierkegaard's words are interpreted by Lowrie in his *Kierkegaard*, p. 555. Baillie does not know his longwinded Kierkegaard so well as he knows his brief Martin Buber; but his index proudly carries ten references to "this profoundly gifted eccentric" Kierkegaard.

On page 185, with reference to Kierkegaard's doctrine of the existential moment, Baillie gives this footnote: "See especially his book *Der Augenblick* (1855)." That seven word note contains the following errors. *The Instant* or *The Moment* was a series of pamphlets published in 1855 in Copenhagen. A German translation with the title *Der Augenblick* appeared

in 1909 as vol. xii of Kierkegaard's collected works. *The Moment*, or, as Hollander translates, *The Present Moment*, being an attack on the established church and its ministry, written in popular style, *does not discuss the existential moment*. For the existential moment, you must see some of Kierkegaard's earlier books.

Dr. Baillie would profit by reading Walter Lowrie's massive but meaty book on Kierkegaard; and people who want to embellish their pages with that Danish name would do well to familiarize themselves with Lowrie's third and fourth appendices, perhaps even with his seventh. In Appendix IV, p. 616-618, Lowrie gives a synopsis of all the sections of *The Instant*. I do not think that *When Is 'the Instant'?*, the fifth paragraph of No. 10 (not published in 1855) justifies Baillie's note.

Does any reader object to obscurity's criticism of a man whose teaching of philosophy and theology has shone in Canada, the United States, and Scotland? As my beloved teacher, the late William M. McPheeters, used to insist, *look up the references*. Moreover, a cat may look at a king. And our little chihuahua puppy has a perfect right to inform me of her low estimate of my skill in preparing her breakfast, saying it is too hot or too cold.

12. *A Popular Error About Barth*. An American like the writer has to confess with shame that there is a great deal of superficial information and misinformation about Barth current in this country today. When some easy books are written about Kierkegaard, there will be similar popular inaccuracies about him.

It is easier to read than to study; and, unfortunately, too many of us find it easier to speak or write than to make sure that we have found out the thing that we are planning to say. Honest scholarship seeks verification before expression; and makes thorough investigation before publication: true research, in a university as elsewhere, demands honesty.

Theologians who understand Barth to be the man who is responsible for sending God into far-off exile behind the clouds of eternity or heaven simply do not understand Barth. They act as if Barth were trying to spoil our playhouse. They speak and act as if God were at hand, subject to our willingness to use Him, like water in the pipes: turn a hydrant and see Him flow; turn it all the way and hear Him splash! Barth did not chase God away; on the contrary, Barth reminds us of the majesty of the God who is near.

Karl Barth is a reverent and old-fashioned Christian. When he speaks of God, he means the God of orthodox trinitarian theism. He means the Great and Gracious God Who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. He means the God that Barth is not alone in finding in the Bible and also in the Church's witness. He means the Kind God, the *Bon Dieu* of our French cousins, Who is not mere grandmotherly kindness but *God* Who is willing to be kind, a Heavenly Father. Barth's message is not chiefly about the great distance between us and God; rather is it this: The God Who saves me had to come a long way to get to *me*. Or, God crossed a gulf to make friends with me. Or, God in Christ stooped infinitely low to reach me. The Grace of God in Jesus Christ

shines gloriously in contrast with man's needy helplessness. This essence of Barth and Kierkegaard is thoroughly Augustinian.

13. *Quotations from Barth.* The following extracts from some of Barth's recent works are intended to support statements made about him. The dates given are of English publication, except for the Gifford Lectures, published in 1939 but delivered in the two previous years.

From *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 1936. "The Word of God always tells us something new, which otherwise we could never have heard from anyone" (p. 160). "As the Unknown He makes Himself known" (161). "The man who really knows the Word of God . . . also knows that he can bring no capacity to this knowledge, but must first of all receive capacity" (224). "Acknowledgment of the Word of God must mean letting oneself continually be led. . . . He yields to the authority of *another*" (237). On page 252 and page 466 Barth rejects the formula *finitum non capax infiniti*, the finite has no capacity for the infinite, and prefers the formula *homo peccator non capax verbi Domini*, man the sinner has no capacity for God's Word. "The Word of God . . . tells man that he is a rebel, who has wantonly abandoned the communion between himself as creature and God as Creator, and has placed himself in a position where this communion is impossible. It tells him that he wanted to be his own master, and thereby has betaken himself off to the sphere of the wrath of God, to the state of rejection by God and so of being closed against God" (467).

It is as sinners that we are accosted in the revelation of Jesus Christ and claimed by Him (509).

With the last quotations compare these, from *Credo*, 1936, containing lectures given in Utrecht in 1935. "The whole human race stands . . . under the wrath of God—and Jesus *did* place Himself there" (78). "Jesus Christ the eternal God made our state and fate His own" (92). "God Himself in Jesus Christ suffers the *punishment* that our existence would have to incur" (93). "Forgiveness, however, means this: that Christ takes our place" (159). The following from page 34 was referred to above in paragraph 11: "In the proposition, 'God is the Creator,' we recognize not only God's transcendence, but also the immanence of that God so completely transcendent to the world. Remembering the Creator's transcendence, we shall be safeguarded against ascribing to the world as such any divinity whether imparted to it by God or belonging to itself independently. This very same recollection of the Creator's transcendence will, however, also warn us against denying God's co-existence with the world and therefore His immanence, i.e. His free omnipotent presence and Lordship in the world that He created. God never and nowhere becomes the world. The world never and nowhere becomes God. God and the world remain over against each other. . . . In standing over against the World that He has made, God is *present* to it—not only far, but also *near*, not only free in relation to it, but also *bound* to it, not only transcendent, but also *immanent*. . . . We are concerned with the transcendence

of God the Creator. The knowledge of that compels the recognition of His immanence also."

From the Gifford Lectures on *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*: "That man is *against God* is true and important and has to be taken seriously. But what is even truer, more important and to be taken more seriously is the other fact that God in Jesus Christ is *for man*. And it is only from the standpoint of the latter fact that it can be seen how true and important the former is, and how seriously it must be taken" (46). How much breath and ink have been wasted by expounders and opponents of Barth who missed that ancient orthodox Christian dialectic: "This revelation, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, necessarily means the discovery of the darkness which is man, of the plight in which he exists and the depths to which he has sunk" (49). "It is only the children of God who can testify to their sin" (53).

In this series may be placed extracts from *An Interview with Professor Karl Barth* by Professor William C. Robinson, *Bulletin* of Columbia Theological Seminary, November, 1938. Barth said: "Reason is a good gift; by all means let us use it especially today. Tell the people of America that Karl Barth hopes to be a rational being" (6). And again: "There is no having or possessing of God as though we could control Him or take Him into our service. But in the service of God, in the obedience of faith, we know. There is no faith without knowledge" (6). Dr. Robinson summarizes: "We hold that the Bible is the Word of God; he, that by the free grace of God the Bible as ex-

pounded in the Church becomes the Word of God." This last point I stated and illustrated with great care at the Ministers Forum at Montreat, 1936, as well as in the second Austin Seminary lecture.

Now from Barth's very recent *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day*, 1939. On page seven he calls upon us of the Church to look backward on the path along which we have come, and see the former time, when our rights before God were forfeit and our cause lost.

Next from *The Church and the Churches*, 1936, written for the World Conference on Faith and Order which met in Edinburgh in 1937. The Church gets both its existence and its task from the fact that the Word has been uttered "in the fact of the Incarnation; in the man Christ Jesus, in whom the sin of all men, their contradiction against God and their own inner self-contradiction, is done to death, taken away, forgiven, and exists no more. The task from which the Church derives its being is to proclaim that this has really happened and to summon men to believe in its reality." However, of this book Donald Maclean wrote that it is "by a theologian who does not regard clarity as absolutely essential to a satisfactory expression of what he intends to convey to his readers."

Lastly, from Barth's much more perspicuous chapter in the 1937 symposium *Revelation*, edited by John Baillie and Hugh Martin. The Christian apprehension of revelation cannot be grasped from without (41). We have missed the reality and potentiality of Jesus Christ if we imagine that we can "measure Him, survey

Him, pass judgment upon Him and therefore master Him" (47). He is "the only way by which men may come to know God and by which a relationship, and more than this, a communion, between man and God is established" (55). "In Jesus Christ God Himself steps into the place of sinful man, while sinful man is for his part translated into the place of God" (56). "God Himself *restores* the shattered order of the relation between Himself and man" (75). Barth and Kierkegaard, along the line of the last three quotations, are in the line of gospel teaching that goes back through Calvin and Luther to Augustine and Paul: not mere discontinuity, but discontinuity overcome; not merely a gap, but a gap crossed.

14. *Current Paradoxes.* The "all God's chillun's got shoes" theory, that heavenly and apocalyptic hopes are nothing but a mechanism of escape from reality, is quite popular today. A recent book on *The Small Sects* classifies numerous varieties of other-worldly or supernatural hope under a caption that labels their adherents "the disinherited." In other words, those for whom this life is too hard encourage themselves with hope of a better life. Those for whom this world is too hard encourage themselves with hope of a better world. In compensation for present lacks, they dream of future abundance. There is considerable plausibility in that theory. Unless a man had formed the habit of eating at noon, or unless he knew that he was expected at noon, or unless he heard the dinner bell or the noon whistle, he would not leave the interesting work of his office until he was tired or hungry. Is the

comparison inexact? He confidently expects to get the dinner. Indeed, those sects of the disinherited manifest great confidence in an unseen spiritual power that produces very perceptible effects. Probably such analogies, however useful for classificatory purposes, are easily overstressed: they should not control one's thinking.

Dean Shailer Mathews has written some interesting volumes on the thesis that our Christian doctrines are developed from the social patterns of various ages. That thesis feeds the kind of anti-Calvinist history (for example, Gray's *Prophets of the Soul*) which argues that in a democratic world an Almighty Ruler is out of date. Now the newspapers seem to say (mid-December, 1939) that dictatorships are spreading; but aside from that, the modern age is characterized by its recognition of the reign of law and the practical use it makes of the powerful laws of nature. Natural laws are a force stronger than man; but these same laws, properly used, let man cross the ocean or dive beneath its surface, let him fly through the air, let him talk by wire or by wireless. This reign of law gives an *experience pattern* of the divine sovereignty. On Dean Mathews' own premises his view is too narrow because he limits it to *social patterns*. If doctrines were mere rationalizations, they would be rationalizations of one's whole experience with the cosmos, not merely rationalizations of one's social experience. By the way, in Isaiah 55:9 there is something very much like natural law; and in the next verse it is used by analogy to uphold a spiritual law.

Take four contemporary paradoxes at random. William James suggested that "pessimism is a disease

of satisfied epochs and classes." Renan is cited by Ralph Barton Perry (work cited, p. 488 and references) as summarizing a good deal of history into a remark about the unsatisfied barbarian who upsets the dinner-party of settled and complacent centuries. The Freudian death-wish is a paradox. So was the Tarheel preacher's remark: "No one ever heard a rich man whistle." These and similar paradoxes are at most only more or less true. Their truth is only partial. They are only true to a certain extent. The limited validity of these almost-truths puts them into an entirely different category from the great paradoxes of Kierkegaard, especially from his absolute paradox.

15. *Personal Attitude.* I greatly admire Albrecht Schweitzer for his powerful mind, his deep spirit, his exemplary moral leadership, and his noble character. But that does not make me accept his theology, his philosophy, his exegesis, or his reconstruction of history. It is easy to enjoy a landscape without letting the eyes focus on some blemish such as an advertisement sprawled across a gaudy signboard. Even the man who has resolved to buy nothing advertised on signboards *may* evade the hideous sin against beauty; by letting his gaze focus on other objects, he may keep the painted horror in the periphery of his view and of his consciousness. Much that Kierkegaard says pleases my poor taste and wins the assent of my humble judgment. But the things he has to say do not always persuade me. I like Kierkegaard but do not always agree with him. I am his admirer, not his follower. I do not

look *to* him for leadership; I look *at* him, and frequently find him worth quoting.

For example, every year I contribute seven devotional meditations to *Daily Manna*, a calendar edited by Martin Monsma of Pella, Iowa, and published by Zondervan of Grand Rapids. For June 25, 1940, I borrow this explanation of Jesus' "Come after Me" from Kierkegaard:—

"While the brave warrior is valiantly advancing, taking all the enemy's arrows on his chest, but thus protecting his rear rank man, can you say that the latter comes after him? . . . The doughty warrior must fall before you know whether his fellow-soldier will come after him, take his dangerous place, making his chest the target for all the arrows, or whether he'll turn his cowardly back to danger and lose courage because he has lost his leader and good example." "While the loving wife trusts that in her husband, the dearest thing here below, she has the example and model for her life; while she walks beside him, leaning on him as becomes a woman (for she was taken from his side), can you say she comes after him? . . . Alas! The noble husband must be taken away to see whether the poor widow, lacking his support, will come after him or forsake his example." "While a hen, seeing a hawk, spreads her wings to cover her brood, can you say that the chicks come after their mother? No. . . . While a child clings to its mother's skirts? No; it must learn to walk by itself."

That personal attitude is expressed here in case this book finds either of two critical readers, and retains

his attention as far as this section. One of those critics is the old-fashioned heresy-hunter, whether the chronic kind or the young minister still afflicted with a rash of undigested "didactic and polemic theology." Such gnats don't bother me much. The criterion of orthodoxy which such a heresy-hunter uses may be an ancient creed or a very modern one: some of my oxyrhinic friends use one, some the other.

The other critic is the up-to-date scholar who changes his mind, not every decade, but every time he makes a purchase from the religious book club. He does not really change his own mind; his mind is turned like the lines of print on the pages of the morning paper which shares his attention with his first cup of coffee. He conscientiously reads all the new books and "keeps up"; so sometimes he shames me and makes me slip a shy hand up to feel for hayseed on my pate. I am ashamed of that weakness, and hope to outgrow it.

But even in connection with this up-to-date and slightly pharisaic brother, there is a tiny bit of comfort for me in one current of wartime thought, in these days when our tragic distress is so much worse than it was a year ago while I was writing lectures for the seminary. This contemporary current of thought is the sudden militancy among people who not long ago called themselves pacifists. Most of them (mark you, most, not all) were never genuine pacifists, of course, except in the sense of *preferring peace* to that method of politics which employs armed force. They were merely people who would not fight, nor profess their readiness to fight, *until they were interested*. My comfort comes

from the fact that I had detected the hit-and-run character of their thinking, and foreseen this warlike current. I too prefer peace; and one reason that I retain my commission as a reserve officer of infantry is that the organized reserve is a more wholesome instrument for peace and a more effective one than some of the peace societies. Pacifists flourish where men protect them.

Going back to Kierkegaard, his use of paradox ought to be no barrier between him and American readers. Neither should his absolutely honest recognition of paradox where he found it. There are plenty of paradoxes in American life: the Constitution, that venerable document by which conservatives swear, makes careful provision for its own amendment; and martial law, with its suspension of civil rights, is provided for in the very Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

You may find paradox in the Bible. The Apostle Paul, with a mind which no worthwhile moderns dare patronize, seems to have had no difficulty in holding that we are dead and our life is hid with Christ in God and yet that we ought to participate very actively in the common life of this world. The First Epistle of Peter reveals a writer who was sure of the divine election and yet who at the same time was urging his readers both to be holy and to be alert to their surroundings, balanced, practical, and sensible: see his two Greek words for "sober." This paragraph will be quite meaningless to people who no longer read the epistles of the New Testament. Kierkegaard read them.

16. *Dialectics*. It is not hard for one who is familiar

with the prefix *di-*, meaning two, as in *dioxide*, double oxide, to make the mistake of confusing that prefix with the other Greek prefix *dia-*, meaning through, thorough, as in *dialogue*, a conversation in which the speakers talk a subject through. In a dialogue there are *two or more* speakers. Dialectic is not primarily a two-sided development, though it may happen to have two sides. Under the caption *Transcendental Dialectic* Kant discusses antinomies: you find him, for instance, solving a contradiction by his distinction between infinite and indefinite (book ii, chap. ii, sec. 8f). Hegel uses the name dialectic for his two-into-one method. Reinhold Niebuhr in *Beyond Tragedy* uses it for a double-barreled method of human speech about God which is not only inadequate, but also according to him is consciously and necessarily deceptive.

But the word dialectic means talking a thing through thoroughly. Although it connotes uneven or zigzag method, its denotation—by right of ancestry—is *laying out all the relevant ideas for consideration*. While of course it implies rational procedure, dialectic means exhaustive consideration.

Logic requires exact definition of terms. Philosophers, whether logical or not, often claim the prerogative of giving their own definitions to such words as they select for their own favorites. So libraries of philosophy contain a variety of employments of dialectics. Modern use of the term dialectic has a habit of drawing on the Latin use of the word to translate the more common Greek word logic. To the Stoics dialectic was *ars bene disserendi*, the art of discussing

well. The inventor of any new dialectic, whether Kant or Hegel or Kierkegaard or Niebuhr, naturally claims this favorable meaning for his own invention.

17. *Lowrie on Kierkegaard's Method.* Kierkegaard's admirer and lover, biographer and translator, Dr. Walter Lowrie, has this to say on p. vii and xf of the preface to his great book *Kierkegaard*:—

"S. K. exacts of his reader a very great effort. He declines to make things easy for him by presenting a 'result,' and he obliges him, therefore, to approach the goal by the same difficult path he himself has trod."

"I am obliged to provide here the necessary helps for the understanding of books which the author has perversely made so difficult of comprehension. For though on the surface they are clear enough to be delightful, yet the thought which the author principally desired to convey lies commonly far beneath the surface. I speak of his method as 'perverse,' in spite of my appreciation of the fact that S. K. was actuated by a purpose as noble as it was modest. He would proffer no definite results because he preferred to regard his works as a way rather than a goal, and himself as a stimulus to thought rather than as an authoritative teacher. In his day he would have no disciples, and now one may claim to follow S. K. more faithfully by thinking *as* he thought, than by adopting thoughtlessly *what* he thought. In his last days S. K. himself was ready to admit that his 'indirect communication' was, as I have called it, perverse; for he recognized that a *daemon* (and not a good one) had compelled him to employ it."

18. *Grammatical.* Kierkegaard's strictures on the church of his day were in the third person; however, the open publication of these attacks on his contemporaries and acquaintances made them second person. Remember that he himself was a penitent. Probably if our religion is healthy-minded we will accept these reproaches to ourselves in the first person.

To you Kierkegaard's message may be news; more likely it is a reminder; perhaps it is re-emphasis. It is possible to love your fellowman, even without overmuch confidence in his innate ability and his victorious singleness of aim. The honest pastor, like baker or grocer or farmer, has to reckon with not uncommon defects in human nature. Pioneer, professor, and president meet with surprise and catastrophe. Our laws have to make room for act of God and of the public enemy. Cranky though he is, Kierkegaard invites his reader to face unpleasant facts open-eyed, and then to let self and facts be transformed by the power of the gospel.

CHAPTER VI

IT IS HARD TO BE A CHRISTIAN:

THE MESSAGE OF KIERKEGAARD ²⁴

ARMISTICE DAY, November 11, 1940, will be the eighty-fifth anniversary of Soren Kierkegaard's death at the age of forty-two. In recent decades his name is often seen, his words are often quoted, and his influence has become very great in certain quarters. Any simple explanation of Kierkegaard is suspect, but his most important teachings may be gathered around his central theme, the difficulty of being a Christian.

This unusual man and mind, who began to publish a voluminous and many-sided literature nearly a century ago, and whose journals and notebooks are rich mines for treasure seekers, cannot be easily classified nor easily understood. Kierkegaard writes very clearly; his meaning is always plain. But he writes from so many different points of view that you may miss his meaning after all, unless you read thousands of his pages or else have a good introduction. It is hardly fair to know him merely as the source of Barth's "infinite distinction

²⁴ *Union Seminary Review*, October, 1939, p. 45. I had used this theme and this general line of thought long before my honored friend Dr. S. M. Zwemer, himself an alert student of Kierkegaard, published a book with the same title as that of this chapter.

of quality between time and eternity," which Barth introduced to explain Barth's way of dealing with the relationship between such a great God and such a small man. Kierkegaard does draw that distinction, and later he mentions the infinite distinction in quality between man and God; but he also calls man a synthesis of time and eternity. He has a good many other things to say, about divers matters, and says them in surprisingly fresh, erudite, poetic and sparkling ways; but the burden of his message is a call for individuals to make a hard decision. Choose the Christian way, he seems to urge; choose, but it won't be easy.

Kierkegaard's mind was a growing mind. His apparently uneventful life had adventures that were as real to him as those of Lindbergh, or Trotsky, or Hitler. The gloomy Dane sometimes hid his melancholy under outward gaiety; and he died in peace. But suffering kept becoming more and more important in both his life and his thought.

I. *It is hard to tell anyone about real Christianity.* Kierkegaard was a great admirer of Socrates and of the Socratic method. Kierkegaard's own polynomial method is based on the following principle: one person may play midwife to another's thoughts, but can neither beget nor bear them; faith and understanding must be born of inward travail, and must be borne with patience until the time.

Kierkegaard was a profound introspective psychologist, with a tendency to emphasize zigzags and curves rather than straight lines. Comfort, inward peace, joy, or inspiration to service, in an adult or adolescent mind,

to him seemed not really Christian unless there had been a preliminary stage of conviction of sin, of the feeling of personal guilt, of some form of despair leading to repentance through faith.

In his *Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard explains part of his psychological method as follows: a real psychological observer needs first a mind as agile as a rope-dancer, then a tactful ear, and lastly the creative mind of a poet. If he has all that, why bother with the case method or burrow into a library for examples? With running water at hand, as he says, why run downstairs for a drink? Let the psychologist invent his types. Kierkegaard invents characters who are the pseudonymous authors of some of his books, or are actors in them, or both.

Kierkegaard had been trained in the Hegelian philosophy with some Danish improvements (by Martensen, of whom more later). The German mind sees, grasps, and discusses metaphysical distinctions and subtleties where we run-of-the-mill Americans find nothing but plain simplicities. Thoroughly schooled according to the German system, and completely at home in it, Kierkegaard applied the keenness of his brilliant mind to the discriminating presentation of certain psychological states. His *Fear and Trembling* is a masterpiece in which, under the pen-name of a certain Johannes who cannot quite come to faith, he studies the faith of Abraham who spared not his only son Isaac whom he loved. There are four parallel accounts of the journey to Moriah and the sacrifice. That is, each account starts the same way, but they diverge. There

are four narratives, four different results, four histories of different states. Thus is the reader made ready for the author's intensive study of what he understands faith to be. Later, in two philosophical works, Kierkegaard writes as Johannes Climacus, another man who has gone about as far up as a man can climb without the last leap of faith. Still later Kierkegaard invents an author named Anti-Climacus, a Christian of an extraordinary kind, a jumper whose leap of faith carries him a longer way than most.

Now Kierkegaard's notion of Christianity is that you do not lead me into Christianity by telling me what Christianity is, nor by persuading me to come over to your side. The process is roundabout, and I must leap some gaps when there is no pavement. So, while publishing religious discourses in several series under his own name, he used pseudonyms to show other stages through which people might pass on their way to genuine Christian faith and life.

This indirect method of trying to get people to think themselves through and out of false views of life makes it easy for Kierkegaard to be misunderstood. The scholarly commentators disagree. And quite naturally his *Diary of a Seducer* attracts some readers who do not read the ethical argument for marriage which follows it. That *Diary* has been published in French and printed in an abridged American translation. *Either-Or*, the major work of which the *Diary* is a part, was scheduled to appear in French ten years after the *Diary*, but the second volume is hanging fire, while English and American translations still await publishers.

That *Diary* undertakes to tell how John the Seducer sees a girl, falls in love, contrives to meet her, to woo her and become engaged, then by indirect suggestion gets her to break off the engagement and give herself to him sans promise or obligation. At the end he waits eagerly for the carriage which is bringing her to his rooms. The next morning he closes the *Diary* with an entry in which one reads: "I don't care to remember. . . . No farewells. . . . Up to now I loved her; from now on she does not matter to me." The hidden point is like Qoheleth's: the vanity of the search for pleasure. In another large work two years later, this same John appears as a principal speaker at *The Banquet* which glorifies the pleasure-seeking life. Kierkegaard wanted to describe pleasure, and then mere duty, as favorably as possible, and yet as unable to give lasting satisfaction. He also discriminated between various forms and stages of Christianity, condemning what he finds faulty and presenting his honest best.

II. *Christianity is hard to believe.* According to Kierkegaard, faith is the highest to which you can attain, and no man can help you. Faith in God is faith in the God to Whom all things are possible; it is faith in the impossible, in the absurd, in what does not make sense. Abraham, trusting in God's promise of blessing to and through his son Isaac, was called upon to trust the same God enough to be willing to sacrifice Isaac. (I do not think that Kierkegaard ever read John Calvin.) One must have courage to believe.

III. *Christian faith is hard to understand.* For

Kierkegaard, faith begins where reason stops, and believes what it does not see; external reality and the individual are incommensurable. "It is the duty of the human understanding to understand that there are things which it cannot understand, and what those things are. Human understanding has commonly occupied itself with nothing but understanding, but if it would only take the trouble to understand itself at the same time it would simply have to make place for the paradox. Paradox is not a concession but a category, an ontological definition which expresses the relation between an existent cognitive spirit and eternal truth." He thinks of Christian truth as brought by supernatural means to one who does not know it, who is in error, and who must be given the very condition that will enable him to believe. Faith is a miracle, and its object is personal. Carl Koch summarizes Kierkegaard's chief religious ideas as depth, paradox, and aloneness before God. Höffding says that of all philosophers of discontinuity, Kierkegaard is the one who, after leaping a bridgeless chasm, spends most time looking around to see how he got across.

IV. *In fact, Christianity is hard to accept.* If you try to smooth Christianity down to fit evenly into your rational system, you denature Christianity. Today Kierkegaard would make the same kind of remark about trimming Christianity down to fit into a scientific system. For him Christianity is a specific and individual something and, though he does not often say so, supernatural. For him God is very personal, and the individual's relationship to God very personal also.

With a few deft strokes Kierkegaard outlines a philosophy of religion which argues that the message from God can reach man only through a God-Man, but immediately he adds that such a message will not be received unless something wrong in the man is made right by superhuman power. (A child, or even a dog, can identify a king,—if it knows him.)

Kierkegaard's striking remarks about contemporaneity with Christ remind me of Thorwaldsen's great statue of Christ, placed in Copenhagen in Kierkegaard's day. The most striking of these remarks are in *Training in Christianity*, a rich, mellow book of his penultimate period. He builds upon the fact that the invitation, "Come unto Me" (which also appears upon the base of Thorwaldsen's statue), is spoken by the lowly Jesus Who was to be shamefully crucified, and he skilfully analyzes various contemporary attitudes towards Jesus. He finds a stumbling-block for reason in Lessing's doctrine that mere historical events cannot prove anything eternal. He denies that history can prove the deity of Jesus: history can neither observe deity nor get deity into the premise of an argument. But the greatest stumbling-block,—and from how many angles does he approach it!—is that man must confess himself a needy sinner.

Observe the individualistic emphasis. He defends the duties of integrity and decency from an ethical standpoint, and from the Christian standpoint takes them for granted. He says much about love from one to one. But he hardly ever applied this to the larger social relationships. Nor is he concerned about re-

forming the world, nor confident of doing so by the day after tomorrow.

V. *Christianity in its true sense is hard to profess.* The open decision for Christianity is not easy, because choosing Christianity means choosing to suffer. If you adopt the Christian way as your way, you take the road of suffering. Kierkegaard's dialectic of suffering, corresponding to Luther's *theologia crucis*, may be summed up in this way: 1) Jesus Christ is your model: try to imitate Jesus; that is the first step. The Reformation called that Law, as contrasted with Gospel. 2) But the task is too difficult, and you realize your failure, and need help. Paul writes to the Galatians that law can lead people to Christ. 3) Then you believe, and receive the gift of grace: one may develop an unshakable belief that God is love. 4) The effect of that good news of love and forgiveness is to make you thankful for grace; and in thankfulness you again set out to imitate Jesus, your model. This thankful imitation is an orthodox way of presenting Protestant ethics. It is as orthodox an ethical dynamic, as against any doctrine of merit, as thankful obedience or as the newborn child growing like the Father. This imitation, according to Kierkegaard, means following Jesus on the way of suffering. Observe that this dialectical explanation is a theological account, both theoretical and experimental, of why we have to bear the cross, according to the most frequent saying of Jesus.

With a sensitive heart that suffered various agonies, Kierkegaard often wrote about suffering. One of his volumes of religious discourses opens with an ex-

haustive study of the theme that purity of heart is singleminded choice; it closes with seven discourses entitled *The Gospel of Sufferings*. He considered himself a great sufferer, for reasons too long and perhaps too peculiar to be given here. He probably thought at times that he would suffer, perhaps die, as a martyr or as a witness to the truth.

To our generation there is an unhealthy self-centeredness in Kierkegaard. When Jesus was asked which was the great commandment, the Nazarene insisted upon answering with two. Despite Kierkegaard's claim that he loved all men, and despite his known charities, the Dane lived and died with a great love for God and a kindly patronizing feeling toward his fellowmen. When Denmark went to war, he was upset, but chiefly because his servant was taken for the army. When as a prominent literary man he was invited to call at the royal palace, he patronized his king,—but diplomatically let the king take his remark for a compliment. Kierkegaard was certainly a genius; his diaries indicate his full awareness of that fact. But he did not claim the authority of a prophet. Nor did he apply himself to social justice and its problems. But Hollander remarks that our times too are ruled by material considerations, wholly led by socializing ideals and misled by national ideals, and need Kierkegaard's bitter antidote.

A healthy Christian soul alternates between *worship*, alone or shared, to lift the spirit up to light, and *work*, active life among things and people, work in which worship's illuminations, emotions, and decisions ought

to bear fruit. A mature soul may also worship as it works. Kierkegaard concentrated upon the relation to God which gives activity its dynamic. But perhaps, then and now, his emphasis may be defended by his figure of the corrective, which Karl Barth got from him. In seasoning a dish which tastes too flat, the cook adds something sharp, a pinch of spice. That corrective loses its identity and blends into the combined flavor; it is sacrificed: thus far Barth follows Kierkegaard. But Kierkegaard went a step further: after a while, perhaps in another generation, there is need for a swing back in the other direction, a corrective of a different kind. Perhaps he was needed ninety years ago; diligent search might reveal a few of us who need him now.

VI. *It is hard to live Christianity.* The last year of Kierkegaard's life was spent in a fierce attack upon ordinary well-established Christianity, by newspaper articles and pamphlets which a French admirer has called the *Provincial Letters* of the nineteenth century. The clergy were the chief objects of his onslaught. Although the Lutheran Church in Denmark is an established church, we free Americans cannot avoid the force of his charge. For the sake of our souls, we pastors and professors ought to examine ourselves in Kierkegaard's mirror. A curved mirror, I admit: but a mirror that shows the mud on our faces.

Life has its paradoxes which evade any reasoned system. So has theology. But Christianity is a matter of life; it must be lived. Luther, says Kierkegaard, was correct when he emphasized faith instead of works;

but then the next generation took advantage of the way Luther slighted James, and forgot all about being doers of the word and not hearers only. Christianity must be lived, in imitation of Christ; and if churches and church leaders do not live Christianity, they ought at least to admit their failure. Kierkegaard admitted his.

In his diaries Kierkegaard judges Bishop Mynster, his father's old pastor, to be eloquent but worldly and complacent. Similarly he criticized his old teacher, Martensen, who had become professor of theology; and Bishop Grundtvig, the successful reformer. At the funeral of Mynster, the bishop was eulogized by Martensen as being part of the holy chain of witnesses to the truth. After a long time Kierkegaard exploded, firing through the new Bishop Martensen at the established church and at all of us self-complacent Pharisees. Except a few passages in the New Testament, I have never read anything more disturbing to that fatal tendency to let one's self-examination and one's criticism of his own work travel in a rut.

We proclaim the gospel of the Jesus, who walked homeless, eschewed gain, taught meekness, served God, lived unselfishly, and was willing to die for others. And we, the preachers of this Jesus, wear our gold watches and our Phi Beta Kappa keys and our luncheon club buttons and our fine linen. We eat good food and drive good cars. We become doctors of divinity and are called "Reverend," especially when men introduce us to strangers who might afterward be embarrassed if they should carelessly soil our pure ears with some oath or some indecency. We draw our salaries, support our

families, and educate our children. We are pleased when people praise our sermons, and we joyfully report progress in our churches. Only, says Kierkegaard, there is no Christianity in all that.

A church is a body of sinners who are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ and consequently are trying to live as God's children ought to live in this world. The church deserves many of the attacks which are made upon her nowadays; but Kierkegaard's weapon hits a vital point. He demands sincerity in life and speech.

The demonstration by university students at Kierkegaard's funeral foreshadowed some other disturbances created by him after his death. Do not undertake to study Kierkegaard unless you are willing to be disturbed by his personal challenge, as many have been. As for me, he clarified my thinking about natural theology and brought me into clear agreement with the opening lines of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which condense John Calvin's teaching. He also makes me more critical of myself and my work. Others have, like Haecker, gone from Luther to Rome, or like Schrempf, gone away from Luther in the other direction, or like Lowrie and Swenson and Tisseau, have found deeper, sweeter faith from the study of this queer, introspective, keen, sincere, gripping Christian.

N.B.—Within reach of most theological students is blind George Matheson's *Sidelights from Patmos*. In his sermon on *Saint John's Paradox concerning the Dead*, Revelation 14:13, there is a splendid example of the ordinary way of stating and solving a paradox.

By the way, that old sermon anticipates some recent theological literature.

This life is a struggle; it was meant to be that way. The struggle includes whatever embarrassment Christians feel at the taunt about eating pie in the sky by-and-by. A Christian has a perfect right to hope for better things: he can hope for better things in the large, and meanwhile in his tiny way work for better things near by. In fact, most Christians who have admitted this pastor into a share of their hopes for the next life are looking forward to useful activity there. The dying Kierkegaard looked forward to sitting on a cloud and shouting, "Hallelujah!" Perhaps he was thinking of the relaxation and praise of Revelation 14:13, and seeing them as the result of labors in imitation of the cloud-rider in verses 14 to 16 of the same chapter.

CHAPTER VII

TRAILER

ABOUT INDEFINITENESS

IN the preceding chapters there are five separate attempts to introduce Kierkegaard to the reader, each of the five from a different particular viewpoint. This chapter drags along behind chapter six and attempts some clarifications. The next chapter will be puppy-like nosing around one of Kierkegaard's great characteristic ideas, his concept of dread or anguish, related to the very Christian use he makes of despair. Then chapter nine will attempt another introduction, this time literary and philosophical and perhaps theological. Chapter ten offers a short Kierkegaard bookshelf, which has grown wider during the writing of this book. In the closing chapter the tourist will stammer some of his appreciation of the wonders of the Carlsbad Cavern.

* * * * *

One can believe, earnestly and practically, that this is our Father's world and that He is always near, and yet at the same time believe that God the Creator is superior to the world that He has made. As someone has said, God is one with the world in the same way that a good rider is one with his horse. Or the world

manifests His immanence as the car that you are driving becomes a mechanical extension of yourself or a part of you. Of course there is a revelation of God in nature. But the revelation of God in nature is usually clearer to people who are being reminded of God than to those who are seeking to find Him. In the universe God is more easily recognized than discovered.

Paul had more brains than most of his admirers and correctors. There is reason to believe that his understanding of Christianity was superior to that of many of his nineteenth and twentieth century critics. If secular wisdom fails to find God, there remains the foolishness of preaching (I Corinthians 1:21). Not that preaching has to be foolish—though too much of ours is!—but the preacher's message is foolishness if rated by secular standards. Paul declares that the effort to reconcile Christianity with Hebrew prophetic and priestly religion and with Aryan (Greek) philosophy cannot succeed.

* * * * *

Kierkegaard wrote a great Christian book under a title variously translated:

Training in Christianity,
Preparation for Christianity,
Introduction to Christianity,
Apprenticeship to Christianity,
School of Christianity.

The third and last part consists of seven discourses on John 12:32. In the fifth of these seven discourses he says that in this world, in the parenthesis between Christ's

ascension and His return, the church must be militant. A triumphant church or an established church connotes a harmonious environment in which the individual church members may be classified and honored in direct proportion to the amount of worldly praise and honor coming to them from the converted, conquered, and Christianized world. But with the world against the church, as Christ foresaw and foretold, this ratio is inverted: the mark of the Christian is the opposition of the world.

Kierkegaard undertook to break down the apologetics of the schools and the ordinary "evidences" of Christianity. He set out to show that these evidences lack validity. Can nineteen centuries of Christianity absolutely prove the truth of Christianity? Absolute is a boundless and unlimited term, like infinite. If history is to prove an absolute truth, were three centuries enough? If not, suppose you add fifteen more centuries and reach Kierkegaard's century; or add one more and reach ours. Can the addition of those measurable magnitudes under the limit of present history give you *infinity* as a total?

Students of such an old classic of apologetics as Flint's *Theism* need no startling theological discovery to prepare them for evaluating divers proofs and making them mutually supplementary. But that mathematical infinity is a red light wherever it crops up in philosophy and theology. Of course a preacher who finds a message from God where the Spirit shines upon the Word may love to read philosophy despite its lost trails. But it has often lost the trail: for instance, when

Anaximander's indefinite Apeiron was transmuted into the infinite. Here is the difference: the indefinite lacks boundaries and limits toward us; the infinite lacks boundaries and limits away from us. The indefinite is vague where we touch it; you cannot transfer a handful of smoke from your right hand to your left hand, nor carry a pocketful of fog into the house. The infinite is also vague and ungraspable at any place where we have a glimpse or touch of it; but in addition the infinite is definitely understood to be limitless in all directions; you cannot say that it has no boundaries at the other end, because it has no end to be bounded; it just keeps on going. That confusion of indefiniteness with infinity, of the vague with the infinite, of the ungraspable with the unlimited, is a prolific source of mistaken certainty in philosophy. Mere philosophy cannot be sure; of that Kierkegaard reminds us.

There is a great difference between a lease for an indefinite time and a lease for an infinite time. There is a great difference between traveling west for an indefinite distance and traveling west for an infinite distance. There is a difference in the legal standing of the two leases. There is a difference in the possibility of the two journeys.

Let us be more precise. The infinite has no limit and can have none. The indefinite has no known limit. If the indefinite has a limit, that limit is unknown to me; and the indefiniteness to me consists in my inability to see, measure, or state the limit. Let us replace the smoke and fog illustrations by a more exact ex-

ample, an anecdote from my beloved South. A young college student, home on vacation, decided to tease the colored yard-man. This pious old negro, not responsible for the grammar that had never been taught him, knew his creed and knew his faith. He said something about the Holy Ghost, so the smart young man set out to prove that there was no such being. Finally the courteous old Christian scratched his white and woolly pate and brought forth this gem of wisdom: "I see, Mr. John; there ain't no Holy Ghost *as you knows of!*" There indefiniteness is ignorance.

Mansel discriminates with some emphasis between the infinite and the indefinite in his 1858 Bampton Lectures, *The Limits of Religious Thought*. Herbert Spencer was indebted to Mansel for part of his doctrine of the unknowable. Mansel was probably indebted to Kant's first *Critique* (the reference is given above in section sixteen of chapter five). Kant discusses linear progressions: the mathematician's *progressus in infinitum* and the philosopher's *progressus in indefinitum*. One may say that both mathematician with his infinite and the philosopher with his indefinite are in peril of defining the indefinable. In plane geometry two parallel lines never meet; and when for specific purposes the mathematician assumes that they meet at infinity, he for the moment is treating infinity as if it were a certain point at an unknown finite distance. Logical empiricism can explain that. So, of course, can Vaihinger's *als ob* philosophy. But most of us ordinary run-of-the-mill folks prefer to admit that *we depend upon things we cannot see and make use of the unknown*.

Moreover, even where reason stumbles, we may believe in a person. Faith believes more than it has seen; and faith is not dependent upon proof. It can accept *personal testimony*.

* * * * *

There are all kinds of indefinitenesses in argument from undefined terms. A careful and experienced teacher like William Adams Brown tells you what he is speaking of: for example, "by the supernatural we mean the individual, the unpredictable, the creative." That may not be your meaning for "supernatural," but you know what Dr. Brown means when you read his books.

The systematic philosophers try to encompass all we know within the limits of some system. It may not be out of place to remark that such philosophers do not exhaust all the possibilities, and hence their choice of alternatives takes place within limits that are too narrow. The failure to consider a wider range of possibilities is partly due to the abstract character of their subject-matter, and partly due to the narrowness of some old or new tradition as to which are the important questions and answers in the history of philosophy. Perhaps we have here one reason for the insufficiency of the historic metaphysical views of reality. Essential reality and abiding value have been variously named in the history of human thought. Among the candidates for this exalted position have been Being, Change, Force, Matter, Spirit, Egoism, the Unknowable, the All, Wholeness, Justice, something blind, something fluid, something moral, Workability,—and, in our

practical American way, Planned Activity according to some more or less practical program.

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Kierkegaard is so fond of the word infinite that constant use blunts its edge. There are times when his reader is tempted to take it for little more than an equivalent synonym for immense. The habit of using powerful words in trivial connections dilutes their strength, whether the habit be schoolgirl hyperbole, homiletical striving for effect, or careless profanity.

Speaking of habit, one observes that the habit of fine discrimination and of setting things, which seem to go together, into opposite corners as contradictory, is opposed to Hegelianism and to every other monism. This habit of antithesis is very irritating to some thinkers, especially when they have an irenic purpose. In *The Christian Faith*, p. 161, Alfred E. Garvie objects to the common theological distinction between the objective and the subjective theories of the Atonement. This contrast, he says, "is to me that itch (I purposely use the word) for antithesis which spoils both writing and thought. The *distinguo*, like any other useful tool of the study or the workshop, has its uses but may be used wrongly or on the wrong task."

Kierkegaard may be charged with indefiniteness even in the pointing of his ethics. Many of his ethical discussions lack application, or are so vaguely applied that the reader asks himself: "Suppose that what Kierkegaard says is true, what difference does it make? What shall I do about it?" But wait: part of the superiority of the golden rule to the decalog is that the positive rule

of Jesus, like His law of love, controls the motive without specifying the action (or prohibition); it is up to the individual to engage in the activity of choosing what to do with the altruistic energy that wants to do something. Love your neighbor. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your fellow as Christ loved you. Then, on your road to Jericho, find your hijacked victim or hear the appeal of the blind.

But it cannot be denied that our Dane is an extremist. Denmark is an extension of western Europe, jutting out into the North Sea. The Danes are a southward extension of the Scandinavians, separated by water from their Swedish and Norwegian cousins. Whichever way you look at him, Kierkegaard seems to go about as far as possible and maybe a little further.

His emphasis is not on result, but on motive; not pragmatic, but internal, concerned with attitudes. For example: "Charity is best shown when the poor gives his last penny, all that he has; and when the beggar can do nothing but is charitable anyway. . . . The poor, the wretched might die; then it is most important to bring aid. No, says eternity: it is most important to practice charity, namely, that the help should be an act of charity. A man's dying is no misfortune in eternity's eyes; but it is a misfortune that he has not practiced charity." And again: "Charity is never brighter than when it can do absolutely nothing." These quotations are from Wahl's French, p. 727; he translated them from a German translation.

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Fondane says that "during the time when scars were growing over the great wounds Napoleon had made in Europe, only Heine had dared to make fun of Hegel and his skinny little French disciple, Victor Cousin. Kierkegaard, to be sure, made cruel mock of Hegel—but no one was aware of it."

The same French critic claims Kierkegaard as the champion of despair, dread, and death against all the Hegelians, neo- and otherwise. Of what he calls the recent resurrection of this champion, Fondane says: "Suffering, anguish, and death fell like a ton of brick into the hierarchy of values and spoiled in advance any least effort to find a worthwhile metaphysics."

Our Dane is deep. He is deep in the sense of not being completely understood after a superficial examination. After all, why did Soren Kierkegaard not marry Regine? No one knows. Conjectures, even learned conjectures, are nothing but guesses. Commentators often feel required to speak with assured certainty of this uncertainty: then, among the explanations, they select according to the crossmatching of corpuscles and plasma with their own.

Despite contrary views, one may still find Kierkegaard much deeper than Chestov or Wahl or Fondane, or any other contemporary of ours who is his disciple or imitator or ally.

Another thing: if you expect to find Kierkegaard in German philosophers such as Jaspers or Heidegger or Heim, you will be disappointed—or fooled. In them you will find his influence modified by or modifying the characteristic originality of academic scholar-

ship, the required and perhaps pedantic new work of the aspirant for academic honors in the university's department of speculative thought. This new work may be reinterpretation or rearrangement or at least new emphasis,—in other words, revaluation. It may also be a new combination, like the varying of ingredients and proportions when you undertake to devise a new sauce. But Kierkegaard altered is no longer Kierkegaard.

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Although there may be a haziness about our understanding of all the delicate shades of Kierkegaard's thought, on one point he is the most definite of the definite, the clearest of the clear, the sharpest of the sharp-pointed, and the plainest of the plain. Like the apostle James, he insists that faith must show itself by its works. James' short epistle, and the Sermon on the Mount, which probably influenced that epistle greatly (one is not compelled to accept all the changing styles in New Testament criticism), include many of Kierkegaard's favorite texts. And Kierkegaard could do things with a text. He turns a text over and looks at it from different sides. He digs into it like an oil crew drilling for oil a mile beneath the surface. He puts tiny sections under the microscope, sometimes with the addition of a stain of personal interpretation to make certain features visible. But all this laborious scrutiny is not for theoretical comprehension of ideas. It is for practical understanding of duty. Admit that he paid little attention to social machinery, statics or dynamics, statistics or legislation. Nevertheless, few

writers have borne down more heavily on the importance of attitudes and actions, of humility and sacrifice, of courage and endurance, than this lonely pilgrim who so honestly and sweetly and seriously tried to practice what he preached.

REMARK: Everyone knows that Kierkegaard refers to be infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity. In the last two chapters of *Sickness Unto Death* he clarifies the same distinction of quality or kind or nature between man and God. The difference exists between God and the sinner; but there is still an abyss between God and the forgiven sinner. Then, after these rather promising pages, Kierkegaard closes the volume with the most far-fetched definition of faith that was ever devised. Having been carefully prepared by passages scattered all through that book, the definition is meaningless if quoted without several pages of explanation; so I spare you. Reflection on that far-fetched, highly specialized, and extremely abstract definition leads to the conclusion, however, that it amounts to the definition of faith that must lie back of the words of Jesus (Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34) about the hen and her brood. In faith the chicks would have run to the shelter of the mother's wing and there found safety, without any real understanding of why it was safe or even of what the danger was.

Many somewhat articulate persons find it easy to say a few words about their Christian experience. Nevertheless, as Kierkegaard says, it is hard to be a Christian. One may add that it is very hard, perhaps impossible, to give a complete and accurate report of one's Christian

experience. After rereading three splendidly helpful books by the talented Quaker Elton Trueblood, the writer feels compelled to say that an accurate and comprehensive and comprehensible account of deep religious experience is very rare, even among good people who really have that experience. Besides, what poet can sing in verse, what engineer can express in formula, what biologist can tell in prose, the rapture of a lover's caress?

CHAPTER VIII

KIERKEGAARD'S PESSIMISM—IF ANY

IN spite of a general recognition that he is a master of paradox, in the minds of many people Kierkegaard is a one-sided teacher—usually on the wrong side. Because he frankly faces the ugly and disappointing side of life, they classify him as a pessimist. His interest in Schopenhauer seems to bolster up that classification. It is easy to forget that the gloomy Dane found peace at last, and to infer from his melancholy that he took a consistent dark view of time and eternity. Those who take this short and easy course sail unseeing past a narrow fjord within which are ample havens for many ships if they can be navigated between the rocky cliffs that mask and threaten the narrow entrance. Sailing past this Scandinavian fjord where our Danish guide takes refuge, they miss the characteristic way in which he strives with might and main to hold two contradictory positions at the same time. Also the straitened entrance to his rockbound harbor is full of perils. So confusing is it to follow Kierkegaard's twists and turns as he goes through the mazes of thought, that as usual the parsimonious habit of the mind simplifies its explanation. This rich thinker is brought down to mere pessimism.

The reader is now invited to take a few hesitant steps with me into the murk of *The Concept of Dread* and *Sickness Unto Death* (which unfortunately the writer knows only in French translations and in bits translated into English, German, and Italian): let us sniff the odor of this pessimism and see whether it smells of the valley of Hinnom. To me it brings the sweet scent of trailing arbutus on a Virginia hillside in the spring.

Either of these two books would be unique in literature if the other had not been written. The second, published in 1849, five years after the former, is even more *sui generis* than *The Concept of Dread*. Commentators dodge definition of his word "dread." Lowrie is courageous enough to give a glossary and honest enough to call his own definitions into question; he frankly says that his translation "dread" does not adequately translate the original *angest*. The modern Danish is like the German, *angst*; and the invariable German translation seems to be *Angst*, and the French *angoisse*. Hollander and others render it by our word "anguish." Often it means "anxiety," and sometimes it is as tame as "unease." *The Concept of Dread*, by Vigilius Haufniensis (Watchman of Copenhagen), purports to be a mere psychological study, dealing with original sin and so pointing toward systematic theology. The book is full of psychology of an original sort; and it makes a distinction between *mere ethics* and *ethics for sinners*. The reader is invited to follow the writer into this cloud; but before doing so he is urged to count the unfamiliar and unattractive ideas in this

paragraph and choose between venturing into dusty obscurity or skipping this chapter.

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The Concept of Dread has been called Kierkegaard's "first entirely serious book" (Lowrie, p. 296). Certainly it has a great deal to say about seriousness and about many serious subjects. Let us diffidently make an effort to get hold of some fraction of this side of his teaching.

This book is a study of inherited sin; as we say, of original sin. You realize by now that our Dane was too individualistic to believe in original sin, or even in Kant's radical evil. One of the difficulties of his discussion is that sometimes original sin is guilt and sometimes it is merely a handicap for the individual. Some of his distinctions are so finely drawn that my 20-20 eyes cannot see them in sunlight, much less in this cloud of dust. Fondane asserts that the meaning of the word dread changes as the exposition develops. Let us begin with one of the clear distinctions of the book itself. Objective dread is the travail of creation (Rom. 8); subjective dread is something in the soul of a man who feels guilty.

Since the lack of hope that is a part of subjective dread points toward the despair which is studied in *Sickness Unto Death*, it may be worth while to think of the practical dangers of these unappetizing subjects. Here is a pious little parable from the back cover of *The Religious Digest*, January, 1940. It is entitled *The Devil's Best Tool*.

"It was once announced that the devil was going out

of business, and would offer all his tools for sale to whomever would pay his price. On the night of the sale, they were all attractively displayed, and a bad-looking lot they were. Malice, Hatred, Envy, Jealousy, Sensuality, and Deceit, and all the other implements of evil were spread out, each marked with its price. Apart from the rest lay a harmless-looking, wedge-shaped tool, much worn and priced higher than any of them.

"Someone asked the devil what it was. 'That's discouragement,' was the reply. 'Well, why do you price it so high?' 'Because,' replied the devil, 'it is more useful to me than any of the others. I can pry open and get inside a man's consciousness with that when I cannot get near him with any of the others, and when once inside, I can use him whatever way suits me best. It is so much worn because I use it with nearly everybody, as very few people yet know it belongs to me.'

"It hardly need be added that the devil's price for discouragement was so high that it was never sold. He still owns it, and is still using it."

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The basis for this concept of dread is an effort to account for sin. The author is an individualist, and does not want to think of sin coming as a result of temptation from without, so the line of thought that connects I John 2:16, Genesis 3:6, and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, is not available to him. As Höffding remarks in another connection (quoted in chapter two), Kierkegaard is the philosopher of discontinuity who recognizes the gap and the leap, but

then haunts the verge of the chasm, trying to figure out how in the world he ever got across. He makes a psychological effort toward a partial account of how sin begins. He studies the way sin began in Adam; he studies the way sin began in each of us since Adam. A theologian named Usteri had tried to trace its development from the first prohibition (Genesis 2:17). Kierkegaard discards that. Another theologian named Baader had tried to work from the growth of concupiscence. Kierkegaard rules that out. Then he proposes, as psychological but not theological explanation,—and not complete explanation at that,—the uneasy feeling of being able to do something, do some indefinite, undefined, unknown act, which will be terrible and will have dreadful consequences. This vague but painful uneasy state he calls dread.

Thus he has rejected two theories and put forward one of his own. He read Usteri's development of the federal theology in a Zurich edition, and refused to take his particular addition to Calvin-plus-Cocceius. He found Baader insufficient. But you and I have not read either of them, and why should we? Be satisfied to know that Kierkegaard considered and rejected one effort to explain sin as a result of being forbidden to do something; remember Louisa Alcott's story of beans up the nose, and the way in which a few years ago the wets blamed youthful drinking on prohibition: and to know that he rejected a second effort to blame sin on evil desire, which of course begs the question. As psychologist, Kierkegaard then inserts his notion of dread between innocence and sin. Dread recognizes a

painful, a fearful possibility of being able to do something or other which, if done, will be just too bad. This dread is still innocent but it is innocence pushed to the edge. It is innocence pushed to the edge of a chasm, and unhappy about it. This is a higher ignorance and a higher anguish.

This fine-drawn hypothesis, which is probably an introspective analysis of the author's own puzzling mind, will hardly be welcomed with parades and brass bands and confetti among us. To most Americans it will seem to resemble a large soap-bubble. Very thin at best, it may look pretty in the sunlight—but what can you do with it? It is too fragile for any use. Instead of splitting hairs about how sin got here, we need to apply ourselves seriously and vigorously to the problem of getting rid of it if possible. Nevertheless there are observations scattered through the book that may find place in our own more or less illogical, incomplete, and inconsistent systems.

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For example, every individual gets his start within an historical tangle, and today as always the consequences of natural law come to pass. But Christianity makes a difference. It teaches us to climb above this accumulation of sinful history; and condemns the complacent for not wanting to climb. Here as always,—for he insists upon the necessity of the leap to cross the gulf,—Kierkegaard offers a reminder that mere addition will never make the transition from quantitative to qualitative.

This emphasis upon the impossibility of changing

quality by continual increase of quantity reminds one of such a yesterday's book as Micou, *Basic Ideas in Religion*, which credits organic evolution with the origination of a new fallacy, the fallacy of the imperceptible. The change from state to state (innocence, dread, guilt) in the book of our Dane, and from species to species in evolutionary theory as discussed by the Episcopalian theologian, cannot be explained by mere gradual progression. There must be a break of some sort, whether push, pull, or jump.

Again, you and I may as well be prepared for surprise, because suddenness is a regular feature of life. Put it this way: you may as well expect the unexpected. or in American vernacular: theory, no matter how logical, may not work out in practice. Before Mr. Van Loon and others had popularized the term "Bible belt," George Horace Lorimer's Major devised a scheme to prepare a special edition of the Bible for sale in the black belt. He began in Alabama. The sales talk was fine, but the specially prepared pictures of dark-skinned angels were wrong. That was sudden failure. A garage mechanic called my attention to another illustration of how human nature breaks into good theory with its surprises, when he told me today that every car of a certain type that comes in for repairs needs to have the emergency brake relined. Having accustomed ourselves to a brake lever that came up from the floor, we forget the convenient handbrake under the dashboard. For years the brake handle was by one of our knees, and we used to set it back so hard that when our ladies wanted to drive they needed our mas-

culine grip to release the catch on the brake handle. To our surprise and probably that of the manufacturer as well as mechanic, nearly every car equipped with the improved device, nearer the hand and at an easier angle for pull or squeeze, has to have this brake relined at least once. Who would have anticipated that, lacking the collision with our knee to remind us of the lever, we would forget to throw the brake completely off when we start?

Again, Kierkegaard has a good deal to say about what he calls *the demonic* or *the demoniac*. In this book he uses this name for the evil spirit's dread in the presence of goodness. Remember the evil spirits which cried out in dread and anguish when they were in the presence of Jesus. There is a similar idea in William McFee's *Derelicts* (p. 351), where one man's life had been destitute "of goodness and kindness, not because he had any deliberate design, but because he's one of those people who are unaware of goodness and kindness, who get on very well without either, who don't understand them, and who suffer unbelievable agony of spirit when confronted with them." This demoniac is (1) concealed inwardness breaking out into the open; (2) suddenness or surprise; (3) emptiness and pain; and in Hegelian language, (4) negation and nothingness. With this demoniac state runs loss of liberty.

In that connection, the current use of the word demonic or demoniac in religious sociology and socialistic theology today illustrates the parsimony of the mind mentioned above. This is not the law of parsimony in

Scottish metaphysics and logic, but the somewhat indolent tendency to expend the least effort. Just as it is amusing—or tragic—to observe the growth of superstition among people who have emancipated themselves from belief in God, so it is amusing or tragic to contemplate the reliance upon “the demoniac” among contemporary philosophers who see evil but would be ashamed even to dream of a personal devil. In contrast, here is a passage which Lowrie (p. 303) translates from the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Scraps* (How I long for that book! Dr. Hollander kindly lent me his manuscript of a couple of chapters): God “is in the creation, in it everywhere, but He is not there directly, and only when the individual turns in upon himself (i.e. only in the inwardness of self-activity) does he become aware of God and find himself in a position to see Him. . . . Nature, it is true, is God’s work; but only the work is directly present, not God.” One may note another thing in Lowrie a few pages further on (329-332), Kierkegaard’s formula about behaving absolutely toward the absolute and relatively toward the relative. Some diligent student can have lots of fun playing with that formula, and with Kant’s categorical imperative (as an improvement over the Golden Rule!), and with the “relative absolute” that came out of Chicago, and perhaps with Lowrie’s own surprising discovery of a startling link between the formula and Luther’s doctrine of vocation.

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Let us turn back to original sin again. There really

is such a thing as original sin. A friend of mine in a very practical book speaks of it thus:—

“For a long while theology sought to explain the existence of the worse self in us all, by the doctrine of original sin. Often it was put in such harsh forms as to drive the heart to violent protest. The church grew apologetic about the doctrine, and then a new and realistic psychology began to teach precisely the same thing, as a result of its own investigations; except that they did not use the same words, and made no implication as to moral responsibility on our part. The doctrine of biological heredity is not wholly different, stressing as it does our kinship with the animal in structure and in disposition.” (From Lewis Joseph Sherrill, *The Opening Doors of Childhood*, p. 167. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.)

Kierkegaard calls man a synthesis of body and soul, of time and eternity. The Genesis account of creation makes man a synthesis of the dust of the earth and the image of God. Most Christian doctrines of sin recognize the two forces, one of earthy gravitation pulling down, the other, whether you call it *nephesh*, *ruach*, *psyche*, *pneuma*, breath, life, self, or spirit, lifting him up. Unfortunately the natural and inborn tendency to fall below one's moral standard is universal. It will be a surprise to me if I ever find that Soren Kierkegaard is Pauline enough to admit that man is dead in sin; but synergist though he may be, he sees faith as a leap by which one springs out of an old condition and into a new range of possibilities.

Dr. Sherrill's application of this duality follows

(same page, same permission of publisher and author):
“Any parent is playing Pollyanna about himself and his children if he fails to reckon with these two selves in his own person or that of his child. Let him call them by whatever terms are best suited to his own thinking, but let him see them! They are there, and they are in a life-long struggle.”

Innocence, says Kierkegaard, is a quality or state that is annulled when something else, sin, comes in. Innocence is unconscious of being innocent. If you know enough about innocence to desire it, you are too late; your innocence is already gone, gone forever.

The arrival of sin wipes out innocence, of course. He goes so far as to say that when innocence is annulled, it is annulled by something transcendent, namely sin. (In that passage and perhaps elsewhere transcendent is a mild synonym for “from outside.” Something transcendent is something else, something different, something additional, something that comes across a boundary from outside.) Sin enters suddenly, by a leap, as a new arrival. But hungry logic in its eager totalitarian haste translates that leap from quality into quantity; so that human reason, begging the real question, merely assimilates the sinner’s disposition to keep on sinning, and treats it as part of the normal continuity of life. The human reason prefers continuity to gaps; and instead of irregular jumping, likes to march in step with the drumbeat. Dare we assert that the intellectual activity of the human mind prefers tick-tock rhythm to syncopation and swing? Reason can understand continuous development or evolution. Sin, ac-

cording to Kierkegaard, is a breach in the development or evolution which reason can understand, and so reason transforms it into a myth. A few decades ago something was said about a fall upward.

Parenthetically, it is an utter mistake to call Kierkegaard a mystic in any extreme meaning of that flexible term. If you want to follow out that thought, see Wahl, p. 406-8, including as usual in such a book the footnotes, especially the references to Barth and Tisseau; and on page 719 of the same volume. But though not a mystic, he is mysterious. There is a passage near the end of chapter II of *The Concept of Dread* in which Kierkegaard, with or without logic, concludes one sub-section with the statement that dread of sin produces sin, and in the next sub-section avers that the individual, in dread of being taken for guilty when he is not, thereby becomes guilty. With reference to influence and the power of example, one finds him saying that the innocent individual thinks himself down to the level of his environment. But, he adds, if the child were a perfect little angel to begin with, how could this happen? How would mental confusion make him think himself across such a gulf as that which separates innocence from guilt? One reason for my manifest confusion in the attempt to shine a pocket flashlight into this darkness is that I am unable to distinguish the irony from Kierkegaard's real thought here and in some other places.

He is easier to understand when he deals with individual guilt. Any soul's ignorance is just like Adam's. Innocence and guilt being qualities, the change made

when one more member of the human species becomes a sinner is not simply a quantitative change: it does not produce a definite (known or unknown) quantity of sin to be added to the sum of sin already totaled up. Qualities are produced by change, not by addition. Nor can they be reckoned by addition. More of one thing does not make another. Every sinner leaps for himself; it is his own jump. In every sinner sin makes a fresh start: "Guilt is not an epidemic which spreads like smallpox, 'and every mouth shall be stopped'" (Rom. 3:19). Someone else varies the trope: our physicians do not vaccinate a city; they vaccinate the people of the city one by one. To be vaccinated, each individual has to be vaccinated individually.

In the realm of pleasure, a state which Kierkegaard finds normally to precede ethics and religion, no one is troubled by guilt. Christ is the only guiltless Being Who was ever saddened by sin; but, being more than an individual, He freely chose to bear the world's sins and undergo punishment. (He chose, in the words of John Knox, to underlie sin for us). But Kierkegaard turns from this angle to the psychological, which must remain within its own proper limits. So he brings in prohibition and lust, Usteri and Baader, and so on.

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The preceding paragraphs may not convey much of value about *The Concept of Dread*. But in at least one respect they are unlike what that usefully critical contemporary of ours, Jacques Barzun, calls "an innocent display of second-hand misinformation." My mistakes are my own, unless by chance some translator deceived

me. The sketchiness of this discussion contrasts with a sentence by Douglas Haskell in *The Nation* (April 13, 1940, p. 490) about Lewis Mumford's "solemn, comprehensive, 'planning' approach" of which he says: "It tends to believe that nothing can be done till everything is done. Infatuation with the togetherness of the all makes serious rifts appear to be complete breakdowns." This chapter lacks solemnity and comprehensiveness; but it does recognize rifts and breaks as part of Kierkegaard, and its plan is a deliberate hop, skip, and jump. We have hopped and skipped; now for the jump:

We jump to the end of this little volume about dread. The final short chapter points from psychology to theology; its caption is *Dread as Salvation by Faith*. Its penultimate sentence tells us that the sinner who enrolls as a pupil of dread will find his rest only in redemption.

Men who differ from us old-fashioned and repentant sinners are probably better men than we are; but to us weak and too frequent transgressors against the light there is immense encouragement in Kierkegaard's message, which agrees with that of Titus 2:11-14. Although we are weak and worse than weak, trespassers and neglectors and deniers and betrayers, "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men," so that we can look backward and see that "our Savior Jesus Christ . . . gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us"; for the road just ahead we find His purpose to "purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous unto good works," "teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"; while

farther ahead on the same road we are "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing." For the last words quoted, Kierkegaard would probably have substituted the vaguer word, eternity.

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Current literature is paying more attention to what a writer in *The Christian Century* for April 24, 1940, calls "despair, escape, and fear." Our Dane would not have liked the way Angus H. MacLean in the article quoted sets despair, escape, and fear in unfavorable contrast to a genuine quest for God; our Dane would have rejoiced to read that the holy place is in the presence of the sufferer. However, he would have tried to see the sufferer from the inside rather than from his social relationship. Either view, as we know, is incomplete without the other. It is gratifying to perceive that shallow optimism is no longer the only loud note among writers and publishers. In a typical group of book-reviews in *Time* (March 11, 1940), one finds notices of several contemporary studies of things that certainly are not immediately and on the surface optimistic. The first book reviewed is a study of lynching and mob cruelty. Another is called *Dangerous Thoughts*: among other subjects it deals with the scientific ignorance of statesmen, semi-science claiming to be scientific, sub-liberty claiming to be free, and the danger that war will destroy our civilization (Barzun's review of this volume for *The Nation* was quoted a couple of paragraphs back). In another review of this *Time* group we find "a horror study" and "a conflict of almost mythical cruelty and stature, described with meticulous

and searching dread." Still another book reviewed there contains stories "told with bitter anger"; "their essential subject is despair, fear, moral bankruptcy."

No more than Lowrie (p. 415) would this far-distant student dare the rash and futile effort to summarize *Sickness Unto Death* into a few paragraphs. That sort of book cannot be summarized. Take a simple comparison: a diagram of the positions and movements of the members of the wedding party may be useful in planning the church ceremony, though it will not show the beauty and grace of bride and maids nor the sweet solemnity of the actual marriage. Possibly the floral decorator has a sketch to show his helpers where the greenery and flowers are to be; but whatever meaning such a sketch may have to us common mortals who lack his trained imagination and his flair for arrangement, the sketch will not show us the color and light, the harmony and vitality and softness and purity, which are the constant aim and frequent result of his labors.

"That sort of book," did I say? Respectful apologies! Where else is there a book of the same sort as *Sickness Unto Death*? But for *The Concept of Dread*, it would be unique in the world's literature. There is nothing else like it.

Its closest tie, so far as its message is concerned, is with *Training in Christianity*, by the same imaginary author, Anti-Climacus. This Anti-Climacus is a Christian to an extraordinary degree; whereas the real author was proud to claim for himself, "I manage to be only a simple Christian." *Training in Christianity*, published a year after *Sickness Unto Death*, is much easier to

read; and because it is a genuinely religious book full of sharp points, it will be easier on your mind but more painful to your heart and conscience. One-third of *Training in Christianity* is included in Hollander's volume; and the whole is available in German and in Tisseau's French, so it is better to refer you to those translations than to offer my weak abstract or comment. This book argues that Christianity is marked by humility and suffering; and that the faith which accepts the gospel must humbly believe where the mind cannot see.

In *Sickness Unto Death* the method is like that of land surveyors: backwards and forwards and cross-ways, with transit and chain and rod and stakes, writing dry little figures in field notebooks: the beauties of color and bloom are ignored; a lovely tree becomes a landmark, a mere substitute for a numbered stake; and nature's pleasing wonders are dried out into plane geometry or even evaporated into cotangents and logarithms. Kierkegaard dissects the idea of despair for us whom Paul called dead in sin in order that, with full realization of our dying and hopeless condition, we may avail ourselves of the healing offered in the gospel.

The unusual character of the book stands out in its plan, its approach, its manner of presentation, and its style. It is a clinical review of all kinds of despair, carefully classified. The preface announced edification and severity, the former produced by the latter; and the exordium glances at Lazarus, in John 11:4. The method uses divisions and subdivisions, psychology and metaphysics, classic allusions and current illustration,

and a dry coolness that camouflages a burning zeal, to produce Christian heroism where the individual stands utterly alone before God, alone in the greatness of his striving and his responsibility. It involves such accessories of exposition as paradox, contrast, combination of apparently unrelated images ("Christianity, with a giant step beyond the fence marked 'Don't overdo,' jumps all the way across into the Absurd"), and definition that is built up in successive stages like the reinforced concrete frame of a skyscraper.

The original title page gave the author as Anti-Climacus, but added "edited by S. Kierkegaard"; and bore the words, "to edify and wake up." The nom-de-plume was devised while the book was in the printer's hands.

Dr. Lowrie tells us that Kierkegaard regarded this book as the greatest of his religious works. The same commentator connects it with the way that "Luther had dwelt upon the dreadfulness of the sin of doubting the forgiveness of sins" (p. 409). He also classifies most of the great pseudonymous works under the following striking and essentially accurate heads: "Away from the Aesthetical!" *Either-Or* through *Stages on Life's Way*; "Away from Speculation!" *Philosophical Scraps* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* thereto; and now "Back to Christianity!" *Sickness Unto Death* and all the rest of the 1848 writings (it appeared in 1849). *The Concept of Dread* does not fit smoothly into this scheme: no smooth scheme fits Kierkegaard.

Biographers tell us that these books about dread and

despair reflect events and attitudes that can be dated in the author's life. Perhaps so. But this book we are studying is not a confession of deeds nor is it very personal. It is just a treatise about despair, with an upward twist at the end. Besides, confessions and autobiographies are not always so revealing. Consciously or unconsciously, they skip. John Stuart Mill's self-centered account of his own life, which was chosen for Dr. Eliot's five-foot bookshelf, would never give you any faint impression of the tragedy that occurred in that home when carelessness allowed Mill's servant to burn the manuscript of the first volume of Carlyle's *French Revolution*. Kierkegaard merely sets out to analyze various kinds of despair, and how fearful are the results of his analysis! But the end leads toward the leap into a Savior's arms.

As Wahl says (p. 406), "*C'est du fond de l'orage que naissent les éclairs*"; from the murk of the storm comes the lightning flash. In that passage Wahl shows how Kierkegaard's moments of greatest joy followed his darkest sorrows. You can, without difficulty, find parallels in the Psalms and in Isaiah and Hosea and Zechariah; or if you like it better, find them in Shakespeare or Jeffery Farnol or Mark Twain. Let us look at a couple of the dark clouds in this book, or, if you prefer, at a couple of symptoms of the *Sickness Unto Death*.

Anti-Climacus confesses that his admired Socrates was only a moralist, not a religious moralist. For Socrates, sin is ignorance, and wisdom is wise enough to do the right. Unfortunately, Socrates was wrong here. He may have invented ethics as a branch of

philosophy in our classic culture; but he missed sin. The Greek failed to reckon with the sad fact that a man who knows righteousness can choose to do its opposite. (Perhaps Plato did not dig down far enough into motives and desires.) The Greek laid down a sort of intellectual categorical imperative. But the distinguishing mark of Christianity is the doctrine of sin. There must be revelation, that is, the Christian revelation, to clarify what sin is for us (Book IV, chapter ii). This typical argument, two-thirds of the way through the book, is a sample of the way the study of our need is made to point toward our help.

The same chapter closes with an addition to the progressive definition which he is making of sin: an essential element is that sin is *sin in God's sight* (see Luke 15). And the real abyss between man and God is sin (Appendix to Book IV). As he says at the end of chapter iii of the same book, Christianity first establishes the positive character of sin: sin is not a mere negation or privation, but is wrong beyond the comprehension of the mind; then this same Christianity undertakes to get rid of this positive evil in equally incomprehensible fashion. This may lack felicity of expression, but it is one of the happiest paradoxes of Kierkegaard, and of the religion to which he adhered.

He emphasized the direct relationship of the individual to God. No matter how the towline dragged, or even slacked and sagged and coiled and looped, the individual was in God's presence. Kierkegaard was also conscious of the profound influence which that other individual, his father, had on him. This he often

acknowledged. But he does not seem to have fully reckoned with the general fact of person-to-person influence, of the God-planned and Spirit-used value of personal testimony. A preacher is not merely a voice,—with all respect to Karl Barth. A preacher is a man telling his fellows what God says. The tones of the telling are affected by the preacher's own sincerity; the effects are partly dependent upon the credit his hearers allow to his individual character. The definition of a sermon as “a message from a Person to a person through a person” would have pleased Kierkegaard; but considering himself to be without authority, he would have eliminated “from a Person” so far as his religious discourses were concerned: perhaps he would have replaced it with “about a Person.” The patent facts of individual influence on individuals were not allowed very much weight in his theology, whether systematic or pastoral. He was too busy with his constant struggle to confront the sinner with *his actual woeful situation alone before God.*

* * * * *

Please take careful note that for Kierkegaard this was not pessimism at all. This was an early stage of what you may call a philosophy of meliorism, or a theology of sin and grace, or a gospel of good news for sinners.

Many of his contemporaries, like ours until recently, were full of arrogant pride in human achievement. We are proud, for instance, of that ultra-modern invention, standardized parts for machinery. Not yet, for example, have I found a garage unprovided with

spark plugs and valve caps to fit my car. But, dear reader, that magnificently practical system of interchangeable parts was not devised by you and me. We inherit the usefulness of it and claim the pride and glory.

To human pride, and to humbled pride which may be springing to life among today's disappointed and bewildered and discontented and restless seekers, he offers a serious diagnosis before prescribing medicine. Is your physician a pessimist because he says that you have the flu and cannot preach Sunday? Or is he your benefactor who is making provision for your future health and activity and usefulness?

* * * * *

The Old Testament prophet reminded his hearer that the Lord requires the performance of justice, the love of mercy, and humble walk with God (Micah 6:8; summarized in Matthew 23:23). One may prefer the literal translation, "humble thyself to walk with thy God," for such a walk is not that of two equals, keeping step, but that of a child clinging to a father's finger. The man who has done his best to be just and love mercy is humbled by his own failure, and has to cling to a strong hand for support. The gospel brings the child's hand and the Father's together. Kierkegaard's great fondness for the New Testament expression "fear and trembling" leads him to a similar idea about human talk with God. Since the two are so far apart (Ecclesiastes 5:2, the well-known favorite text of Barth in his early fame), only in fear and trembling can a man talk with God. The loquacity of the man who humbly

prays in fear and trembling is thereby diminished. Hence silence; listening; mayhap hearing.

Life is not simple; why make it so? Life is full of enigma, surprise, irregularity, and even of things that are incommensurable; it cannot be reduced to the smooth deductive logic of Euclid—and even Euclid had to deal with pi. Life is not a bed of roses, nor is it free from thorns. Life is not easy; why seek to evade the hard fact? Recognition of the difficulty ought to make the help more welcome. In the gospel the help is at hand.

* * * * *

Pessimism means expectation of the worst.

*'Twixt optimist and pessimist
The difference is droll:
Optimist sees the doughnut;
Pessimist sees the hole.*

Or the contrast is that between two men at a boarding-house table. One inquired, "Is there any milk in that pitcher?" But the optimist said, "Please pass the cream." The best-meant definition may be defective; but those little everyday scraps of light humor mark the boundary. They mark it for everyday use as well as frontiers are marked by such great rivers as the Rhine, the Rio Grande, or the St. Lawrence.

Of course such a contrast is not exhaustive. The ordinary classification of Shakespeare's plays divides the histories from both tragedies and comedies; but the distinction between tragedy and comedy is fundamental. It is far easier to grasp this distinction than to put it into words.

A world-view, an individual's outlook upon the world and life, is optimistic if it looks toward the sunrise; or if it expects, when the bright colors of the sunset have faded away, to see the stars come out. What the optimist expects is something better than what he has. Even if he does not conform to the exact etymology of the word and confidently look for the best, his expectations are happy rather than fearful. What the French call meliorism, an anticipation of improvement combined with striving toward it, is optimistic. On the contrary, when pessimism looks ahead, it sees at the end nothing but failure, catastrophe, and extinction.

Life is long and time is fleeting. Any rational view of life needs perspective. You have no outlook upon life and the world while you are carrying an awkward burden through the hurrying traffic of crowded streets. Some perspective is required for any fair vision of where we are and where we are going. For Kierkegaard as for Spinoza, life must be seen under the aspect of eternity. Contrary to many light remarks by those who slight him, and also contrary to some heavy remarks by his professed followers, Kierkegaard must be classified as an optimist. At the very least he is a meliorist. Other-worldly or not, he looked forward to better things. His religious wishes are indicated by his deathbed prayer: first for forgiveness, then for freedom from despair in death, and to know a little beforehand when death would come. His personal hopes may be guessed from his cheerful wish at the end: to grow wings, sit on a cloud, and sing Hallelujah.

Even when he seemed most joyously "esthetic,"

darkness and gloom are scattered through his writings. Darkness and gloom are frequent in his more serious works. He wanted to look evil squarely in the face. He studied sin because he desired to face the ugly facts, for he was honest. He analyzed sin to see its danger. He described sin to bring out, in contrast, both the grace of forgiveness and the joy of being forgiven. That apparently simple fact escaped many smart men who claim to have him properly indexed and filed.

Kierkegaard had studied theology. He was familiar with Paul's assertion that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. He was a Christian, and like Paul he opposed any suggestion to sin more so that grace might more abound. Snatch a playing child from the wheels of a backing truck, and you get no thanks. But save a weary swimmer from drowning, and he is properly grateful; for *he knew his danger*. An appreciation of the sinfulness of sin, of the painfulness of pain, and of the evil of evil, lays a foundation for rejoicing in the Lord.

CHAPTER IX

A QUEER LOVE-LETTER

Kierkegaard's Book, THE REPETITION

By a fashion of several centuries ago, the title of this essay would have gone on, in smaller type: "wherein a doleful lover who, because of his melancholy, hath left his betrothed disconsolate and deserted, so roundaboutly seeketh to win her back that *firstly* he neglecteth to profess the fidelity of his heart, *secondly* he confuseth his religion with their love and therefore treateth her as naught but guerdon to one who hath faith against all seeming and not as fair damsel to be wooed, won, and praised, and *thirdly* he filleth his epistle with thoughts metaphysical and poetical which, intermingling, at length begat a new school of philosophy, so that the fruit of his love was not sons and daughters but the existential philosophers and perhaps the dialectic theologians."²⁵

To many people, despite the increasing number of

²⁵ On October 16, 1843, the thirty-year-old author published three separate books: 1) *The Repetition, An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, by Constantine Constantius; 2) *Fear and Trembling, A Dialectical Lyric*, by Johannes de Silentio; 3) *Three Edifying Discourses* (the second volume in a long series), by S. Kierkegaard.

books about him,²⁶ Soren Kierkegaard is either a queer name, or a gloomy Dane, or the obscure author who suggested to Karl Barth "the infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity." But really this Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55) was a great writer; a thinker whose mark will probably abide in the history of philosophy; a psychologist who has already been posthumously psychoanalyzed by the popular pseudo-scientific methods of some graduate students who lack Emil Ludwig's artistry, but his own psychological interpretations contain material for several doctoral dissertations; a rather profound commentator on his own and other times; a stylist whose work is often of outstanding beauty even when translated into a language as unlike Danish as French; a competent theologian in his own right; and a richly original expositor of many passages in the Bible. He had a great way, in book after book, of doing beautifully what every pastor wants to do, namely, treating the same text and the same theme again and again, always with fidelity and yet always with an intriguing freshness.

This paper is an effort to expound enough of *Repetition*, one of his most difficult works, to give the reader a certain definite though limited impression of

²⁶ See for example the bibliographies in Jean Wahl's *Etudes Kierkegaardiennes*, Paris, 1938, a 740-page encyclopedia of what other people say about Kierkegaard, supported by lots of second-hand quotations; and in Franco Lombardi's more compact and unified *Kierkegaard*, Florence, 1937. A modest list of the books in English appeared in the *Union Seminary Review* (Richmond), April, 1939, p. 281. Since then we have Payne's fine translation of *Fear and Trembling* (with what seems to be an unacknowledged debt to Hollander's translation of a long selection from the same work in a University of Texas bulletin of 1923).

this man whom our juniors will study. A translation of this short but pregnant book is soon to appear in England. My study of the book was made in Tisseau's French version.

* * * * *

To introduce him theologically, let me remind you or inform you that Kierkegaard was receiving a great deal of belated attention in Germany when Karl Barth startled the world with his Alpine cry, "You cannot say *God* by shouting *man* with a loud voice." And Germany was ahead of the rest of the non-Danish world. It is true that the Spaniard Unamuno read Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Scraps*,—perhaps in German, although he cites the title in Danish. Other countries knew Kierkegaard little or not at all. The *Britannica*, in a tiny article on him, in the eleventh edition, misspells the title of a book, and the mistake is carried on into the fourteenth edition. Barth, who is a great scholar and a wide and alert reader, quoted Kierkegaard often, and to some extent took him as an ally.

Karl Barth is rather anxious to stand on his own feet, and to have his independence of other men recognized. During the World War he came to believe that God is not just like us except for our faults; not the same sort of being that we are, only more so; not an unlimited enlargement of our image; not a mere multiplication of the human by some infinite multiplier. Size is not the only difference between man and Deity. God is not merely the totality of existence or the Unconditioned or the Absolute or the All or the Perfect

Being. God is not merely immanent in the world. He is transcendent, above, beyond, out of reach unless He reaches down to us. Unfallen man was created in the image of God, but in spite of that God is also different. Barth picked up Rudolf Otto's expression, "Wholly Other" or "Quite Other," for God,²⁷ and contrived to use it with variety and emphasis. Barth also took a famous phrase from Kierkegaard, but many a critic and many a Barthian and many a near-Barthian completely missed Barth's point.

In the second edition of his *Romans*²⁸ Barth asserts that for him the relationship between such a God and such a man and the relationship between such a man and such a God are the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy. The kind of God and the kind of man are shown in Ecclesiastes 5:2, from which he has just quoted: "God is in heaven and thou upon earth." In subordination to these two sentences and leading up to them, Barth makes the frequently quoted remark in which he borrows from Kierkegaard: "If I have a system, it lies in my keeping clearly in view what Kierkegaard called 'the infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity." To this distinction Barth accords both negative and positive significance. Theologians who had forgotten the distinction were struck by the negative meaning: they rediscovered the forgotten chasm, and labeled Barth as the abyss-finder or even gave him credit (or blame) for digging out

²⁷ R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, tr. 1919, p. 28. One tastes the flavor of Kierkegaard on that page.

²⁸ 1921; p. 10 of the late Sir Edwyn Hoskyns' translation, 1933.

the gap that separates man from God! But the positive meaning ought to slap the reader in the face: Barth's chief concern is the passage across the chasm.²⁹ The passage may be an autogyric ferry or it may be a narrow bridge with a fatal drop to the bottom on either side if the traveler slips; but the essential thing is traffic from one side to the other. The negation is important; if such an abyss is before you, you had better be aware of it and take precautions. But the importance of the chasm is ancillary to the crossing itself. Barth is sure that the Word of God has crossed to him. Barth believes that the divine power, like ancient Christoferus, has borne him across. As theologian he is busy at what Höffding pictured Kierkegaard as doing: hanging around the gap and trying to figure out how he ever managed to get across it, from where he was to where he is.

Kierkegaard often spoke of that infinite distinction of quality between time and eternity (one may prefer the French translations, "difference of kind," "of nature"). He uses the same extreme language in a journal entry about the distinction between God and man. In other books he employed similar words of the difference between truth and error and of the difference between losing all and forsaking all. Kierkegaard reacted violently against the Hegelian philosophy which was popular in Denmark in his day. He went to Berlin

²⁹ Hence his objection to any natural theology, which, in Walter Horton's language, gives "the wrong God"; his refusal to build on human theological ability to treat God as an ordinary object of thought; and his order of heads in divinity: 1) Prolegomena: the rule of faith, God's Word; 2) The Trinity: no dealings with any god but the One Who is Triune; etc.

to hear Schelling, but was disappointed in him. Instead of the linked progress of Hegel's dialectic, Kierkegaard stood for discontinuity and gaps. Instead of mediation of opposites into synthesis, he found it necessary to *leap* from one position to another. As he says in *Purity of Heart*: the world of men and things is not a glass pane through which we easily and naturally see God: "In that case it could never have happened in this temporal world that God's Son, appearing in human form, would be crucified, rejected by the age. . . . The world as we know it cannot be eternity's clear window; as we actually see it, it is eternity's door slammed shut." But that did not make Kierkegaard sad, because he felt that the saving contact between his soul and God had been made. As he put it in *Philosophical Scraps*,³⁰ God the Teacher speaks to us and tells us something which however we are unable to learn; but the Gracious Teacher does still more, and supplies in us the very condition of our learning. For Kierkegaard, the individual is "before God." "Before God" is about the most frequent phrase in his later books. "Before God" implies a relationship far closer than mere immanence. If anyone wants to label Barth and Kierkegaard with the single word transcendence, let him remember that although for them God is transcendent, God can transcend the transcendence and make a vital and existential contact with men.

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But let us leave theology and seek to meet the man. Since I am to introduce you, let me identify myself as a

³⁰ *Philosophical Fragments*, tr. Swenson, 1936.

quiet citizen, stay-at-home and meet-local-responsibility, with a fondness for reading adventures. *The Swiss Family Robinson* taught me to read; then came Defoe, Dumas, Henty, Scott, Cooper, and Hugo. Next, before much taste for any history except anecdote had been acquired, I stumbled across Conrad. Adventures could take place in the soul, part of the inner life, but could be told in terms of external contacts,—and could be so interesting! Conrad's *Romance* even more than *Lord Jim* typifies ideal literature of relaxation for me today. Kierkegaard's adventures were more like those of *Jude the Obscure*,—unfortunately Hardy muffed it in his last few pages, just as he let a couple of slips spoil the argument of *Tess*.³¹ Jude prepared himself for the university, then wrote to the heads of the colleges. Nothing happened; no answer. But something happened inside Jude even before the bird-egg ensnared him into that ill-fated marriage.

Kierkegaard's life, up to his last attack on organized religion and on us parsons, an attack that need not be discussed in this paper, had three adventures. The second adventure was his love affair, smeared all through the present book and indeed through many of his others. The lack of delicacy with which, under the imperfect

³¹ The morning after the last words of this paper had been written, I had leisure to read my spring issue of *The American Scholar* and enjoyed Dr. Weber's article. While still believing that Mark Twain's comments on Hardy were lively enough to do more than bore the latter, I welcome the opportunity to quote, "If a way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst," p. 218; the pertinence of these words in a reference to Kierkegaard's philosophy will appear in the following pages.

disguise of pseudonyms, he actually published studies of the various possible ways in which the affair might have gone on, for instance *The Seducer's Diary* (part of *Either-Or*), suggests that certain civilized restraints on speech may have been lacking in his childhood home, where a selfmade country boy had taken his own servant as his second wife.

The third adventure was a war with a comic paper; even his agony when he was mocked, cartooned, and caricatured, all in response to his own challenge, is not without its own comic side.

The first adventure was hardly his own. It was second-hand, his reaction to the persistent feeling of guilt that his father had because, in a hard boyhood, he had cursed God. Nevertheless the tremendous impression that his father's remorse made on Søren is one of the most important influences that affected his work. Even that admirable and revered old man was a sinner before God.

Kierkegaard wrote systematically, industriously, and rapidly, and under a variety of pen-names he presented various esthetic, moral, and religious viewpoints on life. Always he thought of life as to be lived and not merely talked about; his interest was in life as existence rather than life as polite conversation or professorial theory. From almost any viewpoint he could write convincingly. Therefore, as Wilhelm Pauck said,³² "one is forbidden to attach too much significance to any one of his works with which one happens to be acquainted."

³² *Christian Century*, May 5, 1937.

Of course the diaries and papers published after his death reveal a great deal of the man. Nevertheless, caution is necessary there too. Before publishing anything, Kierkegaard was accustomed to revise most carefully. He would write a book, rewrite it, then write it again. In addition, he wanted his *Edifying Discourses* to be read aloud in the individual reader's privacy; so he read them aloud during the revising process. If some commentators take a hint of Kierkegaard's and find more than one type of religion in the discourses, and if the pseudonymous writings of this self-analyzing genius must be taken with one or more shakes of salt, certainly his journals must be used discriminatingly.

* * * * *

The poetic,³³ religious, and philosophical book *Repetition* was intended to explain part of his position to his beloved and jilted Regine and perhaps to win her over to his side. From so complex and dialectical a person as Kierkegaard, who moves by jumps and by an occasional hop to one side or the other instead of smoothly following a straight course, one would expect an involved and convoluted arrangement. That complexity is what one finds here.

To connect, in this one little volume, the various lines of thought as he apparently flits from one to the other, would require a multitude of cross-references, like an

³³ If ever prose was poetry, this is. Madame Besseloff, in *La Revue Philosophique*, CXVII, 335, avers: "In Kierkegaard's *Repetition* the genius of poetry rises up against 'the law of indifference' which enthalls the world. . . . Everything in this poem bears witness to a contentment mysteriously won in the midst of discord." In later pages this scholarly lady is not always so convincing.

old-fashioned Teacher's Bible. Or you could use colors, like one of those polychrome editions of certain parts of the Bible in which some learned mole-trailer reveals (according to the critical mode of his school and date), just which MSS, glosses, oral traditions, and personal comment some scribe used in his scissors-and-paste redaction of a work that, *mirabile dictu!* turns out to be a religious classic. With all this, like the ancient scribe, our romantic and religious Dane produces a book which gives the effect of unity to any reader except a certain species of erudite doctor or some embryo thereof.

The story within the story, as popular among the romantics as it was among the Elizabethans or in *The Arabian Nights*, is used more than once in *Repetition*. The narrator is Constantine Constantius, who was to reappear a year and a half later as a character in *Stages on Life's Road*. He seems to have two things to say about repetition, each with complications and what our grandmothers' piano music called variations.

He begins with the notion which came to him of returning to Berlin in search of an experimental answer to the problem, "Is repetition possible? What does it mean? Does an act gain or lose by being done over?" The book works this out both in terms of Constantine's own thought and experience and in terms of a young friend's love-affair. Constantine's own thought runs from the Greeks to his Hegelian contemporaries with whom he disagrees, and from metaphysics to a farce on a Berlin stage. The introspective psychological experiment deals with having the same experience over

again. In terms of pleasure, can I see the same show again with the same enjoyment? The answer is No.

Paralleling and explaining this is the young friend's love-affair, a modification of one of the unhappy patterns of romanticism. In a cool way Constantine observes and gives a little advice of the take-care-of-your-own-feelings sort. The young lover seems to love his beloved very deeply, but the poetry of his love is not in the present nor in anticipation and hope. His love is a misplaced memory, a sad pleasure in thinking how it will be to look back on love after it is gone. The downward movement of the last part of the book begins with a new title, *The Repetition*, at the head of a fresh page. But the young man's letters, swayed this way and that by strong emotion, are still framed in the comments, personal, psychological, and philosophical, of the detached Constantine. The conclusion is that there may be possibility of repetition in a religious sense. Job received back what he had lost: his health, a new set of children, double the lost property, and religious assurance. (Perhaps the ancient writer's belief in survival led him to trust that Job and his lost sons and daughters would be reunited.) The Russian philosopher Leo Chestov and his admirer B. Fondane³⁴ are impressed with Constantine's statement about the young man taking his difficulty to a private thinker, Job, rather than to some noted philosopher who poses behind his professorship and proves his utterances by unanswerable gestures. (As a former university pro-

³⁴ Chestov, *Kierkegaard et la Philosophie Existentielle*, 1936, p. 38 f; Fondane, *La Conscience Malheureuse*, 1936, p. 214.

fessor, I take comfort in the sour grape aspect of this polemic. Kierkegaard had sought a chair.)

Kierkegaard might have agreed with Philip Mauro, that a philosopher is a man who goes into the business of making up an explanation of the universe out of his own head. He would have agreed with Sparkenbroke that philosophy is only the female aspect of the contemplative act, and that interior discipline can merely prepare the ground because that which makes the ground fruitful comes like seed and rain and sun from outside oneself, and further that "visitation is necessary and whoever has been made aware of the possibility of it waits for it always; his life has no other continuous meaning or purpose"; but the Dane would have translated Charles Morgan's words into Christian terms. In general, however, philosophy and theology are studies of what has already happened, and the event outweighs the study.

Kierkegaard was intraverted. Not that he was selfish, which seems to be Dr. Link's application of the word in *Return to Religion*; but he was introspective, penetratingly so, and was more concerned about his inner life and the individual's than about events in the external world and society. He felt an urge to publish, and he did publish, books and books and books at his own expense and far too fast for the sale to repay him. So he used up a considerable inheritance: in fact, just after drawing out his remaining balance he fell ill on the street, mortally stricken. He wrote during a war; but the parts of his diary which I have read indicate that he was concerned about the war for one single

reason, inconvenience: his man-servant was drafted. He did accept invitations to call upon his king, and mocked him subtly. Christian VIII took as a compliment what Kierkegaard really said about himself: "It is hard luck to be a genius in Gopher Prairie."⁸⁵ Kierkegaard's ideas about liberty and political democracy may be gathered from these sentences:⁸⁶ "While men are struggling to overthrow thrones and governments, they seem to do their best to promote the most dangerous kind of slavery: the cowardly fear of one's fellows. A tyrant, if there is such a thing, if some old legend is not being worked up for the purpose of starting a revolution, a tyrant can be overthrown; that can be seen to, and rather easily. Nowadays the fear of rulers and tycoons should be classed as ancient history: people are fighting this danger which has ceased to be very great. A greenhorn figures that the danger must surely be great because so many oppose it; a little experience learns that the danger which so many resist hardly amounts to anything, since there is a crowd of combatants and 'the crowd' is the last thing you see where there is a great peril to get rid of."

⁸⁵ *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, A Selection Edited and Translated by Alexander Dru*, 1938, p. 837. I first found this gem in Hoffding, *Soren Kierkegaard als Philosoph*, tr. Dorner and Schrempf, Stuttgart, second ed., 1902. Surely my anachronistic rendering, far more appropriate than "a market town" or "a provincial town," will be forgiven when the reader realizes that perhaps Kierkegaard's diatribes against the ministry helped influence his Swedish cousins to award a Nobel Prize to the author of *Elmer Gantry*.

⁸⁶ *L'Evangile des Souffrances*, tr. Paul Tisseau, Bazoges-en-Pareds (Vendee) 1937, p. 163, in the seventh discourse. This Gospel of Sufferings forms the third part of *Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits*, 1847; the first part, *Purity of Heart*, is available in two readable English translations.

What he sets himself against he calls, "this evil spirit, this cowardly fear of one's fellows and of the tyranny of an equal. . . . which assumes the task of destroying all the individual's relationship with God." Kierkegaard wanted his books to be read individually by individuals.

Though he loves sincerity and demands it, Kierkegaard is fond of criss-cross treatment and indirect approach. To him, one might say, truth is a veiled and skirted dancer. Even when, in some of his profound treatises on sin and hopelessness, he deals with truth quite naked, she modestly tries to cover the more fecund parts.

* * * * *

The outline developed in this book *Repetition* is, according to his custom, skilfully interwoven. His pattern is not the ordinary expository or forensic I A I a, disposing of each subordinate unit and leaving it, as you stroll by the exhibits at a fair or as the courteous attendant in the filling station verifies the air pressure in your tires. His carefully planned course seems to zigzag; but he is returning again and again to look at the things that interest him, each time in the light of whatever he has learned since his last look. His method is more like a textbook of plane geometry, where angles and triangles keep recurring, than the straight-line progress of a biography written for juveniles.

The opening reference to the Eleatic problem of movement, which Diogenes undertook to solve by walking, leads up to Constantine's statement of his problem, "Is repetition possible?" He plans an experiment: he will repeat a trip to Berlin and try his

good times all over again. The paragraph goes on with a learned and original bit of philosophy,—Plato, Leibniz, Hegel,—and ventures a prediction that almost anticipates Nietzsche's resurrection of the doctrine of eternal recurrence. He also manages to give a first hint of existential philosophy in contrast with lifelong efforts to dodge life. In general, Kierkegaard, richly imaginative child of the vikings, stayed at home and sent his adventuring thoughts abroad in time and even into eternity;³⁷ but I think that he did honestly try to report every difficulty he met.³⁸

Love, the other theme, is introduced by a quotation from an unnamed author, really Victor Eremita, the pen-name under which Kierkegaard's successful *Eiher-Or* had been published. Remembered love, said Victor, is the only happy love. A year later Kierkegaard was to write in his journal: "What is happiness? A joke that does not happen till it is over and gone."

³⁷ Some who are upset by the intentional vagueness of meaning which Kierkegaard allows to eternity and the eternal may find light in a few lines from a Danish story published during his student days. The hunting and drinking Jutish parson Blicher lets his young hero look from a cliff down at the North Sea; two hundred feet below him beat the waves of the boundless ocean. He looks out to sea: "Everywhere, without any change or a fixed point for the wandering gaze, the waters reach out of sight to the horizon, where they mingle with the sky, as indistinctly as time with eternity."

³⁸ The Christian Century notice of Robert Payne's translation of *Fear and Trembling*, issue of June 28, 1939, notes the lack of "a criterion, since reason obviously is none, by which the spiritually wise may select those particular absurdities upon which they shall lay hold by faith." Kierkegaard found little difficulty in accepting the Bible narrative, except for the serpent in Genesis. He says frankly that he cannot understand the serpent, which means temptation coming from the outside; so leaves it out in his unique study of original sin.

Victor Eremita represents one of the many sides of Kierkegaard himself. Kierkegaard thought of himself as the hermit in the omnibus, a lonely man indistinguishable from the crowd, a gay wit in society who was concealing his inward melancholy. The given name suggests hedonistic self-confidence. The idea which Constantine quotes from Victor is that a lover has lots of unhappiness. (Ten years later Kierkegaard enjoyed Schopenhauer.) But when all is over, and the former lover is no longer bothered by hope nor tormented by the spirit of curiosity and adventure, he can happily remember the pleasant features of his love-affair. Now I do not think that Kierkegaard really meant this as his own feeling. Certainly his subsequent experience contradicts it; so does his doctrine of faith as expecting the impossible from God. This idea is that of Constantine, the cool and friendly observer who has no existential relationship to the affair.

Kierkegaard who wrote this was a lover who had been happy for a brief time with his sweetheart, who had given her up because he was too melancholy to make her happy, and who secretly was hoping that she would see his position and some day be his. Doubtless he failed to appreciate Regine. She seems to have been a fine girl and to have grown into a sweet, understanding, utterly womanly woman,—perhaps far beyond his comprehension. He gave her up for reasons that seemed satisfactory to his conscience. He, or at least part of him, wanted her back on a different and higher or more religious basis. The young man, like the author who created him, had entertained his fiancée during

their engagement by reading printed sermons to her. How she must have enjoyed their dates! Repetition, to the young man, meant going back to the joys of betrothal and then on into marriage like ordinary sweethearts. Would that be esthetic repetition, i.e. pleasure in beauty, love, and companionship? Would it be ethical repetition, a new moral relationship? Would it be religious repetition, the third stage of a classification Kierkegaard was struggling with in his other writings?

Here is part of Constantine's first explanation of his subject: "Repetition is the same movement as memory, but going the other way. What you remember is what has been; that is repetition turned backward. But repetition is memory carried ahead." Observe that the meaning of repetition lies near that of hope. But repetition is contrasted with hope as well as with memory. "Hope is a new garment . . . that has never been worn. Nobody knows how it will look or fit. Memory is an old garment that has been laid aside. No matter how good, it won't do when it is too small. Repetition is a garment that won't wear out: it feels comfortable, is not too tight, and does not wrinkle." That is a thoroughly masculine comparison: hope is an untried garment, memory an outgrown garment, repetition as comfortable as an old pair of shoes. He pretends that repetition will replace the Hegelian meditation; which claim is the best satire, the most cleverly veiled irony in all Kierkegaard's great attacks on Hegel.³⁹ So Con-

³⁹ As a young man with a reputation to make, Kierkegaard courageously attacked Hegelianism, the reigning philosophy of

stantine goes to Berlin to test his theory, and see whether he can have as good a time as on a previous trip to the same capital. When that fails and the young man's problem comes up again, Constantine has to confess himself incapable of making the religious movement. Like Johannes de Silentio, he cannot make the double jump: Johannes can leap part way, to infinite resignation; but not all the way across to faith. With all his cleverness, Constantine admits that sophisticates do not have much fun, anyway: they learn to avoid annoyances, but pay for the lesson by losing zest.

All these *cannots* match the somber color of this melancholy Dane's basic thought. The Greeks decided that philosophy begins with *wonder*. But as Chestov insists, Kierkegaard found its beginning in *despair*. Through the tortures of hopelessness and fear, thought grows into new powers which lead to sources of truth that do not even exist for other men. Man still thinks, but his thinking is no longer like that of the man who, amazed at every day's new discoveries, sets out to understand the structure of the universe.⁴⁰ The existential philosophers find that philosophy is the anguished and profound struggle of thought faced by things so antagonistic that the wrestling of human thought against them seems hopeless. Like Jacob after Peniel, the existential philosopher limps from a shrunken sinew:

his country. His opposition to Hegel was sincere. But I doubt his seriousness in setting up repetition as a philosophical carry-all. He did not believe in general methods and universal panaceas. He was subtly mocking all one-formula philosophers.

⁴⁰ Chestov's work cited above, p. 37 f. Cf. E. Brehier's Zaharoff Lecture, Oxford, 1933, p. 19.

no towers for him, ivory or otherwise: his seat is in the bleachers. Yet because the existential philosophy is realistic enough to admit the importance in human life of anguish, dread, disappointment, doubt, and despair, the man who tries to think it through may be led to win a blessing. The antagonist may turn out to be angelic, not demonic.

* * * * *

After this trip to Berlin, which Kierkegaard really took at that time, Constantine begins the second part of the book with a new title, this time simply *The Repetition*. He gives with his own comments some letters from the young man who, in his distress, has found help in Job. The singular lover reads Job day and night, copies and recopies the book in Gothic and Latin script. Job refused his wife's advice to put an end to his misery by cursing God. Job endured the test and held on to his faith in God. The young man rejoices in hope that he also, if he believes, may receive double after his grief. Perhaps, Kierkegaard seems to be saying to Regine, since I am blameless God will let me have you again. His faith expected to find fulfilment in this life; he would get the girl after all. (Later he was not so sure that faith would be fulfilled here below, so he looked toward what he called eternity, which as children we were taught to call heaven; and he blamed his sublunary loss on his own lack of faith.)

The young man confidently looks for God to speak to him, as to Job, out of a whirlwind. He even tries to get himself ready for a husband's role, though these

pages impress one as overstrained and perhaps intended for a bit of ironic comedy. At any rate, when Kierkegaard and his young lover realize that the lady belongs to another, the tenth commandment wipes out all hope of getting her back. The young man decides that repetition is not in time; eternity is the true repetition.

The Kierkegaard who wrote this was a very firm believer in the gospel. But Constantine is an objective psychologist; he is convinced that faith means believing that to God anything and everything is possible; he cannot quite leap from his theistic stoicism to that high level of faith. Kierkegaard in all his philosophical books deals with faith as believing the unreasonable. Later books of his develop the notion that faith can be reached only by way of despair. In other words, hope is neither cheerfulness, nor naive confidence, nor proven trust, nor mere optimism: Christian hope is a sequent of hopelessness; and faith is the amazing child of despair.

God postponed the reward of Job's good behavior, rejecting the merely ethical reward-philosophy of the three friends and any immediate Be-done-by-as-you-did treatment of Job. The incomprehensibility to man, even to such a man as Job, of the transcendent Creator and Manager of the universe is the point made. The young man frequently shifts his ground. After his first letter about the comfort he gets from Job, he writes one full of complaint. "Why am I involved in this reality business? . . . And if I am involved, where is the Manager, . . . No manager? To whom can I carry my protest?" The world nauseates him. Calm Constantine, more

honest than the romantic Hegel, takes real account of this nausea, this world-sickness. The young man squirms around and tries to avoid blame for the way he had disappointed the girl. "Marrying her would have ruined her. Maybe the thought of marriage headed off seduction." An interjection is permitted to the reader at this point.

In fact, though our author had a remarkable art of fine discrimination between different points of view, and loved to describe a situation from many angles, yet he was remarkably callous where we would expect him to consider a young lady's feelings. Perhaps he lacked that kind of sensibility. He was the youngest son in the large family of a newly-rich retired merchant who married his housekeeper in time to legitimate their first child. Anyway, Soren took advantage of his pseudonymity or, as he called it, his polynymity, to make unkind flings at Regine which were the reverse of delicacy or even finesse. In this book Constantine mocks at the way a melancholy poet's love attracts a girl, and at the girl for being selfish enough to believe that she is loving him faithfully when she sticks to him while he wants to be free. Some years later under another alias Kierkegaard made fun of the girl who announced that she would kill herself for grief: be sure, he says, that she won't do it at all; that is just why she is talking about it; it is only hot air. Love, one might add, is a thing of mind as well as of body, and bodies should not outrun minds (even mentally),—as some who took flirtatiousness for courtship and were too easily wooed have realized in their scarred hearts.

Kierkegaard speaks in his journals of a secret that he is hiding. Naturally those who write about him spin cobweb theories as to what guilty thing he was burying, and like skilled detectives they have surely found him out,—only they do not all find the same secret sin. Despite their expert skill, one may rate them as failures in the D'Artagnan-Dupin-Sherlock Holmes role. How can anyone be so learnedly far from common sense as to find, all through Soren Kierkegaard, from the reticences and inhibitions of his love-affair to his final misrepresentation of Christianity as inclining toward an asceticism that would forbid marriage, from his hedonistic books to his most intimate diaries, anything except full evidence that he was physically a virgin and mentally almost so? In our day, when it is exceptional to find a novel like *Family Style*, in which we have a heroine who actually refuses to follow the vulgar Freudian-epigonistic policy of "obey that impulse," the careful self-restraint of the verbose outpourings of Kierkegaard's journals is quite restful.⁴¹ If some of our psychologists are even half right, there is something else that may be dragged in here. The scarcity of novels dealing with religion in a manner that religious people can recognize is probably due to the fact that genuinely religious people are too busy with living their religion to have much time to write about it,—or even preach about it, should I add?

⁴¹ Styles change for novels as well as for clothes. Some sixteen years ago we had a plethora of novels about young men, quite curious and somewhat lustful, whose inhibitions stopped them at the last minute. The old Dial put an end to all these autobiographies of frustration by a pointed reference to novels as autobiographical confession and to "the great refusal."

Among the possibilities are that evangelical Christianity, for instance, or sacramental mysticism, or dispensational premillennialism, may be of such nature that only an insider can understand.

The book we have been studying is hardly a novel. Kierkegaard's story of Constantine's fruitless attempt at repetition, and of the young man's almost succeeding in religious repetition, are small parts in a large and complicated whole. The author had a message to his age, a message about the difficulty of being really Christian. He felt that Christianity had been made into such a consolation that it had ceased to be a demand.⁴² But he did not want to tell you what to think, nor to tell you what he was thinking. He set out to guide the individual reader through a process that *may* lead to faith and understanding. His aim was to get the reader to think out different possibilities and to think them through. And part of his aim in this book was to carry a secret message to Regine, if she were able to think things out and through.

The end of the story is very simple,—as simple, if you will excuse the pun, as the simplicity in practical personal dealings of this Duke of Dialectics and Prince of Paradox who threw away his love, exposed his feelings and probably hers to the public, and with all his cleverness outwitted himself. Kierkegaard hurried home from Berlin and made haste to publish this love-letter (*Repetition*), and its more polished twin (*Fear*

⁴² Dru, work cited above, p. 999. Is not Christianity both consolation and demand, gospel and ethics, the fifth chapter of Romans and the twelfth?

and Trembling). But before they were printed, he learned that the girl was engaged to a former school-teacher of hers whom she had mentioned when Kierkegaard made his first avowal. Kierkegaard tore up a few pages at the end of *Repetition*, and made some other changes. Therefore we do not know whether the young man originally followed Goethe's Werther or not, or whether by one of his marvelous turns Kierkegaard actually let the young man win back his love after all. The latter is unlikely, because the original subtitle was, *A Fruitless Attempt*. The book was hastily published as it is. The author remained in Copenhagen.

Regine lived on there too, except for a few years while her husband was governor of the Virgin Isles,—a very good governor, Walter Lowrie tells us.⁴³ She sometimes nodded to her ex-fiancé when they passed. His later efforts to make friends with her and her family not unnaturally failed. While her influence is not so visibly dominant in the productions of his later years, the influence is there, and it seems evident that he carried a broken heart and a solitary love to his tomb. Regine lived to a happy old age and contributed some reminiscences to inquiring admirers of her queerly unhappy lover, reminiscences which answered some questions and rounded out a few corners of his biography.

*He who will not when he may,
When he will he shall have nay.*

⁴³ Lowrie, Kierkegaard, 1938, p. 461. This magnum opus of Lowrie's will be indispensable to any serious student of Kierkegaard from now on, even to the Germans and the Danes.

The world is richer since Kierkegaard poured out the passionate deflected expression of his intense and soft-hearted soul. Whether you accept, oppose, or neglect his ideas, he has contributed them to the emotional and ideological social culture of which we are part. It was his deliberate intention, particularly with reference to religion, to be a spice or corrective to the flavor of the public mind. He willingly foresaw that, if he succeeded, like vanilla in a cake he would be lost and unrecognized in the blend, and he also foresaw times when his message would not be so timely. In the process of making up a salad, you taste the dressing and decide that it needs more paprika; a minute later you taste and reach for the salt. Kierkegaard was willing to be thus sacrificed as a corrective.

Marguerite Wilkinson remarks of Sara Teasdale:⁴⁴ "Her philosophy of poetry is a philosophy of absolute fidelity to the truth as it is felt. . . . The worst of all artistic immoralities is to say in a lyric what has not been felt in the heart. . . . She has been emotionally honest. She has felt things that all women feel and she has given her emotions a true form and significance." To be sure, Soren Kierkegaard does not tell us what all men feel. However, he has skilfully and honestly shown the depths of certain moods which are among our actual possibilities. As a true poet, he clearly sees and vividly expresses some things that men may feel; in fact that many men do feel. Thus he offers us help in understanding ourselves.

⁴⁴ *New Voices*, 1922 ed., p. 278.

CHAPTER X

KIERKEGAARD FOR AMERICANS ⁴⁵

KIERKEGAARD made more than one stir in his native Copenhagen during his lifetime. A demonstration by university students at his funeral prefigured the fact that after his death he would attract still more attention. A generation after his death that began to be true in Germany; but it seemed to require post-war moods to give him vogue on the Continent.

Despite Professor David F. Swenson's valiant work at the University of Minnesota, to most Americans Kierkegaard was non-existent or only a queer name. The name is not uncommon among Danish-Americans: one friend in the little town where I live has an uncle named Kierkegaard; and another was confirmed in a Danish Lutheran church in Iowa by a Reverend Mr. Kierkegaard. But this great and famous writer is omitted from our standard works of reference or damned with few lines. One such king of the reference shelves changed *n* to *u* in the title of his first great book, *Enten-Eller, Eüther-Or*; and even today some of our scholarly young pedants, liking that forceful expression for "you must choose," give it not in the

⁴⁵ Amplified from an article in *The Calvin Forum*, December, 1939.

original Danish but in the German form *entweder-oder*, which happens to be less emphatic than our plain and simple *either-or*. Perhaps we Presbyterians and some of our near kin have read Kierkegaard's name in Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, p. ix; or in Denney, *The Death of Christ*, p. 216 ff, 231 f. We may have noticed such phrases as this of Forsyth's (a great favorite with Scotch reviewers): "that searching Christian genius Kierkegaard—the great and melancholy Dane in whom Hamlet was mastered by Christ." Above the horizon rose Karl Barth in Switzerland and in Germany; his early books often mentioned Kierkegaard or quoted him. Then Walter Lowrie, *Our Concern with the Theology of Crisis*, p. 11, called this writer, still such a stranger to us, "that tremendous Dane who failed to make any impression upon his own century and has become the predominant intellectual factor in ours."

Once I devised a pun and in a manuscript recopied September 3, 1935 (see chapter two) and published in *The Evangelical Quarterly* for January, 1936, p. 63, called him "the gloomy Dane." But February 4, 1936, I found the very same expression on the jacket of Bain's book published in Great Britain in November, 1935. Despite my honored correspondent Dr. Swenson, the adjective can be defended: the journals frequently show the melancholy diarist as a lonely man who turned a cheerful or gay face to the world while, in earnest and almost desperate solitary prayer, he counted his blessings in honest effort to be of good cheer in his heart.

Now at last in our own language we are beginning to have a considerable literature by and about Kierke-

gaard. Swenson and Lowrie and Payne and Dru are about to publish other books. I propose to list those already printed in English of which I know today, as these pages are revised for the last time in March, 1940. Furthermore, as a pastor who enjoys Kierkegaard but who, of course, has not surrendered to him, I shall venture to express some frank personal opinions about these books.

A word of warning: Kierkegaard was a many-sided writer, and most amazingly productive. It would be hard to outline him satisfactorily, even with the famous three or more heads bracketed between introduction and conclusion. In two lectures three and a half years ago, and again in the sixth chapter of this book, I have tried to subsume most of his main teachings under the theme, *It Is Hard to Be a Christian*; but part of the real Kierkegaard always eludes any such simplification. When first I read Allen's book, to be mentioned more fully below, it seemed to me that he had overschematized Kierkegaard's thought; but afterward I found every item of his schematization in the Dane's own writings; yet nevertheless the scheme is still as unlike what Kierkegaard's books and journals reveal to me as a caricature is unlike a real portrait. Of course this scheme is valuable. But unlike the thought of Descartes, or that of Spinoza or of Kant or Hamilton or Spencer, Kierkegaard's thought cannot be fairly presented in summary form,—not even by himself. Perhaps Bergson's basic distinction between fluidity, duration, life, on the one hand, and the geometrical form of our thinking about that living flow of experience

on the other, may help the student of philosophy to understand what I am trying to say.

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We have several books that include treatments of Kierkegaard. Lowrie's book on the theology of crisis has been mentioned. Professor Donald Mackenzie's *Christianity the Paradox of God* is another. Far better is the section in Aubrey, *Present Theological Tendencies*: Professor Aubrey follows a competent German Kierkegaardian scholar, W. Ruttenbeck, and to introduce his study of Barth begins with Hegel and passes on to Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelianism as a starter for Barth. The chapter on Kierkegaard in Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (in other respects a splendid book), is utterly infelicitous: the Scot unfortunately depended upon a German writer upon contemporary philosophers, Werner Brock. A glance through Brock's book suggests unripeness; careful reading of his pages on Kierkegaard failed to show a Kierkegaard that this student of Kierkegaard can recognize. Professor Wahl of the Sorbonne writes that he agrees with this opinion of mine about Brock.

There is not much valuable information about Kierkegaard in most of our books about Barth and about Brunner. The famous passage where Barth quotes him, in the preface to his second edition of his commentary on *The Epistle to the Romans*, is usually mangled and mutilated by those who quote it. This deals with what is literally translated as "the infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity." Let me offer a simpler translation. Barth is replying to the charge that

his system makes him force a meaning upon the text: "If I have a system, here it is: as persistently as possible I keep in view what Kierkegaard called 'the infinite unlikeness in kind' " (one might almost say, as the French translators do, "in nature") "between time and eternity, taking this dissimilarity in both its negative and its positive aspects." These two aspects do not receive enough attention from those who comment on Barth. Following Höffding, I made a feeble stab at them in my article already mentioned, which has been whittled down into chapter two of this book. Immediately after the words which I have just translated, Barth quotes most of the last half of Ecclesiastes 5:2 : "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth." Barth's omission of the last clause of the verse may amuse you until you recognize that the Preacher probably agreed with our distinguished Swiss brother here: he warns against presumptuous thinking and speaking rather than mere verbosity and longwindedness. Barth's next sentence may be quoted from Hoskyns' translation, p. 10: "The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy." And Barth goes on to state that while philosophers speculate about this relationship in terms of ultimate origin, the Bible puts Jesus Christ here, connecting God and man. On this positive aspect Barth and Kierkegaard agree.

Charles Clayton Morrison, in the important article which terminates *The Christian Century's* "How My Mind Has Changed" series (November 8, 1939, page

1372), asserts that "the supreme and permanent service which Barth has rendered Christian thought does not lie in his dogmatic identification of God as the Wholly Other, his doctrine of God's absolute transcendence of man and nature. It lies back of this. What Barth has done is to rescue a liberal generation from the swamp of subjectivity into which it had wandered under the spell of religious psychology. Barth and Wieman stand together in their common insight that God is not to be found in psychological experience, as such, but in Something upon which psychological experience—including reason and moral ideals—depends, and to which man's whole experience is the living response." The liberal editor wants to be very liberal with Barth, more so than in the other column on the same page, but his clear conception of the negative aspect of the distance between man and God in Karl Barth's preaching is not balanced by any adequate conception of forgiveness and the Cross-built relationship that reconciliation establishes between such a lofty God and such a lowly man.

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Unfortunately, Dr. Lee M. Hollander's pioneer volume *Selections from Kierkegaard* is out of print. The translator's interest was largely in the style; but his long selections are admirably chosen for our religious interest; they are somewhat less apt, but not much less, if our interest is in philosophy. This volume was in the Comparative Literature series of the University of Texas, bulletin 2326.

In 1932 the Dragon Press, Ithaca, N. Y., issued five hundred copies of Knud Fick's translation of *The Diary of a Seducer*. This is already a collector's item, at a high price. The English style is delightful, except for an uncertainty in the use of "so," "as," and "like." Kierkegaard said in his journal that this novel was intended to make Regine disgusted with him. As the last part of the first volume of *Either-Or*, it was also written to show the failure, even by a selfish and erotic standard, of one who believes that "It is not necessary for one's life to be without its love relation just because one does not contract a marriage" (*The Art of Rotation*, an essay in the same volume of *Either-Or*). Seducing John is described (in some of the many pages unfortunately omitted by Fick) as a man who is lost inside himself. "A lost traveler has at least one consolation: the scenery around him keeps changing and each change brings hope of getting out of the unknown; but he who is lost in himself has not so much space to move in, and soon sees that he is going around and around with no way out."

This *Diary* climaxes the presentation of the esthetic goal of life, namely, careful provision for selfish pleasure. It is a psychological study of a man who wants to take without incurring any obligation. The vanity of such a life is shown: the morning after his success, John writes: "All is over, however, and I don't want to see her again." Fick leaves out too much; he blurs the fact that John, as the author's imaginary editor says at the beginning, is "the dupe of his own

plot" and suffers the frightful esthetic punishment of his "lucid folly."

In Robinson's *Anthology of Philosophy* (Crowell), you will find a selection, made and translated by Swenson, from Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Scraps*, with some suggestions about his polemic against Hegel.

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There are four books by Kierkegaard which you can buy for about two dollars or two dollars and a half apiece.

The first is Swenson's translation of *Philosophical Fragments*, 1936. Here you have something worthy of study, a type of religious philosophy which is not even mentioned in such a book as Burt's on that subject. The important part of the book is very briefly and plainly put. There is a good introduction and there are good notes. A much longer sequel, the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript . . .*, is being translated by the same competent hand.

A second was published by Harpers in the latter half of 1938: *Purity of Heart*, beautifully translated by Dr. Douglas Steere. This was recommended by the Religious Book Club, and worthily so. From the translation and introduction, however, you would not have the slightest suspicion that Kierkegaard was writing this meditation to be read before the Lord's Supper. In 1937 the same religious discourse was printed in London, translated under the title of *Purify Your Hearts!* by Aldworth and Ferrie. Mr. Ferrie is an

English Presbyterian pastor who revised the translation that his sister made from the Danish. Comparing the two translations with Tisseau's limpid French version, one finds that sometimes the American is better than the British, and sometimes the British is better. In one place a bit of quotation is given an entirely different rendering and an entirely different meaning by each of the three.

In a personal letter Mr. Ferrie,—who is minister of Holly Lane, Erdington, carries his M.A., and writes like a scholar and a gentleman as well as a brother,—expresses this opinion, brought forth by our mutual sympathetic interest in Kierkegaard: "I think it is the absence of intellectual pride in him that makes him, so to speak, accessible. This is the barrier that shuts us out from communion with most of the greatest writers. They cannot help—even the greatest—feeling how great they are, and their humility is affected. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, calmly describing himself as a genius, has far more true humility, simply because he is in the presence of God all the time."

The third, Robert Payne's translation of *Fear and Trembling*, was brought out by the Oxford Press in the summer of 1939. Kierkegaard thought so much of this volume that he expected it to outlive him and to keep his name alive. It is a study of Abraham's faith, and is generally believed to present one side of Kierkegaard's own thought about faith. Nearly a century ago this volume and its twin, *Repetition*, appeared the same day under different pen-names. Both books deal with faith as hoping against hope.

Payne's translation of *Repetition* has also been announced; let us hope that it will soon appear. This book *Repetition* probably finds its place, in large libraries, on the shelves with other works that treat of philosophy. But the method in which Kierkegaard handles philosophy is full of variety and originality. Like Shakespeare whom he greatly admired, he peppers his serious and tragic pages with bits of humor. Such captions as *Trailer* in this little book which you are reading are crude imitations of his *Preliminary Expectoration*, *Pause*, *Interlude*, and *Metaphysical Crochet*. At times, with his tongue in his cheek, he employed the scholastic method of pedantic divisions and subdivisions and numbered sections, though he dreaded numbered sections and often said so. This book *Repetition*, apparently less methodically arranged than even Dr. Lowrie's two-point outline indicates (in his Appendix IV, p. 605, No. 7), is put together as carefully as a mosaic or a jigsaw puzzle. My own humble essay at an original contribution to the study of Kierkegaard's philosophy is an interpretation of the category of repetition as a parody on Hegel's meditation or on any other effort to treat all problems by one single method. Having spent twenty years in two pastorates, and having practiced various confessional, psychiatric, interrogative, indirect, direct, and other pastoral methods, the writer is thoroughly convinced that people are not all alike, situations are not all alike, facts are not all alike, principles are not all alike, and successful methods are not all alike either. Even my favorite method, closing pastoral visits and conversations with prayer offered

in an ordinary tone of voice, is not always best. Kierkegaard professes to offer repetition as a method to solve all the problems of philosophy; this, I believe, was a hoax, and many a studious investigator of Kierkegaard has swallowed the bait. Modifying the figure, let us say that Kierkegaard was clever enough to cover his tracks and baffle the systematic students whose unwelcome advent he foresaw. He was foxy enough to scatter references to repetition through other books and even through his journals.

The theme of *Fear and Trembling*, which book is really a "dialectical lyric" as well as a theological treatise, concerns faith as confidence that God, to keep His promise, will do the impossible. The preacher who reads this book will be stirred up. Here are no ready-made sermons for Saturday night haste, but brilliant discussions which will make one re-think some of his theological and practical material about surrender and about faith and about the loneliness of temptation.

This English edition of *Fear and Trembling* is a very attractive specimen of printing and binding, and offers a good place to begin your study of Kierkegaard. Aside from its value as a work of art and as a fresh approach to the story of how Abraham was tested, this book is a good introduction to the great Danish thinker and to his unusual frankness in recognizing difficulties. But let the student beware: Johannes de Silentio is not Kierkegaard; nor is all that Kierkegaard says about faith to be found in this single work. One ventures to call attention to the translator's failure to acknowl-

edge his apparent indebtedness to Dr. Hollander, who translated nearly a third of this book in the university bulletin already mentioned. Certainly there are some remarkable verbal similarities in the two translations.

The fourth, which came out late in 1939, contains three pieces of valuable autobiographical material under the title of *The Point of View*. Dr. Lowrie, the translator, in his preface tells us the good news that the Oxford Press is now planning to give us all the Dane's works in English.

This small but important volume gives Kierkegaard's explanation that (1) even in such "esthetic" productions as *The Seducer's Diary* his purpose was essentially Christian; and (2) while he was trying to live in a way that matched his teaching, providential guidance ("Governance," as Lowrie prefers it) so controlled his life that he says: "I have rendered a service to the cause of Christianity while I myself have been educated by the process" (p. 96). Much of the current misunderstanding of Kierkegaard and of those theologians who today acknowledge his influence will be changed to comprehension if not to agreement if teachers and writers will only read what he says (p. 160): "Christianity is just as lenient as it is austere . . . infinitely lenient. When the infinite requirement is held and upheld, held and upheld in all its infinitude, then *grace* is offered . . . and to it the individual, each for himself, as I also do, can flee for refuge. And then it is possible." Kierkegaard then registers strenuous objection to either (a) presenting the requirement

without grace or (b) minimizing the requirement and introducing grace as a matter of course.

Not only is this book a needed explanation to much of the author's immense literary and theological production, but it also has the right to a place on the shelf where you keep such revelations of the inner self as the confessions of Augustine and Rousseau and the autobiography of John Stuart Mill. This laying bare of Kierkegaard's usually well-hidden heart was not published until after his death, except for about a dozen and a half pages which contain the precious bit about "my tactics" which Forsyth found and quoted. There is no question that *The Point of View* is interesting in many ways; and it is a pity that such small type was chosen for this translation.

This book ought to be read. Anyone may find food for thought and for agony of soul in the problem of how to become a Christian. One interested in Kierkegaard will study the parallel accounts that are bound together in this volume. A close student will, from reading this translation by Dr. Lowrie, become dissatisfied with some of the simplifications in the glossary to the same scholar's massive critical biography. But although we need understandable symbols in handling him, any reduction of Kierkegaard or his favorite thoughts to simplicity is like reducing the human body to its mere constituent chemical elements, oxygen, hydrogen, carbon, chlorine, and so on.

Kierkegaard's main object may have been plain; but his rich mind was as fond of reflection as the wall-mirrors in a barber shop; and when you explain his

terminology in easy, direct, or "immediate" words, you miss something. You are like the chap who makes a simple classification of warring nations into (1) perfectly white and (2) totally black, whereas the student of history knows that no matter how white a nation may be at the beginning of its defensive war, if the struggle lasts long the noble defenders will gradually acquire soiled hands and hate-scarred hearts. In our American history think of the confiscation of Tory lands, of Reconstruction, and of that putrid "hang the kaiser" spirit which spread like flu among the stay-at-homes while some of us at the front were being scared bald.

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There are four books about Kierkegaard for about the same price as these translations.

By far the best is *Lectures on the Religious Thought of Kierkegaard*, by the late Eduard Geismar, Professor of Theology in the University of Copenhagen. These were the Stone Lectures at Princeton in March, 1936. Even better than these fine informative lectures, with their well-chosen presentations of parts of Kierkegaard's own writings, is Swenson's introduction. I was interested and pleased that a highly commendatory review of Walter Lowrie's "tremendous book" in the fall, 1939, issue of *Radical Religion* carried a complimentary reference to this introduction by Swenson.

The other three are British, but the first of them is well advertised over here. *Kierkegaard*, by Allen, gives an account of the man and a study of his teachings. This study has already been mentioned in the first part

of this chapter. But Swenson, in his introduction to Geismar, p. xxiii, without giving Allen's name, demolishes Allen (p. 205) as follows: "To one who has through a reading of the *Journals* seen how Kierkegaard's reflection, with respect to each and every position he was about to take, anxiously guarded the integrity of his guiding principle of not 'lying himself into the possession of a result'—to such a reader the lofty superiority with which a recent English writer on Kierkegaard, intending to bestow a compliment while pointing a criticism, says of him that 'he was a valiant fighter in a cause he did not understand,' can scarcely fail to convey a sense of something a bit ludicrous. . . . A professor in the history of philosophy passes in review during the course of a year the greatest thinkers of all time, and shows precisely where each of them has failed and where they succeeded. The reviewer-journalist . . . quickly concocts an article . . ." The ricochet strikes me too.

Bain's *Soren Kierkegaard* is very interesting, but hardly profound. The summaries of certain works are excellent. The quotations in the appendix, especially the prayers, are well selected. Dr. Bain finds some dangerous elements in Kierkegaard's teaching. Ferrie criticizes both Allen and Bain for trying to explain Kierkegaard, that is, to explain him away.

The third British book is Dru's translation of two essays by Theodor Haecker of Innsbruck. Really, of course, this is a German (now; Austrian when published) Catholic presentation. The title of the little book is *Soren Kierkegaard*; it is a very valuable con-

tribution to the study of Kierkegaard by a man who has done a great deal of translating and commenting and has a right to individual and even pioneer opinions. Haecker maintains that the real Kierkegaard is not to be found in the many volumes which, though he afterward acknowledged them, Kierkegaard originally published under so many carefully discriminated noms-de-plume. Haecker does not like the philosophy of those books, and he would disagree with some of the theology which they contain. According to Haecker, the real Kierkegaard expresses himself in the several series of edifying discourses and other religious writings.

* * * * *

And now we have two big books in the seven-dollar class. Each is well worth its price. The great work of Dr. Walter Lowrie, after years of ministry in Rome and of lecturing in America, is his *Kierkegaard* which came from the press in 1938. This is a large and scholarly volume, thoroughly equipped with appendix after appendix, abounding in long and short quotations with very exact references to the Danish edition of the collected works, and is very interesting to read through and quite pleasant to browse in. No serious student of Kierkegaard can do without this magnificent book. The method of presentation gives a better understanding of the Danish thinker than a more formal statement. Many of the choicest passages I had found in Kierkegaard are translated and scattered through this book, and it brought other treasures to my attention.

With reference to one remark of Lowrie's, and to another in the review of this book by Dr. S. G. Craig

in *Christianity Today*, let this be said: no Calvinist can read much of Kierkegaard without observing with regret that the Dane had not read Calvin. Calvin would have helped his soul in its solitary battles for truth. But Kierkegaard was a rebel soul, against the majority, against the crowd. He admired Luther, and yet not only disagreed with him on some points but also wrote violently against him. The suggestion that Kierkegaard's ascetic conception of Christianity might have finally led him to Rome seems more absurd than the famous Absurd about which he had so much to say. The Calvinistic theology might have had a beneficial and welcome influence upon him,—I mean the Calvinism that Calvinists teach or the Calvinism that Calvin taught, not some of the weird caricatures that numerous non-Calvinists seem to think that they would hear in our churches if they came to hear our sermons. But no form of Calvinism would have won the full allegiance of this man who could not understand the serpent and therefore calmly omitted the serpent from his study of the fall and of original sin in his book *The Concept of Dread*. By the way, that book is available in German, and in two French translations, but not yet in English. We shall have it soon.

Another and more recent volume of some seven hundred pages is Alexander Dru's large book of selections, *The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard*. Dru's choice of his selections is based on Haecker's and the point of view is the same. He omits the entry of March, 1844, in which Kierkegaard wrote: "There are only three positions between faith and knowledge. 1. Paul:

'I know whom I have believed.' — 2. Credo ut intelligam. — 3. Faith is direct, unmeditated. In each, knowledge follows faith." Dru gives (p. 282f) the full context of that remark of Kierkegaard's to the King of Denmark about which I made a lucky guess in my first effort to write about him (chapter two). It seems that the author really felt the remark to be true of himself, but diplomatically offered it to be taken as a compliment to Christian VIII, when he said: "It is hard to be a genius in Gopher Prairie." Of course Dru renders this well-known saying with dignity: "It is a misfortune to be a genius in a provincial town." The remark itself is based on a false sense of comparative values, as if the steady pressure of the personal influence of man on man in a small but permanent group had no standing beside the more general but scattered and perhaps brief impact produced by fame. Dru's book is also to be commended for browsing or for study. It contains many quotable sentences.

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FINAL NOTE — There are three welcome additions to this list of books by and about Kierkegaard which Americans can buy and read in our own tongue. Each of the three gives us something by Kierkegaard himself.

In *Time* for Dec. 9, 1940, is an attractive notice of the publication (by the Princeton University Press) of the Dane's second great esthetic work, *Stages on Life's Way*. This writer "is slowly being excavated from the Danish." "His most active American disciple, Walter Lowrie, waded into the Danish language solely to rescue Kierkegaard for a larger audience." In this

expensive but worthwhile volume the reader will find *The Banquet (In Vino Veritas)*, an ethical essay on marriage, and a double-barreled diary of a love affair much like the author's own. This is still a rather early Kierkegaard.

Another big volume, which the Oxford Press dates 1939, is Lowrie's translation of nearly four hundred pages of *Christian Discourses*. They are rich and beautiful, and represent one of the deepest and mellowest periods in this queer life. Some of these discourses were actually delivered in church at Friday Communion. Let me give two little samples of their theology. Here is one: Instead of self-importantly proving that God exists, urges Kierkegaard, humbly prove your belief in His existence—by your obedience. Then, showing how faith is the strongest possible fortified position, safe even against blockade, he adds (almost as usual), "along with faith in the fortress dwells obedience" (p. 89). Here is a second sample, very characteristic, and important to clear up a problem that had been troubling me: It is evident that for Kierkegaard faith is not merely something simple and direct, like a child's trust; it is direct and childlike trust *after* reason has done its questing and questioning and has given up. In more technical terms, faith is "immediacy after reflection." Now on page 182 of this precious volume we find that Kierkegaard warms this teaching and makes it taste good. With his way of seeing two opposing sides at once, he cannot define faith as a calm certainty; but he explains that faith is happy trust even in fear

and trembling. "Faith is . . . the blissful assurance which is found in fear and trembling."

In the lower price class Oxford gives us the little volume *The Present Age*. The name part is a description of his (and our) time taken from a review which Kierkegaard wrote of a friend's novel. Dru, editor and translator, adds a translation of the fine little paper *Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle*. Between them is a third fragment, a choice and characteristic bit of jugglery with ideas, entitled *Has a Man the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?* The question works down to this: Can you be so sure that you are right that you not merely dare to die for the truth, but you even dare to incur some responsibility for the guilt of murder which your persecutors assume because your neck is stiff? This little book will interest you if you are already interested in the author. Otherwise let it alone.⁴⁶

In *Philosophy*, 1939, p. 235, Dorothy M. Emmett, M.A., makes a remark about Kierkegaard which probably anticipates the final verdict of a very large proportion of his future readers in the United States. After a sympathetic reference to his sufferings, she says: "Such a man can see a few things with a penetration not given to ordinary people who are naturally more

⁴⁶ A welcome letter from Dr. Lowrie, received December 28, 1940, brings the news that before this little book of mine is published, two more volumes of his translation of religious writings should appear from Oxford (containing some of my favorites); and that about the end of March the great philosophical Postscript will come out at Princeton. Soon we shall have *Sickness Unto Death and Repetition*, a volume of essays and translations by the late Professor Swenson, and others.

extraverted—but heaven save us from taking his exceptional insights, won perhaps at the very cost of onesidedness, and making them an exclusive philosophy or theology.”

* * * * *

We may expect more books about this rather fascinating wrestler with hard problems; and confidently hope for more translations of what he wrote. Kierkegaard's writings need less comment than those of any other serious thinker. They also need more comment. Less because he writes clearly, plainly, and amply; more because of the variety of viewpoints from which he treats each theme.

N. B.—Kierkegaard's existential philosophy flavors the thinking of such a student of his as President John Mackay. My tower and bleachers contrast, p. 187, is far inferior to Mackay's "balcony" and "road." One detects the influence of those South American years during which the Scottish-American missionary often lectured on Kierkegaard.

CHAPTER XI

A VIKING OF THOUGHT

THE DANE KIERKEGAARD SEEN FROM A TEXAS MANSE

THE viking was a northern barbarian who attacked settled countries in which civilization and Christianity were suffering from the ordinary and perpetually recurrent ills of complacency, ease, and wealth. The viking was also like a fresh breeze from the sea. He was a storm of swift wind from the ocean who, though he destroyed houses and murdered the innocent, also reminded stay-at-home men of their manhood. For a long time he was a better raider than settler, though in due time his healthy stock contributed to the farming population that fed the nations; but the landing of the dread pirates from the north showed the hollow weakness of false fronts in government and society.

His coming meant fighting, rapine, looting, and destruction; but afterward there were stronger individual units among the feudal groups. And the Scandinavian vikings who ranged from the Orkneys and Greenland to the Levant, and won battles in Russia and in France, and settled in the British Isles and in Sicily,—these all-conquering northmen were individualists who trusted in the swing of the warrior's sword against the buckler

line of weaker men whose reliance was upon the shield-wall. The shield-wall was the strength of a crowd; but each viking's sword and shield were free. Those heroes like Saxon Alfred who finally overcame the Norsemen became heroes only by fighting against the viking invasion. If you cannot see some Kierkegaard in that description, this book is a failure.

But on the other hand the word viking is not descriptive enough. It brings to mind a long ship filled with eager rovers, who rowed, robbed, risked, and returned together. But our solitary Dane put out his little kayak alone on the high sea. By himself he ventured on the lonely, perilous journey among the perils of the mighty unknown deep. He was brave, because he trusted in God.

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Some people will never care for Kierkegaard.

Suppose you are hungry. Various unpleasant and irritating manifestations of that fact attract your attention and urge you to eat, or to cook and eat, or to procure the cooking of your food, or to labor for the wherewithal to purchase your next meal. The feeling of hunger with its manifestations and its results is a part of our common human experience. Suppose a young preacher eats Sunday night supper in a deacon's home and from thoughtless remarks at table learns to his dismay that there is almost a feud among some of his most trusted church officers. At evening service he finds himself hardly able to worship, and too utterly bound to be able to lead the congregation in their worship; but in half an hour, after calling on man

after man until he has heard eight elders and deacons lead in prayer, he again reaches the place where he feels in his heart the fellowship of erring but sincere hearts (like his) bowed in humble thanks and earnest petition before the mercy and truth of God. Probably with more or less effort any reader of this paragraph can put himself into that young preacher's place. But let a talented author like Jules Romains develop in a novel the mental processes of a group of infantry officers whose orders called for certain and unnecessary destruction to their men. The skill of the author may make both scene and motive real to you, and if you will build up a context of acquaintance with military customs and with French army history to fill out the background of those wearisome approaches in the author's preceding volumes, you will find yourself delighted and instructed and stimulated by this study of human nature under pressure. On the other hand, many people will never bother to read Romains' *Verdun*, and many who read the double volume remain outside the book even after they have attentively perused every page. Do you grasp the actual issues that are involved? And if so, do you consider them important and worth while?

Many people, who approach Kierkegaard with a genuine desire to make his acquaintance and perhaps to sit at his feet, may be expected to give him up as a waste of time. Some of the problems which occupied him will seem unreal to them. His struggles will seem out of place in the particular experience-centered curriculum of their plans for study. Very well. On only

one or two occasions has the author of this book ever shared with anyone the terrific experience of his lonely soul on the Sunday evening just referred to. The full struggle in the minds of the officers at Verdun may not be worth acquiring at the cost of long hours of duller reading; and who wants to prescribe weary and deadening contact with the immoral gravitation of the low-average standards of conduct in the characters of Jules Romains' previous volumes?

For somewhat similar reasons, many people will not want to read Kierkegaard. The first parts of *Eiüher-Or* and *Stages on Life's Way* seem to be defenses of the most consummate selfishness. The *Scraps* and other philosophical writings attack reason's self-confidence, and will upset the faith of some. A German scholar wrote me that he avoided the Dane because he was afraid of his influence. A notice which an American religious quarterly gave to Dru's selections from the journals called that book "a terrific revelation of introverted genius." But there is something to be said for the other side. A lover of Kierkegaard may suggest that patience has its reward, particularly in the Dane's religious writings. Even Dr. Wieman, whose Christian theology, methodology, and philosophy are just about as far from Kierkegaard's as possible, in a *Christian Century* article gave strong testimony to the devotional value of *Purity of Heart*.

In his human and inspiring syndicated column, Dean Raimundo De Ovies remarks: "One reason why genius often has a hard time getting on in the world is because there is so little of it. It is so surprising a discovery

that it is seldom recognized until its possessor has been laid in his grave." That may have some bearing on the world's slowness in learning to appreciate Kierkegaard. He and his contemporaries in remote Copenhagen seem to have agreed in recognizing his great talents and the fact that he was an original genius. That is why the comic paper could make him so funny: a distinguished and wealthy author, with spindle shanks and uneven trouserlegs! Respect bounced back into ridicule; admiration had preceded mockery. But admiration is not always comprehension. Let us be thankful that we can admire Einstein without being among the dozen who understood his general theory of relativity when it was published.

One great peculiarity of Kierkegaard's seems to have passed without remark. He was such a versatile thinker and writer, and he wrote in such a variety of moods, that it is possible to like parts of his work very much and nevertheless at the same time to find other parts boring or meaningless. We all have preferences among the works of our favorite authors, and we may like some bits in otherwise insufferable printed deserts of paper and ink. But many-sided Kierkegaard offers the outstanding opportunity to have violent likes and dislikes among the productions of one pen.

Kierkegaard's preference for complexity and involvement instead of plain directness, or, as he calls it, for reflection instead of the immediate, often results in his writing some particular passage from more motives than appear on the surface. He liked to hide meanings, too, as well as motives. There are concealed rhythms

and harmonies in his work as well as James Joyce's. Furthermore, being quite conscious of his own abilities, and thoroughly committed to the position that he was a genius, a mere genius without authority from God or the church, Kierkegaard was not above showing off. He wrote and rewrote and polished before he published. Few writers can touch him for variety. At his best, not very many rank with him for charm.

You may dislike some of Kierkegaard's work and be entranced by other books of his. As Hollander indicates, short quotations give no idea of the man or the style or the contribution to modern thought. People will turn against Kierkegaard on insufficient acquaintance. And alas! the student is tempted to fear that many valuable interpreters and expounders of Kierkegaard's work have scored absolute zeroes with reference to this or that part of his varied activity. In print are some singularly unenlightening remarks, by real scholars, about some phases of his work. *A fortiori* an American pastor, writing in a Brownsville hotel in a few spare hours before presbytery convenes, interrupted by items of church business and by the visits of his beloved brethren, contenting himself on his first visit to this interesting city with one hotel-window glance across the Rio Grande into Mexico, having read only part of Kierkegaard's numerous works and those in translation, this pastor will surely not put all his missiles on the target. Under such limitations, even an archer whose grandsire drew a good bow at Hastings can do no more than his best.

It is a truism that out of the heart the mouth speaketh. We have the sound advice, from an ancient expert in what is now the deeper psychology, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." The immense service which Kierkegaard is ready to do for the individual reader is primarily in the inner realm. But he insists that if the heart is really Christian, the outward life will be profoundly changed. This life-changing is a frequent thought in the writings of his last seven years, and is bitingly emphasized in the attack on the established church and its complacent ministry which occupied his final year. But his writings up to that time, especially *Fear and Trembling*, had been denying us any outward criteria by which to pick out the knight of faith. Perhaps he was inconsistent. But purity of heart in the sense of singleness of aim, a willingness to accept suffering as one's daily cross, and charity, were three of his great demands upon the individual. In addition, at the last he contended that the church leaders must at least be sincere enough to admit their failure to measure up to the high standard of their Christian profession and preaching.

Since he disliked and distrusted crowds, he made no effort to "implement" the activity of changed lives by organizations for social service or for reform by legislation. He trusted no such method; nor did he believe in self-governing democracy. He was not one of our activist Americans, impatient to do something about the ills of the world and more impatient to get others to take his medicine, but often too impatient to wait

for a thorough study of the disease and a careful decision about the treatment. I have a friend who is an osteopath, and consequently has a license to practice the healing arts in Texas. Under our state law this license permits him to give any kind of treatment he sees fit, whether within the range of studies of his honorable and useful profession or not. So, although the D.O. is denied the privilege of attending the regular graduate clinics and conventions of the M.D.'s, and although he seems unprovided with medical journals, he gives surgical and electric treatments and seems to use everything new in the realm of serum or remedy-by-mouth. Patients crowd his offices, despite the awareness some of them must have that all he knows about these new-fangled treatments is what he reads in the advertising circulars of the drug salesman! Kierkegaard was not in such a hurry to go off half-cocked, nor in such a hurry to get results, nor in such a hurry to draw a crowd, nor even in such a hurry to know exactly what the other fellow needs and to prescribe a remedy. He favored taking time for reflection. And his powerful mind, working at its usual high speed, habitually took plenty of time for reflection. He wrote a number of long pieces which he left unfinished; and embodied some of that unfinished material in other works. A few short finished pieces were left for posthumous publication. For well-considered reasons, he slowed down his literary activity for years. And he was patient enough to withhold publication of a completed work until the time seemed ripe.

Kierkegaard, as just stated, did not trust self-

governing democracy. He had no confidence in majorities. On the contrary, by selected extracts from his writings you could make a good case for the statement that he was a conservative second-generation parvenu bourgeois aristocrat to his very fingertips. He would make a poor political guide, for a democrat who loves personal freedom or for any regimentarian, whether fascist, puritan, inquisitorial, or communist.

But he did and does demand a truth-seeking religion that may veer hither and yon in its quest, but that always carries the burdens of others. He sees social duties in forms that remind one of our Saviour's quotation of Leviticus 19:18, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," as the second great commandment. Observe that Jesus was asked for one great commandment but insisted on replying with two, for the two great commandments stand together and either without the other leaves the would-be obeyer in unstable equilibrium. Kierkegaard rightly says that you cannot love God unless you actively love your neighbor too. "If a man say, 'I love God,' and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?" "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (I John 4:20; 3:17). But Kierkegaard adds that we are not commanded to love a crowd! Love the individuals of whom the crowd is made up. You and I probably prefer to think of God Who loves us all as if all were one, and yet loves each as if he were all. We think of parents

loving their first baby with a double heartfelt of love, and then as others arrive loving each one to the same boundless extent; and the half-dozen boys and girls that to outsiders are So-and-So's children are to the parents John and Bob and Sue and Mary and Frank and Carrie Mae. The coming of each child has found or made his individual place in the family group. One can almost say that Kierkegaard insists that your love for others must pass through the defile of individual love, just as he does say that Christianity must pass through the defile of the individual.

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Lombardi devotes most of the last quarter of his book *Kierkegaard* to a collection of brief extracts entitled *Kierkegaard on Kierkegaard*. In the prefatory note to this appendix, the Milan professor defends himself in advance against a possible criticism: should the reader find passages that he has already met in the body of the work, "it is as if somebody with whom you have been talking repeats, as he takes his leave, this or that thing which has already been discussed and which sticks in his mind; apparently he wants to fix and mark the record of it in your memory" (p. 255).

Every important statement about Kierkegaard in this little book of mine has been made at least twice, in different contexts. This was done because Kierkegaard and his way of thinking are unfamiliar to us and our generation. All through this book, in an awkward manner, in feeble imitation of a method which Kierkegaard employs with both frequency and skill, I have been trying to cross certain points again and again. When

you visit a strange city and sojourn for a while, you begin to feel at home on some streets before you set out to learn the others; and you must learn to recognize certain important intersections and prominent buildings from various approaches. Then you are ready either to explore the rest of the city or to traverse it rapidly without losing your way as you transact your business there.

But books about Kierkegaard will be of little use or value to you, unless you read books that he wrote. The only exception is Lowrie's book about him, which is full of well-chosen long quotations. Lowrie was writing a life of this Dane of the ready pen and of the patient revision; Lowrie supports and illustrates his own statements by copious extracts from diary and published work and posthumously published collected papers; Lowrie does not analyze all Kierkegaard's published works; but Lowrie as a lover often inserts long passages merely to let his author speak for himself. Lowrie invites you to read the works of Kierkegaard, and is busy translating some of them now. But Lowrie's own book by itself does show many true features of the enigmatic Dane.

Aside from that, you may read a library of books about Kierkegaard and yet know less of him than we know of Melchizedek, unless you also read Kierkegaard's own books. Nothing but sophomoric rashness will comment on Kierkegaard before digesting some of his books. The word digest as here used does not refer to *précis-writing*. Nor does it refer to modern short-cuts to a liberal education by way of collected abstracts

of the world's great books, whether these abstracts are found in print or whether they are written into a notebook from a professor's note-guided lecture. The reference is to wise old Francis Bacon. Some of Kierkegaard's pages and volumes have pleasure and even profit for the taster. Only a yokel-minded pedant will try to swallow any of his books whole. But some of his books are worthy of being chewed and digested. Any man who has much to say about Kierkegaard before he has made a reasonable effort to masticate and digest at least a few of his books lacks honesty or common sense.

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Most of Kierkegaard's great problems can be found in my own parish. Mine is an old Presbyterian church on the Texas coastal plain, where our economic life depends upon cattle, cotton, oil, turkeys, and transportation. Wickedness and goodness abound in the lives of our twelve thousand inhabitants, and poverty is neighbor to wealth. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish pastors treat one another as gentlemen and friends. Community duties, and the pastor-in-law relationship created by mixed marriages, extend my pastoral activities far beyond the care of my several hundred souls (some of them remarkably sluggish Christians).

Among all these beloved people are some who are morbid, as Kierkegaard was because of his father. And some are unconsciously selfish and cruel, as Kierkegaard was in his love-affair. Some are over-sensitive. Some love the indirect forms of expression. Some are troubled by the human tendency to think of individuals

as mere units of group or race or class: is Mr. O'Brien just a railway conductor, or just a Catholic, or is he my friend Dan O'Brien? Some suffer, some fear suffering, and some coddle their suffering. And some are profoundly troubled and deeply grieved by the un-Christianity of us professing Christians.

Wahl (p. 329) very truly credits Kierkegaard with seeing what Paul and Luther saw: The deepest religious life comes only to the sinner,—in redemption, of course. "Christianity is the absolute religion because it considers man as sinful, for what other difference could more completely separate man from God?" (p. 330, following Ruttenbeck). The profound realism of Kierkegaard, queer though he is, helps a pastor to understand and sympathize with ordinary people. An understanding pastor can reprove, rebuke, exhort, with the necessary longsuffering (I Timothy 4:2). To him Kierkegaard's works may be more useful than a theological monograph or a handbook of psychology and pastoral counseling. For with all his oddities, Kierkegaard helps a pastor to serve the people for whom God has given him a word: a word of truth that the pastor must rightly divide, apply, and speak. The far-reaching possibilities of this revealing Danish genius and his frankness in acknowledging the wrongness of wrong and the hopelessness of despair show some of the weird possibilities in everyday individuals—and underline our need of the grace of God.

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One may dare to enter the misty bay of prediction, with its shoals and cross-currents. In these wartime

days our newspaper columnists often make weekly voyages into those impenetrable fogs: presumably their boats are wrecked, for often the writer comes back swimming. But occasionally he holds up a minnow, and proudly cries: "See what a fisherman of prophecy am I!" Nevertheless I hazard my little skiff in those dangerous waters. When the complete works of Kierkegaard are available in English, not many of us will read them all. Connoisseurs, amateurs, professionals, and directed students will taste here and there, chew and digest a little, perhaps swallow some gulps, and will "cram" notes made up of someone else's comments. But a little of Kierkegaard himself will get into our thinking, and though Kierkegaard himself will be dissolved and out of sight, yet, like salt in a well-prepared and tasty dish, he may in some measure permeate the whole and contribute to the ultimate flavor.

He will not be of direct help to you in your struggle to decide whether to support or oppose Dies, or Roosevelt, or Browder, or any other leader or standard-bearer of a cause. But he will offer you some indirect suggestions which, if welcomed, will work around in your soul and make you an individual capable of profounder moral decision.

Meanwhile let us rejoice that before he began to publish numerous books his journal had noted the remarkable fact that the Bible used adjectives for most of the divine attributes: God is wise, powerful, holy, and so on. But love is a noun: God is love. By the way, light is a substantive also: God is light.

There is a timelessness and therefore a timeliness

about Kierkegaard's words. During most of his life he was far more interested in Socrates and Lessing than in his Copenhagen fellow-citizens. There is a strong impersonal element in this individualist's attack on the bishops and clergy of his country's church. This fight of his last year is a live issue today. In fact his attack is just as hard on us as it was on Martensen and the pastors "especially in Protestantism, especially in Denmark." He demands that at least we admit how far we fall short of the Christianity we teach. Such an admission is poor remedy for our failure. But we cannot deny the failure.— This paragraph is being written just after the radio announcement of the fall of Copenhagen to German arms, but such upsets can never deprive us of Kierkegaard's lasting message.

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Kierkegaard does have a message for our time.

One might state it in terms of his either-or and his progress from stage to stage: Life, in time and the world, will always lack something, will always lack the one needful thing, until the individual humbly turns to God in faith; even in time we need eternity. In terms of philosophy: Reason cannot compass the eternal and cannot even make a satisfactory contact with eternity without leaping across a gap; and even then the life of faith is to venture far out in one's lonely kayak, unlike the viking who had companions in his long-ship when he put out into the deep. In terms of theology: God is entirely out of our reach and beyond our understanding,—until in Jesus Christ He draws

near to us and says, says in the voice of the lowly and despised Jesus, "Come unto me." In terms of psychology: Despite the freedom of the human will, we enter into the moral struggle with an initial handicap; but we must decide. In terms of religious faith, God's unlimited grace in Jesus Christ comes to supply our need. In terms of religious living, the responsibility is upon us to live up to the example of Christ; and our failure must be acknowledged; and our persistent, humble, trustful effort must be kept up.

Kierkegaard emphasized the transcendence of God, the better to glorify the divine grace in the gospel. He reminds us of the abyss between the human and the divine in order to make us appreciate how far the Lord Christ came to save us. He shows the full austerity of the requirement in order to bring out the forgiving gentleness of the leniency. Like Luther and Calvin, he makes faith all-important, but faith for him is a response to grace, a trust in grace. He loved to teach that from the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field we may learn calm and perfect trust. Faith has to go beyond sight ("for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"—Rom. 8:24), beyond reason, and even against good common sense. Like an Eskimo in his solitary kayak, the man of faith paddles out into the deep sea in his lonely boat. In another figure, faith is a leap. It may even be a leap in the dark; but if so, it is a leap into the unseen because a trustworthy voice commands, "Jump!" The element of personal trust is present. But the venture must be made.

But are not *calm trust* and *venturing far out* both

normal parts of the experience of the religious soul in the Christian life? They may even alternate; but calm trust and venturing far out are ordinary ups and downs of the Christian pilgrimage from cradle to grave. Cradle marks the start; grave marks the end which is a new beginning; and in between one walks on his own feet along a path of his own choosing. Not that he can see the ups and downs of his chosen pathway until he reaches them, nor the turns and crossways where he must choose again. The road and the countryside are there before he comes and will be there after he is gone; he traverses them on the way toward a goal. However, through green pastures or some Gethsemane, by still waters or in the valley of dark shadow, he must walk on his own feet through this active and decisive life. For life demands activity and decision.

Let him walk in *fear and trembling*, and let him walk in *faith*. In this do not the psalmist and Paul and Kierkegaard agree? From the Dane we expect paradox and paradox. They nicknamed him "Either-Or," and the nickname still echoes through scholastic halls and pages; but at the heart of his religion was a profound and practical *both-and*. When despair yields to faith, the latter combines humble and fearful doubt with confident trust. Unsure of self, uncertain about things, the believer may rely upon the promise of God.

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