GREEN

LIFE

FROM the sky to homely earth, from depth of space mirrored in the expanse of ocean to the fields or gardens at our door, we descend in turning from blue to green. And in our symbolism we exchange the lofty apprehension of metaphysical intuition as it penetrates the profundities of the soul and gazes upward to God for the life of nature, vegetable and animal, including the vegetative and animal life in ourselves. We have returned from the metabiological to the biological. But whereas we have hitherto been mainly concerned with the contemplation which involves a certain separation from its object, we have now in mind a closer contact with the object, an immediate experience of its concrete actuality, a participation of its life, in short the complementary factor of concrete vital union. Indeed, the life, here so directly and concretely experienced, is in part our own, an aspect of our own nature and activity.

This biological life, in its various effects and embodiments, is the object of the nature-religions; those polytheisms which deify the elementary powers of nature. Even the inorganic is for the nature-religions regarded as alive: wind and sun and sea are as living as the plant or animal. No doubt a metabiological activity akin to that of the human spirit, a quasi-human personality, is ascribed to these nature deities. But so long as a nature-religion is unaffected by later speculations this rational humanity is subordinate and instrumental to biological life, its needs, pleasures and passions.

But although the object of the nature-religions is some manifestation or embodiment of natural life, yet inasmuch as they are religions even the nature polytheisms involve, in the religious acts they evoke, a reference, confused, obscure or unrecognised, to the supernatural Deity in but beyond nature, immanent in but transcending the biological order—involve, that is to say, a worship of the true, if Unknown God. Idolatry is distinguished from Image-worship by an undue finality. It rests in the relative as though it were the Absolute, worships the creature, the image and vehicle of the Divine Spirit, as though it were that Spirit. Hence the passage from Idolatry to Image-worship is not difficult for

any sincerely religious pagan. Moreover even in primitive religions the sky-god, no doubt because of the physical elevation of his dwelling and its remoteness from earth, is invested with a spiritual, ethical, and absolute character, being regarded as the supreme and universal Father and Creator. Thus the most rudimentary forms of religion contain the germ and indistinct lineaments of a supernatural monotheism. The germ, however, very largely failed to grow; the outline became no clearer. On the contrary, the polytheistic nature-cults, as they developed, tended to thrust this primitive monotheism more or less completely out of sight.

In the East, Vedanta and even Buddhism, though the antithesis of nature-worship, have continued to incorporate it as a lower and preliminary stage of religion. With a sacred philosophy which rejects the life of nature even too exclusively the Hindu and Buddhist is able to combine a worship of its deified powers. Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism have on the contrary faced nature polytheism with uncompromising hostility. Only thus could the supreme claim and truth of religion as essentially spiritual and metabiological be asserted with complete success. This necessary reaction against the worship of natural life, against the confusion which

invested the biological with the value of spirit and even of Absolute Spirit, did not and could not escape the universal law of human reaction. It tended to depreciate unduly the positive and even religious value, that is to say, the holiness, of the manifestations, channels and embodiments of natural life as reflections of the supernatural and images of God. The public baths were abandoned to decay. Christian art was long marked by lack of interest in the beauty of the human form. The substitution of Byzantine mosaic for Greek sculpture was profoundly symptomatic of this change of outlook. Drama was long widely condemned, for example, by Bossuet in the seventeenth century. Such excesses, however, were but the inevitable reverse of the positive affirmation of spirit and its sovereignty, which was inspiration and the indispensable achievement of that religious movement of the later Empire which under Divine Providence made the Christian Conquest possible. The doctrines of the Incarnation, Eucharist and Resurrection have consistently maintained at the centre of Christian belief the holiness and worth of the body and its physiological life. An incarnational and sacramental religion cannot deny physical life and beauty. The Liturgy is never weary of praying for physical health, even in the penitential rite

of Ash Wednesday. The Post-Communion for the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost condenses into a few words a programme of psychotherapy.[1] And the subordinate worth and claims of physiological life as the necessary basis of the spiritual life in man have found full recognition from the most responsible Catholic thinkers of to-day. For there are not two vital principles in man—two souls—but one vital principle and one energy, which may be informed and directed either by a natural and biological or by a supernatural and spiritual purpose. The biological life with its distinctive quality and temperament, specific and individual, is the material—the immediate matter—which the spiritual will, itself moulded by the love of God, must inform and fashion. And the good artist respects his material.

But the natural life with which we are now concerned is, as I have said above, not only in man. It is the life of nature as a whole—the life that works in the leaves, blossoms in the flowers, moves and feels in the animals. Nor would I exclude those inorganic elements and forces on which life depends

[1] 'PURIFICA, *quæsumus, Domine,* MENTES NOSTRAS *benignus, et* RENOVA *cælestivus sacramentis: ut* CONSEQUENTER *et* CORPORUM *præsens pariter, et futurum capiamus* AUXILIUM.' *'Purify our minds,* we beseech thee, O Lord, in Thy loving kindness, and *renew* them by Thy heavenly sacraments, that *as a result* we may obtain both present and future *bodily help.'*

and which even seem themselves alive: the light of the sun, *il padre d'ogni mortal vita;* the wind, as it rides through the grass or sings among the foliage; water, as it advances in the exultant vigour of the sea waves, or rushes in foaming haste down the bed of the mountain torrent. The energy which foreshadows life, life vegetative and subsentient, life mobile, fully sentient and sub-intelligent—these three form an ascent of natural force, inorganic and vital, developing and unfolding new marvels of power and beauty. And the unfolding of life is a sequence of increasingly complex organisms more subtly adapted to their environment and functions. And throughout, the energy-matter is moulded ever more perfectly by the form imposed upon it, a wedlock of form and matter renewed in the generation and growth of every individual organism, and symbolised for the nature-religions by the marriage of the Mother Goddess, the energy substrate, with the Sky Father, the form that quickens that lower energy to organic life.

In thus speaking of an energy-matter formed to organic life, I am of course speaking comparatively. A totally unformed energy-matter cannot actually exist, it is mere potentiality. But the formed matter of one level becomes the matter of a higher form.

Inorganic energy-matter is the matter of vital form, life in turn of spirit.

Of the scientific study of the biological process and ascent we have already spoken. Here I have rather in mind its direct apprehension and enjoyment by sensible experience—not the botanical dissection of the dead flower, though that also is valuable, but the sight and it may be the smell of the living blossom. For the life thus experienced is a revelation of the living Author of Life—*deus vivus et vivificans.*

If the Word is the Ground and Exemplar of Form, the Spirit is the Ground and Source, the Mover and Giver of Life. His love is the supreme life, and His the creative brooding over chaos, till created life, that shadow of Himself, arises and unfolds. If the Liturgy is preoccupied with the work of the Holy Spirit as the source of supernatural life, it does not forget His function as the author of natural life. He is the *Creator Spiritus,* and it was natural life which the Psalmist had in mind when he wrote: 'Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.' A rugged but powerful sequence written by St. Hildegarde[2]—a mystic of

[2] In Prof. Phillimore's Anthology, *The Hundred Best Latin Hymns,* No. 40, pp. 58, 59.

marked cosmological interests—emphasises this aspect of the Spirit's work:

O ignis Spiritus Paracliti
Vita vitae omnis creaturae
Sanctus es vivificando formas.

'Fire of the Paraclete, life, source of all life created, Holy art Thou giving life to the forms'—that is, creating the energy substrate, in which the Divine Ideas receive concrete embodiment and existence as created forms.

De te nubes fluunt,
Æther volat,
Lapides humorem habent,
Aquae rivulos educunt,
Et terra viriditatem sudat.

From thee the clouds move, the air flies on its way, the stony rock exudes moisture and gives forth streams, and the earth puts forth the green herb.'

O iter fortissimum
Quod penetravit omnia
In altissimis
Et in terrenis
Et in omnibus abyssis,
Tu omnes componis et colligis.

'Most mighty traveller, thou dost penetrate all things in the heights above, on earth and every abyss'—those utmost depths and foundations, the matter

whose action is laid bare by modern physics, and those obscure depths of life where another chaos of warring instincts is being moulded to an organic purpose. 'Thou dost gather together and arrange all.' Life is essentially organisation, order; and the higher the life, and the fuller therefore the communication of the life-giving Spirit, the more complex the organisation, the more perfect the order. The advance of energy, life, intelligence, is everywhere correlative with an advance of form, external arrangement of homogeneous parts, organic harmony of differentiated parts, rational order of developed instincts and functions; a correspondence indicated by Herbert Spencer's formula of evolution as the passage 'from an indefinite incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity.' The Word and the Spirit are one God.

No doubt as the physical forces tend to oppose the higher purpose of life, and break away from its control in the disintegration of death, so as a result of the inherent limitation of creatures the exuberance of biological life tends to resist its moulding by a rational teleology ever stricter and more perfect. In nature we witness an internecine struggle of living organisms, and in man, so far as he lives by the biological laws of the flesh, an internal anarchy of

uncontrolled and unharmonised passions, or the irrational tyranny of the most powerful amongst them, to which there corresponds an outer anarchy of suicidal strife between individuals, classes and nations, or the uncontrolled tyranny of one individual, class or nation. But the victory of spirit, if therefore slow and incomplete, is sure. Examples of marvellous co-operation and inter-adaptation mark in various directions the evolution of vegetable and animal life, a co-ordination and co-operation of parts in the individual or of individuals in the species—even, as in the phenomenon of symbiosis, between different species. And human history, for all the abuse it records of the free choice by which man must voluntarily execute the Will of love and life, displays signal victories of reason and self-sacrifice over irrational and egoistic instinct, whether individual or social.

Moreover, in this advance of being, law becomes increasingly intrinsic, identical with the inner law of the subject's nature. The physical particle is externally restricted by the interference of other particles. The plant obeys an intrinsic law of growth, the animal an instinct which determines its activity for the good of the species, even at times at the cost of its individuaal life. And if even the most

interior of these laws is unfree, it is at least spontaneous, obeyed with no sense of constraint.

In man, because he belongs in part to the biological, in part to the metabiological, zone of being, there is no inner law which spontaneously determines and co-ordinates his behaviour. But his will, obeying freely the Spirit's law of love, may attain even on earth such supremacy that he follows that law without constraint as his highest good and the satisfaction of his desire. Here, far more than in the animal, law tends to become identified with spontaneity because spontaneity is now rational freedom. But everywhere external law enforced by compulsion is but the necessity of imperfection. As such it tends, as life develops and advances and ascends the scale of being, to yield to the inner and perfect law of liberty, *lex perfecta libertatis,* in which law and love are one.

Thus the struggle for existence is the law of life only in its positive aspect, the tendency of every living thing to maintain and assert its being. The inevitable reverse, competition against others, is but the imperfection of a life so remote from the full life of God, and the higher the form of life the more that negative aspect is subordinated to the positive law of love. Even in animal nature the sacrifices of

motherhood and of those insect workers—bees or ants—who wear out their lives prematurely for their community, foreshadow the spiritual life that asserts itself triumphantly in loving surrender of the biological. 'He that loses his life shall find it.'

There have been, indeed still are, those who see in the theory of evolution as taught by Darwinian and post-Darwinian science a menace to religion. No doubt when interpreted in terms of a positivist and mechanical philosophy, evolution must appear to exclude God. But the illusion is dissipated when it is seen as a manifestation of Creative Spirit, the record of the Spirit's motion over the face of the deep. The mechanical operation of natural selection cannot account for the appearance of the variations it selects. And whatever the extent of the part it plays in evolution—on this point scientists differ widely—it determines at most which of these new essays of life shall survive. The struggle for existence is the expression of that factor of blind necessity with which the form, the creative manifestation of the Divine Idea, must contend in this lower world. And evolution is precisely the gradual overcoming of necessity, the progressive rationalisation and spiritualisation of matter which man's work continues on a higher plane.

Since the hierarchy of being is, as we have seen, a scale of degrees between nothingness and Absolute Being, we shall expect a continuity in their appearance. Up to the present there is no scientific proof of abiogenesis—the derivation of living from non-living matter. But St. Thomas accepted it as taught by the Aristotelian science of his day, and it is not easy to believe that the first living organisms were introduced into the world from without. Everything indicates that when the chemical organisation of matter attained a certain complexity, the organising form assumed that quality we call life, though it was a distinctive and novel quality, and as such a novel and fuller communication of the Spirit, made whenever and wherever a subject was prepared to receive it. The ascending complexities of chemical or biological factors may thus be compared to a series of increasingly powerful field-glasses or telescopes. The more powerful lens presents objects invisible to the less powerful, focusses them within the field of vision. But it does not produce them. Similarly, each superior complex of predisposing factors more elaborately combined focusses a brighter reflection of the Divine Light, a novel form which mirrors the Exemplar Idea in the Divine Mind, for example, a new chemical property or form of organic life. But

this new light, this novel form, is not strictly speaking the product or effect of the complex of factors which focusses, receives, and reflects it from the fontal Light and Absolute Exemplar, the Divine Word. Only the appearance of the new objects is conditioned by the lens, and the appearance of the new quality by the predisposing complex. The advent of mind was not dissimilar. If God is revealed more fully at one point of the evolutionary sequence than at another, the special manifestation lies in the product, not in the mode of its production. But since mind implies personality, the creative gift here possesses an individual character as opposed to the universal or possibly specific gift of biological life. Given a complex of biological factors produced by the parents, there flashes upon it from the Divine Logos what has been termed a seminal reason, *ratio seminalis,* the informing soul of the new organism, whether the vegetative soul of a plant, the sentient but irrational and mortal soul of a beast, or the rational and immortal soul of a man. The view that new qualities and kinds of being emerge when particular complexities of a lower order have been achieved is known as emergent evolution, and is often stated as though the higher emerged automatically from the complex of lower factors. Thus stated,

emergent evolution contradicts the law of causality. But in the light of theism it assumes an altogether different aspect: emergence and creation are seen to be two aspects of the same fact—emergence the phenomenal aspect, the product viewed empirically; creation the noumenal aspect; the production viewed metaphysically.

Looking at evolution from below, we see emergence—from above, creation. Everywhere the phenomenal truth visible to science is the reverse, the obverse the noumenal truth visible to philosophy and religion. Therefore the scientist who, as such, views the evolutionary process phenomenally and from below will see God's creative action nowhere. The metaphysician and theologian who views it noumenally from above will see it everywhere. Evolution thus exemplifies Father Faber's profound observation that God's revelations are also concealments; 'that He discloses Himself by hiding Himself.' [8]

It has always been a commonplace that man is a microcosm whose composition contains inorganic matter, vegetable and animal life, and intelligent spirit. And if it appears that in his ancestry also he is a microcosm, his genealogy corresponding to his present composition, a recapitulation of the evolu-

[8] *The Blessed Sacrament*, p. 362.

tionary process,[4] so that he traces his lineage from inorganic matter through vegetable and animal life to intelligent spirit, the genealogical microcosm does but re-inforce the actual. If man is undeniably matter, vegetable, animal, and spirit, why is it difficult to admit that his evolution has passed through the lower stages which still co-exist in him with the highest? The lower has not produced the higher simply of itself, has not been able of its own power to add to its stature the successive cubits of additional being. Only the Divine Fount and Fullness of Being can thus raise His creature to a higher perfection of essence, involving a new mode and quality of being at every step nearer to Himself, though always infinitely distant. To the religious eye evolution, the gradual development of being, the ascent of degrees, is an objective psalm of degrees, a Gradual Psalm sung to the praise of the Lord and Giver of Life, as Life ascends towards His Temple of Spirit. And in human history this psalmody is continued in a different way, no longer as hitherto wholly objective and necessary, but increasingly a subjective and free worship. 'We glow inwardly

[4] Even the stages of man's embryological development correspond generally, though not in detail, with stages or levels of racial evolution. But I am speaking more widely of man as in his nature a recapitulation of the entire evolutionary process.

and go forward . . . we ascend thy ways and sing a song of degrees. *Inardescimus et imus. Ascendimus ascensiones et cantamus canticum graduum.*' The creative evolutionary process, creation in and through evolution, is thus a hymn of praise—faint in matter, louder in the plant and animal, clear and jubilant in the spirit of man, till it reaches its climax in that eternal anthem of the heavenly choirs, in whose perfect harmony the discordant notes of blind necessity and evil will are for ever silent: 'Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts, Heaven and Earth are full of Thy glory. *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt cæli et terra, gloria, tua.*'