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THE FORMATIVE FACTORS OF KIERKEGAARD'S DEVOTIONAL LIFE
AS ILLUSTRATED IN HIS LATER DISCOURSES

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Theology
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of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Sacred Theology

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INTRODUCTION

A STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem here undertaken consists in finding, crystallizing, and evaluating the formative factors which molded and influenced Soren Kierkegaard's devotional outlook, as all this is seen in his later discourses. This means that his life has been studied towards the end of finding out what factors made him what he was and what were the crucial points of his development.

Having ascertained these factors, there follows an evaluation of them in respect to his development. This part of the study tends to be interpretative, the link between biography and literature.

The last step is an explorative tour through Kierkegaard's devotional writings in order to find evidences of the factors we discovered and evaluated.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY

Biography is always illuminating. To the Christian mind one of the most important emphases in the life of another Christian is the devotional life. To focus the attention upon the devotional life of so outstanding a Christian as Soren Kierkegaard is particularly rewarding.

Since it has been only a few years that all of

Kierkegaard's writings are available in English, no great attempt has been made by the Kierkegaard scholars to emphasize his devotional life. It seems rather that most scholars are more interested in his speculative writings than in his decisive Christian literature, and most readers of Kierkegaard seem to be more impressed by the fact that he is the father of existentialism than the author of some of the most valuable devotional literature written.

Another reason which justifies this study is the fact of Kierkegaard's sheer brilliance. Certainly in any catalogue of Christian writers and thinkers he would be in the top-most category as far as mentality is concerned. Can one of the most brilliant minds (and he has been compared with Plato) be truly humble and devout before the Lord Christ? This question and its answer is always intriguing. That a brilliant mind should engage in speculative philosophy is not difficult to understand, but when a genius occupies himself with the Christian categories and holds that they are the most important, then you have some one whose devotional life is most important.

Still another reason which makes Kierkegaard particularly valuable for study in this way is his devotion to subjectivity. One of his pet phrases was, "Truth is subjectivity." He held that only the truth that edifies the individual is truth for that individual. In other words, in his own devotional life as well as in his writings, there is to be found an honesty of

analysis which is at times terrifying. He plumbs the depths of his soul and in the process the reader becomes self-conscious.

In summary, the justifying value of this study is to be found in these facts: 1. To the Christian that aspect of biography which indicates a man's relationship with his Lord is most rewarding; 2. For the most part Kierkegaard's fame is based more on his speculative than on his devotional works; 3. Many valuable insights are discovered in observing this fascinatingly brilliant mind come to grips with the Christian categories; and 4. He is outstanding in his knowledge of religious psychology.

A PREVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATION

Exclusive of the Introduction this thesis has three chapters.

The first chapter contains a study of those outstanding formative factors which shaped Kierkegaard in the direction of devotional writing. It is largely biographical and as much as possible autobiographical. The half dozen or so outstanding factors that left their impression upon him are defined.

Chapter two contains an evaluation of these factors in terms of how the biographical and historical forces at work made him what he was. This section is interpretative. It answers the question why Kierkegaard was what he was. An attempt is made to understand him psychologically without going to the extreme of performing an autopsy on his soul.

The last section is the most interesting and the most important because it contains a study and analysis of Kierkegaard's Christian discourses (the second phase of his literary production) in order to find the evidences of the biographical factors in his literature. This third chapter will be the literary evidence which should prove the deductions arrived at in the second chapter. Thus in recapitulation: the first chapter will be biography, the second psychological interpretation, and the third will be the literary evidence of his development.

THE SOURCES

The sources for the first chapter are two, the Journals, translated and edited by Alexander Dru, and the definitive biography, Kierkegaard, by Walter Lowrie, two-fifths of which is quotations from his works.

The second chapter is buttressed by quotations from the lesser lights who have written about Kierkegaard. The following have been studied: Geismar's Lectures, Swenson's Something About Kierkegaard, Thomte's Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion, Haecker's Soren Kierkegaard, William Riviere's A Pastor Looks at Kierkegaard, an article or two by Douglas V. Steere, and one by Otto A. Piper. Summing up, the second chapter will make use of the secondary sources that are available on our subject.

The final chapter contains a study of Kierkegaard's Christian discourses. The sources here, of course, will be the writings themselves.

CHAPTER I

THE SALIENT BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF SOREN KIERKEGAARD'S LIFE THAT REVEAL CRUCIAL POINTS OF DEVELOPMENT

I. THE INFLUENCE OF KIERKEGAARD'S FATHER UPON HIM

Soren Aabye Kierkegaard was born on May 5, 1813, in Copenhagen in the great house on the Nytorv (New Market), which his father had bought upon retiring from business with a fortune. Soren was the youngest of seven children born to elderly parents. Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard was fifty-six years old at the time of the birth of this child.¹ Years later S.K. (Soren Kierkegaard) made this remark: "I owe everything, from the beginning to my father."²

A maternal uncle had brought the father to Copenhagen when he was twelve years old and had employed him in the business of selling wool of the Jutland heath. There on the heath, while tending sheep as a little boy, Michael had an experience so devastating in its consequences that it left its mark on

¹ Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, (London, Oxford University Press, 1938) p. 19.

² S. A. Kierkegaard, The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard, Edited and translated by Alexander Dru (Glasgow, Oxford University Press, 1938) p. 246, # 773.

Soren, born forty-five years later. One little item in the Journals of S.K. records the power of this experience upon the father:

How terrible about the man who once as a little boy while herding the flocks on the heaths of Jutland, suffering greatly, in hunger and in want, stood upon a hill and cursed God -- and the man was unable to forget it even when he was eighty-two years old.³

This passage caused Soren's elder brother Peter, who had resigned the bishopric of Aarlborg when he was an old man, to cry out, "This is our father's story and ours." Then the retired bishop said that his father as a boy of about eleven years tended sheep on the Jutland heath and suffered much from cold, hunger, and loneliness. "Once in his desperation he stood upon a stone, lifted up his hands to heaven and cursed the Lord God, who, if he did exist, could be so hard-hearted as to let a helpless, innocent child suffer so much without coming to his aid."⁴

The memory of having cursed God in his childhood never left Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard. He felt that the temporal blessings he received in life were a part of God's curse. He feared that he had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost and that God was punishing him with good fortune. It is for this reason, writes Walter Lowrie,

³ Journals, op. cit., p. 150, # 556.

⁴ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 22.

. . . that the old man's soul continued in anxious dread, for this reason he beheld his children condemned to the 'silent despair,' for this reason he laid upon their shoulders in tender years the most stern requirements of Christianity, -- for this reason he was a prey to temptation and in constant conflict of soul.⁵

There was a period in the father's life when it seemed that God's hand was falling especially heavily upon him. In the space of two years Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard lost through death three of his children and his wife. The younger son Soren could never forget that the pious old man met all these calamities with the words of Job, "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away -- blessed be the name of the Lord."⁶

The Inherited Melancholy. Walter Lowrie concludes the opening chapter of his masterful biography with these words:

Doubtless S.K. inherited from his father a disposition to melancholy, but doubtless it was aggravated by his upbringing. It was a congenital melancholy, but also an infection from his father. It was his great misfortune, and yet we cannot conceive of S.K. without it, nor without it could we have had from him the profit we now experience. He recognized himself that it was his melancholy which made him a copious man, producing in exuberant abundance the material which his imagination employed.⁷

S.K. pursued his mental activity with a relentless honesty. He probed his mind and his soul. Certainly of all men he heeded Socrates injunction to 'Know Thyself.' He was

⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

quite at home with many aspects of his intense melancholy. He personalized it, calling it his most intimate, confidential friend, even "the most faithful mistress I have known, what wonder then that I should be ready to follow her at any moment of the day."⁸

He readily acknowledged that his life began in melancholy, that it drew him for a time into debauchery⁹ and then it was also responsible for his longing to "fall asleep for so long that I would wake up an old man, so as to lie down and fall asleep in eternity."¹⁰

Yet S.K. acknowledges that it was his melancholy which made him the man that he was.¹¹ In one very revealing passage in the Journals he states the three facts which made him an author: "It is essentially owing to her [Regina Olsen], to my melancholy, and to my money that I became an author."¹²

Basically he recognized that this melancholy was a sickness of the mind and not at all consistent with the Christian life. He had the faith that, "Christ will help me

⁸ Journals, op. cit., p. 90, # 359.

⁹ Ibid., p. 240, # 754.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 129, # 470.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 214, # 681.

¹² Ibid., p. 235, # 748.

to be victorious over my melancholy."¹³ One entry in his Journals dated August 16, 1847, indicated that he found it necessary to remain quiet in order that he might understand himself and "really think out the idea of my melancholy together with God here and now. That is how I must get rid of my melancholy and bring Christianity closer to me."¹⁴

It is a well-known fact that it was this melancholy which made it impossible for Kierkegaard to marry Regina Olsen. Yet it was his unrealized love for this girl that awakened the poet in him and made him write so copiously and so beautifully. But all this will be treated in a later section. Suffice it to say that, in looking for prime motivating causes in S.K.'s life, we find his father's melancholy to be in first place.

The Inherited Wealth. The passage from the Journals quoted above concerning the three forces which caused S.K. to be an author, namely his melancholy, his love for Regina Olsen, and his money, implies that he had inherited a sizable fortune from his father.

A little book entitled Soren Kierkegaard and Money Matters, by a Professor Frithiof Brandt and a Magister Else

¹³ Loc. cit.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 218, # 694.

Rammel, is quoted by Lowrie in the biography and apparently throws much light on a subject that previously had been much misunderstood.

According to this little book, S.K. inherited about \$75,000, a sum which "must be doubled at least if we would form an idea of its purchasing power a hundred years ago, even if we take into account the simpler scale of living which prevailed at that time."¹⁵

Lowrie claims that it has been proven a myth that S.K. spent a great part of the fortune on the publication of his many books. This myth developed out of the numerous references in his works and Journals to the fact that he had to lay out money to have them published. Lowrie believes that these references by S.K. take into account his estimate of the living expenses of the author, his large library, and his secretaries which were so necessary in those periods when he was most intensely productive.¹⁶

It is also a well-known fact that S.K. always required the best of everything. "The best was his category -- and it was an expensive one."¹⁷ Although he denounced the aesthetic level of living as inferior, he needed to be surrounded

¹⁵ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 501.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 502.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 503.

by everything that was in accord with his taste. Lowrie quotes S.K. as speaking thusly about the necessity of extravagance:

Without extravagance, I should never have been able to labor on the scale I have labored; for my extravagance has all along been reckoned with a view to keeping me in the vein of productivity on the prodigious scale.¹⁸

Nevertheless Kierkegaard felt that he was too extravagant, particularly in his later years, when his fortune was all but gone. But it was his wealth that permitted him the leisure to explore his thoughts and develop them.

But even if I look upon my literary existence as quite isolated from the rest of my life -- there would still be a difficulty, the fact that I have been favored by being able to live independently. I fully recognize this and feel myself to that extent very much less, compared with those men who have been able to develop such a spiritual life in real poverty. Even in antiquity that meant greatness, and still more so in Christianity.¹⁹

Lowrie reports that Brandt published for the first time a letter written by S.K. to his brother which points out how he clung to the idea that neither of the two boys was destined to survive his 34th year. This idea had been impressed upon them by the father. S.K.'s consumption of his inheritance had been shrewdly (if not wisely) reckoned with a view to this prophecy. Since he lived almost nine years longer his extravagance had reduced him to penury. His

¹⁸ Loc. cit.

¹⁹ Journals, op. cit., p. 244, # 766.

lawyer, Councillor Lund, regarded his death as opportune and a blessing since S.K. was spared the difficulty of being dependent upon another.²⁰

The Heritage of Mentality. Certainly not the least of all the inherited blessings was the wonderfully keen mentality, which apparantly was the common heritage of all the Kierkegaard children, for they were all highly gifted intellectually. The father was a very severe man, but under "this rough coat was a glowing imagination that not even old age could quench."²¹

Their home did not offer many amusements and S.K. almost never went out and thus very early in life he came to occupy himself with his own thoughts. When he asked to go out, the father would often take him to far away places by the aid of the imagination. The father would describe things so vividly and accurately that after a half hour of such exercise he was as worn out as if he had spent the entire day out of doors. As might be expected, the boy soon learned to exercise this magic power.²²

With all this training of the imagination the father

²⁰ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 504.

²¹ Ibid., p. 31.

²² Ibid., p. 32.

developed also in the boy a sharp dialectic. The boy enjoyed listening to his father discuss and argue with some of the leading lights of Copenhagen who came to their home. At an early age he learned the power of a word which could carry the argument, if it was spoken at the proper time. He rejoiced to watch the effect of the irresistible logic of the father and how it would turn the tables in an argument.²³

The father carefully, in fact, severely impressed upon the child's mind the truths of Christianity. Lowrie quotes a long autobiographic section from Training in Christianity which records how the father inserted a picture of the crucifixion among a group of children's pictures and then when it came to the top of the pile the father spent much time in describing Christ's suffering and humiliation.²⁴

Perhaps the father was a bit too vivid and too severe in the Christian education of his son. S.K. made this entry in his Journals:

It is terrible when I think, even for a single moment over the dark background which, from the very earliest time, was part of my life. The dread with which my father filled my soul, his own frightful melancholy, and all the things in this connection which I do not even note down. I felt a dread of Christianity and yet felt myself so strongly drawn towards it.²⁵

²³ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 39 f.

²⁵ Journals, op. cit., p. 273, # 841.

Lowrie quotes from the untranslated Journals this, dated September 9, 1839:

As a motto for my life in childhood I know nothing better than the words of Goethe's Faust,
'Halb Kinderspiel,
Halb Gott im Herzen.'
 (Half child-play,
 Half God in the heart.)²⁶

The 'Half child-play' is evidence that although the upbringing of S.K. was severe, he knew what it was to play. The rector of the School of Civic Virtue, in a report on Soren, recorded that he detected 'childishness.'²⁷ Lowrie has an interesting statement on this trait:

For it has always seemed to me that there was a child-like quality in S.K., even in his maturity, and even up to the end. This is the trait that most endears him to me. He was always humorous, often whimsical, and, in the strangest contrast to the grimness of his life and the sternness of his purpose, he was as sensitive as a child and as tender.²⁸

From whom did he get this trait? Lowrie says,

It has been suggested that this trait, inasmuch as it evidently did not come from the father's side, must have been inherited from the mother, that 'nice little woman with an even and cheerful disposition,' of whom we hear so little, and whose moral influence upon her son was so slight.²⁹

That he was 'Half God in the heart' speaks volumes.

²⁶ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 58.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁸ Loc. cit.

²⁹ Loc. cit.

No matter how inappropriate his religious instruction was, it is clear that the Christian categories were firmly imbedded in his heart. That is always an accomplishment.³⁰

The severe instruction impressed upon his wonderful intellect suppressed the child in him and gave him, in a sense, a divided personality.

II. THE LOVE AFFAIR WITH REGINA OLSEN

This love affair is one of the most important events in the life of S.K. The passage from the Journals referred to elsewhere, "It is essentially owing to her, to my melancholy, and to my money that I became an author,"³¹ indicates his knowledge of his indebtedness to her as a stimulus. That S.K.'s love for Regina was deep and persistent is seen from the fact that his will left everything to her (there wasn't much and what there was -- she refused). Many of his works were dedicated to her. Yet he had such complete self-knowledge that he realized that if Regina had become his wife, the same glamour would not have attached to her in history.³²

There were five definite stages in this amazing love story. It began with love at first sight. It was S.K.'s

³⁰ Loc. cit.

³¹ Journals, op. cit., p. 235, # 748.

³² Lowrie, op. cit., p. 192.

first love and Regina was only fourteen years old. When she entered her eighteenth year there was (1) a sudden and successful wooing; then (2) a lover's quarrel which was quickly resolved (3) by her all-too-devoted attachment, while he understood (4) that they must separate. He sent her back the ring; yet (5) she fought fiercely to retain him, until he felt obliged to pretend that he was only a mean scoundrel who had been playing with her affections. After two months of this deceit she let him go.³³

These five stages do not end the story. Kierkegaard wrote books with the intent of proving that he was indeed a low fellow (Either Or in two volumes plus Two Edifying Discourses). When these failed to convince Regina, i.e. she was still friendly towards him, he quickly wrote three more volumes in the hope of convincing her that, even if he were not a scoundrel, then at least it was impossible for him to marry her. These books were Fear and Trembling, Repetition, and Three Edifying Discourses, but Regina became engaged to Fritz Schlegel before Repetition was finished.³⁴

First a few words about "Her." Regina was the youngest daughter of State Councillor Olsen, a superior

³³ Loc. cit.

³⁴ Loc. cit.

official in the Ministry of Finance, immediately under the famous Privy Councillor Collin. She was the youngest child in a large family and apparently the favorite. Lowrie claims S.K. "obviously makes use of a phrase familiar to the home when he calls her repeatedly 'our own dear little Regina.'" At the time of their engagement she was not quite eighteen and he was almost twenty-seven.³⁵

The First Stage. S.K. fell helplessly in love with Regina, referred to her as the "sovereign in my heart." "Everywhere, in the face of every girl I see traces of your beauty." "You are so near to me . . . filling my spirit so powerfully that I am transfigured for myself . . ." "Thou blind God of love! Wilt thou reveal to me what thou seest in secret." "I will cast everything from me in order to follow thee." These are excerpts from an entry dated Feb. 2, 1839 in the Journals.³⁶

From a long-winded section in the Journals we note these excerpts:

On Sept. 8 I started out from home with the resolute intention of deciding the whole thing. We met on the street just outside her house . . . There we stood alone in the sitting room. I begged her to play a little piece on the piano for me, as she did at other times. But that

³⁵ Ibid., p. 196.

³⁶ Journals, op. cit., p. 70, # 259.

wasn't a success. Then suddenly I take the music book, shut it not without some violence, throw it down on the piano and say, 'Ah, what do I care about music; it is you I have been seeking for two years.' She remained silent. For the rest, I had even warned her against myself, against my melancholy. . . . Her father said neither yes nor no; but nevertheless he was willing enough. . . . I asked for an opportunity to talk with her. I got it for September 10 in the afternoon. I said not a single word to beguile her. She said, Yes.³⁷

But all was not well with S.K., for almost immediately, "I saw that I had made a terrible mistake. . . . I suffered indescribably in that period."³⁸

The Second Stage. A lover's quarrel was precipitated by a statement of hers, "if she thought I only came from force of habit she would break off the engagement at once." This period was apparently short-lived, for Regina "gave way [the third stage] . . . she gave herself unreservedly to me, she worshipped me."³⁹

The Fourth Stage. S.K.'s decision that they must separate was not arrived at simply.

And now of course my melancholy woke once more. Her devotion once again put the whole 'responsibility' upon me on a tremendous scale, whereas her pride had almost made me free from responsibility. My opinion is and my thought was, that it was God's punishment upon me. . . . If I had not been a penitent, had not had my

³⁷ Ibid., p. 92, # 367.

³⁸ Loc. cit.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 93, # 367.

vita ante acta, had not been melancholy, my union with her would have made me happier than I had ever dreamed of being.

But there was a divine protest, that is how I understood it. The wedding. I had to hide such a tremendous amount from her, had to base the whole thing upon something untrue.

I wrote to her and sent her back the ring.⁴⁰

The Fifth Stage. This followed, wherein Regina tried to hold on to S.K. An interesting paragraph from the Journals tells the story:

What did she do? In her womanly despair she overstepped the boundary. She evidently knew that I was melancholy; she intended that anxiety should drive me to extremes. The reverse happened. She certainly brought me to the point at which anxiety drove me to extremes; but then with gigantic strength I constrained my whole nature so as to repel her. There was only one thing to do and that was to repel her with all my powers.⁴¹

These lines wind up his close contact with her:

The following morning I received a letter from him [her father] saying that she had not slept all night, and asking me to go and see her. I went and tried to persuade her. She asked me: 'Are you never going to marry?' I answered, 'Yes, perhaps in ten years' time when I have sown my wild oats; then I shall need some young blood to rejuvenate me.' That was a necessary cruelty. Then she said, 'Forgive me for the pain I have caused you.' I answered: 'It is for me to ask forgiveness.' She said, 'Promise to think of me.' I did so. 'Kiss me,' she said. I did so but without passion. Merciful God.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 93 f., # 367.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 94, # 367.

⁴² Ibid., p. 95, # 367.

S.K. was ever faithful to his one love. He made an unsuccessful attempt to reestablish contact with Regina and her husband after their marriage had been consolidated by six years and Regina's father had died. Regina lived till 1904 surviving her husband eight years. She lived to inherit the fame that S.K. had carved out for her. She admitted that she had always cherished for S.K. "a spiritual affection."⁴³

III. THE ATTACK BY THE CORSAIR

"No other external event made so deep an impression upon S.K. as the attack launched against him by The Corsair, the comic paper of Copenhagen."⁴⁴ In this fashion Lowrie begins his chapter on this subject.

The Corsair was something new in Denmark, and to borrow a phrase from Hamlet, something rotten. It was a newspaper, ably managed by a Jew named Goldschmidt, who in five years had made it the most popular paper in the country. Its appeal for the rabble was that it lampooned the aristocrats and apparently the populace was willing to pay liberally for seeing S.K., as one of the most distinguished men in Denmark, held up for ridicule. S.K. said that before the time of The Corsair the rabble did not exist in Denmark, but the

⁴³ Lowrie, op. cit., pp. 193 ff.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 347.

paper created the rabble.⁴⁵

Kierkegaard had a marked liking for Goldschmidt himself. Several times he had paid Goldschmidt the compliment of saying that he should dissociate himself from The Corsair. Actually S.K. was the only gentleman of distinction who would talk to Goldschmidt without condescension. In view of this friendship the conflict which arose between them was all the more regrettable.⁴⁶

The event which brought about the open breach and which moved S.K. to joust with The Corsair was the second word of praise that appeared in that paper in relation to S.K.'s pseudonymous works. His letter to the paper was in the form of a prayer in which he lamented the cruel distinction of being made immortal by The Corsair as the only one who was not abused within its pages. Actually he held up publication of this prayer for a month as he was occupied with something else at the time.⁴⁷

On December 22, 1845, there appeared an Aesthetical Annual entitled Gaea, prepared as a New Year's Gift by P. L. Møller, which contained a supercilious criticism of Part III of the Stages. S.K. responded with a letter published in

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 347 f.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 348.

⁴⁷ Loc. cit.

The Fatherland, another paper, on December 27, 1845. Instead of being a defense of his book, the article was a bitter and disdainful expression of personal contempt for P.L. Møller. This personal attack was devastating. Goldschmidt admitted that Møller was annihilated by it.⁴⁸ The punch-line came in a Latin phrase at the end of the article, "ubi spiritus, ibi ecclesia - ubi P.L. Møller, ibi The Corsair." The annihilating feature of all this was the divulging of the secret that Møller was at that time the virtual editor of The Corsair, and the revelation of that fact was fatal to him because he was at that time hoping for the appointment to the chair of aesthetics in the University. His publication of the Gaea was an attempt to conciliate the favor of the literary men outside of Copenhagen. Møller was crushed by this episode and disappeared from Denmark, fell into degradation and obscurity and died miserably in France.⁴⁹

It is believed that S.K. launched this attack against The Corsair in the interest of public decency. In fact, he was doing a very brave thing, but he probably did not expect himself to suffer such a long and devastating attack because of it. He felt that the more important people who had long agreed that something should be done about the paper would

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 350.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 351 f.

rally to his side. They did not. They left him in the lurch. He attributed their failure to support him to envy. But what hurt him even more was the fact that the common people on the street with whom he had been accustomed to discourse would now make fun of him.⁵⁰

The Corsair had launched a smear campaign. People were urged to think of S.K. as half crazy. His spindly legs and uneven trousers were caricatured. Everywhere he went the rabble was egged on to insult him.⁵¹

In February of 1846 Kierkegaard recorded this entry in his Journals:

Little by little with the spread of enlightenment. . . it will naturally become more and more difficult for a philosopher to satisfy the requirements of the times. In antiquity men demanded intellectual gifts, an open mind, and passionate thought. Only compare the present times; nowadays in Copenhagen they require that a philosopher should have also fat calves or at least a well-turned leg, and that his clothes should be fashionable.⁵²

The ridicule of S.K. was carried "to incredible lengths in the little land upon which he was wasted."⁵³ The University students in 1847 produced a play which contained a ridiculous character upon whom was bestowed the name of Soren Kirk. This was not as bad as it sounds, for the char-

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 352.

⁵¹ Loc. cit.

⁵² Journals, op. cit., p. 153, # 570.

⁵³ Lowrie, op. cit., pp. 354 f.

acter in the play was not meant so much as a travesty of S.K. as it was of the students who were aping his style. It is a fact that the name Soren, which up until that time was the commonest Christian name, passed out of use because writers used it for their most ridiculous characters.

The sum effect of these attacks upon S.K. was good at least for posterity. They all served to make ever so plain to him a fact that he had in a sense lost sight of, namely, that he was different from other men. He was unique. They forced an intellectual maturity upon him because they emphasized that he was an exception to the universal human. The wound that had been his torment in childhood was opened again. He had tried to forget his youth. He had plunged into the dissipations of student life in the hope of attaining the likeness of other men. He sought in early manhood to achieve the 'universal human' by marriage. This thrust him into a six year period of authorship and he was reaching the point where he believed that he had completed his purpose of writing and could now contemplate retiring to a country parsonage and thus conform to custom. Lowrie writes:

We can understand very well that the attack of The Corsair and the ridicule of the whole world in which he lived must have been particularly painful to S.K. because it opened wide the old wound which he had so sedulously sought to close.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 362.

Instead of laying down his pen and retiring to the obscurity of the parish ministry, S.K. took it up again to write what is his most important literature -- his decisive Christian works -- the Discourses et al.

IV. S.K.'S ATTACK UPON THE CHURCH

In a long chapter entitled "Loading the Gun," Walter Lowrie's definitive biography of Kierkegaard presents the facts and figures leading to this last phase of his authorship, which was comprised primarily of a sharp and sustained attack upon the established church of his native land. This last phase was not the result of a sudden revelation or a turn-about in his thinking, but was rather the ^acumulative result of his life and thinking. S.K. was convinced that Christianity did not exist in pure New Testament form and he blamed the church for blocking the way. He hammered home again and again his single thesis, "Christianity no longer exists." It was the death of Bishop Mynster, the Primate of all Denmark, on January 30, 1854, that brought about the explosion. Professor Martensen pronounced the panegyric upon the deceased Bishop on February 5, and in it:

. . . the Professor proclaimed ~~that~~ the 'irreplaceable' prelate (whom he expected to replace) was a 'genuine witness for the truth,' 'not only in word and profession, but in deed and in truth,' vindicating to him a place in 'the holy chain of witnesses which stretches from the

days of the Apostles.⁵⁵

S.K. wrote at once a scathing denunciation of Martensen in which he indicated the serious shortcomings of the late bishop and asked whether the professor was telling the truth. This denunciation was dated February, 1854, but a point of honor held him back. S.K. felt that he could not publish it until Martensen had been appointed to the vacant post of Primate of Denmark. Martensen was consecrated to the post on June 5, but still S.K. held back. A popular subscription had been started for a memorial to the late Bishop and he did not want to interfere with that. It was not until December 18, 1854, that he published in The Fatherland the attack he had written in February.⁵⁶

It must be understood that S.K.'s attack against Martensen and Mynster was not a personal one. These two were the eminent exponents of the prevailing weakness of Christianity. Martensen was the most brilliant theologian of Denmark and his works were known in England and America. Mynster was:

In all respects one of the most admirable bishops the Protestant churches can boast of, a man of imposing presence and persuasive eloquence, whose sermons were not only heard with acclaim but read with devotion, an orthodox theologian who at the same time was well abreast of

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 565.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 565 f.

the highest intellectual culture of his age, a wise ecclesiastical ruler, and withal a man of genuine piety.⁵⁷

For the old Bishop S.K. had had a special regard, not merely because of his high position, but also because he had been the devoted Pastor of his deceased father. Also, he had listened for years to Mynster's sermons with profit. But S.K. became aware as early as 1843 that Mynster's sermons were conceived only for Sundays -- "but alas there are six days in the week." He said in one place, "I am Bishop Mynster's sermons on Monday."⁵⁸

Gradually he became more and more aware of the fact that the Bishop had come to represent a fixation in Christianity. He knew the Bishop to be intolerant of anything resembling a move back to New Testament Christianity. The last straw was the eulogy uttered by Martensen, whom S.K. considered to be someone considerably less than Mynster, whose weaknesses were bad enough.

The disillusionment S.K. suffered concerning the established church can be seen from this entry in the Journals entitled, "The Preaching of the Gospel":

Parson: Thou shalt die unto the world. -- The fee is one guinea.

Neophyte: Well, if I must die unto the world I quite

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 504.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 513.

understand that I shall have to fork out more than one guinea; but just one question: Who gets the guinea?

Parson: Naturally I get it, it is my living, for I and my family have to live by preaching that one must die unto the world. It is really very cheap, and soon we shall have to ask for considerably more. If you are reasonable you will easily understand that to preach that one must die unto the world, if it is done seriously and with zeal, takes a lot out of a man. And so I really have to spend the summer in the country with my family to get some recreation.⁵⁹

The Journals express also the fond wish that S.K. had that it would have been more desirable to persuade the Bishop to end his life with the admission that what he represented was not really Christianity, but a mitigation of it.⁶⁰ As it was, S.K. felt that he had to wait until the Bishop's death to speak out against him and the established church and that for which they stood.

S.K. did not consider himself the embodiment of the Christian ideal. In fact, he felt that he least of all had fulfilled it, but he did not want to have Christianity watered down to a comfortable code of ethics. All that he wanted from the church was an admission of its mediocrity in order that it might find the grace of New Testament Christianity, and thereby be enabled to take a step or two

⁵⁹ Journals, op. cit., p. 471, # 1267.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 493, # 1296.

in the right direction. That admission was not forthcoming.

His attack upon the church commenced with the letter against Martensen published on December 18, 1854. This was followed by twenty more letters in The Fatherland which appeared at irregular intervals until May 26, 1855. But on May 24th, 1855, he published the first of ten issues of the Instant, a pamphlet of twenty-four pages which contained seven or more pithy articles written by S.K. on a great variety of subjects, although the Church was always the object of his attack. People were encouraged to subscribe to the Instant. It had a larger circulation than any of the established papers and was purchased only by those who were interested in reading what S.K. had to say.⁶¹

The effect of all this was to convince some that they did not really belong in the church, to stimulate others to be better Protestants, and to induce still others to take refuge in the Catholic Church.⁶²

The one thousand parsons of the Established Church were for the most part only embittered. They did not know S.K.'s works to begin with and thus hardly had a basis for understanding the seriousness of the attack. Bishop Martensen made a poor attempt to answer the charges brought

⁶¹ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 570.

⁶² Loc. cit.

against him, but later thought it best to preserve a dignified silence. The subordinate clergy did not know what to say. With all this there was no external change in the Church. Nor had S.K. expected it to collapse. Actually he felt that he would perhaps pay with his life and be stoned by the mob.⁶³

During this last phase of his life, S.K. spent himself to the utmost. Nine months after he started his attack against the church, he fell sick on the street carrying home the last bit of his once considerable fortune. He died November 11, 1855, of a vaguely diagnosed sickness. He went without the Sacrament because he would not receive it from a Pastor -- only from a layman. There was riot at his funeral because some of his followers objected to the hypocrisy of the Church appropriating in death this man who had denounced it so completely.⁶⁴

⁶³ Loc. cit.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 583 f.

CHAPTER II

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO THESE FORMATIVE FACTORS

This present chapter will interpret the information gathered from Kierkegaard's biography and Journals and presented in the last chapter. This section will answer the question, "Why was S.K. what he was?" Our own deductions will be based upon what the Kierkegaard scholars write as they interpret him.

I. THE SCAR OF SUFFERING

Eduard Geismar began his lecture on "The Life of Kierkegaard" with these words, "It would be rather difficult to over-emphasize the influence that Kierkegaard's father had upon the life and work of his gifted son."¹ And later in the same lecture,

From this father the son inherited a keen intelligence, an unusual power in dialectic, a strong imagination, a painfully melancholy disposition and an inability to live without an attempt to understand life in its deepest root.²

We are here primarily interested in the phrases, "a painfully melancholy disposition and an inability to live

¹ Eduard Geismar, Lectures on the Religious Thought of Soren Kierkegaard, (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1938) p. 1.

² Ibid., p. 2.

without an attempt to understand life in its deepest root."

Geismar informs us that a Danish specialist in mental disorders has diagnosed Kierkegaard's trouble as a case of manic-depressive psychosis, an alternating between exaltation and depression. This doctor also says that his

. . . case is not entirely typical, in that the two phases were blended in a unique manner. During his periods of exaltation he had command of the emotional and intellectual content of his depressed states. He was able to use this as literary material, fashioning out of his sufferings a series of works unique in the world's literature. He realized his own condition with the utmost clarity and penetration; he made his suffering and its consequences subserve the religious purpose of his life.³

At first blush it may seem a bit unfair to accuse S.K. of being mentally unbalanced. But that unkind accusation is not simply the price he had to pay for being a genius, for in several entries in the Journals S.K. himself refers to his near madness:

I am in the profoundest sense an unhappy individuality which from its earliest years has been nailed fast to some suffering or other, bordering upon madness. . . an old man, himself prodigiously melancholy. . . had a son in his old age upon whom the whole of that melancholy descended in inheritance. . .⁴

Read this piece of self-knowledge also from the Journals, "My life began with immediateness, with a terrible melancholy, in its earliest youth deranged in its very

³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴ Journals, op. cit., p. 169, # 600.

deepest foundations."⁵ Moody and brooding by nature, his suffering was increased by an active imagination and a powerful, self-penetrating spirit of reflection. Geismar analyzes him thusly:

He insisted upon reaching an understanding of his subconscious life, and this is bound to excite disturbances. His mind was divided between religious inwardness, moral sincerity, the esthetic creativity which brought imagined worlds into being and his unceasing reflectiveness. He found it a long and difficult task to wend his way through this complicated reflectiveness and this imaginative creativity to a decisively religious state of mind. The Kierkegaardian literature is a reflection of this long path, and describes in a fashion the way its author took through the complexities of analytical reflection.⁶

Haecker contributes these thoughts,

From an early age Kierkegaard's relations with others were marked by malicious and satirical wit which nothing and no one could understand. Undoubtedly it went far beyond the normal, and he himself described it as demoniac.⁷

Lowrie calls S.K.'s background "tragic" and claims that from childhood his nature was "sensitively attuned to tragedy."⁸ And Thomte informs us,

Throughout his whole life Soren Kierkegaard suffered from melancholy depressions, something that accounts for the Eingeslossenheit or self-isolation in his personality.

⁵ Ibid., p. 240, # 754.

⁶ Geismar, op. cit., p. 7.

⁷ Theodore Haecker, Soren Kierkegaard, translated by Alexander Dru, (Oxford University Press, 1937) p. 2.

⁸ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 24.

He himself realized that this was the psychological factor behind the pseudonymous writings and the indirect communication.⁹

S.K. had a full understanding of the fact that much of the unhappiness was due to an unwise religious education. These impressions from childhood, while in many cases too severe for a childish mind to bear, were precious to him. He knew that although his father had many faults, still he had given to the child an understanding of God's love in Christ.¹⁰

Kierkegaard's intense melancholy made him introspective. It is this soul-searching that makes him unique in the field of philosophy and valuable in the field of religion. Here is a significant quotation from Swenson:

His claim to originality as a thinker is bound up with his choice of subject matter. He set himself the problem of mapping out the life of the spirit, the subjective life of the emotions and the will. It is fair to say that among the great thinkers of the world, the philosophers of the first rank, he had in this task no predecessor except Socrates. When we pass in review the great names in the history of philosophy, we find that they have, almost without exception, devoted their great powers to the objective domains of metaphysics, epistemology, and the system of nature. The inner life has been neglected. So true is this, and so accustomed have we become to this neglect, that in the popular

⁹ Reidar Thomte, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 194.

¹⁰ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 26.

consciousness the life of the emotions has become identified with a necessary and unavoidable vagueness, dimness, and lack of clearness. It was an uncharted sea that Kierkegaard set out to map, a task for which, as he himself says, he could find no guidance in books.¹¹

Summary: In an attempt to collate the evidence before us, these thoughts suggest themselves: 1. Kierkegaard inherited from his father the tendency toward melancholy; 2. The father further conditioned him to a life of melancholy inwardness by surrounding the boy with the paraphernalia of melancholy; 3. Even though S.K. knew from whence he had received these markings, he still loved his father; 4. This melancholy was at once his great weakness and his great strength; a weakness in that he could never realize the "universal human" by marrying, a strength in that it uniquely enabled him to record in clinical detail the movements of his own soul; 5. The end product of all this is a remarkably subjective writer who concerns himself with the problems of the individual in becoming truly Christian.

The Leisure to Write. In the sentence quoted somewhere above, S.K. attributes his authorship to three factors: Regina Olsen, his melancholy, and his money. This reference is obviously meant to indicate that because of his sizable fortune, S.K. did not have to occupy his time with trying to

¹¹ David F. Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1945), pp. 26 f.

make ends meet. He was absolutely free. What would have happened to S.K. if he had had to work for a living like everyone else is useless speculation. Certainly it would have cut down the quantity of his production as well as the quality. This entry from the Journals is more revealing than many another speaking on money matters:

There is another danger which threatens far more completely to destroy my pleasure in writing. That is the condition of my finances, and the confused financial times in which we live, when one does not know which way to turn. My kind of work requires time and peace. The further I go the more passionate will be the opposition I meet from the outside, I who have got so far that I am in the power of the people. If on top of all that I am to have worries about my livelihood, then my work cannot continue. It has always been a sacrifice and is therefore looked upon as mad. But if my money comes to an end further work is obviously out of the question.¹²

It was no coincidence that S.K. fell unconscious in the street on the way home from the bank from which he had just withdrawn the last slender sum of his once large fortune. Lowrie states that he did not have the will to live, for when he entered the hospital he told them that he had come there to die. He was paralyzed from the waist down. He himself said at the hospital that his illness was psychical. He had no use for the doctors and their treatments.¹³ We think Lowrie's deduction is accurate. Although it would be

¹² Journals, op. cit., p. 269, # 832.

¹³ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 583.

difficult to prove, S.K.'s death was probably hastened by the running out of his fortune.

The scholars do not make much of this point. Perhaps it is too obvious. But had S.K. not had his father's money to support him, we would not have his literature today.

Summary: Kierkegaard was able to produce the literature that he did only because he had inherited a substantial amount of money from his father. This money gave him almost complete freedom from money matters (until the end of his life, when it was running out) and permitted him to explore the realm of spiritual things with independence. What S.K. would have done without that security and the leisure it gave him is speculation, what he did with it is historical reality. S.K. was indebted to Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard and the world also owes him a debt of gratitude. Because of his legacy, S.K. was free to pursue the idea and the ideal.

The High Intellectual Standards. Here, too, the connection between father and son is of paramount importance. As pointed out in the previous chapter, S.K. inherited from his father a mind of the highest power. Yet this fact alone is not sufficient to explain how S.K. could develop and produce the way he did. There is more involved than raw intellect. The personality and character that control the mind is of great importance.

S.K. had a very keen knowledge of himself and of his genius as well as of the educative processes that made him what he was.

If I were asked how I was educated to be an author, my relation to God apart, I should answer: by an old man whom I thank most of all, and by a young girl to whom I owe most of all -- and to that which must have existed as a possibility in my nature: a mixture of age and youth, of the severity of winter and the mildness of summer -- ; the one educated me with his noble wisdom, and the other with her loving lack of understanding.¹⁴

The important phrase here, it seems to me, is, "the severity of winter." His father bound S.K.'s conscience to faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁵ And so, rightly understood, it can be said that it was S.K.'s conscience that drove him to the highest intellectual attainments via the route of the highest intellectual standards. The Journals record this, "God's power is in the conscience. Give a man all the power in the world, God is still supreme there."¹⁶

This urge to write S.K. interpreted as a call from God. It was a life of leisure that he lived, but no lazy man's life.

Only when I am producing do I feel well. Then I forget all the discomforts of life, all suffering, then I am in my thought and happy. If I let it alone even for a couple of days I immediately get ill, overwhelmed, trou-

¹⁴ Journals, op. cit., p. 308, # 912.

¹⁵ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁶ Journals, op. cit., p. 153, # 569.

bled, my head heavy and burdened. An impulse such as that, so rich, so inexhaustible, which after having held out day after day for five to six years, still flows as richly as ever, an impulse such as that must be a call from God. If all the wealth of thought which still lies in my soul is to be forced back, that would be torture, a martyrdom, and I totally useless. . . . It is sad and depressing to pay one's money in order to be allowed to work harder and more industriously than anyone in the kingdom. It is melancholy and depressing after all that work to be persecuted by the cowardly envy of the aristocrats and the mockery of the plebs!¹⁷

Here you see his effort, almost involuntary effort. S.K. could not keep quiet, he had to write, and yet, it bothered him that all this work did not at all bring him any material reward. He had to spend his own money to have his books printed. They seldom paid their own way. (See first chapter.)

Summary: We need not belabor the point anymore. The deductions, too, are somewhat obvious: 1. The mere high intellectual endowment does not tell the whole story of S.K.'s literary attainments; 2. Coupled with his intellect was a conscience that drove him to do his duty; 3. An overwhelming urge to write, an impulse that could not be capped, completes the picture.

II. REGINA OLSEN AWAKENS THE POET IN KIERKEGAARD

That Regina exerted a tremendous influence over S.K.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 191, # 627.

is not the speculation of biographers trying to understand him, but the facts of the situation as S.K. himself has presented them to us. From the Journals:

How extraordinary, Socrates always spoke of having learnt from a woman. Oh I can also say, I owe what is best in me to a girl; but I did not exactly learn it from her, I learnt through her.¹⁸

Possibly the most important single statement on the influence of Regina on Kierkegaard's authorship is to be found in The Point of View:

Before my real activity as an author began there was an occurrence, or rather a fact, . . . since presumably an occurrence would not have been sufficient, for I had to be the active agent in the affair. I cannot elucidate this factum more particularly, telling in what it consisted, how terribly dialectical it was in its combination, or really what constituted the collision. I can only beg the reader not to think of revelations or anything of that sort, for with me everything is dialectical. On the other hand, I shall describe the consequence of this factum in so far as it serves to illuminate the authorship. It was a duplex factum. However much I had lived and experienced in another sense, I had, in a human sense, leapt over the stages of childhood and youth; and this lack, I suppose, must (in the opinion of Governance) be somehow made up for: instead of having been young, I became a poet, which is second youth. I became a poet, but with my predisposition for religion, or rather, I may say, with my decided religiousness, this factum was for me at the same time a religious awakening, so that I came to understand myself in the most decisive sense in the experience of religion, or in religiousness, to which, however, I had already put myself in relation as a possibility. The factum made me a poet. Had I not been the man I was, and the occurrence, on the other hand, what it was, and if I had not taken the active part I did take, it would have amounted to nothing more: I should have become a poet, and then perhaps after the lapse of many years should have come into relation with the religious.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 242, # 761.

But just because I was so religiously developed as I was, the factum took far greater hold of me and, in a sense nullified what I had become, namely the poet. It nullified it, or at least I was led simultaneously to begin in the same moment at two points, yet in such a way that this thing of being a poet was essentially irrelevant to me, something I had become by means of another person -- on the other hand the religious awakening, though it was certainly not a thing I had experienced by means of myself, yet it was in accordance with myself, that is to say, in this thing of becoming a poet I did not recognize myself in a deeper sense, but rather in the religious awakening.¹⁹

Eduard Geismar presents this material:

This tragic love affair set free in him simultaneously the poetic afflatus and the religious determination; these two energies combined to produce the unique series of esthetic and philosophical works that flowed from his pen. . . .

. . . the same tragedy also aroused the poetic talent within him. This strange kind of unhappy love, where the hindrance was not external, but came from within the mind, made him a poet by the grace of sorrow; but in this poet esthetic imagination and philosophical reflection were inseparably united. . . .

From that deep wound in his soul came one series after another of imaginative creations, expressing in the most varied ways the experiences of his own life.²⁰

Swenson contributes this information:

She had awakened and given form to poetic faculties within him, but he had long lived too spiritually not to find her physical presence an embarrassing surplus. . . . There is scarcely one of Kierkegaard's literary productions in which we do not find echoes of his experience, and the Journals bear constant testimony to the intensity with which his mind seized upon all sides of this abortive and painful experience.²¹

¹⁹ S. Kierkegaard, The Point of View, (Oxford Press, 1939), pp. 83-84.

²⁰ Geismar, op. cit., pp. 8 f.

²¹ Swenson, op. cit., pp. 14 f.

But let us get back to the reason why S.K. felt that he could not marry Regina. It was his deep melancholy which made him unfit for marriage, he thought. The seemingly bottomless well of his melancholy was always flavored with the bitterness of guilt. It was the sense of guilt which had been instilled in him by his father which worked in and through his melancholy and made him break his engagement. In his youth he had at one time rebelled against a religion that was so burdened with guilt as was his father's. Yet he could find no satisfactory alternative. The tension between him and his father was at one time so unbearable that he left home, but before his father's death a reconciliation was brought about.²²

This consciousness of guilt, inherited from his father and so important in his relationship with Regina, had one happy aspect: it bound him to God in devotion for time and eternity.

Summary: The unsuccessful love affair with Regina Olsen turned S.K. more deeply into himself. Yet he could not live without her. She was in his thoughts constantly. She produced in him the poetic inspiration which, coupled with his religious determinism, sent him heavily laden down the road of authorship.

Regina and His Sense of Guilt. S.K. could not marry

²² Geismar, op. cit., p. 4.

Regina because of his melancholy sense of guilt and yet he never forgot her. Guilt -- Regina -- God formed a sort of necklace which he wore all the days of his life. Listen to Geismar:

In one of his devotional works we find a discourse on the theme that in his relations with God man always suffers as one who is guilty, and that this is a joyful thought. But why a joyful thought? Because whenever doubt seeks to make it uncertain whether God is love, the consciousness of guilt challenges this doubt and prevents it from having a foothold. Here then we have a religious mind whose way to the divine love goes through the divine judgment.²³

Thus S.K., like Luther, understood that the love and severity of God are not irreconcilable traits. The tragedy of his engagement gave S.K. deeper insights into religious problems. He might have found himself confined to a hopeless remorse, without ever finding a peaceful relationship with God. This possibility is reflected in his writings:

In Stages on Life's Way, some two-thirds of the book is devoted to 'Guilty or Not Guilty:- A Story of Suffering,' where an unhappy love affair is delineated in the form of a diary kept by the masculine Quidam. Here the way toward a true and genuine consciousness of guilt is analytically and poetically described, although the diary stops short of revealing any final result.²⁴

Geismar further develops the thought that S.K. was confronted by an acute moral problem when he decided not to marry. He would have to break his promise that he would marry

²³ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

Regina. The ideal of faithfulness, "to an incurred obligation had been shattered; nevertheless, the grace of God remains to him." This enabled him to see the relation between Christianity and moral consciousness. "Of this insight he avails himself when the time comes to delineate the fundamental categories of Christianity, founded as it were on the synthesis of sin and grace."²⁵ For S.K. the road to Christianity went through the deep and dark valley of guilt.

Geismar presents one other important phase of the affair with Regina. We will treat that in the next section.

Summary: Possessed of a sense of guilt which he could share with no human being, but with God alone, S.K. firmly believed himself unfit for marriage. Marriage with him would ruin Regina's life. He had to save her from himself.

S.K.'s Erotic Consciousness. Geismar quotes one Edward Spranger who wrote in his Psychologie des Jugendalters:

In the mind of youth the erotic consciousness is normally developed before the sex-consciousness. The consequence is that in this period the erotic cannot be sexualized; this would be felt as profanation. "When this dualistic feeling remains in adults," says Spranger, "it means a restriction of the personality, a mental condition that cannot be called sound." I have spoken of these things to one of our great specialists in Denmark. "There," I said to him, "I have found a picture of Kierkegaard's mental difficulty." He answered that this peculiarity is one of the distinctive symptoms of the

²⁵ Loc. cit.

manic-depressive psychosis.²⁶

Geismar interprets this diagnosis and states that it is a key to some of the mysteries of S.K.'s life:

It explains why it is so difficult for him to marry, and it explains the inimitably tender touches in the erotic pictures he sometimes draws. They are as fine as delicate lace, intellectual without corporeality, and far removed from all sexuality. We may be able to understand why he speaks in the Journals of his own sex consciousness as a most unusual mingling of purity and impurity. And finally I think that this peculiarity explains how it could happen that the same Kierkegaard speaks later in the diaries about marriage and sex in a tone of the most shocking cynicism, in sharp contrast with the delicate delineation of earlier days.²⁷

Summary: His unhappy affair with Regina was certainly a crucial point in Kierkegaard's development. Spranger's ideas together with Geismar's deductions are the psychological explanation and constitute an insight into understanding S.K.'s frustrated love life.

III. THE AWARENESS OF A CALLING TO WRITE DECISIVE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

The attack of the Corsair and the ridicule that accompanied it did not crush S.K. His polemical nature reacted to all of this in a way which had important and far-reaching results. "He would no longer endeavor to escape from his

²⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

singularity and isolation, he would not become a tame goose." He thought of himself as 'separated' in a religious sense and came

. . . to regard his 'difference' as an indication that he was called upon (though not directly commissioned by a divine call) to perform in behalf of Christianity what only an extraordinary individual could do.²⁸

Thus he gave up the idea of being a country parson. He also gave up his career of authorship and "devoted himself henceforth to religious writing exclusively."²⁹

The second part of his literary career is almost exclusively given to religious works which "are saturated with thought, but the thoughts are not presented for their own sake, as ministering to a purely intellectual interest."³⁰ He filled his writings with reference to the unspeakable beauty of God, but he always kept the reader conscious of the fact that the realization of the Christian ideal involved the deepest suffering.³¹

Swenson contributes this thought: "The experience [with the Corsair] became fruitful to him in a more profound understanding of the Christian categories of innocent suffer-

²⁸ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 362.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 363.

³⁰ Geismar, op. cit., pp. 14 f.

³¹ Ibid., p. 15.

ing, and heterogeneity with the world."³²

Lowrie in a translator's note in The Point of View writes this about the affair: "But while it increased his unhappiness and isolation, it added, as he said, 'a new string to my instrument.'"³³ And thus Lowrie has devoted an entire chapter in his biography to this new phase of S.K.'s career and calls the chapter, "A New String to His Instrument."³⁴

Lowrie quotes from the untranslated works of S.K.:

It is an instance of God's grace to a man when precisely in the experience of adversities he shows that he is so fortunately constituted that like a rare musical instrument the strings not only remain intact through every new adversity but he acquires in addition a new string on the string board.³⁵

Thus the Corsair brought it about that, instead of being the concluding work, the Postscript was the turning point. Lowrie says in his Short Life of Kierkegaard:

[The Postscript] was not a religious work in the stricter sense; but it was in the direction of the religious. He said in one place that the Postscript was a 'deliberation' whether and in how far he was to become a Christian.

But he said of all his works that they were 'my education in becoming a Christian.' His education was now so far advanced that henceforth he devoted himself exclusively to the production of religious works, which became

³² Swenson, op. cit., p. 21.

³³ Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 168.

³⁴ Lowrie, op. cit., pp. 364 f.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 364.

progressively more and more Christian.

During the three years he was an esthetic writer he posed as an idle man-about-town. 'The costume was correct,' he thought. But he reflected that with the publication of the Postscript and with the inception of distinctly religious writings 'the costume must be changed.' That change was accomplished for him by the persecution of the Corsair.³⁶

Thus S.K. became exclusively a religious writer. But it should be said for the record that even while he was engrossed in religious themes, he did not lose his taste for the esthetic.

Summary: The completion of Kierkegaard's Stages on Life's Way together with the attack of the Corsair upon his person and works made him conscious of the fact that he was different and that his difference was not to be seen in his esthetic works. He must therefore make it abundantly plain by means of religious works. In the moment of adversity he felt he was led by the grace of God to discover new powers -- a new string to his instrument.

The Metamorphosis - Holy Week, 1848. The year 1848 was an important year in the life of S.K. Lowrie quotes an untranslated section of the Journals thus:

1848 potentiated me in one sense, in another sense it broke me, that is to say, religiously it broke me, or, as I put it in my language, God had run me to a standstill.

³⁶ Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1946) pp. 187 f.

.
 Economic anxieties come upon me suddenly and all too near. Two such heterogeneous weights as the opposition of the world and anxiety about my subsistence I am unable to lift at the same time.³⁷

The war and revolution of 1848 reacted most powerfully upon S.K.'s mind, and he expected to die before the year was up. For that reason he wrote furiously, "like a dying man."³⁸

It is generally agreed that this year was the climax of his literary productiveness. S.K. himself is said to have believed that 1848 was ". . . beyond all comparison the richest and most fruitful year I have experienced as an author."³⁹

The roots of 1848 naturally extend into the past and the Journals indicate that something was brewing. Note this entry dated August 16, 1847:

And so the decision is taken; I remain at home. [Instead of going to Berlin]. . . I now feel the need of approaching nearer to myself in a deeper sense, by approaching nearer to God in the understanding of myself. I must remain on the spot and be renewed inwardly. . . . I must come to closer grips with my melancholy. . . . Something is stirring within me which points to a metamorphosis. For that very reason I dare not go to Berlin, for that would be to procure an abortion. I shall therefore remain quiet, in no way working too strenuously, not to begin a new book, but to try to understand myself, and really think out the idea of my melancholy together with God here and now.⁴⁰

³⁷ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 392.

³⁸ Loc. cit.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 393.

⁴⁰ Journals, op. cit., p. 216, # 694.

Thus the change that came upon S.K. had cast its shadow before. The great change came in Holy Week, 1848.

NB NB Wednesday, April 19, 1848. My whole being is changed. My reserve and self-isolation is broken -- I must speak. Lord give thy grace.

It is indeed true, what my father said of me: 'You will never be anything so long as you have money.' He spoke prophetically, he thought that I would lead a riotous and debauched life. But that is just where he was wrong. But with acuteness of mind and a melancholy such as mine, and then to have had money: what an opportunity for developing all the agonies of self-torture in my heart,⁴¹

Yet another entry dated 'Easter Monday' indicated that S.K. could not immediately break his self-isolation.⁴² Lowrie explains that the new conversion (he had been converted ten years earlier) had changed his whole nature. S.K.'s morbid reserve had been overcome by a realization that God forgives and forgets our sins. He had felt previously that he should make a public confession of his sin (his melancholy nature), but now he felt that a confession of faith was more in order. The entries following the Holy Week statements in his Journals are very largely concerned with reflections about the forgiveness of sins.⁴³

Summary: A great change came upon S.K. in 1848. It

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 235, # 747.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 235 f., # 749.

⁴³ Lowrie, op. cit., pp. 405 f.

was the dawning understanding that God had yet some use for him, that God forgives our sins and removes their power. S.K. now had new experiential material about which he could write.

From Indirect to Direct Discourse. The outcome of the Easter experience was a radical cure. From this time on S.K. never again used "indirect communication." Nor did he resort to the use of pseudonyms in the way that he had previously used them. There was to be no more "ventriloquism, " as he put it.⁴⁴ S.K. felt that his whole nature was changed and that he had to speak. He at once began to plan the outspoken books which he was to write during the course of the year. The "religion of hidden inwardness" which had been his pet was now his chief aversion and the object of his biting satire.⁴⁵

He had used the direct communication in the Edifying Discourses, but in the Christian Discourses one can detect a more polemical note. Lowrie claims that from the one to the other of the five books written in this year there is an observable advance in plain speaking:

...When S.K. said in the entry of Wednesday in Holy Week

⁴⁴ Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 208.

⁴⁵ Lowrie, op. cit., pp. 406 f.

'I must speak,' he implies, 'I can': what one must do one can do. He learned to believe in the forgiveness of sins when he realized that this was a must: 'Thou shalt believe in the forgiveness of sins.' Training in Christianity, the last work written in 1848, could hardly have been exceeded for plainness of speech, and yet it was exceeded two years later by For Self-Examination, and that in turn was exceeded by Judge For Yourself! -- and yet to S.K.'s thinking this was not downright enough to be used in the last polemic for which he was all this time sharpening his weapons.⁴⁶

S.K. had begun to suspect that

. . . the commonest and the greatest danger was a religion that was all too hidden, that the claim to the possession of Christianity in hidden inwardness might be only subterfuge, a cloak intended to hide the fact that there was nothing beneath it.⁴⁷

From this time forth he wanted no disguises for himself nor for anyone else. His nature had changed completely. At the moment of his conversion "the change was only potential." He had to struggle before he could acquire boldness to step out openly into his new role.⁴⁸

Summary: The radical change in outlook that came over S.K. in 1848 was reflected in his literary production by a change from the indirect to the direct discourse and by putting aside the use of the pseudonym as he had previously used it. His literary output was now almost exclusively religious and of a polemical nature.

⁴⁶ Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard, Loc. cit.

⁴⁷ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 408.

⁴⁸ Loc. cit.

V. BACK TO NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

In a sense this title could stand for all of Kierkegaard's literary production which followed the *Metamorphosis* until his death. We mean it here to stand particularly for his attack upon the Church. We have this attack listed as one of the crucial points of his development. In a sense that is a mis-representation of fact because he died in the middle of the fray. Yet in another way it was a real mile-stone, even though it turned into a headstone. S.K. was constitutionally opposed to diluted mediocrity of faith as developed and sustained by the Danish Church of his time.

In 1853 S.K. wrote in an unpublished article which Lowrie translates:

I have something on my conscience as a writer. Let me indicate precisely how I feel about it. There is something quite definite I have to say, and I have it so much upon my conscience that (as I feel) I dare not die without having uttered it. For the instant I die and thus leave this world (so I understand it) I shall in the very same second (so frightfully fast it goes!), in the very same second I shall be infinitely far away, in a different place where still within the same second (frightful speed!) the question will be put to me: 'Hast thou uttered the definite message quite definitely?' And if I have not done so, what then? . . .⁴⁹

The attack against Mynster and Martensen, the two leading figures in the Danish Church, was covered in the first chapter. Here we will discuss the more general aspects

⁴⁹ Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 225.

of the Church. In his Journals S.K. recorded these observations:

From a Christian point of view it is just about as pitiful as it could be -- indeed to use the predicate Christian of conditions in Denmark, even though it is in order to add that conditions are extremely poor, is really saying too much. The predicate Christian is ridiculous when it is applied to Denmark.⁵⁰

Several other quotes from the Journals will fill out the picture of the true state of the Danish Church one hundred years ago:

CHRISTENDOM'S DISHONESTY

And how do I explain the dishonesty of all these millions? As hypocrisy, and in that sense from evil? No, no. I explain it from lack of human courage, and mediocrity.

Take an illustration: a mighty prince, in the days when it still meant something to be king or emperor -- you will see, people find it best to behave like this: the wisest thing is to say nothing but good of him -- but at the same time have nothing to do with him. That is the worldly-wisdom of mediocrity.

And this is the pattern according to which the whole of official Christianity is manufactured: to speak well of God, sweetly trumpeting it forth -- the more the merrier: only do not enter into relation with God.

There is nothing which mediocrity fears so much as something really exalted, the infinite -- but it is not so stupid as to say so straight out. . . . To say straight out: I am afraid of anything exalted, to that mediocrity would say: that is not very clever, for that is to enter into relations with it. No, nothing but praise -- and then cleverly not get into relations with it.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Journals, op. cit., p. 509, # 1326.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 537, # 1382.

Another section entitled:

MEDIOCRITY

Among the mediocre, individuals are certainly not unreasonable towards each other, they do not provoke impudence, they respect each other's mediocrity.

But contemporary mediocrity, the whole mass of mediocrity, or mediocrity en masse is an impertinence to God, because it tries to raise itself up to the highest position, that of the ideal. Just as people insure one another against fire, mediocrity as a whole insures the individuals who go to make up that mediocrity, that mediocrity is the truth.⁵²

Thus we see that S.K. was greatly concerned about the all too prevalent mediocrity in the Church. S.K. had many sharp things to say also against Protestantism in general and against Luther in particular. Editor Dru in the Introduction to the Journals has this illuminating footnote:

¹ S.K.'s increasing dissatisfaction with Luther and with Protestantism, and a tendency to mark their shortcomings in relation to Catholicism, is not a 'result' to be used, but part of his work in bringing a 'corrective.' Most of his criticism holds good against easy-going Christianity of any sort. But he is nevertheless open to the crudest misconstruction, and the apologist, whether Catholic or free-thinker, would have no difficulty in making second-hand use of his 'god-fearing satire.'⁵³

S.K.'s cry was, "Back to New Testament Christianity -- what we have now is far from that." His attack against the Church as covered in the first chapter presents the details of the fight.

⁵² Ibid., p. 547-48, # 1408.

⁵³ Ibid., p. liii.

Summary: During this last phase of his career S.K. was occupied with something that had concerned him all his life: The obvious discrepancy between the ideals of Christianity and the actual practice of Christendom. He bewailed the mediocrity. He attacked individuals and the institution not in a personal way, but objectively. He had to attack. It was on his conscience. God would hold it up to him if he did not do so. The attack was the logical, necessary culmination of his life and thinking. His purpose was to bring about a reformation because he was convinced that true Christianity did not really exist.

S.K. -- The Ready Sacrifice. All his life Kierkegaard understood that true Christianity also involves suffering. He felt that in following Christ it would be necessary to endure His suffering. Lowrie points out that his contemporaries dismissed this emphasis of S.K.'s as a "morbid symptom, something pathological."⁵⁴ He had a passion for martyrdom.

Read this from the Journals dated 1852:

ABOUT MYSELF

Christianity in these parts simply does not exist; but before there can be any question of its being restored again 'first a poet's heart must break, and I am that poet' -- these words of mine are only too true. . . . Denmark has need of a dead man.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Lowrie, op. cit., p. 538.

⁵⁵ Journals, op. cit., p. 467, # 1258.

Also this entry from 1854:

THE PASSION FOR MARTYRDOM

. . . I have but one wish, one prayer, one desire, one passion, that I may experience suffering, become hated, persecuted; mocked, spit upon, put to death. For if God's love for me were to be expressed by the fact that I enjoy good days in a physical sense by receiving this world's goods, if it were to be directly expressed thus -- fie, fie, that would be disgusting to me, I should die for shame, I should loathe it like an unnatural lust, feel that it was as disgusting as greasy fish with treacle.

Behold, this is the passion for martyrdom.⁵⁶

Geismar interprets these ideas of martyrdom in this way:

In the depths of his mind there arise new pictures and ideals, and among them the ideal of the martyr-prophet. This man when he comes will arouse the decadent Christian world, perhaps allowing them to kill him for the sake of truth. In him the reflective mind is combined with a divine mission. He is the true reformer, polemic in his attitude toward Christendom as a whole. Kierkegaard is not himself this martyr-prophet; but it is perhaps his task to prepare the way for his coming, helping to create ears ready to listen to him. And when he comes, this witness for the truth, then will be initiated the true reform of the Church.

In any case, Kierkegaard has the sense of being used in the providence of God as an extraordinary instrument. This reconciles him to his sufferings, which constitute a necessary discipline and are his teachers.⁵⁷

S.K. writes this of himself in The Point of View:

I have nothing further to say, but in conclusion I will let another speak, my poet, who when he comes will assign me a place among those who have suffered for the sake of an idea, and he will say:

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 518, # 1336.

⁵⁷ Geismar, op. cit., p. 14.

'The martyrdom this author suffered may be briefly described thus: He suffered from being a genius in a provincial town. The standard he applied in relation to talents, industry, disinterestedness, devotedness, definition of thought, etc. was on the average far too great for his contemporaries; it waisted the price on them too terribly; it almost made it seem as if the provincial town and the majority in it did not possess dominium absolutum, but that there was a god in existence.

. . .
'This was the martyrdom. But therefore I, his poet, perceive also the epigram, the satire.' . . .⁵⁸

Summary: Thus it is seen that S.K. recognized himself as unique down to the very end of his life. He did not shrink from sacrificing himself to this cause of reformation that took so much out of him and no doubt hastened his death. He was a true martyr -- in that he gave himself whole-souledly for the cause of the Christian Gospel. He feared no earthly enemy. He saw only the eyes of the Lord looking at him and requiring that he spend himself for His sake. The fact that he died while fighting this battle against the Church adds also to his stature. He was a man of conviction. Although death stared him in the face, S.K. made no mitigating statements which detracted from his position.

. . .historically [he] died of a mortal disease, but poetically [he] died longing for eternity, where uninterruptedly he would have nothing else to do but to thank God.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, op. cit., pp. 100 f.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 103.

Conclusion: The formative factors catalogued in the first chapter and interpreted in the second chapter explain at least in a measure why Kierkegaard was what he was.

The sum effect of a childhood spent with the intense, melancholy Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard was that S.K. bore all his life a deep scar of suffering. He accepted it as his lot. He even held it up as the ideal, as the *conditio sine qua non* of Christian faith. The inherited wealth gave S.K. the necessary freedom from daily work and the independence of spirit necessary to pursue the task of plotting the movements of the human soul. The conscience developed in him in childhood forced him to devote himself to the highest standards. This consecration coupled with the shining intellect produced the amazing literature.

Regina Olsen released the poet in S.K. She was his inspiration. She fired his imagination. His sense of guilt over his melancholy nature, he felt, unsuited him for marriage but drove him closer to God and opened the door for a life of spiritual contemplation. Spranger's ideas concerning S.K.'s failure to develop along normal lines regarding the erotic consciousness and the sex-consciousness present the psychological explanation for his abnormal love-life.

The attack of the Corsair brought S.K. back to the self-realization that he was not an ordinary human being. He was a Christian and therefore different. He awoke to the

fact that he had not made plain the fact of his uniqueness by his esthetic works. He must now write in the decisive Christian category. He felt led by the grace of God and equipped with a "new string to his instrument." The change in his thinking was largely brought to a head by the momentous spiritual experience of Holy Week, 1848, when he came to a knowledge of the fact that "I must speak." Thus there occurred the shift in emphasis from the indirect to the direct discourse. There were no more pseudonymous works. He had learned to believe in the forgiveness of sins and had to write about that plainly.

The fourth formative factor was S.K.'s attack upon the Church. This resolved itself psychologically into one single plain thesis: Christianity does not exist. Back to New Testament Christianity! He saw himself as the necessary sacrifice to bring about a reformation in the Church. He was largely unsuccessful in his reformatory work; the Church went on in her old ways. Nevertheless the attack upon the Church diminished his shining influence not at all. It proved that S.K. was willing to live existentially -- that he was willing to live and die for the Christian categories.

CHAPTER III

THE DEVOTIONAL CONCEPTS

This chapter will present the literary evidences of S.K.'s devotional life with special reference, of course, to the formative factors and their influence as treated in the two previous chapters.

It is a well-known fact that S.K. defies systematizing. It is part of his greatness. He refuses to be broken down into a logical outline. He provides a method of thought and not a system. When a 'system' is made out of S.K., he is mutilated. Swenson writes, "Intellectually, the subjective thinker will not permit his mind to rest in that supposed certainty of sense knowledge, for example, that deceives the sensuous man in his stupor."¹ Certain other quotes further describe the genius of S.K.'s literature:

The subjective thinker . . . will have no system as his final result, since system and finality are one and the same thing, and since life, for the living individual, comes under the head of unfinished business. He will avoid the sense of security which comes from the credulous trust in the permanence of the customary and will actively bring home to himself, as a daily discipline, the precariousness of every established order. . . . The fixation of the religious life about a formula or an institution as a final resting-place that decides once and for all the issues of life is an illegitimate objectivity which the subjective thinker uses his dialectics to avoid. . . .²

¹ Swenson, op. cit., p. 130.

² Ibid., pp. 130-131.

Swenson further develops the thought that S.K.'s writings are misunderstood when "it is regarded as a contribution to the world's objective scholarship, an addition to learning, a gefundenes Fressen for budding Ph.D.'s and scholarly professors."³

Thus there is not to be found an outline of thinking which would act as a guide-line for us here. Our problem is resolved only by taking various Christian concepts and seeing what S.K. has to say on these subjects.

We have limited our field of operation to the later discourses -- the decisive Christian sermons, instead of choosing all of S.K.'s writings which date from the Metamorphosis. We are fully aware that such a winnowing has limitations. There are other works of prime importance that are also Christian to the core and date from the same period, such as Sickness Unto Death and Training in Christianity.

The decisive Christian sermons, however, are of personal value to us and have constituted a source of stimulus in preaching. Nor are we alone in maintaining that the discourses are of prime importance. Theodore Haecker presents the idea 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

³ Ibid., p. 132.

always appeared under the name of S. Kierkegaard."⁴

I. THE SEVERITY OF CHRISTIANITY

Basic in S.K.'s Christian consciousness is the fear of God's stern severity. On the back of the title page of the volume, For Self-Examination, there is this little note:

" . . . No, let thy striving first express, let it express first and foremost, thy fear of God. -- This has been my striving." And a bit further on, " . . . if my life expresses . . . that I fear Thee -- this means that 'all is won!'"⁵

Under the heading of "Preliminary Remarks" to the sermon on "How to Derive True Benediction from Beholding Oneself in the Mirror of the Word":

And thou, my hearer, wilt reflect the more lofty the conception of religion is, the more stern it is; but from this it does not follow that thou canst bear it, it would perhaps be to thee an occasion of offense and perdition.⁶

It is certainly safe to say that S.K.'s mature understanding of the Christian faith and life and the keen appreciation of his own guilt before God stem from the severity of his father's life and the pains he took to impress the same

⁴ W. T. Riviere, A Pastor Looks at Kierkegaard, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1941), p. 76.

⁵ Soren Kierkegaard, For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 28.

⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

severity upon S.K. The father was weighted down with a sense of guilt and so was the son. S.K. describes himself in the preface of For Self-Examination as ". . . the author, who personally knows best his imperfection and guilt."⁷ This self-knowledge makes atonement necessary, but that shall be pointed out in a later section.

The consciousness of sin is most completely covered in three other works, namely, Training in Christianity, The Concept of Dread, and Sickness unto Death.

For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves!, published in 1851, presents the ideals of Christianity in the form of a criticism of the conditions extant in the Danish Church of that day. S.K. was readying his heavy artillery for the battle of 1854-55, but as yet he only brought the truth to bear upon the Church from a distance.

In presenting the ideals of Christianity, S.K. was readily given over to sharp criticism of the status quo in the Church. He presented the severity of true Christianity. He loathed the mediocrity everywhere present in the faith and life of the Danish people.

"The Mirror of the Word." Thus, in a sermon for the fifth Sunday after Easter, Kierkegaard wrote on the epistle for the day, James 1:22 ff. It was entitled, "The Mirror of

⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

the Word." In it S.K. labors for the "disquietude in the direction of inwardness."⁸

S.K. presents a critical estimate of Lutheranism. He suggests that the Lutheran Church has taken advantage of Luther's doctrine, and since Luther did not make much of the ethical implications of the Gospel (which are obvious enough), the requirements of following Christ have largely been ignored. Kierkegaard suggests a re-study of the subordinate clauses of Lutheranism.⁹

He goes on to point out the necessity of seeing oneself in the mirror of God's Word and not merely looking at the mirror. He disparages those who learn to read the Word of God eruditely, who go after the root meanings of the original text and who are possibly never alone with God's Word. He summarizes:

. . . one might say that the greater part never read God's Word, and that a smaller part read it learnedly in one fashion or another, that is to say, do not really read God's Word, but behold the mirror. Or to say the same thing in another way, the greater part regard God's Word as an antiquated document of olden time which one puts aside, and a smaller part regards God's Word as an exceedingly noble document of olden time upon which one expends an astonishing amount of diligence and acumen, etc. . . . beholding the mirror.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

A second major emphasis in this sermon is that, when one beholds himself in the mirror, it is necessary to say to himself continually, "It is I that am here addressed, it is about me this is said."¹¹

S.K. further points out the craftiness of the mind to get out from under the weight of the Gospel message. "Oh, depth of cunning! They make God's Word something impersonal, objective, a doctrine -- whereas instead it is as God's voice thou shouldst hear it."¹²

The final point of the sermon is that, after having beheld oneself in the mirror, one must not forget ". . . what manner of man thou art, not be the forgetful hearer."¹³

The value of this sermon lies in the pointed application of the Bible truth to the heart of the individual. The implications are strong and obvious: the Christian must raise his standards of dealing with the Word of God. God is sharply displeased with the loose-handling of His Word.

Christ the Way. The next sermon written on the epistle for Ascension day is even more severe. It speaks of Christ as the Way. The text is the first verses of Acts 1, wherein the Ascension account is presented.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 60.

¹² Ibid., p. 64.

¹³ Ibid., p. 68.

S.K. points out how Christ is the narrow Way, and that He was narrow at the very beginning.¹⁴ He was born in poverty and wretchedness. He was tempted as we are. He suffered as He went forth to war with the world.

And this narrow Way, which is Christ, ". . . becomes, as it goes on, narrower and narrower, until the very last, until death."¹⁵ Christ suffered defenselessly. His life became more difficult at the end when He was betrayed, kissed, nailed to a cross. The way is narrower.

The way was narrow up till the last, and then on Ascension Day He climbed a mountain. A cloud received Him out of sight. He ascended into heaven -- He is the Way.¹⁶

Here again the implications are strong and clear. Christ is the Way. If we follow Him, as we must, then we can expect to have to walk the same narrow way. One catches intimate glimpses of the poor imitation of the Christianity in Denmark one hundred years ago. True Christian faith is a good deal above the common standard. Christianity is much more severe.

The Spirit Giveth Life. The third sermon in For Self-Examination is entitled, "It is the Spirit that

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

Giveth Life." It is based on the epistle for Pentecost, which is Acts 2:1-12. Once again the truth of Christianity is presented in such a way as to point out the sharp difference between the world and the Christian community. There is an either/or involved.¹⁷

S.K. begins with that keynote. He says that most folks believe in a spirit, not in the Spirit. They believe in the spirit of the age, or in the world-spirit, or in the 'spirit of humanity,' but not in the Holy Spirit. Now this is a terrible failing, because it is the Spirit which giveth life. Nor do such people believe in the evil spirit. They are not conscious that there is any real opposition between good and evil.

Before the Spirit can give life, the Christian must die unto the world and unto himself. He must die to ". . . every merely earthly hope, to every merely human confidence, thou must die to thy selfishness or to the world."¹⁸ This is a most difficult task because, "A man does not cling so tight to his physical body as a man's selfishness clings to his selfishness!"¹⁹ Love, S.K. claims, is one of ". . . the strongest expressions of selfishness."²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 93 f.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁹ Loc. cit.

²⁰ Loc. cit.

With this dying unto all things, then, comes life. And with the life of the Spirit comes the gifts of the Spirit. Faith is a gift of the Spirit. So also is hope and real love, which is unselfish.

S.K. ends this powerful sermon with an illustration of the rich man who had a beautiful team of horses which were given their head. They were treated the way they wanted to be treated. Soon they looked terrible and behaved badly in the harness. Then the King's coachman was called upon to drive them. In a month the horses had changed completely in appearance. They had been driven in accordance with the coachman's understanding of what it is to drive, and not in accordance with the horses' idea of what it is to drive. S.K. draws the parallel between the horses and the Apostles. The Apostles were driven by the Diety who was pleased to become a coachman. The twelve men pulled Christianity and so did the next generation of Christians, but,

O Holy Spirit -- we pray for ourselves and for all.
 . . . here it is not talents we stand in need of, nor culture, nor shrewdness, rather there is here too much of all that; but ~~what~~ we need is that thou take away the power of mastery and give us life.²¹

Once again we see the severity of the Christian religion. It means a dying to the world, to selfishness. It means being driven by the Lord Christ.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 104 f.

"Becoming Sober." The second half of this volume is entitled Judge for Yourselves! It contains two longer sermons, the first of which is entitled, "Becoming Sober." It is based on St. Peter's injunction in his first epistle, chapter four, verse seven. It points out the severity of the conflict of the Christian with the world. The disciples were accused of being drunk on Pentecost, and S.K. claims that the accusation is still being levied because the Christian is not understood. What the Christian calls sobriety, seeking to know oneself before God, calls down the misunderstanding of the world, which thinks the Christian is quite out of his right senses. To the Christian this self-knowledge, which ends in absolute obligation to God, is a part of the program of becoming sober.

The second thought developed in this sermon is expressed in this way: "To become sober is: to come so close to oneself in one's understanding, one's knowing, that all one's understanding becomes action."²² Here too, of course, the merely human view holds the opposite opinion and the Christian is further accused of drunkenness. For the shrewd, sobriety is that which ". . . the discreet people exemplify, taking care to keep their understanding, their knowledge, at

²² Ibid., p. 130.

a due distance from their lives."²³ The Christian accuses the worldly person of drunkenness and vice versa, and so there is perpetual misunderstanding.

Then S.K., after having presented the ideal of Christianity in becoming sober, asks a few questions: "What does reality look like? Where are we? What is the situation in Christendom?"²⁴ He accuses the Church,

We have so mixed up the finite and the infinite, the eternal and the temporal, the highest and the lowest, that they all coalesce and it is impossible to tell which is which, in other words the situation is one of impenetrable ambiguity.²⁵

In this fashion, hammer and tongs, Kierkegaard goes after the Church, the parsons, and the hierarchy. He accuses the Church of selling Christianity to people, ". . . without laying any obligations upon life, . . . peddling indulgences, . . . trafficking with Christianity."²⁶

S.K. further accuses the preachers of living off the fact that there have been those who have sacrificed all for Christianity. This was really the beginning of his attack against the Church. There is considerable polemic in this work, but it was three years later that S.K. unburdened his

²³ Loc. cit.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 138.

²⁵ Loc. cit.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 147.

heavy artillery against the Church. On the concluding pages of this discourse on "Becoming Sober" is to be found a conversation which S.K. is to have with God:

I will say: 'That which we called Christianity was not Christianity, it was a very much softened interpretation of Christianity, a something remotely related to Christianity; but this I have conceded, I have made the admission aloud and very audibly, that it is not properly Christianity.'²⁷

Here we see his deepest conviction regarding the state of Christianity. It did not exist. S.K. did not claim to be the embodiment of true Christianity, but only stood ". . . in relation to becoming sober."²⁸

Christ the Pattern. The second sermon in Judge for Yourself! is entitled, "Christ as the Pattern, or No Man Can Serve Two Masters." It is based on Matthew 6:24 to the end.

This sermon, in the same vein as the other, is most outspoken in criticism of the Church. Kierkegaard begins by stating that the phrase "No man can serve two masters" must be a misunderstanding, for it is too high for mortal man to achieve. In other words, the Gospel, in saying this, really condemns all men.²⁹ S.K. goes on to say that the obstacle

²⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 157.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 164.

" . . . between Christianity and men is that people have lost the conception of the absolute requirement."³⁰ Common sense is rebellion against the absolute. Common sense informs one that the absolute is madness.³¹

It is about Him we will speak, about the Pattern. He has said, 'No man can serve two masters' -- and His life gave expression to the fact that He served only one master. By paying attention to His life we shall see the absolute requirement, and we shall see it fulfilled. Meanwhile we constantly recall to mind that Jesus Christ was not only a pattern but also the Redeemer, in order that the Pattern may not alarm us to desperation; . . .³²

S.K. then traces the life of Christ, the lowliness of His birth, the star (common sense would dispense with it) at the nativity. The flight to Egypt was necessary in order to make it possible to serve one master. Christ sent out His disciples with nothing -- in absolute poverty. To common sense this is an offence. He was without family connections. He was betrayed, stood before judges and was accused, and still He served only one master. Christ is the Pattern.³³

And this is Christian piety: to renounce everything in order to serve God alone, to deny oneself everything in order to serve God alone -- and then to have to suffer for it, to do good and have to suffer for it. This is what the Pattern expresses. . . .³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., p. 168.

³¹ Ibid., p. 169.

³² Ibid., p. 171.

³³ Ibid., pp. 172 f.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 179.

'No man can serve two masters,' this is His Word, and He was the Word: He served only one master. So He was not only right in saying this, but right also in saying what He said in the Gospel: 'No man can serve two masters.'³⁵

Imitation must be the order of the day for every Christian every day of his life. And it is precisely at this point "where the human race winces."³⁶ If pressure is brought to bear upon Christians at this point, they will drop away. And when Christianity widens out to such an extent that it corresponds with the world, "Then Christianity has triumphed completely -- in other words, it is done away with."³⁷

The Savior of the world . . . did not come to the world to bring a doctrine; He never lectured. . . . His teaching in fact was His life, . . . It means that one does not become a Christian by hearing something about Christ, . . . No, what is required is a predicament (situation): adventure upon a decisive action, . . .³⁸

Thus again we see clearly the severe, uncompromising Christianity which S.K. recommends as the only genuine article. It is severe, but there is also the Redeemer Who saves.

The Pattern must be brought to the fore, for the sake at least of creating some respect for Christianity, . . . to get Christianity transferred from learned discussion and doubt and twaddle (the objective) into the subjective sphere, where it belongs, as surely as the Savior of the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 188.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 197.

³⁷ Loc. cit.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 200.

world, our Lord Jesus Christ, brought no doctrine into the world and never lectured but as the 'Pattern' required imitation -- casting out, however, if possible, by His atonement all anxious dread from men's souls.³⁹

This last quote is the end of the sermon and a fine statement of S.K.'s balance. He was holding up the highest ideal of Christianity, but he did not turn it into legalism. The discourse ends with a Gospel note to keep away despair.

II. THE CONCEPT OF LOVE

It is the personal conviction of the writer of this essay that S.K. was driven into a deeper appreciation of the idea of love by his own frustrating love affair. A sentence by Otto A. Piper in a book review on Kierkegaard's Works of Love in the magazine, Theology Today, bears this out:

. . . By what he called love he hoped to find the solution of the problems created by his strained relationship to his father and his former fiancée. His love is a self-chosen way of playing providence in other people's life. . . .⁴⁰

Scarcely knowing the experience of love during the last fifteen years of his life (which was the period of his literary productivity), his father dead and his beloved Regina married to another, his brother Peter most unfriendly, S.K. withdrew within his own soul but there kept love alive. He wrote on this subject with considerable penetration.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 216-17.

⁴⁰ Otto A. Piper, A Book Review on Works of Love, Theology Today, III (January, 1947), p. 554.

Lowrie writes this about Works of Love in the large biography:

. . . The task he felt called upon to perform was not to reform the dogmatic tradition of his Church but to insist upon its being practised. He assumed that the dogma was all right, and rather than attack the points which were objectionable to him he simply ignored them. He engaged in no controversy against the central Protestant doctrine of 'faith alone', but without any show of hostility, and without any possibility of rebuttal, he could insist that love must prove its reality by its works, that we cannot love alone, or love without works. In these 'Christian reflections' S.K. dwells very properly upon the most immaterial, the least conspicuous, the most unobservable 'works' of love, whereby every man, even the weakest and the poorest, can discover for himself at least, the reality of his love. . . .41

Douglas Steere in the Introduction to Works of Love calls this work the "greatest single work on Christian ethics."⁴² S.K.'s obsession is with the individual and in Works of Love he never gets around to the ethical obligations and duties of the Christian society. Instead of this being a limitation, it is rather another stroke of his genius. By keeping the universality of the commandment to love free from application to the political and social problems of Denmark in 1847, posterity is best served, for it is plain that the command to love given by God knows no off-season and no exception.

S.K.'s intensely personal approach to the Christian problem of loving one's neighbor is traceable, we think, to

41 Lowrie, op. cit., pp. 375, 376.

42 Kierkegaard, Works of Love, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1946), p. vii.

his own life. One gets the feeling that the inadequacy of his own personal relations with his fellow man made S.K. all the more conscious of the Love of God and the absolute need of man to reflect that love to his fellow man.

The prayer at the beginning of the book sets the keynote and indicates the source of all true love:

How could anything rightly be said about love if Thou wert forgotten, Thou God of Love, from whom all love comes in heaven and on earth; Thou who didst hold back nothing but didst give everything in love; Thou who art love, so the lover is only what he is through being in Thee! How could anything rightly be said about love if Thou wert forgotten, Thou who didst manifest what love is, Thou, our Saviour and Redeemer, who gave himself to save us all! . . .⁴³

"The Hidden Life of Love." In this first discourse, Kierkegaard further develops the thought in the prayer mentioned above.

Whence comes love: Where is its source and its well-spring? Where is the secret place from which it issues? Truly, that place is hidden, or it is in secret. There is a place in the heart of man; from this place issues the life of love, for "out of the heart are the issues of life." . . . Love's secret life is in the heart, unfathomable, and it also has an unfathomable connection with the whole of existence. As the peaceful lake is grounded deep in the hidden spring which no eye can see, so a man's love is grounded even deeper in the love of God. If there were at bottom no wellspring, if God were not love, then there would be no quiet lake or human love.⁴⁴

S.K. points out very clearly that the life of love is

⁴³ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

hidden and yet the hidden life of love is recognizable by its fruits. In developing this thought S.K. presented much material that seems to be autobiographical:

. . . For even if a single particular expression of love, if a love affair, were pushed back by love in a painful concealment: the same life of love would nevertheless produce a new expression of love, and would still be known by its fruits. Oh, ye quiet martyrs, of unhappy love! What you suffered from a love that must conceal a love indeed remained a secret; you never revealed it, such was the greatness of your love that made this sacrifice: and yet your love was known by its fruits! and perhaps just those fruits became precious, those which were matured by the quiet burning of a secret pain.⁴⁵

Here we see a description of precisely what happened to S.K. His love had been pushed back into concealment because of his melancholy nature and yet the fruits made known that love. His writings revealed his love. Without the pain there could have been no fruits. Without the anguish of the unrealized love there would have been no literature, as he himself said.

"Thou SHALT Love." In the sermon by this title S.K. points out the apparent contradiction: that loving is a duty. ". . . Love also existed in heathendom; but the idea that love is a duty is an everlasting innovation -- and everything has become new. . . ."46

One sees S.K.'s own home life in this next quote:

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

. . . But since this commandment has been in force through eighteen hundred years of Christianity, and before that time in Judaism; now since everyone has been brought up in it, and from the spiritual point of view is like a child brought up in the home of well-to-do parents, who quite naturally forgets that his daily bread is a gift; now since the Christian religion has many times been rejected by those who were brought up in it, because they preferred all kinds of novelties, just as wholesome food is refused by a person who has never been hungry, in favor of sweets; now since the Christian religion is everywhere presupposed, presupposed as known, as given, as indicated -- in order to go on: now it is certainly asserted as a matter of course by everyone; and yet, alas, how seldom is it considered, how seldom perhaps does a Christian earnestly and with a thankful heart dwell upon the idea of what his condition might have been if Christianity had not come into the world! What courage was not needed in order to say for the first time, "Thou shalt love," or rather, what divine authority was not needed in order by this word to reverse the ideas and concepts of the natural man! . . .⁴⁷

One sees herein a picture of the home life of S.K., for he was brought up of well-to-do parents. He was well-fed. He knew what it meant to prefer sweets to wholesome food. He had rejected the Christian faith for a time while he was at the university and yet by the grace of God and the love of his father he came back. He knew what it was to be without Christianity. He knew the great either/or of Christian faith. Thou shalt love is an everlasting innovation. It was the difference between Christianity and paganism.

"Thou Shalt Love Thy NEIGHBOR." The sermon by this title gives S.K.'s ideas on the neighbor concept. Speaking

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

to the man in the street was a constant source of joy to him. He prided himself in his many friendships with unimportant people. He was deeply hurt when The Corsair affair turned many of these people away from him. The quotation below shows how, perhaps, his love for his fellow man at least compensated for his lost love of Regina.

. . . Christianity has pushed earthly love and friendship from the throne, the impulsive and the preferential love, the partiality, in order to set spiritual love in its place, the love of one's neighbor, a love which in earnestness and truth and inwardness is more tender than any earthly love -- in the union, and more faithfully sincere than the most celebrated friendship -- in concord. . . .48

"THOU Shalt Love Thy Neighbor." The discourse titled with this emphasis stresses the democracy which is implicit in the love concept.

Consequently whatever your fortune was in love or friendship, whatever your need was, whatever your loss, whatever the despondency of your life in your confidence in the poet: the highest still remains -- love your neighbor! Him you can easily find, that is certain; you can unconditionally always find him, that is certain; you can never lose him. . . no change can take your neighbor from you, for it is not the neighbor who holds you fast, but it is your love which holds the neighbor fast. . . .49

Here again is compensation. There is no release from the injunction to love the neighbor. No circumstances of life can alter it, no despondency, no misfortune. Love abides.

48 Ibid., p. 37.

49 Ibid., p. 54.

"Love Is the Fulfillment of the Law." This discourse indicates that S.K. holds to the highest concept of Christian love, namely, that love is to lead to God.

. . . The merely human interpretation of love can never get any further than reciprocity: the lover is the beloved, and the beloved is the lover. Christianity teaches that such love has not yet found its right object -- God. A love relationship is threefold: the lover, the beloved, the love; but the love is God. And therefore, to love another man is to help him to love God, and to be loved is to be helped to love God.⁵⁰

S.K. on occasion read sermons to Regina. At least he was aware at that stage in his life that love had greater responsibilities than physical and mental. To say, however, that at the age of twenty-seven years he had the full-orbed understanding that enabled him to write as he did in the Works of Love, would be an over-statement.

Here is a statement of what might have been had S.K. married. It presents a problem that all must face in respect to human love:

. . . How many a man has not a maiden's love, from the divine standpoint, destroyed, just because he, defrauded of his God-relationship, remained too true to her, while she in turn was unlimited in her eulogies over his love! How many a man has not been corrupted by family and friends, while yet this corruption did not appear to be so, for now he was loved and praised for his love -- by his family and friends? How many a man has not an age corrupted, the age which for compensation adored his affectionate disposition because it made him forget the God-relationship, and transformed it into something one can vociferously make a show of, rejoice over and effeminately admire without being consciously reminded of anything higher. . . .⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 99.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 105.

S.K. was not corrupted by Regina's love. Nor was he corrupted by the praise and affection of his fellow men.

"Our Duty to Love the Men We See." In the sermon with this title, S.K. points out how the sin of fastidiousness makes it almost impossible to regain the gifts of good nature and love. The task does not consist of finding the lovable object but rather it means finding the person you know already to be lovable.⁵² "The most dangerous of all evasions as regards loving, is to wish to love only the invisible."⁵³ This quote sums up the sermon:

. . . If you will, therefore, become perfect in love, then strive to perfect this duty, in loving to love the man you see; to love him just as you see him, with all his imperfections and weaknesses; to love him as you see him when he has completely changed, when he no longer loves you, but perhaps indifferently turns away to love another; to love him as you see him when he betrays and denies you.⁵⁴

"Love Covereth a Multitude of Sins." Here Kierkegaard develops the idea that love spreads fearlessness. "When we say that 'Love gives fearlessness', we mean by that, that the lover by his very nature makes others fearless; everywhere where love is present, it spreads fearlessness; . . ."⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., p. 129.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 130.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 141.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 227.

The suspicious man will frighten people away from him and the cunning man spreads fear and unrest, the tyrant oppresses, but love brings fearlessness. These ideas are most interesting because S.K. did not actually live up to them himself. He claimed all his life to love Regina. It certainly appears that he did, but why did he not confess his sin to her and thus rest his case in her love for him? For if it was the real thing, it would have covered his sins. It appears that his understanding of the Christian principle was greater than his ability to live it. S.K. diagnosed his own problem when he wrote, ". . . But why is forgiveness so rare: Is it not because faith in the power of forgiveness is so little and so rare?"⁵⁶

Thus in this book, Works of Love, Kierkegaard sings the praise of love. In a way it is severe, showing how it is the inescapable duty of the Christian to love. It points out how suffering accompanies the life of the person who performs the works of love. Perhaps this volume is best summed up by stating that Christian love is best expressed in the works of love.

III. THE NECESSITY OF SUFFERING

Kierkegaard's Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits,

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 239.

published in Copenhagen in 1846, had three parts. The first two sections, Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing and The Gospel of Suffering, will be dealt with in reverse order. The third section, What We Learn From the Lilies of the Field and the Fowls of the Air, will be treated in the last part of this essay.

These Edifying Discourses had one unified purpose -- to force the reader into making a careful self-examination. They track down the evasive thoughts which nullify the Christian's attempt to build himself up. These sermons strike hard. They cut deeply in order to relieve the soul of the cancerous tissues which grow and slowly use up all the strength of the soul.

There is a direct relationship between the suffering in S.K.'s own life and his keen incisive writings on the problem and necessity of suffering as a Christian. Douglas V. Steere wrote:

The melancholy shade of his father's closely held sin, the breaking of his engagement with Regina Olsen, the public ridicule to which his sensitive nature was exposed by the public attack of the modish journal Corsair, the disillusionment with Bishop Mynster and the church in his closing years, all bore upon him. What is significant about Kierkegaard is the use he made of this suffering. He refused to seek invulnerability. He accepted the suffering, he lived with it, he searched it, and he found its costly meaning for him -- that he was to live as one called under God -- to live as a lonely man -- to live for an idea. Through suffering he found, and later was kept in his vocation. For his intense nature this pressure of suffering meant debauchery, insanity, suicide -- or the penetration of the sorrow for its message.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ S.K. Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing, (New York, Harper Brothers, Revised Edition, 1948), p. 22.

Thus these Edifying Discourses (not to be confused with the earlier Edifying Discourses which deal with the religion of immanence) make plain that S.K. used

. . . these sufferings [to] release light that has no fear of darkness. And rarely in religious literature has suffering been treated with such delicacy and penetration as in Kierkegaard's own writings.⁵⁸

In The Gospel of Suffering, which we shall treat first, S.K. articulates the idea that there is happiness involved also in the thought of following Christ:

. . . how the burden can be light though the sorrow is heavy, that the school of suffering prepares for eternity, that it is not the way which is narrow but the narrowness which is the way, that in relation to God we always suffer as those who are guilty, that eternity outweighs in its blessedness even the heaviest temporal suffering, and that the spirit of courage in suffering takes power away from the world, and transforms derision into honor and defeat into victory.⁵⁹

"Following Christ." This sermon shows that it is necessary to deny oneself; to take up one's cross and to follow Christ. After taking up the cross it is then necessary in a long-continued process to bear the cross. This must be done daily, it cannot be done once for all. Following Christ also means walking the same way as Christ walked -- in the form of a servant. It means also to walk alone, for it is necessary to renounce the world and forsake every relationship. In eternity

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁹ Swenson, op. cit., p. 101.

the Christian will not be asked how great a fortune he left behind, nor how many battles were won, nor how clever he was. In eternity he will be asked what treasure he accumulated in heaven, how often a victory was won over temper, whether he excelled in self-denial, whether he was willing to sacrifice for a good cause.⁶⁰

S.K. had a particularly strong conviction that he was walking alone, that he was cut out for a special task, and that personal loneliness was the price he would have to pay for it.

There is joy in this thought of walking in Christ's footsteps. It is akin to the joy of a young man who, in deciding what profession he will follow, finds a hero and sets out to emulate him.

There is only one name in heaven and on earth, only one way, only one pattern. He who chooses to follow Christ, chooses the name which is above all names, the pattern which is highly exalted above all heavens, but at the same time so human that it can be a pattern for a human being, so that it is named and will be named in heaven and on earth, in both places as the highest. For there are examples whose names are only mentioned on earth, but the highest, the only one, must precisely have this exclusive quality whereby it is indeed recognizable as the only one: that it is named both in heaven and on earth.⁶¹

Thus we catch again some of the autobiographical experience of S.K. He suffered. He bore the cross. He followed

⁶⁰ S. A. Kierkegaard, The Gospel of Suffering and The Lilies of the Field, (Minneapolis, Minnesota, Augsburg Publishing House, 1948), pp. 11 f.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

after, but with it all he had the joy which comes of following Him whose name is above every name. Here is no morbid over-emphasis on suffering, here is the happy balance achieved by the soul of the Christian who rests his case in the forgiving love of God through Christ.

"The Burden Can Be Light." In this second sermon S.K. shows how the burden can be light even though the suffering is heavy:

. . . When the lover in distress is almost sinking under the weight of the beloved whom he wishes to save: then the burden is certainly heavy, and yet, if you ask him about it, it is so indescribably light. Although the two are in peril of life, and the other is the one who is weighing him down, he wishes only one thing, he wishes to save her life; hence he speaks as if there were no burden at all, he calls her his life, and he wishes to save his life. How has this change come about? I wonder if it is not because a thought enters, an idea in between, "The burden is heavy," he says, and he pauses; but now reflection follows on the thought, and he says: "No, oh, no, it is nevertheless light." Is he then double-tongued because he speaks in this way? Oh, no. If he speaks thus in truth, then he is truly in love. Therefore it is by the aid of the thought, of the reflection, and by the fact of being in love, that the transformation takes place.⁶²

Here S.K. speaks from his own near experience. He perfectly understands the supremacy of love over suffering. Suffering is no suffering when it is endured for the beloved. Thus the burden of the cross is not a burden at all but brings joy in the knowledge that it is borne for the Lover of our souls.

⁶² Ibid., p. 26.

Believe the yoke is profitable to you. This easy yoke is the yoke of Christ. But what then is the yoke? Ah, yokes may vary exceedingly, but it is only Christ's yoke of which the sufferer believes that it is profitable for him. Hence it is not true that the Christian is exempt from human sufferings, as these are known in the world. No, but he who bears his suffering in such a way that he believes that the yoke is profitable, he bears the yoke of Christ.
 . . .⁶³

"Suffering Trains For Eternity." In this discourse S.K. points out how suffering teaches obedience. Christ learned obedience, even though His will from eternity was in harmony with the Father's. He came to His own and they did not receive Him. He was rejected by those He came to save. He was crucified -- yet through all His sufferings He learned obedience.⁶⁴

. . . Suffering is a hazardous kind of instruction, for if one does not learn obedience, oh, then it is terrible; it is like the strongest medicine when it acts in the wrong way. In this danger a man needs help, he needs God's help, otherwise he does not learn obedience. And if he does not learn obedience, he may learn the most pernicious things -- learn cowardly despondency, learn to quench the spirit, learn to suppress all the noble fires within him, learn defiance and despair.⁶⁵

This too along the same lines is worthy of note:

When a man suffers and is willing to learn from what he suffers, then he constantly learns only something about himself and about his relationship to God; this is the sign that he is being trained for eternity. . . . Therefore the school of suffering is a dying away from the world.
 . . .⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 51 ff.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

S.K. felt that his suffering -- his hidden secret of his father's guilt, his renounced love, his being attacked by the public -- was all part of the suffering that is the lot of every true Christian who thereby is being prepared for eternity. "The longest schooling trains for the highest; the school which lasts as long as time, can train only for eternity."⁶⁷ Our suffering makes sense only in the light of the eternal. "There is no obedience without suffering, no faith without obedience, no eternity without faith. In suffering obedience is obedience, in obedience faith is faith, in faith eternity is eternity."⁶⁸

"The Narrowness is the Way." S.K. explains, in this sermon, his ideas on joy in affliction.

The affliction is the way -- and this constitutes the joy: that it is consequently not a characteristic of the way, that it is hard, but a characteristic of the affliction, that it is the way, so the affliction must consequently lead to something, it must be something practicable and appreciable, not superhuman. Each of these thoughts contains a more closely edifying determination of this joy, and therefore we shall pause to consider each separately.

It is not a distinguishing quality of the way that it is hard, but a distinguishing quality of the affliction that it is the way. The more closely the affliction and the way are connected with each other, the more closely also is the task. . . .⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 111.

Thus the affliction leads to something, in fact, the affliction is the helper. Note this quote:

. . . As long as the child still has a timid fear of the teacher, it can no doubt learn much; but when confidence has driven out the fear, and fearlessness has triumphed, then the higher instruction begins. And thus, too, when the sufferer, assured that the affliction is the way, has overcome the affliction; for is not this in the higher sense overcoming affliction, to be willing to believe that the affliction is the way, is the helper!⁷⁰

Affliction cannot overcome the Christian because he is taller than the temptation:

. . . the temptation has no superhuman magnitude; on the contrary, when the affliction is most terrible, the believer is taller by a head, a head taller, aye, he is indeed a head taller, as he rises above the affliction. And when the affliction is the way, then is the believer also above the affliction; for the way on which a man goes certainly does not go over his head; no, when he walks on it, then he plants his foot on it.⁷¹

Thus S.K. retains no real fear of suffering. It is something that carries with it also the way of escape. He knew this to be true from his own experiences. Though his loneliness and sufferings were many, yet he was able to live with them.

"Courage in Suffering." In this discourse with so challenging a title, Kierkegaard points out that courage in suffering destroys the power of the world and brings victory out of defeat. Fear makes us slaves, but this slavery is really self-created bondage. This fear stems from forgetting God.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 114.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 116.

A "conversion of courage" takes place when, instead of being ashamed of being derided by the world, one is able to boast of this suffering as did St. Paul, and then "that which a whole world calls dishonor and works at, holding that it is dishonor, that for the mystery of faith is honor with God."⁷²

S.K.'s gospel of suffering, stemming from his own life and understanding of the processes of affliction and their soul rewards, presents valuable insights into the well-nigh inscrutable problem of pain. That he suffered in his own life is history; that his response to this suffering is morbid is, I believe, fiction. Now and then he lapses into some dark saying that seems perhaps an overstatement, but that is after all the problem of every writer, particularly of one who experiences things deeply.

In the next part of this section we shall cover the devotional work, Purity of Heart, which is related to The Gospel of Suffering in several ways.

This work is probably the most popular and the best known of all of Kierkegaard's writings. It is a long sermon -- more accurately a confessional address. It deals with repentance and remorse. Thomte writes:

The presupposition of the discourse is that sin has intervened in the relationship between God and man, and that it has brought about a delay, a halt, a break, a deception, and a sense of perdition in man's consciousness.

⁷² Ibid., p. 156.

The discourse is not concerned with an objective presentation of repentance, but it is calculated to make the reader self-active so that he may soberly recognize himself in the presence of God.⁷³

In other words the purpose of this discourse is practical. S.K. shows up the excuses and subterfuges used by the human heart in seeking to evade man's prime responsibility of loving God above all else. Purity of Heart deals with the unity of the ethical ideal that the heart can be clean only when there is singleness of aim, "and that this singleness of aim is possible only for one who chooses the good, and actual only when he chooses the good in truth; . . ."⁷⁴

Douglas V. Steere in his introduction to this work puts it strikingly:

This isolation of man from the flock, from the mass, from the crowd and the heightening of his consciousness as an individual which the Eternal accomplishes is the central theme of Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing. Before the quiet gaze of the Eternal, there is no hiding-place. As individuals we are what we are before God, and no mass opinion affects this in the least. Kierkegaard believed that his generation was seeking to live in mere time and to make the Eternal superfluous. He reminded them of the Eternal's power to dissolve away time and to separate the crowd into individuals. In memory, in conscience, in remorse, in work at a calling, in the solitude, the Eternal still impinges upon the individual and awakens him to a consciousness both of himself and of his responsibility and of his worth to the Eternal.⁷⁵

⁷³ Thomte, op. cit., pp. 154-55.

⁷⁴ Swenson, op. cit., p. 100.

⁷⁵ Purity of Heart, op. cit., p. 19.

In the Translator's Note to the Revised Edition of the English Translation of Purity of Heart, Steere writes this concerning that work:

. . . it is prepared to put into the hands of the serious reader the surgical instruments for a major spiritual operation. The instruments are razor-sharp and they can cut through any cancerous worldly growth, no matter how fibrous, in order to liberate again the healthy tissues of a man's individual responsibility before the gaze of the living God.

The note that it sounds is alien to the modern ears which are tuned to collective thinking, collective action, and collective salvation. It is, however, not an individualistic nineteenth century note that Kierkegaard sounds, but a universal note of the inward life of man, a note that even this age will be compelled to learn again when its present grim honeymoon with collective salvation has spent itself.⁷⁶

The writer of this essay read Purity of Heart without finding anything that might be construed as directly autobiographical. Yet the entire idea of this work seems to be a clear expression of the struggle S.K. had with himself. The shadow of his own life lies over this devotional work. He who had followed his father's urging to study for the ministry, had renounced his love Regina, maintained purity of heart even when the adversity of great unpopularity descended upon him. This work was certainly born in the fires of his own troubles and temptations. He had been successful, although he would be the last to admit it, not desiring to hold himself up as an example. We found no references that we could call autobiographi-

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

cal in the strictest sense, and yet one gets the impression that this work is more directly related to Kierkegaard's life than is many another of his writings.

Another outstanding feature of this work that bears mentioning is its epigrammatic quality. It abounds in short, pithy sentences. Thus: "The prayer does not change God, but it does change the one who offers it."⁷⁷ ". . . purity of heart is the very wisdom that is acquired through prayer."⁷⁸ "When the lover gives away his whole love, he keeps it entire -- in the purity of the heart."⁷⁹ "The reward of the good man is to be allowed to worship in truth."⁸⁰

Some of the choice, longer quotes have an equally keen cutting edge:

When the good man truly stands on the other side of the boundary line inside the fortification of eternity, he is strong, stronger than the whole world. He is strongest of all at the time when he seems to be overcome. But the impotent double-minded one has removed the boundary limit, because he only wills the Good out of fear of earth's punishment. If the world is not really the land of perfection, then by his double-mindedness he has surrendered himself to the power of mediocrity or pledged himself to the evil.⁸¹

In the eleventh section of Purity of Heart S.K. explains this title:

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 60.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 98.

Purity of heart: it is a figure of speech that compares the heart to the sea, and why just to this? Simply for the reason that the depth of the sea determines its purity, and its purity determines its transparency. Since the sea is pure only when it is deep, and is transparent only when it is pure, as soon as it is impure it is no longer deep but only surface water, and as soon as it is only surface water it is not transparent. When, on the contrary, it is deeply and transparently pure, then it is all of one consistency, no matter how long one looks at it; then its purity is this constancy in depth and transparency. On this account we compare the heart with the sea, because the purity of the sea lies in its constancy of depth and transparency. No storm may perturb it; no sudden gust of wind may stir its surface, no drowsy fog may sprawl out over it; no doubtful movement may stir within it; no swift-moving cloud may darken it: rather it must lie calm, transparent to its depth.⁸²

In the pivotal section twelve, entitled "What Then Must I Do?", S.K. points out the listener's role in a devotional address, and one sees the acute scrutiny in which he held his own soul.

. . . For in order to achieve its proper emphasis the talk must unequivocally demand something of the listener. It must demand not merely what has previously been requested, that the reader should share in the work with the speaker -- now the talk must unconditionally demand the reader's own decisive activity, and all depends upon this. . . . the devotional speaker is admired for his art, his eloquence, while that decision of which each man is capable, and that which it may be well to note, is the highest thing of all, is completely ignored. In a devotional sense, to be eloquent is a mere frill in the same way that to be beautiful is a happy privilege, but is still a non-essential frill. In a devotional sense, earnestness: to listen in order to act, this is the highest thing of all, and, God be praised, every man is capable of it if he so wills. Yet busyness places its most weighty emphasis upon the frills, the capacity to please, and looks upon earnestness as nothing at all. In a contemptuous and frivolous fashion, busyness thinks

⁸² Ibid., p. 176.

that to be eloquent is the highest thing of all and that the task of the listener is to pass judgment on whether the speaker has this gift.⁸³

Here Kierkegaard leads the reader down the same torture-some paths that he himself took in order to arrive at a satisfying relationship with God. That this type of devotional earnestness is unpleasant does not seem to occur to S.K. It is part of the Christian unavoidable cross.

The talk asks you, then, or you ask yourself by means of talk, "What kind of life do you live, do you will only one thing, and what is this one thing?". . . The talk assumes, then, that you will the Good and asks you now, "What kind of life you live, whether or not you truthfully will only one thing. . . No, the talk is not inquisitive. . . in order to be able earnestly to answer that serious question, a man must already have made a choice in life, he must have chosen the invisible, chosen that which is within."⁸⁴

S.K. answers the question, "What Must I Do?" with a simple, "Live as an 'Individual'", for he says, ". . . the most ruinous evasion of all is to be hidden in the crowd in an attempt to escape God's supervision of him as an individual. . . ."⁸⁵ He takes a dim view of a crowd because the crowd will never be correct.

For many fools do not make a wise man, and the crowd is doubtful recommendation for a cause. Yes, the larger the crowd, the more probable that that which it praises is folly, and the more improbable that it is truth, and the most improbable of all that it is any eternal truth. For in eternity crowds simply do not exist.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 178-179.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 182-183.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 185.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 191.

Conclusion: Man and the Eternal. In this magnificent closing section S.K. summarizes the suffering the individual must endure through confession.

Only the individual can truthfully will the Good, and even though the penitent toils heavily not merely in the eleventh hour of confession, with all the questions standing as accusations of himself, but also in their daily use in repentance, yet the way is the right one. For he is in touch with the demand that calls for purity of heart by willing one thing.⁸⁷

Thus the daily life of repentance is the necessary suffering that the Christian must endure if he would maintain the pure heart. S.K. answers objections before they are even brought to the surface of the consciousness: "Alas, perhaps the unaltered monotony of the suffering seems to you like a creeping death. . . yet an infinite change is taking place."⁸⁸ The cross of suffering develops the Christian.

If the talk were to characterize your altered condition through the years, would it dare use the words of the Apostle and say of your life of unaltered suffering: "Suffering taught him patience, patience taught him experience, experience taught him hope?"⁸⁹

This for Kierkegaard was the highest commendation, that suffering worked beauty into the soul by establishing faithfulness. Eternity asks only about faithfulness.

Because of the whole-souled quality of his approach to life, S.K. makes everything into suffering and takes suffering into everything.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 217.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 209.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 209.

IV. CHRISTIAN HOPE

The final section of this essay deals with a concept of his devotional literature for which Kierkegaard is not too well known. He is better known as a disciple of suffering. This is too easily construed to indicate that S.K. was psychopathic -- that he gloried in suffering. That such an idea is false will be pointed out in more detail later.

S.K.'s spiritual development is clearly outlined by his various series of discourses. Lowrie says,

... When he said of his works in general, "They were my own education in Christianity," he doubtless had in mind the Discourses in particular. Of them Swenson says justly, "The development of the Christian thesis is gradual, careful, methodical, advancing step by step." Some of the steps are indicated by the titles. S.K. called the first collection "Edifying Discourses," being inhibited by a strange scruple from affirming that they were issued authoritatively "for edification"; yet in 1848 he ventured to apply this "higher category" to the third section of the Christian Discourses; in 1847 he had already characterized The Works of Love as "Christian reflections"; and in 1849 the Discourses on the Lilies and the Birds were called "Godly Discourses." These are subtle distinctions, but they clearly indicate a sense of progress. For all that, he regarded even the last Discourses as examples of religiousness "A", they were distinctively Christian, yet not exponents of the paradoxical religiousness which is peculiar to Christianity.⁹⁰

A quotation from Geismar's lectures gives us an excellent overview of the Christian Discourses:

There is here then a description of the suffering through which the deeper self takes command, and the personality is born in terms of its eternal validity. The Christian Discourses take up the theme of suffering and develop it

⁹⁰ Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard, op. cit., pp. 199-200.

further. Some of these discourses are addressed to sufferers in the theme of the joy that is born of suffering: the happiness that is contained in the thought that we suffer only once, but triumph eternally; the happiness contained in the thought that affliction does not destroy hope, but increases it; the happiness contained in the thought that the poorer a man becomes the richer he can make others; the happiness contained in the thought that the weaker you become the stronger God becomes in you.⁹¹

There are four sections to this work, Christian Discourses.

The first part deals with the anxieties of the pagan mind (S.K. is, of course, talking about himself). He writes of the anxieties of poverty, abundance, lowliness, highness, presumption, self-torment, irresolution, fickleness, disconsolateness. Each anxiety is treated in separate discourse, except the last three, which are handled together.

The second part of the work contains a series of discourses on the Christian Gospel of suffering, emphasizing the joy of it. Part three is a sermon series on the prevailing situation in the Danish Church. It is entitled: "Thoughts Which Wound from Behind -- For Edification." Lowrie says this work ". . . is the first expression in S.K.'s published writings of the polemic, which later was to become predominant, against established, and self-satisfied Christianity. . . ." ⁹²

The fourth section of the work is a series of sermons, seven in number, on the Lord's Supper. A note "From the Journal"

⁹¹ Geismar, op. cit., p. 67.

⁹² Lowrie, Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 376.

printed in Christian Discourses:

The contrast between the third part and the fourth is as sharp as possible and as searching: the one is like a commemoration of the Cleansing of the Temple -- and then the quiet and the most heartfelt of all acts of worship: a communion on Fridays.⁹³

"The Anxiety of Abundance." In this outstanding sermon of the first section of Christian Discourses, S.K. shows the folly of wealth and the vanity of worrying about physical possessions. The bird of the air does not have the anxiety of worrying about what it will eat and what it will drink. Nor is the bird poor because it does not have the anxiety. The bird is rich but does not know it. You ask then how does the bird live?

. . . Well, it is God who every day metes out to the bird the definite measure, i.e. enough; but it never occurs to the bird that it has or might wish to have more than enough. What God gives every day is . . . enough. But the bird does not desire to have either more or less than enough.⁹⁴

Nor does the bird concern itself with worrying about where it will get its next meal. The poor bird is not poor, but it never occurs to it to ask where it will get its next meal, what with all the food at its disposal. The bird does not possess abundance and has not the anxiety of it. Now the parallel: the rich Christian has not this anxiety either.

" . . . For when one in abundance is without the anxiety of it

⁹³ S. A. Kierkegaard, Christian Discourses, (London, Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 252.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

. . . through ignorance, he is either a bird, or (in case he is a man and yet like a bird) he is a Christian."⁹⁵

Thus the Christian, learning from the bird, is not anxious about earthly things:

So the rich Christian has an abundance but is ignorant of it, and that then is something he must have become. For it requires no art to be ignorant, but to become ignorant, and by becoming so, to be ignorant, that is the art.⁹⁶

The rich Christian being ignorant of the abundance of physical things that he has cannot have the anxiety of abundance. He has no anxiety about losing it, because he is as one who does not have it. When he uses his money for good he sustains a surprise, as if he had found something.⁹⁷

Who has this anxiety? The bird does not have it, nor does the rich Christian. The rich heathen has this anxiety, for he has knowledge of his abundance. Therefore those that desire to be rich fall into many temptations which corrupt. "No, there is no hunger so insatiable as the unnatural hunger of abundance, no knowledge so dissatisfied as the defiling knowledge of riches and abundance."⁹⁸

In one of the concluding paragraphs S.K. gets at the root sin:

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁹⁶ Loc. cit.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

And what then is the temptation which comprises the many temptations? It is, by doing away with God, to cease to be a man; instead of being purer than the innocent bird, to be godforsaken, worse than being bestially defiled, to sink lower than the beast; poorer than the poorest slave of the heathen, to serve in the most miserable and senseless thralldom, in abundance to slave for meat and drink, in wealth to slave for money, a curse to oneself, to nature an abhorrence, to the race a defilement. . . . When one is rich there is only one way of becoming rich: that of becoming ignorant of one's riches, of becoming poor. The bird's way is the shortest, that of the Christian is most blessed. According to the teaching of Christianity, there is only one rich man, namely, the Christian; everyone else is poor, both the poor man and the rich.⁹⁹

In this sermon, while there are no direct personal references to himself, there is an overall personal flavor. One senses that Kierkegaard speaks with authority. He was wealthy. He did not worship material things. He realized that his true wealth was to be found in heaven. Therefore by faith he was able to spare himself the anxiety that is inherent in the wealth that the heathen possess. Here is the note of victory.

"The Weaker, The Stronger." The sermon with this title develops the theme that there is positive joy in the fact that the weaker one becomes, the stronger God becomes in him. S.K. addresses this discourse specifically to sufferers, trying to encourage them. If the sufferer looks at himself and discovers how weak he is, then he is not happy, but if he would look away from his own weakness to perceive what it really means to become weak -- that God becomes strong in Him when he becomes weak --

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 38-39.

this will make him joyful. God shows His great love by making us something in apposition to Himself. But in so doing, God also requires something from man.

Here we have the reciprocal relationship. If a man would selfishly keep for himself this something which love made him to be, and would selfishly be something, then, in a worldly sense, he is strong -- but God is weak. And it is almost as if the poor loving God were duped: with incomprehensible love God has gone ahead and made man something -- and thereupon man dupes Him and holds on to this as if it were his own.¹⁰⁰

The worldly man thinks that he is strong. He is confirmed in this belief by other people's worldly judgment. God is therefore weak in him. The Christian, on the other hand, falls into no such error, for he surrenders his independence. He exists for God, and the Lord sometimes helps him in this respect by taking from him his dearest one,

. . . by wounding him in the tenderest spot, by denying him his only wish, by depriving him of his last hope -- then he is weak. . . . He is weak, but God is strong. He, the weak man, has relinquished entirely this something which love made him to be, he has whole-heartedly consented to it that God took from him everything there was to be taken. God only waits for him to give lovingly and humbly his glad consent, and therewith to relinquish it completely, then he is entirely weak -- and then God is strongest. . . .¹⁰¹

At the end of this last statement there is a footnote which the translator, Lowrie, adds: "The perfect sincerity of these discourses appears when one observes that in such a passage as this S.K. describes the path he trod in 'becoming a Christian.'

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 134.

It is evident that he was able to comfort sufferers because he was a sufferer."¹⁰²

The person who is strong without God is the one who is really weak. But when the Christian becomes entirely weak, God becomes strong. "He who worshipping and praising and loving became weaker and weaker, himself of less importance to God than a sparrow, as himself nothing, in him God is stronger and stronger."¹⁰³ Then comes S.K.'s strong point: "And the fact that God is stronger and stronger in him signifies that he is stronger and stronger."¹⁰⁴

Here we see how triumphant S.K. was in his own personal life. Though he had suffered and was to suffer to his dying day, the triumphant note is obvious. Another quotation near the end of this discourse further indicates this:

The worshipper is the weak man; so he must appear to all the others, and this is the humiliating part. He is entirely weak; he is not able like others to make resolutions for a long life, no, he is entirely weak; he is scarcely able to make a resolution for the morrow without adding, 'If God will'. He is not able to rely defiantly upon his own strength, his talents, his gifts, his influence, he is not able to utter proud words about all he is able to do -- for he is able to do nothing at all. This is the humiliating part. But inwardly what bliss! For this weakness of his is a love-secret with God, it is worship. The weaker he becomes, the more genuinely he can pray; and the more genuinely he prays, the weaker he becomes -- and the more blissful.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Loc. cit.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 135.

¹⁰⁴ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 137.

This truth -- which is largely lost sight of -- S.K. has expressed very beautifully and very powerfully. Here is victory in life. Here is true worship -- worship in spirit and in truth, and the truth is that man is entirely weak. Lowrie's footnote establishes this discourses as autobiographical, harking back to the suffering which was so great a part of Kierkegaard's life.

"It Is Blessed Nevertheless . . . To Suffer Derision In A Good Cause." This sermon is taken from the third section of the work, Christian Discourses. This is the polemic section in which S.K. starts to level his heavy artillery against the Church. This discourse is perhaps the one most heavily weighted with his personal problems.

The qualifying phrase from the Beatitudes, from which the text for this sermon is taken, is most important. It must be for a good cause that one is derided, it must be for the sake of righteousness. If these factors are correct then everything else follows and it is blessed to suffer derision.¹⁰⁶

Following the sentence, "It is blessed therefore to suffer derision in a good cause," there is a footnote by Lowrie that is revealing and speaks right to our point:

It becomes clearer and clearer that S.K. was moved to comfort the sufferer from derision by the comfort with which he himself was comforted of God for the derision he

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 229.

suffered from the Corsair, suffering, as he often said, 'in a good cause'. And surely he chose here to use the word 'derision', rather than a term which to us might seem more serious, like mocking, scorn, reviling, or persecution, because it was only derision he had suffered. Only! Hundreds of pages of the Journal reveal how keenly he suffered from the 'beastly grin', and from being 'trampled to death by geese'.¹⁰⁷

The derided man is bereft of all human companionship. He has only God. But ". . . -- ah, how blessed to be alone so as to have God; blessed be all the persecution, the scorn, the mockery which taught him . . . to be alone with God, to have God as his only possession."¹⁰⁸ Thus it is blessed to suffer derision in a good cause.

The question is then raised, what if Christ were to come again? Would He be received? "It has almost become a by-word in Christendom that if Christ were to come again He would encounter the same fate as before when He came to the non-Christians."¹⁰⁹ The Church has triumphed outwardly over the world. There remains to it only one triumph yet unrealized. It must triumph over itself. It must become Christian. Here is the keynote of the Attack waged against the Church seven years later.

There are few genuine Christians in the Church. Those few are militant, and being militant, they are derided and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 230.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 235.

despised. Being despised they come under the commendation of Luke 6:26, which says, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! For in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets." S.K. says this is what Christianity means, ". . . (and if this is not its meaning, there is no meaning in Christianity), that a man should live his life in such a decisive way . . . that it is impossible all might speak well of him."¹¹⁰

Thus it is a "paltry inheritance of renown" which a man leaves after him, when all men speak well of him. Rather,

. . . it is a judgment: woe unto him that he succeeded! It must have been either a base inhuman man, or it must have been a false prophet. . . It is blessed to suffer derision in a good cause, and this is Christianity.

Is this difficult to understand? By no means. . . . The difficulty with Christianity emerges whenever it is to be made present and actual, whenever it is uttered as it is, and uttered now, at this instant, and to them, precisely to them who are now living. Hence it is that people are so eager to keep Christianity at some little distance. Either they will not express it exactly as it is (that is one way of keeping it at a distance), or they will let it remain indefinite whether it is addressed quite to those who now are living.¹¹¹

S.K. ends this discourse with a typical display of his famous irony which firmly clinches his point:

. . . Imagine an assembly of world-minded, timorous people, whose highest law in everything was a servile regard for what others, what 'one', would think and judge, whose only concern was the unchristian concern that 'one'

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 236.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 236-237.

might everywhere 'speak well of them', whose loftiest aim was to be just like the others, whose only enthusiasm and only fear-inspiring idea was the majority, the crowd, its applause. . . . -- imagine such an assembly of the adorers and worshippers of the fear of man, hence an assembly of the honoured and esteemed (for how could such people not honour and esteem one another? To honor the other is in fact to flatter oneself) -- and imagine that this assembly (yes, it's like a comedy), that this assembly is to be regarded as Christian. Before this assembly the sermon is preached on the words, 'It is blessed to suffer derision in a good cause!'

But it is blessed to suffer derision in a good cause!112

At the time of the writing of this discourse, S.K. had already suffered the abuse and derision of the mob, brought about by the personal attack upon him by The Corsair. He had learned from that incident and was therefore better prepared and equipped to face the conditions which were engendered by his own attack upon the Church in 1854-55. Suffering was necessary. It was his rightful lot. He combed the Scriptures for every passage which linked suffering with the reality of his own existence.

"Come Unto Me!" This is a sermon from the series of seven written as a preparation for the reception of Holy Communion. We select this one to discuss here because it is one of the few sermons written by Kierkegaard that he actually preached. This discourse was preached in the cathedral at Copenhagen, where is the famous Torwaldsen statue which depicts Christ extending a welcome with outstretched arms. On the base

112 Ibid., p. 238.

of the statue is the inscription COME UNTO ME. Thus, in preaching on this famous text (Matt. 11:28), S.K. had the advantage of being able to point to the famous statue which so vividly indicates the warm, welcoming heart of the Lord Christ. This is a charming meditation full of grace. His approach is fresh.

'Come hither, all ye that labor and are heavy laden.' A strange invitation. For commonly when men assemble for joy or for united labor they say, it is true, to the strong and the joyful, 'Come hither, take part with us, unite your strength with ours.' But of the afflicted person they say, 'No, we will not have him with us, he only spoils the joy and retards the work.' Oh, yes, the afflicted man understands this well enough without need of hearing it told to him; and so perhaps many an afflicted person goes off by himself alone, will not take part with others lest he spoil their fun or retard their labor. But then this invitation however, to all them that labor and are heavy laden, must apply to him, since it applies to all the afflicted; how could any afflicted person say in this instance, 'No, this invitation does not apply to me'?¹¹³

"All that labor" applies to all men, not merely to those who toil for their living by the sweat of their brow. It includes all who struggle with sad thoughts, with doubt, difficulties, and sadness.

When inviting those that labor and are heavy laden, the Gospel does not mean ". . . that there are some, however, to whom this invitation does not apply because they are whole and have not need of a physician."¹¹⁴ The Gospel invites all. It is not willing to be a by-path.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 269.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 270.

. . . no, it addresses itself to all, and it requires that every man shall know what it is to labor and be heavy laden. Accordingly, even if thou wast the most fortunate of men, so fortunate, alas, that thou art envied by many, the Gospel addresses itself no less certainly to thee, requiring thee to labor and be heavy laden. Or if, without being the most fortunate man, a man especially favoured, thou art living in happy contentment, with thy dearest wishes fulfilled, and without want, the Gospel addresses itself no less certainly to thee with the requirement of the invitation. Or, on the contrary, if thou wast sitting in earthly want and need, this does not indicate thee as the one to whom the Gospel speaks. Yea, if thou wert so wretched that thou wert to become a proverb, yet this does not indicate thee as the one to whom the Gospel speaks.¹¹⁵

So the invitation cannot be taken in vain. It means that each guest must labor and be heavy laden. That means "there is a sorrow unto God."¹¹⁶ This sorrow has nothing to do with outward circumstances.

. . . He who bears this sorrow quietly and humbly in his heart, he it is that labors. And there is a heavy burden; no worldly power can lay it upon thy shoulders, but neither can any man, any more than thou thyself, take it off. It is the guilt and the consciousness of sin. He who bears this burden, alas, he is laden, and heavy laden, but yet precisely so laden as the Gospel requires.¹¹⁷

The invitation of the Gospel, besides containing a demand that man comes heavy laden, announces also a promise, "I will give you rest." That is exactly what the weary laborer wants. Thus Christ gives the only rest the penitent wants, and that is forgiveness. Thus the Inviter, Christ, is not merely the spiritual pastor. He is the Savior. He still stands and invites man

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 270-271.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 271.

¹¹⁷ Loc. cit.

to come heavy laden with the consciousness of sin. He gives rest.

Here again we sense in these pages the authority of one who has experienced all of these things. S.K. knows with great certainty the loveliness of this precious word, "Come unto me." He himself went and was cleansed.

"What We Learn from the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air." Kierkegaard actually wrote three series of sermons using the same text and developing the same theme. Two series are included in the volume Christian Discourses. The third series is included in the volume which bears the title, The Gospel of Suffering, recently published by Augsburg Publishing House.

The basic idea which S.K. explores in this third series (considered the most important of the three) is the over-all serenity that the Christian should experience when he has the faith to seek first the kingdom of God. The three sermons are built around the three ideas of contentment, glory, and happiness. These are the elements of the wonderful Christian hope.

S.K. talks to the person who is troubled, and in the first discourse, "Contentment with our Common Humanity," tries to bring the joyful message to him by telling him to look to the lilies and the birds as most wonderful teachers. You neither pay them with money nor with humiliation, and they remain silent "out of consideration for the troubled."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Kierkegaard, The Gospel of Suffering, op. cit., p. 170.

Look at the common lily of the field. Do not think of the rare plant which the gardener cultivates in his garden. Notice how this common lily grows. Though no one takes care of it, yet it does not have to toil harder than the rare plant which is tended by a gardener. The Bible says, "They toil not." Yet even King Solomon, noted for his sartorial genius, was not arrayed so beautifully as the common lily.¹¹⁹

The lily does not compare itself with other lilies, that they are more fortunate than it. Hence what does the concerned individual learn from the lilies?

He learns to be satisfied with the fact of being human, and not to be disturbed about the distinctions between man and man. . . .

All worldly concern is at bottom due to the fact that a man is not satisfied with the fact of being human, that by means of the comparison he anxiously desires to be different.
 . . .¹²⁰

By considering the birds of the air, the Christian arrives at contentment over the fact of being human. The bird concerns himself not in the least about past or future harvests. It has no anxiety for the necessities of life. Precisely in this point the bird has contentment. If the bird were to conceive of a future need, it would lose its peace of mind, it would acquire anxiety over these necessities.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 172 f.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 183-184.

The worry about the necessities of life is therefore the snare wherein no external power, no actuality, can catch a man, but wherein only he can ensnare himself, the rich as well as the poor -- if he refuses to be satisfied with the fact of being human.¹²¹

In a summary paragraph S.K. writes:

Thus it already appears that subsistence anxieties result from comparison; here, namely, in the appalling way that the man is not satisfied with being human, but wishes to compare himself with God, wishes to have security through his own efforts, which no man dares to have, which security, therefore, is also precisely the care for the earthly necessities.¹²²

Note also this incisive statement on comparison:

There is frequently carried on in the world a greedy dispute of comparison between man and man about dependence and independence, about the happiness of being independent and the hardship involved in being dependent. And yet, yet human language and human thought have never conceived a more beautiful symbol of independence than -- the poor bird of the air; and yet, yet no speech can be more strange than that it should be so hard to be -- free as a bird! To be dependent on his own wealth, that is dependence and heavy bondage; to be dependent on God, absolutely dependent, that is independence.¹²³

These divinely appointed teachers, the lilies and the birds, teach man godly contentment with his lot in life.

These are powerful thoughts. Was S.K. himself content? Many would say he was of all men the most unhappy, a constant sufferer. We would disagree with that. He suffered much, but he certainly had a keener understanding of contentment than do most men.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 192.

¹²² Ibid., p. 193.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 197.

CONCLUSION

This third chapter attempts to perform the impossible. No one can decide with any degree of absolute certainty why an author wrote what he did. In other words, there is a definite speculative aspect to this chapter. There can be a discussion, if not an argument, over almost each selection that was either quoted or paraphrased.

Yet with all its limitations, the experience of attempting to pin down these devotional concepts to S.K.'s life has proved to be very profitable. A veritable treasure of seed thoughts and illustrations for sermons has been discovered. The writer of this paper has basked for hours and hours in the wonderful spiritual sunlight that bathed S.K.'s life.

The four devotional concepts to which we have limited this study do not by any manner or means exhaust his theological thinking. They certainly define at least some of the major areas of his religious life. Of course, they are nothing new to the Christian, but they do bear the indelible stamp of S.K.'s own experience.

We should like to present a summary statement of these concepts: S.K.'s Lord God is a stern deity, but a loving one. In His scheme of things God expects us to suffer and in fact sees to it that we do. Constantly breaking through the thick clouds of His severity and our suffering are the strong rays of hope and promise. Inwardly we rejoice and therefore have the

desire and the ability to share with others the love which we know. As a matter of fact, the love we know does not take root until we share it, until we perform the works of love. S.K. pours out the utmost scorn upon all cant and mediocrity within the church. Obviously, the necessity for these emphases is timeless.

A dominant note in Kierkegaard's thinking that impressed itself upon the writer is the positive optimism we formerly did not believe was in S.K.'s writing. There is a quite popular conception of him which makes references to him as "the gloomy Dane," "a morbid thinker," and "pessimist." These criticisms are untrue, we can say with some degree of authority, at least as regards S.K.'s Christian literature, more specifically the later discourses. When Haecker's statement, quoted above, is kept in mind, that the real Kierkegaard is to be found in the religious discourses, then we can say that the negative epithets hurled in S.K.'s direction reflect an incomplete knowledge of his Christian writings.

One is overwhelmed again and again by the positive Christian hope which is to be found everywhere in these discourses. True, there is severity and sternness, but that is always offset and balanced with God's love and the hope He extends in our direction. S.K. does emphasize the fact that as far as God is concerned, man is always in the wrong, but he does this in order to induce the classic Christian response, repentance and faith. It can certainly be said that Kierkegaard

"rightly divides the Word of truth," as St. Paul instructed young Timothy to do. (II Timothy 2:15) There is balance between law and gospel, sin and grace.

An important idea that must always be kept in mind when reading S.K., we discovered from Walter Lowrie, is the extreme distaste which S.K. bore toward the inferior brand of Christianity that was being perpetrated by the Danish Church one hundred years ago. With this clearly before the reader, it becomes evident why S.K. had to denounce and lament the Church at the top of his lungs and with, at times, vitriolic language. He had to make himself heard. He had the true prophetic consciousness. This fact is lost sight of by those who hastily denounce him as a morbid pessimist and dismiss him as a gloomy psychopath.

That Kierkegaard overstated his case is no doubt correct. What reformer in seeking to turn the tides of history and counteract overwhelming floods of popular opinion has not made the same error! S.K. very definitely considered himself a reformer. He felt that his task was greater than Luther's. He would free man inwardly from mediocre Christianity where Luther freed man outwardly from the shackles of slavery to the Roman Church. Thus S.K. loosed his whirlwind of literature; but it spent itself. He was unsuccessful. Denmark did not heed him. He felt and was unappreciated. He made the statement that the only thing that was wrong with the Danish language was that it lacked Danes. His audience was too small for his message.

Kierkegaard's Christian literature is, as he termed it, decisive, unmistakably clear in its ethical and spiritual implications, and Christian to the core.

The inherent value in these discourses lies in their artless humility, even when S.K.'s figures of speech conjure up the most exciting and brilliant pictures. As a writer he is an honest craftsman who does not fall in love with the tools of his trade, namely words, but dedicates them to the high purpose of constructing a temple of thought to the glory of God. Nowhere did we discover cleverness for the sake of cleverness. Yet, consistently shining through the translation are proofs that S.K. was extremely clever.

Clearly he was a man of conviction and purpose. He was a man of one idea. His purpose was to re-introduce Christianity into Christendom. S.K.'s Point of View makes it clear that the purpose of all of his writings was a religious one. His ethical and esthetic works were merely designed to engage those who occupy those levels of thinking, and to lead them, as the Psalmist says, to the "rock that is higher." (Psalm 61:2)

Kierkegaard's niche in the history of Christian thinking is assured because his message is timeless, since it occupies itself with the pure Christian categories. He is assured a place also in philosophy because of what he did to Hegel and his "Both/And." The psychologists also rightly claim him because he mapped the uncharted sea of the soul. As a writer he will be admired as long as men respect the clever and original turn of phrase. Soren Kierkegaard cannot be forgotten.

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