

A DIALOGUE OF DEVOTION

IT came to pass on Sunday morn
When the Parish Mass was done,
The men of Woodstock all went home,
And the women every one,
But Hugh the Glover set out north
By the banks of Glyme alone.

The sun shone hot on stem and stone,
The robin sang on the thorn,
The last mist lifted off the grass
Was tree-top high that morn,
When he doffed his shoes by Wootton Church
That stands high on a rocky perch,
Where the Glyme runs into the Dorne.

And barefoot still, by vale and hill,
He took his pilgrim's way,
For the King's Glover of Woodstock
Sought a great grace that day—
To learn of the Anker of Dornford
Wherein Devotion lay.

Now Hugh the Glover was a rich burghess of Woodstock, high in the favour of King John and his peers. He had a fair, cheerful wife; six sons and two daughters; and a large two-storied house with an arched door and a gabled roof. But for all this he had been ill at ease for a long time, because he did not know the meaning of the word 'Devotion.' I do not say he could not hazard a guess at it—most of

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us could do as much—but he did not think that was the right way to approach so noble a word. And every time he heard Mass—which was almost every day of his life—and the priest prayed for Hugh the Glover and all the other bystanders '*quorum tibi fides cognita est, et nota devotio,*' 'whose faith is known to Thee and known their devotion,' it troubled the good burgess not a little, that he who held the Faith so clearly should have so dim a grasp of Devotion. So he set out to speak to the anchorite (or anker, as he called him), who having given up more to God, he thought, than anybody else in the neighbourhood, was sure to know more about such high matters than those less dedicated to perfection. And herein the Glover of Woodstock judged wisely; for, all things being equal, the solitary's life is (as St. Thomas says) the most perfect life of all.

The abode of the Anker of Dornford was a square stone cell, with windows in the front and flanks, and a walled orchard in the rear. The north window was covered with horn, and let in a dim but constant light. The east window was heavily shuttered and barred, and curtained with leather, and let in what speech the Anker had with the outside world and what food was bestowed on him by the faithful. And the south window was quaintlier shuttered and lightlier barred, and curtained with an old banner of the Holy Face; and this let in the Light and Food of his soul whenever the Anker received Our Blessed Lord at the hands of the Curate of Wootton. The Glover knocked at the shutter of the east window; and as soon as it was unlatched, which was not for some little while, for the Anker within was busied with his psalms and orisons, he knelt on the worn earth under the window and asked the holy man's blessing. Then, without more ado, he began as follows:—

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HUGO :

' O Blesséd Recluse, I would know
What thing Devotion is?
Much of the matter I have heard,
All twisted and amiss;
Then how beholden should I be,
Would'st thou but show me this.'

Cor sapientis quaerit doctrinam.

ANCHORITA :

' Devotion standeth in man's soul
With shoes of swiftness shod,
'Tis thy prompt will to yield thyself
To the high hests of God,
'Tis the surrender of desire
To serve His lightest nod.'

*Devotio nihil esse videtur, quam voluntas
quaedam prompte tradendi se ad ea quae per-
tinent ad Dei famulatum.*

HUGO :

' "Yield" is a word I know of old
And plainly understand,
I yield me to the touch of Love
As the first curves of a shapely glove
Yield to a gentle hand;
"Surrender" hath a craven sound!
To hand me over gagged and bound!
How may so base a doom be found
With a man's pride to stand?'

Non trades servum domino suo.

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ANCHORITA :

‘ No true Devotion can there be
If will is overborne,
Thou must surrender like a bride
Upon her wedding morn,
Like a city opening wide its gates
At the sound of a king’s horn.’

*Attollite portas principes vestras, et eleva-
mini portae aeternales; et introibit rex gloriae.*

‘ Thy will is all the wealth thou hast
To give or to withhold,
For He who takes, as thou may’st see,
This thing or that away from thee,
Leaves thee thy soul’s full liberty
Secure and uncontrolled.
Devotion keeps not back one grain;
She is God’s loving-cup to drain,
His managed steed to spur or rein;
His purse to spend (if He but deign)
To the last piece of gold.’

*Tua sunt omnia, et quae de manu tua accepi-
mus, dedimus tibi.*

HUGO :

‘ Aye, that is plain, beyond a doubt,
But how to bring this will about,
Which is so rare to find?
Is it God’s work or man’s own wit?
Hath man no part but to submit?
Or may he help or hinder it,
According to his mind?’

Oblatus est quia ipse voluit.

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ANCHORITA :

‘Two causes give Devotion birth,
Both God and man take part :
The Spirit bloweth where He will,
And man may greet or grudge Him still,
Welcome or shun the dart :
But blest are they that hear the Word
And keep the message they have heard,
Pondering it in their heart.’

*At ille dixit: Quinimo beati, qui audiunt
verbum Dei et custodiunt illud.*

‘’Tis Meditation, then, shall wing
Devotion for her flight—
For every wilful deed doth spring
Out of some sort of pondering
On what is wrong and right.
Thy thought of God shall lay the fire
His grace shall set alight,
Devotion clap her hands for mirth
And bring more wood to keep the hearth
Kindled both day and night.’

In meditatione mea exardescet ignis.

HUGO :

‘The thought of God lay in my mind,
A seed too small to see
(Lost in my towering lust and pride
And greed for mastery)
Which now hath thrust such branches forth
And grown so great a tree.’

*Quod minimum quidem est omnibus semi-
nibus; cum autem creverit maius est omnibus
oleribus.*

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‘ Like a vast cedar in my soul
It holds the ground alone,
And all my wishes haunt its shade,
This carols like a thrush in glade,
This hath a ring-dove’s moan;
Now sorry is my soul, now glad,
Two notes my heart hath, gay and sad—
Which is Devotion’s own?’

Laetamini cum Jerusalem, et exultate in ea omnes, qui diligitis eam: gaudete cum ea gaudiis universi, qui lugetis super eam.

ANCHORITA :

‘ Chiefly Devotion causeth joy,
But grief thou can’st not miss;
Thoughts of God’s goodness first awake
Thy will to put thy life at stake,
And all thou hast for His sweet sake,
There is great joy in this.
But sorrow follows hard apace,
Because thou hast so long a race
To run before thou see’st His Face
Who is thy Only Bliss.’

Nam et in hoc ingemiscimus, habitationem nostram, quae de caelo est, superindui cupientes.

‘ And if thy failings and thyself
Be first and foremost shown,
Then nought but sorrow seems in sight,
So hard and hopeless is thy plight
To strive for such a crown;
But joy unbounded shall succeed,
For God is greater than thy need,

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And Adam's sin, O blithe misdeed!
Hath brought thy Saviour down.'

*O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit
habere redemptorem!*

HUGO :

'Here too a mist unscattered clings—
For if in thought of holy things
Devotion hath most skill,
The wisest wit, the theme most high,
The sage that writes his ink-pot dry
Upon the Blessed Trinity
Should sweetliest yield his will;
Yet know I many a simple dame,
Or crack-brained beggar, old and lame,
That scarce can lisp the Holy Name
Loves Our Lord better still.'

*. . . quia abscondisti haec a sapientibus et
prudentibus, et revelasti ea parvulis.*

ANCHORITA :

'Two answers hast thou here besought—
What kind of thinker and what thought
Best find Devotion's clue?
The greatest thought is God above,
And He, Almighty Truth and Love,
Has most of all our mind to move,
If He were clear to view;
But we for weakness cannot see
Without Our Lord's Humanity,
Who taught us "Whoso seeth Me
Seeth the Father too."'

*Et qui videt me, videt eum qui misit me
. . . nemo venit ad Patrem, nisi per me.*

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'The thought is strong, the thinker weak,
Yet if a man can keep him meek,
All mortal wit and wisdom eke
Devotion's wide estate;
Thou see'st the witless serf adore,
Thou see'st the learned vaunt their store,
Thou think'st they therefore love God more
Whom nothing can elate.
Yet saint on shining saint has shown
That by each gift a man may own,
Sought, held and used for God alone,
Devotion grows more great.'

*Ait illi Jesus: Diliges Dominum Deum
tuum ex toto corde tuo, et in tota anima tua,
et in tota mente tua.*

HUGO :

'Aye, there again—I hear men pray
And with Devotion, as they say,
To that saint or to this;
Is it Devotion we bestow
On God's high favourites here below
And in the courts of bliss?'

Non habebis deos alienos coram me.

ANCHORITA :

'Men are devout, as thou hast said,
To all God's friends alive and dead,
For love of Him Whose love and dread
Have filled them to the brim:
He is the virtue of each gem,
His saints are but His vesture's hem,
Devotion does not end in them
But passes on to Him.'

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. . . *et tetigit fimbriam vestimenti ejus*
. . . *et ait Jesus: Quis est qui me tetigit.*

‘For He thy God, the Lord of Lords,
Himself hath taught by deeds and words
Devotion to mankind,
Who gave the world up to our will
With all its wealth to save or spill,
To love or leave behind.’

Tradidit nobis terram lacte et melle.

‘Then as a man who far doth fare
Puts treasure in his servants’ care
To squander or control,
He added to our mortal dower
All mortal beauty, wit and power,
And an immortal soul.’

*Vocavit servos suos et tradidit illis bona
sua.*

‘And when the world and we therein
Were brought to nought by wilful sin,
He yielded up His Son to win
Our souls and set us free;
Who sought in all things to fulfil
Our welfare and His Father’s will,
From Bethlehem’s stable to the hill
Of bitter Calvary.

*Qui dilexit me et tradidit semetipsum pro
me.*

‘And He before that worst of ends,
As one who from a world of friends
Unwillingly departs,

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Yielded Himself to dwell in bands
The captive of His own commands,
Surrendered to anointed hands
And to adoring hearts.'

Hoc est corpus meum quod pro nobis tradetur.

When the anchorite had said this he had said everything: and Hugh the Glover knew he had heard the last word on Devotion. So he asked and received another benediction, and with a light heart betook himself home.

HELEN PARRY EDEN.