

The Stained-Glass Window

BY THE REV. CANON SALTER



THE other day I paid a visit to a country town in the centre of which stood a well-kept churchyard surrounding a church that was obviously loved and cared for by its people. A noble spire pointed men's thoughts up to God above, and the clock beneath it reminded men that here on earth we spend our years as a tale that is told. But I had to confess as I wandered round the building that it looked dingy and dirty from the outside. The east window, for example, was drab and dull and uninteresting with its discoloured protecting wire netting and its accumulation of dirt. As I stood there a middle-aged parson stopped and spoke to me. He said: "Have you seen that window from the inside? Church windows, you know, are parables of the Christianity they portray. The only way to appreciate a church window—and the only way to judge true religion—is to see it from the inside. It's only from that standpoint you can understand its true meaning and message."

He led me inside the House of God, and I quickly realized how true his words were. What a transformation! The east window was a masterpiece. Its sheer beauty took my breath away for a moment. What from the outside had looked drab and dull was now inspiring and uplifting. It was a representation of the Ascension of our Lord. A majestic Figure looked lovingly down on His friends below as they, with an air of expectancy, looked up at Him. On the sides of the upper half of the

window were faces of young angels smiling at Him and them. In the right-hand bottom corner was a cluster of trees and flowers to remind men of the beauties of God's wonderful world, and in the left-hand bottom corner was a scroll with the words "Fides et Fortitudo" (Faith and Fortitude). It took me some minutes to take in all the symbolism of this picture, and my friend wisely allowed me to gaze at it in silence.

As we made our way to the church door, he turned to me and said: "Perhaps now you see my meaning when I say that the only way to judge a church window, just as it is the only way to judge Christianity, is from the inside. You cannot fail to have noticed the big difference between the stained-glass window looked at from the inside and from the outside. I often feel the same is true of Christ and His Church. Outsiders cannot possibly appreciate the value of Christian worship or the power of Christ at work in the lives of those who believe in Him and in His way of life. Armchair critics talk about the failure of Christianity in the modern world. They see the external forms of religion only. Those of us who have experienced the love of God and the power of Christ within us, know that such a faith really works. I defy any man to come inside the Church and to put the power of Christ to the test in his own life and then to fail to see its splendour and beauty."

I have been haunted by that stained-glass window ever since. I can still see those eyes of the Master looking into mine, and His smile still radiates a feeling of optimism in my soul. The expectant upward gaze of His friends still makes me, too, want to lift up my own heart in adoration and worship. Surely those two words, faith and fortitude, are just the guiding lights we need to help us along the road of life in these days when every man wants the help of God and real moral courage to enable him to face life's battles.

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