

Have You A Soul?

By Daniel A. Lord S.J.

"I've just had a horrible thought."

Bradley père from his vantage point before the large fireplace surveyed the group of his intimates, confident that his sentence would create a sensation.

Sue Bradley, one of the twins, giggled disrespectfully. She loved to see her father dramatise himself. No man could resist the temptation to self-dramatisation when he stood with a real log fire behind him and the right sympathetic audience in front of him, and, tonight, the audience was both right and sympathetic.

There was Mrs. Bradley, who had, through the years, cultivated a charming receptivity to her husband's conversation. There was Dick, the other twin, who sat with his back against the huge lounge and let himself be pleasantly hypnotised by the snap of the log fire. There were the McDermotts and the Fosters, who, peacefully relaxed, sat sipping their after-dinner coffee; these were old friends, who dined with the Bradleys almost every second month, friends with whom conversation was pleasant and the interchange of experiences both casual and intimate.

And in a deep corner of the lounge, his face restfully turned toward the fire, was Father Hall, who had come to town for a week's negotiations with his publisher.

Horrible Thought.

"Yes," said the senior Bradley, for he saw that his line had fallen on alert ears, and he was quite willing to repeat it, "I've had a horrible thought."

"My darling," his wife cried, in mock sympathy, "do say an ejaculation."

"Wrong guess," he said, swaying on his heels in approved master-of-the-house fashion. (A pity, mused Sue, that he isn't wearing tails; he could put his hands under them and flop them after the fashion of an English duke in a Broadway comedy of manners.) "in fact, horrible as the thought is, it borders on the devotional."

"That's your field, Father Hall." Kevin McDermott, who looked like a matured tennis champion and was a tobacco broker, laughed. "Tell Father Hall your horrible thought," he said to Mr. Bradley, in mock patronising tones.

The rest of the group clamoured to hear it, and Mr. Bradley accepted this as proof that he was playing his scene well.

Not At All Sure.

"Well," he explained "all my life I've been trying to save my soul. And it just occurred to me that I'm really not sure that I have a....."

"Darling!" cried his wife, in quick protest. "You're one of the biggest-souled men in the world."

He bowed elaborately.

"Trust my wife to say just the right thing," he said, with an all inclusive gesture. "But—if I may be permitted an aphorism—to flatter my disposition is not to appeal to my brain. And I'm darned if I know whether or not I've a soul."

Evan Foster waved a coffee spoon in the direction of Father Hall.

"You're just wasting your time exhorting this doubting brother to guard against the loss of his soul."

Not Doubts.

"Hey," protested Mr. Bradley, "don't get me wrong! I don't doubt that I have a soul; in fact, I'm convinced that I have one. What I meant was this: If anybody stopped me in the street and said, 'Look here, old man, how do you go about proving that you have a soul?', I'd be as dumb as a turtle. Of course, I have a soul. And Father Hall has convinced me that I ought to save the doggone thing."

"Better not tie that adjective to your soul," cautioned Sheila Foster. "Sounds too much like—"

Her husband raised a warning hand. "You may skip telling us what it sounds like, honey," he said. "We all got it."

Mrs. Bradley stepped into the situation with her usual firmness.

"Doesn't the Bible prove that we have a soul?" she asked. "Didn't Our Lord tell us to save our souls? Didn't He die so that we wouldn't lose them? That's enough to satisfy me."

Vicious Circle.

Her husband fixed her with a stern, reproving eye.

"There you go, arguing in a vicious circle."

"Darling," she protested, "the circles in which I move are delightful and not in the least bit vicious."

"This one is vicious," retorted her husband. "You use the Bible to prove that you have a soul by declaring that the Bible tells you that you ought to save your soul. A equals B because B clearly equals A."

"I don't get it," said Mrs. Bradley, emphatically.

"We do," cried Sue, who had exchanged a quick glance with her twin.

"What's more," added Dick, "dad's absolutely right. I'll bet that if anybody asked me to prove that I have a soul, I'd start stuttering like a telegraph key. And so"—he cast a sweeping glance of accusation about the group around the fireplace—"would the rest of you."

Just Accept It.

"I didn't know that you had to prove that you have a soul" Alma McDermott was very puzzled. "I just accepted the fact. Why should you want to prove it?"

"Because," explained Bradley, "so darn many people think they have no soul. At least, they say that they haven't one." He turned abruptly to Father Hall. "Materialists is what they call them, isn't it, Father?"

The priest nodded. "Correct. Russia and Red Mexico and large sections of what we call civilised nations and many a professor of psychology—all of them think that a soul is as out of fashion as a banshee and just as fictitious."

"Oh," inserted Sheila Foster, who tried hard to live up to the Irish in her name and her blood, "I believe in banshees. I had an old aunt who.—"

"Don't get started on banshees," commanded her husband. He looked at the group in appeal. "If she starts telling you about that aunt that used to take tea with the good little people and was on intimate terms with a leprechaun—...she'd never let us get back to talking about souls."

Confusion Compounded.

Kevin McDermott stirred his coffee thoughtfully.

"I had that same thought about souls some years ago. I suddenly realised that if anybody backed me into a corner and told me that I had to prove that I had a soul, or else, I'd be obliged to accept the or else.

I looked up some books on the subject. "Lord, what a muddle they threw me into! The Catholic books seemed the worst to me. They all started off, not by proving to me that I had a soul, but by proving to me that the fellows who said I didn't have a soul were all cuckoo. And by the time I was half finished reading about the things that these non-Catholics hold and don't hold, I was the guy that was cuckoo."

His voice was so despairful that they all laughed in sympathy.

"What a lot of junk I waded through!" he said, ruefully. "It seems that one set of people say that I haven't any soul at all and another set say that I'm nothing but a soul."

"My big, husky man, nothing but a ghostly soul?" his wife almost shrieked. "How horrible!"

All Kinds of Souls.

"A lot of 'em seemed to think that there was no such thing as an individual soul, but that the world was full of one big

soul that flowed through our brains as water flows through faucets.”

“Explaining water on the brain?” wisecracked Evan Foster. The rest of the group groaned him into silence.

“Some said that thought was merely a nerve vibration,” Kevin continued, “and some said thought was a manifestation of a world soul. Some said we thought only about words and not about universal ideas. I was dizzy when I’d finished reading the books, and I’ll be darned if I ever reached the point where an author proved that I do have a soul. Of course, I quit. So when our host begins wondering whether or not he has a soul, I’m in the same boat.”

The group lapsed into a moment’s silence. It really did seem silly to think that while they were, like all good Catholics, busy trying to save their souls, in the face of the thousands of people who claimed that there were no such things as souls, they couldn’t even prove that they had one.

Was there any logical proof? Or did they simply have to take God’s word for the soul’s existence?

Mr. Bradley walked across the room and sat down in an easy chair. He was the stage manager; he had set the stage for the act that he hoped would follow. He was the actor who had rung up the curtain with a mighty good speech and who was now content to let someone else take centre stage. He was, above all else, the puzzled Catholic who had been made to realise that he was ignorant about a subject that worried him and left him decidedly troubled. Well, he had tossed the problem into the hands of his good friend, Father Hall. Let the priest, who sat pleasantly relaxed, the light of the fire brightly playing across one half of his keen, alert face, solve the problem.

Not Surprised.

Father Hall held a match to the large bowl of his pipe. He was among friends who understood his after-dinner preference for his pipe and his disdain of the host’s expensive cigars. Father pulled the smoke into his mouth, appreciatively; then he flicked out the flame of the match.

“Well,” he began, “I’m not surprised.”

“Not surprised at what?” demanded Kevin McDermott.

“Not surprised that no one in this crowd of educated Catholics could - in a pinch prove that he has a soul. Of course, one of these days Dick and Sue will be studying in their Catholic-college psychology class the proofs for the existence of the soul. But I’m sometimes amazed when I realise how many people there are who get callouses on their knees, saving souls whose existence they accept on faith, and how many there are who have never even stopped to wonder whether they could prove from reason that they have a soul to save. It’s one of the startling phenomena of Catholic thinking or shall we call it Catholic lack of thinking?”

Everyone in the group stirred uncomfortably, even though Father Hall’s voice was entirely without bitterness or resentment. Their guilty consciences were prodding them.

Can It Be Proved?

“Can it be proved from reason that we have a soul?” put in Alma McDermott, timidly.

“Certainly it can be proved. Why the Bible is built up around the fact of a human soul. Genesis recounts the story of God’s breathing into the newly- formed body of man ‘a living soul,’ thus making him in the image of his Maker; the Gospels end with the stories of Christ’s sending the Apostles into the whole world to save souls and to bring them into the eternal kingdom of heaven, where, while the bodies lay sleeping in the earth, the souls would be endlessly happy—‘this day . . . with me in Paradise.’ From beginning to end the Bible accepts the soul as the second great reality. The first reality is God. The second is the human soul.

“But that’s only the beginning; or, rather, to put it more accurately, it’s a mere confirmation of something that men would know and understand about themselves even if there were no Bible. You see, human history is certainly clear on at least this one point: that the vast majority of all men of all times have believed that they have something that is beyond and above and independent of—to some extent—the body.

Separated by Death.

“The fact of death was and is inescapable. And even the primitives, the Egyptians and the Assyrians and the prehistoric men and the American Indians, laid their dead in some kind of grave. But though the bodies were dead and though everyone had learned from grim and often unpleasant experience how swiftly bodies decayed and became once more part of the earth, none of these people thought that with burial came the end of their dear relatives and friends. Somewhere in another world these dead continued to exist, somewhere where they could eat the food that was placed on their graves or could hunt and talk or could enjoy some sort of paradise or be punished in some sort of hell.

“The dead bodies were there, rotting; that was obvious. But something that was not the body was judged in the moments that followed death, judged because it was the more important part of a man, the part that had been responsible for his goodness or his badness.

Various Names.

“Perhaps not all of these people called this something a soul. But all of them, from the cave men to the pagans of modern Jamaica, who ‘capture’ the souls of their dead in little boxes as they escape from the dead bodies—all men were convinced that there was something in a man that was not his body, something that was superior to his body and was so independent of his body that after the body was dead that something went on living a life that was even more complete than the life it had lived while it was incased in the body. In fact, that something was so tremendously important that it was punished or rewarded according as the man lived a bad or a good life.

“Evidently this something was the thing that made man.

“So, you see, belief in souls is an historic tradition. The Bible is meaningless unless souls do exist. But so is human history and human self-analysis.”

They Made Other Mistakes, So—.

Mr. Bradley shook his head.

“Oh, we’ve given up believing in so many things in which people always used to believe—fairies and ghosts and the sun’s moving round the earth. . . . That argument doesn’t impress me too much.”

Father Hall nodded in partial agreement.

The fact that a great many people agree on a thing doesn’t necessarily prove that the thing is right, unless—”

He paused deliberately and dramatically. That caught their attention, and he pierced the attention with a gesture of his forefinger; “unless their reasons for agreeing on it are compelling, satisfactory reasons.”

They all seemed very full of thought. Even Dick and Sue puckered their young brows in an effort at serious reasoning. Father Hall let them think.

“Then you believe,” interjected Mrs. Bradley, at last unable to stand the too-protracted silence, “that in the case of the soul the reasons were satisfactory?”

Clear Observation.

“Perfect!” replied Father Hall. “You see, long before there were laboratories, men did quite a bit of observing. Sometimes I’m inclined to think that men did more observing along some lines before the invention of microscopes than men have done since that time. But don’t say that I said so.”

“We’ll tell all our friends the first chance we get,” cried Sue. “You’re just an old fogey that doesn’t believe in science.”

“Doesn’t believe in all scientists,” corrected the priest. “Science is wonderful. But often scientists are men who know so much about one thing that they are absolutely blind to everything else.”

He drew in on his pipe and slowly exhaled a ghostlike cloud of smoke.

Different from Animals.

“Well, it didn’t take a heap of acute observing to make men—even very primitive men—realise that they were more than a little different from the animals around them. The tiger might be far more powerful physically than men were, but men had something inside themselves, some cleverness, some mastery of skill, that let them outwit the tiger that could knock them cold with a biff of its paw. Men could build traps. They might be afraid to meet a gorilla in the jungles, but they would have hooted at the suggestion that some gorilla was sitting down in a cave and drawing pictures of men on the wall. Men drew pictures of gorillas; by no stretch of fancy could they imagine gorillas drawing pictures of men.

“They found they had within themselves the power to learn to do almost anything that they saw the animals do. But the animals learned nothing from them. Men were not so swift as was the deer, but men could outwit and kill the deer. The elephant could crush a man with his trunk or his forefoot, but a man could dominate an elephant and force him into slavery. The bird’s nest was a masterpiece of adaptation, but men learned to build houses and temples and palaces that were not only highly serviceable but extraordinarily beautiful. And if anyone had suggested to a primitive tribe that it should invite an ape to sit as a fellow counsellor, or train a dog to act as court physician, or have a chimpanzee as troubadour of the tribe or a beaver as the official architect, men of that tribe would have laughed boisterous, savage laughter.

“Animals, they knew, were different from men. Everyone knew that they were different. They lacked something that man had. And that something lifted man so high above the entire kingdom of animals —strong, fleet, beautiful, clever though those animals were—that between a man and an animal there was no possibility of equality.

Not Their Bodies.

“Now these men were shrewd enough to realise that this superiority was not in their bodies. The deer could outrace any man. The elephant could outwork him. Unarmed, he dared not meet the lion or the gorilla. His hair was not so beautiful as was the plumage of the bird of paradise. His skin could not resist heat and cold and the darts of an enemy as could the skin of a hippo. No; it was not man’s body that made him different. Then what was it?

“Well, they argued quite logically—or so it seems to me—that if it wasn’t their bodies that made the difference, it was something beyond their bodies, something that they possessed in addition to their bodies, something the animals didn’t have. They called it their soul, or they gave it some other name. But whatever they called it, it was the thing that made them men and, making them men, made them masters.

“All you and I have to do is watch a man and an animal tackle any problem or meet in any sort of competition in which the man can use his full manhood and his complete abilities, and we are very much inclined to think that these old ancestors of ours were pretty smart.

What a Difference!

“In fact, I never read that some materialistic scientist is working to prove that there is no essential difference between a man and a monkey without thinking, ‘My friend, I’ll really be impressed when I hear that a monkey has set out to prove conclusively that there is no difference between a monkey and a man.’ Our interest in monkeys is so different from the monkeys’ lack of interest in us that that in itself is almost enough to prove that we are superior to monkeys.”

Bradley, their host, was waiting to object.

“Of course, animals and men are different,” he said. “Man’s brain is more complicated than that of an animal. We’re different, we human beings, because our structure is more elaborate. A monkey is more elaborate than a clam. An ape is more elaborate than an ant. And we are more elaborate than any of the animals. Doesn’t that elaborateness explain our superiority? Why drag in a metaphysical thing like a soul?”

A Principle.

“Dear! dear!” sighed Father Hall. “You say metaphysical as if it were a nasty word. You’ve been reading the

wisecracking unbelievers, my lad. They don't like the word metaphysical. But metaphysical is just a term that we apply to those things that we can't touch or see. Liberty is something that nobody ever saw. It's metaphysical; but, believe me, it's a mighty important thing. Principles are metaphysical. Do you know what we mean here by a principle?"

They didn't answer immediately. It sounded like a trick question. Mr. Bradley took the lead.

"Evidently we're not supposed to know. So just go ahead and explain."

Examples.

Father Hall pulled on his pipe.

"Well, let's fumble around for some examples," he said, looking just a little embarrassed. "I really should have been given some time to get all this in order," he continued. "After all, when a man hasn't studied psychology for almost twenty years .

"No apologies," cried Sue.

"And no alibis," jibed Dick.

"My pals!" The priest groaned and threw up his hands in mock despair.

"Some examples," prompted Mrs. Bradley.

"Well, let's say that a crowd of people, strangers to one another, are sitting in a railroad station. All of a sudden a number of things go wrong. A woman faints. A locomotive throttle refuses to budge. A man sitting on a bench grabs his forehead and enthusiastically starts to scribble on a piece of paper. Two men wax hot in argument; one hits the other, while a third man runs up and collars the first two."

"Sounds like the last reel of a mystery movie," murmured Sue.

You Watch.

"Now you are sitting in the station; you know no one there. You are simply watching. As the woman faints, a man runs up to her, pulls a stethoscope out of his pocket and expertly uses it, gives her something to drink, deftly manipulates her muscles, and presto! the woman is revived. What do you conclude about the man?"

"Why, obviously he's a doctor," cried Alma McDermott.

"All right; let's continue. When word comes that the locomotive throttle is stuck, a man jumps up, climbs into the cab, monkeys with a few gadgets, and lo! the throttle works. He is . . ."

"—an engineer," supplied Sheila Foster.

"Let me continue," interposed Sue. "The man who runs up to the men that are arguing is a detective—"

"Correct. And if another man appears on the scene and offers to get them released."

"He's a lawyer."

"If he isn't a prominent politician with a drag at the city hall." Evan Foster was highly ironic.

Judged by Results.

"In other words," said Father Hall, "we don't know enough about what this last chap did or how he did it to be able to tell what he is. But in the other cases you knew precisely what each man was from watching—"

"—what he did." Mrs. Bradley filled in the blank with an air of embarrassment. It seemed so simple, so simple.

"Correct. But note: You did not see the doctors medical knowledge; you just saw the man practising medicine. You did not see the engineer's mechanical ability; you simply saw the man successfully monkeying with a machine. And monkeying is a very poor word there. For all the possible monkeying that a monkey could do wouldn't get the machine fixed. The policeman made an arrest, but he couldn't show you or the fighting pair his authority. And nobody could see the lawyer's legal knowledge or the politician's 'pull.' You didn't have to see those things. You saw what we call an effect, something done. You knew what was the cause of that effect, and that cause was the knowledge, skill, special ability of each man—which is roughly what we mean by a principle. Get it?"

How About the Writer?

They all nodded.

“Now let’s do a little looking at the way in which some other things work.”

“Hey!” interrupted the male twin. “What about the chap who grabbed his head and started to write?”

“Oh, then you walked over and picked up the paper that he had thrown away.”

“Dick being noseey as usual,” said Sue.

“And it was a scrap of lovely poetry, clearly original.”

“From the moment he grabbed his forehead,” Dick muttered, “I knew he was a poet.” And to Father Hall, “Sorry for the interruption. What are we looking at now?”

Bodies.

“Just a group or cluster of bodies, various kinds of them. In the visible world we have a wide range to pick from, haven’t we? Everything from pebbles to philosophers, from geraniums to germs to gems, from orchids to oysters, from crystals to butterflies—”

“Oh,” cried Sue, “what happened to our alliteration?”

“Sorry,” Father Hall corrected himself, “from crystals to crypts and crustaceans.”

“Excellent!” applauded the twins.

“Now let’s choose a few from this varied range of bodies and make a picture.

“A rock lies under a wide-reaching tree on the side of a hill; near it sheep are feeding, while on the rock sits a shepherd watching his sheep, counting the profits he’ll make when the ewes have lambed and out of the joy of his heart singing a song of his own contriving.”

Pastoral.

“What-ho! Watteau!” was Kevin McDermott’s contribution.

“So, whether they were assembled by a pastoral painter or by our imagination, we have in one spot a rock, a tree, sheep, and a shepherd. Each of these things is quite obviously very different from all the others. The rock lies there, slowly corroded by the passing storms and the heat of the sun. It is, as we say, inanimate. The sheep browse about; they feed on the grass, which is turned by the power of their digestion into flesh and bone and the curling wool upon their backs; they will breed lambs that will be reproductions of themselves, complete in all details; and if these sheep have some accident or other, a little care and nursing will make it possible for their health to be restored.

“Over them hangs the beautiful tree. Its roots reach far down into the soil, and the chemical elements that it pulls out of the earth are incorporated into its growing branches. It drops acorns to the ground, and these acorns are capable of becoming other trees. An axe may damage its bark, but if the damage is not too great, the wound will heal and the tree will continue to thrive.

Sheep and Shepherd.

“Yet the sheep have things which the tree doesn’t have. The sheep recognise their master when he calls. They have a thousand instincts that they exercise without training or experience of any sort. They move about under the impulse of cold and heat and hunger and the desire for water. They follow their master with the fidelity of Mary’s famous lamb.

“Finally, we come to the man. He’s a poet at heart, a maker of songs. He sees the sheep as a means for making money, and for that reason he has decided to breed them. He sits in the shade and thinks of profit, of God, of the sheep he’ll have ten years from now (sheep that have no present existence), of love and beauty, the while he creates a new song out of the sounds that he’s heard around him.”

Enter the Cat.

While Father Hall was talking, a sleek Persian cat wandered into the living room. The cat moved towards Mrs. Bradley, and, with a spring, was in her lap and curled, purring, on her knee.

“Why bother,” the priest said, suddenly, “with imaginary pictures? Everyone, please look at Mrs. Bradley.”

“Easy assignment,” said her husband, gallantly.

“How nice!” she murmured. “I’m either Exhibit ‘A,’ laboratory experiment number 26, or the centre of the stage.”

“You are a charming proof for the existence of the soul,” said the priest. He looked around at the guests. “There is the beautiful chair in which Mrs. Bradley is sitting; there is the corsage of roses that she is wearing; there is the purring cat on her knee; and there is our hostess herself.

“That comes close to being a fair summary of the visible world:

“The inanimate world . . . the chair.

“The vegetable world . . . the roses.

“The animal world . . . the cat.

“The world of human beings . . . our hostess herself.”

They laughingly applauded the picture, and Mrs. Bradley looked immensely pleased.

Ninety-eight Cents Worth.

Father Hall continued.

“Now, as far as the chemical elements that go to make up the human parts of our two pictures—the shepherd on the hillside and the hostess in the midst of her guests—there is not a great deal of difference. You remember the old chemical analysis of a man, don’t you? The fat in his body would make half a dozen bars of soap, the sulphur would furnish heads for a box of matches, the chalk would whitewash a chicken coop, the iron would make a tenpenny nail. I think the total value of my body, chemically speaking, is about ninety-eight cents.”

“Horrible!” murmured Sheila Foster.

“Yes; if that were all there was to it, it would be horrible. And, according to the men who deny that man has a soul, that is all, and it is horrible.”

Not the Same.

The priest held up his hand emphatically. “But all you have to do is study the various kinds of objects, and you’ll see that they are not the same and that chemistry cannot explain the whole of man. The rock is explained by inorganic chemistry. Rocks are acted upon; they do not act. There is no principle in them to make them act. Dirt may pile on a rock and make it larger, but the rock does not feed on that earth. If a rock is cracked or smashed, it stays broken. And by no stretch of the imagination can you conceive of a little chip of a rock taking root and growing into another large rock. Nor can you conceive of the rock’s giving birth to a litter of little stones while it itself remains unchanged.

Alive.

“Now let’s glance at the tree under which the sheep are pasturing. That tree does things that the rock cannot possibly do. We say that it falls within the field of organic chemistry. The tree grows by taking into itself chemicals that it makes part of itself. It has the power of healing its own wounds, if those wounds are not fatal—as when some lover carves a heart and initials in its side or an automobile crashes into it and destroys branches and bark. And, finally, the tree drops seeds that are capable of becoming like the tree from which they fell.

“What is true of the rock is true of the chair in which our hostess sits. And what is true of the tree was true of our hostess’s roses until they were picked from their bush.

“Now let’s take a look at the sheep. The grass that they eat, they make part of themselves. A cut they receive from a barbed-wire fence is healed by the quick action of their own blood. And in time they will be nuzzling the little lambs that

they have developed inside their bodies.

“And, again, what is true of the sheep is true of the cat.

Instinct.

“Did you notice that cat enter the room, move towards the fire, single out his mistress—though she is wearing a new dress that he perhaps never saw before—and go where he knew he’d be petted and played with? Did you ever see a cat stalk a mouse? or hunt a bird? or protect its newborn kittens? or do any of the thousand other things that we call instinctive? Did you ever see an ant build its city? an oriole build its nest? a duck find its way from the north to the far south? a dog sniff his master and fawn upon him? a bear go into his hole for the winter?

“Now we maintain that these things that a tree does, but that a stone cannot do, show that the tree is alive and the stone dead. There is a life principle in the tree which makes the tree capable of actions that a stone could never perform. We see that cats and sheep have instincts that no tree or plant possesses. Hence there is some principle in animals which makes them different from vegetation. We watch effects, and we see that those in the animal are so different from those in vegetation that we conclude that the cause must be different. We recognise the doctor’s medical knowledge by watching him act. We recognise the life principle in a tree by observing the effects in that tree. When we watch a dog in action, we know that a dog differs from a tree. And in each case we come to know the cause from the effects we see. Remember that a principle really means a source, a cause, a beginning. Clear?”

Easy to See, But—,

They all seemed to take a deep breath. Father Hall laughed with them. The thing was fundamentally simple, the sort of thing one recognised just by looking at it. It was not easy to make easy things seem easier. Anybody looking at a lizard knew it was different from a rosebush, just as a cow surely was different from the moon over which it jumped, and Jack’s dog different from the beanstalk that Jack climbed.

Father Hall wondered whether he had made it clear that chemically these apparently different things were not vastly different. Yet what they did was so different that some essential principle in each of them must make them different—the rosebush different from the rock, the lizard very different from the rosebush it used for its sunny promenades.

“May I go on?” he asked, at last.

They nodded.

We Come to Man.

“Now, looking at the shepherd on the rock more pleasantly, at Mrs. Bradley here, we find that both of them are capable of things that we never even vaguely associate with an animal, much less with a rock, a rose, or an oak tree.”

“Correct.” Mr. Bradley nodded in agreement. “Do you know of a rock or a rose that ever threw a dish at its husband’s guiltless head?”

“How vulgar!” protested his wife. “Anyhow, if I had, I can assure you that the head would not have been guiltless.”

“Keep family squabbles out of this,” ordered McDermott, with authority. “Imagine any wife throwing plates at a husband’s head and not hitting somebody else.”

“Never mind them, Father,” said Mrs. Bradley. “Tell me what I do that makes me so different.”

“Not merely so different, Mrs. Bradley, but so different from rocks, roses, and the kitten in your lap. The things you do are really very much the same as the things other human beings do.

All and More.

“You have, first of all, the essential chemicals of the mineral kingdom.

“You have the power of growth and healing and producing offspring like yourself, all of which is characteristic of the animal kingdom and the vegetable kingdom.

“You have instincts that are like the instincts of the dog and the cat.

“But everything that you have beyond that is different.

“For you are capable of thinking.”

“I’m glad you saved it by the word capable,” said Mr. Bradley.

You have free will,” continued Father Hall. “You find in your soul a divine discontent. And you are by nature a creator. You want to create things, to fashion things, to be an artist, a builder—of anything from a knitted sweater to a great novel, from a glass of jelly to an aeroplane, from a suit to a symphony, from a miniature to a house of which you will be mistress.

“And these things make you very, very different from any mere animal that pastures in the fields or walks the roads or haunts the jungles of the earth.

The Something More.

“And because even the simplest and most primitive men have realised their ability to do these things and have recognised in themselves divine discontent and the desire to improve on earth, they have always known they were different. That is why they were so sure their body, which is akin to that of the animal, was not all. That is why they knew they had some principle which produced the effects we call thinking, willing, improving, creating. That is why men were so sure they had a soul.”

Suddenly, Kevin McDermott began to talk and the conversation became general. Kevin spoke of the Egyptian hieroglyphics he had seen in the Smithsonian, particularly the little soul of a man being weighed in a balance-scale by the god of the dead. His wife supplemented this by recalling that she had heard somewhere that the Greeks thought the soul was located in the brain, “living there in a kind of advanced penthouse,” she suggested. Evan Foster recalled out of some faint memory of his Latin studies that soul and spirit were the same word, and that spirit originally meant wind. And Dick added that “anima,” also a Latin word for soul, originally meant breeze.

Soul and Breath.

“That’s not too difficult to explain,” said Father Hall. “The Greeks and the Romans both knew that at the moment of death the principle by which the body thought, willed, was discontent, and capable of creation departed. Its departure was precisely what made the body dead, and hence different from a living body. They noticed that at the very end there was a final sigh, a sort of last breath, like the passing of a wind from the mouth of the dying man. That, they thought, might be the soul departing. So they used to signify soul by both ‘spiritus’ and ‘anima,’ a natural enough mistake, but a rather beautiful one. At least, it indicates very clearly that these early people were sure that something in them was beyond and different from the body.”

“But, of course, they were wrong,” was Kevin McDermott’s comment. “And since they were wrong about the thing that makes man different, isn’t it possible that they were wrong about man’s being different at all?”

Father Hall shook his head.

“They knew from what Man did that he must have something that distinguishes him from other creatures that have bodies not much unlike his own. Some principle. . .”

What Makes It Work?

Little Mrs. McDermott sighed wistfully.

“That principle you talk about ...it’s not clear to me.”

They could feel Father Hall rummaging around in his mind for some comparison. The quick light that flashed in his eyes told them that he had found it. They sat waiting.

“A number of years ago the magician, Hermann the Great, had a marvellous clock. It was made of transparent glass with a brass pivot in the centre. Around the edges of the face were figures that ran like the figures of any clock, from one

to twelve. Hermann would take a minute hand and stick it on the pivot. Then the audience was asked to mention any date in history; let's say someone mentioned October 17, 1833. Hermann spun the minute hand, and when it stopped, it pointed to the number that corresponded to the day of the week on which that date had fallen.

"Now anyone watching that clock knew very clearly that the glass and brass couldn't make a calculation like that. I saw the clock at close range and could see nothing that might point to an explanation of how it worked. Yet it demanded that someone do a fairly complicated bit of calendar research. Then it was someone with a mind that had to stop that hand at the right number. Who? What?"

Too Simple.

"Well, the trick didn't hold its place on Hermann's programme very long, because it really was too simple. Off stage there was an assistant who had the necessary information and charts before him. He also had a series of electrical connections, one attached to each of the numbers. A person in the audience shouted out a date. As Hermann placed the minute hand on the pivot, the assistant consulted the proper chart and found the correct day of the week. Hermann spun the hand. The assistant touched the connection that shot electricity into the correct number, and by the power of electro-magnetism the hand was stopped dead on the correct number."

"How ridiculously simple!" exclaimed Mrs. Foster.

"Yes; isn't it? But the audience saw only the glass-and-brass clock. They had to argue to a principle that they could not see, a principle which did two things: From a given date it calculated the day on which that date fell, and it exercised some force that stopped the clock."

It Needed a Principle.

"Don't look at me. when you say that stopped-the-clock stuff," thundered the host.

"We'll ignore that outburst" said Father Hall, mildly. "The audience knew that glass and brass can't reason, calculate, or will. So there had to be some principle—even though they didn't know what it was—that thought and willed. Simple, but no more simple than the reasoning process that taught men that chemical elements, however complicated, don't think or will, and that there must be some principle capable of performing these extremely difficult processes."

"Then," said Mr. Bradley, feeling he had started all this and should come into the picture seriously, "all men, looking at their own bodies and comparing them with the non-thinking stone, the non-feeling tree, the non-rational animal, argued that they themselves must surely have a principle that thought and willed, was not part of their body, and lived even after their body had died. Correct?"

"Correct," agreed Father Hall.

"Interesting, but that still doesn't prove anything, does it? There may be other explanations.

The Process Called Thinking.

"Just a minute," said Father Hall. "Let's look at this process called thinking."

"This is going to be a novel experience for my wife," giped Evan Foster.

"Darling," retorted his wife, "as long as there's a powerful mind like yours in the family, I can feel free to devote myself to the sole business of being beautiful."

"Modest little thing, isn't she?" demanded Mr. Foster of the company in general.

"Go on with your thinking processes," urged Mrs. Bradley, and Father Hall resumed.

A Writer at Work.

"Let's say that a writer is sitting at his desk, deep in the process of creating a book. Now, creating is hardly the correct word, for creating means making something out of nothing—"

"Whereas too many writers make nothing out of something," broke in Kevin McDermott, who evidently didn't like

some of the modern writers.

“No; that’s not what I was going to say,” continued Father Hall. “A writer doesn’t make something out of nothing, but he does make something out of a good many other somethings. You see, writing a book is a most elaborate process. The author draws on his memory; he uses some of his own experiences; he refers to books he has read and observes the actions of people in various localities; he puts together words the meanings of which he has learned in a thousand different ways. And when he is finished, this one man has built out of a thousand different sources a unit which is his book.

“That’s a pretty elaborate process. We can reduce it to something that looks simpler, but really isn’t. Will somebody here give me a sentence?”

Wanted: a Sentence.

They all thought elaborately. You could almost hear the wheels going round.

Mr. Bradley walked over to the table and picked up the evening newspaper. He turned to the editorial page.

“How’s this?” he demanded, and read aloud: “‘Man’s liberty is so much the white light of his life, the greatest gift of God, that we feel like crying aloud, 'let’s fight for it!’”

They all applauded the oratorical way in which he had read it.

“Dad ought to run for Congress,” whispered Sue, audibly.

“Senate or nothing,” retorted her twin.

“Excellent,” cried the priest. And with that remarkable memory that he sometimes displayed, he repeated the sentence verbatim.

“‘Man’s liberty is so much the white light of his life, the greatest gift of God, that we feel like crying aloud, ‘Let’s fight for it!’”

They all meditated on the sentence quickly.

“Now,” said the priest, “the human brain is not unlike an intricate filing case. Into the various sections a man slips the experiences of his life, sounds, colours, nouns, verbs, pains, pleasures, motor reflexes that he has developed through practice. Part of his brain is working while he is talking, another part when he walks. The brain is so compartmented that injury to it often results in queer twists. One small sector of the brain is hurt, and suddenly the man can’t distinguish colours, or he loses the power to recall nouns.”

“Like Alice in the mysterious woods,” interposed Sue. “She couldn’t even remember the noun tree. Remember?”

“Sh-sh!” hissed her twin, and she “sh-sh-ed.”

Pigeonholes.

“Really, the brain is like a desk full of pigeonholes, and the more the specialists come to know about the brain, the better are they able to localise in definite sections definite types of memories, experiences, factual data, and the like.

“Now, let’s go back to our author for a minute. Let’s say that he is sitting before a desk that has pigeonholes. His filing cabinets are along the wall. He keeps notebooks in which he jots down names, descriptions, bits of unusual conversations that he means to use in his book. He goes to work on that book. Let’s watch him: He pulls some notes out of a cubbyhole; he roots around until he gets precisely what he wants out of a file; he thumbs through his notebooks in search of data; he goes to his library and jerks a quotation out of a book.

“Then he, the one person, puts all this together and makes the one, unified, coherent, logical book, a book so uniquely his own that, by observing its style, we know precisely who wrote it.

Quite a Process.

“Now, let’s take that sentence again. It’s really an excellent one. To put that sentence together, the man who wrote it and we who understood it had to pull a deal of things out of our minds.

“First, we pulled some nouns: man, liberty, light, life, gift, God, and so on.

“Then from another part of our brain we jerked the colour white and our experience with light.

“From our auditory memory, our memory of sounds, we pulled the idea of crying aloud.

“We have never seen God, but we pulled out a concept of Him.

“And, finally, we issued a call to battle, to do something about it, to get the good old will in operation: ‘Let’s fight for it!’”

Packed.

“Why,” cried Sheila Foster, “I hadn’t any idea that sentence had so much in it.”

“Trust me to find a good one, just the right one in fact,” boasted her host.

Father Hall looked at them with a sharply questioning glance.

“Our author was the only one who corn-piled all the data in his book. All right. Who compiled all the data we’ve just checked over in that one sentence?”

“Why, the writer of the editorial of course. And you and I.” Mrs. Bradley sounded just a little impatient.

“Which part of the author? Which part of you? From various parts of your brain; from various emotional experiences something pulled together into a single sentence the most varied ideas, concepts, brain phantasms. Who? What?”

“Still a little foggy,” said Mrs. McDermott, wrinkling her brow.

Words Into Messages.

“Let’s take another comparison,” said the priest. “You’ve seen teletype machines in telegraph offices. Over the wire comes a message. It is printed out word by word. It rolls out of the machine and into a basket. But it becomes a message only when someone picks it up and reads it, putting the words together to make a completed piece of news.

“All right. The words are lying around up there in your brain; phantasms, we call them. What power in you puts these phantasms together into a message? What power takes out of the different compartments of your brain experiences, colours, sounds, words, and so on, and unites them into one logical, intelligible message?”

“We call that power the soul. And unless you grant the existence of the soul, it is simply impossible to explain how the author of that sentence managed to convey sense, and it is impossible to explain the fact that we can listen to or read separate words and unite them into a single, clear sentence.

“But if we have a soul that acts like the author who pulls out of the filing cabinet of his brain memories, experiences, impressions, words, pictures, then everything is simple. The soul is the power by which we think. It is the principle of unity that pulls all our scattered experiences together into intelligible thoughts. It is the real author of our books and our sentences. It is the source of our intelligent thinking.”

Chemical Brain.

“Hey!” demanded Evan Foster. “Why couldn’t it be the brain that does the thinking?”

“Why couldn’t the filing cabinet put the novel together without any help from the novelist?”

“Tain’t the same. The brain is alive. The filing cabinet is dead, inanimate.”

“Our brain is still essentially a composite of chemicals. More than that; the various parts of the brain are very much parts—that is, they are separated one from another. There has to be some power, some faculty that pulls together into one spot, one sentence, one idea, one judgment or message that lies in these various parts. The author is the power that pulls the parts from his filing cabinets and makes his unified book. The soul is the power that unifies what lies in our brain, which is our most elaborate but widely-extended filing case.”

“I suppose that’s why while we say, ‘my heart beats’ and ‘my feet dance,’ we say simply, ‘I think,’” suggested Mr. Bradley.

“Correct.”

“But we say, ‘I dance,’ too,” corrected Dick.

“Quite right,” said the priest. “Thinking is particularly applied to the soul, to the essential someone that is I. We don’t say, ‘my brain thinks.’ But because the soul in man is not only the principle of his thought processes, but the principle of all his vital activities, the source of his natural life, we simply say, ‘I dance’ or ‘I walk’ and even ‘I sleep,’ though we know it is primarily our feet that dance and walk and our body that sleeps.”
