

Dr Duthoit's Vision

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I KNEW a fine specimen of an English abbe when I was at school at Hereford. This was Dr Duthoit, Prebendary of Consumpta per Sabulum in Hereford Cathedral, Rector of St Owen's, bookworm and, chiefly, rose-grower. He was a middle-aged man when I was a little boy; but he suffered me to walk with him in his garden sloping down to the Wye, near a pleasaunce of the Vicars Choral, reciting sometimes the poems of Traherne, which he had in manuscript, but, for the most part, demonstrating his progress in the art of growing a coal-black rose. This was the true work of his life, and nearly forty years ago he could show blooms whose copper and crimson tints were very near to utter darkness. I believe that his ideal was never attained in absolute perfection; and perhaps the perfect end and attainment of desire do not prove happiness down here below.

After 1880 Prebendary Duthoit and I rarely saw each other, and rarely wrote. He was at rest among his roses by the quiet River Wye, and I dashed to and fro in wilder waters, but each contrived to let the other know that he was still alive, and so I was not altogether surprised to see the Prebendary's queer, niggly writing on an envelope a week or two ago. He said he had heard of a good deal to talk about. Well, with a popular legend with which I am understood to be in some way concerned, and he thought that an odd experience of his might possibly interest me. I do not give the text of his letter, chiefly because it is full of Latin phrases, which I might be called upon to translate.

But the matter is as follows: On the 4th August, the day of the service at St Paul's, Dr Duthoit was walking up and down and about that pleasant garden on slopes of the Wye. Just above the water his gardener had prepared under direction and instruction a plot of ground in a very special manner. I do not gather the precise purpose of the operation, but it seems that the soil had been very fine and level for a superficies of about ten yards. To this place the Prebendary walked, slowly and reflectively, wishing to assure himself that his orders had been accurately carried out. The plot had been perfectly level the night before, but Dr Duthoit wanted to be more than sure about it. But to his extreme annoyance, when he turned by the fig-tree, he saw that the plot was very far from even. He is an old man, but his sight is good, and at a distance of several yards he could discern quite plainly that there had been mischief. The chosen plot was in a disgraceful state. At first the Prebendary thought that the Custos' sandy tom-cat had scaled the wire entanglement on the top of the wall. Then he felt inclined to consider the ruin done by Scamp, the Bishop's wire-haired fox-terrier, and then, going across, he put on his spectacles and wondered what had been at work. For the level which had been so carefully established was all undone. At first the Doctor thought it was the mischief of some random beast, this confusion of hills and valleys which had taken place of the billiard-table of the night before. And then it reminded him of the raised maps which he had seen in the Diocesan Training Schools, and then it reminded him more distinctly of a sort of picture map which had illustrated his morning paper a day or two before. And then he wondered violently, because he saw that somebody had, with infinite pains, made this garden plot of his into an exact model of Gallipoli Peninsula.

It was all so ingenious and perfect that the old clergyman held his wrath for the moment, and peered into this miniature intricacy of peaks and steeps, and gullies and valleys. He had scarcely

gathered himself together to wonder who had had the ingenious impudence for the mischief, when amazement once more seized him. For he saw now, stooping down, that this garden Gallipoli was swarming with life. There were hosts on it and about it, and then Dr Duthoit forgot all about what we call the realities and facts of life, forgot that this sort of thing does not happen, and watched what was happening.

He writes that, queerly enough, he lost all sense of size. He was not a Gulliver looking down upon Lilliput; the mounds ten inches high became to him actual and lofty summits. The tiny precipices were tremendous. And the red ants swarmed to attack the black ants that held the heights with savage and desperate fury. He says he panted with excitement as he watched the courage of the attack and defense, the savagery of the "hand-to-hand" fighting. The black and red fell by myriads, and the doctor had persuaded himself that he observed amazing incidents of individual heroism. One particular range seemed to be the especial aim of the red forces, and they swarmed up victorious and held it for a while, and then retreated. The doctor could not quite make out the reason of this. He started violently when his man called to him. Roberts said he had called for five minutes without getting an answer, and that the Dean was in a hurry, with only five minutes to spare. So the Prebendary went into the house in a kind of "dwam," as the Scots put it, and had no notion of what the Dean had to say; and when he got back to the garden he found his gardener smoothing the plot with a long rake, and raking in a lot of dead ants with the mould.

The gardener said it was the boys; but the doctor took no notice, and went to the Custos that night, and the Custos reading his paper a fortnight later began to think that the old Prebendary was a prophet.

And the Prebendary? He ends his letter: "Quod superius est sicut quod inferius" ("that which is above is as that which is below"), as the Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus testifies, and it is my belief that this is a world battle in the sense which we do not appreciate. There have been some who have held that the earthly conflict is but a reflection of the war in heaven. What if it be reflected infinitely, if it penetrate to the uttermost depths of creation? And if a speck of dust be a cosmos -- the universe -- of revolving worlds? There may be battles between creatures that no microscope shall ever discover.

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