CHAPTER IV

THE LIFE OF BLAISE PASCAL: PART II: 1655–1662

SOLDIER OF CHRIST: 1655–1658

AFTER this second, final conversion, Blaise Pascal's first thought was to go to Port-Royal as a Solitaire. He went straight to Singlin at the Paris House, who sent him to Port-Royal des Champs to see Arnauld and de Saci. De Saci was not at all keen to see him, and did so only because it was Singlin who had asked him to do so; he "hoped the holy light of Scripture and the Fathers would keep him from being dazzled by Pascal's brilliance."[1] He applied his usual method of opening the conversation on the subject of greatest interest to his interlocutor. The result was the marvellous dialogue in which Epictetus and Montaigne confront Saint Augustine and Scripture, and of which Sainte-Beuve says: "Is it not beautiful, and is it not a speaking figure, to see Pascal thus setting down at the beginning these two columns of error (if one can call Montaigne a column), and passing between the two, the one of stone and the other of smoke, after having given their measure, passing from philosophy to religion, to be received at the entrance by the humble, delicate, and irrefragable M. de Saci? Is there not a high grandeur here in the substance of this discussion, and in its form, in the interest of the drama and its setting, is there not a beauty almost equal to what is admired in the most celebrated Dialogues of antiquity?"[2]

What Pascal said during this conversation concerning Epictetus and Montaigne covered the same ground as the analysis we have just made of his inward struggles during the period immediately before his conversion, though in the tone of one who has conquered their doctrines and found the solid ground of truth. We shall return in the next chapter to certain elements in his treatment of these authors which point forward to the *Pensées* and projected *Apology*. Meanwhile, the difference between de Saci's approach and Pascal's approach to such doctrines is well indicated by two remarks made in the discussion. Speaking of Montaigne, de Saci says: "One can say of Montaigne, in the words of Saint Augustine: 'In all that he says, he sets faith

[1] *Entretien*, Chev., p. 344.

[2] *Op. cit.*, II, III, 1, p. 393. Sainte-Beuve says "almost" equal to antiquity because he has rejected Christianity, and regards the topic and setting of this dialogue as being less universal, less humane, than those of classical antiquity. This is one of the few places where Sainte-Beuve's prejudices overcome his usually admirable objectivity.

aside; so we, who have faith, must similarly set all he says aside.'"[1] And at the end, Pascal, after admitting the danger of reading these philosophers without guidance, says: "It seems to me only that by joining them together they could not succeed too badly, because the one opposes the evil of the other: not that they can give virtue, but only that they can trouble people in their vices: the soul being beaten by these contraries, of which the one drives out pride and the other sloth, and not being able by its reasonings either to rest in any of these vices or to escape them all."[2] The whole difference between Port-Royal and Pascal lies in these words.

The arrival of Pascal at Port-Royal had indeed caused apprehension among the Solitaires as well as joy. It was indeed a great thing to have among them one who could shed on it the reflected lustre of his intellectual achievements; but on the other hand, Pascal's brilliance, his strong, independent, and critical mind, did not fit in very well with the rather naïve simplicity of the Solitaires. Pascal had, it is true, laid aside all his self-love and self-seeking: he wished to live only for God; it is noteworthy that from now until the day of his death he never wrote anything on his own initiative or under his own name. But still, it was *he* who was now living for God. It was the experience of his whole life which had brought him to see his true condition and led to his conversion; and he now began to evaluate it all again in the light of his new-found faith. And that was precisely what the somewhat narrow pietistic spirit of Port-Royal could neither appreciate nor understand. Port-Royal "set aside" everything in life but the practice of rigorously simple Evangelical piety and Catholic penance. Others beside Pascal were suspect because they could not wholly conform to this pattern—though pattern is hardly the word to use of a group of men each of whom had through his solitary way of life unconsciously encouraged the development of his own originality and idiosyncrasies. Nicole was another example. He was a man who had achieved learning, titles, dignities, before coming to Port-Royal; and he was somewhat diffidently admitted as a teacher in the schools and member of the inner circle only when he had renounced his worldly distinctions. Even then he was reproached with "spoiling the spirit of M. Arnauld". "As a historian very learned in the theological systems of the past, he discerned the complexities of problems which the *naïveté* and ignorance of the Solitaires solved without difficulty. He was not, like the great Arnauld, simply a machine for putting into shape the rather vague ideas and feelings of the party. He had thus brought into the party a mind already formed elsewhere, intel-

[1] Chev., p. 351.

[2] Chev., p. 357 f.

lectual habits, methods, preferences ; and, withal, a kind of gentle obstinacy. He ended by leaving the party. By Nicole, you may judge of Pascal."[1]

Pascal stayed at Port-Royal, however, for most of 1655, and learned from the simple life there many things which are reflected in the *Pensées*. He found among these people a happiness, a sweet reasonableness (soon, alas, to be broken), a virtue, and a finished politeness, which greatly struck him. He thought a good deal about education, as his nephew Etienne Périer was at school there, and even invented, to everyone's astonishment, a method of teaching children to read by syllables instead of by isolated letters. He was consulted on logic, and communicated his reflections on the geometrical method, adding comments on the art of persuading, rules for carrying conviction, and a commentary on a page of Montaigne's Essay on *The Art of Debating*.

Above all, Pascal sought to come to terms with his new experience, and passed much of his time in meditation and contemplation. It is very probable that *Pensée* 553, the *Mystery of Jesus*, dates from this period. It is a meditation in " the first sorrowful mystery of the rosary "—the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane—according to the method of St. François de Sales.[2] It is in three parts ; a meditation on the historical agony of Jesus in the Garden, a meditation on the mystical agony of Jesus in each of His elect, and concluding resolutions.[3] But as Brunschvicg rightly says in his edition of the *Pensées*, it defies all commentary. The only adequate way of treating it is to use it as a guide for one's own meditation.

" Jesus will be in agony till the end of the world : one must not sleep during that time. . . .

" Jesus being in agony and the greatest pains, let us pray longer. . . .

" Be comforted, thou wouldst not seek Me, if thou hadst not found Me.

" I thought of thee in My agony, I shed such drops of blood for thee. . . .

" Lord, I give Thee all. . . .

" Do small things like great ones, because of the majesty of Jesus Christ who does them in us, and who lives our life ; and great things like small and easy ones, because of His omnipotence."

Probably it was in this year also that Pascal wrote his *Comparison of the Christians of the First Times with those of Today*,

[1] Strowski, *op. cit.*, III, I, i.
[2] Strowski, *op. cit.*, III, I, v.
[3] P. M. Lahorgue, *Le Réalisme de Pascal*, p. 284.

and his *Summary of the Life of Jesus Christ.* But the peace of his meditations was not destined to last long. The very month after his arrival at Port-Royal, the act took place which set ablaze the controversy which led to the *Provinciales.*

The storm had indeed been gathering for years, ever since the *Augustinus* was published in 1640. In 1641 a Papal Bull had again prohibited discussions on Grace, naming the *Augustinus* explicitly. In Paris, however, there were lively debates on the subject. Arnauld wrote *Apologies for Jansenius* in 1643 and 1645. In 1649, the Syndic Nicolas Cornet of the Faculty of Theology, an ex-Jesuit, brought before the Sorbonne certain heretical *Propositions*, alleged to be taken from the *Augustinus*, and had them censured by a " packed " house. Parliament tried to smooth things down ; but the obstinacy of Arnauld, which was to cause so much suffering, would not let the matter rest. He forthwith wrote, in 1651, an *Apology for the Holy Fathers* to show up the worst errors of his adversaries, the Jesuits, as represented by the doctrine of M. Le Moine, Professor at the Sorbonne.

Let us recall the doctrines of the opposing parties, together with the intermediate position of the neo-Thomists (chiefly represented by the Dominicans), whom the Jansenists long hoped to win to their side.

Jansenism affirmed that *all* men are a prey to sin, but that God's good pleasure elects *some* men to receive His free and infallibly *efficacious grace.* This grace cannot be resisted ; but it is not irrevocable ; sanctification does not necessarily follow justification.

Neo-Thomism affirmed that *all* men are under sin, but that *all* receive a first, *sufficient* grace : this by itself cannot lead them to eternal happiness, but is *sufficient* to set the will free, give it a sense of good and evil, and make it capable of performing good acts in conformity with the natural law. Beyond it there is the free, irresistible, *efficacious grace,* given by God to whom He will, by which alone man is saved. While it remains, the soul is sanctified. If it be withdrawn, the just man not wholly abandoned by God still has a *proximate power* to obey the commandments of God, a power which his will may use well or ill.

Molinism affirmed that all men receive a *sufficient grace,* which suffices not to save man, but to enable him to pray, to request and *merit* the saving, *efficacious grace. Efficacious* grace *may* come even *without* a good use of *sufficient* grace ; but it *must* come if *sufficient* grace is used well ; and if God withdraws it, He leaves a *proximate power* strong enough to recall it.

Jansenism and Molinism have nothing in common. Neo-

Thomism is like Jansenism in its definition of efficacious grace, but not in its attitude to those not yet touched by it or deserted by it; and neo-Thomism is like Molinism in its definitions of sufficient grace and proximate power, but not in its doctrine of the relation between them and efficacious grace, since Molinism says it is a relation of cause and effect, while neo-Thomism says it is the relation between a humble request and a free gift.

Jansenism regarded Molinism as entirely impious, and neo-Thomism as an untenable compromise whose adherents might yet be won over. Molinism regarded Jansenism as a definite heresy, and neo-Thomism as an over-complicated and doubtful but not heterodox doctrine. Neo-Thomism regarded Molinism as a dangerous though not heretical deformation of St. Thomas, and Jansenism as an excessive over-simplification of St. Augustine.[1]

Arnauld's Jansenist *Apologies* were effectively countered by his opponents, who submitted the heretical Propositions, which had been reduced from seven to the definitive number of five, to the Pope for his judgment. There was much searching of heart at Port-Royal. Barcos and others thought it would be wiser to let the matter go, as over-eagerness might make it believed that Jansenism really did make these statements. But Arnauld and other scholars of the party decided on defence, and a deputation was sent to Rome, with no result except to weaken the Jansenist position. Pope Innocent X issued a Bull confirming the censure on the *Propositions*. Once again, the moderate party at Port-Royal wished to let matters rest, and concentrate on their stand for *efficacious grace*, which was not affected by the condemnation. But Arnauld and his group could not let things rest, and began to introduce the distinction between *fact* and *right*, which was to become painfully familiar as the controversy went on. The Pope, they said, could indeed adjudicate on matters of *right*, but not on matters of *fact*. As a matter of *right*, the Propositions condemned were indeed heretical; but as a matter of *fact*, they were not to be found in the *Augustinus*.

What were the famous Propositions? And did Jansen utter them?

The Propositions are :—

1. Some commandments of God are impossible of fulfilment by just men, even when these men desire and endeavour to fulfil them with all the strength they have; and the grace which would make them possible is lacking to these men.

[1] This enlightening summary of the doctrines involved in an extremely complicated controversy is substantially that of Strowski, *op. cit.*, III, 2, i.

2. In the state of fallen nature, inward grace is always irresistible.

3. For merit or demerit in the state of fallen nature man need not be free from inward necessity; he need be free only from outward constraint.

4. The semi-Pelagians admitted the need for prevenient inward grace for every particular act, even for the first act of faith, but they were heretical in holding that this grace was subject to the choice of man's will to resist it or obey it.

5. It is a semi-Pelagian error to say that Jesus Christ died or shed His blood for all men alike.

The First Proposition does occur in the *Augustinus*.[1] It follows from the radical doctrine of Jansen concerning the effects of the Fall, which implies that as the source of all man's acts in the fallen state is poisoned, all these acts are sinful before God; that only God's sovereign and irresistible grace can remedy this; that this efficacious grace is given only to the elect; and that it may be withdrawn even from them.

The other four propositions are inferences from what Jansen said rather than statements made directly by him.

The Second Proposition follows from the first. God's efficacious grace is always victorious over man's concupiscence. Jansen did indeed admit the existence of a lesser grace, corresponding to the Thomist sufficient grace, which he called *exciting* grace; but if it was not victorious, he held that it can never have been intended to be so.

The Third Proposition is taken from Jansen's denial of the "freedom of indifference", or capacity of free choice either way; by inward necessity in all his acts, he is still responsible for them so long as he is not acting under pressure from without.

The Fourth Proposition is derived from Jansen's charge against the Molinists that they subject the grace which initiates faith in man to the control of man's free will.

The Fifth Proposition is a blunt way of stating Jansen's interpretation of the Scriptural doctrine that Jesus Christ died for all men. As he held that God's grace always has its full effect, and yet saw that many men are far from showing any effect of grace, he interprets the phrase "for all men" as meaning, not every man in particular, but only some men of all sorts and conditions.

The Port-Royalists first denied that Jansen had said these things, then affirmed that if he did say anything like them he did not mean it in any heretical sense. In 1653, when trying to prevent Innocent X from condemning Jansen, they presented

[1] *Cf. Port-Royal*, II, II, 10.

to the Pope a *Three-Column Memorandum* giving the three possible senses of the Propositions, namely, the opposite errors of Calvinism and Molinism, with Jansenist Augustinianism as the true interpretation in the centre. But this effort did not prevent the Pope from censuring the Propositions. Thereupon the Jansenists accepted the condemnation as valid in right, but affirmed that in fact the doctrine of Jansen and Saint Augustine on efficacious grace was not involved in this condemnation. This affirmation was not accepted by bishops or Pope; but things seemed to be settling down when, just after Pascal's entry into Port-Royal, an incident occurred which aroused the wrath of Arnauld and precipitated a crisis.[1]

On January 31, 1655, the *Curé* of Saint Sulpice refused absolution to the Duc de Liancourt because of his connections with the Jansenists of Port-Royal. Arnauld replied to this excommunication by writing a *Letter to a Person of Condition* and a *Letter to a Duke and Peer*, as an appeal to public feeling. In them he affirmed that in *fact*, the Five Propositions were forgeries, and that in *right* grace had indeed once been lacking to a just man, when Peter denied his Lord. For these statements he was at once arraigned before the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne; and on January 14 he was condemned on the question of fact. The condemnation on the question of right was inexorably approaching, when on January 23 the bombshell of the first *Letter written to a Provincial by one of his friends, on the subject of the present disputes of the Sorbonne*, burst right in the middle of the debate. Thus opened Pascal's meteoric career as a polemist—as the doughty champion of efficacious grace.

How did he come to be drawn into the struggle?

His own experience had convinced him of the need for efficacious grace, not as an abstract idea, but as a living reality, to overcome the impotence of his own will. In the attack on Arnauld, he saw a threat to the sovereignty of efficacious grace. But he had not any equipment as a theologian. One day, however, he was present at a discussion when Arnauld read to his friends a document by which he proposed to appeal from the Sorbonne

[1] Brunschvicg, on p. 113 of his book *Le Génie de Pascal*, gives the following interesting note on the question of *fact*. "In his posthumous work on Pascal (1901), Hatzfeld speaks of making a literal comparison of texts (between the *Augustinus* and the Propositions); but he restricts his quotations (as Voltaire had already done in Chapter 37 of his *Siècle de Louis XIV*) to the First and Fifth Propositions. . . . Arnauld wrote in 1661: 'The true sense of Jansen is not in conformity with the Propositions, especially the Second, Third and Fourth.'" There is more than mere coincidence in these facts, which provide a welcome signpost to guide one through a thorny maze of controversy which has not even yet been cleared.

to the public. Arnauld was tired out by the debates he was carrying on under unfair conditions against a "packed" assembly; and his document too clearly showed it. He saw that his friends did not think it would appeal to the public, and turned to Pascal, saying that *he* ought to do something. What was wanted was a short statement showing that all the fuss was a mere quarrel about words without any real significance. Pascal wrote a draft, which was accepted as it stood, and issued as the first *Letter to a Provincial*. . . .

This and the next two *Provinciales* were really a comedy on a geometrical theme. Pascal would never have agreed to enter on a purely theological discussion; but as the matter was presented to him, he saw it as a question of *equivocation*. That was his ancient enemy, which he had already routed in his debate with Fr. Noël by insisting on clear and unvarying definitions of all terms employed; and he simply applied the same geometrical method in a dramatic form. These first letters were really an indirect appeal to the Thomists to abandon their alliance with the Molinists—since while they used the same words about grace as the Molinists they did not mean the same thing by them, and really stood for the same thing as the Jansenists.

While he was writing, however, and scoring an enormous success with the public, so that the condemnation of Arnauld by the Sorbonne, which had occurred between the Second and Third Letters, did not really impress anyone at all, he was reading up the whole subject and thinking deeply about it. He began to suspect that the real issue was deeper than he had realized, and that it was not after all a mere matter of equivocation. Arnauld told him that the Thomists and Molinists agreed that their "sufficient grace" and "proximate power" produced a direct effect on action, whereas the Jansenists denied that, and would not admit any grace outside "efficacious grace" except a "general and imperceptible habitus or manner of being."[1] When Pascal asked for further explanations, Arnauld showed him his treatment of neo-Molinism in his *Apology for the Holy Fathers*. This shows how Le Moine based his doctrine of *actual* sufficient grace on the argument that without some such grace man would not be responsible for his acts, so that they could not be imputed against him by God. Man, he said, is not responsible unless he is conscious and free in making his wrong choices. Arnauld denied this and said that man's most guilty acts were those into which he falls by ignorance, by carelessness, or by being swept away by temptation. Of this material from an unread book Pascal made the immortal *Fourth Provinciale*, which

[1] Strowski, *op. cit.*, III, 3, v.

contradicted the first three by showing that after all there was a terrifically important issue involved in the whole debate—the issue of personal responsibility.

The orthodox theologians said that the degree of man's responsibility corresponds to the degree in which he is clearly conscious of what he is doing when he makes an evil choice. The Jansenists said that " we are responsible for what escapes from the very core of ourselves, even without the judgment of our moral conscience, even without our choice or any reflective consent. To be guilty is to have a nature with the kind of core from which guilty acts emerge," [1] to be the kind of person that produces guilty acts. Not only our voluntary acts, but our involuntary ones, belong to us. " We are ' natures ' and not ' wills ' ; from the inaccessible abyss of our being (our corrupt being) constantly emerge, by unforeseeable upsurgings, our thoughts, our feelings, our acts. And all that is ours, all the more ours the less our will has intervened ; all that is our sin ; all that is our personality." [2]

This is the essential debate of the entire century, which is typified in the contrast between Corneille's Stoic heroes and Racine's Jansenist *Phèdre*, between the dominant neo-Stoicism of the age and a deeply Christian insight into the corruption of man's heart. And the need for choice between the two types of humanity which thus confront each other is implicitly presented in the *Fourth Provinciale.*

Pascal proceeded to put this problem concretely in the following *Provinciales* by a searching critical analysis of the moral doctrine of the Jesuits. Strowski speaks of a change of front here ; [3] but it is rather a concentration upon one point of the same front. The theological issue would have revealed its complexity more and more, and the public would soon have tired of it ; but the moral consequences of the Jesuit doctrine of man were apparent and appalling, and could be treated in a way which would make people laugh, but would also make them choose. The series of Letters from the Fifth to the Sixteenth is therefore filled with a scathing critique of the principles and the consequences of Jesuit moral theology : probabilism, direction of intention, easy devotion, and all the casuistical principles which were then greatly in vogue. Especially from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth the Letters are full, as Voltaire said, of " every kind of eloquence." [4] And they dealt the Jesuits a blow from which the Society has never fully recovered.

[1] Strowski, *op. cit.*, III, 3, vi, p. 82.
[2] *Loc. cit.*, p. 83.
[3] *Op. cit.*, III, 4, i.
[4] *Port-Royal*, III, III, 9, p. 111.