

The Descent of the Dove

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A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church

Charles Williams



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For the Companions of the
Co-inherence



Altinari, Photo.

PARADISE, by Lodovico Brea

PREFACE

My first intention for the title of this book was *A History of Christendom*: it was changed lest any reader should be misled. The frontispiece is a reproduction of a painting by Ludovico Brea. The presidency of the Holy Spirit over the "holy and glorious flesh" ("*la carne gloriosa e santa*") is there exhibited in the height; at the foot is the entombment of the consummate Flesh. Beyond the one lies the state known as the Beatific Vision; below the other the principle called the Harrowing of Hell. Between the two extreme points appears the great mass of created souls; those on earth, and, beyond a line of angelic beings, those "in heaven." There are recognizable faces, but they are momentary; they are travellers upon one or other of the Ways. But the painting, above and below, is of the co-inherence of the whole redeemed City.

The shy allusions to dates and the shyer quotations from theology are related in the main to the same points. It is open to any reader to complain that many names, of persons and events, which have been of immense importance to Christendom, have been omitted. But though they have been important their omission here is unimportant. It was inevitable that this particular book should talk about Dante and not about Descartes, since its special themes are found much more in Dante than in Descartes. Nevertheless, I hope the curve of history has been justly followed, as I hope and believe that all the dates and details are accurate. If I have made a mistake

anywhere, it is not for want of reference to the specialists, but from the mere stupidity of human nature. An effort has been made to keep proportion; the final modern chapter has not been allowed to run away with the book. A motto which might have been set on the title-page but has been, less ostentatiously, put here instead, is a phrase which I once supposed to come from Augustine, but I am informed by experts that it is not so, and otherwise I am ignorant of its source. The phrase is: "This also is Thou; neither is this Thou." As a maxim for living it is invaluable, and it—or its reversal—summarizes the history of the Christian Church.

I may perhaps be permitted to add that the themes of this book are also discussed, from different points of view, in other books of mine—in *Descent into Hell*, *He came down from Heaven*, and *Taliessin through Logres*. The first is fiction; the second is not; the third is poetry—whether that is or is not fiction.

The dedication of these pages is meant generally; but in particular for all those who have, in one place or another, cared to study with me "the half-read wisdom of dæmoniac images", and most especially for D.H.S.N., who nobly and happily disputed on the Nature of Love:

What make ye and what strive for? keep ye thought
Of us, or in new excellence divine
Is old forgot? and do ye count for nought
What the Greek did and what the Florentine?
We keep your memories well: O in your store
Live not our best joys treasured evermore?

C. W.

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