

THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT

by

W Heaton Cooper



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INTRODUCTION

A painter friend of mine, Ronald Mann, who inspired me in 1983 to write an autobiography, "Mountain Painter" said of that book that there was a good deal of light in it but not much shadow. In great paintings by great masters, especially by Rembrandt, a good deal is happening in the shadows that has a direct bearing upon what is happening in the lighter passages. I agreed with his criticism and added to the script a fairly complete picture of certain dark places in my life, the darkest being the death of my wife, Ophelia, in 1975 at the age of sixty from cancer of the brain.

But I did not attempt to describe the darkest and most prolonged dark period which started some two years before her death and continued increasingly during her illness and for some five years afterwards.

Since that time, having been led through into light, I have been meeting several people who are undergoing similar periods of darkness in various forms and degrees and from different causes and, sometimes, from no apparent cause at all. While listening to Beethoven's Eroica Symphony on my radio a clear thought came that I should write about these later experiences, and, when the Symphony ended, I knew the form it should take, and the title.

Throughout a painting life of sixty five years I have been practising and improving the visual memory, or recollection, which still remains for me something of a mystery, such as total recall of something seen fifty years ago yet sufficient to enable me to carry out a full sized detailed painting.

Until I started writing this book I had not realised that recollection of experiences and emotions from early childhood can be possible and complete even though I had not given them a thought since they happened.

I suppose the key to this may be the motive which, in this case, is to try to help others to open long-closed cupboards and let the light in. I hope this may happen, and bring some further understanding, such as I have had in writing this book.

W. Heaton Cooper.
Grasmere. 1986.

I

MORNING LIGHT

MOST of us at some period of our lives have wanted, sometimes desperately, to know the meaning of life, and may have even doubted if there is any meaning. We may have wanted the answers to ‘Why am I here?’; ‘Am I alone or part of some great design?’; ‘Has what I do and what I am now any effect on what I shall become when this earthly life is over?’

I am not going to try to give a complete answer to any of these questions. No human can do so. But there have been certain experiences in my eighty-two years of life that have given hints of the answers to all of them, and, when I have followed the signposts, even through the darkness, they have, in no uncertain way, brought me into a fulness of life and deep joy more than I had ever expected or experienced.

At the age of fourteen I decided to leave the village grammar school at Ambleside and, instead of taking a place in a public school to which I had won entrance, to become a painter and start my training in my father’s studio.

My father and mother, whom he had found and married in Norway in 1893, truly loved each other for the whole of their thirty three years of married life, so we, my two sisters and my brother, were, on the whole, a very happy united family. My mother had a delightful sense of fun, rather than humour, which she did not often reveal to her children. Being by nature a very dominating person, and having to manage on very little money, she ruled us by insisting upon strict immediate obedience with no questions asked. If this was not forthcoming, corporal punishment was, and we accepted it usually as our just rewards. In adolescence I came to resent and fear this domination.

My mother's religious upbringing had been a very real but rather narrow Lutheran one, especially in matters of the emotions. We were a conventional Anglican family, attending church each Sunday morning, being baptised and confirmed and taught to say our prayers morning and night, a discipline which I, for one, abandoned as soon as possible except in moments of dire distress. The only sex education I received from anyone was when my mother told me that, if I "played with myself" I would have to have a needle stuck through my penis; and when I left home for London at the age of nineteen, my father warned me to avoid prostitutes for fear of catching venereal disease. How things have changed!

My father, Alfred Heaton Cooper, was entirely single-minded in his devotion to painting, and he worked very hard, as he well needed to, having a wife and four children to provide for. His life was very happy and fulfilled. I loved him dearly, and rejoiced in the five years working together on the fells and in the valleys of Lakeland until I went on to learn in the one London college of art that did not require fees, but only merit.

One summer evening, when I was seventeen, I was up on Wansfell above the head of Windermere, trying to paint the valley of the Brathay that was crowned by some of the highest and most rugged of our mountains. But, after struggling for some hours, I had to admit complete failure, so I stopped and just looked. The wind was coming from the sea some thirty miles to the west. It was bringing clouds which, when they reached the mountains, were sending down moving curtains of rain. I saw the streams and rivers bringing water into the lake which bore it back again into the sea. Something about this orderly cycle of the movement of moisture brought to me an intense awareness that I was seeing part of the design of the whole universe, and with it came the conviction that there was a mind, therefore a person, who was creating this design. And because a person, somehow I, also a person, could become part of this design if I chose to.

The vivid sense of joy and ecstasy left me in no doubt about choosing. The glow of this experience lasted for several days, and has recurred on many occasions since, though not quite so overwhelmingly as it did on that first occasion.

This was my first experience of the presence of God in nature. On reading Psalm 104; some of the writings of Chinese painters and philosophers, and some of the earlier poems of William Wordsworth, I saw that others had had similar experiences of the divine spirit in nature. Some had been content to have this as the inspiration of their life and work. Others had gone on to discover God becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ.

It is hard to imagine nowadays a man of nineteen who had never before visited a city. Laurie Lee, author of "Cider with Rosie", is the only one I can think of. For years I had gazed at pictures of Paris, Athens and the more spacious parts of London, so our capital city in a wet dark October in 1922 was a crashing disappointment.

The entrance to the Royal Academy School of Painting is down a narrow dark alley between the forty-foot wall of the Burlington Arcade and the immense bulk of Burlington House. The studios are on the ground floor and little daylight can reach them. My scholarship was for five years. During the two years that I studied there I learned something about oil and tempera painting and more about figure drawing, thanks to that splendid draughtsman and teacher, Ernest Jackson, whose memorial adorns the lovely church of Saint James in Piccadilly.

The three things that I missed most in London were space and light; the sight and sound of running water; and friends. Acute self-consciousness and a sense of abysmal inferiority isolated me from all but three of the men students, and we used to go places after school and enjoy each other's company. Two of the women students

attracted me but I was far too shy to have much contact with them, being quite sure that I was a thin ungainly youth with a pasty white face and a permanently red nose. This image can't have been entirely true because one of them made a poem about me of which I remember two lines.

*'Cooper is long and lank and brown
As is the ribbed sea sand.'*

(a lampoon of Coleridge's *'Ancient Mariner'* of course.)

One of the men, who was a good deal older than me and whom I didn't particularly like, seemed to go out of his way to be friendly and helpful. Lonely as I was I felt grateful, and we would sometimes have a meal together, read poetry or listen to music. One night, as it was very late, I stayed the night. He seduced me. I had never heard of the existence of homosexuality so it came as a great shock. I very soon found out that this, especially the physical side of it, was not at all to my liking. I believe he really did love me in his perverted way and we remained friends for several years.

My father sent me £2 a week to live on and, in my second year, I won the Creswick Prize for landscape with a fairly large oil, *'Sky clearing after rain'* which brought me in £30 a year for the next three years. But I could stand London no longer, so built myself a wooden studio 20 feet by 15 near Storrington in Sussex, and there I lived and painted for the next three years.

I lost my heart to a lovely Irish girl, but, when she chose to marry another man, I decided to pack up and return to London and try to make up for the three years of my scholarship that I had missed. Galleries and private collectors were quite encouraging and commissions began to come my way. However, in the severe winter of 1929 I went into hospital with double pneumonia and pleurisy. While in a convalescent home in Margate I learned that my father had died of cancer.

Not having contracted tuberculosis as was suspected I returned home to earn a living somehow for my mother, sister, aunt and myself from my brush. During that year we managed to pay off the mortgage on our old house, Cross Brow, in Ambleside. My mother and sister were determined to live in the more lovely village of Grasmere four miles away, so we rented a cottage there named White Bridge. In 1907 my father had built a studio gallery from whole pine logs, imported complete from Norway. This was in good condition in Ambleside, so here began a problem for me. We could not afford to employ a sales person; my mother's arthritis was now chronic and crippling so she could not travel on buses or look after the gallery, and my sister Una refused to take any responsibility. So then began for me three years of increasing anxiety and frustration. When I was out painting I was worrying about the closed gallery, and when I was in the gallery trying to sell something yet all the time I was longing to be out on the fells painting.

My health was not very good and our family doctor said that I would not survive another winter unless I spent it in a hot sunny climate. Mrs Edith MacIver, whose sons ran the family line of cargo ships between Liverpool and Buenos Aires, generously presented me with a three-month voyage to Argentina and back, which certainly saved my life, and I returned home more able to tackle the problem of subsistence.

Over the next three years my greatest joy was to be out painting among the lakes and fells, especially from high ridges and summits. I had wonderful days climbing the rock faces first with Gordon and June Osmaston whose wedding I had attended in 1924, then with Fellow members of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club. Harry Kelly, a pioneer of many climbs and editor of the club guide books, invited me to illustrate these with drawings in place of photographs, a pleasant occupation that continued for some forty years.

But whenever I dared to look into the future I could see myself rather like a mouse on a treadmill, with no hope of having a life of my own, marrying and having a family. With this as an excuse I indulged in several affairs with girls who wanted, as I did, satisfaction through sexual intercourse. Although that is now called 'making love' there was little real love in it, only attraction. My vision and spiritual life were steadily withering. Worst of all there grew a bitterness and resentment against my mother and sister whom I blamed for keeping me in this financial prison, so I was not very good company when at home with them.

In fact, I hated them because they got in my way, and this hatred was becoming like a cancer, destroying any love that I ever possessed. To fail in loving is, for me, to fail in the most important thing in life. So I was a failure.

One day towards the end of May 1934 my good friends, Gordon and June Osmaston, came to see me. Gordon was by this time a major in the Royal Engineers and engaged in surveying the Himalayas, and they were on leave. We had become good friends through having trusted our lives to each other while climbing rock faces in the district. But this time I felt there was something different in them, a kind of radiant happiness and wholeness that overflowed towards each other and to me. They soon told me why.

They had been staying in Oxford where they met a group of infectious Christians that had become known as the Oxford Group. With them they had given control of their lives wholly and for ever to God as revealed by Jesus Christ. As soon as they told me I knew that this was what I should do. Next morning Gordon came and shared with me all his aims and failures which he had come to realise and taken seriously since facing the challenge of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ in terms of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.

The next day was Whit Sunday, Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit to men. Gordon asked me if I would care to come with him to church. During the service he stood up, at the invitation of the minister, and witnessed to his new found faith. Then came the sermon, with two texts from Saint John's gospel. *'If you obey my teaching you are really my disciples. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.'* (John.8.30) and *'I am the vine. You are the branches.'* (John.15.5)

The words might have been sent to meet my urgent need. I had longed to be free, especially of the burden of sin, and I had always longed for the truth in life and in art, yet there was this one condition. *'Obey my teaching'*. Then had come the tremendous promise of becoming part of Christ, therefore of God — a branch of the vine.

This was truly the Holy Spirit speaking.

All that evening I struggled with God, arguing. 'I am ready to give you control of my whole life. Not of painting, of course, otherwise what shall we all live on? Anyway, it's the only fairly good thing about me. You can't want me to give it up and become some sort of a parson going round preaching to people for the rest of my life. That really would be the end.' At last, about eleven o'clock, with rain pouring down outside, I said 'Alright, God, if you really are there, I'm ready to stop painting for ever if that's what you want, and to be whatever you wish if you will only take from me the burden of the failure I am. If you will take control.'

Immediately the burden of sin and guilt, of not being able to love, was not there any longer. Instead was a sense of light, peace and joy and, best of all, God's love in the presence of Jesus Christ. I knew all was well.

II

MID-DAY

NOW came the exciting job of working all this out in everyday life. I told Gordon what had happened and we spent some time in silence, giving everything into God's control, ready to obey, and writing down any thoughts that came as being as near as we could get, in our present imperfect state, to being His will, taking as our standards the absolutes of honesty, purity and love.

First I found that I should be completely honest with my mother and sister over money. I had allowed them to understand that all the earnings went into the family pool, whereas I had kept back some of it to spend on my own pleasures. I realised that this confession could give them more power over my life but I must take that risk. When I told my mother she said she had known this for some time but what astonished her was my free confession.

A few days later she came to me and said that she wanted to live the way I had found. Almost at once she became the sweet, gentle, undemanding mother that I had always longed for. I introduced her to an elderly woman friend, a fully committed Christian, for further sharing, guidance and decision. The whole situation had completely changed.

Una, in time, became as loving and unselfish as she had ever been in her life. However she never quite gave all of herself to God and, sadly, she was to bring suffering upon herself in later life.

Then each day brought the morning listening with Gordon, the chance of being honest wherever I had failed, a new sense of purity

and wholeness entirely free from lust, and, best of all, of God's love going through me to everyone. After some weeks of this cheerful freedom of obedience, a thought came that I should go and paint at a certain place at a certain time. So God had given me back my painting now that it was no longer my security and He was.

Over the next few years I met many more free infectious Christians, mostly of the Oxford Group and its founder, Frank Buchman, first at Oxford and then in my home at Grasmere. After my brother started life again, the first person to find a new faith through me was a young communist teacher on holiday. One morning he invited himself to come out painting with me, and, while I painted, he sat beside me pouring out all his longings and his failures. It ended up with both of us on our knees on the top of a mountain, giving our lives to God.

In 1936 the thought came to me that I should build a good stone house, studio and gallery in the middle of Grasmere. At that time we had just £120 in the bank. However during 1937 I wrote and illustrated a book, *'The Hills of Lakeland'*, all within a year; bought a small piece of land; had an excellent design of our building from Brian Bannatyne Lewis: obtained a mortgage with which to employ a good builder, who completed the building within the year 1938. This we financed by our selling the originals of my book, which we hung in the gallery and sold while the men were still working on the house. 1938 was quite a year as I also found a wife.

When Ophelia Gordon Bell first came with her aunt to my studio I knew that she would be my wife. It was wonderful to find that she agreed, with the sense of our marriage being the next right step for both of us. Before we could marry World War Two broke out, so the wedding eventually came to pass on May 25th, 1940.

Now began a life of unimaginable joy. Each day became an exciting adventure together. My mother, by now aged seventy four and crippled with arthritis, lived with us. When I went off to be Air Ministry camouflage officer for the north west of England, Ophelia somehow managed to run the studio gallery as well as the house; look after my mother; and produce our first-born child, a daughter whom we named Otaia after my Norwegian aunt, then living in Langdale. It was good to be together again when peace came, and, in December 1945 a son, John, arrived.

Over the ensuing years, during which another son, Julian, and another daughter, Clare, arrived, we acquired many and deep friendships in the arts, in Moral Re-armament (the way of life which grew out of the Oxford Group) and among young people from many countries who came to stay with us. On Clare's arrival we found that our studio-house was too small, so we rented a much larger one for thirteen years, up on the fellside a mile north of Grasmere and rejoicing in the ancient name of Winterseeds.

These were the happiest days of my life, our days filled with our growing family and our art, for Ophelia had, at last, begun sculpture once more with a portrait of Edmund Hillary. We had met him in August 1953 when John Hunt invited us for the day to meet the successful Everest team. She discovered that, far from losing her skills during twelve years with almost no sculpture, this portrait was better than any she had made before. This was most encouraging for her. From then onwards commissions kept her busy and fulfilled. One commission for industry was for two Portland stone figures weighing four tons each. Another for an over-life-size figure of Saint Bede for the tower of a Catholic church. Yet another she carried out in welded pieces of aluminium, Christ on the cross, for a home of healing in Kent.

Of course we had differences, sometimes very powerful ones. We were both fairly strong minded artists. But whenever we asked God for forgiveness and guidance, the answer, the peace and the healing came. This was often not at all simple, certainly not easy. Being by nature a man who likes himself rather too much and enormously enjoys his work, I was apt to be unaware of and insensitive to the spiritual problems that Ophelia was battling with, and of the difficulties our children were having in the various stages of growing up. Now that they can feel free of my domination and self-righteousness they tell me that they were often afraid of my disapproval and so could not confide in me over their sometimes agonizing experiences. They say that I always saw moral decisions too much in black or white. In fact I was not loving them and trying to understand them as a father should.

Ophelia sometimes was overwhelmed by a sense of having utterly failed as wife and mother. When we were alone together this would sometimes become uncontrollable hysteria, as though some dark power was trying to take her over. After one such occasion I woke up aware of a black object, octopus shaped and moving, that hovered over us. I was terrified and could only say "Jesus, Jesus" and immediately the evil thing was gone.

I tried to understand the reason for these attacks that seemed to spring from no apparent cause, and I could only assume that they may have been some very deeply hidden result of her parents having separated completely when she was three years old. However by the next day or even after a few hours she would recover, seek forgiveness and accept healing and strength from God, becoming again the vivid, energetic, imaginative and creative person she was always meant to be.

We had many happy years with our children and friends, camping, skiing and mild rock climbing, exploring in Scotland, Norway, Italy and Switzerland where we attended conferences at Mountain House, Caux, the European centre of Moral Re-armament two thousand steep feet above the lake of Geneva.

My mother was now in need of trained medical care so she lived with a trained nurse in Grasmere. She died in 1956 at the great age of ninety.

III

INTO THE NIGHT

BY the 1970s, with all our children married and our horizons in friendship, worship and work expanding, life could hardly have been more fulfilled and joyful. Yet now at the age of seventy there began to creep into my life a sense of futility and shadow. Nothing much mattered any more. This increased in spite of Ophelia's loving care and encouragement. I began to feel separated from her and the children and, then, sometimes from God.

This shadow was the more difficult to understand because there was no apparent cause for it, in fact every reason for it to be dispelled by the love and prayers of Ophelia, our children and friends, especially believers, and our village doctor, Dennis Pratt. He advised me to consult a local psychiatrist, but, after five visits, I found that he could not help.

I tried to continue to paint but this became meaningless and clumsy without any inspiration.

Yet throughout this darkness I felt the need of some life-line to hold onto beyond the love of my family and friends, some regular discipline for what remained of the Spirit in me. One such discipline was to read each morning and night a collection of quotations from the bible in a little book named "Daily Light", which was one of the threads that kept me in some degree attached to reality. Sometimes thoughts would come to me as a result of this discipline, sometimes not, but I wrote down any that came as being the nearest I could then get to truth and light. I always shared them with Ophelia and with friends who were themselves believers and living on the guidance of God.

Outwardly I tried to behave as though all was well except, of course, with Ophelia, who knew the truth. I gave lectures on painting and the Lake District and even in 1970, at the invitation of the vicar, preached from the pulpit in the ancient and lovely church of Crosthwaite near Keswick.

Ophelia and I travelled in Dorset and Wiltshire and, in 1971 spent three weeks in Norway, travelling and living in our ancient Dormobile, and, at that time, painting.

Otalia and John were married in 1963, Julian in 1972 and Clare in 1974, so we were involved more in their lives. Ophelia's work was taking up more of her time and interest, and was becoming increasingly a form of spiritual fulfilment as she produced various sculptures in stone and metal on the theme of Christ on the cross, and the suffering and helplessness of man without Him.

As for myself there began to grow a sense of guilt over being a burden to my family and our anxious friends and then about my parents. I seemed to have failed my father. We loved each other dearly, and he had great hopes for my progress as a painter so that I should paint better than himself. Yet, after I had left home in 1922, I had given less and less of my time and caring, living my own life in the south, only returning home for Christmas and part of the summer. He had come to see me in hospital in London in 1929 looking thin and ill and sad. I little realised that he was beginning to suffer from the cancer that killed him in July.

I felt also that I had neglected my mother, who had grown into a lovable and humorous person, though suffering increasingly from arthritis. I used to visit her often while she lived with the nurse, but in the end she died alone in the night. Thinking about all this now I realised that much of this sense of guilt was quite unreal and imaginary.

Ophelia and I would often take a daily walk round the Grasmere valley. One day early in 1975 her right foot began to drag. Her doctor, a woman, sent her immediately to a specialist and his diagnosis was cancer of the brain. An exploratory operation carried out by an eminent specialist in Preston Hospital revealed that the tumour was too deep and large to be removed and that she had only a few more months to live.

Mercifully, except for about an hour at the beginning, she was spared all physical suffering, but first the control of her limbs and then of speech caused terrible frustration in one who had been so active. We had her at home for some five months but, towards the end, she needed constant professional medical attention which she received from the very caring staff of the Westmorland County Hospital.

There she died at six o'clock on the evening of August 12th 1975 at the age of sixty.

I can't remember very much about the dark days that followed except the way the children rallied round and supported me. It was something of a relieving chore to share out her possessions among the family and friends. Her green slate grave stone in Grasmere cemetery was carved with her favourite Roman lettering, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," and, at the top, her Flower of Understanding.

She had carried out a sculpture of the Madonna and Child some two years before, so we gave this, as her memorial, to the church where it hangs on the central pillar.

I had then no heart for anything, even for going on living, and now I felt deep down that I had been the cause of her death. My friends the McAlls, psychiatrist and doctor, with whom I stayed in the New

Forest, assured me that this was not in any way possible. I even went to Italy, to the places we had been together a few years before. It was disastrous. Rome had become a nightmare, Florence a cold and confusing city full of art that no longer spoke to me and people of whom I became terrified. But the worst was to stay in Assisi and no longer be aware of the presence of Jesus and Francis. A visit to Norway in 1976 was rather better, as I stayed with my cousin in Bergen, my aunt at Balestrand and my good friend, Victor Sparre, painter and maker of stained glass, in Oslo. And, all through the dark years, I continued to attend morning service in church each Sunday even though this discipline failed to bring the light I so much needed.

All this time my friends in M.R.A. were praying for me and involving me in the great hopeful outgoing work of the Holy Spirit in Britain and the world beyond. This was happening very greatly through art, especially the art of the theatre, headed up by my old and trusted friend, Ronald Mann, his wife Mary and his sister Dorothy. They would stay with me or nearby, walk and paint and treat me as a normal being who was 'resting' from painting for a while. This steady stream of love coming through such friends kept my spirit from being utterly destroyed and must have prepared me for the miracle that was to happen.

One day my old friends, Hugh and Joan Atkinson, came to tea. As they were leaving Joan turned and said 'We are praying for you, Heaton'. I am sure others must have said this to me often, but, for some reason, on this occasion my whole being seemed to do a U turn from a downward direction to an upward one. So this, for me, was the light at the end of the tunnel and the beginning of a new day.

IV

A NEW DAY

ONE of the first signs of this new lease of life was that I wanted to get out painting among my old haunts, the fells and valleys, rivers, becks and lakes. After a few bold but rather fumbling efforts I was painting with more assurance, skill, speed and quick judgement than I had done for years. This was a splendid help to morale. Perhaps the most rewarding thing that happened was the great relief and joy that came to my family and friends who had stood by me throughout the dark night of my soul. I saw everyone with new eyes, and they responded. Whereas before I used to avoid people, especially in any numbers, I now began to accept invitations to parties, concerts, openings of exhibitions and mountaineering dinners.

As I continued to enter this new dimension of living, the experience of worshipping together in our village church became increasingly more important and enjoyable — greeting old and new friends, joining in the old familiar prayers, for local people in need and for problems around the world, the joy of feeling free to sing out lustily, the stimulating address, always with plenty of food for thought and always from first-hand experience, by our Rector, Keith Wood. Then the cups of tea or coffee across the road in the ancient tithe barn, with ample opportunities for meeting people from many parts of the world and, in winter, to exchange greetings and news with our fellow villagers.

Once a week our Rector welcomes anyone who cares to come to his large study to read and discuss the bible. This is usually a very lively and thought-provoking ninety minutes, all of us learning something from each other and feeling free to speak of our deepest thoughts.

Instead of going to church only at Mattins, I began to take a blind friend, John Kennedy, each Sunday to Holy Communion at eight. John died in 1985 soon after his wife, Betty, had taken the same journey. But I found that I needed this weekly service of the Eucharist, the one service that Jesus asked us to hold, so now I continue with this very strengthening experience. While writing this book I have come to realize how much of it I owe to the church.

The children and I had formed a private limited company with which to manage the Studio business. John became managing director, Julian and his painter wife, Linda, each came to work there on two days a week only, as they were occupied with their own painting in their studio flat in Ambleside, the village where John also lived with his wife and three children. I gave all my possessions to the company — paintings, prints, books, everything — and we decided together at each annual general meeting how much each person's salary should be based partly on need rather than seniority, for I, though chairman, was a family of only one. John proved to be an excellent managing director, his own experience as well as creativity inherited from parents and grandparents enabling him to make sure judgements in choosing a team of young assistants, organizing the many sections of the business and planning and executing all with interesting flair, bringing in many innovations in display, execution, framing, mounting and the rest.

I had not until now really faced up to my own failure over my children, having dominated them for so long, just as my mother dominated me, and having to be always right. No one can be always right and be a true Christian. It is a contradiction of terms. It comes from the failure to be real about oneself in the light

of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. It is based on fear, and on the misuse of power. I imagined that I could somehow prevent my children from making mistakes. This is a temptation that many parents have to face, and it can be agonizing. After their early years, in which they must be taught the difference between right and wrong, we need to encourage them to choose to do the very best they can, to obey the deepest thing in their hearts, thoughts good and loving; but we must leave them really free to choose, without fear in ourselves. Perfect love drives out fear, and goes on whichever way they may choose.

Our family parties at Christmas and at the increasing number of birthdays became very happy occasions. On my eightieth birthday we had ninety guests and used the two galleries as well as the house. It was a joy to see again so many old and new friends, several cousins in my family met for the first time and many new links were established.

Each year I was now making several journeys to London, to conferences, openings of exhibitions, first nights of plays at the Westminster Theatre, the British headquarters of M.R.A., staying often with my daughter Clare and her very nice husband Das and son Andrew, or with the Mann family. And often I would stay for a few days at Tirley Garth in Cheshire, the M.R.A. northern centre where many conferences take place. In 1977 I attended an arts conference within a larger conference at Caux, making the opening speech and giving two illustrated lectures. It was an interesting and important gathering in an inspiring setting far above Montreux. Also I attended smaller discussion groups in London composed of artists of several kinds.

I went several times to Norway to see my cousins in Bergen and my 97 year old Aunt Tulli, who still lived until 1984 in the little old family home at Balestrand. She died peacefully in her sleep soon after my last visit. The little house is to be opened in 1986 as a small folk museum called the Dyer's Cabin. On two occasions I was invited to Greece, to see my friends Jim Brown the composer and his wife Mary, the singer. First in Athens, with a few days on the island of Aegina and, in 1983, in their little farm cottage on the island of Andros, in the tiny village of Agios Petros, 600 feet above the small harbour of Gavrion.

In October 1983 I started to write an autobiography, inspired by my friend Ronald Mann. The book came from my mind and hand very quickly, involving around ten hours writing each day for a month to produce the first draft. It was just as though it had been waiting inside me to be written and I didn't know until I started, then it was as though a key was turned. Very soon a Cumbrian publisher, Colin Baker of Frank Peters, who had been doing our colour printing for several years, came and asked if he might publish the autobiography, which I had named "Mountain Painter", and all four of my previous books. The launching of the new book took place at Brockhole, the National Park Centre on the shore of Windermere. Chris Bonington opened it with two splendid speeches, in the morning for the press, T.V., radio, etc. and, after an exquisite lunch as guest of Bronwen Nixon at Rothay Manor Hotel, cooked by herself, a second speech to some 120 of my friends from far and wide. The book was splendidly reviewed in all the leading dailies, weeklies and some art and mountaineering journals, in Britain and abroad.

Although the arrangement was normally that all profits should go to the family company, my children said that this book was such a personal venture that I should keep the royalties. I had all along felt that the book was a gift of God — in fact that all my possessions,

including my money, belonged to Him as every Christian should — so all I need do was to ask Him what He wants me to do with His property. The answer was to form a charitable trust through which, so far, I have been able to covenant money to thirty three charities. All this has brought in a continuous flood of letters from young and old, and several public appearances which I enjoyed. Best of all many new people came into my life. In 1984 I stayed with a Maltese family, the Sciortinos, where besides making many new friends, I was invited to speak to the British Residents Association, and a full page review of *'Mountain Painter'* appeared in *'The Times of Malta'*.

In February 1985 I was asked by my friend, Monsignor Leonard, Adviser to Cardinal Hume, to entertain Cardinal Glemp of Poland and his retinue to lunch in my little home. First I drove the Cardinal at great speed over Newlands Pass, along Buttermere and over Honister Pass. After lunch the Cardinal gave me a lovely book on Poland and a warm embrace on both cheeks. In London he said to a friend of mine 'Heaton Cooper, he drives at great speed but with Polish enthusiasm'. This year I have been invited to stay with the Bishop of Warsaw, who was at our luncheon party. He also told me that they included me in their Masses on Christmas Day, a fact that I found very moving.

Melvyn Bragg interviewed me on the shore of Crummock Water on a calm sunny morning in May 1984, for his film *'Land of the Lakes'*, a three hour television film. In the summer of 1985 Richard Else, the producer, and his crew shot a film about me, based on *'Mountain Painter'*, a half-hour television film, to appear in 1986 first on B.B.C. North East and later on B.B.C.2. In May 1985 I was invited to have lunch with the Queen in a marquee in the Coniston valley close to

where I was born. She has all my books and likes them quite a lot. In the next week I met Prince Philip at Brockhole and had a short talk with him about painting, mountains and aid for Sub-Saharan Africa.

All this new life that continues to enter my life I can only attribute to the love and truth that God is giving me each day (usually from the New Testament, the Psalms or Isaiah) now that I rise early and commit the whole of my life, then and for ever, to God. Then I face up to my failures in the light of the life and teaching of Jesus, ask for and accept forgiveness from God, then write down any thoughts that come during the next half-hour or so. I don't imagine these thoughts are perfect, but only the best I can have in my present imperfect state to being His will for me today. The important thing is total committment.

Some of these thoughts, when shared with others where needed, help to bring more people into my life, even though I must be nearing the end of it. The greatest gift of all is to be allowed to be used to help others, by His Holy Spirit, to become whole.

Within a wider horizon than my personal one, the whole question of darkness and light seems to me, in some ways, something of a mystery. I am sure that God does not create darkness, evil and the total death of the soul for us humans. I believe we create it ourselves, the whole human race. Yet, when it has happened, provided there still exists a life-line between us and God, or a believer in the centre of the situation, it seems that God is able to turn it all into a channel for His Holy Spirit, and for the coming of His kingdom on earth.

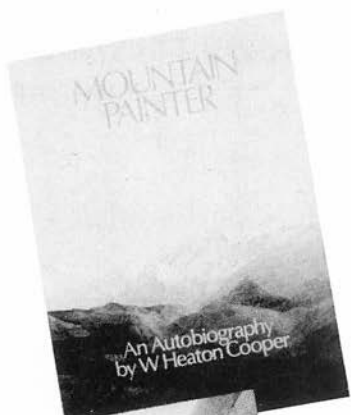
On the question of failure or success, it may well appear to some people that this potted story of my life is nothing but a kind of success story, and so not very interesting or encouraging to anyone who feels they are a failure. I would like to say three things about this:

- i) It doesn't matter if you are a failure. Even if you don't love yourself, and no one else seems to love you, God does.
- ii) For much of my life I have been a failure because I am not, by nature, a loving person. I still fail each day to love enough and have to ask God to forgive me, and to use me as an instrument of his love.
- iii) If apparent success comes, I must claim no credit, but give all credit to God as far as I allow His love and guidance to go through me to others.

Jesus came to heal the failures, the sick, the sinners, not the proud and the self-sufficient.

“If you do my will you shall know the truth,
And the truth shall set you free.”

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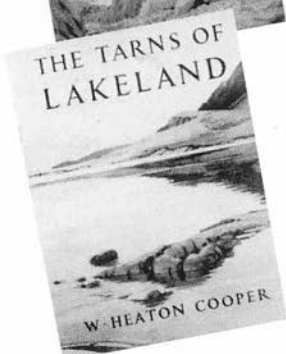
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