

Preface

The addresses collected here are circumstantial in the sense that at their inception they responded to particular events and settings. They were proportioned to their circumstances, and here they are printed in the main as they were delivered.

Although they were independently written, for divers purposes and at sundry times, they have turned out to possess a fair concinnity. They accord one with another in approach and ultimate intention, and when ranged in a series they exhibit a thematic continuity from analytical particulars to metaphysical generalities.

It is not deliberate that the collection opens and also closes with the contemplation of man's isolation in the infinitudes of the universe, but it is surely not quite fortuitous either. Under this wide aspect, one way to appreciate the tenor of the addresses is to recall an enigmatic description, stemming from Paracelsus nearly five hundred years ago and continued by Swedenborg, and to see them as intimating something like a doctrine of signatures.

In this character they make a sequel to previous though more concerted sets of essays which have appeared under the titles *Primordial Characters* (1978) and *Reconnaissances* (1980). It is in like character also that they are not distractingly provided with references; instead, the sources and authorities mentioned or tacitly drawn on have been consolidated into a select bibliography.

The parts of this book were all delivered, at some state or another of their composition, in the United States of America. It is fitting therefore that they should be dedicated to the memory of a forebear of mine who spent much of his adult life in that great land. His laconic and quizzical style, like his Bostonian intonations, reflected the impress upon him of a country to which he was as devoted as I too was later to become. Something of my own commitment to the qualities of American life and character can doubtless be traced to his example; and I should like it to be taken that in publishing these circumstantial deliveries in the United States I shall be making some return of thanks on his part as from myself.

R.N.

All Souls College, Oxford
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