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# THE CORNERSTONES



THE  
CORNERSTONES

*A Conversation in Elysium*

*by*  
ERIC LINKLATER

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## THE CORNERSTONES

*The scene is a glade in the Elysian Fields. The mild air of perpetual spring is coloured, in part, by the green shade of a set of beech-trees, and a few lambs are cropping the emerald grass. There is birdsong, with various tunes but none insistent or overloud, and a stream tinkles. Sailing with perfect assurance a tall blue sky, cirrus clouds guarantee the fine weather.*

*To the natural amenities of the glade have been added a rustic bench or two; a table on which are set some beakers and a jug of nectar; and a television set of unrestricted range.*

*On a bench, reading, sits KUNG FU-TZE, whom we know better as CONFUCIUS; and nearby IN conversation, are ABRAHAM LINCOLN and VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN. In their features the Immortals have not much altered from the appearance by which the world remembers them. He looks still as young as a hickory-jail, -stiu tall \* lined with melancholy and humour in his dark eyes, strength*

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*in his great hands, nobility his essence. LENIN with his curt black beard, the impatient dome of his bald head, is still the picture of vitality, restless intelligence: his eyebrows lift, his eyes narrow, his face grows taut and contracted with the zest of enquiry. CONFUCIUS remains the ugliest of men : of enormous stature, he has pendulous ears, projecting teeth, a snub nose, and a huge calm dignity that reduces these trivial misfortunes to insignificance. The clothing of LENIN and LINCOLN has undergone a subtle change, comparable to that produced by Manet when painting gentlemen at a picnic : its incongruities have been harmonised with an idyllic background. The silken robes of CONFUCIUS needed no improvement. He, living, was already dressed for heaven.*

*There is a fourth person present, but he is barely visible : the others do not see him. He is lying on the grass, behind the trees, and is presumably asleep. At any rate he makes no movement.*

## LINCOLN

It's unfortunate that you had no weaknesses. One or two picturesque human frailties would have done far more to make you popular, in my

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country and in Britain, than the unassailable logic of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, for example. Or the inevitable deductions of *The State and Revolution*, let us say. You made the mistake of publishing a library of text-books, and omitting to write an apology for their author. You let us admire or detest your intelligence, but you gave us little chance to sympathise. Perhaps you should have written a good popular autobiography.

### LENIN

Work was my autobiography. My life was my confession. I wrote text-books because they were needed. Revolution was necessary, and my people had to be instructed in the philosophy and technique of revolution.

### LINCOLN

But my people, and the British, don't much care for instruction, unless it promotes some purpose of their own. They prefer entertainment. In the English-speaking world the professor becomes a popular figure only by reason of his eccentricities.

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He may be the ultimate authority on Plato, the Quantum Theory, or the Law of Rent; but his learning will have no general esteem unless he goes to his daughter's wedding in carpet-slippers. Then he may become a legend. And you, in your Chair of Revolution, which is a hard subject, not obviously recommending itself to the non-revolutionary majority, had more need of carpet-slippers than most.

LENIN

But it wasn't my intention to amuse the world. I wanted to reform it: a part of it, that is.

LINCOLN

And you went about your business in so methodical and deliberate a way that the world, or much of it, acquired the uneasy belief that you were more interested in the process than the purpose of reform. You got the name of a technician, not of a humanitarian, which is the more popular name. There was a feeling that you believed in revolution for the sake of revolution. Against amateur politicians you played like a professional,

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and the others naturally resented the way in which you spoiled their game.

LENIN

Were you not also a professional ?

LINCOLN

I had the dedication, but not the training. There were others more expert than I. I was spared the obloquy of pre-eminence. But you stood on a height, and the world saw the work of your brain, but scarcely heard the voice of your heart.

LENIN

It was surely natural that my heart should speak Russian ? And what it spoke was so obvious that it would have been waste of time to translate it. The same things have been said wherever there were slavery, oppression, poverty, and injustice. Why should I exhaust my energy, and your patience, on platitudes ? You know what conditions were in Russia. You know how we lived. Our shame and serfdom were common knowledge.

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In such a state of life there was one duty : to change it. Why we had to change it was clear enough. Whoever wanted reasons had only to look out of the window. But how it was to be changed required teaching.

### LINCOLN

The world is very fond of the obvious. It will listen for ever to eloquent dissertation on the deplorable blackness of black, and our laudable ambition to be white.

### LENIN

What I did in Russia was what you did in America. You freed slaves, and so did I. I saw two nations in Russia, the rich and the poor. My purpose was to make one nation. And you in America saw the land breaking between North and South, and the threatening birth of two unfriendly peoples. There was one way to stop that division. Civil war. You saw that clearly, and so did many others. But many shrank from the cost of war.

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LINCOLN

I myself shrank from it.

LENIN

But your judgment prevailed, and by war you made unity out of disparity. So did I in Russia. And you had your enemies, on both sides, as I had mine. Not till you were safely dead was Illinois\* regard for you adopted by your whole people. You complain that I took insufficient trouble to make myself palatable, and my cause popular in the world. But you did not readily become a national hero, and the British were in no hurry to add you to their pantheon, even though you had the overwhelming advantage of being killed in the moment of victory. So far as my personal reputation is affected, I was unlucky in that respect. When the unhappy Dora Kaplan shot me, her aim was less accurate than Booth's,

LINCOLN

A public man should never let a woman try to assassinate him, unless he wants to die by poison.

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Even then he might be well advised to measure the dose for himself. But you certainly can't trust a woman with a gun. There was a neighbour of mine, when I was a young man, whose wife aimed to shoot him on no fewer than five occasions, and got so mortified by continual failure that eventually she shot herself; though whether by misadventure or the deliberate choice of an easier target, was never rightly known. Her widowed husband, a prey to loneliness and melancholia, followed her to the grave within six months.

LENIN

A pleasant story. Where did it happen ?

LINCOLN

In Sangamon County. A simple locality in those days, full of God-fearing people and good hunting.

LENIN

It was, perhaps, not vastly different from Shushenskoye, in Siberia, where I spent three years of exile. Was there a river in your county ?

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LINCOLN

The Sangamon.

LENIN

We had the Yenisei. There was good shooting in the marshes. Wild duck of all kinds, and hares on the higher ground. I had a dog, a Gordon setter, that I trained. He had the nose of an epicure, and the patience of a peasant in retrieving. One of the most agreeable things I know is to see a good dog working. I spent, I suppose, some of the happiest days of my life in Shushenskoye. In exile in Siberia. An odd confession, isn't it? There was the torture of frustration, of course, whenever one sat down to think of it. But there were grey mornings by the river, and the short twilight with the duck flighting, and the dog coming out of the darkness of the reeds with a mallard in his soft mouth, and his wet body quivering with delight. And at night there was singing, there was my chess-board, and my books. I read Turgeniev and Lermontov, Tolstoy and Hegel. I had a room with white walls, with fir branches in the corners, and rugs of the peasants'

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weaving. My wife and her mother shared the cottage. Yes, I was comparatively happy in Siberia ; though desperately anxious to get away from it. There's much to be said for a simple life.

### LINCOLN

And we were much to be pitied for being unable to enjoy it. But a gun and a fishing-pole can't satisfy a man whose brain is tormented by the spectacle of neighbours who persist in committing follies, and are condemned to reap evil. I never rightly determined in my mind the boundary between conscience and consciousness, but it seems to me that conscience is only the executive part of the longer word. If you're aware on the one hand of human bondage, and feel on the other some capacity, however small, to lighten the load, then you're doomed to action. You're at the mercy of your conscience. But I always envied the man who found contentment in fishing.

### LENIN

We can't afford the luxury of simplicity until we've completed our task. We have conquered,

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or nearly conquered, what is called nature. I said once that Communism meant the Soviet Republic plus electricity, and that isn't far from the truth. Science and applied science have given us the means to produce and distribute all that everybody needs to eat and drink and wear, to work at and play with. The earth to-day is like a market garden for our tables. The seven seas and the sky above the clouds could be charted as highways from orchard to cornland, from cattle ranch to vineyard. Industry has found a new world, and furnished it. Miracles come off the conveyor-belt in every factory. We have taught deserts to grow meal and wine, and children born in the dark of a ghetto to measure the light of stars. In the world of to-day mankind could fill both hands with plenty, and recreate itself in abundant leisure. But there remains an obstacle. We have subdued all nature to our needs but the last obdurate, most bitter corner : human nature. Human nature must still be taught and disciplined.

LINCOLN

There is one profession that won't feel the

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draught of unemployment for a good long time to come.

LENIN

We have begun our teaching. And our discipline.

LINCOLN

So did Confucius, about two thousand five hundred years ago.

LENIN

His conception of the world was static. He tried to establish a system based on the mythical virtues of a dead age. But nothing is built for all time, nothing is absolute. Everything decays, and decay can be resisted only by ceaseless new construction. Man must advance. It is fatal for him to rest. If he stands still, he is destroyed.

LINCOLN

Like the Children of Israel when they sat down in Sinai. That, I have always thought, is one of the most illuminating stories in history. No

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sooner had Moses left them, to go climb the mountain, than they set up shop and began to worship the Calf of Gold. Which means, I suppose, that they started selling hard liquor and looking-glasses to the local Indians. How vital in man is the commercial instinct !

#### LENIN

I, and the most doctrinaire of my Communist friends, had to recognise that. We were forced to make our principles more elastic than they were meant to be, and learn the art of compromise. The small bourgeoisie were among the enemies of our revolution, but we had to make use of that instinct of theirs. We had to foster our little shopkeepers and their like. But remember what happened when Moses came down from the mountain : he burnt the Golden Calf and humbled his people. And that, I should say, is the correct and necessary penalty for undisciplined exercise of the commercial instinct.

#### LINCOLN

In my country they have preferred to let the Golden Calf grow into a cow, and milk it.

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LENIN

You can never milk it dry. It is not an economic animal.

CONFUCIUS, *rising from his seat, a finger between the leaves of the book he has been reading, comes towards them and addresses* LENIN.

CONFUCIUS

I have been reading your little work on the teaching of Karl Marx, in which I find much to interest me. Very fruitful of debate, I think, is a dictum you quote, and which Marx presumably accepted, that nothing in the world is permanent, or sacred for all time. You imply, do you not, that the world is for ever changing ? That change, indeed, is the dominating characteristic of the world ? But to me it seems that although the world of to-day is superficially a very different place from that which I more intimately knew, yet many of its conditions are identical with the circumstances of life in my time. Men are still distressed, and still deceive their fellow men. Dissolute rulers, with whom we were well acquainted, have not

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wholly vanished from the scene. Nor has anarchy, nor injustice, nor contempt for right thinking, nor the exaltation of wrong ideas. In my day we feared the imminent collapse of civilisation. That fear has not been dispelled. Nor, strangely enough, has civilisation. There was, not many years ago, a proposal of the greater nations that all should disarm, and thereby for all time put an end to war. In my father's time, who was a soldier and regarded the idea with suspicion, we had in China a disarmament conference, and enjoyed peace for the appreciable period of two or three years in consequence. A desire for enduring peace appears to be common to many ages, and to many different races of people. So also does frustration of their desire.

LINCOLN

You're not a pessimist, by any chance ?

CONFUCIUS

No, no.

LINCOLN

Nowadays, I am told, it is pretty generally accepted that the first parent of those swallows,

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that we see flying so prettily and so very skilfully, was some kind of lizard. It must have taken even the most ambitious lizards a long time to learn to fly, and if our friend Lamarck is right, they eventually developed wings because their aspiration insisted on getting them. So if man aspires to peace, he may yet develop a peace-contriving mind. I think he is doing so. If a desire persists, in time and space, from ancient China to modern America, it will yet learn to fly in some age or other, perhaps far distant, perhaps within living sight.

#### CONFUCIUS

I was not depreciating man's long desire for peace. I was merely numbering some points of resemblance in your larger world and my small world of China. The essence of our common world is unchanged. And therefore, with no more than formal diffidence, I suggest that the problem offered to a superior person in Moscow, New York, London, or Chungking to-day, is precisely that seen by a superior person in the state of Lu, in the far-off days of Duke Ting. The core of the problem is the art of government.

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LINCOLN

Surely the core of it is the purpose of government ?

CONFUCIUS

The purpose of government, of good government, is the outer part of the problem, recognisable by all. It is ...

LENIN

To secure to the people the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

LINCOLN

You agree with that ?

LENIN

Don't you ?

CONFUCIUS

I would rather say that the purpose of government is to teach men their moral obligations, and

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to set them a good example. A man's moral obligations are duty to himself and charity to his neighbours. A general recognition of these obligations would assuredly guarantee the sort of life and liberty which they who composed your Declaration of Independence, Mr. Lincoln, almost certainly had in mind. How wise they were in refraining from adding to the duties of government the positive bestowal of happiness ! How practical and how modest was their proposal merely to ensure conditions in which a citizen, with all the pleasure of persistent hope, might for ever pursue his happiness !

#### LENIN

I find it difficult to admit any material similarity between your world and mine, between your problem of government and ours to-day. You thought of government in terms of an hereditary caste whose function it was to govern. In considering the art of government, how much attention did you pay to its social and economic aspects ?

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### CONFUCIUS

There was once a Duke of Tsi, a wasteful man, a spendthrift who scattered the wealth of his dukedom on a variety of foolish interests, not one of which was productive. He asked my advice, and to him I answered that the whole art of government lay in the economic use of revenue. But that is not entirely the truth. To another ruler, who needed the reminder, I said : Consider first the welfare of your people. Duke Ting, in my native state of Lu, required different advice. He had not an ill nature, but a weak nature. He did not realise that to govern well a ruler must have infinite patience, take endless pain, be scrupulous in attention to detail, yet entertain large ideas and noble conceptions. So to him I said : He who realises the difficulty of being a good ruler, has almost succeeded in making his country prosperous. . . . These, I know, are merely comments on the art of government. But we should accept no foregone conclusion about it, except one, perhaps. I would even suggest that, as far as possible, the laws of a country should remain uncodified. Let there be well-known principles, but a brief and scanty

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statute-book. With ingenuity a law can always be circumvented, but the acceptance of principles is a good defence against wrong-doing.

### LINCOLN

What is the exception to your rule against foregone conclusions ?

### CONFUCIUS

That government must have authority, and be not afraid to use it. I was, for many years, a student of wisdom and teacher of what I had learnt. My influence, during that period, was negligible. Then I became governor of a small town. My knowledge of men and affairs was no greater than it had been a week before my appointment, but a week after my appointment my influence, within the limits of my bailiwick, was paramount. Having the power to enforce my wishes, I enforced goodness. Authority made my knowledge valuable. It is the nature of the ordinary person that he will work with extreme energy for the sake of a beautiful woman, but with

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little zeal for the sake of virtue, unless there is behind him some benign coercion. Authority is therefore the second necessity of government; the first, of course, being good intention.

### LENIN

But all the time, at the back of your mind, there was the determination to preserve, by your sort of government, the *status quo*. To preserve, or re-establish it. You didn't foresee the part destined to be played by the common people of the world, or do anything to further it. Didn't you once say : The people can be made to follow a certain path, but they cannot be made to know the reason why ?

### CONFUCIUS

And did you not compel the people of Russia to accept as tutors the members of your Communist Party, though your peasants could see no reason in what they taught ?

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### LENIN

They were taught to see the reason. But you, if I may say so without being offensive, spent much of your time in the mere teaching of ritual.

### CONFUCIUS

I was always interested in ritual. It is useful to have established modes of behaviour for those formal occasions which are recurrent in a civilised community. Otherwise a man must always be ready to improvise a suitable manner and agreeable comment. Which would become tedious. In certain rites there is also a valuable symbolism, and the common acceptance of social forms does much to ease diplomatic intercourse. On at least one occasion, I believe, you yourself acknowledged the force of a bourgeois ritual when your colleague, Mr. Trotsky, had to attend some function connected with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. It seriously worried him that he, a pious proletarian, should be expected to wear evening-dress. You, however, were unperturbed by the concession to bourgeois formality, and on your instruction he

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attended the reception in conventional garments. Is that not so ?

### LENIN

It may be. But if Trotsky wore a tail-coat, it was his own choice. What I said to him was : If it will help to bring peace, go in a night-gown. And what the symbolism of a night-gown at a diplomatic reception may be, I do not know.

### LINCOLN

To a good many of the guests, Trotsky in a night-gown would probably have suggested the Wolf in *Red Riding-Hood*.

### CONFUCIUS

You must have been aware, of course, of the danger that Mr. Trotsky would incur by wearing bourgeois clothes : if Marx is justified, that is, in his assertion that a man's consciousness is entirely the product of his social environment ?

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### LENIN

Marx didn't say that a man must change his mind every time he changes his shirt.

### CONFUCIUS

I am glad to be assured of that. I feared, I confess, that materialist philosophy implied too drastic a submission to events.

### LINCOLN

As much as anyone I have been credited with shaping, or accused of mis-shaping, the destiny of the United States. But when I look back upon my life, it seems to me that I was never able to control events. Events always controlled me.

### CONFUCIUS

I have no doubt that you are right. In one of the most disappointing periods of my wholly unsuccessful life, I was prepared, though not without reluctance, to accept employment in the almost

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barbarian state of Chu. This intention, however, was frustrated by the criminal action of the ruler of Wu, a small but highly civilised state on the border of Chu. The Duke of Wu instructed some of his most ruffianly soldiers to intercept my journey, and hold as prisoners both me and my disciples, until starvation should persuade me to abandon my intention. This defeat, following as it did a long series of unsuccessful efforts to harness my wisdom in the service of humanity, both angered and perplexed my good disciple Tze Loo ; who was inclined to believe that both heaven and the world were just. ' If providence bestows its blessings on those who act rightly/ asked Tze Loo, \* why have you not yet found preferment ? ' I was compelled to answer that whether a scholar finds opportunity to serve his country, depends not on himself alone, but on the time in which he lives. The course of a man's life is one thing, however, his consciousness another. Different factors control his consciousness.

LENIN

What are they ?

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### CONFUCIUS

Instinctive or acquired propriety will resist the shock of all events. Circumstance and events will not change the disciplined character of a superior person. It is only the untaught whose minds are wholly at the mercy of their environment. Surely it is a fact, and a remarkable fact, that despite all the superficial changes of the world, all the phenomenal differences between my world and yours, the mind of the superior person has retained a constant quality? Now as then, his mind is dominated by his will to serve that which is good, and the good of his fellow men. And Mr. Lincoln, by his analogy of the ambitious lizard, has given me new hope that this mind will yet become, not merely a good-willing mind, but a good-contriving mind.

### LINCOLN

I hope Lamarck's theory is true. I'm afraid it is not universally accepted.

### CONFUCIUS

I shall ask M. de Voltaire for his opinion. I

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promised to walk with him this morning, and I must hurry to keep my appointment. He has, I regret, been in poor spirits lately.

*CONFUCIUS, emphasising a little the formality of his adieu, takes leave of the others. LINCOLN, going to the television set, turns various dials, and, by and by, presses the operative button; when there is a warning purr.*

#### LINCOLN

I like Confucius, but sometimes I feel that if I had been brought up in England, in a cathedral city, I think, and perhaps if I had gone to Winchester and New College, I should be more at home with him. I don't suppose he means it, but his manner has, at times, an exasperating superiority that, if it wasn't Chinese, couldn't be anything but English. And in England you can find a solid bony complacency that, if it wasn't English, could only be Chinese. In England's conception of the world there are two peoples : English and foreigners. And in China's conception there are also two peoples : Chinese and foreigners. Neither the Middle Kingdom nor the United Kingdom has

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ever thought it worth while to understand foreigners, or to learn their languages. It would be a mistake, however, to say that the English and the Chinese dislike foreigners. They tolerate foreigners in the most kindly way, so long as the foreigners stay in their proper place, or come to their assistance when needed. And it would be a very great mistake to suppose that I dislike the English or the Chinese. I am devoted to them. I just envy, in my weaker moments, their abominable complacency.

#### LENIN

Britain is physically an island, China for centuries was psychologically an island. Their people have been conditioned by similar circumstances.

#### LINCOLN

You remember what Confucius said about law ? His dislike of method, his putting principle ahead of a well-written statute-book, is pure Anglo-Saxon in its mixture of common sense and sheer inertia.

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### LENIN

In recent years Westminster has been making new laws as busily as a munitions factory.

### LINCOLN

So much the worse for its Englishness. It should stick to principles. . . .

*On the screen of the television set there first appeared a glare of brownish light, a confusion of sandy images, that slowly clarified, and now there can be seen, as if through the quietening water of a stirred pool, the harbour of Tobruk. There are soldiers working on a pier. The pier is built of steel scaffolding, and has been damaged by bombs. Steel tubes, twisted and broken, and in the splintered roadway a ragged hole. Soldiers are busy, bracing the scaffolding, repairing the road. Others are carrying stores and ammunition from the outer end of the pier. Their brown faces gleam with sweat, their shirts are dark with sweat, their bare legs the colour of an old saddle. The air is shimmering with heat, and the pale sea, the tawny shore, reject the intolerable sun.*

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*The purring of the television set becomes speech, and the voice of a COMMENTATOR describes the scene. He has hardly begun to speak when a young man, wearing the uniform of a Flying Officer of the Royal Air Force, enters the Elysian glade, and standing a little behind LINCOLN, watches eagerly, with a hint of anxiety, the moving pictures of Tobruk. He is very young, not much more than twenty, slim and straightly built, with candour and youth's freshness in his face, eyes friendly, and a stubborn chin. His tunic shows the white and purple ribbon of a medal for gallantry. His name is ARDEN.*

### COMMENTATOR

For many weeks under the African sun this narrow beat of desert has been defended by soldiers of the Commonwealth of British Nations. This sterile sand, made fertile by their blood, has put forth a name that will live in the annals of the world with all the battles which have been fought for that increasing purpose of mankind, his liberty and growth of spirit. The men who were born to this destiny, to hallow with their purpose the torrid beaches of Tobruk, its flaming hills, were nurtured under English skies, the winds of Scot-

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land, the silvering stars of the Antipodes, the great noons of Hindustan. They grew to manhood in many corners of the earth, to the music of their own rivers and the songs of the speech of their own people, but held in unity by service to their common Throne, their common faith in common principles of freedom, truth, and justice. Look now, and see how they have served their faith. Are they gaunt in the face, and dark ? It is the bone of their resolution, and the livery of the sun. Are their eyes alight ? It is their unquenchable spirit, and the light of their camp-fellow, Victory. Their talk comes grating from their throats. The burning heat has dried them, and they breathe in storms of tempest-driven sand. But their words are the words of triumph. Here are conquerors !

*The view changes. It travels inland, marching the defended perimeter. Barren soil, heat-haze, hillocks flattened by the noonday sun, and shadeless gullies. Barricades of twisted wire, a foundered tank and the wreck of lorries, a strong-point invisible until from a casemate a machine-gun opens fire. The enemy replies. There is a stutter of rifles, the staccato drumming of automatic weapons, and mortars lob their shells*

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*into fountains of dust. A yellow cloud obscures the view, and the firing ceases. The moving picture travels farther. No life is to be seen, no movement under the sun. But the silence of the littered desert is taut with expectancy. It may break without warning into the noise of battle. The perimeter is sleepless. The covered trenches and the sandyforts are many-eyed.*

*The view returns to the harbour, and now there is an irregular drone of engines in the air. The soldiers on the pier, carrying shells, square boxes of ammunition, work faster. The drone of the aeroplanes increases. German bombers cross and re-cross the pier in shallow dives. Anti-aircraft guns open fire. The silver streak of falling bombs can be seen among the puff-ball cloudlets of exploding shells. Tongues of flame with a fringe of smoke, almost invisible in the sunlight, flicker from the outer end of the pier. Fountains of water rise, and fall in diamond showers. Two or three wounded men struggle to escape from the burning ammunition boxes. A sergeant, returning to help them, is thrown down by the blast of a bomb. He rises, bleeding, and reaching one of the wounded, lifts him to his shoulders. So burdened he comes slowly down the pier, and the view narrows upon him.*

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ARDEN

My brother ! It's my brother !

*In the moving picture a German bomber tumbles from the sky. The raid is over. Light fades from the screen, and then returns to show an elderly man posed in front of a large telescope. The COMMENTATOR'S voice is heard again; but only for a moment or two.*

COMMENTATOR

Though many nations are now at war, the world has not wholly forgotten the avocations of peace. Science still claims its votaries, astronomers still search the starry spaces of the sky. Here is Dr. Salvador Cuestas, of Buenos Aires, who has lately discovered a bright spot on the northern hemisphere of Saturn. . . .

LINCOLN

Are you interested in Saturn's spots ? Neither am I.

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ARDEN

That was my brother on the pier. I recognised him at once. He's ten years older than me. He was a schoolmaster. He wouldn't take a commission because this war, he said, is a war of the people, for the people. So he chose to fight in the ranks.

LENIN

Was that why you fought — and died ? Because of your conviction that it is a people's war ?

ARDEN

I don't suppose I thought so clearly about it as my brother. I can't remember that I ever felt there was much need for thinking. About what I should do, I mean. Germany was on the warpath, and we had to fight, not only for ourselves, but for the sake of general decency. I thought we should have gone to war in 1938. That year between Munich and the attack on Poland was almost intolerable. I had a chance to go to America that winter, but I didn't go because I was ashamed.

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People would have asked me : Why is England doing nothing ? Why do you let Germany ruin good harmless countries like Czechoslovakia ? Isn't it your duty to do something for Europe ? — And I shouldn't have known what to say. So I stayed at home and learnt to fly.

LENIN

You believe that your country has a duty to the rest of the world ? That Britain is the natural guardian of what you call decency ?

ARDEN

We believe in freedom and fairplay. We have a lot of influence in the world, and I think we have certain obligations that we ought to recognise.

LINCOLN

You would enter your country on a dangerous course.

ARDEN

Oh, we're used to that.

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LENIN

So you went to war because you felt it your human obligation to fight against Germany ?

ARDEN

Yes, I suppose so. My brother says there have been four really creative periods in history : the Greek, the Christian, the Renaissance, and the Modern. And Hitler's Germany denies all the good that every one of them has contributed.

LINCOLN

Greek and Christian, yes. Hitler found the idea of democracy too big for him to swallow. Too noble, difficult, and dangerous. He has degraded science, played Herod to the arts. Like a mole, afraid of the light, he has never dared to think of Christian charity. But how sober and practical is much of Christ's teaching ! Love your neighbour as yourself: it sounds ridiculous only to people who have never taken the trouble to enquire how much they do love themselves. No

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reasonable creature loves himself like a lover. He wants only to take care of himself.

LENIN

And the Renaissance ? But where does your brother find the spirit of the Renaissance ? In Marlowe's Elizabethan, Dr. Faustus ?

ARDEN

• He used to quote : \* Let me have one book more, wherein I might see all plants, herbs, and trees that grow upon the earth/

LENIN

It is a possible interpretation, though not the only one. And certainly Hitler couldn't afford his people the luxury of unrestricted knowledge, the libertarian's quest of truth, when his system depends for its strength on the blind acceptance, throughout Germany, of his own arbitrary statements. That aspect of the Renaissance he has

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certainly denied. But tell me your idea of the Modern period. What are its contributions ?

ARDEN

It may sound rather fanciful, but surely we are on the frontier of a new world ? Something as really new as the territories discovered by the American pioneers ?

LENIN

If you are fanciful, your fancy — you may be glad to hear — is fairly common property. Go on.

ARDEN

But our new world and its possibilities were discovered by science and industry. To begin with, just after the industrial revolution, everybody behaved as pioneers always do. They were wasteful, destructive, and horribly untidy. They had no sense of responsibility. But now we are beginning to see that our new world must be looked after,

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and properly cultivated, and its produce should be reasonably distributed. If it were really well managed, it could provide enough for everybody. I don't mean food alone, but comfort and books and tooth-brushes and motor-cars. And security.

LENIN

Yes, yes, we know that. But are we prepared to cultivate it for that purpose? Is that truly our intention? — Our intention! How we cling to life! What have we here to do with the living World, who walk in blissful impotence this glassy idleness? We've done with life. We have become spectators only. We sowed our seed, and now must watch our children bring the harvest home. But what will they make of it? Is it to be a harvest for the world, or for the exploiters only? Are you in England honest in your enterprise?

ARDEN

Yes, on the whole I think we are, though we haven't advertised our modernism as much as

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other countries. Russia, for instance, and America. Or China, with Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles, and now its United Front and New Life movement.

LINCOLN

You put China among the moderns, do you ?

ARDEN

The Chinese have been fighting Japan for about five years now. They couldn't possibly have fought so well if they hadn't had faith in something. Chinese armies in the past were always ready to compromise. But the new Chinese are fighting for something which doesn't permit compromise. A faith. And if it isn't faith in the new world they can see, what is it ?

LENIN

So your champions of modernism are China, Russia, America — and Britain ?

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ARDEN

We haven't, as I said, made a song and dance about it in Britain, but we have done a lot of good work in the last forty years. Some countries like to work from a blueprint, but we prefer trial-and-error. And though our method isn't as spectacular as some, it does produce solid results, and it does keep fresh our good intentions. The worst of revolution is that it often leads to counter-revolution, but with trial-and-error you just keep on trying. We've enormously improved the health of our people in the last couple of generations. We've cleared away most of the filth and squalor and desperate poverty that existed in England and Scotland about the end of last century. We have made it easier for children to get some sort of education, and our ideas of education are getting better. We're not so insular as we were. Not nearly so insular. We're not so tightly confined by class distinctions. We admit that everybody has certain rights, and our social legislation tries to give more and more people what they're entitled to, without causing a sudden change that might undo all the good that's been slowly created. In fact

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we're progressing in our own way, and I think it's a good way. And the reason for our progress, of course, is an increasing sense of duty. We know that we have to look after other people as well as ourselves.

### LINCOLN

Has man become so conscious of his world as to know that ? There is a mighty advance, if it is true.

### LENIN

A growing view must make a larger consciousness. Within his own parish a goodish man has always been willing to give help and sympathy. But it's a new thing in history that a man may regard the whole world as his parish. The great men of the past had, indeed, a universal understanding of humanity in one respect: they saw its tragedy. The common tragedy of man who knows a little, feels greatly, and must be defeated. But did they know that their understanding was universal ? I think not. They knew that death was common property, but they did not know how much of common property there is in life. The

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world of the day before yesterday was full of un-scaleable barriers and bolted doors. There were vertical lines of division that obscured the identical parallels. But now the doors are opening, and any man who reads, learns, and thinks, may know for a certainty what the greatest of his predecessors could guess at only : the common pattern of life, the common trend of history, as well as the common fact of death.

LINCOLN

You believe in the virtue of to-morrow ?

LENIN

I do.

LINCOLN

And Arden had no time to doubt it. How old were you, Arden ?

ARDEN

Nearly twenty-one. Well, twenty and a half.

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### LINCOLN

You paid more dearly for your faith than Lenin or I, but you escaped a lot of disappointment. How were you killed ?

### ARDEN

It's not a story I'm particularly proud of. I tried to do something clever, and failed. It was in September 1940, over the Channel. My squadron had been doing a lot of fighting, and we had quite a good score. They were terribly exciting, those weeks, and I had a curious feeling of being desperately tired, but so keyed-up that I didn't really need to rest. My body didn't matter. My brain was doing the work. I got rather over-confident, I think. The day before I was killed I put down two iops and a Dornier. As soon as I got up to six or eight thousand feet, and saw cloud below me, not earth but cloud, and the thin blue sky all round, I used to feel I could do anything. It was glorious. But the odd thing about those weeks is that I can't remember anything I did on land. I

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can't remember ever eating. I suppose I did eat, but I don't remember. It seems now that I spent all day and every day flying. Well, on the last day we broke up a lot of Dormers and Messerschmitt nos over South London, and followed them across the Channel. I shot down a Domier and helped with another. Then I turned to go home, because I had used all my ammunition, but on the way back I looked round and saw one of our fellows having a bad time with three Messerschmitts. They were part of a new lot coming over, I think. I thought I might take their attention off the other Hurricane by doing a dummy attack on them. But it didn't work. I turned and went down at them pretty fast. I went straight for the leader, and he just let me have it. My engine caught fire, and I had to bale out. I was floating down, feeling rather angry because I had made such a mess of things, when suddenly I felt a fearful blow on my right hip, as though I had been rammed by a flying telegraph-pole. It was one of the Jerries who had come after me. I tried to dodge about by spilling air from my parachute but he came at me again, and got me cold. So that was the end of the war for me.

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CONFUCIUS *has returned to the glade. He re-entered soon after the beginning OF ARDEN'S story; to which he has been listening with grave attention.*

### CONFUCIUS

In the days of my life upon earth I never failed to impress upon those of my countrymen, who were so complaisant as to listen to me, that the superior person could be recognised by his behaviour in any situation. When out shooting, for example, my friends and followers would never shoot a sitting bird. Such behaviour, I taught them, belongs to the impercipient man, the barbarian. The superior person, whose actions are characterised by propriety, will shoot only at a bird in flight. And so to my understanding, Mr. Arden, your death is doubly deplorable: in manner as in fact. For a soldier who will shoot his enemy while the latter is floating helpless in a parachute, is a person who would shoot a female mallard sitting on her nest. He is a man without teaching or natural perception : a barbarian.

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LINCOLN

Do you begin to realise, my dear Lenin, the truth of my assertion that a Chinaman is an Englishman under his skin ? There's an English Colonel of my acquaintance, a resident here, who was killed in the last war. He has only one complaint against the Germans : that they aren't sportsmen. But in that omission he discerns the total failure of their social system and their moral code. A Chinese interpretation, don't you think ?

LENIN

Is it a corresponding triviality of mind, or an identical refinement of understanding ? I don't know.

ARDEN

Of course by that time, sir, the Jerries were getting a bit harassed. We'd been shooting a lot of them down, and I daresay this fellow rather lost his head when he saw that he had me in the bag. Most of them fight very bravely.

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CONFUCIUS

It was the act of a barbarian. I shall not condone it.

LINCOLN

How is Voltaire ? Or didn't you find him ?

CONFUCIUS

M. de Voltaire is indisposed. In his present state of mind, he says, he is incapable of contributing to our conversation anything but his own dissatisfaction. Which he prefers to keep to himself.

LENIN

I miss his company.

LINCOLN

So do we all. Poor Voltaire ! But your return is opportune, Confucius. You must give us your opinion on a theory of Arden's : that our four

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countries, China, Russia, Great Britain, and America, are the apostles of modernism, and — would you go so far ? — the destined cornerstones of the world of to-morrow.

ARDEN

It isn't really my theory. It's my brother's. He thinks that if the four countries declared their national aims, in the broadest way, they could find sufficient common ground to formulate a common policy that would be of advantage to the whole world. He says that Russia and America are very like each other in many ways. They're countries with similar aspirations.

LINCOLN

Your brother, I suspect, would shock the Daughters of our American Revolution.

AJRDEN

But daughters often think themselves more respectable than their fathers, don't they ?

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### LINCOLN

They know that revolution, like brandy, has to be sanctified by time.

### LENIN

Having never been burdened by respectability, at least in the general estimate of the world, I can entertain ideas, and even friends, without fear of the social consequences. Some of the more dogmatic of my Communist associates would certainly be troubled — troubled as deeply as the Daughters of the American Revolution — by any proposal to link them with the Capitalist society of North America ; but very many of my Russian comrades have an admiration for the technical accomplishment of America, and a sympathy with its people that is derived, I suppose, from two things. From the fact that America, by revolution, broke violently into a new world in which life and liberty were promised to every man. And from their knowledge that our Russian government, though by a different method, is designed for the same end.

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I accept the comparison : we share some, though not all, of each other's aspirations.

LINCOLN

And we have a common enemy.

LENIN

We have many common enemies. Ignorance, for one. Ignorance in the rulers of the world, ignorance in those over whom they rule. We must always criticise without mercy, and teach without ceasing. I agree with Confucius that the art of government is of paramount importance, and until the time comes for all states to wither away, that government must have authority. But within a government, or upon its circumference, must be those who will keep a scrupulous and perfect watch upon its motives. The world, as we know it, is a human world. The only purpose of government is to promote the welfare of humanity. To care for the bodies of men, to foster the growth of their minds, to ensure for them the right and opportunity to pursue their proper happiness.

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LINCOLN

It is a human world, I agree, but a world which is animated, in its quest of goodness, by something which, in the word of all the ages, is called divinity.

LENIN

Would it not be easier to say that man has been so conditioned that he feels it imperative to better himself?

LINCOLN

It may be easier, but is it nearer to the truth ? Shall I ask you how man has acquired the apparatus to hear your imperative ?

LENIN

In the growth and flux of his world. The world changes and horizons enlarge. Power is put into the hands of men, and their faculties grow with what they feed on.

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LINCOLN

But what inspires the growth and changes of the world ? Is the idea of change not born within the minds of men ?

LENIN

I see it as implicit in the nature of the world. You have yourself admitted that you never controlled events, but events controlled you.

LINCOLN

They did indeed. They tossed and tumbled me as if I were afloat in mid-Atlantic. But what impelled me to go to sea ? I could have stayed very comfortably ashore in Sangamon County.

LENIN

You lived on a frontier. The circumstances of frontier life conditioned your mind. They forced you to accept a challenge.

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### LINCOLN

There were others who lived on the frontier, many of them, and heard no challenge. . . .

### CONFUCIUS

If I may be allowed to intervene ? Your argument has reminded me of a celebrated discussion that for several years occupied the minds of all deeply-thinking men in the state of Lu, in the days of Duke Ting. The purpose of the discussion was to establish an order of priority for the Chicken and the Egg. There were those, and they were many, who declared that of necessity the Egg must have preceded the Chicken. Their arguments were incontestably sound. But there were others, a multitude of others, who protested that by the very nature of both, the Chicken must have preceded the Egg. Their arguments were undeniably correct. The citizens of Lu were divided in almost equal numbers by this impassable chasm, and the affairs of the state were brought to a standstill. A mission was sent to the Imperial capital of Loyang, where the problem was debated by the most

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eminent scholars of the whole Empire, and with a like result. Loyang was divided into opposing and resentful camps. The mission therefore returned to Lu, and having to cross a high mountain that lay upon their road, they encountered by chance an aged hermit who had some appearance of wisdom. In despair, they implored his help, and having stated their problem as clearly as they could, they added for his benefit a summary of the major arguments for either side of it. 'Bring me,' said the hermit, 'an egg and a chicken.' They were brought. Having killed, plucked, and boiled the chicken, the hermit cut off the meat and minced it finely with a knife on a board. Then, breaking the egg, he spilt it into a pan, and made an omelette. Folding the omelette about the minced chicken, he enjoyed a hearty meal and then addressed his audience, who had patiently and with close attention been watching these several operations. 'I do not know,' he said, 'whether the Egg preceded the Chicken, or the Chicken the Egg. What I do know, however, is that they are now together, and for so long as it matters, they will so continue. . . .' May I suggest for your consideration, a parallel between this ~~trivial~~

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argument, and your momentous discussion as to the precedence of Consciousness or Circumstance ?

LENIN

Our difference is hardly so digestible as your omelette.

LINCOLN

Indeed I was growing tired of the chewing it needed, and there was a danger of forgetting what, in truth, we are still waiting to hear : Confucius' opinion of the cornerstones that Arden, or his brother, has selected for to-morrow's world.

CONFUCIUS

I am satisfied with your eastern cornerstone. On China of to-day you may safely build some part of your new world. But elsewhere in your foundations I detect a number of flaws. America, for example, sometimes reminds me of a period in the very ancient history of China, long before the excellent days of the superlative Yao, Shun, and

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Yu, when an ingenious person whose home was on the northern bank of the Yellow River invented the wheelbarrow. His invention excited much interest, and for several years the roads of that part of China were crowded with enthusiastic young men wheeling their barrows hither and thither. But all their barrows were empty. The discovery that they might be employed for useful purposes had not yet been made. And the ingenuity of America, which has invented machinery even more complicated than the wheelbarrow, has not yet, I think, been united to an equal perception of its proper use. And then there is Russia. In Russia, I would say, there is a tendency to believe in the singularity of its virtue. This should be remedied.

LINCOLN

It was you, Lenin, who insisted on the necessity of criticism.

LENIN

Let us hear his judgment of Britain.

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### CONFUCIUS

There is in Britain a good bottom of sense. It has studied the art of looking after itself. But its bottom has grown to excessive proportions. Britain should also develop imagination.

### LINCOLN

Then all the foundations of our modern world are seriously flawed, except China ?

### CONFUCIUS

Their weaknesses are not incurable, and I can discover no other foundations that would serve you better. If you were to wait for perfection, you would wait for ever. If you take the best you can find, and make the best use of it, you will do very well. And you must not suppose that I find perfection in my own country. The necessary precepts have been enunciated there, but the great majority of my countrymen have not yet heard them.

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LENIN

You approve the present government of China? I should have thought you would find some disparity between its aims and your teaching in Lu.

CONFUCIUS

In their essence I find them identical. It is true that various responsibilities have now been put upon the shoulders of women, that I confined to the more rugged strength of men, but women, it may be, are now fit to bear them. I have, I assure you, received much pleasure from the instruction of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his admired consort. For the doctrine of the New Life which they have been preaching is essentially that which I endeavoured, with insufficient ability and almost no success, to propagate many hundreds of years ago in the dukedom of Lu. They have in their own lives set an example of virtuous and requisite behaviour. They have taught propriety and the moral obligations of the individual. And, indeed, what else is there to learn ?

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### LENIN

The art of government. How shall our new world be governed ?

### CONFUCIUS

In my own country, in the ancient days, there were many small states, and above them, uniting all, an Imperial government. It was my belief that in every state there should be a government of sufficient wisdom and authority to inculcate the principles of good behaviour, and whenever necessary to enforce good behaviour, among the individuals and different sections of that particular community. I further believed, and continually taught, that the Imperial government should have similar authority, and the necessary power, to adjudicate between states, compelling them, if compulsion were required, to recognise those principles of justice and submission to the law which, as they so rightly insisted, were accepted by their own subjects.,

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### LINCOLN

The moral of which is that our four nations, assisted I suppose by whatever countries care to join us, must make of our armed forces and our goodwill an authority capable of enforcing over all the earth a rule of law. We are to become the world's policemen. And the world may like it, when the world gets used to the idea. The ordinary decent man would certainly choose to live in a town where there's a good police force, rather than some place where he has to carry his own gun.

### ARDEN

We have the means to do it. It would be quite easy nowadays, with our combined Navies and an international Air Force. We could garrison strategic positions and hold a striking force always in readiness at each of them. A lot of fellows might resent, in the beginning, having to serve under foreign officers, but they would have to get used to it. They would learn a lot, and there would be marvellous opportunities of foreign service.

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LENIN

There are the means to do it; but is there the will to do it ?

LINCOLN

The world can't afford many wars on the scale of this and the last one. They cost too much, in lives that cannot be replaced, and material which takes too long to replace, and labour which is utterly wasted. Though the world may not have realised the moral objections to war, it must by now be well aware of the economic objections. And economic arguments are nowadays, I gather, of all arguments the most highly esteemed. If then the world were offered a practical organisation, designed to maintain among nations the rule of law and thereby obviate the occurrence of major wars, the world would be inclined to approve and support it. I specified, remember, a practical organisation.

LENIN

You have supplied a negative reason for the establishment of our condominium. Our police-

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man's alliance would probably be accepted, you say, if it seemed capable of preventing any worse misfortune. But we need a positive reason. Were you right, Confucius, when you said that the core of the problem was the art of government, and the purpose of government nothing but the obvious periphery ? For is the purpose of government, of all governments, so obvious ? Would the purpose of our fourfold government be entirely obvious ? It should be, yes. It would have to be ! But there is, I repeat, one and only one justification of any government in the world : that it promotes the welfare and the happiness of its people. Government must be a dedicated thing. It must serve, with passion and purity, with unfailing diligence and all the knowledge of the centuries, the single cause of humanity ! Some of you believe in sanctities which I do not credit, and I shall not quarrel with your belief. But I believe that man is sacred, and with all who do not subscribe to my belief, I cannot fail to quarrel. There is my faith. It is a faith in which you and your people and your governments might be united. And we can do nothing without a faith. We can do nothing good without that faith ! There is our positive reason.

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### LINCOLN

A faith has little chance of being accepted as such unless it is seen in action. Nearly every government of recent years has piously asserted, as its prime intention, the improvement of the conditions in which live the people who elected it. That intention, owing to the imperfect nature of politicians — who are inevitably as human as the electorate — is always vitiated, and for a very long time will continue to be vitiated, by such things as personal ambition ; the desire of power, whether personal or national; greed of wealth ; the conflict of classes. But it seems to me — no ! That is evasion. That *seems to me* is a politician's trick, a lane of escape if he be proved wrong. I shall say instead, I shall pledge my opinion, that there does exist in the world to-day a wider and more general knowledge, than ever before, of the proper task of government. Whether this knowledge originated within parliaments or within the anonymous ranks of the people, I do not know. But it has spread to both. And the task, Mr. Lenin, is that which you have stated. It is to serve the cause of man. There is a cause in which we both believe.

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I believe too in the God who created man, not, in the beginning, after His own image, but destined to achieve God's image. Whether you subscribe to that belief is your own affair. We can still join together in the service of those whom I believe to be God's creation, and whom you believe to be their own creators. But our purpose, I repeat, must be made visible in action. Let our four countries reaffirm the good intentions that each has made to its own people. Let them join and marry those intentions to embrace all people. Let them bring to being, by the union of their armed forces, peace in our time and the continuance of peace. Let them give to their spoken faith the muscle and the bones of action, and the growing consciousness of the world will keep it sound and steer it right.

### LENIN

Action is the only way to bring all together and make all real. We must substantiate our faith. — And there again's the mockery of our beatitude, this slippered paradise ! What action can we encompass here ? We've left our planet, though

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we dote upon it still. We, shepherds as we think — still flattering ourselves — have neither dog nor whistle to direct our flock.

### CONFUCIUS

It is natural for us to suppose that the world cannot very well get on without us. But our fears may be unjustified. It is a long time since I died, but the Middle Kingdom has not perished. There are men now living who seem to me well qualified to lead the world in the way it should go.

### ARDEN

They wouldn't lack followers. I know what I'm talking about when I say there are thousands and tens of thousands of young men in Britain who would follow, with absolute devotion, anyone they could trust — but with their brains ! With their brains, not their emotions ! — who offered them a policy of real co-operation with other countries, of real humanity, of a peace they could work for as well as die for, and a noble pur-

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pose. We want nobility, though we're frightened to say so. But we respond to it, to every phrase of it we hear. That's why people believe in Winston, because he strikes the note, and when he strikes, it rings like Big Ben. But there's a great difference between the young men of this war and the men of 1914. Rupert Brooke, in 1914, could say : ' Honour has come back as a king to earth.' Nobody said that in 1939. Nobody would have believed it. We had learnt too much. We had heard too much humbug and claptrap and shoddy pretence and mean lying in the years between. We had lived on sourness too long to grow easily enthusiastic. We were glad when war started. We were greatly relieved. Honour had come back, we knew, though not as in 1914. Not as a king, but as a pilgrim. So we kept quiet about our gladness, till we could see if the pilgrim knew his way. Till we could test our own capacity, and prove that we were fit to follow. But now we have proved it. We have fought for two years, not cleverly perhaps, not always cleverly, but always bravely. Not only the Services can say that, but the people in the streets. The people in the streets ! They're ready for a greater task, and

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they want nobility ! They want a larger purpose than patriotism. And the way is clear because now — not yet for principle or belief, but for sheer necessity — our four countries are all on the one side together. Red Russia is red for a new reason now. Red with gallantry, with the blood of its soldiers, indomitable soldiers, who are fighting our battle as well as theirs. And gallantry has always made friends, fast friends, in Britain.

#### LENIN

Red with gallantry, with agony too. With agony they did not merit, who had suffered so greatly, and were honest in their purpose. Would I were there to share their agony ! My task was unfinished.

#### LINCOLN

So were all our tasks, and so will every human task, till the end of time, be unfinished. There is no profit in lamenting that. Let us comfort ourselves by thinking of the Nobler Purpose that even now, if Arden is right, may be hatching upon

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earth. Are you unconsolated ? Then let us comfort ourselves more effectively by drinking to it. That nectar on the table, if it is the same brewing of nectar as stood there yesterday, is very good nectar indeed. Shall we fill our glasses ? The toast, gentlemen, is the Nobler Purpose — and soon may it show itself apparelled in action !

CONFUCIUS

' I drink to that. Kanpei !

LENIN and ARDEN

The Nobler Purpose !

LINCOLN

And now, I think, we must go. — You're coming too, Lenin, are you not ? — There's a discussion on *The Poet and his Responsibility*, and with Pushkin and Burns to lead it, and Aristophanes in the chair, there should be entertainment.

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### CONFUCIUS

I have here, in manuscript, the first four chapters of a new work on which M. de Voltaire is engaged. It is entitled *Candide Returned*. It will probably correct any tendency I may have acquired, as a result of our conversation, to anticipate an immediate appearance of the millennium. So you will not, I hope, consider me unsociable if I retire to read it.

### ARDEN

I want to look at the war again. It seems only the other day that I left it.

LINCOLN and LENIN take their leave, and go. CONFUCIUS goes too, but in the opposite direction. ARDEN is about to switch-on the television set when his attention is caught by a movement of the man who has, throughout the scene, been sleeping behind the trees. The man rises, cautiously, and having made sure that LINCOLN, LENIN, and CONFUCIUS have gone, he comes towards the table, where, after nodding to ARDEN, he helps himself to a drink. He is a SOLDIER, dressed in

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*very ragged khaki, wearing a steel helmet. He is sturdily built, and moves lightly. His appearance is shrewd and tough; there is, at times, a note of rather bitter humour in his voice. His helmet sits at a jaunty angle, he wears his rags with an air.*

ARDEN

Who are you ?

SOLDIER

It's all right, sir, I'm just going. I've got to get back.

ARDEN

Back where ?

SOLDIER

The usual place. Up the line again.

ARDEN

But aren't you . . . ? I mean, don't you belong here?

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SOLDIER

No. I've just been having a stand-easy. Hiked the look of the trees and, the fields, so I slipped in over the wall. But I ought to be on my way again. I've got to find the old battalion.

ARDEN

So you aren't dead yet ?

SOLDIER

Not yet.

ARDEN

But how did you come here, if you weren't killed?

SOLDIER

Well, in a manner of speaking I was killed. I've been here once or twice before, as a matter of fact. I had a couple of weeks in 1918, and I<sup>1</sup> needed them too. I lasted well in that war : I'd

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three and a half years without a break. Then I ran into a bit of trouble at a place called Fricourt. In August. Ever hear of Fricourt ? That's where I got mine the last time.

ARDEN

I thought you had been fighting in this war.

SOLDIER

So I have. I was in Greece this time. We had a tidy scrap in Greece, and considering the odds against us, we did pretty well. I'm not ashamed of my last campaign. And it was more difficult this time, because the pass at Thermopylae's more open than it used to be. The sea's gone back. There used to be a kind of salty marsh no more than twenty yards from the side of the hill.

ARDEN

How do you know that ?

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SOLDIER

A man doesn't forget Thermopylae. You know about the old war memorial they set up there, to the soldiers who held the pass, and fought till every one of them was killed ? It had a good inscription on it:

*The mil of Lacedaemon bade us stay :  
Give Sparta tidings that we still obey.*

ARDEN

That was the memorial to Leonidas and his Three Hundred.

SOLDIER

Don't I know it ! But it would suit us quite nicely too, with a bit of alteration.

ARDEN

I don't understand you. You say you were killed in France. And then in Greece. . . . Can men die more than once ?

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SOLDIER

It isn't being killed that matters so much. It's living. And I've lived for a long time. I've lived in lots of places, and here and there I've learnt a bit. Not much perhaps, but what I do know is good. I was listening to what you and your friends were saying, about the new world that's round the corner, and once or twice I nearly intruded. I wanted to remind them of something else their world will need. There was something they forgot to mention in all their plans and specifications.

ARDEN

What was that ?

SOLDIER

Me.

ARDEN

But we didn't know you were there.

*The Cornerstones*

SOLDIER

That's just it. It's only now and then that people do pay much attention to me. But they can't get on without me. Your philosophers and your scientists and your prophets-in-Israel can plan their worlds, but they come to me to make 'em, and they come to me to hold 'em up when they're in danger. Good intention is well enough, and you can't have too much of it. But good intentions without me are like living in the country and being afraid of mud. You just don't get anywhere. But I'm well used to mud. I've spent more time living in the mud than marching in processions. And by God, there'd be no processions to march in, if it weren't for men like me, who can go knee-deep in mud, and drive defeat from the mud, and carry good intention to the enemy's capital. World after world have I made, and seen 'em fall in ruins, and set-to and made a better. For fourteen pence a day, or thereabout.

ARDEN

Tell me who you are.

*The Cornerstones*

SOLDIER

I've had a lot of regimental numbers in my time, and I've forgotten the last one.

*He undoes the remaining button of his tunic, and digs his hand under his shirt to scratch his ribs. His ragged sleeve falls open, to show along his arm a thin white scar.*

ARDEN

Was that the wound you got in Greece ? Or ac Fricourt ?

SOLDIER

It's older than them. A lot older. But it was in France I got it too. A battle we fought on the day before St. Crispin's Day.

ARDEN

Crispin ? Crispin Crispianus ? He that outlives this day. . . . Oh, no ! What was he really like ? The King, I mean ?

*The Cornerstones*

SOLDIER

He used to swear a lot, if I remember rightly.

ARDEN

' We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother ; be he ne'er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition :  
And gentlemen in England now a-bed  
Shall think themselves accursed they were not  
here. . . . '

SOLDIER

There's always some who stay in bed too long, thinking about their good intentions I've no doubt, and then feel sorry they didn't get up in time. But you were going to have a look at the war, weren't you ? I'd like to see what's happening too. There's a lot of geography in this war, and I'd be as well to know where I am when I get back.

## *The Cornerstones*

*ARDEN turns knobs and dials on the television set. The screen is lighted.*

*A view appears of the battered city of Chungking. Japanese aeroplanes are bombing it. In caves and cellars, dug deep, lantern-lighted, a multitude of people endure with iron patience. The river runs between deserted fields, burnt villages. Upon the plain a cloud throws a shadow like a gigantic skeleton. A bundle of bones in blue cotton, his eyes glazing, an old man lies dying on the slope of a new grave, a dying child, marasmic, in his arms. But in the mountains young men are drilling. Young peasants, thick of body, stubborn-hearted, are turning into soldiers. And on the mountain road from Burma comes a caravan of noisy lorries, shaking the dust, heavy with cargo for the war.*

*The moving picture travels into Russia. Factories behind the Urals. Pulse of life along the arteries leading to the battle-line. Men and women singing. Sorrow like a cancer at their hearts for the thousands, for the scores of thousands who have died, but faith more hotly rising from the fuel of anger, and their song is like a river swollen by the snows. Gunfire, and soldiers moving through forest and steppe, through marshland and the reedy fields about a lake, through*

## *The Cornerstones*

*Arctic tundra and on the Crimean coast. Ungainly corpses, the bitterness of overborne resistance, but the river of song overflowing in counter-thrust and counter-charge. The screech and roar of tanks, bourdon of aeroplanes. Valour leaping, bayonet-pointed. A mass of men dwarfing all the history of arms. Lenin's town defended by the new Trojans. In silence, behind the German lines, in a forest of cinder-trees and mass of ashes, a gaunt patrol of partisans : wolf-sortie, capture of supply wagons. Resolution lives upon its faith. In a deserted town rain melts the long-since clotted blood upon its pavements. Snow-clouds are filling in the north.*

*Into western Europe. On captured pavements the coffin-tread of German soldiers, and women hollow-breasted from hunger, from bitterness, and shame. Hatred of the invader running like an open sore from the Lofotens to Bordeaux. Bravery goes underground, hatching plots for freedom. In Amsterdam and Bergen the tough conspirators hear news of Serbian guerrillas, the tide of revolt in Czechoslovakia, Cretan shepherds who will not yield, and the deathless hearts of the thraven men of Marathon. Poland, stript and beaten, calls for revenge.*

## The Cornerstones

*The fortress in the sea. From Dover to Shetland the guns are manned. Island of the Saxon and the Pict, of Angle, Celt, and Norseman : the despair of conquerors. The despair, too often, of its friends. Chaucer's kingdom, Shakespeare's birth - room, wounded in every town. Church spires are dust, and Acacia Road is blotted out. But shipyard and factory are loud with hammer-blows. Here are the heirs of Agincourt and Bannockburn, of Malplaquet, Trafalgar, and the Somme : a people not to be driven, hardly to be taught. A people of simple pleasures, simple morality : Fairplay. Given to beer and the growing offlowers in back gardens : people who put a shilling on a horse, worship Aston Villa and Newcastle United, take their years ease at Blackpool. But in the Gothic twilight of great cathedrals are the colours, battle-torn, of their legions that have stood to many wars in all the lands. The names of their regiments are a chorus of bravery: Grenadiers and the Men who fought at Minden with roses in their caps. The Gloucesters, badged like Janus, fighting fore and aft, and the Black Watch, red-hackled. Loyals, Royals, and Die-Hards. Sherwood Foresters -and the black-ribboned Welch. The Sixtieth and the Ninety-Second, kissed by the gay Duchess. The Kings and the Duke of Wellingtons.*

## *The Cornerstones*

*Bufs, Green Howards, and Pontius Pilate's Bodyguard. Lancers, Dragoons, and Hussars, pent in their armoured dragons. Per Mare per Terram, the Royal Marines. These are the names that are spoken now in the minds of the island people. And new names mingle with them, of the aircraft drumming up the Channel, drumming over Germany. Offspring of the Elizabethan voyagers in their Hurricanes and Stirlings. Spitfires and Blenheims piloted by the secret flint of the island's heart.*

*The island-rivers flow fast to the sea. On all the oceans are its vessels, and the cargoes are coming in from the mighty arsenal of America. Out of American factories come the weapons of freedom. But the seas between are a graveyard for sunken ships: tough as clinkered firebars are the sailors of the Merchant Navy. The men without a uniform are loyal to their mystery. They serve the sea, and the sea is Britain's highway. Salted in valour, they will not be defeated.*

*The Rock of Gibraltar, and Malta dauntless in a peacock sea. Battleships, cruisers, and destroyers of the Royal Navy: here is pride that none disputes. From the Denmark Strait to Hiram's coast of Tyre they beat the marches. The Navy suffers, and still it grows. It has lost how many of the long and lovely destroyers*

## *The Cornerstones*

*that were called by the names of the fighting tribes of Africa and Asia ? But the White Ensign flies from ever greater ships, and to its geography of victory the Navy has added new names : Narvik, the River Plate, and Matapan.*

*Africa, then the Levant. Sons of the Dutch voortrekkers, the hardy pacemakers who marched through Abyssinia. Tall soldiers from Australia, black courage from the Gold Coast, colonists of the old colony of Natal, bearded men from the Punjab, the solid never-questioning loyalty of New Zealand, the Maratha heirs of Sivaji, soldiers of the highlands of East Africa, Frenchmen who have found the soul of France in freedom, muleteers of Cyprus, Sikhs with the wooden comb in their long hair, regiments of the British Army: had Rome in its heyday legions like to these? They have fought and conquered, or fought and drawn off to gain their breath again. They are inured to battle.*

*The moving picture returns to the stubborn sandhills of Tobruk. Light is fading, and the screen grows dark, but among the shadows can be seen a fighting patrol moving outward from the perimeter. A searchlight, as if tearing from the darkness a strip of hide, discloses their huddled figures. Motionless they crouch. In a gully*

## *The Cornerstones*

*they are hidden from the enemy. Cautiously a sergeant moves, turns his head. ARDEN peers closer at the screen. He has recognised his brother. . . . The beam of the searchlight is flung suddenly to one side. Darkness falls upon the screen. ARDEN twists a dial, then another. The voice of the COMMENTATOR is heard.*

### COMMENTATOR

Shall this heroism be in vain ? Shall the suffering of so many nations be in vain ? Shall this labour all be fruitless ? They must not be. If men have bowels less hard than stone, they must feel as theirs, and long remember, this present agony of the world. If they have minds that understand the smallest part of what they see, they must know there is a cause for which these soldiers spend their youth. And therefore out of suffering and knowledge they will make their resolution. They will resolve that this torment be not the throes of death, but birth-pangs of another world. A world that shall be the province of wise and charitable, hale and happier men.

*ARDEN still sits gazing at the black screen of the tele-*

## *The Cornerstones*

*vision set. The SOLDIER gets up, and from the foot of a tree takes his rifle and equipment.*

SOLDIER

That was good, what that fellow was saying, and I hope it may be true. But tell your friends, the next time you see them, that they can't do it without me. They can't win the war without me, and they'll make a poor thing of the peace without me, in spite of all their good intentions. Tell 'em that, will you ? And now I've got to go.

ARDEN

You shan't go till you have told me who you are. What is your name ?

SOLDIER

My name is Courage.



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