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**T**HESE essays are on a number of different subjects, but there is a kind of unity in the collection since most of them approach the same general subject from different and particular points of view. The subject is the conflict between freedom and authority, between the rebel and tradition, between the individual and the State. It is, as Mr. Warner states, 'a problem which, to some extent, has exercised every human being and every society throughout the ages; yet in our own time it has been posed with especial force, and our failure to deal with it has been attended with unprecedented catastrophe.'

In these essays the problem is approached from some of the various points of view of literature, and Mr. Warner (poet and novelist himself) ranges widely over Greek and Latin classics, Elizabethan drama, and Russian and English novelists.

This volume was awarded the Essay Prize in the recent Literary Competition conducted by **the** publishers.



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# THE CULT OF POWER

*essays by*

REX WARNER

*London*

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD

**First published 1946**

*This book is produced in  
complete conformity with the  
Authorised Economy Standards*

**Printed** in Great Britain by  
WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LTD., LONDON AND BECCLES  
for JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD.,  
**8 Bury Place, London, W.C.1**

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**For My Mother**

## THE CULT OF POWER

THE worship of violence, of absolute power, of lawlessness, the setting-up of the individual against the universe—all these are old things. Socrates argued against them: Marlowe was fascinated by them. To-day they seem to have returned, with their old strength newly armed, and more dangerous than before. Indeed the introduction of a new element—the 'leader-principle'—into the mixture has had tremendous effects, so that what used to be a kind of individual romanticism now claims the title of a general religion.

The violent self-assertion of the individual is one of the roots of tragedy, which always presents the spectacle of the individual at odds with an environment that is shown to be too strong for him. There is something fine in the hopeless struggle of the hero and the universe, although we know that the universe will win in the end and very often the hero (Macbeth, for example, or Doctor Faustus) is represented as a person who deserves our disapproval. Yet still our sympathy, to some extent, goes out to him, not only because we know that he is in a hopeless position, but also because he corresponds to something in our own nature, a kind of revolutionary urge, a desire to defy the powers that be, a longing for irresponsible freedom from the necessities that press upon us in our ordinary lives. So we watch with pity and terror the fates of those who, whether deliberately, like Faustus, or accidentally, like Ædipus, or by a kind of innocent acceleration, like Macbeth, have set themselves up as arbiters of their own

destinies against far stronger forces, have become, as the Greeks put it, 'infatuated'. It is this pity and terror that produce the 'purgation' of our own feelings, and, without attempting to enter upon a deeper analysis, it may be said that one at least of the effects of this purgation is salutary from a social point of view. We recognise that this revolutionary, iconoclastic urge in ourselves is heroic; indeed all progress depends on it; and we learn that when it acts irresponsibly, against the nature of things, it is infinitely harmful and is visited by penalties which, however dreadful, we still feel are, in a way, deserved. In the most intellectual of all tragedies, the Greek, it is Necessity against which the hero fights, an inscrutable power, often unjust by human standards, yet none the less deserving of reverence. In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, a much more concrete force is imagined, the God of a Church outraged by blasphemy and open rebellion. In Shakespeare we find, together with the Elizabethan admiration for the extravagance of emotion that his heroes show, something not unlike the Greek mistrust of its tendency to carry men too far from the herd, too far from the beaten track into mere lawlessness and irresponsibility, into that state of 'infatuation' where the precepts of religion, the ordinary feelings of men, the social conscience become meaningless. We find the same conflict and very much the same attitude to it in Ibsen. Indeed all great tragedy is played against this background of immense forces, forces more powerful and, in the last resort, more estimable than the best that the individual can produce. Using the word in a wide sense, one can say that all tragedy is religious.

The cult of violence and power takes the hero out of tragedy and begins by denying the reality of the religi-

ous background—God, Necessity, Law, Social Conscience. It is remarkable that we find some of the best known of the power-experts appearing during or at the end of ages that have been renowned for tragedy—the Athenians with whom Socrates argued, and, in our own country, those thinkers who prepared the way for Hobbes. In these ages, and in others when the power-cult has come to the fore, there has been a general breakdown in political life accompanied by an uncertainty about moral and intellectual standards.

In spite of the difference in time, the age of Socrates is nearer to us than the age of Hobbes. We have all heard expressed, in a modern setting, the arguments for moral anarchy with which Plato opens his 'Republic'. They are intellectual, irreligious arguments, and those who use them reject utterly the background of dim yet powerful forces which both tragedy and religion recognise. They make their appeal now, as they did then, to the brilliant and irresponsible individualist, who is conscious of the pressure of society upon him and convinced of his own ability to break free from it. It is the philosophy of the 'self-made' man, and, although it has notable successes to its credit, it has never, in this intellectualised form, been able to sway great masses of people. The self-made man will usually admit that he has 'made' himself at the expense of others, that he may have won the grudging admiration of his fellows but seldom their enthusiastic support.

Yet these arguments for moral anarchy, the assertion of the individual combined with a refusal to admit the existence of supra-individual forces, are an important stage in the sequence that leads us to the position in which we find ourselves to-day. This individualism, in its 'irreligious' form, is the sign of the break-up of a

whole social system of values which have, for one reason or another, become too weak to inspire respect or to enforce obedience.

The next stage is not, as the individualist fondly imagines, the triumph of the unfettered 'strong man'; for now the forces that we have noticed in tragedy reassert themselves. The masses of people, however ignorant, cowardly and incapable they may seem to the 'strong man', are, in the end, infinitely stronger than he. They demand, once he has sapped their faith in their old system of social life, a new system; they will not rest until they have it; and they will utilise the 'strong man' for their purpose. There is a deep sense in which it is true to say that it is the leader who is led, or rather pushed along a path which may end in some desirable situation or at a precipice. What will be its ending is a thing that is determined by forces that are wider still, material forces and also the fundamental forces in the nature of man himself as distinct from those that make themselves apparent owing to a particular stimulus.

Each age, like each tragedy, is different, yet there is a general theme in history, a theme of breaking-up and rebuilding. The same problems, differently stated, constantly recur. Some people will explain the whole according to the strict principles of historical materialism, the changes in the relations between production and organisation. It is an extremely helpful method, but it may be helpful also to look at the same problems as they appear in men's minds, to consider the 'super-structure' of ideas which both acts upon the material factors of history and is acted upon by them.

What, in our present situation, would strike one as most remarkable, if one had not observed much the

same thing happening before in history, is the rapidity with which generally accepted ideals of the early twentieth century such as toleration, kindness, objective truth, freedom, have been replaced in many people's minds by their exact opposites. More remarkable still is the enthusiasm with which people have accepted the substitution. It is true that we see this process most clearly in fascism and, amongst fascist states, most clearly of all in Germany; but it would be most unwise to regard it as a process that is wholly alien from ourselves. To say the least, the movement is European. One of the defects in the arguments which Lord Vansittart uses in his attacks on the whole German people is the fact that he should logically at the same time incriminate the Italians, the Spaniards, a large number of the French, and not a few of his own countrymen. For all these share in the ideals which have plunged the world into war. Fascist ideals appear *in* the most unlikely places, and, in England, are by no means confined to the followers of Sir Oswald Mosley.

It is suggested here that at the root of this whole cult of power and violence, including fascism, is the philosophy of the moral anarchist, of the individual asserting himself against general standards that seem too weak to be able to restrain him. This is the first stage, and to many people there seems to be something admirable in the attitude of the rebel so far. After all, revolt is the seed of progress. But revolt that is based solely on individual, anarchist self-assertion is against the nature of man and of society. The more successful the moral anarchists are, the greater is the feeling of insecurity in the minds of everyone, including, in the end, the moral anarchists themselves; for in the end they have so sapped the general system of ideas that they

have nothing from which to revolt. At the beginning of his career the individualist rebel can exercise his powers with extraordinary satisfaction to himself and others; he can go gaily on his way, smashing down the holy images on every side, not without the applause of weaker spirits. But when all the holy images are destroyed, he will find himself in a great desert, with little to do. His supporters will begin to miss the faces that he has taken from them. Confidence will be replaced by fear, by the worst kind of fear, that which springs from a sense of insecurity and of weakness. It is at this stage that what might have been a hero is apt to turn openly into a villain. Now, in order to carry conviction, his self-assertion must become more and more violent, overt, and exaggerated. It passes all reasonable bounds, taking on the characteristics of a mania or infatuation. Our hero is doomed, like the heroes of tragedy. He is in the grip of Necessity, and more immediately in danger from that Social Conscience which he has rejected, which may well be, as he has often declared, largely compounded of cowardice, ignorance and conventionality, but which none the less disposes of stronger forces than anything which he can muster. There is one way of escape, and that is by giving to the mass of people, for whom he has so often expressed such contempt, what they want—a system of ideas by which they can regulate and give meaning to their lives (indeed this is something which, by this time, he needs himself). But the old idols are smashed, and to resuscitate them would be to admit failure. There is only one thing for it—after having rejected God to make himself God and to cause it to be generally believed that those characteristics by which he won his first eminence—and perhaps these have been self-assertion, violence,

brutality, amongst others—are the characteristics of Godhead. The old faith, the old system of values, must have very thoroughly disintegrated to make such a plan possible. That is an indispensable condition. And the remedy is indeed desperate, for the individualist is turning himself into a leader, losing for ever his irresponsibility, submitting himself to the discipline which he prescribes for others. He must now stand as a father to the people which in the past he has so despised and derided, and the people will insist that he fulfils his function. Though he has invented a religion in which he himself is the central figure, the religion is none the less stifling. And suppose that the religion does not work, does not provide the assurance and security without which people live in fear? Social Conscience is not the only form of Necessity. Such questions may harass him, but he has certainly achieved something remarkable by escaping from his first dilemma. He has made an individual protest into a religion, at least for the time. That is indeed something.

Such, expressed in rather allegorical terms, seems to be the sequence of events which we have seen in Europe recently: from the intellectual sceptic to the power-addict, from the power-addict to the 'leader'. And, again as in tragedy, running through the series after the initial successes of the first stage is the underlying note of fear, the consciousness of weakness, which, to be dispelled, demands more and more violence, more and more assertion of the obvious trappings of power.

We have seen that the first condition necessary for the whole process is the breakdown of the authority of the established ways of thought. It is this that makes individual moral anarchy certain and in the end provides the possibility of fascism. These established ways

of thought may be good or bad, noble or savage. Their survival depends on whether or not they appear to work.

Since the middle of the last century many people in many different ways have pointed out that our established ways of thought do not work, and, with the best intentions, have helped to produce the state of moral and intellectual anarchy in which Europe found itself after the last war. One may notice the rationalist revolt against religion, the socialist revolt against the hierarchy of the state, the revolt of writers and artists of the 'ivory tower' school against society at large. It does not matter to our argument that all these and many other forms of revolt had different immediate aims and ideals. They all had in common, like most revolts, the conviction that they were aiming at a kind of freedom from various forms of constraint that were hampering the human spirit—the religious authoritarianism that refused to recognise scientifically ascertained facts, the political backwardness that refused to apply the theory of democracy, the whole life-outlook of the 'bourgeois' and the 'philistine'. And in support of the theoretical onslaught came the stark facts of poverty, unemployment and war to convince even the least theoretical minds that something was wrong with the whole system of ideas on which their fathers had relied.

Far the most important of these facts was the war of 1914 and its peace. It may be reasonable to lament the mood of cynicism, of pleasure-seeking, of irresponsibility that marked the twenties; but behind this mood was the bitterest disappointment and disillusion. Churchmen may deplore the emptiness of their churches: they should remember that the Churches of

Europe had proved themselves wholly ineffective to prevent an unparalleled mass slaughter. Sociologists may lament the apathy of the electorate: they should remember that the electorate had been outrageously deceived. It began to seem to many people that the governing class was unfit to govern—yet who else was there? That the faith of the past was meaningless—yet what other faith existed? More and more people reached the stage at which their 'emancipation' was complete. They believed in nothing, and their minds had no points of reference except the most obvious—food, sex, display, 'success'. If, behind all this, there was any dominant philosophy, it was the old philosophy of the critical revolution, now completely victorious, but by a kind of Pyrrhic victory, for it had lost most of its vitality. Scientific toleration was becoming intellectual laziness, free thought and free love had lost their nouns, rationalism, having overthrown religious dogma, was now, in some bewilderment, chasing its own tail. The battle was won; yet how dreary, bleak and forbidding was the conquered field!

And now we are in the second stage of the process which we have noticed already. The rebel can only preserve his confidence by more and more outrageous rebellion, while those who have almost automatically followed him begin to regret the absence of the familiar images which he has destroyed. And of course the two tendencies can, and usually do, coexist in the same person.

An interesting example of a mind in this state can be found in the work of D. H. Lawrence, one of the very few writers of the time who really faced up to the problems of his age. Lawrence had been greatly influenced by a Sunday-school education of the 'gentle Jesus'

variety, and he rejected it utterly, seeing as well as anyone else the hypocrisy of it in the actual organisation of society. He realised too that the class hierarchy, its structure being determined more and more by money and less and less by tradition, was out of date, that the governing classes to whom he had had to look up in his childhood did not deserve his respect. At the same time he realised the futility and felt the fear of complete 'emancipation', of intellectual nihilism. He was conscious all the time that the 'gentle Jesus' myth was at any rate one form of a European system of ideas, that the class hierarchy had in the past given a coherence to society that was now lacking. He had rejected both the system of the past and the lack of system of the present. What was he to do? He attempted to build a new system for himself and others. And it seems to us now that his system, for all its fervour, was very largely negative, a mere assertion of his denial of the system of his upbringing. His God, for instance, must be the exact opposite of the 'gentle Jesus' of his childhood. There must be nothing at all gentle about the 'dark' force to which the dark independent outlaws of his dreams would owe a sort of reverence. Yet he was original in demanding a God at all, in asserting that there must be a re-establishment of a connection between the rebel and the universe. What is most significant is that he found the connection not in the mind or spirit but in something deeper, 'darker' and more violent, in sex and blood.

He was not only concerned with the connection between man and the universe, but also with the connection between man and man, since both these bonds had been broken by the intellectual nihilism in which he lived. Here, too, he preserved his character as a

rebel. He would have none of the corrupt social structure of the past, but looked forward rather wistfully to an aristocracy of 'dark' men full of sex and supported by their moon-like wives, men who would understand and reverence the dark forces and would control and discipline if need be the materialistic and soul-less mass of their fellows.

It must be admitted that Lawrence was never entirely easy in his mind with regard to this dark aristocracy of his. In 'Kangaroo' he regretfully rejects it, but in his later books he returns constantly to his theme of a master-class with a new conception of life, a 'male' 'dark' conception, in which 'blood' takes the place of 'spirit', in which the ideal of 'gentleness' is to be banished and replaced by something strong, concentrated, violent and burning, like the sun. Yet to the last he is not quite sure of himself. The figure of Jesus continues to haunt him, and in one of his last stories he attempts to convert Jesus Himself to his own conception of life.

His insistence on blood and sex and maleness is all very well as an individual protest; but it lacks something in order to be a creed that is to bind men together, to give them the assurance which they lack. Men have gone to bed with women for very many years now, and have usually enjoyed it. But this enjoyment is not sufficient in itself to form the basis of a new outlook on life, and Lawrence himself seems to have been uneasily conscious of this. Yet he was convinced of the Tightness of his protest. He would never be content with the vague and ineffectual generalities, becoming more and more cynical now, of those who followed the 'white' forces. He detested such ideals as universal brotherhood, toleration, kindness in the

**form** in which they were presented to him, **for these** words and phrases seemed to him the merest hypocrisy, and those who mouthed them were all the time betraying their 'maleness', their integrity, by pretending to feel what could not be deeply felt in their present environment, by pretending to believe in things which were so far from being put into practice. It was the vagueness and dissipation of the 'white' ideals that so infuriated him, and it was the apparent concreteness of the sexual instinct that attracted him into making of it the corner-stone of his new system.

Meanwhile, Hitler and others all over Europe, actuated in part by the same feelings that had moved Lawrence, were evolving a much more successful and destructive system of ideals. They, too, had inherited the legacy of the moral anarchists; they, too, had revolted against the past and yet felt the insecurity, hated the dissipation of the present. In their system also we find the 'dark' forces of Lawrence—blood, sex, virility, violence—but these forces are now no longer centred in the sexual nature of the individual. The consciousness of revolt is still present, but now it is allied with a security that Lawrence never felt. The community to which Lawrence looked forward, the leaders and the led, is established. Men act, instead of wasting their energies in abstract thought. And yet, if Lawrence had seen it, he would have been appalled.

Fascism finally succeeded, at least temporarily, in making the synthesis that eluded Lawrence. It preserved the idea of the rebel, but also gave the rebel security by making him a leader with an ideal. The very name 'National-Socialist', the most brilliant of modern political inventions, shows the nature of the synthesis. For the name is a contradiction in terms.

Socialism is the product of the 'white' forces; it is a general idea, based by some minds directly on Christianity, certainly regarded as applicable to all the world, as international. And nationalism was one of those constricted ideas which the critical philosophy of Europe had imagined to be discredited.

Yet into this discredited nationalism it has been found possible to bring together all the 'dark' forces of violent revolt against ineffective abstractions, and with the aid of the idea of socialism these forces have been given the sense of security, of comradeship. It is no longer a band of rebels, collected from all nations and climes, such as Lawrence might have imagined as an aristocracy. It is a whole race that is encouraged to believe itself entitled to assume the direction of the world. What is inside its bounds is good; what is outside is bad. The standards have at last been re-established: men know what to believe. It is something wholly different from the beliefs of the past. Ideas are no longer to have general, but only particular application; and this, for the moment at least, makes them easier to apply. There is to be no longer any truck with the dogmatic and generalised belief in a God to whom all human souls are of equal value; instead there is a human leader to take the responsibility of his own people. There is no more use for the liberal 'scientific' notions that the interests of mankind are inseparable. The leader will see to it that his own people get the lion's share. There is no longer any talk of gentleness, of international good will and the like. The armed people confront the world with an independence and virility that scorn such weak notions. Yet among themselves there exists a 'real' brotherhood, as distinct from the sentimental professions of

the priests and internationalists, a brotherhood in arms.

We have come a long way from the mere individualist, the moral anarchist, who insisted upon the right of the strong man to over-ride constraints, a long way from the polite critic who pointed out the failures and hypocrisies of an agreed system of thought, a long way from D. H. Lawrence, whose 'dark' forces were still individual and whose heroes, for all their sympathies with tigers, were horrified by the vulgarity and indiscriminateness of actual war. The 'hero' of this European tragedy has been peculiarly successful. The vast forces which in other dramas have so certainly secured his ruin are still there, but they are strangely disorganised, since he appears, at least for the moment, to have won some of them over to his side. Yet increasing violence, increasing lust for power are the signs of fear, and fear springs from a consciousness of insecurity. So far there is reason for encouragement; but if law and order are to be re-established at the end of this tragedy, they will have to be a different law and order from those which collapsed so thoroughly in the first act. Mere reiteration of European ideals of universal love and justice will cut no more ice after this war than they did in the time of D. H. Lawrence. Life will desire to assert itself within narrow and constricted bounds rather than to be swallowed up in the empty sands of unfulfilled promises and generalities that have no apparent application. Nor is the situation likely to be at all helped by bogus religious revivals led by elderly generals. The only reply to the cult of individual or racial power and violence is the actual practice of general justice, mercy, brotherhood and understanding

## ON READING DICKENS

How good it is to meet someone who enjoys Dickens, and how rarely this happens! And yet fifty years ago it would have seemed, I suppose, to most people almost incredible that a time should come when it would be necessary to defend rather than to describe and applaud his works. But such a time has come. Indeed one might go further and say that before Dickens can be adequately defended he must be disinterred; for today he is not even vigorously attacked but for the most part left unread, elevated on the high shelves marked 'classical' in libraries.

There are, no doubt, still people who read Dickens as he was read in his own day, who follow his writing with excitement and lay the book down with gratitude, and are not greatly concerned with asking themselves, as though they were reviewers, 'Is this thing tainted with "Victorianism"? Does it conform to the eternal standards of "the novel"? Is it realistic, sur-realistic, or what not?' These are admirable and enchanting questions, but on some lips they can freeze enjoyment as successfully as any suggestion to a hearty diner that his meat is poisoned, that there are caterpillars in his salad, that his appetite is gross, his palate insensitive. Some literary purists of the type who collect in 'circles' are full of such questions and suggestions where Dickens is concerned. And in these 'circles', though great prestige can be won by those who have some acquaintance with the names of fairly recent foreign authors, if you were to introduce into the conversation, however timidly, the name of Captain Cuttle or

of Dick Swiveller or even of the Weller family, you would be guilty of a breach of taste and good manners. The literary purist must be assumed to have read Dickens, but should not be questioned on the extent of his reading or the accuracy of his memory. Still less must he be imagined to have enjoyed what he has read; for that is really vulgar.

But if you are polite enough not to make such an outrageous assumption, if you merely enquire humbly what is wrong with Dickens, then this literary man whom we have imagined will, although in his opinion the question has been settled long ago, probably be graciously pleased to tell you. He will preface his remarks by saying, 'Dickens is an important author, but . . . ' and having thus indicated his tolerance and catholicity of taste, he will go on to inform you that the whole mass of his work is vitiated by a rather vague quality called 'Victorianism'; that individual passages are marred by a sickly and disgusting sentimentality; that this author has the effrontery to preach (and to be 'didactic', according to the critical stock-in-trade, is almost as bad as to be 'propagandist'); that he is incapable of producing characters and can only manage caricatures; that he is an optimist.

We must attempt to meet these criticisms, even though we may feel that some of them are not criticisms at all and that none of them much affects the greatness and the uniqueness of Dickens' work. For perhaps our imaginary purist will not be impressed with what most impresses us—Dickens' extraordinary fecundity of creation. He may regard this too as among the unpleasant aspects of Victorianism. Still the fact remains that, with the exception of Shakespeare, no other author has created so many characters or, if you prefer

it, caricatures, which have become household words in the English language. Pictures of these characters still adorn the walls of pubs and the advertising pages of newspapers. And they are pictures of few out of many. He seems to have created more characters and more distinct scenes than any other writer who has ever lived. This, it may be, is not necessarily a credit to his work. It might have been better, some may say, if he had created fewer and more concentrated characters and scenes. But if you come to find that these creations of his are, for the most part, full of life and activity then you must be impressed by the amazing exuberance of his imagination, and you must recognise that his achievement has been to create a world whose boundaries are wider than those of the world of any other English novelist, indeed of any other English writer, Shakespeare being again excepted. What may be called the intensity of this world is another question. Imaginative exuberance is not the only quality we look for in a great writer of fiction: but only the very greatest writers of fiction have possessed anything approaching the exuberance of Dickens. One may find the same joy in invention in *The Arabian Nights*, in the novels of Smollett, in *'Don Quixote'*; and all of these were early favourites of Dickens. But it is, unfortunately, today a very rare quality; and this is perhaps because today a writer is expected to describe rather than to create a world. Dickens must have felt himself to be a magician, a conjuror, a creator standing before an audience which expected from him something marvellous. And this close connection between him and his audience will bring us to the first of the criticisms which are so often made against him, his unfortunate *'Victorianism.'*

Here one will be forced to offend our imaginary literary man and state boldly the fact that in one respect those authors who lived in the reign of Queen Victoria were exceptionally fortunate, since this was the last period in English history during which an author was considered of any account whatever. And not only does an author like to be regarded as a fairly valuable object, but it is actually good for him when he knows that in the eyes of society he is a person of some weight. He will be in much closer touch with his audience when there is a feeling of mutual respect between him and his readers. Under these conditions he will be tempted neither 'to give the public what it wants' nor to retire in disgust from what he may regard as a world of philistines and hypocrites. Instead he will really fulfil the functions of a public servant: his work will become a part of history, contributing to and reflecting the changes and the development of life around him. And so long as he is in touch with readers rather than reviewers there will be less danger of his work becoming standardised. His novel will not be petrified by the Medusa vision of what critics call 'the novel', nor will he himself be so much inhibited by what publishers and libraries have decided is 'a commercial proposition'. It may be said, then, that so far from it being an indelible disgrace for an author to have been born at the beginning of the nineteenth century, this accident of birth was, in some ways, an actual advantage to him.

Not that one could pretend that the Victorian audience was as fine and stimulating a one as must have been the citizens of fifth-century Athens or of Elizabethan England. The world was being transformed at an enormous pace: the discoveries in the application

of science were at least as important and far-reaching as the earlier discovery of America. All received ideas were being thrown into the melting-pot; and yet a great number of the Victorians, until late in their period, seem to have been curiously unaware of the revolutionary part which they were playing in history. The rapidly growing middle class, for whom Dickens wrote, had the stability and rather stupid assurance of those who, on insufficient evidence, regard themselves as divinely elect. Smugness, prudery, snobbishness, an affectation of gentility and culture are some of the qualities which, not unjustifiably, are associated with the word 'Victorianism', although it may well be queried whether these qualities are wholly absent from the modern English. Still to imagine Dickens as tainted with these prevailing vices in his audience is really nonsensical. It is just here that he performed that public service which is one of the functions of a good writer. If it had not been for him and a few like him we might never have observed that there was anything wrong with 'Victorianism'. As it is he gave us the types for all those qualities which, in the forms he showed to us, we still deride. He pointed out to us, in the characters of Mrs. Jellaby and Mrs. Pardiggle, the cruelty and hypocrisy of charity that only serves to enhance self-satisfaction; he gave us, in Pecksniff, the enduring type of all the ideas of meanness and smugness that we can possibly put into a denunciation of Victorianism; he showed us the cruel monster of the law and of institutionalism of all kinds where the letter constrains or dictates to the spirit. It is a fact, which has been well pointed out by T. A. Jackson in his book on Dickens, that he was a radical and in some ways a revolutionary writer. That he was at the same time extremely popular

seems to reflect some credit on our maligned ancestors, 'the Victorians'. It is rather doubtful whether today any considerable audience could be found for social criticism so far-reaching and so emphatic.

There is much more to be said than this about Dickens as a social critic. This criticism is perhaps most profound when it is least obvious, where a symbolism is used which defies any exact explanation. Like Dostoievsky, Dickens was both fascinated and horrified by the criminal type, and in his later work he seems to suggest that criminality, or the impulse towards it, is much more widely spread and much more closely connected with the morals of respectability than the majority of his readers would be willing to admit. In 'Barnaby Rudge' we notice the connection between the urbane Sir John Chester and the howling destructive mob, led by hangmen and lunatics; in 'Great Expectations' we see the hero achieving a show of gentility and independence, while all the time he owes everything to an escaped convict from whom he recoils in horror; in 'Our Mutual Friend' among much else that is symbolical there is the bond in crime between Rogue Riderhood, the outcast, and Bradley Headstone, the puritanical schoolmaster. In these books and others of his middle and late period Dickens seems to be using an allegorical method in his analysis of society and to be indicating, as Dostoievsky did, the massive forces of violence and lawlessness which are the counterparts of that legitimate selfishness and personal accumulation on which society rests. Indeed Dickens' allegory goes much further than this. Aspects of it have been brilliantly dealt with by Mr. Edmund Wilson in 'The Wound and the Bow'. However, it is not the purpose of this essay to investigate Dickens' method so much as

to attempt to answer some of the most ordinary criticisms which are made against him.

In one of these, often associated with the main charge of 'Victorianism', it seems that one must admit there to be some substance; for the Victorians, in spite of their many great qualities, do seem to have had a taste for certain forms of sentimentality which it is really impossible to defend. Few of us today, unless we are suffering from a severe cold and are fortified by the additional advantages of whisky and aspirins, can weep as we should over the misfortunes of Little Nell or the protracted death of young Paul Dombey. This is indeed sob-stuff; nothing could be more so, since into this, as into all parts of his work, Dickens enters with his enormous enthusiasm, revelling in the mood which he provokes, in the tears and laughter which he can summon from an audience who seem to have been, as the Elizabethans were, delighted by all forms of melodrama.

It is a fault, certainly, this sentimentality, though, in its less extreme forms I must confess to a certain liking for it and indeed for melodrama in general. The invariably thwarted villain, the hero with his 'By heaven, Madam, you wrongme!', the incredibly 'pure and flower-like heroine—these are not characters from real life, but they are such old friends that I shrink from the thought of seeing them shrivelled by the acid of scientific contempt. They appear on the Elizabethan stage, in Fielding and Smollett, and their appearance is not necessarily a sign of imbecility or degeneracy in the author or his readers. The Victorians, and the Elizabethans too, liked their emotion strong and neat and, as in real life, emotion is seldom either the one or other, the result was often what we call bombast,

sentimentality or bathos. And yet it was in the midst of such tastes and in addressing such audiences that Shakespeare and Dickens thrive; for, though the audience may have been uncritical, it was eager and enthusiastic; though the taste may not have been refined it was genuine. And the modern tendency to fight very shy of emotion, unless it can be guaranteed sealed and bottled scientifically, may perhaps be found at least as unpromising and as unscientific as the Victorian demand for something in the nature of an overflow. One can enjoy a pleasant deception harmlessly so long as one is even half aware that one is being deceived. The rigour of a too narrow realism is more dangerous. As Bacon says, 'It is not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh in and setteth in it, that doth the hurt.'

Certainly it is a part of Dickens' method to exaggerate rather than to minimise his subjects, and this exaggeration of certain qualities in people leads to sentimentality; but Dickens' view of life is very far from being sentimental. His romantic heroes and heroines, uniformly honourable, reliable and uninteresting, seem to have been designed to cater for the prevailing taste for melodrama and the happy-ever-after conclusion. But these characters are the thinnest and the most quickly forgotten of his creations, and when we consider his development it is important to notice that they hardly appear at all in his later work. One may admit that Dickens could hardly have read Freud; that in so far as his work is concerned with the relations between the sexes he is less revolutionary than are some modern authors; that he held the conventional view of the desirability of a happy marriage. But this is not to say that he was either prudish or unobservant. He criti-

cised remorselessly what he saw around him. The frozen boredom of Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, the sacrifice of pride to property that marks the marriage of Edith and Mr. Dombey, the whole world of that great upholder of the sanctity of the home, Podsnap—these are sufficient proofs that Dickens has none of that satisfaction with what is assumed to exist which is the mark of both prudery and sentimentality.

These characters, and many others, are forgotten by those who tax Dickens with being an 'optimist'. It is a vague enough indictment; for if an optimist means one who believes that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, Dickens most obviously was not such a person. If, on the other hand, it means one who can see a real goodness in human nature which can be, in spite of all arguments to the contrary, admired and loved, then nearly all writers have been optimists. In the mouth of our imaginary critic the charge will probably mean simply that Dickens' view of the world was a more encouraging one than that, say, of Thomas Hardy. This criticism will be found to mean little more than that the two writers were looking at the world from quite different angles, Hardy from a philosophical and Dickens from a social point of view.

Here we must return again to the Victorians and notice that, on the whole, they seem to have been the last people in Europe to realise what was going on about them. It was not until the end of their period that it became generally observed that the intellectual, moral and religious principles of their life had been undermined and shaken by the course of events. This was a fact which had been noticed long ago by Tolstoy and Dostoievsky, and the modern development of the novel, by them in Russia, by Hardy in England, was

made possible simply because the authors and a growing element of society had come to doubt the religious and philosophic assumptions on which their societies were based and were thus impelled to turn their minds towards subjects which, before then, had found no place in novels. Dickens is not a philosopher and in his work he appears no more perplexed by religious and philosophical theories than had been Fielding or Smollett, the English picaresque novelists in whose tradition he wrote, who desired to, and did both instruct and entertain, but who had no ambition to criticise or even to define the intellectual foundations of their life. The economic and social foundations of life were certainly criticised by Dickens, though from an emotional rather than from a philosophical standpoint. What he observed with growing clarity as his work developed, was the glaring inconsistency between the assumptions on which society was based and society itself. He did not doubt the assumptions, and so the hypocrisies of actual fact were the more apparent to him. Writing in the tradition of Fielding, he is both a satirist and an entertainer, but as his work develops, the element of satire grows more and more in severity and outspokenness. His later books contain no beneficent deities like Pickwick or the brothers Cheeryble whose part had been to irradiate jollity and philanthropy over all deserving characters just as the curtain was going down. In the thirty years from the date of *The Pickwick Papers*' until Dickens' death there is a continual development that is away from 'optimism'.

Even in *The Pickwick Papers*' Dickens appears not merely as an entertainer but also as a satirist. His life-long hatred of the law is expressed savagely enough in the characters of Dodson and Fogg, and the descrip-

tion of the debtors' prison in which Mr. Pickwick is confined is by no means an exercise of wit. Still it remains true that the book is, as a whole, a comedy in the English romantic tradition, although Mr. Pickwick, as the book proceeds, grows into more of a 'character' than anything which has appeared previously in the English novel. From a retired businessman interested in local antiquities he swells into a kind of English Dionysus, dispensing good-will and jollity over his whole environment. Indeed, a tone point it almost appears that Pickwick and Sam are going to turn into something bigger still, and the book into something which, like 'Don Quixote', is as close to tragedy as to comedy. But Dickens is not a philosopher, and Mr. Pickwick emerges from the debtors' prison more or less as his own rosy, beneficent and amiable self. The book ends in an atmosphere of handshakes, tenderness and virtue. The good are all rewarded; the wicked either punished or reformed.

In 'Nicholas Nickleby' too there is the conventional happy ending. This time it is the brothers Cheeryble, to us quite incredibly beneficent employers of labour, who fill the parts of fairy-godmother and gods from the machine. Dickens tells us that these characters were drawn from life, and there is no reason to disbelieve him. But such characters were soon, whether they liked it or not, overwhelmed by the tide of progress in competition. The scene was becoming grimmer and grimmer, and Dickens observed it. There are no more Cheerybles after 'Nicholas Nickleby'. Indeed in his next book, 'The Old Curiosity Shop', though there is still one character left to fill the part of a Pickwick by scrupulously correct conduct and considerate treatment of his employees, his part is a very subordinate

one and the impression he makes is small compared with that of Quilp and Mr. and Miss Brass, Little Nell, too, for all her virtue, is actually driven to death. In her story and that of her half-mad grandfather we notice very clearly that allegorical method which Dickens develops even further in his later work. There is the old man driven mad by his pursuit of money by gambling, his belief that his great vice is a means to a good end, namely the making of his grandchild into a 'lady', and the result of all this is her early death. The fantastic company in which the two find themselves in their wanderings, even the sentimentality and strain of some of the scenes between the girl and the old man suggest that in this part of the book Dickens is describing forces which are bigger than the characters themselves, and is embodying in his people and scenery the cruelties and delusions which he observes in a wider society.

And from now on the novels, though they still show an unwavering faith in human nature, show less and less faith in human society as it was then and is still constituted. 'Martin Chuzzlewit' is an important landmark. It contains scenes of extremely bitter satire on American life, and it is important to understand the reason for the bitterness. Dickens, with his faith in human nature once it should become uninhibited by an oppressive social structure, had looked towards America with the kind of hope and enthusiasm which today many socialists have felt for Soviet Russia. His visit to America shocked him profoundly; for, though he noticed and commented upon many admirable features of American life, he observed that in this 'land of the free' the tyranny of money was no less powerful, and much more openly admitted, than he

knew it to be in England. Slavery was still in existence, and yet the American editors were as ready to glorify falsely the perfection of their constitution as were the English editors and parliamentarians whom he had left behind. Dickens was not a great political theorist, but he was very much of a radical and held firmly to the radical notion that human nature is essentially good and is, when freed from the obvious encumbrances of stupid and inhuman restraints, capable of betterment. In America he expected to find free men who, because of their freedom, would be good. And when he discovered that in the rising cities of the coast freedom depended on dollars as in England it depended on pounds, he reacted violently. It does him credit that this disappointment did not result in his becoming, like Wordsworth, a 'lost leader'. Disillusioned about America, he did not react so far as to doubt whether what he had seen in England as evil was in fact what he had thought. His feeling, not for theories but for human beings, was too warm for that, and even in 'Martin Chuzzlewit' the palm of villainy is carried off by Pecksniff, the representative of English middle-class respectability.

And his next novel, 'Dombey & Son', carries his social criticism much further. Here it is not a mean and obscure hypocrite like Pecksniff but the head of a great business house, a pillar of London mercantile society, who is brought to abject ruin by his pride in his possessions and in his name. Here, as in 'Bleak House', and as in all Dickens' later work, we feel the author's outraged sense of the tyranny of the machine, whether social or legal or economic, over the human being of flesh and blood. Nor did Dickens see, as the more facile optimists of his day saw, any great hope of

amelioration in the rising industrialism of the time. 'Hard Times' shows that the tyranny of modern 'efficiency' is just as disgusting to him as are the tyrannies of feudal pride, of inhuman religion, or of stupid parliamentarianism. More and more does he turn his mind to the thought of human suffering that is irremediable. 'Great Expectations' is an ironical title, and the book is dominated by the two figures of the escaped convict and the old, mad, deserted bride. The very scenery changes. There are not many more of those sparkling coach rides which the Pickwickians enjoyed. Instead we notice the fog that pervades London and the High Court of Chancery at the beginning of 'Bleak House', or the wilder fog and rain over the marshes in 'Great Expectations'.

This development is by no means the record of an incorrigible optimist consistently surveying the world through rose-coloured spectacles. The truth is that, though Dickens' amazing energy and insight are directed towards all parts of his work he tends, as he grows older, to concentrate them more and more on the less 'pleasant' aspects of his environment. He does, it is true, retain to the last a faith, perhaps a somewhat naive faith, in the essential goodness of human nature, a goodness which is revealed in those characters who are unspoilt by a longing for power, money, prestige, or by the effects of a mechanical social pressure. Such characters are children, one or two retired gentlemen of the old school, and many working-class families which are just above the starvation level. He makes it clear that, in his view, it is intolerable that the human spirit, essentially good, should be warped and twisted by institutions that are heartless or passions which are inhuman. In this sense he is didactic

and a preacher; but so are the majority of great writers.

It has often been emphasised that one result of Dickens' work was the abolition of many of the specific wrongs which he attacked. Schools like Dotheboys' Hall, for example, no longer exist. This is true, but we should not assume from this that Dickens was merely a social reformer with well-meant but facile remedies for the ills of the world. Actually he was remarkably proof against the illusion of necessary progress, and the great medicines of science and education, unailing panaceas for later liberals, seem to have afforded Dickens nothing but an unpleasant taste in the mouth. As for amelioration by political methods it is sufficient to quote a sentence from his letters in which he refers to 'my hope to have made every man in England feel something of the contempt for the House of Commons that I have. We shall never do anything until the sentiment is universal.'

It is this hatred for the insincerity of institutions, this faith in the goodness, if unperturbed, of human nature, this English anarchism which, expressed with the exuberance of genius, has made Dickens' characters into household words. But here, finally, our imaginary literary man will interpose and tell us that Dickens, having been born, unluckily for himself, before either Freud or Proust, was of necessity debarred from the creation of anything that can rightly be called a character. He could only manage caricatures; or, to use Mr. E. M. Forster's phrase, he could only produce 'flat' as contrasted with 'round' characters.

Mr. Forster's distinction between 'flat' and 'round' is an interesting one. 'Dickens' people', he says, 'are nearly all "flat"', and he seems to imply that this flatness

is something rather reprehensible. And yet Dickens is a great author, and the contradiction puzzles Mr. Forster. Those who dislike Dickens\*, he says, 'have an excellent case. He ought to be bad. He is actually one of our big writers, and his immense success with types suggests that there may be more in flatness than the severer critics admit.'

Mr. Forster himself is not among 'the severer critics', though he allows them 'an excellent case'; his rather wistful surprise that Dickens is as great as he knows him to be is as though Dickens were a cricketer who had hit a six over the bowler's head off a ball which, according to all the text-books should have been dealt with by means of the late cut. And it seems possible that the text-books which Mr. Forster is almost unconsciously applying to the case of Dickens, admirable as they certainly are for Mr. Forster's own uses, do not give good advice to everyone. After all, the six has indubitably been hit, and that is what matters, nor can there be any 'case' so 'excellent' as to disprove this fact.

These terms 'flat' and 'round' are misleading if we assume, as Mr. Forster seems to do, that a 'round' character is in some way 'better' than a 'flat' character. It is an odd assumption. No one would maintain that a piece of sculpture is necessarily 'better' than a painting. But the modern novel, like everything else, has been profoundly influenced by modern science, and perhaps it is felt to be more scientific to create characters which, because of their psychological complexity and because they can be viewed from many different directions, are assumed to be rounded. This is a fallacy, since it is the effect of the work as a whole that matters, and a thorough-going psycho-analysis may or may not

add to this effect. As Mr. Forster admits, Dickens 'achieves effects that are not mechanical and a vision of humanity that is not shallow.'

He does this by methods which are very different from those of Mr. Forster himself, but that is no reason why either of the two methods should be despised. It may be said that Dickens is writing in the tradition of Fielding and Smollett, while Mr. Forster has preferred the more psychological methods of Richardson. Certainly for the Dickens' character, who is a 'character' in the colloquial sense of the word, there is a long and distinguished ancestry. Behind Mr. Micawber and Mr. Pickwick stand great figures of the past—Squire Western, Commodore Trunnion, Thwackum, and the rest—all creations for audiences who liked to see nature written large rather than meticulously.

And of Dickens one is constantly inclined to use adjectives which denote size and scope. His whole world is a big one and he views it rather as a child might view a strange city, but with the intellect and penetration of an adult. The lights he sees are more brilliant, the shadows more monstrous than they appear to habitual inhabitants, at ease in their surroundings. There are undiscovered meanings and suggestions *in* every expression of the face, in the weather, even in the surfaces of articles of furniture or the angles of roofs. The whole is something to be viewed with wonder, enthusiasm and trepidation. These too, it seems, are the emotions which he excites in his readers. We are amazed at his creative exuberance, at his skill or energy; but what makes us call him great is, finally, the greatness and extent of his outlook. It may be true that his characters are types, that each closely imagined detail is made to serve a dramatic end; but that is not the whole story.

Behind the feeling that 'all the world's a stage' there lies a deeper conviction in which there is no trace of the cynical or the artificial; for, in the end, Dickens is more like Prospero than Jacques.

## DOSTOIEVSKY AND THE COLLAPSE OF LIBERALISM

THE greatest problem of our time is to reconcile together the modern scientific revolutionary spirit with those other forms of human activity which, whether they are described as religious, artistic or moral are inherited from a long past, have roots which penetrate more deeply into history than can the intellect of any individual and which constitute, whether one likes the fact or not, conditions which no revolution can overturn. This problem appears under a multitude of forms. There is the conflict between science and religion, between the individual and the State, between the original mind and the fetters of a hampering environment, between the child and the parent. It is a problem which, to some extent, has exercised every human being and every society throughout the ages; yet in our times it has been posed with especial force and our failure to deal with it has been attended with unprecedented catastrophe.

On this problem Dostoievsky has more to say than has any other of the great novelists. Not that he has found a solution for us; but no one else seems to have been so fully conscious of the over-riding question or to have analysed so distinctly the effects of our inability to answer it. Some readers are offended by the very vigour and acuteness of his analysis. Indeed his characters often seem rather to be squirming under a surgeon's knife than to be progressing solidly in any spacious and classical air. 'Half waking up towards day-break he had cried "Laceration, laceration", probably

applying it to his dream.' This is said of the sanest and gentlest of Dostoievsky's characters. To many people there seems to be something dangerous and obscure in this preoccupation with 'lacerations'. D. H. Lawrence, for instance, writes, 'As always in Dostoievsky, the amazing perspicacity is mixed up with ugly perversity. Nothing is pure. Dostoievsky is always perverse, always impure, always an evil thinker and a marvellous seer.' And the same Lawrence pronounces in a kind of verse:

Dostoievsky, the Judas,  
with his sham Christianity  
epileptically ruined  
the last bit of sanity  
left in the hefty bodies  
of the Russian nobility.

This last criticism based, as it appears, on a curious faith in hefty aristocratic bodies is, of course, presumptuous and absurd. Lawrence's enquiry into the problem of the European spirit is childish and shallow compared with the work of Dostoievsky. Yet there is some substance in his feeling that 'nothing is pure', exaggerated as is his expression of the feeling. And as for the 'sham Christianity' Turgeniev also is said to have called Dostoievsky 'the most evil Christian I have ever met in my life.' Certainly from the point of view of the squeamish person, of the 'hefty' aristocrat, of the reasonably contented man of the world Dostoievsky may seem 'unhealthy'. So is Shakespeare when he is occupied with the 'lacerations' of Lear or Leontes. A really thorough investigation of the sick spirit (which cannot be made without some sympathy with the sickness) is bound to seem 'unhealthy' to those who imagine themselves sane. But Dostoievsky's justifica-

tion is not only in the thoroughness and accuracy of his investigation; it is in the fact of his being a great artist who out of the tremendous contradictions of his character and of his observation was able in the end to create a world which, however disturbing it may be, is real, fascinating and extensive.

It does not much concern us whether Dostoevsky was a good man or a bad man; indeed, the question is beyond us. That he was full of all kinds of contradictions is certain, fascinated by the extremes of virtue and of vice, capable of saddling himself with unnecessary financial responsibilities for his family and at the same time of spending a honeymoon in gambling away the last possessions of his wife. Like Dickens he was curiously and almost morbidly attracted to crime and, again like Dickens, he was fascinated by scenes of poverty and squalor from which at the same time he shrunk back in loathing. There are, indeed, many similarities between these great writers which may be attributed in part to the fact that both of them suffered in childhood from a particular kind of insecurity. It has always seemed to me that Dostoevsky's childhood—beginning from his birth in a Moscow hospital for the poor—and in particular his relations with his father who, we are told, was, like Dickens' father, a gentleman who had seen better days and a drunkard—that all this must have had a far greater effect on him than what is often assumed to have been the crisis of his life, his arrest at the age of twenty-eight as a revolutionary, his condemnation to death with twenty other young men, his reprieve and exile of four years in Siberia. Ten years before this happened Dostoevsky's father, who had bought a small estate in the country, was murdered by his serfs as a result of his

ill treatment of them. It is to this background of childhood and early youth that one would have to go if one wished to trace the deepest influences of environment on Dostoievsky's mind. The later periods of his socialism and of his exile to Siberia certainly clarified his intellectual convictions; but by that time his character was already formed.

Three years before his arrest his first novel, 'Poor Folk', had been published and had been an instant success. It was sponsored and applauded by the representatives of modern liberalism, and in particular by the critic Belinsky, who upheld the view that literature should combine realism with the dissemination of liberalism and humanitarianism. Belinsky is important in Dostoievsky's life. He seems to have stood for what Dostoievsky may have regarded as the first stage of modernism. He was a rationalist, an atheist, a humanitarian, a critic of the established order, full of fine ideals for a future of enlightenment. It was not long before Dostoievsky quarrelled with him, perhaps because the great critic had described 'The Double', a more ambitious and characteristic work than 'Poor Folk', as 'pathologic rubbish'. Yet the ideas for which Belinsky stood remained with Dostoievsky as a source of spiritual irritation to the end of his life. Professor Yanko Lavrin points out that a most important part of the famous passage in 'The Brothers Karamazov' where Ivan confesses his lack of faith and 'returns the ticket' is most strikingly similar to a passage from Belinsky.

And at the same time as he was meeting and quarrelling with Belinsky Dostoievsky was moving in the circle of young socialist revolutionaries with whom he was soon to be arrested and banished. Some of the

young men actually went so far as to set up a secret printing press, a fact which, fortunately for Dostoevsky and others, did not come out at the trial. Amongst these others was a young aristocrat called Speshnyov, who was later to become the model for one of Dostoevsky's most imposing characters, Stavrogin, in *The Possessed*. This young man seems to have corresponded to what Dostoevsky would have considered the second stage of liberalism, a stage where, owing to the collapse of all faith, there are no longer any standards for thought or behaviour, no barriers against any kind of self-satisfaction, and finally nothing but destructiveness and an agonising emptiness. Professor Lavrin describes Speshnyov as follows: . . . a cynic with an enormous will-power which he used for purely destructive purposes. Yet his irony and devastating radicalism seemed to be only a mask for his own inner desolation. His very face resembled a mask, at once fascinating and repellent.'

After his exile in Siberia and what is called his 'conversion', although it was a conversion which seems to have affected the intellect rather than the whole personality, Dostoevsky reacted with extreme violence from both these aspects of the modern spirit, from the rational idealistic atheistic outlook of Belinsky and from what he came to regard as the logical result of this outlook, a cynical cult of power and violence masking a real emptiness. Yet he could never shake off his obsession with these types, since they corresponded to something real in his own nature and in the world around him. Much as he may have detested Belinsky, he found himself at the end of his life using Belinsky's arguments in the treatment of a character who is, in some ways, his greatest, Ivan Karamazov, whom he

condemns, certainly, but whom he views with both sympathy and respect. And to the end of his days, also, he was fascinated by what he may have thought of as the Speshnyov type, the completely cynical character whose will has successfully carried him beyond good and evil and who finds in that further region nothing at all. There are Svidrigailov in 'Crime and Punishment' and Stavrogin in *The Possessed*, a far more emphatic and impressive version of Svidrigailov. 'Stavrogin's Confession' which was not included in the final version of *The Possessed*, but which has been published separately, shows an additional link between these two characters. Each of them has the guilty conscience of an irreparable and indefensible act, the cynical rape of a young girl. And in Stavrogin's case we are allowed to see the full horror of such an act. It is more horrible than a mere act of cruelty or of bloodshed. 'Bourgeois' prejudices of this kind hardly affect a Stavrogin. The final horror is that the act is absolutely irresponsible, a flat denial to the whole of existence. The strong man who wins what is considered to be individual freedom—freedom from prejudice, convention, fear of others and of himself—is, in the end, most utterly lost. Yet his ideal is somehow splendid, even though its pursuit ends in suicide or insanity.

— It was, no doubt, among the convicts in the penal settlement at Omsk that Dostoievsky began to move towards a faith which, in his great works of the future, was to counterbalance his fascinated feelings of attraction to and repulsion from the ideals of the liberal and the revolutionary. To the knowledge which he already possessed of the variety and intricacy of the individual soul seems to have been added the knowledge of those qualities which, in spite of every kind of variety, unite

human beings together. It was not that he in any way sentimentalised, as Tolstoy in 'Resurrection' is inclined to do, the notion of redemption in a community of suffering. The convicts, he tells us, hated those of their number who belonged to a higher class and lost no opportunity of insulting them. He regarded them as beings who, in many cases, had become hardened and embittered by their punishment and whose good qualities were being ruined. Yet their good qualities were or had been, perhaps, particularly good. These were representatives of that individualism, that ability to act freely, to flout convention, which Dostoievsky had always admired. It was often through the very strength of their natures that they had become involved in crime and suffering. And yet they were of a different type from those with whom Dostoievsky had been familiar in real life and in imagination. They were not intellectuals like Speshnyov or Raskolnikov, but peasants for the most part, and Dostoievsky came to admire not only the strength but the simplicity of their nature. They were not, like the intellectuals, distracted by torments of the spirit, forced to deny life because the meaning of life had departed. In so far, therefore, as they were strong characters, not timidly living at second hand on inherited convention, and moreover characters who were firmly based on earth they were to be admired. So, like Tolstoy, Dostoievsky saw in the peasants the hope for a regeneration of society. And not only in the peasants, for the peasants had not made themselves. They were not intellectual individualists. What had made them really strong was indeed the fact that they did not suffer from the corrupting disease of intellectual scepticism. Orthodox Russian Christianity still had a hold over them and they, more

**than** the sceptical nobility, were still able **to understand** and **to** incorporate the teaching of Christ which, if fully incorporated, would at last give even to the restless and revolutionary intellectual the meaning of life which he so much desired to find. 'Only the people', says Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, 'and their future spiritual power will convert our atheists who have torn themselves away from their native soil.'

This ideal of the people and of a restored Christianity seems at first sight to be the same solution as that which was suggested by Tolstoy; but there is a great difference between the attitudes of the two great novelists. Dostoievsky appears as more level-headed and much less arrogant than Tolstoy. Tolstoy has most of the faults of the puritan novelist, and Dostoievsky, whatever his faults may be, has none of these. In his attitude both to the peasant and to Christianity Tolstoy is stikingly lacking in humility, however much he may affect the virtue. He feels acutely the injustice with which the peasants are treated by the nobility, but he feels this rather as a member of the nobility himself than as a fellow human being. To Dostoievsky injustice is never the worst of crimes nor its effects the worst of sufferings. The worst of all things is the spiritual chaos which results from the individual separating himself from God and from his fellow men. Tolstoy, like Moses, laid down the law in a terrible sincerity and indicated that those who were not his disciples were likely to be lost. All churches were to be reformed in order to please him. Dostoievsky had none of this protestantism, either for good or evil. In his own life he never showed the resoluteness of purpose of which Tolstoy was capable, but neither was there anything narrow or dogmatic about his teaching. He would have

been incapable of dismissing 'King Lear' as a work of art on the grounds that Shakespeare's treatment of the lower classes was lacking in sympathy, nor, conscious of the tremendous tension in his own character, would he set himself up as a Judge over the religions of the world. There is a sweetness and catholicity in the character of Alyosha and the speeches of Father Zosima which are wholly lacking in Tolstoy's later work, and indeed it seems that it is more important for an artist to be impressed with the depth and mystery of life, with his own weakness and ignorance, than with the possibility of organising it in accordance with a general rule. Dostoievsky's dilemma was with him to the end and in his greatest book, 'The Brothers Karamazov', he is most sympathetic to that type of character, the liberal atheist, which both he and Tolstoy decisively reject. Moreover, he is fully conscious of the charge of 'escapism' which may be brought against his declaration of faith in the people and in Christianity. There seems to be something more than the vigour required for the occasion, something of a self-criticism as well or 'laceration', in this passage of the prosecutor's speech in 'The Brothers Karamazov'. 'Then the third son. Oh, he is a devout and modest youth, who does not share his elder brother's gloomy and destructive theory of life. He has sought to cling to the "ideas of the people", or to what goes by that name in some circles of our intellectual classes. He clung to the monastery, and was within an ace of becoming a monk. He seems to me to have betrayed unconsciously, and so early, that timid despair which leads so many in our unhappy society, who dread cynicism and its corrupting influences, and mistakenly attribute all the mischief to "European enlightenment", to return to their

"native soil", as they say, to the bosom, so to speak, of their mother earth, like frightened children, yearning to fall asleep on the withered bosom of their decrepit mother, and to sleep there for ever, only to escape the horrors that terrify them.'

And indeed if we were to regard Dostoievsky solely as a moralist or reformer and not at the same time as an artist, there would be some truth in this self-criticism. What is typical of him is that he does not shrink from making it. His scepticism goes to the extreme depths, and this is the characteristic of his greatness. Saintly Christian simplicity in a communion of fellow-beings on the one hand, and on the other the horror and self-destruction of the wholly 'free' man—these are the poles between which his work is set. His importance is not to be measured by the merits of any practical proposals which he may have made or even by the depth and precision of his psychological insight, though in a discussion of this kind one is bound to give the impression that these are the main matters that count. But his work stands as a whole and is many-sided. Not the most admirable ideals together with the widest knowledge of psychology is in itself sufficient to make a great novelist, and to many people *The Brothers Karamazov* is the greatest novel ever written. So in examining Dostoievsky's views on the dangers that lie before the uninhibited rationalist and modern society in general, one can only hope to throw a little light on some portion of his work, although also one may plead the excuse that these ideas of his have a severely practical value for us who live in a world lacerated by the same wounds which he saw and imagined in individuals.

2

The process which Dostoievsky seems to have imagined is something like this. First, the 'emancipated', Europeanised, critical rationalist, more than half an atheist, but still a respectable and often a genial character, such a one as Stepan Trofimovitch in 'The Possessed', who is a person of some charm in spite of his sentimentality, which consists in a total unawareness of where his ideas really lead; next, perhaps, comes the more thorough-going modernist such as was Belinsky, lacking both the charm and the sentimentality of the dilettante, one who works actively for the overthrow of prejudice and obscurantism, who denies God and is confident in his ability to construct a temple of humanity on earth; then comes the wholly destructive character, the real individualist who has discovered that the 'service of humanity' without God is a prejudice like all the rest, who either worships in another or aspires to be himself the super-man, or man-God, and whose career ends in emptiness, desolation, suicide or insanity. There is a logical connection between these types. It is indeed symbolic that the son of Stepan Trofimovitch, the genial, weak, moderately cultured and moderately 'advanced' ladies' man, should be Peter Verkhovensky, the type of the purely destructive revolutionary, longing for chaos and bloodshed, with only one object of reverence, Stavrogin, whom he imagines as the perfectly strong man, freed from all prejudice, capable of all crime, and lacks the depth of character to discover Stavrogin's own tragedy and desolation.

In some such a way as this it seems that Dostoievsky represented to himself the genesis and the growth of

modern atheistic individualism, although again it should be pointed out that a formula such as this, when applied too closely to a work of art, is bound to be misleading and unsatisfactory. The types which I have indicated are not always clearly defined. Ivan Karamazov seems to incorporate all of them in his own personality. And if the process from self-assertion to self-destruction is the same, the forms which this process takes and the aspects from which it may be regarded are as various as is human nature itself.

The problem is expressed clearly, and indeed even crudely, in the first of Dostoievsky's great novels, 'Crime and Punishment'. The hero of this book, the student Raskolnikov, is the first of Dostoievsky's characters who shows the ideals of the individualist and their necessary weakness and collapse. He has convinced himself that he is exceptional and is thus entitled to take the laws of man and God into his own hands. It is the familiar theme of tragedy, the 'hubris' of the Greeks, the 'vaulting ambition' of Shakespeare, but here it appears in a specifically modern setting. Raskolnikov consciously thinks of himself as a 'modern'; he argues himself into what he believes to be greatness rather than feels it within himself. Indeed he expresses clearly the chain of argument which has led him to the belief that the murder of a villainous old woman money-lender is capable of being justified as a meritorious act. In describing a newspaper article which he wrote he says, 'I remember insisting on the idea that all legislators and rulers of men, commencing with the earliest down to Lycurgus, Solon, Mahomet, Napoleon, etc. etc., have, one and all, been criminals, for, whilst giving new laws, they have naturally broken through older ones which had been faithfully observed

by society and transmitted by its progenitors. These men most certainly never hesitated to shed blood as soon as they saw the advantage of doing so. It may even be remarked that nearly all these benefactors and teachers of humanity have been terribly bloodthirsty. Consequently, not only all great men, but all those who, by hook or by crook, have raised themselves above the common herd, men who are capable of evolving something new must, in virtue of their innate power be, undoubtedly, criminals, more or less, be it said.' And so he divides mankind into two types: the ordinary, 'whose function it is to reproduce specimens like themselves'; and the extraordinary, who are those 'who have the gift or power to make a new word, thought or idea felt'.

As Raskolnikov himself observes, there is nothing very new in this theory. It is precisely the same as that put forward by Thrasymachus in the second book of Plato's 'Republic', the theory that justice is 'the interest of the stronger' and that the type of person to be admired is the strong man who can rise above prejudice, and force or cajole others to do his will. The same theory meets us again in the Renaissance and indeed in all periods of revolutionary change, when the accepted standards of a society are subject to intellectual criticism. The effects of the theory on the modern world are too obvious to require comment.

It may be that Raskolnikov enunciates the theory with too much intellectual clarity for us to be able to take him quite seriously as an adult person; indeed he is represented as an adolescent, too weak in himself to be the super-man of whom he dreams. After the murder he remarks inconsequently, 'The reign of reason and light commences now, of will, of force', and there

is something pathetic in the utterance, since he himself has bungled everything. His murder was to be an act of precision, but his nerves so far get the better of him that he kills, in addition to the old woman, her gentle and half-witted sister who happens to come unexpectedly into the room, nor does he even secure the money for which the crime was originally committed and which was to set him up in some post where his abilities would be used to further new ideas and perform social service which would amply counterbalance anything criminal there may have been in the murder of a 'louse' like the old woman. (Here one is reminded of Dmitri Karamazov's remark about the radical Rakitin, They have this social justification for every nasty thing they do.)

Raskolnikov, in fact, is nothing like what he imagines Solon, Lycurgus, Mahomet, etc., to have been. He is merely a talented and sensitive young man suffering from a sense of grievance and carried away by an idea to the point of insanity. The crime that was intended to be a splendid and emphatic assertion of his personality ends up as being nothing of the sort. It is an action which is shameful, ugly and inefficient. Raskolnikov's subsequent sufferings seem to spring as much from wounded pride, from disappointment at his powerlessness to be a superman, as from any recognition that he has done evil. His confession does not spring from any inner necessity but is the result partly of the tactics of the police and partly of his chance meeting with Sonia. He is, in fact, too small a man to be a hero, and there seems to be something unfitting in his gesture of throwing himself at the feet of Sonia, the girl who had become a prostitute in order to keep her family, and exclaiming, 'I do not bow to you person-

ally, but to suffering humanity in your person.' The words, from Raskolnikov, are pompous and insincere, and the whole incident is of a different order of reality from the scene in *The Brothers Karamazov*, where Zosima bows to the ground before Dmitri.

Yet Raskolnikov's conversion, such as it is, does come from his contact with 'suffering humanity' in the person of the self-sacrificing Sonia, from that and from the New Testament. Nevertheless he never seems to repent of his original theory. Almost to the very end he asks himself, 'How were my thoughts more stupid than other thoughts or ideas which have existed since the world was made?' He has turned out as a failure in action but there is no flaw in his reasoning on the intellectual plane. Indeed the solution of the dilemma is only suggested by means of a dream which he has when ill in the prison hospital.

He dreams of a strange new plague 'coming from the interior of Asia'. Microscopic parasites, endowed with intellect and will, fix upon men and drive them mad. 'But, strange to say, the stricken were at the same time imbued with a strong sense of their own good judgment, never did they believe themselves so strongly endowed with wisdom and intellectual vigour or scientific conclusions and moral perception so correct as now. . . . They were incapable of understanding each other because each believed himself the sole possessor of truth.' There is chaos everywhere. 'People gathered together in crowds, agreed upon a common action, swearing never to abandon one another, then immediately rushed to something else, forgot their argument, and ended in rushing upon and murdering each other. Incendiarism was rife everywhere and famine set in. Everything perished. The pestilence raged more and

more. Of the whole world only a few remained; these were the pure and elect, predestined to found a new race, to inaugurate the new life and purify the earth; but the chosen were not recognised. None knew their voices or heard their words'. This, the dream seems to suggest, is the conclusion of pure individualism, the claim to be 'extraordinary', the ambition towards the man-God. Yet the conclusion is represented mystically. The chain of argument which leads to crime is still, on its own level, unchallenged, although the life into which Raskolnikov and Sonia are to enter finally is shown to be fuller than anything which Raskolnikov at any rate has previously imagined.

The plague 'from the interior of Asia' will recur again. The most remarkable expression of it is in *The Possessed*. But before writing this novel Dostoevsky wrote that strange and bewildering book *'The Idiot'*, the meaning of which, difficult as it is to find, seems often to have been misunderstood. The book has no very direct bearing on our subject, but its indirect bearing is considerable. Dostoevsky has attempted to create in Prince Myshkin the antithesis of the revolutionary individualist, of the Raskolnikovs, Stavrogins and Ivans. Myshkin also appears as a preliminary version of that more successful character, Alyosha, in *'The Brothers Karamazov'*. What is remarkable, however, is that this ideal is rejected by Dostoevsky at this stage as unacceptable and incredible. It is not merely that he introduces Myshkin as an 'idiot', and emphasises continually his epilepsy. More important is the fact that Myshkin, for all his goodness, spreads destruction on all sides of him, and is represented as a 'half-man' and a failure. He has been compared to a Russian Don Quixote, a kind of divine fool and, up to

a point, the comparison is justified. If Dostoevsky had possessed the humour of a Cervantes, even if he had kept up to the end the gentle and amusing satire of the early passages where Myshkin is first introduced to the Epanchin family, then this book might have been more consistent with itself and, in a different way, more moving and more satisfactory. But Dostoevsky was far too seriously concerned with his own dilemma and his search for salvation to achieve the balance necessary for the creation of anything approaching a Don Quixote. As the book proceeds, so does the 'laceration'. The closing passages are weak in construction and hysterical in manner. At one point the author, rather artlessly, exclaims, 'How is anyone to tell a story which he does not understand himself?' And in the appalling horror of Myshkin's final degradation into madness one seems to detect Dostoevsky's own exasperation with a hero who has not turned out to be what was originally hoped and who must, for that reason, suffer the greater punishment. He should have been an example of the 'saviour', what Raskolnikov might have become in the end, what Sonia was, only with an intellectual background as well as a childish faith; but he ends up as 'an abstract spirit', incapable of humanity. He is too saintly, too much unvexed by doubt and sin to be able to understand, except intellectually, the lives of others; and his good deeds bring nothing but calamity. One can understand Dostoevsky's disappointment with him when one remembers that Myshkin represents not only intuitive saintliness but also many of the intellectual ideas of the reformer. His conclusions on capital punishment are those of the European liberal. Here, one might have thought, is the synthesis between liberal reform on the one hand and

Russian saintliness on the other. But the synthesis is not achieved. Myshkin remains a beautiful but exasperating child with a saintliness that is quite incapable of comprehending the forces which are opposed to it.

His incompleteness is shown in his incapacity as a lover. His character is split between the two women, on the one hand Nastasya Filippovna, on the other Aglaya Epanchin. Nastasya is a type of character to whom Dostoevsky seems to have been strangely attracted. She has been betrayed in early youth and nurses as her most cherished possession her sense of grievance. She shrinks from sexual love and is at the same time fascinated by it in its most violent aspect, seeing in that what she really aims at, her own destruction. She hesitates and goes backwards and forwards between Myshkin and his exact antithesis, Rogozin, a man of uncontrollable passions, whose love is more than half hatred and who in the end does what, in a way, both he and Myshkin and Nastasya have always known that he would do, carries her away not so much to possess as to destroy.

There is a strange and secret significance in the relation between the gentle saintly Myshkin and the coarse, violent Rogozin. The two understand each other perfectly. Myshkin knows when Rogozin is going to attempt to murder him, though, as he contemplates the knife, he tells himself 'It is a crime on my part to imagine anything so base with such cynical frankness.' The sentence indicates his fundamental weakness. His love for and sympathy with others are too spiritual, too abstract, the emotions of an anxious observer, of a nurse for a patient rather than of one human being for another. Nastasya is both attracted and repelled by

him more because of his sexlessness than because of the nobility of his character. In a way it seems that he is so closely connected with Rogozin that the two form one character, as though Dostoievsky had said to himself: 'This extreme selflessness and purity are impossibilities; they must be balanced by equally extreme forces of violence and possessiveness.' What they achieve, however, is not a balance but mutual destruction. Myshkin has hardly any hesitation in choosing the half-mad Nastasya, whom he hopes to nurse and to guard against herself, rather than Aglaya, who is capable of ordinary human love and ordinary decent feeling. Pity is more powerful with him than affection and in the end most readers will sympathise with the commonsense view put forward by Eugenie Pavlovitch: 'Aglaya loved like a woman, like a human being, not like an abstract spirit. Do you know what, my poor prince? The most probable explanation of the matter is that you never loved either the one or the other in reality.'<sup>9</sup>

So Myshkin must be pronounced a failure, at least from the point of view of that part of Dostoievsky's mind which was constantly searching for refuge and salvation from, on the one hand, faithlessness and the denial of life and, on the other hand, unregulated destructive passion. From other points of view *The Idiot* is no doubt an admirable book and it has very many admirers. Still, to my mind it seems chiefly interesting as a stage towards Dostoievsky's greatest work *The Brothers Karamazov* and as an instructive example of what may be called his allegorical method, the method of using characters and scenery to represent forces much greater and wider than anything which meets the eye.

The same method is employed in *The Possessed*, although in this novel Dostoevsky appears on the face of it to be much closer to contemporary life and politics than he is in any of his other works. The main character, Stavrogin, is supposed to have been modelled partly on Marx's rival, Bakunin, and partly on the Speshnyov whom Dostoevsky knew in his own revolutionary days. There is a very bitter caricature of Turgeniev, the Westerniser, and other characters and scenes also are taken from real life. Yet the book is as far as possible from being, in the accepted sense, realistic. It is a development of the theme of the plague 'from the interior of Asia', and it is with this bug or disease of the individual judgment, unsupported by tradition or faith that the characters are 'possessed'. In a sense it is a most bitter and violent attack on the nihilists of the day, and from this point of view may be compared with Turgeniev's *Fathers and Children*, but it is far more than a satire of contemporary interest. It expresses more plainly than any other book the central dilemma of Dostoevsky's thought with regard to the whole trend of liberal civilisation.

Stepan Trofimovitch is the type of the early period of liberalism, respectable, sentimental, vaguely sceptical and wholly irresponsible. He is connected by the definitely symbolic relationship of father to son with Peter Verkhovensky, the type of the 'possessed', whose whole life work is destruction and whose whole outlook cynical. The strange transition, horrible and shocking enough to the cultured sentimentalist, is from genial and elegant scepticism to a state where it is possible to say, as Verkhovensky says, 'Do you know how many we shall catch by little ready-made ideas? The Russian God has already been vanquished by cheap vodka. Oh, this gen-

eration has only to grow up. One or two generations of vice are essential now; monstrous, abject vice by which a man is transformed into a loathsome, cruel, egoistic reptile. That's what we need. And what's more, a little "fresh blood" that we may get accustomed to it.'

Today it is rather more difficult than it may have been in the past for us to dismiss as hysterical or as idly allegorical such speeches or such indications of a sequence in ideas and attitudes, for we can remember, among many other facts which support the same conclusions, the easy and dangerous and self-centred irresponsibility of the years between two wars and, as the child and product of this irresponsibility and self-centredness, the flood of destruction which was ready to burst over the earth. Stepan Trofimovitch's chief sin is his incompetence as a human being. He has the advantages of intellect and culture, yet he spends his life as a hanger-on of the rich and wholly avoids all responsibility for his son. Both his sentimentality and his fundamental stupidity are shown in his horror at his son's unfilial conduct. He ends up, however, as a character whom we pity much more than we dislike. His indecision, helplessness and sentimentality are preferable to the resolution, the efficiency and the 'realism' of a Verkhovensky. Finally he achieves a certain nobility, quite beyond the reach of characters such as his son, when in the collapse of his own ideas, outcast, and dying he returns to the simpler view of humanity which in his life-time he rejected, and prays that these devils, whom he has helped to invoke, may be driven from the body of Russia as were the spirits that entered into the Gadarene swine. 'But the sick man will be healed, and will sit at the feet of Jesus, and all will look at him with astonishment.'

Yet neither Stepan Trofimovitch nor Peter Verkhovensky is the dominant character of 'The Possessed'. This place is held by Stavrogin, one of the most significant and at the same time obscure of all Dostoievsky's creations. Verkhovensky, in spite of his efficiency and his genius for organisation, is simply 'Stavrogin's ape', a low type, almost of the same order as the crude and disgruntled group of nihilists who appear in *The Idiot*. Stavrogin, we learn, has been in the period before the book begins the leader and teacher and example of all 'the possessed'. Verkhovensky admires him to the point of idolatry, plans a legend for him and proposes to confer upon him supreme power. He is, in fact, the man-God who is to replace the Russian God whose existence the nihilists have disproved. He is the type of the final end of rational criticism, of individual self-assurance, the complete rejector of prejudices, the really strong man. With no faith in anything but the force of his own intellect and will he is to be, according to Verkhovensky's plan, the saviour and representative of the new age.

Yet, though he exercises such a tremendous influence over his followers and disciples, he sees in himself nothing but emptiness and desolation. In his view he is not pursuing pleasure but merely and vainly the capacity to feel, whatever the feeling may be. Like Ivan Karamazov, he does not even believe in his own disbelief. Conscious of his strength, he has separated himself from every object upon which his strength might have been exercised. His eyes are so disillusioned that they can see nothing. Shatov, the only one of his disciples who seems to have joined the movement from motives of humanity rather than of mere intellectual revolutionism, revolts violently from his teacher, who

used to declare that he 'saw no distinction in beauty between some brutal obscene action and any great exploit, even the sacrifice of life for the good of humanity' and who has brought him to the state where, as he says, 'I don't know either why evil is hateful and good is beautiful.' Yet he shrinks from the gulf which he sees ahead of him in the thoroughgoing agnosticism of Stavrogin and, though incapable of understanding him, tells him truly that the only motive for his action is now a kind of self-laceration. 'Do you know', he says, 'why you made that base and shameful marriage? Simply because the shame and senselessness of it reached a pitch of genius! You married from a passion for martyrdom, from a craving for remorse, through moral sensuality. It was a lacerating of the nerves . . . Stavrogin and a wretched half-witted, crippled beggar!'

But in spite of his emptiness, in spite of his 'moral sensuality', his final failure as a lover and his suicide, Stavrogin is a great character. There is something grand in the integrity of his critical intelligence and his power of icy penetration into what is before his mind. He remains perfectly true to his principles. At the end of Shatov's outburst, 'turning paler and paler', he remarks, 'You are a psychologist, though you are partly mistaken as to the reason of my marriage.' Verkhovensky is amused when during a discussion on atheism an old-fashioned military man suddenly gets to his feet and exclaims, 'If there is no God, how can I be a captain, then?' Stavrogin's comment on the incident is 'He expressed a rather sensible idea.'

It is true that there seem to be faults of exaggeration, even of hysteria, in Dostoievsky's treatment of Stavrogin and indeed of all 'the possessed'. It appears

more melodramatic than significant when we are told that in Petersburg Stavrogin 'belonged to a secret society for practising beastly sensuality', and in spite of Verkhovensky's enthusiasm the practical programme of the revolutionaries is too childish to be taken seriously. Yet these very faults, showing as they do the extreme bitterness of Dostoievsky's reaction from the liberalism and the disillusionment of his youth, are most significant. Equally so is the fact that, in spite of this bitterness, and in spite of the scorn poured on Verkhovensky's essential vulgarity, on the stupidity of the theorist Shigalyov and the whole set-up of compulsory freedom which will end in slavery—in spite of all this Stavrogin remains a tragic and by no means a despicable character.

So far, then, in his novels Dostoievsky has invited us' into scenes of laceration, frustration and despair. From the point of view from which we are considering his work he has suggested that the early form of 'humanitarian' and 'cultured' liberalism is not even funny, so disastrous are its results in the next stage of the process when men claim the right to be 'extraordinary' and grow even more and more separate from each other and from God. On the one hand is the cruel licence of individual passion, while those who, attacked by the same plague of individual criticism, have banded themselves together to proclaim freedom on earth are shown to be vulgar pedants and destructive rogues, lacking all inner freedom and dependent still on some man to be their god. In practise and by results the individualist is most certainly proved wrong, yet still, on his own plane, he is unrefuted and, when he attains the stature and consistency of a Stavrogin he is a figure of Satanic grandeur. Opposed to him are

forces of spiritual humility and of gentle nobility which, for all their intrinsic power, do not seem seriously to affect him. The problem is still there, still unsolved. It has only been presented with greater force and greater bitterness. This is the point at which we have arrived before considering Dostoevsky's last and greatest novel.

### 3

'The Brothers Karamazov' is a work of such tremendous scope and such deep significance that it defies any easy principles of analysis. It seems to sum up in itself all Dostoevsky's previous work, and in addition to achieve a balance and, in spite of the characteristic intensity and the 'lacerations', almost a sobriety or calm which we find nowhere else in the novels. The same types of character—another Stavrogin, another Myshkin—meet us again, but here they have, in addition to their symbolic character, a new warmth of humanity which makes them appear to us more real and more moving than their prototypes who were often over-intellectualised. It is not that in this book Dostoevsky deserts what may be called his allegorical method. Far from it. The allegory of 'The Brothers Karamazov', though less obvious, is far more expansive than that of any previous novel. Here at last Dostoevsky seems to have achieved the rare success of producing figures who are penetrated by and represent gigantic forces and yet who remain human beings. Here his creations are of the same order as Hamlet or Othello. It is in every way his biggest work, being no longer a study limited by the concentration of feeling on one character as hero, but rather a story in which

many characters are on the heroic scale and all of them contribute in different ways to the investigation of the main subject, what is described as 'the Karamazov way', in the slogan 'All things are lawful'.

It seems to be in the size and grandeur of the whole conception that Dostoievsky is at last able to achieve the balance that he fails to achieve in his other work. The plot is simple enough: the murder of the old father Fyodor Karamazov, the trial and condemnation of one son, Dmitri, for a crime which in fact he did not commit, though he well might have done, the agony of the second brother, Ivan, who, with some justice, regards himself as indirectly responsible for the murder, and the development of the third brother, Alyosha, who, together with his preceptor, Father Zosima, represents, though with greater reality and greater sanity, the saintliness of spirit which we first noticed in the character of Myshkin. Yet this simple story of murder and trial in a small provincial town is the framework for the inter-play of forces so vast and significant that this novel must be considered one of the greatest if not the greatest of all that have been written.

It is tempting to make some effort to enquire into the exact significance of the theme and of the main characters; for there is no doubt that the strength of the book is largely in its deep and pervasive allegory or symbolism. One may regard, for example, the three brothers as constituting one personality, as each representing one aspect of the human soul. Indeed it is difficult to believe that in making these characters Dostoievsky was not influenced by Plato's division of the soul into three parts—the intellect, the spirit or emotion, and the element which is bounded by the sensual affections. But in the place of Plato's arrogant

governing intellect Dostoevsky puts Alyosha, representing the sympathy and simplicity of the Christian spirit; without this spirit the other aspects of the personality are involved in waste and suffering. Dmitri, the soldier-type, representing the spiritedness of Plato, is a prey to his own good qualities which lack direction; and the cruellest of all fates is reserved for Ivan, the representation of the unfettered and all-powerful intellect, who is yet to the end an object for our admiration and respect. Then, what is the meaning of the father of the family, the villainous old lecher and buffoon, clinging like a limpet to his utterly selfish life, and killed in the end by his valet and bastard son who has become infected with the ideas of Ivan? Does he stand in some way for the 'natural', unredeemed life-force? And how numerous are all the implications of the main theme, the murder or desired murder of a father by his sons?

All these questions are fascinating, but one must own that their precise solution is impossible. Where allegory blends almost indistinguishably with reality there is the supreme achievement of art. The observer, confronted with such art, is aware of the reality before his eyes, but is aware also of something more real which is scarcely visible, which suffuses and illustrates what he sees, but invites him to an even wider prospect. The effect on his mind is of a suspension of judgment and his feelings are more akin to wonder and delight than to the pleasure and excitement of intellectual understanding. This is the effect produced by 'The Brothers Karamazov' and it is by this achievement of art rather than by any overwhelming argument on the intellectual plane that Dostoevsky seems to have found some solution to his dilemma. We cannot attempt to

analyse in detail the methods by which his artistic achievement was made possible. Our present purpose is merely to follow out those ideas of his which we have noticed already, and which are here expressed with greater force and with a wider sympathy than elsewhere. The 'Karamazov way', the conviction of or impulse towards the belief that 'all things are lawful', is a stronger thing than Raskolnikov's adolescent creed or the blank intellectualism of Stavrogin. In the old father it appears as something crude, vigorous and disgusting: extreme tenacity of life, miserliness, complete selfishness, a longing to be, by whatever means, conspicuous, senile sensuality. In each of the brothers this crude and primitive vigour is transformed in different ways by the action of conscience or of intellect. Dmitri, wild and irresponsible as he is, is acutely sensitive where his honour as an officer and a gentleman is concerned. He has none of his father's low cunning to preserve him, and his military notion of honour is by no means strong enough to save him from the effects of his unbridled passions. He learns something from the sufferings into which he is plunged, but to the end he is an emotionalist, building fantasies, swinging from one extreme to the other.

Ivan has an intellectual power and sense of taste and culture which make the uncontrolled antics both of his father and of his brother Dmitri disgusting to him. Yet we are constantly reminded that 'if there is one of the sons who is like Fyodor Pavlovitch in character, it is Ivan Fyodorovitch'. On the face of it there seems to be little resemblance between the brilliant and cultured Ivan and the abandoned old reprobate who is his father. Yet each of the two has the same lust for life. Ivan regards this lust objectively and considers it

irrational; yet still he feels it. 'I have asked myself many times', he says, 'whether there is in the world any despair that would overcome this frantic and perhaps unseemly thirst for life in me, and I have come to the conclusion that there is not. Though I may not believe in the order of the universe, yet I love the sticky leaves as they open in spring. . . . It is not a matter of intellect or logic, it is loving with one's inside, one's stomach.' Also Ivan is, like his father, though again on a much higher plane, blasphemous. Each of them sets himself up as a law to himself and resents the interference of other laws, such as those of religion. Each is profoundly sceptical, and there is some connection between the scepticism of the two, although the old father's views are childish and vulgar while Ivan is tortured by his own intellectual integrity. For along with this form of intellect and character Ivan possesses some of the qualities which distinguish the third brother, Alyosha. He can appreciate gentleness and spiritual love, though he is forced by his nature to deny their existence as fundamental elements in the order of the universe. Both he and Dmitri conform to what the prosecutor at the trial calls 'the broad Karamazov character', which is, he says, 'capable of combining the most incongruous contradictions, and capable of the greatest heights and the greatest depths. Remember the brilliant remark made by a young observer who has seen the Karamazov family at close quarters—Mr. Rakitin: "The sense of their own degradation is as essential to those reckless, unbridled natures as the sense of their own generosity." And that's true, they need continually this unnatural mixture. Two extremes at the same moment, or they are miserable and dissatisfied and their existence is incomplete. They are

wide, wide as mother Russia; they include everything and put up with everything.'

Alyosha is different. In him the strength and energy of the Karamazovs are controlled by his own saintly nature and by the teaching which he has received at the monastery from the Elder, Zosima. He has a natural urge to do good and is not impeded by the unregulated passions of a Dmitri, or the intellectual scepticism of an Ivan. He is saved by his faith both from their sufferings and from what Dostoevsky still regards as the dangerous vulgarity of the irreligious reformer. In the same way', he says of Alyosha, 'if he had decided that God and immortality did not exist, he would at once have become an atheist and a socialist. For socialism is not merely the labour question, it is before all things the atheistic question, the question of the form taken by atheism today, the question of the tower of Babel built without God, not to mount to heaven from earth but to set up heaven on earth.' In this connection Alyosha's opposite is the vulgar and self-seeking 'reformer', Rakitin, with the familiar slogan 'a clever man can do what he likes'. Both Rakitin and the murderer, the conceited and diseased Smerdyakov, are degradations of Ivan and his doctrine<sup>4</sup> 'all things are lawful'.

Zosima, then, Alyosha and the group of schoolboys whom Alyosha comes to know, to love and to influence deeply, constitute together the answer to the horrors and grandeurs of 'the Karamazov way', though it is not the kind of answer for which Ivan is looking or which he is prepared to accept. Zosima is a mystic and a saint. His faith is an all-embracing love—for mankind, for the animals, for the birds, for every blade of grass. He has the mystical sense of the inter-con-

nection of all things, and is so far from setting himself up as privileged in the individualistic way or as belonging to any 'extraordinary' group that he regards himself and everyone as sharing, not only in the beauty of life, but in all crimes and weaknesses. 'Remember particularly', he says, 'that you cannot be a judge of anyone. For no one can judge a criminal, until he recognises that he is just such a criminal as the man standing before him, and that he, perhaps, is more than all men to blame for that crime.' This is a conviction which is constantly recurring in Zosima's discourses, that 'all are responsible for all'. This conviction and the mystical love on which it rests constitute the escape from the horrors of isolation, 'the pride of Satan', and that hell which is 'the suffering of being unable to love'.

So mystical a faith is, of course, beyond the grasp of the atheistic reason, yet we can follow the steps in experience and emotion by which Zosima has reached it. He is fully aware of the intellectual dilemma of the individual reason, and the dangers of the plague 'from the interior of Asia'. He quotes with approval a conversation he had in early life with a friend. 'To transform the world, to recreate it afresh, men must turn into another path psychologically. Until you have become really, in actual fact, a brother to everyone, brotherhood will not come to pass. No sort of scientific teaching, no kind of common interest, will ever teach men to share property and privileges with equal consideration for all.' Before the age of brotherhood can be achieved we have to pass through 'the period of isolation', and by this is meant 'the isolation that prevails everywhere, above all in our age—it has not yet fully developed, it has not reached its limit yet. For everyone strives to keep his individuality as apart as

possible, wishes to secure the greatest possible fullness of life for himself; but meantime all his efforts result not in attaining fullness of life but self-destruction, for instead of self-realisation he ends by arriving at complete solitude. . . . Everywhere in these days men have, in their mockery, ceased to understand that the true security is to be found in social solidarity rather than in isolated individual effort.'

To Zosima the transformation of the world from 'this terrible individualism' to the solidarity of human brotherhood is inconceivable without 'the sign of the Son of Man', without an acknowledgment of 'the divine mystery in things' which can be reached by love and which can free men from hatred of themselves and others. 'Brothers, have no fear of men's sin. Love a man even in his sin, for that is the semblance of Divine Love and is the highest love on earth. Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. . . . And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.'

This is the final answer to the contradictions and cruelties of the analysis of life from the stand-point of the individual intellect: that life is too big to be so approached. 'God took seeds from different worlds and sowed them on this earth, and his garden grew up and everything came up that could come up, but what grows lives and is alive only through the feeling of its contact with other mysterious worlds. If that feeling grows weak and is destroyed in you, the heavenly growth will die away in you. Then you will be indifferent to life, and even grow to hate it.'

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And this is indeed the fate which overtakes Ivan, in spite of what he describes as 'this frantic and perhaps unseemly thirst for life in me'. In him the dilemma which we have been attempting to describe is more consciously felt and more clearly expressed than in any other of Dostoievsky's characters. What makes Ivan more imposing and more sympathetic than the Raskolnikovs and Stavrogins is just this fact that he is uncannily and yet not unnaturally conscious of where he is going, right up to the verge of madness. He is a far stronger character than Raskolnikov, he has more than the integrity of Stavrogin, since he needs none of the drugs of revolutionism or sensuality to convince him of the reality of his own sensations. He can understand and, in a part of his nature, he longs for the mystical experience of Zosima, the feeling of 'contact with other mysterious worlds'. But he is, like the devil of his hallucination, 'predestined to deny'. And denial brings no satisfaction. He is poised continually between two views of the universe. Either Zosima's dream is correct, the paean of praise from the whole world to its Creator, the harmony of love and understanding; or else there is no God, and life is conducted in the sphere where 'all things are lawful'. Nor is this the end of the matter. Some of the best elements in our nature—our reason, our sense of evidence, even our feelings for humanity—combine to reject the harmony which Zosima preaches; but in the other world where 'all things are lawful', where science and reason have usurped the place of God, these very qualities mislead and betray us. There is nothing left but intellectual integrity. Neither of the two views makes sense. 'The world stands on absurdities, and perhaps nothing would have come to pass in it without them.' There is still 'the

scientific method', but even this to Ivan, conscious of his underlying doubt, is something which inspires a kind of indignation. 'I understand nothing', Ivan went on, as though in delirium, 'I don't want to understand anything now. I want to stick to the fact. I made up my mind long ago not to understand. If I try to understand anything, I shall be false to the fact, and I have determined to stick to the fact.'

In his long conversation with Alyosha from which these quotations come Ivan expresses, with extraordinary force, the intellectual and moral arguments against the 'harmony'. Zosima, in describing the 'emancipated' upper classes, says, They, following science, want to base justice on reason alone, but not with Christ, as before, and they have already proclaimed that there is no crime, that there is no sin. And that's consistent, for if you have no God, what is the meaning of crime?' To this Ivan would retort, 'If you have crime, what is the meaning of God?' And such well-worn phrases as 'the problem of evil' can convey only a faint notion of the passion and sincerity with which he asks the question. He imagines the suffering of the whole world and, in particular, the torture of wholly innocent children, and he concludes that nothing can ever justify such doings. A chorus of praise from the whole universe may ascend to heaven. Complete and perfect understanding may be reached. The mother of the tortured child may embrace the torturer. Ivan himself and those like him may cry with the rest, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' Yet still the fact remains of children having suffered before this state of universal love is reached, and nothing can justify this one fact. No one has a right to forgive this, and if it cannot be forgiven, 'what becomes of harmony? Is there in the

whole world a being who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? I don't want harmony. From love on humanity I don't want it. I would rather be left with the unavenged suffering. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and my unsatisfied indignation, *even if I were wrong*. Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket.'

This, as Alyosha points out, is 'rebellion' and Ivan immediately admits 'one can hardly live in rebellion, and I want to live'. But more urgent than anything is his determination to 'stick to the fact'. Alyosha can only meet the facts that have been so far adduced by assuring his brother that there is a Being who 'can forgive everything, all and for all, because He gave His innocent blood for all and everything'. This is the occasion for Ivan's allegory 'The Grand Inquisitor', in which religion, in the sense in which it is dear to Alyosha and to Zosima, is again attacked from the two standpoints of reason and of 'love of humanity'.

The story of Jesus returning again to earth and being arrested by the Inquisition might seem a likely framework for satire against the hypocrisy of institutionalised religion; but Ivan's allegory is far more profound than that. The Grand Inquisitor is far from being a hypocrite. He is one who, like Ivan, has imagined the beauties of the 'harmony' and, from motives of humanity, has 'returned the ticket'. He suffers in the consciousness of the deception on which his system is built—the theoretical worship of Christ who came to

give men freedom, and the practical worship, for the sake of men's peace, of 'the wise and dread spirit, the spirit of self-destruction and non-existence', who tempted Jesus in the wilderness and in whose three questions 'the whole subsequent history of mankind is, as it were, brought together into one whole and foretold, and in them are united all the unsolved historical contradictions of human nature'.

The Grand Inquisitor sees in the teaching of Jesus something positively menacing to men's happiness. It does not 'stick to the fact', but enjoins an acceptance of the universe together with a freedom of thought and conscience which are quite beyond man's capacity. What men really desire is to be fed and to have their minds at rest, to be spared the agonies of doubt and decision. 'And behold', he says, 'instead of giving a firm foundation for setting the conscience of man at rest for ever, Thou didst choose all that is exceptional, vague and enigmatic; thou didst choose what was utterly beyond the strength of men, acting as though Thou didst not love them at all.'

In each temptation Jesus refused to deprive men of freedom, and history in each case, according to the Grand Inquisitor, has proved Him wrong. He might have given them bread and fed them like a flock of sheep. Instead He preferred 'the bread of Heaven' which could in any case only be the sustenance of a small minority. And this is the result: 'Dost Thou know that the ages will pass, and humanity will proclaim by the lips of their sages that there is no crime and therefore no sin; there is only hunger. "Feed men, and then ask of them virtue!"—that's what they'll write on the banner which they will raise against Thee.' The materialistic reformers will build 'the terrible

tower of Babel' and there will be years of agony. Priests will again be persecuted and tortured, but men will still not be happy. They will find that 'no science will give them bread so long as they remain free', and in the end they will lay their freedom at the feet of the priests again, who will take it from them and feed them and rule over them through the powers of superior efficiency and of the mystery and authority which Jesus rejected in His temptations. So the new ruling class, those who are in reality followers of 'the wise and dread spirit, the spirit of self-destruction and non-existence', will in the end guide mankind into a world where everyone will be fed, everyone happy except for just the rulers themselves, the 'hundred thousand sufferers who have taken upon themselves the knowledge of good and evil', who, out of love for men, have rejected the spacious and impossible freedom of Jesus and have given men what they want. The old Inquisitor is, like Ivan himself, one who has longed for spiritual perfection, for the harmony of which Zosima speaks. 'But yet all his life he loved humanity, and suddenly his eyes were opened, and he saw that it is no great moral blessedness to attain perfection and freedom, if at the same time one gains the conviction that millions of God's creatures have been created as a mockery, that they will never be capable of using their freedom, that these poor rebels can never turn into giants to complete the tower, that it was not for such geese that the great idealist dreamt his dream of harmony. Seeing all that he turned back and joined—the clever people.'

So in Ivan's allegory 'the clever people' are those who have the power to imagine God and yet who, sticking to 'the fact' reject him. The consciousness of their own power and their feeling for humanity lead

them to make life tolerable, by efficient organisation and by all kinds of lies and deceptions, for the wretched masses of mankind who lack both the strength and the desire for freedom. Their tragedy is in the fact that they know what they are doing. They can see the splendour of 'the great idealist's' dream, but they see also that those for whom it was dreamt are 'geese'. Among these 'geese' are the rationalist reformers, 'poor rebels who can never turn into giants'. The tower has to be completed by a different type of person, the man who knows human nature for what it is, who is capable of taking on himself the responsibility from which the mass of people, for all their slogans of 'freedom', in reality shrink, who is, in other words, 'the Leader'.

Not much reflection is needed to see how apposite to the modern world is this allegory. Ivan, indeed, dismisses it as 'a senseless poem of a senseless student'. He realises fully both the appeal and the fundamental deception of the 'leader-principle', and he will have no truck with any kind of deception. He can accept neither the standards of 'the great idealist' nor those of the Inquisitor. He has only his 'perhaps unseemly' love for life and what he calls 'the strength of the Karamazovs', that primitive toughness, with its slogan 'all things are lawful'. But with him the meaning and the desperation of the phrase are infinitely more clearly imagined than they were in the cases of Raskolnikov or Stavrogin.

In the allegory of the Grand Inquisitor we see Ivan's brain working with the self-assurance of its brilliancy and penetration. Later, in his dialogue with the devil, we see the same brain on the verge of madness, split into two by the incompatibilities of the two truths, both of which it has acknowledged and both rejected. Here his crisis is not intellectual so much as moral.

Ivan hates both his father and his brother Dmitri who is on his trial for the murder. He wished the ruin of both of them, and indeed the real murderer, Smerdyakov, had become capable of the deed partly because his weak mind had swallowed eagerly Ivan's doctrine that 'all things are lawful' and partly because he believed that Ivan himself was countenancing the crime. Moreover, in a sense, Ivan was countenancing it. His problem is now whether to have things as they are, since they have gone as he wished, or to perform what seems to him a sentimentally 'noble' action by owning in the court that his brother is innocent and that he himself is, in some sense at least, the murderer. In this problem the extreme sensitiveness of Ivan's moral and of his intellectual nature is tortured to the point of madness. He both believes and disbelieves in the existence of his hallucination, the shabby devil who is 'predestined to deny'. He is attracted towards an act of common justice, and at the same time is convinced of its stupidity. In this moral struggle all his old problems recur with a terrifying force. Passionately he asks, 'Is there a God or not?' and the devil, who is himself, coolly replies, 'My dear fellow, upon my word I don't know.' It would be, in some ways, good to think so. But, 'No, you must go and deny, without denial there would be nothing but one "hosanna". But nothing but hosanna is not enough for life'. The conclusion is that 'There are two sorts of truth for me—one, their truth, yonder, which I know nothing about so far, and the other my own. And there is no knowing which will turn out the better.' According to the sort of truth which is perceived by 'sticking to the fact' the principle that 'all things are lawful' is evident. 'But then, says the devil, 'if you want to swindle, why do you want a

moral sanction for doing it?' And so denial and affirmation extend to the infinity of madness, and Ivan is torn to pieces by his spiritual longing for the one kind of truth and his intellectual appreciation of the other. Alyosha, seeing him in this crisis, observes, 'He will either rise up in the light of truth, or he will perish in hate, revenging on himself and on everyone his having served the cause he does not believe in.' But the young man's analysis is too simple. Ivan both believes and does not believe at the same time. He does indeed come to the court to make his confession, but he does it deliriously, despising both himself and his hearers. There is, to the end, nothing of 'the light of truth' in his bearing. 'Smerdyakov did the murder,' he says, "and I incited him to do it. . . . Who doesn't desire his father's death?' And his last words are, 'Why, why is everything so stupid?'

So ends Ivan's 'perhaps unseemly' love for life, poisoned by his method of 'sticking to the fact', by the very purity of his intellectual analysis which has forced him to reject much in life that seems inconsistent and incomprehensible. In a sense it is true to say that his intellect has destroyed his emotions. A Grand Inquisitor's love for 'humanity' is an abstract, unreal thing compared with Zosima's love for individuals. And Ivan admits himself, 'I could never understand how one can love one's neighbours. It's just one's neighbours, to my mind, that one can't love, though one might love those at a distance.' Zosima's love both springs from and is the justification for a view of the whole of existence. Ivan 'sticks to the fact' and has no general view. His greatness is in the fact that this scepticism is not the result of shallowness, self-indulgence or envy, but of intellectual honesty. He would be glad

to be without it. 'Man was created a rebel,' he says, 'and how can rebels be happy?' Yet to the end he will not submit, and his sin, from the point of view of Zosima, is, no doubt, pride. He is conscious of the weakness and the folly of others, not of his own, and so he is cut off entirely from that 'humanity' which was once to be an ideal to replace God. He has none of Zosima's mystical sense of each being responsible for the sins of all, and when in real fact it becomes evident that he indeed was, in some sense, responsible for Smerdyakov's crime, he shrinks from the notion that there could be any connection between him and that weak-spirited, conceited valet.

It is pride of the true tragic quality, being the result of real power and illustrating something real in ourselves. In 'sticking to the fact' Ivan breaks himself against facts of a different quality from those which he imagined. His 'rebellion' is unimaginably successful. First are demolished the prejudices and traditions of the past; they are destroyed in the name of 'humanity' which seems a more real and tangible thing than the dreams of 'great idealists'; but realism does not stop here; humanity is seen to consist, on the whole, of fools and weaklings; it leads nowhere and can only be guided by the strong, the 'extraordinary' who must be their own law; and for the strong in this sense there seems suddenly to be no aim; there is only the blind self-assertion of violence or crime—a word which has lost its meaning, or the dreadful isolation of the question 'Why is everything so stupid?' Meanwhile the prejudices of right and wrong, even that feeble irresponsible 'humanity', begin to press down upon the strong man, until one fact is forced upon his attention—that he, perhaps less than anyone, is able to stand alone. It is the final defeat of individualism.

## 4

And here one is bound to ask, 'How far is Dostoievsky's view of individualism and of its results true?' The question is a difficult one and indeed requires further definition; for Dostoievsky is an artist as well as a prophet of contemporary life, and so we seem to have to do with two sorts of truth, which are yet connected together—first the general and poetical truth of his analysis of human nature, and secondly the more limited and practical validity of his ideas when applied to the specific facts of liberalism, socialism, contemporary individualism.

As for the first of these 'truths', we must recognise Dostoievsky as being one of the great tragedians, who from the time of Æschylus until today have taken as their theme the grandeurs and catastrophes of revolt and of excess. The tragic hero is always one who tries to stand alone against the forces of nature, of God, or of public opinion, and finds that these forces are too strong for him. Death, madness and disaster are the results of his rebellion, and yet in his rebellion we are bound to sympathise with him, since it expresses the most vital and primitive forces in ourselves. It typifies not only the rise and fall of the Spirit of the Year from Spring to Winter, but our own transitory position of self-confidence between the inscrutabilities of birth and death, and also that contradiction in our social life between invention and tradition, which is the source of progress. The tragic hero is to be admired for his self-assertion, yet feared for the fate which certainly overcomes what is 'extraordinary'. It is in the balance between these two feelings that there arise the 'pity and terror' which 'purge' the mind of the spectator.

In this 'purgation' is the general truth of tragedy and it is a truth that is rather poetical than rational. The fate of Lear or of Ædipus is far beyond the proportions of what we think of as 'justice'. So is the day-to-day process of life and history in the world we see about us. There is no precise justice in the deaths, disabilities, failures and successes that we notice in ourselves or others. Yet if tragedy were merely an illustration of our moral precepts, such as 'pride goes before a fall,' how dull and spiritless a thing it would be! It is of the essence of tragedy that it should go beyond our ordinary moral sense into the sphere of pity and terror, which is more extensive and thus, in a sense, more 'free' than the sphere of precisely calculated rewards and penalties, causes and effects. The great tragedian is himself most acutely conscious of what is, by our normal standards, the unfairness of life or fate or God to the isolated hero. If he is, like Æschylus or Dostoevsky, by nature a philosopher, he will try to explain the contradiction. Yet still the real solution or reconciliation will be reached rather on an artistic than on a rational level.

So in 'The Brothers Karamazov' the views of Ivan and those of Zosima confront each other, rationally as irreconcilable as the rebellion of Prometheus and the authority of Zeus. Yet still, on the poetical level, something more important than this has been achieved, a sense of spaciousness and awe, a 'new acquist of true experience from this great event'. Dostoevsky, then, has written on the poetic scale, allegorically. He must not be judged by the standards of the ordinary 'realist'. As he says himself, 'What most people regard as fantastic and lacking in universality, I hold to be the inmost essence of truth. Arid observations of everyday

trivialities I have long ceased to regard as realism—it is just the reverse.' Still his novels are written about contemporary life and he would claim for his own method not only the poetical truth which we have mentioned but also a practical and contemporary truth, something more historically 'real' than can be reached by mere 'arid observation'. We must enquire, then, how far his picture of contemporary liberalism and lack of faith is correct, how close to the mark have his prophecies come, what facts in the general situation did he leave out of account.

It is easy to see that he realised, even more fully than Tolstoy, the approaching disintegration of European society. He foresaw this disintegration as the result of spiritual and material individualism. 'Everywhere in these days men have . . . ceased to understand that the true security is to be found in social solidarity rather than in isolated individual effort.' So far he seems to agree with the socialists, who poured scorn on the bourgeois individualist and aimed at recreating on a higher level the primitive community. Yet, of course, there is between Dostoievsky and Marx the difference that there is between those who approach the same problem from exactly opposite points of view. Marx, like Dostoievsky, inveighs against the cruelties and hypocrisies of modern individualistic society, but while Dostoievsky regards these as 'sins' and 'crimes', Marx finds in them merely the necessary results of the present conflict between the means and relations of production. As this conflict is resolved, so the 'sins' and 'crimes' will disappear. It is mere hypocrisy to demand virtue of people before you have given them food, and the religious estimate of 'sin' is either feeble-minded 'mysticism' or worse. The material is always 'prior' to the

spiritual. Alter the relations of property and everything else will be altered automatically.

This view Dostoevsky decisively rejects. To him socialism is not merely the labour question, it is before all things the atheistic question, the question of the form taken by atheism today, the question of the tower of Babel built without God, not to mount to heaven from earth, but to set up-heaven on earth' He denies the possibility of setting up heaven on earth without the aid of God, without the recognition that sin is a reality and not something which will disappear with the operation of an improved system of the production and distribution of commodities. His visions of the 'brave new world' of atheism and science take two forms. Either he imagines a feverish outcry for 'freedom' together with an actuality of chaos and destruction; or else, as a further stage of the same process, he sees a mass of slaves, too weak for the freedom they have claimed, ruled over by men who have taken the place of God and who govern by mystery, authority and efficiency.

Two generations have passed since Marx and Dostoevsky wrote. In so far as both these prophets predicted catastrophe as the result of unrestrained individualism, both have been strikingly vindicated. Yet their prophecies, like the replies of Greek oracles, seem to have come true in a different sense from what they appeared to forebode. Dostoevsky imagined a regenerated religious force in Russia which would guide on to a new psychological path the atheistic and materialistic West. Marx saw in the industrialised countries of the West the certain source of the international revolution which would sweep the world and usher in the new age of collaboration. As it is, we see

Marx's doctrine as the official creed of Russia, while what revolutions there have been in the West have been in the direction of Dostoievsky's vision of 'the man-god'. And in the world distracted by war there is no easy division of the hostile nations into capitalist and socialist or Christian and atheistic. Franco has declared for Christianity and Hitler for socialism. In England and America distinguished churchmen have seen in atheist Russia a new hope for the vitality of their religion.

The picture is certainly confusing enough. In his main analysis of economic trends Marx has been most evidently proved correct. Today almost everyone will admit that 'freedom' in production and distribution means poverty, war, inefficiency and injustice. This is admitted, but the next stage in the Marxian programme has not been reached. The workers of the world have not united, nor does there seem any likelihood that, on the strict doctrine of Marx, they ever will, however much it may be demonstrated to them that their economic interests lie in doing so. To Marx the idea of 'national socialism' would have seemed a contradiction in terms. Today it is the rule rather than the exception. Men are capable of uniting in national groups for definite ends, but the wider prospect of universal brotherhood seems, since Marx's day, to have receded. It now appears that internationalism and the brotherhood of man so far from being self-evident ideas are rather the reverse.

It is at this stage that Dostoievsky's view of the world may be to us, perhaps, more enlightening than is that of Marx, for Dostoievsky's psychological insight is directed just towards those fundamental aspects of human nature which Marx consistently

ignores. Indeed, on all problems of morality and psychology Marx is strangely muddled and inconsistent. Here is the great gap in his theory which stares one in the face and yet over which his disciples somehow skip, hop or jump, to the great prejudice of their own cause. Why do men act in ways which are socially 'good' or 'bad'? Why should they wish to subscribe to a general brotherhood of man? What indeed is 'goodness'? To all these questions Marx is either deaf or else returns unsatisfactory answers. Sometimes it is the forces of history which will force men to unite in brotherliness. Sometimes it is men who will force the forces of history in the 'right' direction. Sometimes it is economic self-interest which will drive the majority to come together into the classless society. But then what about the minority? Why did the well-to-do Engels act so strikingly against his own economic interest?

The fact is that on these and kindred questions Marx is all the time assuming that his readers share his own moral sense, though he gives them no justification for doing so. His and their moral senses have been developed and conditioned by the effects of centuries of Jewish history, of Greek philosophy, of Christianity, and his revolt against the conditions of his time is, whether he likes it or not, largely dependent upon the moral insight which has been developed from the past. He attacks the organisation of religion because it is, in his view, inextricably concerned in the maintenance of economic privilege. (Here, incidentally, he is at one with Tolstoy.) But with the actual claims of religion, as apart from the hypocrisies of this or that church, he hardly deals at all. Indeed he attacks the hypocrisies from the ground of the ethics of religion itself, and seems not to observe that this is what he is doing. He

rejects the more obvious forms of wishful thinking with regard to 'another world'; he will have no truck with 'mysticism'. Like Ivan Karamazov, he will 'stick to the fact'. Unlike Ivan, he does not observe how vague and barren for most people is the idea of 'humanity' once the psychological support of religion or 'mysticism' is withdrawn. He urges his followers to ethics of world-brotherhood, indeed the ethics of Christianity, but the sanction for this is in the bleak operation of economic laws rather than in any psychological or spiritual conviction. But man is neither so rational nor so irrational as Marx would have him. On the one hand he looks for something more than the consciousness that he is living in accordance with history. He conceives himself to be more dignified than this and demands enthusiasms which in fact he has found in what Marx regarded as the out-worn superstition of patriotism. On the other hand, once the traditional supports for his conventional morality have been withdrawn he will not continue to act as though they were still there. He may for a time enjoy the delights of anarchy; but in the end will tend to replace the old standards by new ones, either by a disciplined patriotism or by some code depending for its ultimate authority on the 'man-god'. In the mere operation of economic forces there is no reason to assume the certainty of peace or the desire for world-brotherhood. A nation which is socialist can exploit other nations just as much as an individual can exploit other individuals; moreover, it might well be to the economic interest of such a nation to do so. A recognition of the interdependence of all on all is necessary before people will embrace with enthusiasm the ideal of 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs',

and this recognition does not spring automatically into the forefront of people's minds as soon as they find that they are, in some sense or other, owners of the means of production.

Dostoevsky, as we have seen, would certainly maintain that this conviction of brotherhood and feeling for mankind which is assumed as a concomitant of international socialism or, for that matter, of the 'classless society' anywhere, is an impossibility unless it is based on a 'mystical' religious view of the whole universe. He would regard as altogether too naive the assumption of the 'scientific' socialists that all you have to do is to remove inhibitions and organise production 'sensibly', and that then the native goodness of man will blossom like the rose. He would insist that in man evil as well as good is 'native'. Sin is a fact of nature and not merely the result of unscientific organisation of society. The optimism of the socialist is to him either sentimental or pedantic, based on an inadequate or too rigid view of both the heights and depths of nature.

Today it would seem that, if Dostoevsky realised insufficiently the necessity of an economic reorganisation, Marx was most certainly too little occupied with the spirit in which this reorganisation was to be carried out. Dialectical materialism, whatever its merits as a guide to the interpretation of history, is no substitute for either religion or philosophy. The internationalism which Marx assumed as an essential element in socialism is now by the post-Marxian realists of the creed either relegated to a distant future or else rejected altogether. And we, living in a period of history which reminds us of Raskolnikov's dream of agreements made and broken, of passionate convictions leading to appalling crimes, of war, ruin and desperation, may well

find in Dostoievsky's analysis of 'laceration' something from a practical point of view at least as important as the most remarkable pronouncements of scientific 'planning.' It is not the planning that is now in so much doubt as its direction, not the means but the end. It may be that here Dostoievsky, like 'the great idealist', tends to suggest to us 'all that is exceptional, vague and enigmatic', yet also he gives to us a deeper view of human nature, a stronger sense both of the greatness and littleness of man, a more far-reaching sympathy than is easily to be won by the necessary methods of scientific investigation.

## NOTES ON THE LANGUAGE OF ÆSCHYLUS

WHEN one addresses oneself to the subject of how language is used in poetry, one is uneasily conscious that one must either be content merely to catalogue nouns, adjectives, dialects and the rest, or else to venture on to the dangerous ground where, certainly, many who are not angels have not feared to tread, but which is still dangerous and still undefined—the ground where interminably people inquire, What is poetry? What does it aim at? How does it achieve its effect? And when the poetry which one is considering is Greek poetry the difficulties are doubled and redoubled. Indeed, all one's steps must be diffident. Suppose that one is profoundly moved by two lines of English poetry:

His gory visage down the stream was sent,  
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore-

One may well find it impossible to explain even to an English friend the precise nature of the pleasure one receives from muttering over to oneself these lines. It would be far more difficult to explain it to a foreigner. And though one is profoundly moved by the lines oneself, how can one be certain that a person, even a person like oneself, reading them in Milton's life-time would have been moved in at all the same way?

But now our problem is a poetry which was written more than two thousand years ago, in a language which we cannot acquire without much study, for an audience whose life and ways of thought are certainly part of our own tradition, but of whose precise response to the

sound and sense of words we must be even more ignorant than we were in the case of the contemporaries of Milton.

Yet to suggest that our problem is insoluble is not the same as to assert that it should be neglected. It is true that, whatever we do, we shall never fully understand Greek poetry. Nor shall we ever understand English poetry. Indeed, absolute truth is beyond us and it is only subjects that are wholly technical that can be wholly understood. All that our study of poetry can give us is a little more understanding than we had already, but that 'little more' is always valuable and there are occasions when the constant addition of small quantities results in something which is beyond addition, a sudden illumination and a lasting pleasure.

Difficult, then, as is any inquiry of this sort it is still worth making. And we shall find that here, as in almost every other department of life, the Greeks were bothered by just the same problems as those which excite critics to-day. Also we shall find among Greek critics, as among modern critics, the same peculiar vice of nearly all critical writing: the exaggeration of law and order into a stiff and lofty prison-house of the spirit. It is, of course, the business of the critic to assert law and order, either from a consideration of what ought to be or an analysis of what is. In this way he helps us to find our way about in the bewildering variety of word and image from which poetry is made. But as in politics, so in literary criticism. There is always a tendency to exalt the order above the variety and the one above the many.

Yet **the** first thing which must strike us about the use of language in Greek drama is the variety of its uses. **And** at **the** same time one is **not only struck but thun-**

der-struck and astonished at what must have been the subtlety, the alertness, the intellectual and emotional zest of the audience who saw and heard these plays. We know that they had not only a liking for spectacle, in which Æschylus is said to have excelled, not only a delight in pithy statements or in the exact balance of opposite points of view, but were also fascinated by the strangest combinations of images, by music and poetry aimed deliberately at exciting any one of a catalogue of emotions, and were able to appreciate the finer points of metre in such a way that when Aristophanes in a comedy makes fun of some of Euripides's choruses, while the audience of ordinary citizens presumably were interested, the greatest modern scholars find it very difficult to decide what he was driving at. This is another indication of the difficulty of the subject, another reason for modesty and diffidence; yet it is still true that we can understand the point of most of Aristophanes's criticism, so we need not be unduly deterred from our inquiry.

Variety, then, within the fairly strict framework of classical tragedy, I take to be the first quality that should be noticed in any discussion of the use of language in Greek drama; and this variety is found not only in the whole extent of the drama but also in individual dramatists. It is true that Æschylus writes in a style which is more lofty and obscure than that of Euripides; yet Æschylus too will use the familiar example from common life side by side with some far-fetched arrangement of compound nouns and adjectives; he is a master of the direct statement as well as of the prophetic foreboding innuendo.

All the same there is a difference in the methods and aims of Æschylus and Euripides, a difference which

was fully recognised and discussed by the Greeks themselves. To inquire into this difference may help us to understand more of what each poet intended and achieved; but before doing so we should again assert that many aims and many achievements are shared by the two poets. For the purpose of his argument and of his satire Aristophanes groups one set of qualities under the name of Æschylus and another under the name of Euripides. This should not blind us to the fact that neither of the two was a mere logic-chopper or a mere glorifier of the heroic. Both were deep thinkers and each was, in a way, a mystic.

Yet in spite of these similarities, the differences are striking enough. We may (with the certainty of being somewhat inaccurate) call them the differences between the prophetic style and the secular style, between the inspired and the carefully thought-out, between the enigmatic and the precise.

These distinctions, as I have said, are inaccurate. They are not mutually exclusive; they do not give a perfectly fair picture of the differences between Æschylus and Euripides in their use of words. They leave Sophocles altogether out of any picture which they may produce in the mind. And yet they are important distinctions and do correspond, however vaguely, to a real difference of method and outlook which is found not only in Greek dramatic poetry but in the histories of all literatures. Is the great poet the one who uses words in such a way as to hint at or give some shape to what is beyond words? If so, there is sure to be a certain unearthliness, even an obscurity, in his work. Or is he one who surprises us by his exact statements of what we have felt but never perfectly grasped, and who puts before us clearly and distinctly

our own imperfectly apprehended actions and dilemmas? If so, his language also will be clear and distinct. It will go straight either to the heart or to the intellect, without unnecessary elaboration and with none of the airs of the prophet or the master.

Of course it is possible for the two styles to be combined. In a way, they are combined in Euripides and in Shakespeare. In his dialogue (except sometimes in the Messenger speeches) Euripides' language is the language of everyday speech; yet in his choruses we find something of the prophetic style and very much of elaboration, of 'linked sweetness long drawn-out'—a thing which made Aristophanes all the more furious and caused him to regard Euripides not only as possessing all the tricks of the worst sort of lawyer but also of the most distinguished prostitute.

However, there is something in the distinction between the prophetic and the secular which affects very strongly the use made of language by individual poets, and it may be that this distinction goes back to the very beginnings of literature, just as it is present still even in ages of sophistication.

The deliberate and careful choice of words and the order of words seems to have been originally connected with magic or religion. Something of the magical and the religious still clung to the epic poet who had the skill to raise great actions to an even more heroic height by his use of language and metre. And in the days of the epic poets prose, as we know it, was unkilown. It was more natural to write a treatise on physics in hexameters than in anything which approximated to the spoken language.

But as society became more complicated and, in particular, as such activities as politics, history and law

began to be considered important, there arose the demand for a method of using language deliberately for a wholly different end from that of poetry. Persuasive speech was required in politics and law; accuracy was required in science and in history. Early Greek prose started by imitating the tricks of poetry, but gradually found its own feet and evolved into one of the most flexible and accurate mediums for thought which has ever existed. The triumph of prose now affected poetry. Accuracy and clarity became the qualities most valued, and it was sometimes forgotten that both the origins and aims of poetry were different from those of the later invention.

Aristotle appears to approve of the tendency which he notices in tragedy, the tendency from the obscure and decorated towards the clear and the simple. Yet of course he realises the distinction between poetry and prose. In his 'Poetics' he writes: 'The perfection of Diction (meaning "Poetic diction") is for it to be clear and not mean.' It is 'mean' when it is made up entirely of ordinary words, though that is the best way of being clear. It is merely 'riddles' and 'barbarism' when it is made up of metaphors and strange words.

In all of this Aristotle is, as one might expect, perfectly sound and accurate. He gives examples and shows how, by replacing a poetical word by a prose word in various lines of poetry, the whole effect of the poetry is destroyed. It would be easy enough to do the same thing in English. 'Clear without being mean' is an excellent slogan, and yet somehow it seems to miss the point. Neither Aristotle nor Plato seem really to have decided what poetry was aiming at.

Plato, the writer of the most beautiful prose that the world has seen, with an ear marvellously sensitive to

language, dismisses the poets from his 'Republic' because they are not philosophers. His master, Socrates, had questioned them as to what exactly they were up to and they, like everyone else, had failed to give an account of themselves. They were 'like enthusiasts', thought Socrates, and scarcely better than politicians. To be 'like an enthusiast' seems to both Plato and Aristotle rather discreditable, and Aristotle does his best for the poets by pointing out that there is at least method in their madness. Possibly, so far as diction is concerned, he is not immensely helpful. For example: 'Whatever its structure, a Noun must always be either (1) the ordinary word for the thing, or (2) a strange word, or (3) a metaphor, or (4) an ornamental word, or (5) a coined word, or (6) a word lengthened out, or (7) curtailed, or (8) altered in form.'

No doubt this is very true, but why on any particular occasion does a poet make use of one of the eight forms of the Noun? And, of course, even if we were to decide this point, we should still have got no distance. What is the effect on each word of the words at greater or less intervals before and after it? Of the repetition of like sounds? Of a thousand and one other things? Aristotle's analysis of the plot of a tragedy has had deservedly the greatest influence on writers since his time; he is less helpful with regard to the use of language, being content rather to acknowledge tendencies than either to explain or justify them. Briefly, what he recommends is a reasonable compromise. You must have, he says, strange words, metaphors and ornamental words to be a safeguard against meanness in style; and you must have ordinary words to ensure clearness. But when, later, he writes of metaphors he is really illuminating. He says: 'It is a great thing, indeed,

to make a proper use of these poetical forms, as also of compounds and strange words. But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.'

This quality, the 'intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars', is certainly the absolute essential which must be to some degree present not only in the mind of the poet but in the mind of anyone who has anything worth saying on any subject. It is, perhaps, pre-eminently a necessity for the poet; but, alas, Aristotle, having listed it and given it, as it were, three stars to mark its importance, goes on to another subject. Did Plato, one wonders, ever regard metaphor as Aristotle did? If he had done so, he might have modified his views about 'enthusiasts' and allowed to poetry some of the distinction which he attributes to philosophy alone. Was he not even conscious of his own practice of deviating into the poetical when ordinary words failed him? Did he not regard the myths with which he concludes the 'Phaedo' and the 'Republic' as an attempt to further truth by the use of metaphor, by 'the intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars'?

Now Æschylus is full of compounds, strange words and metaphors, while Euripides on the whole avoids them. Perfect clarity is the basis of his style, as grandeur is the basis of the style of Æschylus. The reason for the difference is not that the one poet is a clear thinker while the other is befogged, nor, as Aristophanes suggests, that one poet has a noble and the other a grovelling mind. Both are great poets. Their styles differ because their aims are different. They are, indeed,

as Aristophanes saw, representatives of the two main uses to which literary language may be put. Æschylus still uses language magically and prophetically. He attempts to make it rise much higher and extend far further than what is necessary for everyday life. The dissimilars in which he detects similarity are very dissimilar indeed. In the sense that philosophy is discovery rather than explanation he is more a philosophical poet than Euripides.

Euripides had been fascinated by the success of the new discovery, prose—though, of course, he is far from being deaf to the musical appeal of poetry. He aims at clarity, not only in language but in the representation of character. He is more interested in explaining man than in justifying God's ways, and so sociology and psychology and mere humanitarianism stir him more deeply than religion.

The difference between the two methods is evident from the very beginnings of the plays. Indeed, Aristophanes is extremely enlightening when in *The Frogs* he makes the two poets attack each other's prologues. Euripides' prologues are not only written in language which is as clear as daylight but serve the useful function of reminding the audience of the relevant pre-history of the characters who are shortly going to appear on the stage. The dramatic situation is given to them at the start, much as the data for a problem in geometry might be presented. Then the situation or problem is worked out. Euripides in *The Frogs* shows a natural pride in his achievement, yet whenever he quotes a line or two of his prologues Æschylus rudely interrupts with a tag, 'Lost his bottle of oil.'

This is not a criticism of Euripides' metre; it is

much more a criticism of the lack of variety in his syntax, an indication that an object and a main verb can be inserted very quickly in any of his opening sentences. The same thing could not be done with the opening sentences of Æschylus' plays. And it is not only that Æschylus does not open a play with simple, straightforward sentences. He deliberately places the reader in a fantastic or a mysterious world where great events of a symbolical character are to be expected. Euripides, on the other hand, seems rather to be reassuring his audience that these mythical characters who are to appear on the stage are not really unlike oneself.

And so the plays proceed—Euripides writing lucidly and pointedly, Æschylus still involving himself in difficult phrases, each of which can have half-a-dozen meanings, and using every noun as though it was a symbol of something else. In Aristophanes' 'Frogs' even the well-wishers of Æschylus speak of him as laying about himself 'with words torn up root and branch', and much play is made of his compound nouns: 'horse-cocks', 'goat-stags', and the rest. His method, says the character called Euripides, is first of all to produce some scenic effect so as to attract the attention of the audience and then, after a bit, 'he would speak a dozen words as big as bulls, with crests and shaggy eyebrows'; but finally 'he would not say a single word that was really clear'.

In 'The Frogs' Aristophanes allows Æschylus himself to give at least the beginning of an answer to these charges of obscurity and 'barbarism'. He says: 'When you are dealing with ideas and thought which are both on a great scale, your words have got to be on a great scale too.' The speech of heroes should be loftier than

the speech of ordinary people. It is Euripides' degrading realism which has spoilt everything.

This is a thoroughly adequate defence and again reminds us of the two uses to which language can be put in literature. Æschylus is not trying to explain or to record or even to persuade. He is trying to discover. His thought, therefore, is moving in a region which is just beyond the region of persuasive prose. His task is, in a pre-eminent degree, to detect the similarities in dissimilars and, in a sense, his whole work is a glorified 'horse-cock' or 'goat-stag'. This is not to say that he is incapable of using simple language. Of course he uses it often. But even in his simple statements there is more than meets the eye. What could be simpler than this?

There is the sea and who shall drain it dry? It breeds  
Its wealth in silver of plenty of purple gushing  
And ever renewed, the dyeings of our garments.\*

Yet, as we hear these words we know that the poet is not speaking of the sea, and we wonder whether he is hinting at the unappeasable sins of the House of Atreus, at the blood shortly to be shed beneath the cover of the embroidered bath-robe, at the unflinching surveillance of divine justice, at any of this or all of it, or at more. And so with the more obvious metaphors and similes. They do not explain, but they introduce us into another world of thought and feeling. Whether they are successful or not depends on whether this other world is self-consistent and, in the last analysis, true.

Æschylus, as we have said, is one of the prophetic writers, and if we want to find others who use language

\* Tr. Louis MacNiece.

as he does we shall have to go to the Hebrew prophets, to Milton, to Blake and to the writers of allegory. Yet the points of difference between him and these others are even more remarkable than the similarities. Æschylus, unlike Blake, has a firm and steady place in society. He is even regarded as the poet of the men of Marathon. No one could question his intellectual sanity. He is a religious writer and genuinely endeavours to 'justify the ways of God to men', yet here he was really essaying 'things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme'. In his day moral philosophy was non-existent, history was hearsay, religion in the Olympian sense was wildly inconsistent. Imagine a Hebrew poet writing:

Zeus, whoever he is . . .

and notice the necessary uncertainty of these lines:

But above these is One,  
Maybe Pan, maybe Zeus or Apollo.\*

Milton alone has made a similar use of the mythological characters of religion, and though there is more of black and white in Milton's world than in the world of Æschylus, Milton too created almost a new language in order to express the visions of his imagination. Again it was a style which no one could imitate without degrading it. Yet how narrow, in spite of its terrific force and splendour, is the thought of the strong, delicate, and outraged Puritan when compared with the far-ranging inquiry of Æschylus!

Behind Milton's language are the resources of Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Italian poetry. Before Æschylus there is Homer and no one else of a stature

\* Tr. Louis MacNiece.

comparable with his own. Milton's thought is firmly based on his own intense belief, which has been nourished and confirmed by innumerable commentaries and by a religious war. How is it that, in a sense, Milton appears to us as a less religious poet than Æschylus? Is it because of his puritanism or is it the effect of the Latin language? His appeal to the Muse and to the Spirit

that dost prefer  
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure

is humble enough, but his aim is not to discover, or to worship, or to contemplate, but that:

I may *assert* Eternal Providence  
And justify the ways of God to men.

One feels that Æschylus if he had known the word 'assert' would not have used it in this context. Yet Milton, like Æschylus, is perfectly aware of 'the highth of this great argument'. His language, though clear, is raised above the common level and is profusely decorated. In his use of some of these decorations he is very like Æschylus. Both poets delight in lists of proper names and in images of fire and thunder. Clytemnestra's speech about the beacons in the 'Agamemnon' must have profoundly moved the poet who wrote:

From Aroer to Nebo, and the wild  
Of Southmost Abarim; in Hesebon  
And Horonaim, Seons realm, beyond  
The flowry Dale of Sibma clad with Vines,  
And Eleale to th' Asphaltick Pool.

But more important than any examples or comparisons of incidental decoration is their total effect. Image,

simile, strange nouns, and all combine to make a picture of a world which, though like our world, is on a bigger and more heroic scale. This seems to have been always the aim of epic and of poetic drama. In so far as Euripides digresses from this aim into mere realism he makes, perhaps, a more immediate effect, but misses that magic which, paradoxically, is the means used by poetry to achieve its own clarity. Both Aristotle and Aristophanes indicate that the danger of the prophetic style is barbarism or pomposity and the danger of the realistic style is 'meanness'. Aristophanes seems to imply that in Sophocles the happy medium or blend has been achieved. But there is more to it than this. When the aims of poets are different their methods will be different. The aim of Æschylus is scarcely lower than that of Milton and his mind is much less compressed into what may appear either as the fetters or the supports of a system of theology. Ideas and thought are on a great scale: language too must be on a great scale. But his ideas and thought are less simple than Milton's, and so his language too is less simple. It is difficult to deny that sometimes his 'great wild-bull words' miss their effect. Yet there are very many occasions when his very obscurity seems to aid our understanding. The really great style shows us the magnitude of what is really great: it becomes 'dithyrambic', in the sense in which Plato disapproved of it, when it attempts to give an artificial dignity to the small. Or, if one may try to express the same thing with greater accuracy and more obscurity, it is the great style and the great mind which detect similarities in dissimilars which really are both similar and dissimilar; whereas the mere delighter in language, the mere stitcher of song, will detect similarities in things which are really

either only dissimilar or only similar. And such a statement will involve the question of what is real, which is as much the concern of poetry as of philosophy, and which, finally and perfectly, is beyond both.



## THE ALLEGORICAL METHOD

**M**OST people's minds seem to turn away with a kind of distaste from the notion of allegory. And yet a great part of their speech and action, most of their jokes, much of their entertainment, their pleasures, their complicated thought, their philosophy are allegorical. Strictly speaking, according to the dictionary, allegory is 'other-speaking', the describing of one thing under the guise of describing another. A little consideration would show how full our ordinary conversation and ways of thought are of allegory. When we say that we are 'fed up' or 'browned off', when we describe a 'lightning attack' or a 'stonewaller' in cricket, when we think of the 'shape' of a piece of music or use the words 'God the Father' we are speaking or thinking allegorically. Nor in this ordinary speech and thought of ours would we listen for a moment to the puritanical realist who insists on the spadeishness of every spade. All the world is not a spade, we would say to him. The expression 'stonewaller' does mean something, even if it is applied to a live man. The word that means the thing seldom describes the whole thing, and never could describe the thing in its infinite aspects and relationships. Hence our language and thought have developed allegorically so that 'other-speaking' has become an atmosphere to us.

All this is true; yet in literature allegory and the allegorical method are still viewed with mistrust by the realist critics, though these, I hope and believe, are be-

ginning to die out. They will maintain, 'If an author has anything to say, why can't he say it right out?' and not observe that this criticism of theirs is very similar to, if not the same as, the philistine criticism of poetry — 'If he's got anything to say, why can't he say it in prose?'

The roots of this type of criticism are various. On the one hand is a reasonable and proper mistrust of the 'high-falutin', of pretty abstractions which are unrelated to reality; but on the other side is the sheer Philistinism of the pseudo-scientist, the crazy belief in a mechanical universe consisting of discrete parts, all of which can be catalogued, their functions analysed, put together again and understood. This at one time was widely assumed to be 'the scientific attitude', and accurate description of some of the easiest and most obvious aspects of life was held to be the main part which a writer had to play in the gradual evolution of the new world of hygiene and enlightenment. Both the vastness and the mystery of life dropped out of sight, and the less one saw of them the more one was 'a realist'.

This vulgarity of realism is fast dying out. The mechanical universe is disappearing in radiation, twisting itself into monstrous shapes in barely imaginable dimensions, compared no longer to the homely and work-a-day clock but to most unexpected things, a kind of transcendental sausage or banana. Nowadays the high-priests of science have ceased altogether to give any easy answers in philosophy to their embarrassed faithful. Instead, they offer them hypotheses which appear to contradict each other and are at least as hard to grasp as ever was the doctrine of the Trinity.

All this and all the other factors in the general insecurity of mind and body in which we live have served

to discredit the *naivete* of the old-fashioned realist, who seems to us now to have assumed a rather easier method of dealing with his world than was justified by the facts. It is becoming clear that if pure fantasy unrelated to reality is dangerous, lunatic and irresponsible, pure observation undirected by imagination or moral impulse is almost meaningless.

So along these lines one could defend the use of allegory in literature against those who have chosen 'realism' and 'objectivity' as the articles of their faith. Another and more 'objective' defence would be to refer them to the literature of the past, which is saturated with allegory for the good reason that allegory is one of our most natural and forcible methods of expressing truth. It is the art of expressing a relation between things which is not ordinarily perceived; it is the art of throwing a strong light on aspects of the world which are ordinarily disregarded, or of placing what is familiar in an atmosphere which will reveal something unexpected and unknown in the most unlikely places; to it men have recourse when their thoughts seem to have outrun the ordinary and accepted modes of expression.

When Dickens starts 'Bleak House' with his magnificent description of the pervasion of fog, he is writing allegorically. Part of what he means to suggest is no doubt a mere simile between the processes of law in which his characters are inextricably involved and the blind and stifling descent of fog on a great city. But there is much more to it than that. Fog is the keynote to the whole book. It is constantly reappearing, as though all the time it had never lifted. Thus the impression which he makes on the reader is a deeper one than it would have been if fog had been simply equated or compared with the law. Rather it is felt as some cos-

mic force, vaster than can be readily expressed in words, which includes the mechanical cruelty of the law, the deliberate cruelty of man to man, the isolation voluntary or involuntary of individual from individual.

It may be objected that Dickens is not a 'proper' allegorist, but I should maintain that it is impossible to restrict the word 'allegory' to those authors who, like Bunyan and Swift, are most obviously describing one thing in terms of another. The method is used more or less by all great writers, and it is better to recognise the method than to stamp Bunyan as 'an allegorist', Dickens as 'a novelist' and then be not quite sure where to place a book like 'Moby Dick'.

Possibly a convenient distinction may be made between allegory and symbolism, but even this is difficult, since the two so often merge into each other. Indeed, in our common use of the words we seem to mean by a 'symbol' merely a shortened or isolated allegory, and by an 'allegory' merely a sustained use of symbols which are connected together either in narrative or in description. In 'Bleak House', for example, the all-pervasive fog may be regarded as a symbol, but if we look further into the book we shall find a whole set of characters and scenes which seem, by their fantasticality and exaggeration, to mean more than what meets the eye, just as the fog has meant more, so that the total impression may be called 'allegorical'. To quote Edmund Wilson, who in 'The Wound and the Bow' has written excellently on this very point: '. . . the people who like to talk about the symbols of Kafka and Mann and Joyce have been discouraged from looking for anything of the kind in Dickens, and usually have not read him, at least with mature minds. But even when we think we do know Dickens, we may be surprised to

return to him and find in him a symbolism of a more complicated reference and a deeper implication than these metaphors [he is speaking of the fog] that hang as emblems over the door. The Russians themselves, in this respect, appear to have learned from Dickens.'

There are, indeed, endless varieties of this use of 'other-speaking' or allegory, a range from the obvious allegory of Bunyan, who, since he is using religious symbolism, is able to name or libel his creations, to the much vaguer and indeed obscure allegory of Herman Melville or Dostoievsky or Kafka. In between we find a variety of mixed types, Rabelais and Cervantes and Swift towards one end of the scale, Spenser somewhere about the middle, Dickens towards the other end. And the mention of these names alone will serve to show the infinite variety of the method.

It is interesting to remember that we find both types, the overt and the more or less occult, in Plato. His allegory of the human soul as a charioteer driving two horses, one of which is spirited and proud while the other is sluggish, lazy and unwilling, is an example of the overt type. It expressed something which, for him, was a central truth of human nature. Indeed, in *The Republic* he externalises, as it were, his allegory and makes his tripartite division of the soul the foundation of his organisation of society. In all this he is using allegory in order to make plain a truth which he believes he has discovered. Elsewhere he uses the same method differently to throw some faint light on matters which he admits are beyond the reach of ordinary language and common modes of thought. In the *Thaëdo* after he has put forward every logical argument for the immortality of the soul he is still unsatisfied, since the subject seems to extend beyond the grasp of logical

argument. Here, and in other parts of his dialogues, he has recourse to his own peculiar invention, the 'myth', in which he gives a fantastic picture of the general direction in which his thought is moving. In the 'Phaedo', for instance, he suggests: 'We . . . are deceived into the notion that we are dwelling above on the surface of the earth; which is just as if a creature who was at the bottom of the sea were to fancy that he were on the surface of the water, and that the sea was the heaven through which he saw the sun and the other stars, he having never come to the surface by reason of his feebleness and sluggishness, and having never lifted up his head and seen, nor ever heard from one who had seen, how much purer and more beautiful the world above is than his own.' And so he proceeds to describe 'the true earth' and the world of the dead; and these myths of his have carried such strange conviction that, handed down as they have been through Virgil and the early Christian scholars, they have coloured the views of generations concerning life after death, although Plato himself is careful to emphasise his 'other-speaking'. He says: 'A man of sense ought not to insist that everything is as I have described it; but that this or something like it is the truth about our souls and their habitations . . . that, I think, is a venture fitting and worth while.'

We notice in Plato two of the most common uses of allegory: first, as in his description of the charioteer, to give vigour and vividness to a definite belief; second, to attempt fantastically to throw some light on what is beyond the ordinary reach of words. And in his passage about men as fish living below the surface of the ocean, unable to see the world above their heads, he is employing a method most fruitfully used later by

Swift, the method of imagining normal relationships in a wholly abnormal environment.

The most famous of English allegorists, Bunyan, evidently believes that he is using allegory in both the ways I have mentioned. This is how he describes his own purpose:

Wouldst thou read riddles and their explanation?  
Or else be drowned in thy contemplation?  
Dost thou love picking meat? Or wouldst thou see  
A man i' the clouds, and hear him speak to thee?  
Wouldst thou be in a dream, and yet not sleep?  
Or wouldst thou in a moment laugh and weep?  
Wouldst thou lose thyself and catch no harm,  
And find thyself again without a charm?  
Wouldst read thyself, and read thou knowest not what,  
And yet know whether thou art blest or not  
By reading the same lines?—Oh, then come hither,  
And lay my book, thy head, and heart together.

A magnificent description of allegory and fully justified by Bunyan's own work, though he seems to us now to have done more in the first use of allegory, the throwing of bright light on a definite belief, than in the second, the groping towards a meaning that cannot be perfectly expressed. As he says of his book:

It seems a novelty and yet contains  
Nothing but sound and honest gospel strains.

This is true. Without the moral fervour of Bunyan's belief the book would be nothing: we should be bored by the very obviousness of it all, the carefully labelled characters—Mr. Nogood, Mr. Malice, Mr. Love-Lust, Pope, Pagan and the rest. We should question the accuracy of the division of his characters—why, for instance, Christian should not represent in himself also the virtues of Faithful and of Hopeful. As it is, we are swept along by Bunyan's own fierce and unflagging be-

**lief**, which so infects his style that the strangest things appear credible:

'But now, in this Valley of Humiliation, poor Christian was hard put to it; for he had gone but a little way before he espied a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him; his name is Apollyon.'

Such superb writing as this is needed to produce the full effect of allegory, and it is no accident that the greatest allegorists, such as Swift and Bunyan, have been at the same time the greatest masters of prose style. But without the fervour and vigour of the imagination the finest style will prove unreliable. There is more indeed than this. It seems that unless the allegory is in some sense true it will be flat. Unless the author's imagination has extended to something that is or can be really and rightly felt by other men, then, with all his skill, his work will be in vain. It is not owing to a lack of skill on Swift's part that his attack on mathematicians in *The Voyage to Laputa* seems foolish compared with the rest of *'Gulliver's Travels'*. It is because his thought is at variance with what we know to be true, so that instead of illuminating he obscures. There is the same failure, though in a lesser degree, in parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress*'. The long theological disquisitions may or may not be philosophically accurate, but they are of a different order of reality from the world imagined as the main theme, the world where 'he broke out with a lamentable cry, saying, "What shall I do?" ' Into this world everyone can enter, whereas when Bunyan's imagination flags, when he ceases to hold before his eyes the whole structure of the real world of feeling which he has envisaged, then his very invention betrays him into dullness and ludicrousness. He is much less happy with Christiana

and the children than he is with Christian, and in dealing with them will permit himself such passages as that describing the making of a purge by Mr. Skill: 'It was made ex carne et sanguine Christi (John vi. 54-57) . . . and it was made into pills, with a promise or two, and a proportionable quantity of salt (Mar. ix. 49). Now he was to take them three at a time, fasting, in half a quarter of a pint of the tears of repentance.' The use of allegory demands if it is to be successful a more sustained vigour of imagination than is required by other forms of writing; and when the allegorist slips up he cannot avoid the penalty of falling with a particularly heavy crash.

Few can have watched their step more carefully than Swift. About him there is an almost terrifying precision. He has little of the humanity of Bunyan, none of the gentleness of Cervantes. His unique quality is that *sceva indignatio*, the savage indignation that is like a white-hot fire in which his immensely powerful style is forged. He adopts a method of allegory which we first noticed in Plato, the putting of what is familiar in a wholly unfamiliar environment. First he makes use simply of an alteration of scale. In Lilliput we see the ordinary man surrounded by pygmies. We observe with horror the absolute power which these creatures, in the mass, can exercise over a man who seems to us like ourselves. But we find that they too are like ourselves. It is only when we are given a wholly new viewpoint that the affectation, vanity and cruelty of ordinary life are so clearly able to be perceived. The same effect is secured in the Voyage to Brobdingnag, though here the method in the alteration of scale is reversed, so that we are shown one man in a society of giants. This change in the method allows Swift to express him-

self sometimes even more forcibly than he does in Lilliput. For example, in speaking of the King of Brobdingnag 'the Prejudices of his Education prevailed so far, that he could not forbear taking me up in his right Hand, and stroking me gently with the other; after an hearty Fit of laughing, asked me whether I were a Whig or a Tory'.

This device of altering the scale of things admirably suits Swift's satire, which is derived from his admiration for the great and simple together with his burning hatred for the petty, the mean, the over-complicated and the pretentious. His allegory is far simpler than is Bunyan's. It seems hardly to derive at all from Christianity, and indeed might as easily have been written by a Roman of the time of Tacitus as by an eighteenth-century Englishman. It has far less complexity, far less warmth than *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Yet its whole strength is in its simplicity. Swift's genius demanded a dualism more rigid than Bunyan's comparatively complicated world of good and evil. His style is incapable of showing mercy and can hardly even show sympathy. When, as in the *'Voyage to Laputa'*, he employs a method which does not afford the rigid contrasts between good and evil, vice and virtue, black and white, greatness and littleness, he is strikingly unsuccessful. He finds again a method of allegory which suits him in the *'Voyage to the Houyhnhnms'*, where mankind is represented by peculiarly loathsome apes, the ideal virtues by horses, and the author himself is allowed to assume the superiority of a Yahoo raised a little above his fellows.

Swift's allegory, then, is even simpler and more straightforward than that of Bunyan. It is true that in Bunyan the characters are all labelled for the reader's

convenience and that the whole theme consists of 'sound and honest gospel strains'; yet Bunyan is so much concerned with his main question, 'What shall I do?' that his mind becomes involved in speculations of a more metaphysical kind than any which troubled Swift, his human sympathy demands more scope for expression, and his imagination becomes more diffused. Swift is the kind of satirist who sees only black and white, and both of these with great distinctness. He has none of the enthusiasm which thinks in terms of salvation and destruction. If he despaired of mankind it was because mankind seemed blind to what was to himself perfectly obvious, namely, the advantages of living in accordance with a Stoic's idea of rectitude, sharing the fruits of the earth, obeying an enlightened government, without wars, law-suits or unnecessary disputes about religion. There is a passage in 'Gulliver's Travels' which describes how Gulliver met some magicians who could call up apparitions of the dead. 'I desired that the Senate of Rome might appear before me in one large Chamber, and a modern Representative, in Counterview, in another. The first seemed to me an Assembly of Heroes and Demy-Gods; the other a Knot of Pedlars, Pickpockets, Highwaymen, and Bullies.'

In spite of Swift's 'savage indignation' against the vices which he saw around him, this passage shows a more naive view of human nature than could be found in Bunyan. Yet the fact that Swift seems to have been ignorant that the Senate of Rome was, at most periods, as full of Bullies and Pedlars as the British Houses of Parliament, though it may detract from his value as a political theorist, does not invalidate him as a satirist. The very simplicity of his outlook makes possible the

tremendous concentration of his style, and satire is salutary even if, undiluted, it is unfair.

Few since his day have combined his acute sensitiveness with a similar assurance of the rectitude of their own views, and there have been no more examples in English literature of his most direct and simple use of the allegorical method. The method of Bunyan has been used often enough in sermons and in cartoons, but not much in serious writing. Yet the method still persists, though now it appears less obviously. It is still part of the writer's task to throw an unusually strong light on some aspect of experience which seems to him of particular importance, and today more than ever it seems desirable to imagine and somehow embody those forces in consciousness which are not immediately evident to ordinary observation, to find new relations among them or illustrate old ones. Dostoevsky, Dickens, Herman Melville, Kafka—to mention only a few—have used the allegorical method for these ends.

In these modern allegorists we find a use of the method which is, in one respect, exactly opposite to the use made of it by Bunyan and Swift. With a theme such as the journey to the Celestial City or adventures in a world ruled over by horses, the events related are, on the face of them, so fantastic that great care is necessary in order to win the reader's confidence in the illusion which is being put before him. Style, as has been mentioned already, plays its part here. A more than ordinary precision of detail and assurance in the reality of what is invented is required, so that fantastic figures like Apollyon or a virtuous horse can be made to appear as 'forms more real than living man'. Thus in Bunyan there is not only vigorous and profound feeling but a pervading atmosphere of common sense.

And Swift was so successful in his meticulous preservation of the matter-of-fact manner that a certain bishop is said to have observed that he personally believed that 'Gulliver's Travels' was a pack of lies.

But in Dickens and Dostoevsky the method is reversed. What we expect to be commonplace is made to appear extraordinary. On the face of it they are not dealing with monsters but with normal men and women. Yet these men and women represent often spiritual and social forces which are more powerful and significant than a simple individual in his ordinary relationships. And so they are exaggerated often almost out of recognition and set in an environment where fantastic lights and darkneses throw certain objects into unnatural relief or totally submerge others. The monkey-like family of the Smallweeds in 'Bleak House' is one example out of many. The father of this pleasant grandfather, of the neighbourhood of Mount Pleasant, was a horny-skinned, two-legged, money-getting species of spider, who spun webs to catch unwary flies, and retired into holes until they were entrapped. The name of this old pagan's God was Compound Interest. He lived for it, married it, died of it. Meeting with a heavy loss in an honest little enterprise *in* which all the loss was intended to have been on the other side, he broke something—something necessary to his existence: therefore it couldn't have been his heart—and made an end of his career.' The early illustrators of Dickens were well aware of this aspect of his work and showed his characters as incredibly big or small, fat or lean, crooked or straight. And it is not only the characters but the whole scenery, the very furniture of the rooms, which invested with a fantastic reality. **More** important still, in the general relationships of the

characters and the scenery, in the episodes and in the plots there is, as Edmund Wilson observes, 'a symbolism of a more complicated reference and a deeper implication than these metaphors which hang as emblems over the door'.

Where the allegory of Bunyan or Swift has in its expression an almost ostentatious matter-of-factness and sanity, we observe in Dickens and Dostoievsky a passion for dreams, visions, monstrosities and madness. The early allegorists seem to be saying, 'Look carefully at these strange creatures we show you. You and your world are like this.' The modern allegorists reverse the procedure. 'Here is your world,' they say; 'look at it in a slightly different way and you will see how full it is of monstrous and unrecognised forces.' In both cases, however, it seems that the allegory must be not only vigorously imagined but also, as has been said already, in some sense true. Some of Dickens' evocations of horror or of beneficence offend us because, though forcibly expressed, they seem to us examples rather of emotional indulgence than of consistent thought. The same is true, though to a much less extent, of Dostoievsky, the greatest of all the moderns who have employed this method. Just as the faults in Bunyan and Swift seem to proceed from an over-elaboration of detail, so the faults in Dickens and Dostoievsky comes from an exaggeration of what is vague, mysterious and haunted beyond the point where this is significant.

Here it is difficult to use words exactly, for not only do we have to make a distinction between the prose truth of observation and the poetic truth of suggestion and significance, but we have to recognise that these two kinds of truth interpenetrate. There are occasions

when poetry is 'truer' than prose; there are occasions when prose is 'truer' than poetry; and sometimes the truth of both seems to be evident at once. The truth of prose is in clear statement and direct judgment; the truth of poetry calls for an extension of the mind into regions which are beyond what is immediately stated and where our judgment is neither entirely rational nor conventional. The allegorist, writing in prose, is concerned with both truths, but particularly with what we have called the truth of poetry. For, beyond statements and judgments, he aims at the extension of the understanding.

It is perhaps useless to write of the relative 'greatness' of various types of art; but just as dramatic and epic poetry, in its most perfect examples, have been ranked above all other kinds—and this perhaps because in epic and poetic drama the symbols used by the poet are real men and women—so it may be suggested that in prose those works which, like 'The Brothers Karamazov', combine the realism of observation with the super-realism of allegorical imagination are the greatest of their kind. In this sense, as Shakespeare and Homer are 'greater' than Keats or Sappho, so Dostoievsky and Dickens are 'greater' than the purer allegorists, like Kafka, because they include more in their survey and, in doing so, blend the poetic truth of their allegory with the prosaic truths of conventional observation.

The allegorical method, then, appears in different forms and, as it were, in different strengths. Part of our normal means of expression, its use is extended for particular purposes. Perhaps it has been used with most remarkable effect by those writers who, like Plato, Bunyan and Dostoievsky, have been most

acutely conscious both of the grandeur and of the insecurity of their environment. It is far more than an 'intellectual exercise or amusement, and at these times, 'when even the 'realist' is disposed to doubt the reality and significance of the world in which he lives, it may prove exceptionally useful. Its aims must be what they have been in the past, what we found in Plato, to throw a bright light on some definitely held but generally unrecognised belief or to extend the use of language so as to uncover or partially reveal aspects of reality which elude, from their very complexity, the ordinary methods of the reporter or the social worker.

## ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

I OFTEN imagine a conversation which perhaps once took place—and perhaps never did—between the Roman poets Virgil and Horace. It would be towards the end of Virgil's life, when he had already great works to his credit and when the greatest of them was nearing completion. Horace too would be both famous, comfortable and, as a rule, content. Life had dealt kindly with the two poets and they might well imagine the truth, that posterity would deal most kindly with them also.

How would they feel and speak if they were to look back together on the early days—when each of them was financially embarrassed, when Virgil's farm was taken from him by soldiers returned from civil wars, when Horace in the name of liberty fought against the present regime: the days before they became acquainted with the Emperor and with his great Home Secretary, Maecenas, a man whose original mind perceived that the support of literary men would be valuable to the new order, who saw to it that Horace had his farm near Rome, Virgil his villa in Campania? Since then these great poets had lived in leisure and affluence. Their work had been officially encouraged. From time to time, no doubt, suggestions had been made to them by the Emperor, or by those who were in close touch with the court, as to the desirability of a particular ode for a particular occasion, a dedication or a general line of argument or feeling. Yet these suggestions cannot have been very burdensome. Virgil

loved the country and was ready enough to compose the Georgics. True, he had had to cancel a dedicatory passage to his friend Gallus, who had died ignominiously, having in some way or other challenged the authority of the State; but he had replaced this passage by lines on a mythological subject which were, perhaps, in their sensitive, remote way, more beautiful than any which he had ever written. Horace might conceivably find boring the exploits of the Emperor's relations in combat with the Vindelici, yet odes on such subjects gave him scope for his uncanny skill in making Greek metres more sonorous and majestic in a foreign tongue than they were in their original. Were these poets, one often wonders, perfectly content? How would they speak if they were to discuss their youth in the last days of the dying Republic?

I imagine that first and foremost *in* their minds would be a feeling of thankfulness that they and their friends were at least physically safe. There were no longer rival gangs fighting in the streets and in the forum; there were no longer proscriptions and confiscations at home, violence, corruption and the disgrace of the Roman name abroad. The generations of civil war had come to an end. The State, while preserving many of the old names, had been in fact reshaped. There was less talk of liberty but far more security, and under the shelter of a government which at last had become efficient men were able to imagine a direction in which the history of their country could consciously be made to move. Might it not be towards another Golden Age?

So, perhaps, these great poets may have felt and spoken. Did they, one wonders, ever surmise that, in spite of the vastly increased efficiency of the state and

the new security which it offered, something valuable had gone out of Roman life for ever? That the adulation of the Emperor, which was soon to become worship, while being a natural recognition of a new and hopeful order, was also a mark of spiritual subordination to something not actually divine? Did they miss in their own verses and in those of their contemporaries the voices which belonged to the past generation of political chaos—the spontaneity and freshness of Catullus, the vivid and passionate force of Lucretius?

One wonders, even, what they would have said had they been able to look into the future. They would have seen for century after century the great Roman state machine still functioning: sometimes imperfectly, no doubt, but on the whole serving most efficiently the greatest security of the greatest number. Yet they would have observed at the centre of things, in their own Rome, very quickly appearing the symptoms of decay or of ossification—a series of emperors who were either vicious or irresponsible, in either case most unlike Æneas; a dead political uniformity; the persecution of those who, like the Stoics or the Christians, attempted to follow some law which they regarded as higher than the law of the state; an alarming growth of superstition; a rigid dictatorship, quite different from the gentle guidance of Mæcenas, exercised over the arts of speaking and writing—till in the end, in interim periods of free speech the most powerful voices of Roman literature would be voices of protest against the immorality of the times, or of somewhat sentimental longing for 'noble savages', like the Germans, who remained untainted by the vices of civilisation. They, Horace and Virgil, looked forward from the end of war and faction to the expanding prospect of peace and

prosperity under an efficient governmental system. Their descendants would lose interest in the future and look back instead with admiration on the disorganised past.

Did Virgil, one wonders, imagine something of this or guess at it when he ruined the logical but amplified the emotional structure of the 'Æneid' by making his hero finally unheroic in his desertion of the Carthagian queen? The fates of the Gods, the laws of history, he seems to say, are indeed inexorable; but there are occasions when the civilising missionary will sacrifice smugly something more valuable than his own ends, there are situations where the peace and prosperity won by blood and iron and abnegation are no more than what Tacitus, through the mouth of a rebel Briton, was later to call them—a solitude and a wilderness.

## 2

It is interesting to imagine conversations between dead men, but one can hardly do so without referring their imagined words to the present; and, inaccurate as must be all historical comparisons, this one may not be valueless. For we today are living at a time when the State, in some form or other, seems bound to intervene more and more in the affairs of individuals and when, on the whole, its intervention will be demanded and welcomed. In our times, as in those of Virgil, countless lives have been lost or disrupted by years of economic chaos and war; and in Europe, at any rate, what the ordinary man will want most will be physical security. The other things, he will hope, will be added later; but for the moment freedom from want and freedom from war will be his chief desire.

Moreover, it is now becoming plain to almost everyone that the old pre-war system of individual and national selfishness is, apart altogether from any moral objections which might be made to it, so ineffective and dangerous that it must be replaced by something different. The State which, after the war, is prepared to plan efficiently so that the people may have a reasonable certainty that their national resources are being used to the benefit of all, and so that in international affairs there may be a reality of law and order, will deserve and receive loyalty from its citizens. Such a State is certain to be, in some sense or other, socialist; but we have seen how various are the interpretations of this term. Indeed, though one must work and hope for what is best, it is useless to prophesy what exact form will be taken by the State of the future in any particular area. Here I assume only that such a State will be efficient; to be efficient it must be capable of over-riding individual interests, financial or hereditary, for the common good; and its aims, of peace and security, must be obvious to everyone, so that it will secure the loyalty of its citizens.

How will literature be affected by such a State? Or how is it desirable that literature should be affected? And in attempting to find some sort of an answer for these questions I am well aware that our terms of reference are incomplete, that literature is only one of man's activities, that until we have determined and experienced the precise form of the State of to-morrow we cannot exactly estimate its effect, that we are proceeding by guesswork, not by calculation. Yet guesswork can be a preliminary method of scientific investigation, and to some at least literature is so important that one can no more help guessing its future than one could help

imagining the thoughts of Virgil or of Horace twenty centuries almost ago.

It may be, of course, that the State of the future will disregard literature as entirely as did the State of the recent past; but this, for many reasons, seems unlikely. Even if efficiency in production and distribution were to be the only watchword, we have learnt that for this end alone propaganda is essential. Moreover, we have learnt that a novel can exercise as much (or even more) political influence as can a procession or an official leaflet. So long as men have the leisure and the desire to read, literature is sure to be a force not only in life but in politics. There is a sense in which Dr. Goebbels realises as well as Shelley that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'. Also it seems reasonable to assume that the State of the future will represent itself as something new and hopeful, even though it may retain and revere many of the ideals and institutions of the past. Home secretaries and ministers of propaganda will find the support of literature for their new regimes just as valuable as Maecenas found it. Nor, of course, will they enlist this support in a wholly cynical manner to glorify themselves or to assure their predominance. Apart from vanity or fear, they will regard the achievements of their new systems as worthy of commemoration and, indeed, if they\* succeed, as we have imagined, in solving the problems of poverty, unemployment and war there will be writers enough ready whole-heartedly to collaborate, with the new order. It is probable that the State will subsidise these writers either directly or indirectly; indeed, this will be a necessary step if serious literature is not to disappear entirely. Already before the war there was only a handful of writers who, without independent means, were

able to live by writing alone; and however much the moralists of the market may insist that the rough-and-tumble of commercial competition or bread-winning at an uncongenial job is valuable to the writer, the fact is that time and energy are both limited. If, then, writing is to be regarded as a valuable social activity, the chances are that it will be supported socially. What is likely to be, or should be the attitude of the State to the writers whom it supports, and of the writers to the State by whom they are supported?

Admittedly we can have no perfectly clear idea of what the State of the future will be, but for the purpose of this enquiry, which is in general terms, the gift of precise prophecy is not required. Here I assume only this: that the new State will have met the pressing and crying needs of humanity—food, work, peace, security; it will consequently be popular in the sense that it will have the support of the majority of its citizens, and it will be, by the very nature of the tasks which it will have to perform, more integrated, more powerful and more emphatic than were most of the pre-war democracies. Above all, it will be efficient or will aim at being so.

Maybe the assumptions are unwarranted. Maybe after the war we shall relapse into the old inefficiency of unregulated production and consumption, the clash of private interests, the avoidance of responsibility, the much-trodden road to war. But one may still hope for the best, and the best that seems available now is an efficient organisation to meet the most obvious needs of men and women. And for the purpose of this present enquiry it matters little whether the efficient State is republican, democrat, communist or imperial. Under dictatorships literature has flourished, at least for a

short time; and Socrates was put to death by a restored democracy. Literature may well gain force and direction and power from the new regime which we imagine. Can it also keep its integrity?

### 3

The question of Socrates has indeed an important bearing on our main argument. From the point of view of the restored democrats there is no doubt that Socrates was a menace. His political and moral criticism was too far-reaching, indeed too true, for the general security. Athens had passed through the grimmest years of her history in foreign and civil wars. Now, if ever, was the time for strong government and unquestioning loyalty to 'the gods in whom the city believes', those ideals of the past which had made Athens great. Continual and icily exact criticism of these ideals must have seemed, certainly for the time being, worse than in the worst of bad taste, indeed positively dangerous. Yet Socrates at his trial had the face to suggest that, so far from being condemned to death, he should in the best interests of the city be kept for the rest of his life at the public expense and given free licence to disseminate his overwhelming criticisms, since these, he said, were directed to one end alone, 'to make men better'. What would seem most strange to some of the honest accusers of Socrates is that posterity has agreed with him. Yet how many today would or will agree with a Socrates placed in a similar position in a modern state?

For today and always, it seems to me, literature must make the same claim as Socrates made for himself. It

should be treated with honour by the State, even subsidised, and should be not only allowed but expected to criticise the State in every way. For this is its public service and it is a service which, in these times, seems almost more than ordinarily necessary, since today there exists, together with a general desire for the elements of a good life—food, work and peace (and also a general belief that these elements are attainable)—an extreme vagueness as to how these good things are to be secured and what, in the end, is to be done with them.

This is what may be called the political task of literature—to hold the mirror up to nature, to show men how they live and what is meant by their own words and manners, to investigate everything under the sun, to retain the tradition of the past and to explore the future, to instruct, to criticise, to delight, to create and reveal. In these activities, as in all others, the writer may be greatly helped or greatly hindered by the society in which he lives. The more he can co-operate with this society, the happier, as a rule, he will be. Yet, though his work is conditioned by his social group, it is not determined by it. And there is a sense in which it is true to say that his work must be, whether he is conscious of it or not, always disruptive of any state organisation. For his loyalties as a writer are to something wider and deeper than any state can be. His view of individuals must be closer and more intimate than the view taken by statesmen; his estimate of general principles must be wider and more far-reaching than is possible for a particular legislator. In the ordinary affairs of life he will, like everyone else, look for and admire efficiency. But efficiency can never be to him a reason for existence. And this view of his must penetrate the State

itself if the State is not to be a mere machine or an ossification.

'Give me', says Milton, 'the liberty to know to utter, "and to argue" freely according to conscience, above all liberties', and in spite of materialists it may indeed be maintained that this is the foundation of the rest, for without this liberty change will never be for the best, but will be either automatic or arbitrary, and certainly inhuman. Literature is always, in one way or other, an affirmation of the future or the past against the present; it dies stone-dead if, from servility or stupidity, it begins to glorify the existing state of affairs as though this were changeless and immortal.

Yet in practice it cannot be easy to convince the politicians of a modern state that one of their chief services to the community is to maintain and encourage what will often appear as a revolutionary movement against themselves. In all times of stress and danger censorships have been imposed, and it may well seem after the war, when so many and such urgent practical tasks are to be done, that an efficient government should not tolerate argument at cross-purposes with its open aims. These aims will be reached more quickly if public opinion can, under a central direction, be organised and controlled; whereas a spate of argument and a conflict of opinion will exacerbate existing differences, delay the passage of necessary measures, and so put off the day of general security which is so ardently desired by the masses of 'ordinary' men and women. So it may be argued and so it has been argued in the fascist states with which we are at war. Nor, for this reason, is the argument less dangerous to us, for there is clearly something in the argument.

It can only be met from the standpoint of a com-

plete democratic faith, from the belief that, in the last resort, it is the individual and not the State that counts; that the State exists not only to promote the happiness but also the responsibility and goodness of its citizens. It is the belief in man's nature which shines out so proudly from Milton's words: 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.'

This is, indeed, the only and the overwhelming argument against the attractions of censorship and control—the claim of each man to be, as much as he can be, the master of his own soul and the seeker after his own happiness. He has duties and obligations to others, certainly, but no obligation can over-ride his duty and right to a private sincerity, and in so far as he abrogates this right he ceases to be human. But unfortunately the argument does not end here. Private sincerity is often impossible and almost valueless without some system of social security, some organisation in which there exists a generally recognised way of life. Life would be impossible in a state where the forces of liberalism and fascism were equally divided. Indeed, the success of fascism has been mainly due just to this fact, that it has attempted at a low level to reconstruct a general system of belief to replace the vagueness and uncertainties of unregulated liberalism. Whatever claims one may make for the nature and destiny of man, one cannot claim this—that he is able to exist and develop in a spiritual vacuum or in a mere riot of conjecture. His life, both physical and intellectual, demands a certain stability, and the efficient state which we have imagined will be valued not only for its

promise of economic security but also for its ability to co-ordinate national aims. And the more successful it is—in both of these respects—the more dangerous will be the position for literature. Yet also more full of promise: since if the State can be not only efficient but self-critical, not only stable but developing, the future both of the State and of literature may justify the brightest hopes. Writers, like everyone else, will welcome an ordered society of peace and plenty; and literature can collaborate with the State that achieves these ends. The State, in its turn, must admit the paradoxical nature of this collaboration—that the writer, however he may serve the State, is still the tribune of the person, the critic of institutions, the agent of change. This must always be his work, and today he has a part to play which is even more important and more difficult. His value will be in attempting to re-define the ends for which men desire to live, to salvage from the past what is permanent and set it in its place of honour, to set what is critical, strange, reflective and apparently useless in opposition to what is stereotyped, practical, obvious and efficient.

To fulfil such a task the greatest freedom of expression is necessary and the greatest risks may have to be run. It may seem easy and attractive to attempt to transform man into a dutiful and 'pious' political animal, and so to emphasise the securities and real delights of community feeling that individual consciousness and responsibility will seem out-moded luxuries or weaknesses. Yet, with the best of intentions, this is the road to fascism, tyranny and despair. Æneas was wrong in believing that simple dutifulness is the greatest of the virtues, nor is it the greatest of destinies to be able to crush the rebellious and handle carefully

those who are submissive. The 'fates of the Gods' are much more complicated and demand a perpetual tension between old and new, between the rebel and the official. Each is contained in the same person; each has much to give. Yet in a way the rebel has the last word, for there is no divinely appointed state of equilibrium, and for the State itself, of which so much is hoped and promised, the final end to be accomplished is a 'withering away'.



## MAY 1945

**T**HE sun shines on the white flowers of the lilac and may across the road, on the white towers of blossom balanced upon the drooping fans of the chestnut leaves. The red paint of buses has a defiant holiday air. Girls and boys laugh as they go by on bicycles, and it is now eighteen days since the last rocket-bomb fell on London. Victory is in the air, and for months now the daily drone of bombers has caused us no alarm. Why are one's thoughts not altogether jubilant?

When the day of victory is officially proclaimed the pubs will be full and men and women will fall into each other's arms. It will seem too good to be true. Is it too good to be true? What is it mars the anticipation of one's joy?

Death, certainly, and destruction, irreparable loss. But there will be an end of that, at least among one's own people, and that is something indeed. There will be sense in the mutual embraces and in the prolonged opening hours. Yet how often does one hear people say, when they compare 1945 with 1918, 'it will be different this time'?

I know that they are right when they say this, though I can myself remember little enough of the victory celebrations in 1918. I remember the wild ringing of the chapel bell at school, the singing of a *Te Deum*, speeches from various officers and statesmen, stories of unbridled rejoicing in London. Then, for a few years, all the lecturers sang the same tune. A new world was

to be built by the younger generation within the framework of the League of Nations. I can still see in my mind's eye the buoyant gestures and the enthusiastic faces of lecturers from the League of Nations Union who addressed us at school; I can still hear their confident explanations and feel their encouragement. A dispute had arisen about some islands, places of great strategic importance. What happened? Did men rush to arms and kill, burn, rape, destroy? No. That was the old way. Representatives of the conflicting parties met under a neutral chairman. They sat round a table. Things were straightened out. There was a concession here and a concession there. Agreement was reached. No one was killed. That was the new way. And, as we listened, we looked with admiration at the young, enthusiastic lecturer, who smiled so confidently as he twirled his exotic eyeglass; we dimly envisaged the loyal but considerate statesmen sitting at, or rather round, the table and saving their people from the horrors of war. For they, we thought, looking at the lecturer and thinking of the statesmen, are jolly good fellows.

Of course the lecturer and those like him were right in nearly all that they said. Yet how hopelessly inaccurate were his forecasts! How unjustified was his buoyant step! How blind was his trust in legality! He and many meant well and did their best for obvious decency. They proposed and supported what were obviously desirable ends; but they and all their work were swept away like leaves in the coming storm.

At about the same time as we were listening to the lecturer the greatest of our poets may have been writing, or preparing for publication, his poem *The Second Coming*. He wrote:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

And, in a general dismay, he puts the question:

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Yeats' analysis of the situation after the First World War has been proved to have been far more accurate, though less encouraging, than any analysis made by lecturers from the League of Nations Union. What was it that these jolly good fellows missed? Their aims were unexceptionable. Their case, too, looked good on paper. Roughly, what they suggested was that people should be alert and sensible. No one likes being killed, they proclaimed. Everyone admits that modern warfare is not only destructive and wasteful but a positive disgrace to what we think of as civilisation. There is no dispute which cannot be settled more justly by arbitration than by force of arms; and there are numbers of high-minded men, of known integrity, who are perfectly prepared to act as arbitrators. People who love peace are so much more numerous than the few criminals or lunatics who enjoy war that, if they keep their eyes open and support organisations like the League, there should be no further risk of anything so terrible ever happening again.

It looks sound enough; it looks like common sense; it is what people are saying to-day, though with rather less faith and rather less enthusiasm. Yet it was Yeats who was right. Things fell apart, and the falcon could

not hear the falconer. Before very long it became clear to almost everyone that the First World War had settled nothing at all and it gradually became certain that, unless something was done about it quickly, a second world war was inevitable.

Even during these less hopeful and less liberal years there was plenty of common sense shown in various quarters. There were many people who made careful and correct analyses of the way in which things were going, who protested at each betrayal of the ordinary common-sense principle without which peace would certainly be threatened. Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain, Austria, Czecho-Slovakia: the same people said the same things. The argument was not difficult to follow, and the argument's conclusion was correct. Its repetition may have had some effect. If so, the effect followed too late.

Nor were we even deceived by those who would soon become our enemies. Neither Hitler nor Mussolini made any secret of his intentions, and Hitler actually wrote down his programme in a book. The concentration camps which excite so much horror in 1945 were in existence and were fully described years before the war began.

There were, it is true, certain powerful interests and powerful people who were so blinded by their fear of Soviet Russia that they successfully blinded many of their own countrymen and led them into death and destruction. Some of these, and others also, genuinely admired the new religion of fascism, though most of them pretended later that this had not been the case. They were a powerful group, but they were a small one. Had the average man been more than half-awake they would have been powerless. Others turned away from the world in what may well have seemed a justified

despair provoked by the evidence not only of blind and cruel self-interest but also of crass, illimitable stupidity. Indeed, it was no doubt a melancholy satisfaction to be proved right. Those who for years had advocated control of production now saw production strictly controlled for the efficient prosecution of war. Those who had urged the necessity of an alliance with Russia saw the alliance now in existence, after the destruction of a hundred cities. Those who had remained faithful to the idea of the League of Nations can look at a conference at San Francisco dealing with the destinies of a devastated world.

The fact that Yeats' pessimism was justified, while all the common sense in the world proved, without ceasing to be common sense, ineffective, is certainly one of the facts which may have a sobering effect upon our celebrations of the present victory. Yet it is a fact that can prove helpful if it confirms our belief that man does not live by common sense alone, and that the wider outlook of the poet not only gives men pleasure but must also play a part as important as that played by any statesman in the regulation of life and even in the establishment of a system of general security.

Unless we recognise that 'the centre cannot hold', no patching of the circumference will help for long. In the centre is still the same frustration, the same isolation, the same falling away from dignity. There are no agreed standards or values which go deeper than the trivialities of common sense, and these trivialities become more and more concerned with personal security and the possession of cash. Moral feelings are invoked in time of war and, with less success, by politicians in peace-time; but these feelings are growing weaker, resting as they do on assumptions which are no longer

generally agreed upon. Many, for instance, have fought against fascism in the belief that each individual has a unique value and that no State or organisation of men should be permitted to over-ride or crush what is each individual's uniqueness, his personality; yet this is a belief which, in the past, has rested on the belief in a God for whom every soul is valuable and, without the belief in God, the strange paradox, so contrary to the trend of events, that the individual is uniquely important, is, to say the least, not easy to justify. Indeed, in these respects we seem still inspired rather by ghosts or portraits of the past than by a living tradition. Ghosts occur to startle us, but more often fade away into invisibility [Our 'practical' life is superstitious and the main objects of our superstition are 'science' and 'efficiency'. Since the age is superstitious we do not even achieve a life that can be called either scientific or efficient; we merely pay lip-service to what is vaguely understood to be admirable, and are encouraged at every turn to accept the advice of people whom we think of as 'experts'. (There is an expert on the atom, an expert on astronomy, an expert on milk marketing and on housing, but there are no experts on how to live, and it seems that this is a subject in which we are not greatly interested.)].

It would seem obvious that, without some definite ideas on this point, both science and efficiency must be aimless, but this does not appear to be the general view. Indeed an objective consideration of modern history would rather encourage the belief that people, in the mass, did not want to live at all. Why should they, if for a creature, who can 'look before and after', 'freedom from want' is set up as an ultimate aspiration, and if an unspecified 'good time' is all that can be supposed to

proceed from this 'freedom'? 'It were better to have no opinion of God at all than such an opinion as is unworthy of him,' says Bacon, writing 'Of Superstition', and what is true of God is also true of science. (We must believe that science can enormously enlarge our capacities for thought and action, but in science itself there is nothing divine and hardly anything human. The man is greater than the scientist. Without an end the means are either futile or dangerous.

And our new devils are as unreal as our new gods. Just as it is tempting to believe that the world can be saved by the sudden appearance of an expert, a new drug, or a Leader, so it simplifies the task of thought and imagination if one can persuade oneself that every evil from which we suffer is the work of the Jews, the Capitalist system or the Red Menace. It is natural that the main political and economic controversy of the times, the issue between public and private ownership of the resources of production, should arouse warm feelings on both sides. What is unnatural and inhuman is that every evil on earth should be attributed to a small group of human beings. As the good on earth is wider and more splendid than any investigator could account for, so the evil is even greater than any band of men could produce, even if they could rely upon the whole-hearted co-operation of us all.

Yet these superstitions have been found convenient. The convenience, perhaps, is in the fact that they seem to free the mind from personal responsibility either for thought or action. The general good will somehow descend, as the result of some brilliant experiment or of the findings of an expert; the evil is being plotted somewhere else in a back room and, once the evil-plotters can be identified, they can be persecuted.

This is the final result of superstition—reverence, which amounts to self-immolation, for what is unworthy, and persecution of what is guiltless. The ceremony of innocence is drowned', and, rising out of the ordinary, the drab, the apparently sensible appears like some monstrous genie, a world where people revel in the splendours and degradations of hysteria, duplicity, torture and bloodshed.

We have seen the 'rough beast' and, at the cost of incalculable suffering, we have caged him. Common sense has, in a way, re-established itself. New lecturers will now, no doubt, proceed to new schools and will point out, with obvious sincerity, the miseries and uselessness of war; will explain, using unanswerable arguments, the necessity for the building of a new world. Let them remember in their orisons all our own sins. For we have no right to disown our own shame in the upbringing of the beast from whom we have so lately been delivered. There was no country in Europe without its fascist party, and this at a time before the label appeared likely to prove safe or profitable. Those who organised the processions and the torture chambers could count, often enough, upon a genuine and naive enthusiasm among their young supporters, who saw in the whole movement an attempt to bring back something of 'the ceremony of innocence,' something of the heroic spirit to an age in which good and evil were terms too vague and abstract to stir the blood, an age of cyphers, an age aimless, in spite of its frantic hurry, blind in spite of its efficient news service, starving in plenty, only too pleased with the second best, so long as it was specially recommended. True, the whole thing was a deception. The heroic spirit, in spite of its bravery and ruthlessness, was a sham and a parody;

it was out of date in the sense that Europe, apart from its schoolboys, seemed to have progressed beyond the age of the Vikings. But the movement was also a revelation. It gave to the poor and rejected spirit of our faithless age illusions of grandeur and simplicity which were enough to overturn a continent. It pretended to give life a meaning and a centre which would hold firm. In fact, the meaning was barbarous and the centre was evil. Yet the demands of men are the same now as they were before the war broke out. The war has removed a danger and provided an opportunity. It has solved nothing, nor is it reasonable to suppose that programmes for general security, however admirable on paper, or even the recollection of death and sacrifice, however sincere, will prove more effective than their counterparts of 1918.

The new world cannot be built with the old bricks of legality and monetary arrangements. Such a structure would be another prison-house for men and women whose flesh and blood and spirit demand more from life than uneasy security and scientifically regulated hours, who may be deceived for a time into believing that their prison is a rest centre, but in the end will break its doors.

Of course the legality, the monetary arrangements, the planning are necessary. The point is so obvious that it would not be worth mentioning were it not for the fact that there are still people who find their main interest in making money out of chaos, and so recommend that condition as something good in itself. But it is clear that without food, shelter, clothing and a certain amount of physical security life cannot be lived at all; and by now it is becoming clear to almost everyone that these essentials can more easily be secured by a

planned and directed effort than by the haphazard results of a quest for profit on investments. It is equally certain, however, that a well-sheltered, clothed and fed man is not, simply because of his house, his dress and his meals, any better than a baboon. And if the centre will not hold, the plans too will fall apart. It is not because we lack scientific ability that the mere elements of our life are still not organised scientifically. It is because we are not certain why we want to live at all, and it is therefore hardly true to say now, as the lecturers would say in 1920, that 'everyone hates war'. Quite a number of people obviously enjoy it, having found in warfare a meaning and a reason for existence which they have not found elsewhere. Planning, therefore, which leaves a man without aim or responsibility or enthusiasm is as dangerous as anarchy. Nor can the aims, responsibilities and enthusiasms be easily or scientifically produced as ready-made articles. They must be specifically human and, in our present state of moral and intellectual insecurity, we do not know precisely what this means.

The position may be easier for those who believe in a revealed religion and in the practical instructions of its professors; yet even here difficulties are bound to arise and situations that could never have been contemplated by the early fathers are bound to occur. Though the present is tied and fastened to the past and future it is still the present, and must be interpreted in contemporary terms. Part of the past dies every moment, and we become infected with its mortality if we cling to it too lovingly; part is always alive and we neglect its vitality at our peril. Nor does either the dead always look dead or the live alive. Moreover there are many degrees both of life and death; there are brilliant

morbid growths from decaying tissues, and incalculably strong vitality often beneath the bone.

Such considerations which, when they apply to more than the obvious instance, can only be expressed metaphorically, have the most real and practical value. In a sense Yeats was more of a realist than were the lecturers from the League of Nations Union, and today also the ways of thought of the poet, the artist and the philosopher are capable of giving us practical guidance which is at least as valuable as are the efforts of the scientist or the administrator. That the two ways should not be divergent has long been the hope of humanity, and there have been times when it was generally admitted that all effort should be directed to the greater glory of God and to the relief of man's estate. As it is, we hear much of the relief of man's estate, little or nothing of the glory of God. The result is that the whole conception of man's estate has become blurred, vulgar, dull or mathematical and, in spite of accurate analyses of particular requirements, the general 'estate' of man can seldom have been worse than it has been in the last thirty years.

To greet victory with such alarm and despondency may well seem to be in the worst of taste. To belittle the possibilities of scientific planning and economic reorganisation may seem both ungrateful and reactionary. Victory must mean joy; economic reorganisation is both desirable and necessary. Yet still the justification for the joy, the aims of reorganisation deserve inquiry, and this is an inquiry which can only be carried out beneath the surface of things. It is to inquire what man is, which of his ideals are admirable, which of his habits permanent, and what can be the meaning or purpose of his existence.



## THE STUDY OF THE CLASSICS

THE study of the classics has been defended so often and on so many grounds that it may seem both unnecessary and impertinent to attempt another defence which is bound to be, in great part, a reiteration of what has often been said before. Yet, though the defence of the classics has been skilful it has not been successful and, in a cause of such importance, more words are not necessarily wasted. Then too there has been, perhaps, a rather niggling insistence on points which, though important, are not of the first importance, and the whole subject may possibly be clarified if we consider classical literature not at all as 'mental training' or 'a help with other languages' but as something which is good in itself.

It may be true that no more perfect exercise for the mind has ever been discovered than the turning of English into Greek or Latin, yet, even if this were so, if this were all, and if one stopped here, it would be like developing the muscles and poise of a boxer and being ever afterwards chained to a desk. Indeed to look upon the study of the classics as a form of exercise seems to belittle both the classics themselves and the society which is prepared to put forward such a claim. That Latin prose is good mental discipline is usually the argument of those who, while realising the claims of science and geography in a modern education, would still like to keep 'a little' Latin in the curriculum, probably rather for old-time's sake than for any great benefit

that is likely to be derived from it. The result of the little-Latin-and-less-Greek policy is that this study, which of all others is able to widen and inspire the mind, is felt often by the wretched pupils, who after four years are still stumbling in *Oratio Obliqua*, to be meaningless and restrictive. Blake's slogan 'Enough or too much' may not be universally applicable, but it is certainly a wise directive, so far as the classics are concerned. It may be that in modern society we cannot afford more than a small number of real classical scholars who have read widely in Greek and Latin, and it is certainly a mistake to try to make scholars out of children who lack the particular ability required. Yet there are very few children who will not respond to classical literature if it is made intelligible to them by means of good translations, and it is altogether a sounder thing for a boy to leave school after having read the classics widely and with interest, even though he has read them in English, than for him to leave with the impression, won by hours of labour with crib, dictionary and grammar, that the whole of classical literature is a record of minor battles or the retiring into and emerging from winter quarters.

Suppose, then, that in a school one has one's small body of pupils who are really going to study the language and literature thoroughly, and suppose that for the rest a course were to be designed which would be only less thorough in so far that the texts used would be translations, how could one defend such a system and what would be its advantages? It can, I think, be easily defended, and its advantages would be very numerous.

First, it would break down that artificial and dangerous distinction between the arts and the sciences.

No such distinction exists in classical literature itself, nor is the distinction emphasised by the best scientists or the best scholars today, since both scholars and scientists who are worthy of the name know that a full man is not made by the acquisition of some specialised skill, but only by the widest interest in everything under the sun. It is at a lower level that the distinction is both prevalent and dangerous, the level of the half-educated of both parties who think that their views deserve special consideration, either because of their skill in manipulating a Latin sentence or in setting up a complicated apparatus. At the moment the false prestige of science is much greater than the false prestige of the arts, though with the recent staggering and destructive employment of science before our eyes, we are beginning again to realise that, in itself and without intelligent direction, science has as many dangers as wonders. Indeed, part of the public who previously uncritically worshipped are now prepared, equally uncritically, to condemn and to demand the fettering of powers which, invoked in the name of progress, seem capable of reducing the whole world to annihilation. Nor are the dangers of science merely physical. Science has disappointed its uncritical devotees in every way. Enlightenment was promised in all spheres of ordinary thought and conduct. The wildest claims were made—not as a rule by scientists themselves, but by their camp-followers—as to the dawning of a clear, distinct and antiseptic world, in which the first principles of thought and behaviour would be revealed, as the result of experiment, to the meanest intelligence.

How false was that dream is now sufficiently evident. Diagrams intended to convey a notion of space-time give no final picture of the universe. The study of

hormones is not a substitute for morality. With the almost infinite resources of invention ready for use, mankind can find no use for them except in mutual destruction, and there have been millions to whom the whole structure of knowledge has seemed irrelevant when compared with some dominating and hysterical idea which yet gives them what they need, a sense of their human importance and their human responsibility. It was a Greek sophist who said, 'Man is the measure', and there are many who would disagree and insist upon a higher criterion. Yet how much wiser it is to accept the Greek sophist's view than to take the blood and spirit out of man by subjecting him only to numerical and statistical rules! In the dead uniformity and apparent clarity of mathematical abstraction there is no bond of unity or reason for existence. So far from being united by common methods of production and a generally agreed system of knowledge, mankind has lost cohesion and even begun to retreat from reason. It is one of many startling symptoms that in a period when exact science has won its greatest victories, millions turn to astrology for the direction of their lives.

Increased study of the classics is, of course, no panacea, but it is a step in the right direction. It would provide a common background of thought which has stood the test of time, and it would help to emphasise what is now most urgently needed in education, the study of and respect for man himself. For no system of world security, no monetary arrangement or organisation of industry can hold much promise for the future unless it is based on the recognition of the beauty and uniqueness of the moral and physical qualities of the individual, and his need to live co-operatively with others. This, together with a recognition of the mystery

which must necessarily surround our life, seems to be the final lesson which is learnt from a study of literature and history. Why, it may well be asked, should one recommend instead of contemporary life and letters the study of peoples who lived long ago, whose records are incomplete and whose way of life differed so greatly from our own?

Many answers can be given to this question. First, it is a fact that the achievements of Greece and Rome are the basis for all the subsequent history of our civilisations. It is a basis which all the peoples of Europe and America have in common, and a knowledge of the common origins of our ways of thought is a desirable thing to have in a world which must unite or perish. Yet this in itself is no very urgent argument. One might, on similar grounds, advocate the teaching of Sanskrit in all Indo-European schools. What is more important is that not only is classical literature and history the basis of our common civilisation, but that it is easily intelligible, most profoundly inspiring, fresh and, judged by every standard, excellent in itself. The remoteness of it all in time is, it seems, an additional reason for studying it, since, when we are deeply concerned with what took place fifteen hundred years ago, when we feel a personal affection for a character of whose personal appearance and manners we know nothing at all, we have at least acquired some sense of the human extent of our environment, at least (and it is much) learned something of the dignity and unity of mankind and the pervasiveness of thought and feeling. The agitation of the mind which one experiences when one is able to hear, as it were, with one's own ears the creaking of Lesbia's slipper as she came to her first assignation with Catullus, to weep, as Jerome did over the

misfortunes of Dido, to listen to Andromache's lament, 'Hector, I am unhappy', to follow in the tracks of Xenophon's brilliant and unruly troops, to stand at the deathbed of the best and justest of men, to feel that what one feels today has been felt by others in the past and has been fixed for ever in words of startling beauty and uncanny penetration—all this is more than the product of a sentimental or romantic imagination, more even than the philosophic sense of 'old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago'; it is a possession for ever, and of all possessions one of the most valuable.

This possession, this agitation of the mind coming upon one momentarily and suddenly, is to me indistinguishable from what others have called 'the aesthetic sensation', and I am inclined to wonder whether they have not been too narrow in their view of the sources from which it derives. A. E. Housman's beard used to bristle as he recited to himself a line or two of Blake, lines in which he found no obvious meaning but which were full of the remote magic of poetry. Was his beard quite unstirred when he read in prose the account of Nicias's desperate appeal to his lost army at Syracuse or of how Thucydides arrived too late upon the spot at Amphipolis? This so-called 'aesthetic sensation', it seems to me, is inspired by many other things than poetry and the fine arts. Love, wonder, admiration and sympathy are some of its components, and together with them, together with the love and sympathy which bring their objects near to us, there is always the contradictory knowledge of remoteness. The sensation can be evoked by the sight of a child's face or the look in a lover's eyes, by natural objects, by the contemplation of certain actions or ways of thought, and from feeling

the sensation we are aware at the same time of vast horizons and of a kind of intimacy, so that the whole world seems to us bigger than we knew it to be, yet we ourselves more capable than we had imagined, not perhaps of understanding, but of a delighted recognition. The sensation is, in fact, religious in so far as it is an acknowledgment of other and wider worlds, both within us and without, than the workaday world which meets the ordinary eye.

Of course, no one could maintain that to feel this sensation it is essential to have studied the classics. All I would suggest is that this study is peculiarly helpful in breaking down those conventional barriers of time and place which restrict the mind and may make habits of thought provincial. All literature does this. The advantage which classical literature has here over others is partly, as I have mentioned, its very remoteness and partly its nearness to us in the sense that it is the basis of all European and American ways of thought. This, together with its excellence and its variety, seems to entitle it to a special place in education.

That it is excellent is beyond all doubt, and it is an advantage to study what is undeniably excellent. Modern literature, apart from two or three of the very greatest names, is still, for one reason or another, subject to fashion. Dryden chose to re-write Chaucer and in our own times Shelley, Tennyson and Browning have fallen out of favour. I have heard an English poet deny that there was any merit in 'The Ancient Mariner'. In classical literature there is a greater stability of reputation, not of the sort which outlaws criticism (far from it), but criticism is on the whole directed rather towards understanding than towards the vulgarity of 'debunking'. Classical literature can therefore remain in the

mind and there help to form standards of taste which are solidly founded. Nor are these standards either overpowering or constricting. Certainly there have been dull imitations of the classics, as of everything else; but the classics have inspired far more minds than they have enslaved. The inspiration is as various as the literature itself, but what today seems to require special emphasis is again the inspiration which comes from a fresh, clear and steady interest in man himself and in man's social relationships. Most other literatures have suffered, either continually or from time to time, from some kind of censorship, religious or political, hidden or open. Greek literature and, to a lesser extent, Latin literature has examined life in a spirit so startlingly free from prepossessions, from sentimentality or from haziness, that it is perpetually modern and perpetually inspiring. It is just this spirit that is needed today in a world whose progress seems to have brought more danger than delight, when, as humanitarianism makes its gradual conquests, whole cities are destroyed in a moment, and where, in bewilderment at the appalling contradictions between the teaching of religion and the actual facts, people increasingly take refuge in various kinds of dogmatism or in a suspension of all belief whatsoever. Not that we can 'go back to the Greeks' for an easy way out of our difficulties. It is important to remember that the classical civilisations, though they provided an inspiration for ever, failed as permanent organisations of human beings. This failure is not the least moving of the aspects of classical literature, nor the least instructive. Again our sympathy is involved and our minds are exercised at the spectacle of so much splendour and such goodness fading away and disintegrating in a remote time which is yet part of our own

time. In this history and literature there appears more clearly than anywhere else the tremendous achievements and the enormous dangers of the inquiring intellect. Prophecies are seen to come true. The loss of respect for 'gods and men' is attended by disruption and calamity. The pursuit of power, when power is dissociated from human needs and human values, ends in degeneration. And these human values themselves depend upon a right attitude to the universe. Finally, even the 'dear city of Cecrops' is not enough.

Our problems are on a bigger scale than those which confronted the classical civilisations, yet in classical literature the fundamentals of our problems are stated with an extraordinary clarity. Through failing to deal with them Greece lost her freedom and Rome her cohesion. We shall lose everything if we fail likewise. History does or may, in an important sense, repeat itself, and so, in addition to the many other advantages to be derived from the classics in education, one is right to add the utilitarian one of a positive guidance for the

means whereby one may not only enjoy the delights of art or of intellectual satisfaction, not only come to realise the unity of history and of mankind, but act so that we may remain alive on the surface of the earth.









