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PREJUDICE AND  
IMPARTIALITY

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# PREJUDICE AND IMPARTIALITY

BY

G. C. FIELD, M.A., B.Sc.

PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL



METHUEN & CO. LTD.  
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.  
LONDON

*First Published in 1932*

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN**

## GENERAL PREFACE

MANY of the subjects discussed by both the philosopher and the psychologist are of interest to large numbers of people who are not, in the technical sense, either philosophers or psychologists. It might be supposed, therefore, that such people would like to hear what those who are professionally interested in these subjects have to say about them. At any rate, that is the supposition that has been adopted in presenting this series to the public. Those who are concerned in it do not claim to be expounding established and certain truths, which the lay reader must accept on trust whether he understands them or not. Such a claim might be made by some sciences. But Psychology has not yet reached this position, except perhaps on a few points, and Philosophy, in its very nature, can never reach it. The psychologist and the philosopher can, however, claim that their views on the subjects to which they have devoted a great part of their time and attention ought to be of special interest to any one else who thinks about these subjects at all, and of assistance to him in developing his own opinions and interpreting his own experience.

With this end in view, therefore, a series of

particular problems are here discussed by philosophers and psychologists of recognized standing in their profession. The problems chosen for discussion are of wide general interest, and in some cases of direct practical bearing. And the treatment of these will be as clear and simple as is possible without shirking real difficulties or falsely simplifying complicated factors. The works in this series should be readily intelligible even to those who have no previous training in the technicalities of Philosophy and Psychology. But at the same time it is to be hoped that there will be much in them which will prove of interest and help to the more specialized students of these subjects.

G. C. F.

*June 1932*

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# PREJUDICE AND IMPARTIALITY

## CHAPTER I

### WHAT PREJUDICE IS

IT is one of the chief functions of philosophical thinking to give a clear and definite meaning to terms which we habitually use in ordinary thought and speech. It lies in the very nature of our everyday thinking that the ideas which such terms express are only clearly conceived in our minds up to a certain point ; beyond this point their nature and meaning are allowed to remain vague. This may be a very sensible proceeding on our part. We can often use ideas in a particular connexion quite effectively without having cleared them up in our minds more than to a very slight extent. And so far as our interest lies in that connexion alone there is no reason why we should try to clear them up any further. Yet, obviously, if our interest goes beyond this we shall find that a great deal more clearing up of the idea is possible. Thus for many centuries men have spoken about number and numbers, and used the idea of number

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in many mathematical arguments. They knew well enough what they meant by number for most practical purposes. Yet, according to some mathematicians the real nature of number, all that is implied in the notion, was only discovered in the nineteenth century, while according to others it has not been satisfactorily settled yet.

There may be various reasons for carrying on the clearing-up process of any particular idea beyond what is usual. Of course, sheer interest in knowing, the desire to get an idea clear for its own sake, is a motive that may work with some people. But a more usual motive comes into play when, for any reason, we begin to suspect that, even for the practical purposes of everyday thought and discussion, our ideas are vaguer than they should be. We hope, then, that by clearing them up somewhat further our use of them in this ordinary thinking may become surer and more effective.

The ideas expressed by the term Prejudice, and its opposite, Impartiality,<sup>1</sup> are, of course, familiar and frequently used by us all. We may assume that we have most of us asserted, at some time or other, that those whose ideas were opposed to our own were prejudiced. A few of us may even

<sup>1</sup> I have chosen Prejudice and Impartiality as the best terms we have for the two opposites. The opposite of 'prejudiced' is, strictly, 'unprejudiced'. But that has no substantive. On the other hand, a careful examination of the use of 'partial' and 'partiality' will reveal that it is not really used as the precise opposite of 'impartial' and 'impartiality'.

occasionally have admitted that we might be prejudiced ourselves. Most of us, again, must have come across writings or speeches on the most controversial subjects which began, 'Every impartial man must admit.' Yet we may well suspect that few of those who use these terms could state, without a good deal of careful thought, exactly what they meant and all that they implied by these terms Prejudice and Impartiality. To secure experimental confirmation of this suspicion, a group of University students in the early stages of their course were asked to provide within a limited time a succinct definition of Prejudice. And few of them produced anything more illuminating than 'Prejudice is a biased attitude of mind,' or 'Prejudice is whatever hinders correct thinking.' Our first task, therefore, must be to try to make the notion clearer and more explicit and to suggest at any rate a provisional definition.

The derivation of the word, to which appeal is sometimes made, helps us little. The Latin *praejudicium*, in the sense from which our word is derived, had a legal meaning, and indicated a previous judgement or precedent which governed the decision in any particular case. As used in this connexion the word conveys no suggestion at all that there is anything wrong about the decision being so governed. In fact, the suggestion is rather the other way. But our word Prejudice unmistakably indicates a bad and undesirable characteristic. Further, while we should probably

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say that in certain cases a previous judgement might be a possible cause of prejudice in one sense, it is certainly not the only or most important one. And in many cases it might not involve it at all. It is therefore best to leave the history of the word out of account, and consider only what we can discover from the way in which it is actually used at the present time.

Prejudice obviously indicates a character or quality of something. And if we ask what it characterizes, and where it shows itself, the answer that will probably occur most naturally to us is our opinions, or perhaps more generally our attitudes of mind, of which our opinions form the chief part. At any rate, it is clear that accusations of prejudice or claims to impartiality are most frequently, if not exclusively, made when it is a question of differences of opinion about some point. It characterizes, then, most typically opinions or attitudes of mind. And we can have opinions about, or adopt attitudes of mind towards, almost anything, other persons or things or other opinions or points of view.

What, then, is this characteristic or quality? Probably the idea that will first come into our minds when we speak of being prejudiced for or against anything or anybody is the idea of liking or disliking them or it. Prejudice, therefore, is closely connected with liking or disliking. Yet—and this is the first important distinction that we have to make—a moment's reflection is sufficient

to show that liking or disliking by itself does not amount to prejudice. To take the simplest and most elementary instance, if one man likes strawberry jam, and another likes raspberry jam best, no one, except as a joke, would dream of asserting that the one was prejudiced in favour of strawberry jam and the other in favour of raspberry jam. Even when it is a question of an attitude towards other people, to say that one man is prejudiced against another implies, unless we are speaking very loosely, something more than mere dislike. Indeed, we should probably regard it as a supreme instance of impartiality to like or dislike a man, and yet treat him in just the same way as some one towards whom we felt the opposite feeling. Liking and disliking, then, if they stop there, do not by themselves amount to prejudice.

‘If they stop there.’ The illustration just quoted suggests that that is the important point. By asserting prejudice we imply that the liking or disliking is going beyond a mere simple feeling, and is being allowed to influence something else, particularly our opinions and judgements about the object of our liking or dislike. To show why this stress is laid on opinions and judgements, and the processes of thought which lead to them, a further distinction is necessary.

As we have seen, merely having a feeling towards any person or thing does not amount to prejudice. But we can go further and say that action taken simply and directly as a result of that feeling is

not prejudice either, unless we are going to extend the use of the word very much beyond its normal application. To revert to our former simple instance, just as liking strawberry jam is not prejudice, eating it because we like it is not prejudice either. To apply this to our attitude towards persons, if I hate a man, or am violently angry with him, and try to injure him simply because of this feeling, I might be called cruel or violent, but I could hardly be described as prejudiced. I should, however, be properly described as prejudiced if I allowed this feeling to influence my judgement about him in some other connexion—for instance, with regard to the merits of a piece of work that he had done or his fitness for some particular appointment. This distinction is important, and we shall meet with it again. At the moment, it points to the conclusion that neither having a particular feeling nor acting directly as a result of that feeling could be said to constitute prejudice. Prejudice comes in when the feeling begins to affect our thinking.

It might seem, then, that here we have our definition. Can we say that prejudice consists in allowing our feelings, our emotions, sentiments, wants, desires, likes, dislikes, etc., to influence our thinking and so to affect the judgements and opinions at which we arrive by means of this thinking ?

The suggestion is clearly on the right lines, but it does not go far enough. We have already noted

that there is implicit in the idea of prejudice the idea of something undesirable. By calling anybody's opinions prejudiced we imply that there is something wrong about them. Before adopting, this definition, therefore, we have to satisfy ourselves that the effect of our feelings on our thinking is always for the bad. It is easy, however, to think of possible cases in which this would not be so. Suppose, for instance, that we felt very strongly a passionate desire to find out the truth about anything, it is obvious that the effect of this feeling on our thinking would, in all probability, be wholly good, and we could only say that the more we had of it the better. This is assuming, of course, that it is a good thing to find out the truth. But the assumption is justifiable in this connexion. For thinking is itself a process or operation whose function or purpose is to find out truth. We do not willingly think at all unless we want to arrive at a true conclusion about something.<sup>1</sup> That is always our immediate object, though, of course, we may want to arrive at the true conclusion for the sake of some more ultimate aim, practical or otherwise. The more strongly, therefore, this desire for the truth acts on our minds the more likely are we to perform the work of thinking correctly.

<sup>1</sup> This must be understood in the light of the whole discussion. Of course, we may also want one particular conclusion to be true: that is prejudice, which deflects the course of our thinking. But we must at least have a momentary desire for the truth before starting to think at all.

We could not, therefore, call the influence of this feeling on our thinking prejudice. It is, indeed, the very opposite of it. Is there any other feeling, except this, which can be excluded? For, if not, we might get an amended definition of prejudice as the influence of any feeling, except the desire to know the truth, on our thinking.

This certainly is getting much nearer. But it still seems to need some further qualification before it can be accepted as finally satisfactory. It is obviously true that the desire to know the truth is the only feeling which is directly and immediately relevant to the function of thinking. But there may be occasions on which some other feeling may contribute indirectly to the same result by stimulating and reinforcing this desire to know. Thus, for instance, if it is a question of finding out the best means of bringing health or happiness to some person who is threatened with the loss of them, a strong feeling of affection for the person concerned may stimulate and reinforce the desire to discover these means, and make it much stronger than mere curiosity, the desire to know for its own sake, would ever be. In fact, for most of us, on most occasions, the desire to know the truth has to be aroused in us in the first place by some other feeling of this nature. Disinterested curiosity is certainly one of the rarer virtues.

We may, then, formulate our definition thus :  
Prejudice is the influence of any feeling on our

thinking, except the desire to know the truth or any other feeling that reinforces this desire, in so far as it reinforces it. This last qualification is not merely otiose. It is put in to meet the rare but possible cases in which a strong feeling, such as the strong affection in the illustration just quoted, may, on the one hand, strengthen the desire to know, but, on the other, may so upset our balance and cloud our judgement as to undo all the good that it could do by strengthening the desire to know.<sup>1</sup> Such cases, however, are probably not very common.

Having got so far, we may now put our definition in a more general form. We remember the point just made, that the immediate purpose of thinking is always to arrive at a true conclusion, to find out something, to attain some piece of knowledge. And thinking is always adversely affected by any influence, any feeling or impulse, which directs us to any other end than this. In other words, it is adversely affected by any influence which is not relevant to its immediate aim or object. It is this relevance to the proper aim of thinking which is the essential point. And we may therefore appropriately define prejudice as the influence on our thinking of any feeling, impulse, or motive which is not relevant to the immediate purpose of this thinking. Conversely, impartiality lies in being influenced in our thinking only by relevant

<sup>1</sup> That is, perhaps, why in the medical profession it is not, as a rule, considered advisable for a doctor to attend his own family.

feelings or motives. It seems fairly certain that the only sort of feeling which is always and directly relevant to the purpose of thinking is the desire to know the truth about the subject of our thinking. But almost any other kind of feeling may be indirectly relevant so far as it strengthens and intensifies this desire to know.

In order to avoid possible misunderstanding we may consider here another case, not very important, or of frequent occurrence, in which our feelings may in a sense be relevant to our thinking. That is, when they are used, as they occasionally should be, not as motives affecting our judgements, but as material or evidence on which to base our judgements.

Thus, for instance, I may have a colleague whom I like or dislike extremely on purely personal grounds. If I am called on to decide whether I could recommend him, say, for a research post in a laboratory, my personal feeling towards him is entirely irrelevant. The sole relevant question is whether he is competent to do the work well. And if I let my liking or my dislike affect my judgement on this point, I am being prejudiced. On the other hand, suppose I am thinking of going on a holiday and am trying to decide which of several possible holidays open to me I should enjoy most. If I hear that, on one of them, I am likely to have this person as a companion, then clearly my liking or disliking him is a very relevant factor to be taken into account in deciding my problem.

All this, no doubt, seems very obvious and commonplace. Yet it is worth mentioning in order to bring out the danger of a mistake into which people often fall. We quite frequently hear the idea expressed or hinted at that there is something rather inhuman, cold, and unfeeling about impartiality. But, in reality, impartiality or the lack of prejudice does not in the least necessarily imply lack of feeling. No doubt, it may be easier to be impartial when our feelings, other than the desire to know the truth, are not very deeply engaged. But it is perfectly possible to feel strongly and yet remain impartial. Impartiality does not mean the suppression of feeling, but the keeping of the feeling simply as a feeling, and not allowing it to overflow its banks and permeate our thinking processes.

There is another possible error, which may be mentioned here before closing this stage of the discussion. We may sometimes hear language used which seems to imply that impartiality means having no definite opinions of our own at all. This is an even more absurd mistake. For, after all, the only object of being impartial is to arrive at opinions of our own, and to ensure, as far as we can, that these opinions should be right. The difference between prejudice and impartiality depends on the way in which we arrive at these opinions. There is, no doubt, a real point in the minds of those who speak as if any one with definite opinions ceased to be impartial. The

opinions that we have arrived at at one stage of an investigation or argument are likely to influence the opinions that we arrive at at a later stage. That is not necessarily bad, by any means: it may be perfectly right and proper. But it may, in some circumstances, be bad. There is, in fact, a right and a wrong way of being influenced by previously formed opinions. And the wrong way is undoubtedly a form of prejudice, which will have to be considered more at length later. But that is an entirely different thing from the fear of forming definite opinions at all.

## NOTE

## PREJUDICED FEELINGS

**I**S it only in opinions that prejudice shows itself? Is it not possible that we may also have feelings which could properly be described as prejudiced? The question is largely a verbal one. And it is not of very great importance, because it is clear that the most obvious and usual instances of prejudice occur in connexion with our opinions. Of course our opinions often or generally give rise to feelings. And if the opinions are prejudiced, the feelings which are based on them may so far be called prejudiced too. But it is possible that there are cases in which we might speak of prejudice when the opinions did not come in at all.

We recognize that simply and directly liking or disliking any thing or person does not by itself constitute prejudice. But we might feel, say, dislike towards something which we should not dislike for itself, because it has become connected in our minds, or in fact, with something else that we dislike for its own sake. For instance, we might be listening to a concert, and unable to enjoy the music, while recognizing that it was not really bad, because we did not like the pianist's face, either for itself or because it reminded us of some one else whom we disliked. Could we call our state of mind then prejudiced? Probably not, if we fully realized what was happening to us and why we felt as we did. So far as we did not realize this, however, we might reasonably be described as being prejudiced. And in such a case the prejudice would be displaying itself in our feelings alone, and not in our opinions.

## CHAPTER II

### HOW PREJUDICE WORKS

WE now come to a much more important stage in our inquiry—the consideration of the question how prejudice works. We have spoken of the influence of feelings on our thinking. And the fact that they do influence our thinking is beyond question. But it is very far from clear precisely how they do this. What happens when our thinking is affected by some feeling? This is a psychological inquiry of great importance and great difficulty. What it demands is a careful analysis and description of the processes that go on in our minds in thinking, in order to see at what point in the process the influence of feeling can come in and affect its course.

The investigation of the psychological processes involved in thinking has not, perhaps, received all the attention it deserves from psychologists. At any rate, investigation into it has not even approached a point at which we can present any certain conclusions which have been generally agreed upon.<sup>1</sup> But perhaps that lies

<sup>1</sup> In spite of much subsequent work, Prof. J. Dewey's *How We Think* still seems to me to contain the best discussion of the subject, at any rate for our purposes. I owe a great deal to that, though I have not adopted his scheme in its completeness. Of course, differences in the account are often largely a matter of convenience for the purpose of the particular investigation.

in the nature of the subject. The observation of our own mental processes is very difficult, probably much more difficult than most psychologists are ready to admit. And thinking, in particular, takes so many different forms and reaches such a high degree of complexity that to give any general description that applies to all thinking may seem a well-nigh hopeless task. Yet it is a task that must be attempted. We must not, however, claim to give more than a tentative account open to correction and modification in the light of subsequent research. What follows here, therefore, must be regarded as a provisional working hypothesis. It seems pretty certain that something like this goes on in thinking. But it is possible, or even probable, that the details of the account may need correction.

Thinking is, in its essence, a process of forming an opinion, of arriving at a judgement or conclusion on some grounds. We talk commonly of drawing a conclusion from the evidence, but we apply such a phrase more particularly to some very developed and complicated processes of thinking. But, in reality, the formula would apply to all thinking, even the very simplest. We may take one of the simplest acts of thought that we can imagine. Say that we hear a noise outside the window, and say to ourselves, That's a fire-engine going by. Here we may fairly call the noise the evidence, and 'That's a fire-engine' the conclusion that we draw from it.

Of course, even in a simple case like this, there is more than is set down here going on in our minds. And in other processes of thought we may find every imaginable degree of complexity and elaboration. But what we are trying to do here is to find a sort of skeleton, composed of elements which are always there in some form in every process of thought. Our working hypothesis here is that there are four stages of the process which are always found in greater or lesser degrees of complication :

1. There is, to begin with, something in the situation which arouses our interest. Even in the simple case just quoted, of identifying a noise in the street outside, we do not start the process of thinking and arriving at a conclusion unless something arouses our interest. We do not, as a rule, take any notice of the great part of the noises going on outside. We require something special to start our thinking. It may be something in the external situation itself—for instance, an unusual or unfamiliar noise. Or it may be a suggestion from another source. Any one reading these lines, for instance, might stop and say, Now let me listen to a particular noise outside and see what processes I go through in trying to identify it. There are countless other ways in which our interest may be aroused, but this first stage must always be there. This arousing of interest would naturally formulate itself in our minds as a general question. In the particular simple case quoted it would take the form of the question, What's that noise ?

2. In the next stage we proceed to pay attention. Or rather, perhaps, we pay special and increased attention; we focus or concentrate our attention in a special direction. For, of course, there is some degree of attention always present, involved in the first stage. But when we have asked the first question, What is that noise? we then go on to listen hard to the noise, if it is still going on. If it has stopped, we try to recall it in memory.

This stage is obviously very important. And it is very rarely as simple as in this particular instance, where we have got only a single noise to attend to. Even when there is only a single noise in question, if we are in doubt about it we have to recall to our memory other similar noises that we have heard before, and attend to these. And much more frequently our problem would involve a lot of present facts to be attended to. Suppose, for instance, we heard a lot of strange noises going on outside, some together and some in succession, we should probably want to know what was happening. We should then have to attend to them all, to distinguish one from the other, to pick out and select some for special attention, and perhaps to hold ourselves in an attitude of readiness to listen to other noises that were still to come.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I do not think it is desirable, as some writers do, to make this a separate stage, and call it the stage of discrimination. Attention and discrimination are sides of the same process; or rather, perhaps, discrimination is just one form of attention. At any rate, they are too intimately connected to be considered separately.

3. The third stage is also very important, but is not always easy to disentangle from the second. For when the process of thought is at all complicated the two overlap. They go on together, or rather perhaps in rapid alternation, for a great part of the time, and influence and affect each other. They still, however, remain distinguishable, if not always separable in fact, and it still remains true that what we have called the second stage normally begins before the third, if only momentarily.

This third stage begins when suggestions begin to come into our minds as possible answers to the general question that we began with. Very often, especially if the problem is at all complicated, there is a series of suggested answers. But they are still at this stage only suggestions. In fact, they would formulate themselves in our minds rather as further questions than as answers, a series of particular questions in contradistinction to the general question with which the whole process began. In a simple case, like that of identifying a noise outside, the questions may flash through the mind, Is it a tram? Is it an ambulance? Is it a fire-engine? and so on. It is easy to see how each of these questions as it comes into the mind may turn us back to the second stage of the thinking process, by directing our attention this or that way towards the evidence that will enable us to answer that particular question.

4. The fourth and final stage is the decision to accept one of the suggestions which involves the rejection of all the others. This is the judgement or conclusion of the process of thought. Sometimes, especially in very simple cases, it seems to follow immediately on one particular suggestion. Is it that? Of course, that is what it is! In such a case all other suggestions are rejected by implication. More often, especially if the problem is at all complicated, the final acceptance of one suggestion comes after a series of rejections of other suggestions, as a result of careful and sometimes prolonged attention to the evidence for each. Here there is really a series of preliminary decisions before we come to the final decision. Sometimes, too, we may refuse to accept finally any of the suggestions that come into our minds. We may conclude that there is not sufficient evidence to decide between them, or that there are probably many more possible suggestions that have not occurred to us. So we resolve to suspend our judgement. But this, also, is of course a decision, even if it is not one that leaves us finally satisfied.

We thus have our four stages, or, perhaps, more correctly, our four processes, which we may expect to find in varying forms, and with every conceivable kind of elaboration and complication in any possible act of thinking. For convenience of reference we may name them the stages of Interest, Attention, Suggestion, and Decision.

In very simple cases these stages may follow

immediately, the one after the other, so quickly that they may seem like one process. What is that? We listen. A fire-engine? Yes. But in more complicated problems the process may take hours or days or months. As we have seen, the different stages involved do not, except in very simple cases, follow directly one after the other. They are mixed up with each other; we pass backwards and forwards from one to the other. At a stage in the solution of one problem we find ourselves faced with the necessity of solving a preliminary or subordinate problem, so that our different stages begin afresh, one inside the other, like the stories in *The Arabian Nights*. Yet, however complicated the problem and however elaborately the different processes are intermingled, it seems always possible to distinguish these four processes in some form or other.

Consider a really complicated question like the solution of the problem of unemployment. Obviously something must occur to interest us in this before we begin to think about it. Perhaps we read something or come across a particularly serious individual case or see the long queue of men outside the Labour Exchange. We may, of course, simply say 'How terrible!' and forget about it the moment we have passed. But, if our interest continues, we shall, to begin with, fix our attention upon the fact. If we are at all trained as thinkers we shall begin to analyse the fact, to attend to the different factors involved

in the fact of unemployment. This may suggest a possible solution to us, or several possible solutions. Perhaps, instead of, or combined with, this we remember solutions that have been suggested by other people. Thus, we attend to the fact of unemployment, and see that it involves the absence of demand for the work of the unemployed. Can we provide the demand? Could the State provide the demand? We remember that some writer has suggested this. This suggestion becomes a fresh problem. We attend to the suggestion, and try to picture to ourselves what it involves. This is essentially the same kind of process as attending to the noises outside the window and discriminating between them in order to get an idea of what is happening there. In this case we see that it involves raising the money from some source. Will this do any harm? We remember that there was a lively controversy on this point. Evidently it is a difficult problem. Then, perhaps, we decide to suspend judgement for a bit. Then another suggestion comes into our minds. Somebody has said, we remember, that it is all the fault of Free Trade. We begin to consider that. And so the process goes on. All through we find processes going on similar to those four that we have distinguished. And we do not find anything which could not reasonably be brought under one of these heads.

It seems that this analysis of the stages or processes in thinking has a fairly close relation to

the facts, enough, at any rate, to take it as a working hypothesis. And, that being so, the question arises at what point prejudice comes in. At which stage or stages in the process of thinking do feelings and emotions exercise their influence? It is quite possible that emotional influences may have some effect at every stage. But they appear to act most clearly and certainly at the second stage, and at the passage from the third to the fourth.

1. The second stage is the one that we have named the stage of attention, or, more accurately, of the increase or concentration of attention. It is clear that the direction and the intensity of concentration of attention is a factor which is particularly liable to be influenced by emotions or desires. We often pay attention to this and not to that, or pay more attention to this than to that, because this for, whatever reason, is more pleasing to us than that.

This would, probably, not often have much effect in simple cases, like the interpretation of noises outside, when the objects to which we have got to attend are directly present to the senses. But it is much easier for it to work in the more complicated cases. For there the objects to which we have to attend are largely objects which we have to recall in memory, or sometimes the constructions of the imagination, as when we try to picture to ourselves the way in which a proposed economic or political measure would work out in practice. And it is much easier not to pay

attention to remembered or imagined things than to things actually before us.

Now, it is obvious that the suggestions which come into our minds at the third stage of the thought process are largely determined by what we attend to at the second stage. If we concentrate our attention on one group of facts they will inevitably suggest different conclusions from what would be suggested by concentration on another group of facts or on both groups equally. And this concentration in one direction or the other is always liable to be affected by our likes and dislikes. It may be that among the facts themselves to which we have to attend some may appeal to us more than others, before any suggested conclusions from them have occurred to us. More often, perhaps, it is the suggestions that arise from them which we like or dislike. Then we turn back to the facts and direct our attention on those of them which we know or suspect will lead to conclusions agreeable to us. It is really, therefore, in such cases, the suggested conclusions which we like or dislike. But the effect of this liking or disliking shows itself in the previous stage, by directing our attention towards one part of the evidence from which these conclusions arise, and away from other parts of it.

2. The other point at which emotional influences are particularly liable to make themselves felt is in the final decision to accept or reject one of the suggested answers to the problem.

Some of the facts to which we have attended suggest certain possible conclusions. There is always, therefore, some sort of grounds for accepting these conclusions. On the other hand, if we clearly have only attended to part of the relevant evidence, the proper attitude would seem to be suspension of judgement. Indeed, as we can never certainly know all the relevant facts, there is always some sort of grounds for suspending judgement and refusing to come to a definite decision. What may very easily happen, therefore, is that if we like the conclusion we accept it at once, we quote the facts that do support it as our justification, and refrain from looking for any facts that might tell on the other side.

On the other hand, supposing that the conclusion which seems to emerge from the evidence is displeasing to us, we realize at once the necessity for suspension of judgment. We say, 'Ah! it's not so simple as all that. We must look at the question all round. There's probably something to be said on the other side'. Then we search and search until we find some facts that seem to point to a more agreeable view. And then we feel immediately that the moment has come to make up our minds and arrive at a definite conclusion.

We may say, then, that emotional influences on our thinking act, mainly any rate, by (a) determining the direction of our attention, (b) determining the stage at which we cease to suspend judgment and come to a definite conclusion.

But, of course, we must realize that these two modes of action are not sharply distinct from each other. They generally work together and reinforce each other.

This analysis of the psychological processes involved in the workings of prejudice may help to make, not only the details, but also the general nature of prejudice clearer. We see that its essential and distinguishing symptom is that one among the possible opinions suggested to us is pleasanter or more unpleasant to us than the others; and its adoption or rejection is determined or influenced by that fact. This simple statement of the criterion of prejudice may help us to make some further necessary distinctions between it and various other tendencies which may make for wrong thinking. For it is important to remember that prejudice is not the only cause of errors in thinking. There are, of course, what we may call purely intellectual faults, like ignorance and stupidity, the latter itself a complex thing. But beyond these there are certain impulses or feelings which make for bad thinking, but which should not, strictly speaking, be described as prejudices.

It will be sufficient to mention three typical examples of such tendencies: (1) There is impatience, which makes us rush hastily to a conclusion, without waiting to give proper attention to the evidence. (2) There is its opposite, timidity or excessive caution, which makes us afraid to

arrive at a conclusion, because there might possibly be some evidence that we have not examined yet. Of course, this general tendency, unless greatly exaggerated, is not a fault at all, but a very great virtue. Particularly is this so when it prevents us saying of some conclusion, which, in fact, is very doubtful and at most a balance of probability, 'This conclusion is absolutely certain, and no one who is not a fool or dishonest could doubt it.' We ought to be very shy, in difficult and controversial matters, of beginning any assertion with, 'Every sensible man must agree that' or even, 'There is no doubt that'. A wise timidity ought also to make us determined to examine as thoroughly as possible all the evidence that we can find.

On the other hand, there is a danger of taking up the attitude that, unless we can be absolutely certain beyond a shadow of doubt, we have no right to come to a conclusion at all. We must remember that there are few things, except pure mathematics, in which such certainty is attainable. And if we insist on waiting for it, we shall never think or act at all. We ought always to be prepared to say, 'This is the conclusion which seems to me to follow from the evidence as far as it is available,' while always remembering that with more evidence before us it might be different. This is the attitude that we have to adopt in practical matters, when it is necessary to decide on some course of action. We cannot evade the decision by deciding not to act at all, because that

is still just as much a decision which could only be justified if certain opinions about the situation were true.

(3) Finally, there is laziness, the dislike of the exertion of examining the evidence. This generally produces a similar effect to that produced by impatience, and makes us accept the first conclusion that comes into our heads. No doubt laziness may subsequently come to be a form of prejudice. If we have ever adopted a view, we may cling to it because we do not like the trouble of re-examining the evidence. But in its first effects, like the other tendencies just mentioned, it differs from strict prejudice in this important respect. It does not make any one particular opinion more pleasing to us than the other. In fact, it may lead us equally well to adopt any conclusion, if it happens to be the first that is presented to us.

CHAPTER III  
FORMS OF PREJUDICE—I

OUR notion of prejudice, as of any general fact, cannot be regarded as fully cleared up while we have still only considered its general characteristics. We now require to consider it in some of the particular forms in which it shows itself. That is, we have to attempt some sort of classification of different prejudices.

What this involves it is easy to see, if we consider the general characteristics of prejudice. Its immediate symptom is, as we have seen, that one opinion seems pleasanter to us than another. It is possible that, on occasions, we may like one opinion better than another on purely aesthetic grounds : we may think, so to speak, that it looks prettier. But, whether this is possible or not, it is certainly not very common. In the great majority of cases we like one opinion better than another because it appeals to some already existing tendency or disposition in us. So to classify prejudice really means to classify the different tendencies or dispositions in ourselves which may produce a liking for one opinion rather than another.

But when we look at the problem in this light

we may well quail before the immensity of the task. When we think of all the possible sources of prejudice in this sense which could be present in every individual, they must appear infinite in number. Obviously each individual can form all sorts of pleasant or unpleasant associations with all sorts of things. And each of these may, on occasion, affect our liking or dislike for any particular opinion. Thus, it is said, in one particular case it was discovered that a man had originally been turned towards his strongly-held political opinions because the leader of the opposite party had a vague resemblance to his stepfather, who had treated him unkindly in his childhood. The discovery of connexions like this, and others more fantastic still, is the special pride of the psychoanalysts.<sup>1</sup> But, though things of this sort undoubtedly do happen, there seems good reason to suppose that their extent had been greatly exaggerated. And certainly for some suggested explanations of this kind there is really no evidence at all. At any rate it would be a hopeless task

<sup>1</sup> Among the contributions of psycho-analysis to the understanding of political views which are specially worthy of our attention we may quote, (a) the suggestion that the British policy of the command of the sea has a sex-complex as its basis, a ship being usually regarded as feminine, (b) the explanation of Irish nationalism as due to pre-natal memories of being surrounded by the fluid in the mother's womb, which gives a specially intense feeling of patriotism towards an island, (c) the assertion that the belief in the gold standard is due to the infantile interest in our own excrement, gold being a well-known symbol for the human excrement. This last point should form a valuable argument for the advocates of a managed currency.

to attempt to enumerate all the connexions and associations that could possibly be formed in individual cases.

What we can attempt is to enumerate and classify some of the general tendencies present in a greater or less degree in all normal human beings. We shall probably be justified in supposing that these provide the most frequent causes of the strongest prejudices. But even of these we cannot expect a complete and exhaustive enumeration which will command universal acceptance. Psychological knowledge has not yet attained that state of completeness. Nor need we distress ourselves if we cannot arrange them according to an absolutely logical or scientific system of classification. We may be content if we can enumerate the most important and influential tendencies, and arrange them on any system that seems convenient for the purposes of our present investigation.

One object which arouses some of the strongest and deepest feelings in each one of us is our own self. So we may suggest as the first great group to be considered the impulses, desires, or emotional tendencies centring around the self.

(a) The tendency which we should naturally think of first in this group is the impulse of self-preservation. When this impulse is aroused at all, it is probably the strongest feeling that we normally experience. It is only in occasional and exceptional circumstances that any other feeling can overcome it. But, though of great intensity,

it is of minor interest for our special inquiry, for two reasons. In the first place, in modern civilized societies it is comparatively rarely brought into play at all. Of course, it is aroused in war, though by no means continuously even then. And it is aroused, too, in certain other calamities, such as a famine or a widespread epidemic. But these, fortunately, are not normal conditions for most of us. And, apart from such occasions, we should probably find that few of us had been faced more than once or twice in our lives with a situation in which there was a serious danger of death, if that.

The second reason is more important. When this impulse is aroused, when there is a real danger to life, it is generally met by immediate action directed to keeping alive at all costs. As we have already seen, such immediate action in response to an impulse or desire is not prejudice. There is no question of any influence on opinion, in the way of making one opinion pleasanter than another, or any of the other features that distinguish the working of prejudice. If it is rare for most of us to be in danger of our lives, it must be far rarer to be faced with the choice between two opinions on some general subject, the one of which will involve death and the other life. Such occasions might, presumably, arise in times of religious persecution. In such times we might find some who definitely agreed with the persecutors, some who openly defied them, and some who consciously and wittingly professed agreement with them while

really believing the opposite. And, besides all these, there would probably be many who would be able to persuade themselves, in the manner outlined in the last chapter, that the safest opinion to hold was really the true one. But, apart from such cases, it is normally true that the impulse to self-preservation acts as a direct motive to action, not as an indirect influence on opinions.

(b) We turn, then, to another motive, and one which is very frequently alleged as a possible ground for prejudice. That is the motive of self-interest, a term which is most frequently used with reference to pecuniary benefit or injury. There can be no question at all that the desire for wealth, usually thought of in terms of money, is a very strong motive with the great majority of people. With some people it is probably the strongest motive in their lives. If not the strongest, it is certainly one of the most continuously and frequently active motives in all except an infinitesimal minority, at any rate in Christian countries.

Psychologically, however, the desire for wealth is not a single, simple impulse, and there is room for considerable difference of opinion about the elements of which it is made up. The impulse of self-preservation may enter into it, in so far as, in a modern society, we have to have some money in order to keep alive. But obviously this plays only a small part in the desire for wealth as we know it: few, if any, cease to desire more wealth once they have attained a bare subsistence level.

The desire for comfort and luxury and all the physical pleasures which can be bought with money has also been suggested as the mainspring of the search for wealth. There must be some truth in this. But it can hardly be the whole truth. For ease and comfort seem to be among the first things that people are ready to sacrifice for the sake of gaining riches. It may be doubted, too, whether those who have once attained a certain standard of comfort are very intensely moved by a desire to attain one still higher. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the fear of falling below a standard of comfort once attained is a very much stronger motive.

Others have suggested that the chief motive of the pursuit of wealth is the desire for power. And certainly, whether that is what we chiefly want or not, it is one of the things that great wealth most surely gives us in our present social and industrial system. Or again, perhaps, the desire for reputation plays some part in it, the desire to be looked up to, envied, or admired by other people. Perhaps, again, we are largely influenced by the suggestion of the ideas that are taken for granted in the world around us. We find, from childhood upwards, that almost every one around us is assuming, in their actions, if not always in their words, that a great deal of money is a good and desirable thing to possess, and will open the the door to all sorts of possible enjoyments. Further, we find it widely accepted that the amount

of money gained is a test of success. We are apt to accept such ideas without looking very closely into them. Finally, there are those who would maintain that there is a direct impulse to the accumulation of wealth, an instinct of acquisition, as some would call it, innate in all normal human beings. They would maintain that, however much the other influences might reinforce it, this was the fundamental motive in the pursuit of wealth.

The correct analysis of the elements contained in our desire for wealth is a matter of great practical importance. It affects vitally our decision on many questions connected with the future of our industrial system and, indeed, of the whole organization of society. Is the desire for wealth a native and ineradicable instinct, which will always be there and always have to be taken into account? Or is wealth entirely or mainly desired as a means of satisfying some other impulse, such as the desire for reputation, which might, under a different organization of society be satisfied by other means? The question is of the greatest interest. But for the immediate purpose of our investigation it is of minor importance. For we have to accept it as a fact that, whatever the underlying cause, the love of money is in our world a very strong motive, which is likely to have a great influence both on actions and opinions.

With its direct influence on actions we are not here concerned. Any one who, consciously and directly, made the pursuit of wealth the sole or

main end of his life, might be called selfish or greedy or avaricious, but would not be properly described as prejudiced. Prejudice would come in if his desire for wealth affected his opinions about matters to which it was really irrelevant. For instance, in public and political questions, the ostensible aim of any proposed measure is to advance the welfare of the whole community or of as great a proportion of the community as possible. It is clear that the desire of any particular individual to gain or preserve personal wealth for himself is not relevant to the question whether any proposed measure will or will not make for the greatest welfare of the community as a whole. Yet it is equally clear that this desire of his will influence his answer to that question.

We must remember, once more, if the warning is still needed, that we are not dealing here with people who deliberately advocate a policy that they know to be wrong because it will put money in their own pockets. That is dishonesty, not prejudice. No doubt, cases of this occur, how often it is difficult to say. If we could believe writers like Mr. Belloc, who have to live up to their reputation for cynicism, we should regard it as the normal occurrence. Yet it may be doubted whether such writers do not exaggerate both the malevolence and the clear-sightedness of human beings. The great majority would probably feel it much pleasanter to believe honestly that a policy, which by a convenient accident happened to be

to their own pecuniary interest, was also to the interest of the whole community, and that that was their motive in advocating it. And, once prejudice is allowed to get fairly to work, it is very easy for most people to arrive at the pleasanter conclusion. It is not difficult to profit by one's politics without being deliberately dishonest.

It is generally recognized in certain particularly obvious cases that a pecuniary interest in the decision on a particular question is likely to influence any one's judgment of it. In most public bodies in England there are restrictions on the right of a member to vote on such questions, as, for instance, if it is a question of a public contract being given to a firm in which the member is interested. In the House of Commons a member is liable to penalties if he votes on some questions of this kind. And in the more enlightened municipalities there are similar restrictions. But it is obvious that such definite measures for guarding against the danger are only possible to a very limited degree. When the system of payment of members of the House of Commons was first introduced, some members who were opposed to it thought it a good debating point to invoke this principle against the members who voted in favour of it. But if the principle was going to be applied as thoroughly and consistently as that, it might be invoked with equal force against any member who was a taxpayer and voted in favour of a reduction of income-tax. It would be difficult to

find a more obvious instance of a direct pecuniary interest in the result of a vote.

The fact is that the decision on a great number, probably the vast majority, of public questions affects, directly or indirectly the incomes of those who have to decide them, in Parliament or the municipalities or the electorate. There is always the possibility, indeed in a large number of cases the certainty, that their decision will be influenced by this fact, sometimes admittedly, but far more often unwittingly. The situation is complicated by the fact that we cannot regard this as wholly and absolutely undesirable. Any measure that increases the wealth of the great majority of individuals in the community is, other things being equal, a good measure. And each individual has the right to his fair share of consideration from this point of view. Further, it is often true that one individual is typical of a large number of others, and in such cases he may be justified in taking the benefit to himself as good evidence that it will be also of benefit to all this large number who are in a similar situation. But the very fact that there is thus an extremely limited amount of justification for taking one's personal interest into account makes it all the more easy to be influenced by it far beyond the justified limits. And it is obvious that there are many occasions on which a measure that was to the interest of one individual or a group of individuals would not be to the interest of the great majority.

Another complication is introduced by the fact that, still keeping on the level of purely pecuniary interest, the immediate interest of any group is not necessarily the same as their ultimate interest. This increases the difficulty of judging the value of any measure, and for that very reason opens the door much more widely to the operation of this particular form of prejudice. Suppose that I advocate a measure that benefits me at the expense of sacrifices by other people. Their immediate sacrifice may be too obvious for me to ignore. But it will be very much easier for me to persuade myself that in the long run it will be for their benefit too, and that it is really in their own interests that I should benefit for the moment at their expense. No doubt, most of us have heard, and perhaps used arguments of this kind on many occasions. They should always be scrutinized with the utmost severity, as they are so peculiarly liable to be the result of the prejudice of self-interest.

It is, perhaps, dangerous to draw illustrations from current political controversy. But the same reason that makes it dangerous makes it a particularly good source of illustration, because there, more, perhaps, than anywhere else, can we see prejudice of all kinds working vigorously and continuously. It is necessary, therefore, to look in that direction for at least some of our illustrations. And we can generally be confident that we shall find them equally on both sides in any controversy.

Nothing, obviously, provides such a favourable

field for the influence of this particular form of prejudice as the controversies about the effects of taxation. There have been several careful, scientific discussions of this by economists of different schools. And, though they do not always agree in their final conclusions, there is a considerable measure of agreement on the general conditions of the problem, from which any serious discussion must start. Yet the conclusions that emerge from such discussions are habitually ignored in a great deal of popular controversy on the subject.

Thus it is perfectly clear that the direct and immediate effect of taxation is simply to redistribute income and purchasing power within the community,<sup>1</sup> to make some people worse off and others correspondingly better off. The question of the good or evil done by taxation will therefore depend for its answer on the more remote effects of this ; for instance, on the way in which the purchasing power is used by those who receive it as compared with the way in which it would have been used by those who lose it. Yet we constantly find the question argued on the assumption that money taken in taxation is a dead loss to the community, as much as if the wealth it represented were thrown into the sea as soon as collected. In a letter in one of the leading daily papers, a writer stated that it was obvious that taxation

<sup>1</sup> With the exception, of course, of taxes raised to make payments to other countries, such as the foreign debt. This exception does not seriously affect the main argument.

diminished purchasing power all round, and then added as a hasty afterthought, 'except, of course, among those who benefit from state expenditure'. Considering that the amount accruing to the latter must have corresponded exactly to the amount taken in taxation, the exception seems a considerable one. But it was treated as negligible by the writer of the letter, and ignored in the rest of his argument. This affords a very good instance of how prejudice works, in the way suggested in the previous chapter, by concentrating the attention in one direction. The facts were before the writer of the letter. But by directing his attention almost exclusively on one group of facts he was able to ignore the other side, and leave it out of account in his final conclusions.

Exactly the same thing may be observed on the other side. In the discussions about the reduction of unemployment benefit, those opposed to the reduction might constantly be heard to argue that it would do harm by reducing purchasing power, that is, the purchasing power of the unemployed. So it did, of course, and the fact deserved to be borne in mind. But it gave an entirely false picture to mention this alone, without also pointing out that it increased it correspondingly somewhere else. This kind of argument, like the previous one, illustrates how easy it is to arrive at opposite conclusions by concentrating the attention on the facts—real facts, in both cases—which would naturally suggest the conclusion desired. And it

will hardly be doubted that the great majority, if not all, of those using the former type of argument were payers of direct taxes, while those using the latter type were, if not unemployed themselves, at least potentially interested in unemployment benefit.

(c) There remains for consideration one more form of feeling centring around the self which is of considerable interest. This is the so-called self-regarding or self-assertive tendency. It takes a variety of forms, but all with a recognized kinship. It is the tendency which shows itself in the desire to seem important to others or to feel important oneself, to be admired or respected or at least noticed, to cut a good figure among others and to be able to feel proud of oneself. This is clearly distinct from the other tendencies. It is obviously quite different from the impulse to self-preservation. And, though it may be one of the factors in the development of the desire for riches, it is clearly not coincident with this and shows itself in many ways which do not involve the pursuit of riches at all.

There can be no doubt that, in its different forms, this tendency is a most important influence in the lives of all of us. One great school of modern psychology, that headed by Dr. Adler of Vienna, would regard it as the central and most fundamental motive of all. Particularly in the investigation of abnormal and neurotic cases it has been put forward, with great plausibility, as

the chief principle of explanation. And, though it is probably always a mistake to explain everything in human conduct by one motive, it must be confessed that there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that this is more widely influential than any other single impulse. We may add, also, that it must by no means be regarded as wholly or mainly undesirable. It is natural and inevitable in all of us. And properly disciplined and educated it can be a most valuable influence. We indicate it in such conditions by terms like 'self-respect', or 'proper pride'.

It is not, however, so obviously important for our special subject. It resembles rather the impulse to self-preservation in this. That is to say, it acts more often as a direct motive to action, for instance in the form of ambition, noble or ignoble, than as an indirect influence in the formation of opinion about matters to which it is properly irrelevant. There are a great many problems on which our opinions would have no relation to this impulse. For instance, in economic questions, such as those just discussed, probably most of us would be touched in our pockets to some degree by the adoption of one view or the other. But it would be very rarely that we were affected directly in our self-regarding feelings. One view would not minister to our desire to feel important any more than another.

Nevertheless, there are ways in which it may affect the formation of our opinions. One way

in which it works is, not by influencing our original adoption of any view, but by influencing our attitude towards a view once we have adopted it. Once we have adopted a view it always puts a certain degree of obstruction in the way of changing it. It makes us dislike to admit that we have been wrong. And so we cling to the view once adopted, more particularly if we have had any share in the original formation of it. Socrates said that the greatest service one man could do for another was to show him where he had been wrong and to help to put him right. But this is not a service for which many of us feel very grateful. Our first feeling nearly always in such cases is a greater or lesser degree of resentment, or at least an impulse of self-defence. We find it difficult without considerable effort to consider new evidence and arguments strictly on their merits. Most of us would find ourselves, to begin with, much more anxious to discover the answer to them than to consider what their real weight was.

There is another, though very closely connected form which this impulse may take. This arises if some one suggests, from their diagnosis of any situation, that what is wrong with it is wholly or partly our fault, that we have been doing something badly or making mistakes. Of course, in big questions of public interest such a situation is not likely to arise for most of us in our individual capacity. It would only arise, in such questions, for some prominent statesman or political leader.

For such men, indeed, it frequently does arise. We often hear it argued that the whole trouble, whatever it is, arises from what some prominent political leader or leaders did at such and such a time. We do not, however, find the statesman concerned very ready to admit the truth of the accusation, or even to admit that there may be something in it. It creates something of a sensation in public life when a statesman admits that he has been wrong on some important issue, even when the admission refers to a time many years back. If it does happen, he may be praised for his courage, at least by his political opponents. But he is just as likely to be derided as a weakling. It is curious that in politics, unlike any other department of life, it has come to be regarded as a sign of weakness for a statesman to change his mind. At any rate, it seems to be accepted as a good point scored against his present views if his opponents can quote statements of his in the opposite sense made in previous years. And most public men, when faced with such statements, instead of saying simply, as the Duke of Wellington once did, 'I have changed my mind,' labour to explain that there is really no change of view at all.

In smaller questions similar motives may act with any of us. For instance, we find not uncommonly that, if a man does not get on very well in his profession, he will suggest all sorts of explanations rather than admit that he is not very competent at it. He may talk about conspiracies to

keep him down. He may say that it is only private influence that gets people on. Or that it needs vulgar push or unscrupulous dishonesty, and that he is too refined or too honest to succeed. If he is unsuccessful as an artist or a writer, he may talk about the low standards of public taste, or explain how advertisement succeeds better than honest work or that success is a matter of getting in with the right coterie. There is often a lot of truth in such general propositions. But we should be wise to demand very strong proof that there is nothing wrong with the man himself before accepting them as an explanation of failure in any particular case.

Even in public affairs many of us may find these motives at work in us, when it is a question of criticizing a whole group or profession to which we belong. Here it is complicated and intensified by the feeling of loyalty for and solidarity with the whole group, a feeling about which there will be a good deal to say later. But there can be no doubt that there is a considerable amount of personal feeling here too. For instance, in a discussion of our industrial difficulties we often hear it suggested that part of the trouble arises from a lack of efficiency in the conduct and organization of many of our businesses. But even to suggest such a thing to some business men would be to invite an explosion. 'You think you can show me how to run my own business!' and so on and so on. Very similar results may sometimes be obtained

by suggesting to a skilled workman, say a brick-layer, that there is some evidence that his particular work could be done more efficiently by a change in the accustomed methods. The difficulty that the industrial psychologist often meets with in getting his results considered seriously either by employers or workmen is an illustration of this.

There is another and more subtle way in which this motive may work, which deserves a passing mention. Most of us tend to take ourselves, somewhat idealized perhaps, as a model of the kind of person that we ought to aim at producing. We tend to advocate a policy or organization of society that is most likely to produce people like ourselves. We may sometimes feel, for instance, in reading Mr. H. G. Wells' brilliant constructions of ideal societies that his test of a satisfactory state of society is that it should produce people as like as possible to Mr. H. G. Wells. The same tendency may show itself sometimes in much cruder forms. We sometimes hear reports of wealthy, self-made men who hold forth about the time wasted in education. 'I left school at fourteen' or 'I never had a university education. And look at me!' The last sentence is, perhaps, more often implied than expressed.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, we may mention one more temptation to prejudice, arising from the same motive, which we may call the pride of the specialist. By this

<sup>1</sup> Doubtless the same tendency may sometimes have something to do with the defence of the value of a university education by those who have received it.

is meant the readiness to embrace any view which tends to exalt the importance and value of our own special line of skill. It is said that if a man with an obscure physical trouble consults six different medical specialists he is likely to receive six different diagnoses each tracing it to the particular speciality of the doctor in question. The idea has received amusing expression at the hands of Bernard Shaw. Precise experimental evidence for it is wanting. But those who went through the war will, doubtless, remember during their period of training frequent visits from specialist instructors in various branches of training. Such visits generally included a preliminary lecture. And we became thoroughly accustomed to hearing, according to the speciality of the instructor, that the war would finally be won by musketry work, bombing, bayonet-fighting, or even by the stamina and endurance that only physical training could give.

We must remember that this tendency may often arise, in part, not from a desire to exalt the importance of our own knowledge so much as from the limitation and concentration of this knowledge. Of course, what each person is most familiar with naturally tends to strike his attention first, and so to suggest a certain view. The test of whether this factor or the self-regarding tendency is more prominent in any particular case might be looked for in the way in which any suggestion of an opposite view is received. If the person in question

welcomes this as a new idea and shows a readiness to examine it, we should probably come to one conclusion. If he shows signs of annoyance or begins to look at once for objections to it, we should come to the other.

CHAPTER IV  
FORMS OF PREJUDICE—II

**A**FTER having dealt with prejudices arising from feelings towards oneself, it might seem natural to go on to the contrasted group of those arising from feelings towards other people. This will be treated later. But, before going on to it, there is another group of prejudices which does not seem to fit very well under either of these heads. We must therefore take the risk of shocking the logicians by changing our principle of division and give this a separate treatment to itself.

This group consists of the prejudices due to the working of Habit. Habit, in its direct effect, could hardly be brought under the head either of emotional tendencies centring around the self or those centring around other people. It may, in fact, exercise its influence equally in our attitude towards ourselves, and in our attitude towards others. Its claim to a separate treatment is strengthened, also, by the extremely important part it plays in our lives. Common experience agrees with the investigations of psychologists on this point. Most psychologists begin their treatment of this subject by quoting with approval

the dictum of the Duke of Wellington, 'Habit second nature? Habit is ten times nature!'

The law of habit, the general account of its working, may be formulated in simple, popular language thus: The more often we do a thing in a certain way, the easier it becomes to do it in that way, and the more difficult to do it in any other way. And, other things being equal, the more difficult a thing is, the more unpleasant it is. Doubtless, just because it is expressed in a short and simple formula, this account is not perfectly complete and accurate. The physiologist or neurologist, for instance, would probably give us a different account in terms of the nervous system. He might speak of nervous impulses passing along a particular track in this system, and so making it easier for subsequent impulses to pass along the same track. Even from the purely psychological point of view a full account would necessitate many qualifications and further details. But, for the purposes of the present discussion, this simple statement gives us what it is essential to keep in mind about the working of habit.

Its working is best illustrated by simple physical processes, like shaving or dressing in the morning, which by constant repetition become almost automatic and go on their course unaffected by consciousness. Or we could take examples from other apparently simple processes like walking (or dancing or riding a bicycle or driving a car), and show how they really involve a complicated

process of co-ordinating muscular movements, which has to be learnt at first and eventually becomes automatic. We find vastly more complicated instances of it in the case of professional habits, the habits of doing one's life's work in a certain way, or in habits of speech or habits of thought. Some of these, particularly the last, would demand a very subtle and careful psychological analysis to describe fully. But, though so much more complicated, they all have the same fundamental facts as their basis. And, in any case, our purpose in the present investigation demands that we look forward to effects of habit rather than backward to the ultimate factors into which it can be analysed. For this purpose the simple account already given will probably prove sufficient. If more detail is required, it can be provided when the time comes.

The instances already given are sufficient to show that habit is, in general, a very good thing : it is, in fact, absolutely necessary for the conduct of our lives. To be entirely unable to form habits is one of the distinguishing marks of the idiot. Habit saves us endless trouble, and releases for the important things of life an enormous amount of energy which would otherwise be wasted on trivial details. We can easily imagine what our situation would be if we had to think out afresh each time all the movements involved in walking, or in any of the other familiar processes which we have mentioned as instances of habit. But

habit, like other good things, can on occasion get out of hand and extend its influence more widely than is justifiable. And one of the ways in which this can happen is when it begins to affect our opinions about subjects to which it is properly irrelevant. It is then that it falls within the scope of the present discussion.

Of course, the simple physical processes that we have been considering, like walking or dressing, are not likely to have any serious effect on the formation of our opinions. That arises when the influence of habit extends itself to the more complicated processes at higher mental levels. And the most obvious and most important form in which this shows itself is in the form of professional conservatism.

The tendency to professional conservatism is probably one of the most certain facts that we know about human nature. There can be no question that the longer any one works at a particular trade or profession on particular lines the easier it becomes to go on on these lines and the more effort is required to change. Taking effort is, normally and at any rate in its first effects, unpleasant. It follows, therefore, that any view or belief which involves the necessity of a change in accustomed methods and conditions of working will always tend, in the absence of any very strong countervailing motive, to seem unpleasant at first sight. So our first impulse will naturally be an impulse of resistance to any such suggestion. Of

course in different individuals and in different circumstances the strength of this impulse will differ considerably. But every one is influenced by it to a greater or lesser degree, and the great majority to a very considerable degree.

We may note here how the tendency to professional conservatism, owing to the working of habit, is reinforced by other tendencies, some of which have been already mentioned. There is, for instance, the sense of loyalty to the professional group to which we belong, and the consequent reluctance to separate ourselves from it in any degree by a suggestion of a departure from its established methods. And there is our own self-esteem, which makes us dislike to admit, even by implication, that we have been doing things in the wrong way. When all these combine together they naturally make the general tendency to professional conservatism peculiarly strong.

It is really hardly necessary to give detailed evidence of the strength and importance of this tendency. It is so wide-spread and familiar that it must have come under the notice of every one. Any one who keeps his eyes and ears open will read or hear complaints of it almost daily, not to speak of what he may observe in his own trade or profession. And, to go outside our own experience at the present time, we can find numerous examples in history of how reforms in some profession, which have subsequently been universally recognized as desirable, were fiercely opposed by the members

of the profession when first introduced. They have generally been brought about by the intervention of some external authority, sometimes with the aid of a minority within the profession, less under the influence of habit than the rest.

It is easy to think of instances of this. Law reform was opposed by the majority of lawyers, and was brought about, so far as it has been brought about, by the pressure of outside opinion under the influence of thinkers like Bentham and popular writers like Dickens, with his famous picture of the proceedings in the Court of Chancery. The reforms which made an efficient army possible, including the abolition of the preposterous system of the purchase of commissions, were forced on unwilling army officers by Cardwell, a civilian minister. It needed the action of Parliament to sweep away some of the worst abuses in the organization of the Church of England. More generally, we can find an almost continuous resistance of skilled craftsmen to any suggestion of new methods of carrying on their craft. In all these cases, by the way, we can see clearly how the conservative influence of habit was reinforced by the other influences, such as loyalty to the group, to which reference had already been made.

There are several points of interest to be observed in considering the working of this tendency in practice. One most important point is that the influence of professional conservatism does not always and necessarily extend over the whole

of the man's professional activities. He may be extremely conservative in one part of them, and not at all in other parts. The intensity of any one's professional conservatism is by no means necessarily proportionate to its extent. In particular, intense conservatism and dislike of the thought of change in the general conditions of the work is quite compatible with a great deal of initiative and originality in details. No doubt some of the army officers who most bitterly opposed the changes in general organization showed plenty of initiative in their detailed working of the old system, in the handling of their men, for instance, or even in their tactics and strategy. It is clear that individuals differ widely in the extent of their professional conservatism, as well as in its intensity. They differ, that is to say, in the amount of their professional activities which they come to take for granted as a mere matter of habit, and the amount which they keep under conscious control as a matter for individual initiative in thought and action.

In the most extreme cases, we find the influence of habit extending over the whole of a man's work. He then becomes what we call merely a routine worker, incapable of anything outside his accustomed daily round. We are all familiar with the type. But the countless intermediate stages between this and the opposite extreme, though just as common, are apt to escape notice. That is, because we assume without any warrant

that initiative and originality are qualities which either show themselves in everything or not at all. In other words, we suppose that they differ in different individuals purely in intensity and not in extent. This supposition is, as we have seen, entirely baseless. We can find many other instances, besides those already suggested, of men who show the greatest initiative and originality in working under certain definite conditions or applying a general system to particular cases. And, at the same time, we may find that they take the general system or conditions absolutely for granted, so that they could not contemplate the possibility of altering them. They are unable to conceive working under any other set of conditions, and would feel absolutely at sea if required to do so.

If we reflect, we shall find nothing surprising in this. In fact it is entirely natural. It is just because such a man takes so much for granted and never criticizes or even reflects upon the general conditions or the system under which he works that his mind is free to apply all its energy and powers of initiative to working the system in practical details. So it is very common to find that the most efficient and successful worker within the limits of a particular system is the very last person to be able to take a detached view of the system as a whole, to consider its merits and demerits impartially, and to do justice to possible alternatives. It is because he has given so little thought to the general character of the system

that he has been so successful in working it. And conversely it is because he has given so much attention to working within the limits of the system that he finds it so difficult to take a critical view of the system as a whole.

At the risk of trenching on delicate ground, we may suggest that this reveals the profound fallacy underlying the idea frequently put forward that the successful business man, merely because he is a successful business man, is likely to have ideas of any special value on the wider questions of economics and politics. The very fact of his success in business means, in most cases, that he has devoted all or nearly all his attention to working a general industrial system which he found there and to which he has become habituated. In the field of politics, therefore, where it may often be a duty to question or criticize the whole system and to consider the possibility of modifying it, or even of replacing it altogether by a more desirable alternative, the successful business man is likely to find himself quite at sea and to let himself be guided by pure prejudice. It is a fact that, on the whole, considering their opportunities, their power, and the prestige that they enjoy, particularly in a country like England, the leaders of big business have been singularly barren of useful constructive contributions to political and social problems.

The same differences in the extent of conservatism may be found within the bounds of a single

business or other organization. We may find a man who is extremely efficient at doing his appointed work within the organization, but who would be the last person in the world to whom one would look for any useful suggestions towards a general reorganization of the whole business. In general, the longer he has been accustomed to work under one system the more difficult he finds it to face the possibility of change. It is one of the great practical problems that every organization has to face how to get the advantages of knowledge and experience without the danger of professional conservatism. Too often the long experience, of which so many of those who have it are inclined to boast, has merely resulted in a mind incapable of receiving any new idea.

We may find the general tendency making itself felt to a still wider extent, an extent so wide that it becomes no longer appropriate to speak of it as *professional* conservatism. Just as we may come to take for granted and make a habit of an industrial, legal, educational, or other system, so we may come to make a habit of certain conditions of life in general, a whole social and political system or a system of ideas. We are surrounded from infancy by a vast body of customary modes of behaviour and thought, which we absorb as a rule without question. These constitute the customs and conventions and fashions of our whole age, our country, our district, our social class, or any other society to which we belong.

There is a great effort needed to modify or get rid of any of these. And, unless there is some very strong motive at work in this direction, the effort will prove unpleasant, and will be avoided, if possible.

There is therefore, always and everywhere, a strong tendency to dislike any questioning or criticism of accepted ideas or customs or institutions. This will always tend to produce a prejudice in favour of any view which will allow us to relapse into the ease and comfort of familiar ideas and habits. It is not necessary to labour this point. It is too obvious to need argument, especially if we extend our survey to other ages and other lands, and do not fix our minds on our own age and our own country alone.

Having said so much, we may perhaps venture on a word of comfort to the more conservative members of the older generation. It is possible that a reaction against this tendency may produce prejudices on the other side. There is no doubt that among certain people at certain times established customs and conventions may come into particularly acute conflict with new impulses and new ideas, aroused perhaps by some sharp change in conditions, or any other influence. Those who feel the conflict particularly strongly, especially the rising generation, are apt sometimes to go to the opposite extreme, to dislike an idea just because it is generally accepted, and to welcome an idea just because it is, or is thought to be, new. Of

course, the conservatively minded will always be liable to bring this accusation against any one whose mind is open to new ideas at all. And when we reflect that, on the whole, the great weight of the natural tendencies of our physical nature is on the side of conservatism, we shall be very slow to believe the accusation in any particular case. But, none the less, we must recognize that it may, on occasions, be justified.

We cannot do without customs and conventions. They are as necessary and desirable as individual habits. But occasional revolts against them are equally necessary and desirable. And, when such revolts occur, it is inevitable that there should be a certain amount of exaggeration in them. But the impulses to revolt are much rarer than the impulses to remain the same, and probably partly for that reason, much less dangerous. The older people in authority take a very heavy and serious responsibility in trying to check these when they arise. The attempt at repression is one of the chief causes of their exaggeration. Left to themselves, they inevitably sink down into a new set of accepted ideas and conventions. There is some hope that these may be better. There is also a possibility that they may be worse. But the members of the older generation who find themselves inclined to think them worse would do well to bear in mind their own inevitable prejudice.

One word remains to be said. Professional and other conservatism should be realized and guarded

against. But at some times and in some degree it may have to be accepted as an inescapable fact. We may, on occasions, come to the conclusion that a novel scheme may be desirable in itself, but unlikely to be workable just because of the conservatism of those who will have to work it. That might on occasion be a sign not of prejudice but of clear-sighted recognition of facts. Yet we should remember the possibility of prejudice, and always be very slow to admit this. Perhaps the highest possible development of impartiality would be if we recognized that the scheme could be and ought to be worked but that we ourselves had lost the adaptability necessary to work it. If we could then bring ourselves to stand aside and leave it to the younger men we should have given the supreme proof of our freedom from this particular prejudice.

There is one other form of prejudice which may conveniently be treated under this general head. That is, the prejudice arising from the use of words. The meaning of words is, of course, a matter of the association between the word and some idea or fact. And this association is itself a particular form of habit. With many words we may come to associate, not merely ideas or facts, but also certain feelings, pleasant or unpleasant. And sometimes with some people, the idea or ideas may become vaguer and vaguer, until there is little but the feeling left associated with the word in their minds. We have only to think of the

emotional associations of words like Liberty, Democracy, or—a more apposite illustration at the present day—Bolshevism, to see how effective the mere use of these words can be in influencing opinion. The employment of the question-begging epithet is one of the great arts of propaganda.

## CHAPTER V

### FORMS OF PREJUDICE—III

WE now turn to the last great group of prejudices with which it is necessary to deal. That is the prejudices arising from emotional tendencies directed towards other people. Here again we cannot expect to do more than pick out a few typical examples. A complete enumeration and classification is out of the question.

When it is a question of emotional attitudes towards individuals the situation is particularly complex. It is obvious that there is an almost infinite variety possible in the feelings that we have towards all the different individuals of whom we know. And each of these feelings may predispose us to receive favourably or unfavourably views with which the individual in question is associated. One obvious instance is the influence of our parents and family generally, either by way of attraction or repulsion, on the formation of our views. It is sometimes assumed that the most common and natural attitude in any member of a younger generation is an attitude of revolt against the opinions of the parents. But, as a matter of fact, this assumption seems more often verified in literature than in real life. It is significant that at the present

time, with one exception, all the children of prominent statesmen who are themselves in politics are to be found, not only in the same party, but in the same fraction of the same party as their fathers.

Again we may develop a personal liking and admiration for a leading politician, if we know him—and sometimes perhaps even more strongly if we do not know him—which will incline us to swallow almost any idea that he puts forward. Party propagandists know the value of ‘the little personal touches’ which make large numbers of the electorate think of their political leaders as intimate friends. In such cases it is not always easy to draw the line between following a leader because of our emotional affection for him and the perfectly rational procedure of paying special attention to his opinions because we have found really good reasons for respecting his judgement. The two, in fact, very often may be combined. To decide which attitude was most prominent in any particular case would require a careful scrutiny of the origins and development of the views of the particular person concerned.

If we do not attempt to bring in any reference to the different individuals towards whom different feelings may be felt, and content ourselves with trying to classify the feelings or emotional attitudes by themselves, the task is easier. Most modern psychological text-books attempt a classification of emotions and emotional tendencies and sentiments and other feelings. But it

cannot be said that an absolutely satisfactory basis of classification has been found. At any rate, no such ambitious task will be attempted here. A few instances only will be given by way of illustration.

It is easy to see the general importance of this branch of our subject. Our moral character largely consists of our emotional attitudes towards other people, whether towards individuals or towards human beings in general. We should all recognize that some emotional attitudes were good and some bad, or perhaps, more strictly, that some were better and some worse. But we must be careful of paying too much attention to this moral distinction in connexion with our special subject. From our point of view any emotional attitude may equally prejudice our judgement, if it is allowed to intrude where it is irrelevant to the question at issue. If a man is prejudiced by a good emotional attitude he is, no doubt, on a higher moral plane than a man who is prejudiced by a bad emotional attitude. But both are equally likely to be wrong in their judgements on the matter under consideration. The ideal is, of course, to develop good emotional attitudes and discourage bad ones, but not to allow either to interfere with our thinking about questions to which they are not relevant.

Thus, for instance, benevolence or good will towards our fellow-beings is undoubtedly among the highest human virtues. It should never be

discouraged in itself. But it is beyond question that it may, on occasion, act as a prejudice: it may, for instance, make us unwilling to admit certain facts which really are facts and ought to be recognized. Of course, we must remember that it is very easy to accuse other people of this, and the accusation is probably made far more often than is really justifiable. We ought to be extremely suspicious of any one who was too ready with facile accusations against other people of excessive benevolence. On the whole, the majority of people are not benevolent enough, a fact which may equally prejudice their thinking. Most of us could afford a considerable increase in benevolence without serious risk of doing our opinions any harm. But none the less the fact remains that there are occasions on which benevolence may unduly influence the judgment.

For illustrations of this we must turn once more to controversial topics. And one instance that readily suggests itself is one that is concerned with the special case of benevolence towards animals. The working of this may be studied in the controversies that appear from time to time in the Press on the subject of vivisection.

There are anti-vivisectionists who would say that no results that could possibly be gained, either in the way of the extension of scientific knowledge or the diminution of disease, could justify the deliberate infliction of suffering involved

in experiments on living animals. This is a question of ultimate values about which argument, at least direct argument, is very difficult. Such a view, if it were consistently held, would demand our respect, whether we agreed with it or not. It certainly could not be called prejudice, if it were adopted with the full realization of all it involved. When we have got to this point, our emotional attitudes do become relevant to the decision, and both sides will be equally moved by them.<sup>1</sup>

But when it comes to the question of what scientific and medical results actually have been attained or are likely to be attained by vivisection, the position is very different. This is a question of fact, and emotional attitudes, such as the dislike of inflicting pain, are entirely irrelevant. But few people (apart from those immediately concerned in the controversy) could doubt, after reading the discussions, that a good many anti-vivisectionists have allowed their opinions on the question of fact to be governed by their emotional attitude. They seem ready to accept the slightest evidence that will help them to believe that no results of any value have been attained and to ignore the much greater mass of evidence of all kinds on the other

<sup>1</sup> I do not wish to enter into a discussion of the nature of our moral judgements. But it is, perhaps, advisable to say here that the above sentence is not intended to imply that our moral judgements are nothing but emotional attitudes, though I believe that certain special emotional attitudes are always involved in them, as an essential element. For a further discussion see Appendix.

side. It seems clear that, in many cases, they believe that no results have been attained, just because they want to believe it, and do not want to believe that inflicting pain could possibly produce good results.

We could doubtless find many other instances of the working of this tendency. But this must suffice, after the warning already given has been repeated. We must never forget that prejudice of this kind is, at the worst, the misapplication of a good quality. Even if excess of benevolence may upset the judgement on some points, the people who err in that direction are an element in society that we could not afford to do without. It is their work to prevent us from becoming too readily indifferent to the infliction of pain, which for the majority is a far greater danger.

There is another form of prejudice arising from benevolence which, while still amiable, is less excusable than the last. That is when it takes the form of a strong impulse always to believe the best of other people. When it is a question, for instance, of finding an explanation of something that has happened, this leads us always to prefer an explanation which presents as many people as possible in the most favourable light. Or again, when it is a question of the future effects of some action or proposed measure, it makes us jump to the conclusion that every one concerned is going to react to it in the most admirable way possible.

This general attitude is one to which the term 'sentimentality' may most appropriately be applied. We may sentimentalize in this sense over human beings in general, or over a particular section of the human race. There are people in this country, for instance, who find it absolutely impossible to believe that Englishmen in other lands—they seem less certain about those in more immediate contact with themselves—could ever be guilty of any misconduct. Or, to take an instance within the country, our police force is a very common object of this form of sentimentality, at any rate in the upper and middle classes. Any one who remembers the Savidge case will recall how almost the whole of the public were divided between those who grew sentimental over the position of Miss Savidge, and those who grew sentimental over Inspector Collins and his colleagues. As there was really no evidence to decide between the rival accounts given in that case, it was all the easier for each of us to let his decision follow the direction of his prevailing sentimentality.

Sentimentality, in this sense, is undoubtedly a common cause of prejudice. But it is certainly no greater or more frequent a cause than the opposite tendency, the desire to think the worst of people, and the liking for any view which involves an unfavourable account of people's motives or unfavourable expectations of their future conduct. There is no absolutely appropriate name for this

quality. 'Cynicism', perhaps, comes near it, but for the fact that many people take an accusation of cynicism as a form of compliment, which would be most inappropriate in this connexion. People smarting under an accusation of sentimentality and anxious to find an equally irritating rejoinder sometimes make use of the phrase 'cheap cynicism', which generally produces its effect, though the precise implications of the adjective remain obscure. But, whatever we call it, the tendency is there. It must, in passing, be distinguished from genuine pessimism, which indicates, rather, believing the worst of people, and disliking doing it, so that the pessimist is really unhappy about it. This is very rare, though it does occur. Most people who think badly of others get a great deal of enjoyment from doing so.

It is interesting to speculate on the fundamental causes of this tendency. It can hardly be taken in itself as a simple innate tendency, independent of anything else, a pure malevolence, a wish for people to be bad or a hatred of the human race. We may suspect that the true misanthrope is a creation of melodrama. At any rate, he is very rare, whereas the particular form of prejudice that we are considering is very common. It seems probable that, in most cases, it takes its rise from a tendency which we have already considered, the tendency to self-assertion or self-glorification, and the desire to flatter one's own self-esteem. It is

easy to see how this would make any one anxious to believe the worst of other people, especially if his own motives were not particularly high. If he can succeed in persuading himself of the general badness of humanity, he can get all the satisfaction of feeling himself superior to others without the trouble and effort of really becoming so. It will minister further to his self-esteem by giving him a pleasing sense of his own acuteness and shrewdness in being able to see through the pretences of others.

This is undoubtedly a very common form of prejudice which shows itself in large and small matters alike. Its symptoms are familiar and easily recognizable. We have good grounds for suspecting it whenever we find any one bringing constant accusations of sentimentality against others, or speaking of himself as a realist, or boasting of looking facts in the face, of having no illusions and seeing people as they really are, or using other similar phrases.

There are many other actual and possible sources of prejudice of this kind, of which it is unnecessary to mention more than one or two. Some people, particularly those who dislike being contradicted, would attach importance to the instinct of pugnacity, which in matters of opinion takes the form of the impulse to contradict and disagree with any views put forward. But it is easy to exaggerate the influence of this. Many reported cases turn out to be merely an expression

of the annoyance of the person reporting them at having his own views challenged. And we often find on inspection that the apparent readiness to contradict applies only to views put forward by a certain person or views of a certain kind, which we dislike from some other motive. In any case, unless it is carried to a very extreme degree, the general tendency to criticize and challenge views put forward is a thoroughly healthy tendency, if it is applied to all views impartially. The vast majority need to develop this tendency in themselves as far as it can be developed. For it is our great protection against the far more urgent danger of the opposite tendency, the tendency to accept too readily what we are told without question or criticism.

This tendency is certainly of the greatest importance. It is sometimes discussed by psychologists under the heading of Suggestion and Suggestibility. And it often seems to be regarded as a rather mysterious tendency, deep-rooted and inborn in our human nature. Yet there is some evidence for supposing that, in the main at any rate, it is simply a special case of the working of habit, and of a habit, moreover, which in its beginnings is a very sensible one to develop. Very early in our lives we have to learn to rely on and make use of the information of other people. We get into the habit of normally accepting what they tell us without question, because life would be far too short to test for ourselves every statement we

heard. If I am getting ready to go out, and some one, who is looking out of the window, calls out to me, 'It's raining,' I do not suspend operations while I go carefully into the evidence on which he bases this statement. I simply pick up my umbrella. In simple things like that it is our normal procedure to accept and act on the information given us by other people. But a habit, once acquired, is not always very discriminating in its action, and it is quite natural that it should extend itself to cases in which this ready belief is unwise or mischievous.

Whatever its origin, there can be no doubt about the extent of this tendency. Simple and repeated assertion, without proof, is part of the regular stock-in-trade, both of the advertiser and the political propagandist. It is used with particular effect by the popular Press. When we have heard or read a statement often enough it is likely, unless we are very wide awake, to become fixed in our minds in the form, 'Everybody says' that the policy of such-and-such a party will ruin the country,<sup>1</sup> or that so-and-so's lozenges are a sovereign cure for influenza. The number of

<sup>1</sup> A shrewd observer has suggested to me that it is generally much easier for a politician to get the suggestion accepted that the opposite party will ruin the country than that his own party will save it. I think this is very likely true. But I am not sure what conclusions follow from it. Perhaps it means that we have got at least one stage on towards a wholesome scepticism. Or perhaps it only means that, for reasons suggested earlier, we are more ready to think ill of people than to think well of them.

beliefs that are accepted on no more evidence than that 'everybody says so', or even that 'the papers say', must run into enormous figures. The skilful use of this method has been developed, in some quarters, as a special study of its own.

Widespread though it is, there is still a possibility of exaggerating the influence of this tendency. For it is necessary to distinguish it from another kind of case, which in its external effects looks very like it, but in its origin is quite different. That is when we accept an assertion without proof because what the assertion says is what we want to believe, for some other reason. We are not here yielding to the influence of suggestion. It is not because 'everybody says so' that we believe it; but we take the 'everybody says so' as the evidence which justifies us in believing what we already want to believe.

There remains one emotional tendency directed towards others which demands a special treatment of its own. That is the emotional tendency or the complex of emotional tendencies centring round the groups or collections of people to which we belong, which we may speak of for convenience as Group Loyalty. We are all, of course, members of countless different groups, some highly organized, some not organized at all, some which we join voluntarily, and some in which we merely find ourselves. We all of us belong to a family, a social class, a city or district, and a country or

nation.<sup>1</sup> Nearly all of us belong to a trade or profession, which may or may not be organized. Most of us are associated with some organized body, like a business firm or an educational institution. Most of us, too, belong to a church and to a political party. And we may be members of numerous voluntary societies with more limited aims.

It seems one of the most certain generalizations about human nature that we know, that membership of any group, the mere fact that it is our group, tends to arouse a sentiment of loyalty to this group. Loyalty is a complex of emotional tendencies involving in varying proportions a feeling of affection towards the group, a desire for its advantage, a pride in it, and a wish to be able to regard it as superior to other groups, anger and resentment at any attack on it, hostility to other groups which are in opposition to it, and other allied feelings. When we say we 'tend' to feel like that, we do not mean necessarily that we actually do feel it for every group to which we belong. We mean that all normal human beings will feel it, unless the feeling is driven out or suppressed by some strong, positive counter-influence. Thus, for instance, we may feel so very intensely about one group that there is no room left for similar feelings to any other group. Or two groups to which we belong may come into conflict with

<sup>1</sup> In some cases, like a city or a country, certain physical features, landscapes, or buildings may become associated in our minds with the group and share in our affection for it. This does not, however, affect the main argument.

each other, and we may resolve the conflict in our own minds by transferring our loyalty entirely to one. Or if a group to which we belong treats us particularly badly, our love for it may turn to hate. Such positive counter-influences may work in any of us. But, on the whole, they are exceptional, and the great majority actually do feel like that, though in very varying degrees, to all their different groups.

If any one wants experimental evidence of this let him place himself in a position in which he has to listen to hostile criticisms of any group to which he belongs by members of another group, and then attend carefully to his own feelings. Unless he is a very exceptional person, he will find that he cannot listen to this with quite the calmness that he listens to criticisms of a group with which he has no connexion at all. He will feel, if only in a slight degree, a certain sense of resentment and impulse to stand up for his group. Then let him get some one who is a member of a particular group, say a graduate of a particular university, or a native of a particular city or country, to sing the praises of that group and compare it favourably with other universities or cities or countries. He will at once find that the immediate reaction of other people present will be to say at once, 'Oh, of course he's prejudiced. He was at Oxford himself,' or 'He is a Manchester man (or an Irishman) himself.' That is to say, we all take it for granted, as a result of general experience, that

any one will tend to be prejudiced in favour of any group to which he belongs.

It is easy to see the chief ways in which prejudice based on group loyalty will affect our opinions. It will make us want to accept any view which presents our own group in a favourable light or makes for the interests of our own group or its members, as compared with the members of other groups. It will also make us anxious to agree with our own group, particularly if it is a group like a church or a political party which has a special connexion with opinion and belief. We shall like to feel ourselves at one with it, and be reluctant to cut ourselves off from it by disagreement or opposition. It will arouse a feeling of resentment against any criticism of or opposition to our group. We shall feel this against members of other groups, and even more strongly, perhaps, against members of our own group who break away from it or even criticize it. Such members will be sure to find themselves denounced as disloyal or unpatriotic. Sometimes, if we have become accustomed to think of another group as in opposition to ours, we shall want to disagree with this group almost as much as we want to agree with our own, and we shall welcome any view which is unfavourable or detrimental to it. All these things can be verified by a candid observer in his own daily experience.

It would be impossible here to attempt an enumeration of the different groups to which we

can belong. One of special importance to most of us is our country or nation. It is not necessary to insist on the strength of most people's feeling towards this group. We call it patriotism and are generally inclined to attach a special value to it as distinguished from our feeling towards other groups. There are undoubtedly strong reasons for this. But, considered simply as a psychological fact of experience, the feeling is no different in kind from the feeling towards any other group to which we belong. And its influence on opinion is precisely the same. No one pretends that it is easy to judge impartially on a question at issue between our own country and another. There are, indeed, some people who would say that it is wrong to try to do so.<sup>1</sup>

One group of particular importance for our subject, because of its direct connexion with opinion on public questions, is the political party. It is of great importance to realize that, once we attach ourselves to any party, it is absolutely inevitable that a considerable degree of group loyalty towards the party will arise in our minds

<sup>1</sup> I remember a senior officer during the war who was particularly vehement in his denunciation of the Germans and all their works. But when he was told of a German pacifist writer who agreed with him in some of his criticisms of German actions, his wrath turned with almost equal vehemence against this writer, whom he denounced as an unpatriotic traitor to criticize his own country. It is difficult to say whether this was more logical than the much more common view that criticism of Germany by Germans was a sign of a lofty devotion to truth while criticism of England by Englishmen was merely treacherous and disloyal.

and that this will necessarily colour all our thinking on public affairs. Most of us are ready to recognize this for other parties than our own. But of course it applies equally to all. There is no more ridiculous spectacle than the strong partisan on one side accusing the members of the opposite party of being biased by party feeling. And when a member on one side appeals to the members on the other to rise above party and treat the question in a non-party spirit, it really means in nearly all cases that they are to give up the policy of their own party and adopt that of the party to which the speaker belongs.

This tendency was brilliantly depicted by 'George Birmingham' in a book, now twenty years old, *The Red Hand of Ulster*. After describing the conversation at a house-party of the most extreme Ulster Protestant Unionists, he goes on, "The Dean [who had been among the most extreme] caught me a little later in the morning, and . . . insisted on explaining to me that, as a clergyman, he considered it wrong to take any active part in politics. "The Church," he said, "cannot allow herself to become attached to any party. She must stand above and beyond party, a witness to divine and eternal righteousness in public affairs."

'I am glad that I heard the Dean say this. . . . I might have thought . . . that the Church was, more or less, on the side of the Unionists, if the Dean had not explained to me that she only

appeared to be on their side because they happened to be always in the right, but that she would be quite as much on the side of the Liberals if they would only drop their present programme which happened in every respect to be morally wrong.' The particular situation described in the novel is a thing of the past. But observations like this are as apposite to-day as when they were written.

The fact has to be recognized that without this feeling, this purely non-rational impulse of loyalty, the party system could not exist at all. No party would have either the cohesion or the enthusiasm to carry on. All definitions of party which ignore this and lay exclusive stress on intellectual agreement—such as 'a group of people agreed on the main lines of public policy'—are misleading. They suggest a number of people thinking out their political views for themselves, and then suddenly finding that they are in agreement and forming a party. But, of course, nothing like this happens. Something like it, in the case of a particular individual, may be the reason why he originally joins the party,<sup>1</sup> though in many more cases it is decided by accidental influences, such as family connexions. But, after he has joined it and for the rest of his life, unless he breaks away from it,

<sup>1</sup> Something like it may also occasionally arise when established parties break up and re-form on different lines on some new and burning question. But even here emotional influences, such as personal loyalties and dislikes, are likely to play a large part.

he will think out each problem that arises under the influence of the party connexion, with a strong desire to adopt the view that will be to the advantage of the party, to agree with other members of the party, and, generally, to disagree with the opposite party or parties. Occasionally, this last, the dislike of one particular party, will become his strongest motive. 'I will vote for any one as long as it will keep such-and-such a party out.' People who adopt this attitude sometimes pride themselves on rising above party. But, of course, in reality, they are just as much under the influence of party considerations, with just as much or as little justification as the wholehearted supporters of one particular party.

To deal at all adequately with the psychology of the party system, still more to deal with all forms of group loyalty, would demand a separate book of substantial size. No more need be said of it here. But one word of warning must be given in conclusion. Membership of groups, and the consequent group loyalty are all-pervasive. And it follows that if we free ourselves from an excessive feeling for one group it will very often, perhaps generally, mean that we strengthen our feeling towards another. Thus we may break away from all political parties, only to pursue the interests of some other group, perhaps professional or religious, which may demand that pressure be brought on all parties alike. In such a case, our political views are no more likely to be impartial than if we

belonged to a particular party. In general, freedom from the feeling of loyalty to any one group cannot be taken as a guarantee of complete freedom from prejudice, until we have examined the attitude of the person concerned to other groups of which he is a member.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE OUTLOOK FOR IMPARTIALITY

WE have now given our account of what prejudice is and how it works. We have also described some typical specimens of prejudice, though without even attempting a complete enumeration of all its possible forms. What conclusions, if any, emerge from this investigation? At first sight, it might well seem that what emerges is a conclusion of profound pessimism about the prospects of an escape from prejudice. In considering the working of the processes of thought we have seen how extremely easy it is for prejudice to creep in unnoticed. A slight deflection of our attention this way or that may alter profoundly the conclusions that we arrive at. All right thinking proceeds along a very narrow track from which it is the easiest thing in the world to stray. Again, the enumeration of even some of the possible sources of prejudice shows us how beset we are with impulses any one of which if carried even a little too far may become a source of prejudice. So surrounded are we with pitfalls that we may well be excused if we abandon in despair all hope of attaining impartiality, and resign ourselves to being permanently

cut off from knowledge and truth by a veil of prejudice.

In this mood of despair we may perhaps find a little comfort by considering a parallel experience. If we find ourselves in conversation with an enthusiastic medical researcher, eager to impart knowledge, or if we read a medical dictionary, we may find ourselves at first in a similar state of alarm. It seems apparent that the physical organism is faced with so many opportunities of going wrong in some direction or other that the chances appear overwhelmingly against any one keeping alive for more than a year or two. Yet a little further reflection shows us that in practice the results do not work out quite so fatally. Perhaps the situation may turn out to be something the same in regard to prejudice and impartiality.

This analogy may suggest some grounds for hope. But we must not too readily accept the comfort it offers. For in one important detail the analogy seems doubtful. Nearly every one wants to keep alive, and the great majority want to keep in good health. The doctor, therefore, if he can suggest any way out of the physical dangers that surround us can hope for a large degree of willing co-operation. But, when we consider the mental dangers of prejudice, the uncomfortable doubt assails us whether any considerable number of people really want to get rid of their prejudices. Is the desire to get at the truth and attain accurate

knowledge at all widely spread, at any rate in a strength sufficient to make any one take much trouble in the matter ?

Of course, few, if any, people would adopt prejudice as a fully conscious and deliberate policy. We cannot think and consciously will to think wrongly at the same time. It is of the very essence of prejudice that we are not fully aware of it while it is in operation. Yet somewhere at the margin of the consciousness of most of us there are feelings which would lead us in this direction. If we could imagine these half-conscious motives being drawn out into the centre of attention and put into words, we might get a defence of prejudice, or at any rate a plea to be left undisturbed by the importunities of impartiality, which would run something on these lines :

‘ Why make all this fuss about impartiality ? ’ our imaginary objector would begin. ‘ Your own account suggests that there is not much point in it. There are too many prejudices about to hope to get rid of them. If we escape from one it will probably only be to fall a victim to another. Besides, even if you do get rid of them are you going to be so much better off ? You’ve no guarantee that you will get at the truth on any question which is at all difficult even then. You have warned us yourself that there are many other sources of error besides prejudice. So that impartiality, even if you attain it, is not going to make you infallible. We could doubtless find

many cases in which future events have shown that the prejudiced man was right and the impartial man wrong, for all his impartiality.

‘ So getting rid of our prejudices is not going to guarantee that we are going to get at the truth. What it is likely to do is to damp down all our enthusiasms, to weaken the emotional elements which are the chief driving forces when action is called for. Even if we did get at the truth, we should probably not take any great effort to make it prevail. The late Regius Professor of History at Oxford has told us that most great movements of history have owed their original inception to men who were only capable of seeing one side of a question. Would the Reformation (or the Counter-Reformation) have been carried through if those who began it had eliminated all emotional influence which might have affected their judgement? Would slavery have been abolished? Would Italy have been liberated and unified?

‘ Of course, I remember what you said about impartiality not meaning being without positive opinions of your own, and not meaning being without all emotions. No doubt there are people who arrive at their convictions perfectly impartially and still keep enough strong feeling about them to lead a crusade in support of them. That is, perhaps, the ideal, though, after all, with all his impartiality, we can't be absolutely sure that such a man will be in the right. Apart from this, however, how many ordinary people are capable

of this? Could our impartial crusader ever hope to find enough followers in his crusade to make it effective unless he appealed to their prejudices? After all, we must remember, the matters in which prejudice is commonest are matters in which there really is something to be said on either side, and mathematically certain proof is not possible. Isn't it obvious, then, that the result of an absolutely impartial approach would be that we could not hold any view on these subjects as representing more than a balance of probabilities? And no one is going to fight and die for a balance of probabilities. Without absolute and certain conviction of the rightness of a cause, very few people will ever have the energy and enthusiasm to take much trouble about it. So let us leave impartiality to mathematicians and physicists, and in all matters concerning human beings let us be content to follow our prejudices.

'At any rate,' he might go on, 'this will be far more enjoyable. I must say, I like my prejudices. I enjoy, for instance, feeling absolutely certain that I am right, and that every one who differs from me is either a villain, whom I can hate wholeheartedly—a very satisfying experience—or a fool whom I can despise, thus getting the pleasure of feeling my own superiority. Your life of impartiality seems a restless, uncomfortable kind of thing. I cannot believe that the rewards it offers are worth the effort it demands.'

It cannot be denied that, at first sight, there

seems considerable force in such arguments. And yet there is a fundamental unreality about them. It arises from the fact, already pointed out, that they attempt to state explicitly an attitude of mind which it is not really possible to adopt once it has been explicitly stated. We cannot deliberately choose to be prejudiced. Even the attempt to do so could only come from a disillusioned sceptic, who had seen through his own convictions, and lost any faith that better ones were attainable. That is the only sort of person from whom such arguments might conceivably come. And, coming from him, they would not really be genuine, because they would show that he had already lost the absolute certainty that he wants his prejudice to give. We could not possibly imagine these arguments in the mouth of the enthusiastic crusader whom they are intended to justify. To him the essential necessity is to believe that his convictions are really true and based on a correct process of thought. And so it is with all of us who believe that there is any possibility of arriving at the truth at all. Once we have given the show away about prejudice, we cannot go on with it quite comfortably as if nothing had happened.

The fact is that the very existence of prejudice means that we are at a transitional stage of mental development. And a transitional stage is apt in the long run to prove an uncomfortable resting-place. At a more primitive stage, either in the life of the individual or the society, we do not have

very much in the way of prejudices because we do not, strictly speaking, have very much in the way of opinions of our own. In part, we adopt blindly the point of view of our tribe or society, and follow their customs without thought or question. Outside that, we generally act simply as our immediate feelings dictate. If we dislike a man, who is not protected by any accepted custom, we kill him : we do this, simply because he is hateful to us, without thinking about him in any other connexion, or passing any judgement on his other characteristics. If our tribe, for any cause or for no cause at all, is at war with another tribe, we wish for its success and help it and hate the other tribe as a matter of course. We do not bother about appreciating the situation from any other point of view, asking questions, for instance, about the rights and wrongs of the matter. It is the same attitude as the modern Englishman takes up when he wishes his own county to win the Cricket Championship. There is no question of right or wrong here, and no one would dream of speaking of such an attitude as prejudiced. In all this, we are really at a ' pre-prejudice ' stage.

Prejudice begins when we begin to take other considerations into account besides blind custom and immediate desires. It implies some wish to find something out, and discover some truth : the very act of thinking about such matters at all involves this. Prejudice arises because of some conflict between this wish to find out and other

emotions or desires. It is one way of resolving this conflict, by letting our emotions affect our thinking without admitting it. But the more clearly we realize the conflict between two opposed tendencies, the more do we feel the necessity of following one or the other with our eyes open. If we have attained this realization, we know that we must choose between two courses. We must either go forward and try to conquer our prejudices, or, if we think that is too hard, we must go back to the life of pure custom and emotion, and cease trying to think for ourselves at all.

As for the suggestion put forward that our prejudices make us effective in action, there is something in it, but it is at best only a half-truth. In the sort of situation in which it applies, it is evident that the reason why prejudice on one side is necessary is because of the heavy weight of prejudice on the other that has to be moved. If prejudice is allowed to grow and dig itself in, it may need a counter-prejudice to overcome it. This is always a violent process, and generally does a great deal of incidental harm. But it can hardly be doubted that on occasions it produces a balance of good.

We can never, however, be absolutely certain that this is the only way in which such results can be brought about. No doubt, sudden and spectacular revolutions can only be the work of one-sided people. But we cannot tell what the alternatives to such revolutions might have been.

The impartial and disinterested search for truth has a very corroding influence on prejudice, which may work slowly, but is none the less very deadly. Unprejudiced criticism may not, perhaps, inspire us to go on crusade to turn the infidels out of the Holy Places by force of arms. But in time it may make the infidels begin to ask themselves what they are doing there at all. And perhaps they may come eventually to give us at any rate the substance of what we should have fought for.<sup>1</sup>

There may, of course, be occasions when free and impartial criticism is not allowed, and is even suppressed forcibly. It is in such situations that the justification of prejudice has most weight. For if there is no chance of the ban being lifted, the only hope lies in the development of equally strong passions on the other side, and a consequent violent upheaval. It has often been pointed out how the conflict between Catholics and Protestants led to the beginnings of religious toleration, a result which neither party would have welcomed for its own sake. Yet even here one sometimes wonders what would have happened if Luther had never been, and the spirit of Erasmus and the Renaissance had gone on working undisturbed by the violent action and reaction of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

To return to our general problem. Is there any likelihood that any considerable number of people

<sup>1</sup> Even taken literally this statement receives a certain amount of support from the history of the Crusade of Frederick II.

will want to get rid of their prejudices enough to take any trouble over it? To answer that, we must consider what possible motives they could have for making such an effort.

No doubt, there will always be some people in whom disinterested curiosity, the desire to find out the truth for its own sake, is very strong—strong enough, in fact, to overcome any liking for one particular view rather than another. It is very likely that the number of such people could be increased by education and other influences. But, when we consider the strength of the tendencies making for prejudice, it seems likely that they will always remain a comparatively small minority. That is, of course, as far as questions which have any emotional significance at all are concerned. For there are obviously plenty of subjects, such as pure mathematics, which have in themselves no emotional significance except their appeal to our curiosity. Any prejudices that arise in connexion with such subjects are accidental and peculiar to individuals. So they can nearly always be reduced to harmless proportions.

It is in general the questions which refer to human beings, and particularly to human beings of the present day, which have the greatest emotional significance and are therefore particularly liable to the influence of prejudice. And of these we may make a very rough division into two main groups. One would include those matters on which our views are or will be to a greater or

lesser degree verifiable by observable results within our own experience. Most political questions, for instance, would fall into this group. For their decision depends, to a great extent, on the results which are expected to follow if certain measures are adopted. There is often, no doubt, considerable possibility of dispute about the interpretation of the results when they have actually occurred. But the results are there, and they are generally either pleasant or unpleasant for the people concerned.

In such questions, therefore, up to a point it definitely pays to be right, and, so far as people realize this, they have a motive making for impartiality. At any rate it gives us something to appeal to when making a plea for impartial consideration of a question. We could quote the words of Bishop Butler, ' Things are what they are, and the consequences will be what they will be. Why, then, should we wish to be deceived ? ' Of course, a very large number of people do wish to be deceived. And when we survey the field of politics we do not, at first sight, get the impression that the motives making for impartiality are very strong. But that is largely because the ordinary members of the public tend to fix their eyes too exclusively on the warfare of parties. It is easy to miss the large amount of quiet non-party investigation and discussion that is going on all the time. This does not show itself in elections or even in parliamentary debates. But it is working

behind the scenes, and has its influence on those chiefly responsible for deciding on policy within each party. This is no doubt partly the reason why the policies actually pursued by all parties differ much less from each other than their public speeches would lead us to expect. There is a certain logic of facts which is often more effective in determining policy than the logic of party principles.

The other main group consists of subjects in which there is no possibility of verifying any view by observable results in our own experience. This would include moral questions, so far as these can be discussed without regard to possible consequences and religious questions, such as the existence of God and the destinies of the human soul. On such questions it seems likely that the views of the majority of people will always be dictated to a great extent by what they want to believe.<sup>1</sup> Even here there will always be a minority who will try to guide their views mainly by argument and evidence. And their influence is likely to be felt among those who do not follow their example, sometimes by gradually modifying their opinions and more frequently by softening intolerance and diminishing the antagonism between adherents of opposite views.

It is true, no doubt, that in neither case will impartiality make us infallible. But it will

<sup>1</sup> In moral questions there is a sense in which this is justifiable to a certain degree. See the discussion in the Appendix.

obviously increase the chances of our being right. We must remember that impartiality is not merely a negative quality, the mere absence of prejudice. It rests on a positive impulse, the desire to find out the truth. And this desire will drive us not only to get rid of our prejudices but to strive to overcome all the other possible obstacles in the way of right thinking. We must remember, too, that knowledge and right opinion is not, except to a very limited degree, arrived at by each man for himself in entire independence. It is a co-operative process to which countless individuals contribute. In a way, this may seem to make it more difficult to arrive at the truth, because there are so many possible weak links in the chain. But, on the other hand, if there is genuine co-operation the particular weakness of one may be compensated for by the particular strength of another. So that each stage we advance in clearing away a prejudice from our own minds contributes something to the common effort. In this way the attainment of impartiality is a cumulative process ; each step taken has an effect which extends far beyond what it does immediately for the single individual concerned.

One more possible ground for hope may be suggested, which will be developed in the next and final chapter. We find on examination that most, if not all, of the emotional tendencies which are the chief causes of prejudice may, under certain conditions, be brought into the service of the search for impartiality. Self-interest, the desire

for approbation, loyalty to the group, the working of habit—all these may, on occasions, appear as allies of the disinterested search for truth. How they may be turned in this direction will be one of the questions to be touched upon in the final stage of our investigations.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE TECHNIQUE OF IMPARTIALITY

WE now come to the last stages of our investigation. Let us assume that impartiality is a good thing, and that it is not so far out of our reach as to make all effort to achieve it useless. Can we make any practical suggestions which will help towards the attainment of it? We shall be wise to be cautious about accepting such a challenge. Any one who responded to it in a tone which even suggested that he claimed to be free from prejudice himself would rightly be looked upon with profound suspicion. We have none of us any chance even of approaching impartiality unless we realize how extremely liable we are to prejudice. And the most impartial man will be the readiest to admit that he can never be quite sure that the influence of prejudice has been completely cleared away from his thinking. We are all sufferers from the same disease and the best we can do is to suggest to each other methods of treatment which we think might help to alleviate it. And the treatment would have to be prolonged and thorough. The first stage in it would be to get out of our heads the notion that we can get rid of prejudice by a simple act of will. We cannot

say to ourselves at any one moment, 'From now on I will be perfectly impartial.' To approach to such a state would demand a continued effort and careful training. And to remain there would only be possible at the price of unrelenting vigilance.

Our first step, therefore, is to realize that there is a problem, and that it is not an easy one to solve. We must open our eyes to the extreme likelihood of prejudice being at work in our own or any one else's mind. We must become, as it were, self-conscious about prejudice, and begin to feel uneasy about it. We should aim at developing the habit of wondering whether we are prejudiced about any particular question, and of thinking of the possible ways in which we might be. That is the practical value of any attempt at classification of the various possible prejudices. It suggests to each one directions in which he might look for his own.

It is just possible, of course, that with certain temperaments this process might be carried too far. Such people might come to think so much about their possible prejudices that they became incapable of thinking about anything else. They might give so much attention to examining their consciences to see whether they were capable of looking at the evidence impartially that at the end they had no time or energy to look at the evidence at all. And that would be sacrificing the end of thinking to the means. But that is a very remote

danger for most of us. Even if we went through a temporary stage of this, it would do us no harm provided that we emerged from it at the end.

But this direct frontal attack on our prejudices is only a small part of the task of removing them. We shall find much greater help by developing certain general intellectual habits or accustomed methods of approaching problems, which will make it easier to avoid prejudice. Thus, for instance, it is possible to a considerable extent to develop the habit of carefully defining the exact issues to be decided, of putting the question before us in precise terms, and distinguishing it from other possible questions that might be raised. It is very much easier to allow irrelevant emotional influences to come in if we have several different questions before us at once, without being quite clear which it is we are trying to answer.

We can see how carefully this precaution is observed in a sphere in which we regard it as particularly important to avoid prejudice, and in which, on the whole, we have been remarkably successful in doing so. That is, in the administration of justice. We can see, for instance, what an important part of the function of the judge it is to make clear to the jury exactly what it is that they have got to decide. In a libel action he generally gives a list of definite questions which the jury has to answer. Even in a more simple issue, such as

that presented in a murder trial, we find him sometimes warning the jury that the question they have to answer is not, Did this man commit the murder ? but, Is the evidence sufficient to put it beyond reasonable doubt that he did ? In other spheres we have to be our own judge and define the question for ourselves. And this is not always easy. But if we can get into the habit of making the effort we have taken one important step. Even the purely verbal habit of murmuring to one's self, ' What's the exact question I have to answer ? ' would be of considerable help.

Another intellectual habit of great value is that of putting one's self at the opposite point of view. This, no doubt, sounds more easily said than done. But it is possible to acquire a habit of saying to one's self, when faced by an opinion or theory which one is inclined to reject, ' What sort of case could I make out for this view, if I had to do so ? ' Or conversely, if faced by a view which appears attractive, we should say, ' What sort of case could I make out against it ? ' Of course, we must not rest satisfied with merely putting the two opposed cases. The only object of doing this is to decide between them eventually. But we need not be in too much of a hurry to do this before we are sure that we have worked out the two sides as completely as possible. The man who, like Darwin, is capable of putting the case against his own view as strongly as any of his opponents, is in the long run the most unassailable in argument.

Another way of putting much the same thing is that we should always consider an opposing view in its strongest not its weakest form. We should look for and consider the best arguments that have been or could be brought forward for it, and take little interest in the worst. There is a tendency, particularly in political controversy, to concentrate on the weaknesses of our opponents' case, and dwell on all the foolish things said by them. That may be a good way of winning an election, but it is useless as a means of getting at the truth. For that purpose we need to be constantly reminding ourselves that a view is not proved wrong because it has been supported by some silly people with some silly arguments. If it were, most political beliefs could be decisively refuted.

Above all—and this is a point that needs particular emphasis—let us avoid thinking too much about the prejudices of other people, particularly of those who differ from us. There is no field in which the scriptural precept about first casting out the beam in our own eye is of such vital importance as in dealing with prejudice. If we are only going to apply it to other people and not to ourselves, all this analysis and classification of prejudices will do more harm than good.

This is, indeed, the great danger of all psychological investigation and discussion. If it makes us examine our own mental processes, and become careful and critical about them, it is all to the good.

But it may be treated, and is too often treated, simply as providing a storehouse of terms of abuse to be hurled at opponents. In the early days of the fashion for psycho-analysis, for instance, the first person who could bring in the word 'complex' into an argument was always regarded as having scored several points in the game. But, of course, it was always the complexes of the other side. This general tendency does untold harm by encouraging intellectual laziness. We are all too ready to think that, if we can bring a plausible charge of prejudice against our opponents, we are thereby absolved from the duty either of examining our own prejudices or of considering the opponents' arguments on their merits. It is easier and pleasanter to show why an opponent is liable to make mistakes than to prove that he has actually done so.

The danger of taking more interest in a man's psychological condition than in the actual merits of his arguments is a particularly grave one. It is important to remember that because a man is prejudiced it does not necessarily follow that he is wrong. It may seem strange to say this, after all that has been said of the evils of prejudice. But there is no real contradiction. It is obvious that the more prejudiced he is, the greater are his chances of being wrong. And the more points there are on which he arrives at a conclusion the more clearly this will show itself. But on any single point there is always the chance that he may

be right. We can see this clearly if we consider a question on which only two opinions are possible, like the guilty or not guilty of a criminal trial. In such a case, even if we decided by tossing a coin, there would be equal chance of our being right. And prejudice can hardly be more irrational and irrelevant than this. Or we could see the same thing in a case at issue between two parties in a civil suit. It is very likely that both parties will be equally prejudiced in their own favour. Yet one must be right.

The moral of this is that if any one presents an argument that we are not inclined to accept we cannot dispose of it merely by saying that he is prejudiced, even if it is true. It does not exempt us from the absolute obligation of examining the arguments and the evidence he adduces on their merits before rejecting them. It is not relevant to the merits of the arguments to say that the man who put them forward was prejudiced. Still less, of course, is it relevant to point out how he might be prejudiced, unless we have evidence for supposing that he actually is so. We cannot thus evade the duty of considering the case on its merits. If we excuse ourselves from this on the ground of the other man's prejudice or possible prejudice, we should create a strong presumption that our own view was determined by prejudice, and that we were trying to justify our own prejudice by laying stress on our opponent's.

There is, however, one situation in which the

statement of another man's prejudice, or even the possibility of his prejudice, is relevant. That is when we are faced, not by argument or evidence, but by a mere appeal to authority. When we are faced by this, we have the right and the duty to scrutinize very closely the claims of the supposed authority to be regarded as such. And one test he must most obviously pass is the test of undoubted freedom from prejudice. Thus in the discussion of economic problems, of the kind already mentioned, it may occasionally happen that we come into conflict with a man who, instead of supporting his view by arguments and evidence, says, 'Well, I'm a business man and I ought to know!' or more usually, 'Every business man knows,' etc., etc. In reply to such an assertion, it is perfectly justifiable to point out that, in such matters there are certain particular motives for prejudice to which business men are especially liable to fall victims. Sometimes it takes a vaguer form still: 'Lots of wiser heads than yours or mine have believed in Socialism,' or Christianity, or Free Trade, or any other cause that the speaker wants to support without being able to find the arguments to do so. In general, any naked appeal to authority and unwillingness to consider arguments creates the presumption that the person concerned is under the influence of prejudice and is believing what he wants to believe.

Even here, however, we must make a distinction: we must be sure that the prejudice we allege is

relevant to the question under discussion. As we have seen, prejudices can arise from all sorts of different motives. A prejudice arising from one motive may affect a man's opinions on one set of problems, but not enter at all into his thinking about another set. It would be absurd, for instance, to try to discredit a man's scientific discoveries, simply because he held extreme political or religious views. Even Newton devoted a great deal of his attention to eccentric attempts at the interpretation of prophecy.<sup>1</sup>

We have spoken, hitherto, as if the attainment of impartiality were purely a matter for individual effort. But in fact individual effort, save for exceptionally gifted people, is very inadequate. As we have already suggested, prejudice is essentially a social problem and needs to be dealt with by co-operation. A simple instance of this is the influence each one of us has on the other. The more we try to develop impartiality ourselves the more it reacts on other people. Prejudice is a great breeder of prejudice. We can verify for ourselves in any argument how a strong emotional attitude on one side tends to increase the intensity of the emotions on the other.

Perhaps the greatest step towards the attainment of impartiality would be the development of a general public opinion in its favour. If

<sup>1</sup> The converse is equally true. The fact that a man is free from one particular prejudice, e.g. that he has no pecuniary interest in a question, is no proof that he is absolutely impartial and free from all other possible prejudices.

impartiality became 'good form', as fashionable, say, as being well-dressed, we should have a motive for it which would appeal to nearly everybody. It is too much to hope that this would ever become general. But there are already traces of it in particular directions. Even in politics, an obvious display of personal rancour will weaken the influence of the person who displays it, at any rate in our own country. A more hopeful direction, however, in which to look is towards the development of opinion within certain professional groups. Professional standards and traditions can be a very powerful influence. For instance, the impartiality of judges, which on the whole reaches a very high standard, is mainly due to the traditions of the Bench and the Bar.

Again, the general conditions under which argument and discussion, and the consequent formation of opinion, take place make a great deal of difference. Nearly every one, for instance, is familiar with the effect that being in a crowd has on individual psychological processes. We know the strong stimulation of the emotional side and the increase of suggestibility that it brings, with the corresponding decrease of control by the higher and more rational elements. It follows from this that a public meeting is the worst place possible in which to form our opinions. Possibly the same applies to some extent to Parliament or any other large body. At any rate, we all know how much more reasonable people generally are

when a few of them are gathered round the table than in public debate. It is interesting, incidentally, to consider the possible influence of broadcasting by wireless in this connexion. If we listen to discussions and speeches sitting by the fireside instead of in a crowded meeting, we might hope that our response would be more critical and reasonable and less emotional.

We have left till last the consideration of the social institution which might make the greatest difference of all in this direction, namely, education. The teacher, as we know, gets the youth at a suggestible age, and has an opportunity of producing results such as few others have. It is in his or her power to give a great prestige to impartiality, not so much as a merely negative thing, but as the active and positive desire to get at the truth, and to think rightly. He can do this by his own example, by direct precept, and by the inculcation of the methods and habits of thinking which make prejudice more easily detected. The development of a strong professional opinion against prejudice among teachers would be one of the strongest influences in favour of impartiality that we could possibly hope for.

A study of all the different ways in which the teacher might try to produce impartiality would provide material for a complete volume in itself. We have already indicated some of the general methods of approaching problems which might profitably be inculcated. Is there any special

merit in one kind of problem rather than another as a field for training in these methods? It seems pretty clear that, from the point of view of diminishing prejudice, such training must be given in subjects in which the possibilities of prejudice are serious and real. It is sometimes argued that a training in pure science, where the influence of prejudice can easily be reduced to a minimum, is the best method of producing impartiality and a disinterested desire for the truth in other fields. But this is a fallacy. There are many excellent reasons for teaching science: but that is not one of them. It is just because prejudice can be so easily kept out of scientific work that it does not help us to attain impartiality in subjects in which it is more difficult.

Indeed, the effect of a scientific training may be the exact reverse. In most natural sciences there are established and very high standards of exact proof and evidence. Such standards are often, in the very nature of things, inapplicable to other and more complicated subjects, particularly questions where human beings are concerned. And when the scientist turns to these matters he is often liable to feel that, because his accustomed exact standards are not applicable, therefore there are in such subjects no standards at all. As a result of this he may sometimes become merely indifferent to all such questions. But more often, perhaps, he plunges into them without any of the care that he would observe in his own scientific

research and allows his prejudices free rein. It is certainly not true that, outside their own subjects, the views of scientists are any less prejudiced than those of other men. In politics, for instance, it is extraordinary how often the views of really distinguished scientists never rise above conventional partisanship.

About the attitude of the teacher himself much might be said. He has first to become convinced of the importance of impartiality. But, when he has done that, he has still other dangers to guard against. One of his greatest dangers arises from that association between impartiality and dullness which is so common in many people's minds. Impartiality need not mean lack of imagination. To be unable to appreciate the picturesque and dramatic aspects of life is no proof of freedom from prejudice. Nor, to recall our earlier warning, does impartiality mean either the lack of strong feelings or the lack of definite opinions. In fact, that desire for the truth which is the chief enemy of prejudice will never be satisfied until we have arrived at opinions of our own. Nor should there be any reason to conceal these opinions in teaching. The learner, particularly at the later stages, is much more likely to be impressed by a teacher who has opinions of his own and yet shows himself anxious to be fair to others, than by one who seems to have no opinions of his own at all. But in all this the attitude of the teacher should be no different from the attitude of any one else who

cares about impartiality at all. Here, as elsewhere, the qualities of the ideal teacher seem to be identical with the qualities of the ideal human being. And such a one is still to seek.

## APPENDIX

### PREJUDICE AND THE MORAL JUDGEMENT

WE are often apt to speak (as in this book above at p. 67) as if in the moral judgement we got to something direct and ultimate, as much beyond the range of prejudice as, at a much lower level, are the simple questions of taste, where we either like or dislike without being expected to give reasons. And it is perfectly true that we have to arrive at that point eventually in all our discussions of right and wrong or good and bad. On the other hand, it is equally true, as suggested in Chapter VI, that nowhere is there so much possibility of prejudice as in some of our moral judgements, or at any rate in some of our judgements that claim to be such. To explain this apparent contradiction, it is necessary to offer a few suggestions about what seems to be involved in a moral judgement. These will have to be put forward briefly and dogmatically. Obviously a full treatment of the subject would involve the development of a complete system of Ethics.

Moral Judgements are, in their most typical form, judgements that certain objects are right and wrong, or good and bad, or any other words which we use as synonymous with these. The

objects about which these judgements are normally made are the actions, states of mind, and characters of conscious beings, most usually human beings. They also apply to certain more complex objects, which are largely, at any rate, constructed in the imagination, and which we call our ideals. The situation with regard to these last is very complicated. We do not expect them actually to exist on earth nor even to be completely realizable. But we do demand that they should have a certain relation to reality, if they are to be taken seriously at all. We should regard it as a valid criticism of an imagined ideal if it could be shown to include elements which in reality were absolutely inconsistent or incompatible with each other.

These judgements seem generally to contain two distinguishable stages. In the first place, there is what we call roughly a judgement about the facts, which is primarily an intellectual process. We judge, for instance, about what actually took place, when it is a question of an action already taken, or about what a person's character actually is. When it is a question of a proposed course of action, we judge about what will be involved in it, its probable consequences, etc. For a more remote ideal we judge about its relation to reality, the compatibility of its elements, and so on. All these take place in the same way as any other judgement or process of thinking. And they are liable, in exactly the same way, to the intrusion of the influence of prejudice.

But when we have done all this and decided what the nature of the object we are judging about really is, we have still to take the final step of approving or disapproving it. This is a far from simple process, and it contains an intellectual and an emotional side which seem bound up together in a manner which is very difficult to formulate precisely. It is clear that we have a certain feeling, or emotion towards the object, and that that is an essential part of our approval or disapproval.<sup>1</sup> But it is equally clear that our moral judgement means more than merely that we do in fact experience this feeling. It implies a judgement that the feeling has some sort of real and necessary connexion with this action or with any action of the same kind. It implies, we might say, that if we did not feel like that there would be something wrong with us, and that if any one else in similar circumstances did not feel like that there must be some defect in him. However we put it, this claim to universality in its application is an essential element in the moral judgement.

Imperfect though this analysis is, it perhaps will enable us to see where prejudice might come in at

<sup>1</sup> A particularly difficult problem is the relation of simple liking or disliking, wanting or not wanting, to the moral feeling. It seems to me clear beyond a doubt that in any genuine moral judgement these feelings are present, and equally clear that they do not constitute the whole even of the emotional element in the moral judgement. More than that it is impossible to say here. But this indicates that our likes and dislikes are always in some degree relevant to our moral judgements.

this stage in the moral judgement. It comes in, in the first place, when we mistake some other feeling for the distinctively moral feeling. It may seem strange that this is possible. Yet the evidence seems to indicate that it is. Most of us probably, if we attend honestly to our own feelings, can think of occasions on which, as we recognized later, we mistook our own personal resentment for righteous indignation, or the shock of being faced with something new and unaccustomed for genuine moral repulsion.

Secondly, it might come in in what we might call imperfect universalization of the moral judgement. That is, when we feel the genuine moral emotion for one action (or other object of the moral judgement) and fail to feel it for another, which is similar in all relevant circumstances, because some other feeling, not specifically moral, intervenes. There are particularly obvious instances of that in our judgements about public affairs. We rightly disapprove of dishonest arguments used by our political opponents, and feel little or no disapproval of arguments even more dishonest used on our own side. Our blood boils with righteous indignation at cruelty and oppression in one country, and becomes at most only tepid over similar occurrences in another. We approve of national uprisings against the rule of countries hostile to us, and regard as treacherous and disloyal similar uprisings against ourselves or our allies. More generally, both in public and

private affairs, we know how difficult it is to feel precisely the same towards the vices and virtues of ourselves and our friends as we do towards those of other people. That is so even when we recognize them for what they are in both cases.

We should therefore be very slow to abandon reasoned discussion of any disputed question on the ground that we have reduced it to an ultimate difference of moral standards. Before we do that, we must satisfy ourselves (*a*) that we have made every possible effort to judge the facts correctly, (*b*) that we are clear about our own feelings, and not mistaking something else for genuine moral approval or disapproval, and (*c*) that we should feel the same towards similar behaviour on the part of other persons.

But when we have done all this we do come in the end to a direct moral judgement beyond which it is impossible to go. And at this final stage, as far as we know, there may still remain possibilities of differences of opinion. We do not really know enough about it to say that, if we had purified our thinking of all prejudices and irrelevancies, we should necessarily all agree in our moral judgements. Some people think that this possibility of disagreement indicates that moral judgements have no basis in fact, and that moral distinctions exist only in the imagination. This is a possible view, though the great weight of evidence seems against it. But there can be no doubt about the fact

that we do make moral judgements, whether they have any validity or not. And they have to be taken into account in any study of the formation of opinion.

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